



Ancient Benin
learning pack
KS2

Ancient Benin Learning Pack

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To book an **Ancient Benin** handling session, visit:
http://www.horniman.ac.uk/schools/book_sessions.php for more
information, or telephone the Schools' Learning direct line on
020 8291 8686

Background info: The ancient kingdom of Benin

Benin was a powerful kingdom in West Africa established in the 11th century. The people of the kingdom are the Edo and their language is Edo. (The people of the kingdom of Benin are also sometimes called the Bini but this name isn't used in this pack). The kingdom was ruled by the king, called the oba, who lived in a palace in Benin City, the capital of ancient Benin.



The oba

The Edo worshiped several gods, and certain places, animals and plants had special meanings. The oba was treated like a god and he oversaw religious ceremonies, festivals and rituals led by priests. He also controlled the arts, particularly wood and ivory carving and the casting of brass. The oba was helped by many chiefs. They were powerful people who ran the palace, controlled the towns of the kingdom or commanded the oba's army.

◀ The Benin brass plaques displayed in the Horniman Museum once hung in the oba's palace.

Travel, trade and war

Benin got its power and wealth through long-distance trade across the Sahara desert, and through warfare. The obas who ruled Benin between the 15th and 17th centuries were known as the Warrior Kings. During this period wars were common. As the oba's armies captured new lands, the kingdom of Benin grew larger. This was also a time when the obas had many great artworks made by craftspeople.

▶ Brass bracelet-shaped manillias and cowries shells were used for trade.



Contact with European traders

The Portuguese were the first Europeans to reach Benin. They arrived in the 15th century and set up trade links. They seem to have established good relationships with the obas of Benin very quickly. Benin was interested in buying coral beads, brass and other goods the Europeans brought. The Portuguese took slaves.

◀ Trade relationships with Portuguese people were recorded on brass plaques.

Decline of the kingdom

The kingdom began to decline in the 17th century. The oba began to lose his grip on power and there was civil war. In the 19th century Benin was attacked by another kingdom, and Benin lost much of its territory. The British wanted control of Benin's trade links. They signed a trade treaty but later the British army captured Benin. Benin became part of British-owned Nigeria, many of the oba's powers were taken away and the independent kingdom came to an end.

What was the kingdom of Benin is now part of the Edo State in Nigeria. Benin City is now the capital of the Edo State.



Many of ancient Benin's traditions are still practiced in modern Nigeria. Brass casters still work in Benin City.



Map showing modern West African countries and cities, including Benin City.

Map of modern Africa



Background info: Objects from ancient Benin



The objects from ancient Benin were some of the few African objects bought by Mr Horniman for the Horniman Museum. They were war booty, which had been looted from the oba's palace.

The British army raided Benin in February 1897. This was a mission to revenge the killing of a British General and to "punish" the people of Benin. The soldiers burnt down the homes of the important people of Benin. The fire destroyed most of the city. The British took over the kingdom and looted the oba's palace. One British official described what was stolen:

"In some of the houses were hundreds of bronze plaques of unique design; castings of wonderful detail, and a very large number of carved elephant's tusks . . . there was a wonderful collection of ivory and bronze bracelets, splendid ivory leopards, bronze heads, beautifully carved wooden stools and boxes and many more articles too numerous to mention. A regular harvest of loot."

Among the British men was Mr W. J. Hider. Mr Hider brought some objects back from Benin and sold them, through an auction, to Mr Horniman. Mr Hider believed his objects were the only ones from the kingdom of Benin that had survived the fire. (We now know this was not the case. Other objects from ancient Benin can be seen in museums around the world, including in the British Museum).

The objects from Benin were an exciting addition to Mr Horniman's collection. They were written about in the Horniman Museum Annual Report in 1897:

"The curios which came from the city of Benin are particularly interesting, in as much as Mr. Horniman has purchased them from Mr. W. J. Hider, S.B.S Royal Navy who had collected them during the occupation of the City by the British expeditionary force. Mr Hider had them in a brass roofed stone building in which he was attending the wounded. When the city was burnt on February 18th, nearly everything was destroyed, so these antiquities, &c., furnish the chief among the few to survive".

When the museum opened in 1901, the objects from ancient Benin were displayed as "curiosities" to be puzzled over. People thought it was impossible that African people could make beautiful using such complicated methods. Some people tried to explain the objects from ancient Benin by saying that the African craftspeople learnt their methods from Europeans. Other people didn't believe the objects were African, saying they were from the disappeared empire of Atlantis.

