

# Benin

Non – European Study Unit



Altar of the Hand, Benin, Nigeria  
18<sup>th</sup> century AD

## About this unit

In this unit children learn about the Kingdom of Benin from a range of historical sources. Children find out about the characteristic features of the society and period, through historical enquiry. The unit structure can be applied to studies of other non-European societies, *e.g. ancient Egypt, the Aztecs, the Maya, the Indus Valley, Ancient Sumer or the Assyrian Empire.*

## Where this unit fits in

This unit builds on other units that encourage children to carry out an enquiry based on the use of material evidence, *e.g. Unit 6B*

‘Why have people invaded and settled in Britain in the past? – An Anglo-Saxon case study’. It compliments Unit 10 ‘What can we find out about ancient Egypt from what has survived?’ by focussing on the ways of life in an African society in the past. It works well with any of the Tudor study units and can lead to comparing similarities and differences between roughly contemporary kingdoms in different parts of the world. This study unit works very neatly with the distant place Geography study unit, focussed on modern day Benin, Nigeria.

## Adapting this unit for a different age group

Year 3 and 4 children could:

- be given guidance on how to locate the kingdom on a map and place it correctly in time.
- be given an introduction to the work of historians and museum curators, including research, collecting, conserving, storage, interpretation and exhibiting.
- be given the opportunity to undertake exercises to practice observation skills.
- be given the opportunities to investigate how and what can be learnt from objects.
- be given greater assistance in drawing conclusions from their enquiry.

## Prior learning

It is helpful if the children have:

- used chronological conventions, *e.g. .BC, AD*
- learnt about aspects of life in other periods and societies
- identified different representations of the past
- used artefacts to find out about the past

## Vocabulary

In this unit, children will have opportunities to use:

- words associated with the passing of time, *e.g. AD, century, decade*
- words associated with museology, *museum, curator, evidence, object, artefact, interpretation, gallery, exhibition*
- words associated with the Kingdom of Benin, *e.g. Brass casting, palace, royal court, Oba, Uzama*

## Resources

- maps of the world, West Africa, Nigeria and modern Benin, globe
- a time line showing 1500 AD to present day
- the material in the African galleries
- COMPASS on The British Museum web site
- “The Kingdom of Benin” The Commonwealth Institute (ISBN 946140553)
- “Benin, an African Kingdom”, WWF & Channel 4 video an book (ISBN 1858500066)
- Video about and pictures of artefacts, aspects of life past and present.

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### Learning Objectives Children should learn

- to locate Nigeria and the Benin region.
- about the environment in and around Benin City and how this could have affected settlement patterns and lifestyles.

### Possible Teaching Activities

#### Where is Benin?

Start the topic by telling the children a Nigerian story.

Help the children to locate Nigeria, Laos and Benin City on a world map and identify environmental and physical features including forest, savanna, mountains, rivers, oceans. Use information from the map to ask and answer questions, *e.g. Why is location important to the development of different types and sizes of settlement?*

Ask the children to identify a range of resources, including web resources which could be used

### Learning Outcomes

#### Children

- locate places on a world map
- identify environmental and physical features and how these might affect settlement and lifestyle
- compare with their religion

#### Assessment

Give the children line drawings of a map of the world. Ask them to label the continents and major bodies of water. Ask them to mark on and label the UK, the place of their home etc. Ask them to pencil in where they think west Africa is. Ask the children to write a short explanation of where their home region is and where Benin is.

### Points to note

Link to literacy by searching the class and school libraries for Nigerian stories and tales. Ask your local library service to put together a Nigerian story box for you, or go to the library to hear a Nigerian story. If you have any parents or members of staff with a Nigerian background ask them to come in and tell a story with a group or the whole class.

These activities provide an opportunity to make links with 'Unit 18-Connecting ourselves to the world' 'Unit 22-Contrasting Locality overseas, Nigeria' & 'Unit 24-Passport to the World' in QCA's scheme of work for geography.

Help the children to appreciate the climatic differences between the UK and Nigeria by keeping comparative temperature and or climate charts throughout the course of the study.

Visit <http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/education/index.html>

Look at the Key web sites, such as National Geographic, COMPASS, or get the children to plan internet enquiries and search for their chosen topic using an Internet browser. Help the children to set up folders and save the information for later use, and or help them to print off their finding for a display or later research.

Children and adults can browse The British Museum web site for more information, and The British Museum COMPASS web site for searches and trails focussed on Africa.

