History
The Kingdom of Benin
Year 5 Autumn 2

Key Dates

- Around the year 900, groups of Edo people settled in the rainforests of West Africa.
- In the 1100s, there was a struggle for power and the rulers lost their kingdom. Scared with the risk of their country falling into chaos the Edo asked a neighbouring king for help. The king's grandson, Eweka, became the new ruler of the Kingdom of Benin and peace was restored.
- Around 1440, Ewuare became the new **Oba of Benin.** He built up an army and started winning land. He also rebuilt Benin City and the royal palace.
- 1400 – 1500 sailors left Europe to find a sea route to Asia. They wanted to buy things such as gold, ivory and pepper from people in Africa. The kingdom of Benin began to trade with the Europeans.
- 1500s the Kingdom reached its peak of power.
- 1600s the Obas began to lose control of their people.
- 1700 – 1800 slavery grew and Europeans bought large numbers of slaves to sell in the West Indies and Americas. They were forced to work on Plantations which grew sugar, tobacco, coffee or cotton.
- By the 1800s Benin was no longer strong or united.
- In 1807 the British government banned the slave trade and from 1834 said that it was against the law to own slaves.
- 1870s Britain and other European countries invaded Africa which was called the 'The Scramble for Africa'.
- 1897 the Kingdom of Benin ended when it was invaded by a British army and made it part of the British Empire.

Historical Skills

Chronology: Use dates and historical language in their work.
Historical knowledge and interpretation:
Appreciate that significant events in history both national and local have helped shape the country we have today.
Historical enquiry:
Test out a hypothesis in order to answer a question.

Website Links

Historical Concepts

Cause and Consequence
The 'how and why' of history. The causes look for 'what were the actions/beliefs/circumstances…?' that led to a change or event that we examine, and then the consequences of these.
Civilisation
Through a developed understanding of civilisation our pupils will be able to make links between civilisations they have studied and are studying.

Why don't you…

Have a go at making a Benin Bronze using papier-mâché and paint?
Write a play script about how the first Oba came to be?
Research which museums in the UK have Benin Bronzes?



Key Vocabulary

West Africa: The Western part of the continent of Africa in which Benin is part.
Oba: The Oba of Benin is the traditional ruler and the custodian of the culture of the Edo people.
Eweka: Became the new Oba and so the Oba dynasty began.
Benin Bronzes: Metal workers in Benin made beautiful plaques, masks and statues for the Oba, often called 'Benin Bronzes'. The majority of the artefacts were looted by British soldiers and brought back to Europe.
Edo: The people who settled and formed the Kingdom of Benin.
Guild: Association of craftsmen or merchants, often having considerable power.
Trade: The action of buying and selling goods and services.
Brass: A type of metal an alloy of copper and zinc.

Key Facts

- The Kingdom of Benin was also known as the Edo Kingdom or the Benin Empire.
- The ancient Kingdom of Benin was situated in the South East Coast of West Africa, an area forming part of modern Nigeria and is different from the modern country of Benin.
- The people did not write down their history but transmitted it through their oral (spoken) culture, their art and their legends.
- It had many different periods in its history but it is known for its walled city.

Enquiry Questions

Intro lesson- Africa's story: if we had to remember three things, what would you choose?
What is the Ancient Kingdom of Benin?
What do these artefacts tell us about the kingdom of Benin?
If objects could speak, what story would they tell? The story of Benin's bronzes.
How influential was the Oba in the history of Ancient Benin?
What happened to the Ancient Kingdom of Benin?