This reflects the ideas that many (but not all) people at the time had about Africa and African people, which were very different to peoples' views today.



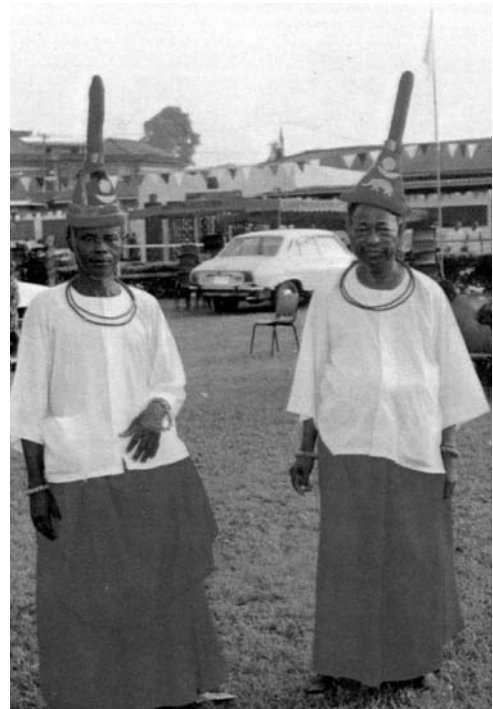
Redisplaying the objects from ancient Benin

Since the Horniman Museum opened, more than 100 years ago, ideas have changed and the collections have grown. Now, the objects from ancient Benin are not displayed together. The musical instruments from ancient Benin are in the Music Gallery. Other objects are in the Centenary Gallery as examples from Mr Horniman's original collection. The Benin brass plaques are in the African Worlds Gallery, which opened in 1999. This gallery celebrates Africa's history, its creativity and its different cultures.

When the African Worlds Gallery was being created the curators wanted to change the ways the stories behind the objects are told. So they asked African people to work with them, to share ideas and to help understand the African objects. Joseph Eboime, a museum director from Nigeria, studied the brass plaques so that they could be understood from the point of view of his own people.

Joseph Eboime was an anthropologist: he studied people. Working in Nigeria, he was able to research the brass plaques by talking to the Edo people, including those from the Royal Palace. He recorded stories, watched ceremonies and festivals and read documents. He used this information to write the labels for the brasses in the African Worlds Gallery.

► Joseph Eboime took photos of ceremonies and Edo people.



Joseph Eboime's work shaped the way the brass plaques are displayed. This way, Horniman Museum's curators feel, the Benin objects and the Edo people are given a voice in the African Worlds Gallery.

Joseph Eboime also wrote booklets about the Benin objects and pictures and information were put on the Horniman Museum's website. Museums in Africa were given computer facilities so that school children and researchers can access the information.



◄ The Benin brass plaques displayed in the Horniman Museum.

We now have lots of ideas and information about the objects from ancient Benin. But the objects were looted from the oba's palace. They seem to have been taken at random, and the buildings they came from were burnt down. So we don't know how or where the objects were kept; we don't know if they belong together, or what is missing. We may never get to the bottom of the meanings of the objects from ancient Benin.

Background info: Should the objects be returned?

The objects from ancient Benin in museums around the world bring up some very tricky issues. For many different reasons, some people think the objects that were looted from Benin should be repatriated, returned to the Edo people. Others disagree.

Neither the Nigerian government nor any other organisations have asked for the objects in the Horniman Museum to be repatriated. However, some of the museum's visitors have very strong feelings about the objects.

These are some opinions about the issue of repatriation. They come from people who work in the museum, school children, museum visitors and websites:

There are many Nigerians living in the UK. Why shouldn't the objects stay in the UK too?

Lots of visitors and tourists come to London. It's a good place for the Benin objects to be so that as many people as possible can see them.

The British burnt down the oba's palace for no good reason so giving the objects back is the least the British people can do.

The objects were won fair and square. They should stay in the UK.

Stealing the objects has given Britain a bad reputation. They can make up for it by giving the objects back.

If the objects were returned, who should they be given to? A museum? The oba? Politicians?

If the objects are returned they'll be sold into private collections.

Can the objects be loaned to a museum in Nigeria for a while?

Without the objects from Benin, people living in Nigeria can't learn about their own culture.

In 1973 the president of Nigeria took an ancient Benin brass statue from the Lagos National Museum and gave it to Queen Elizabeth II. Why should the objects be given back if they'll be given away again?

There isn't enough security in Nigerian museums. The objects might be stolen.