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to use BC and AD appropriately</li> <li>how the Kingdom of Benin relates to other historical periods and to the chronology of world history.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>How long ago was Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Show the children BC and AD on a time line. Ask them to attach labels of the historical periods studied, <i>e.g. Roman Britain, the Tudors, the Ancient Egyptians, Aztecs and the Maya</i> and place the Kingdom of Benin at the correct place on the time line.</p> <p>Discuss with the children the relationship between different historical periods. Ask them to consider which parts of the time line we know most about and where the biggest gaps are. Ask them why we know more about some periods of national or world history than others.</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>use BC and AD correctly</li> <li>sequence the historical periods they have studied from the earliest to present day: highlight the world cultures which ran roughly contemporaneous with the height of the Kingdom of Benin.</li> <li>talk about key features of past societies and compare them with others.</li> </ul>	<p>Link with what children have learnt about life, <i>e.g. in Tudor or Ancient Egypt or Aztec</i> times. This will enable links and connections to be made throughout the unit. For instance, wealth and poverty can be compared across historical periods to develop children's understanding of progress.</p> <p>The links with Ancient Egypt will help children develop ideas and understanding about cultural diversity across a continent.</p> <p>Link with the Tudors and the Aztecs to help children understand and compare the key features of contemporary kingdoms. After visiting The African Gallery, make a short tour of the Later Medieval and Mexican galleries.</p> <p>Link to literacy: make a magazine or write a newspaper article about world fashions for one or two centuries, for example the 1400's and 1500's. Pay attention to climate, culture and ritual for each area. See if you can collect images for royal dress as well as everyday dress for both men, women and children.</p> <p>Link to numeracy especially mental maths. Re-cap on the vocabulary associated with the passing of time, year, decade, century, millennium and the difference between talking in years, i.e. 1492, and centuries, i.e. 15<sup>th</sup> century. Extend children with BC mental maths.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that there can be a variety of evidence available.</li> <li>• to consider how history and traditions can be considered heritage.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>How can we find out about Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Help the children to plan a trip to Benin for a group of either themselves or historians / museum curators who wish to travel to Nigeria to discover more about the Kingdom of Benin.</p> <p>Ask them to plan in small groups and list ways in which they could prepare for their expedition to Benin City.</p> <p>Brainstorm sources of information available to help them prepare: various types of non-fiction books, including cookery books, maps, graphs and a variety of Internet web sites and CD ROM's; artefacts, pictures and video; Nigerian folk tales; interviewing someone who has been there; travel brochures, guides, airline routes and schedules; immunisation maps and charts; the media.</p> <p>Help the children decide what to pack and their personal things (appropriate clothing etc.) and research materials and equipment- camera, video recorder, Dictaphone, note books etc. . Check on your flight and get your Geography "Passport" stamped..</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• identify accessible information sources about a distant place</li> <li>• suggest why some places have become popular with tourists and others not.</li> </ul>	<p>Link to 'Unit 24-Passport to the World' in QCA's scheme of work for geography.</p> <p>Link to literacy by looking at different types of text associated with travel: travel brochure, guidebooks etc. . If materials are not available then plan a marketing strategy for holidays to Benin and decide on the range of literature needed – brochures, posters, guidebooks, accommodation guide. Study materials which may be available for other African locations, such as Egypt, Gambia or South Africa. Help the children to design their own writing frames for each genre.</p> <p>These activities provide an opportunity to make links with Unit – 'Passport' in the QCA's scheme of work for geography.</p> <p>Link to a personal R.E., PSHE or Citizenship project "My Heritage". Children can decide on a civilisation or dynasty to identify with, either through family ties or personal identification. Children can then use similar sources to those used to help research Benin. The children can then create a poster with a picture of themselves in the centre with information and illustrations of how they define their heritage around them. Alternatively create a class book along the line of the Dorling Kindersley book in association with UNICEF, the United Nation Children's Fund, 'Children Just Like Me'.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>what was discovered.</li> <li>the sort of questions that can be answered from artefacts.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>How do we know about the Kingdom of Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Provide information about how we know about the Kingdom of Benin and ask the children to use it to answer questions,</p> <p><i>e.g. What evidence is available? What was found? How do museums get their collections?</i></p> <p>Brainstorm the questions that anthropologists or museum curators could answer after studying objects from The Kingdom of Benin, <i>e.g. Who lived there? What was life like? What were homes like?</i> Discuss these questions in pairs or in groups. Share the ideas with the rest of the class.</p> <p>Now focus on the early contact between Benin and Europe. Provide the children with copies of some of the accounts and illustrations by early travellers.</p> <p>Give the children a copy of a picture of a plaque of a Portugese traveller. Ask them to write their thoughts about or answers to the following questions around the figure. Ask the children <i>What seems to have been of interest to these travellers? What do you think they were doing there? How do you think they travelled to Benin? Where do you think they came from? Who do you think they were?</i></p> <p>Show the children pictures of the brasses with European figures, and remind them of the time of contact – 1400s, 1500s. If they have not studied the Tudors show them some pictures of people in Tudor and Portugese style of dress.</p> <p>Give the children writing frames with a Portugese traveller and an Oba or merchants on it, with both speech bubbles and thought bubbles. Ask them to record what the first impressions would have been, and what they might have said to each other.</p> <p>Ask the children <i>How did the first European Travellers and the people of Benin communicate?</i> (translators from other areas, sign language etc.). Tell the children the story of how Edo probably came to be called Benin.</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>ask and answer questions about the evidence from Benin.</li> <li>ask appropriate and relevant questions about The Kingdom of Benin.</li> </ul>	<p>The questions should be used to shape the enquiry questions for use in The British Museum. Display the questions and use later to link to the later activity ‘What have we found out about The Kingdom of Benin?’</p> <p>Structure the enquiries using the Enquiry Plan charts in The British Museum ‘Museum Activities’ booklet. Encourage the children to choose appropriate resources and evidence related to the question. Help them towards inference and deduction.