

Benin Archaeo-Box (HI10035)

Transport your class back to the classic period of the Benin kingdom with this authentic collection of replica resources. Use the artefacts to create a hands-on enquiry or recreate an archaeological dig! The items can support the teaching of topics across the curriculum in History, Geography, RE and Art.



Contents: -

The collection includes a Benin timeline, plaque, leopard head and armlet.

Please note contents and designs may vary

Questions you could ask children about the artefacts

Initial Discussion

- What is this object?
- Does it resemble anything the children have seen?
- What do you think the item was used for and by whom?
- Does anyone know what it is called?

Collect any other questions the children might have about the artefacts and display them as you try to find the answers through your learning sessions.

Other questions to consider:

- Where does the object come from?
- Who might have made this object? And how were they made?
- Why were they made?
- **What do the objects tell us about Benin culture and life?** *This last question can be returned to at the end of the investigation.*

All About the Artefacts

1. Benin Timeline

Explore and discuss key events of the Kingdom of Benin (from 900AD to 1897AD) Benin was a very rich and powerful kingdom in West Africa from around 1100AD until the arrival of the British in Victorian times in 1897. It was situated in what is mostly Nigeria today.

The Benin people were skilled craftsmen and made bronze plaques and ornaments.

Use the timeline to learn about the kingdom, how it was ruled and when it began and ended. Explore chronology and use historical vocabulary.

2. Plaque



Benin plaques are brass or bronze tablets created by the Edo people in the kingdom of Benin. They were designed to decorate the royal palace, record historical events and illustrate the divine power and regalia of the Oba (king). The Oba is always the central and largest figure, distinguished by his elaborate coral bead crown and tunic.

Look at the clothes worn by the three figures, why are they dressed the way they are? What are they holding? What can we learn about the Benin people from this plaque?

Design plaques and use air dry modelling clay and a range of modelling tools to create unique designs such as a self-portrait plaque.

3. Leopard head



In the kingdom of Benin, the leopard was 'the king of the forest', a symbol of royal power and authority. They were worn during palace ceremonies as an ornament on the hip or waist. The Oba (king) used the leopard head to show people he was strong and had control over the wild forces of nature.

They were worn to protect the wearer, demonstrate high status and show military bravery.

Learn about the animals in Benin art. Make a clay or paper mâché leopard head.

4. Armlet



Worn by the Oba (king) and important chiefs. They symbolised spiritual power, strength and ancestral connections.

Who might have worn this? Were they rich or poor? Why might they have worn an armlet? Do you think it is for decoration or for protection? Where was it used?

Draw the Benin armlet and identify the patterns on it.

Archaeology

Turn your class into an archaeological dig and encourage questioning and historical research. Uncover physical evidence to learn about Benin culture and life. By carefully examining the artefacts you can piece together a more complete picture of what Benin life was like. Create a mock dig site and learn excavation techniques. Section up the dig into square areas so that each child or group can work on one area. Make it clear that the artefacts are fragile and need to be excavated with care. Plastic pallet knives and paint brushes are ideal for this activity.

When they have found their artefact task them to fill out an 'artefact report' where they draw the artefact and describe its features and likely uses. Encourage them to do further research and then report back what they have found out, labelling and displaying their artefact to create a classroom museum of finds.

What can the artefacts tell us about the people of Benin? What was important to them? What do we still need to find out? Make a list of unanswered questions you want to find answers to.