If we give the objects from Benin back, all the other museums with objects from Benin will have to give theirs back too.

The people who made the objects are dead, but their culture lives on. The objects have special meaning to the families of those people. They should have them.

It doesn't matter where the objects are if there is information about them on the Internet.

Nigeria has nothing to show for itself because the Europeans have stolen it all. How can Nigeria tell its own story without the objects that are part of its past?

The objects should stay in the Horniman Museum to act as ambassadors for Africa.

Keeping the objects away from the place and the people they come from takes away their meaning. They shouldn't be in a British museum.

The Horniman Museum should work with the museums in Nigeria to improve their security and the way objects are looked after.

All the objects should be given back. Let the Nigerian people decide which ones the Horniman Museum can keep.

By working with Nigerian people, the Horniman Museum is sharing the objects

The British people stole the objects. It's fair to give them back, they belong to Benin.

What has happened has happened. We can't change the past by returning the objects.

If the objects stay in the Horniman Museum we can carry on talking about them. Without them people in London can't talk or learn about Benin.

The objects have been in London since 1897. Why give them back now?

Background info: Royal Art

Almost all of the objects on display in the museum and the replicas in the handling collection are pieces of royal art. They were made to glorify and honour the Oba, and obas of the past. The objects were used by the Oba or people close to him, the statues were placed on royal altars and the plaques were displayed on the walls of the palace.



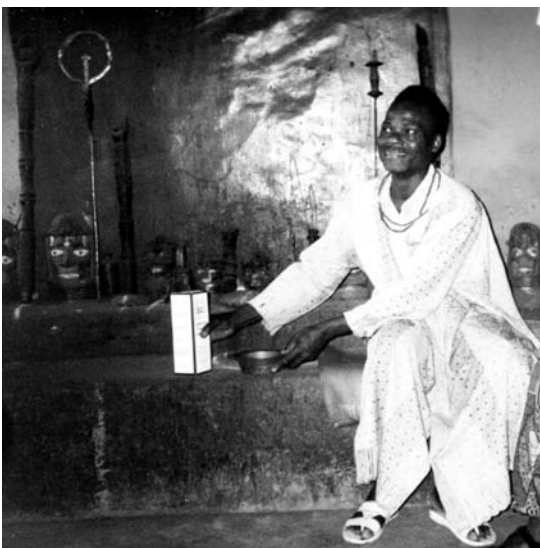
Craftspeople

In the Oba's palace lived guilds of specialist craftspeople who made brass, ivory and wood sculptures for the Oba, and his chiefs and priests. The brass-casters guild made plaques, heads and statues. The ivory-carvers guild made staffs, armlets, horns and other sculptures. These craftspeople made objects only for the Oba and he rewarded them with gifts.

There are still craft guilds in Benin City (now in modern Nigeria) today. They make objects for the Oba as well as making objects to sell.

Brass plaques

Brass plaques were made to display on the walls of the royal palace. Most of the plaques show the Oba's official business, such as trade, ceremonies and warfare. The pictures on the plaques are full of symbols and double-meanings, so they do not record history exactly as it happened. The Horniman Museum only has a small number of the plaques from the Oba's palace, and because they were taken away from where they were originally displayed we might never fully understand them.



Altars

People in ancient Benin would create altars, special places where they could remember and honour the ancestors. Altars allow people to communicate with their ancestors' spirits. Bells would be kept on the altar to call the spirits with. Statues, head sculptures and other objects and offerings would be placed on the altar. The Oba had altars in his palace and would have brass and carved ivory objects made to put on them.

◀ This photo shows a man putting an offering on an altar in Benin City, Nigeria. Taken by Carolyn Roberts from the Horniman Museum.

Materials

Brass

Brass objects were made by casting - pouring hot, melted brass into a mould. Brass was only cast on the Oba's orders because it was a royal material. Brass was a rare and expensive material. An ancient Benin saying is "brass never rusts, lead never rots." The Oba had objects made from brass because it never decays, and he wanted his power and glory to go on forever.



Ivory

Ivory was a royal material. It is white, which symbolises purity, and it was thought to hold the strength and power of the elephant. Elephants were seen as wise, long-living and good leaders. These were qualities the Oba saw in himself. Ivory makes excellent long-lasting decorated objects as it is hard, strong and can be carved easily.

Coral

Coral was used to make beads that symbolised kingship. Only the Oba, the Queen Mother and high officials wore coral beads. The red colour of the coral was thought to be threatening to the enemies of the kingdom. Royal coral beads were also thought to hold a mystical power. They represent Olokun, the god of the waters.