</p> <p>Use The Commonwealth Institute pack to support these points.</p> <p>Use the Channel 4 video to help discuss the issue of slavery. The programme makes good use of story and drama to illustrate this issue.</p> <p>See The Commonwealth Institute pack.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that there can be more than one interpretation of the past, <i>e.g. because of limitations of evidence</i></li> <li>• that art can have recognisable limitations</li> <li>• that art can display a message.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>How can the brasses be interpreted?</u></b></p> <p>Show the children a range of artefacts from Benin. Ask them what they are made of, how they think they were made, where they were originally placed or located, and where they are now kept.</p> <p>Tell the children that they now have a context for the artefacts, they need to see what can be learnt from the people and animals which they show.</p> <p>Ask the children to identify the Obas on the palace plaques, or hand held altar. Ask them to list or brainstorm the conventions used or clues given to show which person is the Oba, what makes the Oba stand out from any other men shown?</p> <p>Choose one plaque and give a copy to each child. Ask them to work in pairs to label, highlight or show in some way the important features of the plaque and what it is meant to communicate. Encourage the children to prepare supporting arguments. Then present to the class. Has the presentation changed minds? Discuss the similarities and differences between interpretations. Check that the children have realised that there can be more than one interpretation of an object or work of art.</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• pick out what is the same and what is different in two explanations of an image</li> <li>• suggest reasons why they are different</li> <li>• suggest reasons for artistic conventions</li> </ul>	<p>This activity can be undertaken entirely in the African galleries.</p> <p>This activity can be undertaken or reinforced in an ICT suite or on a computer with Internet connection, using the COMPASS website.</p> <p>Explain to the children that pictorial art / images have been used since the time of the earliest humans to give a message or tell the story of their people in the images or of the people who created the art. This has been especially important in societies who have needed to impress or where the message or story needs to be told quickly, perhaps due to the lack of a written language.</p> <p>Use this lesson alongside the Channel 4 programme on brass making.</p> <p>This activity could be adapted by giving children sentences from two interpretations on card and asking them to complete a sorting exercise. Ask the children to make their own choice of one of the brasses or other artefacts to interpret. What is it that the craft worker and the person who commissioned the work want you to 'read' from the image?</p> <p>This lesson links well to a variety of art studies and skills. For example, after analysing the artistic conventions of the plaques using the images, children can use filler designs or conventions to influence designs for prints on paper or textiles or for designing masks or wall plaques out of Modroc.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• that cities have some features in common</li> <li>• about how people lived in Benin</li> <li>• to select information from sources</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>What do streets and buildings tell us about Benin City?</u></b></p> <p>Use the site plan of Benin City to help the children locate important areas or wards, e.g. The Oba’s Palace, the Uzuma area, the Palace chiefs areas and the town chiefs areas.</p> <p>Ask the children to compare the plan with a street plan of their locality, considering where the important buildings and areas are located and the distances between buildings or areas.</p> <p>Ask the children to spot any trends or special patterns in the settlement, e.g. <i>‘Who appears to control the space in the city?’</i></p> <p>Provide information about houses in Benin, and illustrations of traditional housing types now and in the past.</p> <p>Ask the children to think about how modern materials may have affected building design and the types and materials of household objects? Do they prefer the modern or traditional building and objects? If they live in Benin today, which type of house and household contents would they prefer?</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• describe how Benin City was organised and make comparisons with a town today.</li> <li>• write about key features of Benin City then and now.</li> </ul>	<p>Link to ‘Unit 22 Contrasting Locality Overseas-Nigeria’.</p> <p>To extend this activity, an important building could be investigated in depth, e.g. <i>children could focus on the Oba’s palace, the purpose of different rooms and spaces and who might have used it.</i> Children must be encouraged to explain their choices.</p> <p>Use the WWF pack to support this work.</p> <p>Use the Channel 4 video and resources.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to use pictures of artefacts to find out about a particular aspect of life in Benin City.</li> <li>• to answer a historical question in an organised and structured way.</li> <li>• to consider how objects are presented in museums.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>What do artefacts tell us about life in Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Visit The British Museum.</p> <p>Show the children the range of artefacts displayed in the African galleries, then focus on the ‘Brasscasting in Benin’ exhibition.</p> <p>Use the children’s enquiry questions as stimulus and ask the children to find out about a particular aspect of life in Benin City, <i>e.g. fashion, food, work</i>, using artefacts. Give them questions to structure their enquiry, <i>e.g. Which artefacts can you use to find out about fashion? What does each of these artefacts tell you about fashion? What other questions would you like to ask?</i></p> <p>Ask the children to select, arrange and label their pictures of artefacts for your own ‘museum display’ about the aspect of life investigated. Ask them to produce a ‘museum guide’ explaining the background to their enquiry about Benin and what they found.</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• select sources and infer information that is relevant to their topic.</li> <li>• use sources to describe an aspect of everyday life in Benin City.</li> <li>• arrange a display and/or make a presentation that provides information about an aspect of life in Benin City.</li> </ul>	<p>If this task is being undertaken at school, then use a variety of images, photos and illustrations. Encourage the children to compare the usefulness of different images.</p> <p><i>Ask What can we see on the photo which we can’t see from the illustration, and vice versa?</i></p> <p>Contact The British Museum Education Department for a copy of the ‘Museum Activities’ booklet which can be used in class as well as at the Museum.</p> <p>Obtain a copy of the The British Museum Benin pack for use in The Sainsbury African galleries.</p> <p>Pictures of artefacts are available on The British Museum COMPASS web site, in The British Museum Benin pack and in the Commonwealth Institute pack.</p> <p>For the ‘museum display’ you could build into the activity use of the COMPASS virtual gallery. Each group could present their findings to the class or travel around the class ‘visiting’ all the ‘museums’.</p> <p>For ideas and practice exercises see:</p> <p>Durbin, G &amp; Corbishley, M.J. “Learning from Objects”</p> <p>English Heritage (tel. : 020 7973 3442).</p> <p>Sallie Purkis “Living Proof” page 16&amp;17, Junior Education Magazine, September 2000.</p> <p>Support this work with The British Museum, ‘Museum Activities’ booklet.</p>