Wood

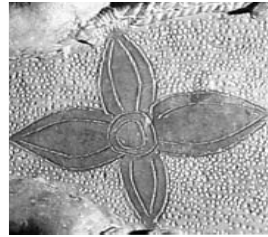
Wood was carved by craftsmen from the guild of wood and ivory carvers. The Oba may have had some objects made of wood, but it was mainly used for objects made for ordinary citizens. Royal objects were made from ever-lasting materials. Ordinary citizens had objects made from inexpensive materials that were seen as part of the life cycle of growth and decay.

Symbols

Royal art includes many symbols. Writing was not used in ancient Benin, so pictures and symbols were an important way of getting messages across. These are just some of the symbols that are often seen in royal art:

Olokun patterns

The background patterns on plaques are made of repeated motifs. These motifs are linked to Olokun, the god of the waters, and show the power of the Oba over the waters.



Water hyacinth (or river leaf) motif



"The sun never misses a day" motif



Heads and faces

A person or animal's head was seen as the source of their success. Your head leads you through your life by thinking, hearing, seeing and speaking. In ancient Benin your head was believed to be the centre of your power. Often only people's or animals' heads or faces are shown, rather than their whole bodies.

Animals

Animals are symbols of gods or spirits. Animals are also often used to symbolise the Oba's powers.



Crocodiles and snakes are symbols of Olokun, the god of the waters, who the Oba was believed to be very close to. Crocodiles are called the 'policemen of the waters' and snakes, too, were said to have been sent by Olokun to punish wicked people and protect good people.

Leopards were sacred animals, used as a symbol of royal power. Only the Oba's leopard hunters were allowed to capture or kill leopards. Leopards were seen as strong, magical and cruel but also good leaders. This represented the two sides of the Oba's power. The Oba once kept leopards as pets. This was to show his power over the "king of the jungle".



Symbols of supernatural power

In ancient Benin, people believed in three magical realms: earth, water and sky. People lived in the realm of the earth, but the Oba's powers allowed him to move between the realms, which ordinary people could not do. The Queen Mother, warriors, priests and chiefs were also believed to have this power.



Objects that point upwards symbolise the power to move between the realms of the earth and the air. These objects include rattle staffs, swords, spears, the Queen Mother's tall "chicken's beak" hairstyle, eagle feathers, and tall pointed hats or headdresses.

Mudfish, frogs, crocodiles and snakes symbolise the power to move between the realms of the water and the earth.



Body art

Many different kinds of body decoration are shown on objects. Body decoration often had special meaning.



Jewellery

Anklets, armlets and necklaces show peoples' rank, status and power. Coral beads necklaces were only given to people who were close to the Oba. Armlets and anklets were often decorated with special symbols.

Tattoos and scars

Tattoos or scars called *Iwu* were made on peoples' faces or chests to show that they were citizens of Benin. On this brass statue, the man's *Iwu* are vertical lines on his cheeks.



Hair

Some people in ancient Benin had very elaborate hairstyles. This may have been a way for people to show who they were or how important they were.

Background info: Sources of evidence

How do we know what we know about the ancient kingdom of Benin?

Oral tradition

The Edo did not use writing. They recorded their history by telling each other and their children their memories and stories about the past. Nigerian historians have begun to make written records of these stories.

Ceremonies and traditions

The Edo still have an oba and hold religious ceremonies and festivals. Traditions like these have often been done the same way for a long time. Studying these may give an idea of how things were done in the past.

Written documents

All the early documents about Benin were written by European people who visited and traded with Benin.

Archaeology

Archaeologists study the clues and remains of buildings from the past. Although the British army destroyed much of Benin City, many traces of the city were left behind.

Objects

The artefacts in the Horniman Museum were probably made in the 15th to 17th centuries. They were taken from the palace and probably belonged to the oba. The museum has nothing that belonged to lower status, 'ordinary' Edo people.

Informed guessing

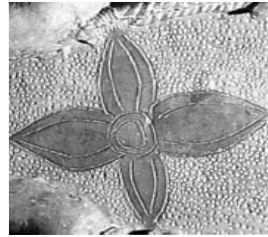
There are some things that we might never know. Sometimes, using the sources we do have, we can make intelligent guesses. But sometimes it is best to accept that we just don't know!

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Objects from the Kingdom of Benin in the Music Gallery

Ukhurhe (rattle staff)



- > Made of ivory
- > Used for calling up spirits or showing the power of the ancestors.

This is a staff or stick. It has been carved to look like a bamboo cane. There is a carved slot in one end, which holds a small rod. This rattles when the staff is shaken up and down.

The clenched fist carved at the end probably shows that the owner was a powerful person. It may also show that they were rich as the clenched fist is a symbol of the "gathering up of wealth."

Ukhurhe like this were often used to show the power of the ancestors. By holding up an ukhurhe, the Oba could show that he has taken on the power of the obas of the past.

Ukhurhe were also used in ceremonies. Tapping it on the ground called the world of the spirits. The ukhurhe may be shaken to make blessings or curses.

Clapper bell

- > Made of brass
- > Used for protection in battle or in ceremonies

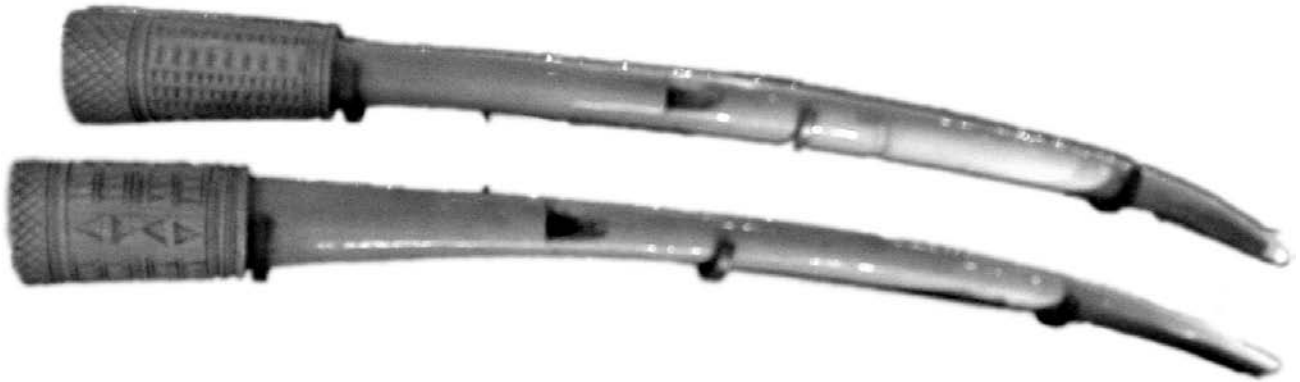
This bell has a clapper fixed inside it that swings when the bell is shaken. This creates a loud sound that is not easily controlled, so these bells are not usually used to make music.

Bells like these were used for protection against negative forces. Chiefs wore bells on their chests. Often they hung them from leopard tooth necklaces. They believed this protected them when they went into battle. Bells were also rung to signal victory.

You can often see bells this four-sided pyramid shape are often shown on brass plaques, like the ones in the African Worlds gallery.



Side blown horns



- > Made of ivory
- > Used for ceremonies

Ivory side-blown horns were used to show the power of the Oba. They were used in royal ceremonies and were blown to signal the arrival of the Oba.

Ivory was an important material in Ancient Benin. It was thought to hold the strength and power of the elephant. Elephants were seen as wise, good leaders and long-living. These were qualities the Oba saw in himself.

Objects from the Kingdom of Benin in the Centenary Gallery

Brass bells

- > Made of brass
- > Used for ceremonies, music or protection.



Many pyramid-shaped, four-sided bells were made, like this one. Bells like these often appear on brass plaques, usually worn around people's necks.

Bells were decorated with many different patterns and designs. Often they would be decorated with faces, like this bell is, although we are not sure why.



This bell, shaped like a man's head, is more unusual. Very little is known about these head-shaped bells. We are not sure if the Oba or people at the palace would use them. We are not even sure if they were made in Benin! They might have been made in another African kingdom.

Brass bells were an important part of religion in Ancient Benin. They were kept on altars, where religious objects were used. Bells would be rung to signal the beginning of a ceremony or to call to the spirits.

Many bells were made and used in ancient Benin. They might be used by the army or by musicians, or by other people in ceremonies or for religious reasons.

Ezuzu

- > Made of goat skin.
- > Used for keeping cool.

Fans like these are often shown on brass plaques and other brass objects.



Ivory armlets



- > Made of ivory and gold.
- > Used for body decoration.

The armlets are decorated with carved faces. Some of the faces have long hair, beards and moustaches and wear hats. They are probably Portuguese men, maybe traders.