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<b>Children should learn</b>	<b><u>How and why do we classify evidence in history?</u></b>	<b>Children</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• how and why artefacts are classified.</li><li>• to group artefacts into categories.</li></ul>	<p>Use the 'museum displays' to focus on classification of artefacts from The Kingdom of Benin, <i>e.g. Did more than one group use the same artefact pictures in their display? Which pictures of artefacts were used most? In what other ways could artefacts be classified?</i></p> <p>Ask the children to group their pictures of artefacts into two categories.</p> <p>Discuss with the class the reasons for different classifications and why museums, historians and archaeologists use them.</p> <p>You could continue the investigation into classification and identification of artefacts by visiting The African galleries, and or by using the COMPASS web site children's search for Africa. Discuss how the artefacts have been classified. <i>What are the categories?</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• work out why artefacts have been grouped together.</li><li>• suggest reasons for different classifications.</li></ul>	<p>Use of the African galleries and the COMPASS children's search for Africa will help the children place the Kingdom of Benin within a continental context.</p> <p>Historical and archaeological material can be sorted using a range of criteria to help define research. Artefacts are often sorted by material first, i.e. into broad groups such as 'pottery', 'metalwork', 'glass', or by age, for example Prehistoric, Medieval, or place of manufacture: Egyptian, Greek, British. An archaeologist or researcher may specialise in Ancient Greek coins, and thus have studied the Ancient Greeks, in general, coins and metal technologies.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>about the types of evidence for The Kingdom of Benin.</li> <li>that there are different ways to remember history.</li> <li>that the re-telling of history depends on the bias, memory and skill of the storyteller.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>What types of evidence can we use to study the Kingdom of Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Play ‘Chinese whispers’ with the children. Ask the children: <i>What can happen when a story is told many times and over centuries?</i> Discuss oral history and traditions. Ask the children about their memories of life in KS1. There will be a range of memories and experiences. Do the children have any traditions which stem from that time? Do they have any artefacts which can tell us more about their time in KS1? Are there any pictures or photos they can use to support the oral evidence, or any written records? Are they primary or secondary accounts? Discuss points of view and bias.</p> <p>Tell the story of the first Oba with the children. Make comparison lists of what the story does and doesn’t tell us directly. What does it not tell them that they would like to know more about? Now brainstorm what the story can tell us indirectly. Discuss inference with the children. Ask: <i>How is inference different to direct evidence?</i></p> <p>Ask the class to re-tell the story of the first Oba, half writing from the point of view of the people of Benin and half from the point of view from the King of Ife. Compare the similarities and differences between the two stories. <i>Has everyone told the stories in the same way and remembered all the main points?</i> Brainstorm what the main points were then group/mark/edit to help the children see what was missed out. Has anyone embellished the story?</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>write about the origins of The Kingdom of Benin.</li> </ul>	<p>The history of the people of Benin and of Nigeria in general has not been written down by Nigerians until this century. The Benin people told and remembered their history by use of oral history told as stories, traditions and ceremonies, and by recording events or activities through the art of bronze casting and other arts, e.g. ivory and wood.</p> <p>From around the time of the first European contact, written accounts of Benin City, its people and King started to be made. There are also illustrations by some of these early visitors. The Commonwealth Institute pack has good resources to use for this lesson.</p> <p>Remind the children of any oral history work they may have carried out for the history Local Studies Unit.</p> <p>The Channel 4 Benin video features traditional storytelling and the supporting WWF pack is useful here.</p> <p>Links can be made to the Literacy Hour if you are studying African stories or traditional tales. Pick African tales from your class library, genre boxes or contact your school’s library service for traditional African tales and modern artefacts to help in the re-telling.</p> <p>Continue this work into your Literacy extended writing time. Encourage the children to edit for clarity and interest. Remind them that they are writing a story which is normally spoken aloud.</p>