The smaller armlet is also decorated with faces of men with short hair and no beards. They may be men from Benin. Armlets were not used just for body



decoration in ancient Benin. Jewellery showed what job someone did, what group they belonged to or their relationship with the Oba.

As these armlets are made of ivory and gold, which were royal materials, they may have belonged to the Oba or members of his family.

Hand-held ivory clappers

- > Made of ivory
- > Used for ceremonies

Clappers are played by beating them together. They were believed to sound like ahianmwē-oro, 'the bird of prophecy', which was also sometimes known as 'the messenger of god'.

The figure on the clapper on the left is probably the Oba, as he wears a large bead on his chest. He wears a coral bead cap, headband, collar, anklets bracelets and a wrap-around skirt with a lattice (criss-cross) pattern.

The figure on the clapper on the right also wears a lot of coral beads and a decorated wrap-around skirt. The figure is playing a bell with a beater. This type of bell was used in ceremonies to chase the powers of evil from the kingdom.

Ivory was probably used to make these clappers because they are used in royal ceremonies.



Objects from the Kingdom of Benin in the African Worlds Gallery

Benin Plaques



- > Made of brass.
- > The plaques covered the walls of the Oba's palace.

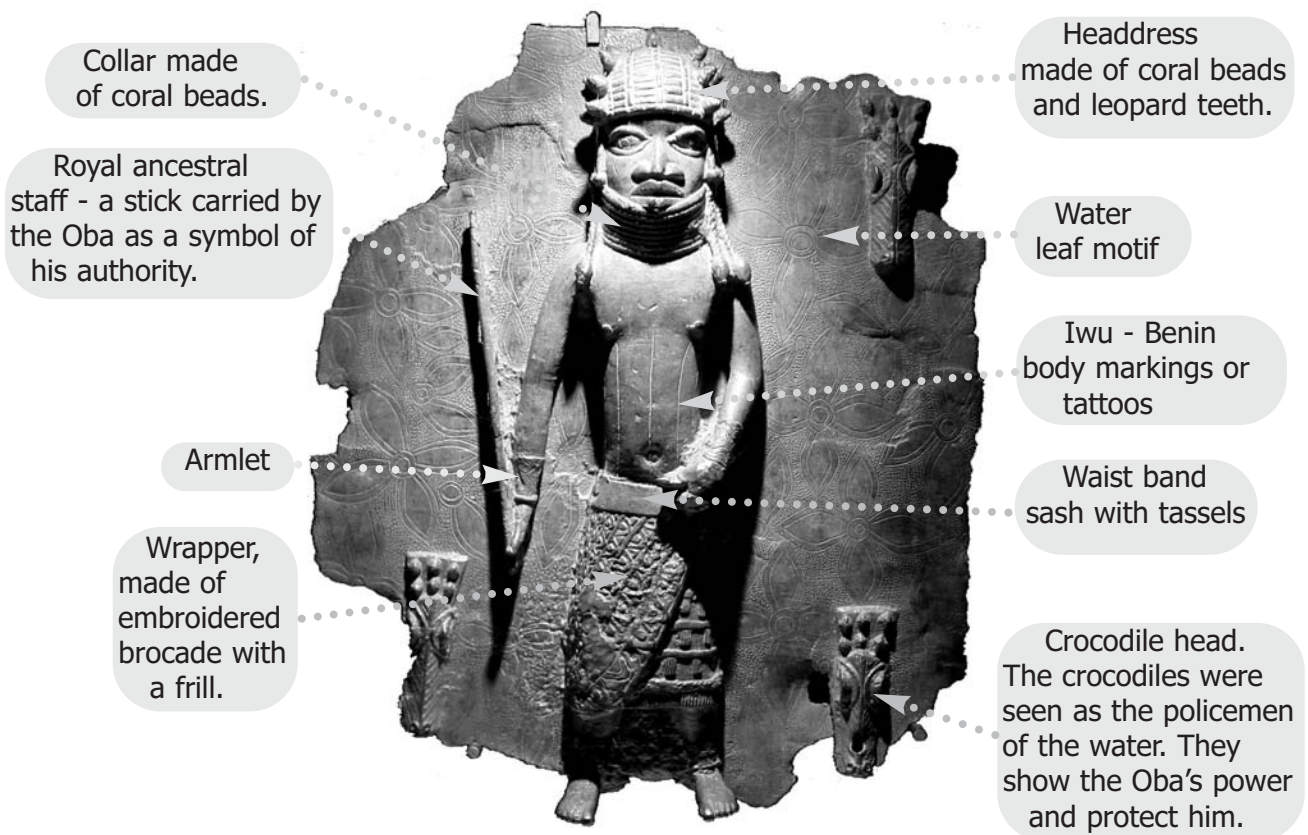
The Oba ruled the Kingdom of Benin from his royal palace, which was at the centre of Benin City. The walls of the palace were covered with brass plaques. They were made by the brass-casters guild, a group of craftpeople who lived in the palace and worked for the Oba.

The plaques showed past Obas, merchants, warriors, chiefs and famous priests. They recorded the parts of the history of ancient Benin that the Obas wanted people to see. They recorded events, stories, trade arrangements, triumphs and victories.

There was no written language in the ancient Kingdom of Benin, so the plaques give us an important view into the history of the kingdom. But we don't know the whole story.

Plaques were taken from the royal palace in 1897 when the British army captured Benin City. They were brought to London and sold in auction houses. The Horniman Museum has 8 plaques but there are many more in museums and private collections all over the world. The plaques here give us clues about the ancient kingdom, but there are many parts of the story we still don't know.

Oba Orhogbua



- > This plaque was made in the 16th century.
- > The figure in the middle is Oba Orhogbua.
- > The Oba is surrounded by crocodile heads.



In the Music Gallery you can find a staff from Benin.

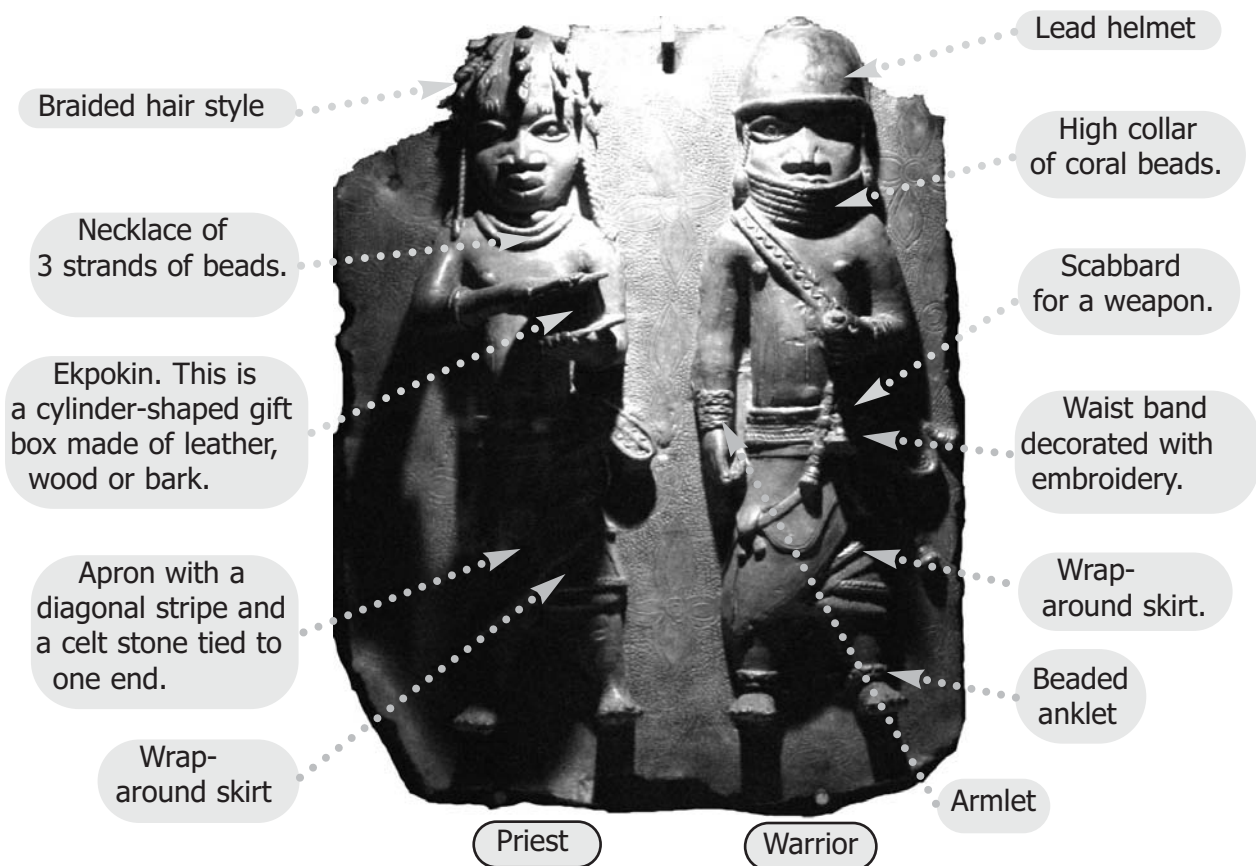
Staffs a little like the one on this plaque were used by many people in Benin to show their power.