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<p><b>Children should learn</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to summarise what they have found out about the Kingdom of Benin.</li> <li>That there are gaps in evidence from the past.</li> </ul>	<p><b><u>What have we found out about life in the Kingdom of Benin?</u></b></p> <p>Remind the children of the list of questions they produced for the activity ‘How was the Kingdom Of Benin discovered?’ Ask the children to select and answer questions from the list, then ask them, <i>What are the most important things you found out about life I The Kingdom of Benin? How did you find out? What do you still want to know?</i></p> <p>Supply the children with a set of 5 or 6 statements concerning The Kingdom of Benin, and related to the lesson themes taught. Ask the children to place these statements in order of what seems most important to them. Ask them to delete the least important one of them and add in a statement of their own in the appropriate place.</p> <p>Ask them to write up to 4 or 5 sentences about each of the statements.</p> <p>Ask them to support their opinions with examples or evidence. Discuss how to do this first and practise with a writing frame of needed. Ask them to write in their work whether they agree or disagree with each statement.</p> <p>Ask them to write a conclusion for their work about their study of the Kingdom of Benin, outlining what else they would like to know and how they could carry this research out independently.</p>	<p><b>Children</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>select questions and use relevant information to answer them</li> <li>suggest why they can answer some questions more fully than others</li> </ul> <p><b>Assessment</b></p> <p>Encourage the children to decide on a sensible and informative order to set out their findings.</p> <p>Pupils who need extending can be encouraged to list references in the form of a bibliography and web site list.</p>	<p>For this activity you will need to revisit the questions identified by the children at the beginning of the unit, which they used in the Museum based work.</p> <p>For some children their essay can be supported with the use of a writing frame.</p> <p>Cut and stick the statements or use a word processed document to practice cut and paste, click and drag, editing on hard copy etc.</p> <p>Use a multi-media package to produce an information CD-Rom about Benin. Pairs or groups of children can design or generate their own separate stack of multi-media cards for different topics and the children can use accessible images to illustrate their work: Maps and illustrations either downloaded from the web, a scanner or digital photos from their trip to the Museum.</p> <p>Web browsing related to the topic or specific activities undertaken using The British Museum COMPASS web site can also be incorporated in the discussion and the references.</p> <p>Use a bibliography template or design table with the children which they can sort alphabetically.</p> <p>Create information book or CD-Rom which is a collection of the essays. If possible show the children copies of periodicals or ‘learned journals’. Give yourself and the journal an appropriate name: ‘The British Benin Society’ etc. Donate a copy to the British Museum Education Department or make it accessible on your school or class web site.</p>