Oba Orhogbua ruled Benin between 1550 – 1578 AD. Before he became Oba he was educated and baptised in Portugal.

In this plaque Oba Orhogbua is holding a stick. This is the royal ancestral staff. Orhogbua became Oba when his father, Esigle, died. Orhogbua's first task was to deal with some rebellious villagers who refused to pay their annual tributes (payments of goods, slaves or cowrie shells). By taking up the ancestral staff he showed that he had taken over Esigle's power as Oba. Because of this, the villagers had to surrender to him, and pay their tributes.

The royal ancestral staff is a symbol of the Oba's authority, which he takes on from the Oba before him.

Uko'Oba: the Oba's emissary



- > This plaque was made in the 16th century.
- > These men were on a mission for the Oba.
- > One man carries a head (or some soil) in a box.



In the Centenary Gallery you can find ivory armlets similar to the armlet worn by the warrior chief on this plaque.

The men on this plaque are acting as the Oba's emissaries, sent on a special mission to act on the Oba's behalf.

The man on the right is a war chief. We know this from the large amount of jewellery he is wearing and from his helmet and scabbard. With him is a royal army priest, identified by his braided hair style, his necklace and the celt stone (a stone tool) he wears.

The war chief and the priest seem to have been sent to lead an army to capture foreign land. This plaque shows us their mission was successful. The ekpokin the priest carries probably holds the head of someone they captured or soil from the conquered land. The ekpokin was given to the Oba to prove the mission was successful.

Ohen N'ugbor n'ome eto ene: the elusive priest of ugbor village

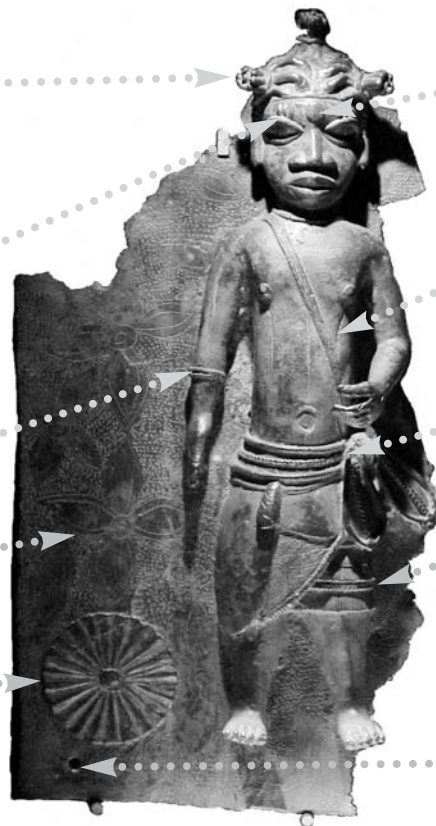
Dreadlocks tied into bundles - each bundle has a special meaning.

Body marks above his eyebrows show he is a citizen of Benin.

Armlet

Water leaf motif

This symbol means 'the sun never misses a day.'



Mystical badge worn on his forehead.

Iwu - Benin body markings or tattoos.

Decorated waist band.

Wrap-around skirt.

This hole was probably used to fix the plaque in place.

- > This plaque was made in the 15th century.
- > The man on this plaque is a priest.
- > The priest is a trickster who once tried to fool the Oba.

On the next page you can read the story of the Ohen n'Ugbo and Oba Ewuare. Find somewhere where you can all sit comfortably together and take turns to read aloud.

This plaque tells an old story from the time Oba Ewuare was in power (1440 - 1472).

The man on the plaque is the Ohen n'Ugbor, the priest of Ugbor village. In the story, the Ohen n'Ugbor tries to play a trick on the Oba. The Ohen n'Ugbor's hair is tied in bundles. Each bundle has a special meaning, which is explained by the story.

This is an unusual plaque because it records a time when someone tried to trick the Oba. None of the other plaques in the museum seem to show anyone who tried to make the Oba look foolish.

The priest of Ugbor village and Oba Ewuare

The priest of Ugbor village was a trickster. He went Oba Ewuare's palace and told the Oba some fiendishly difficult riddles. The priest said that if the Oba could solve any of the riddles, the Oba could take his life.

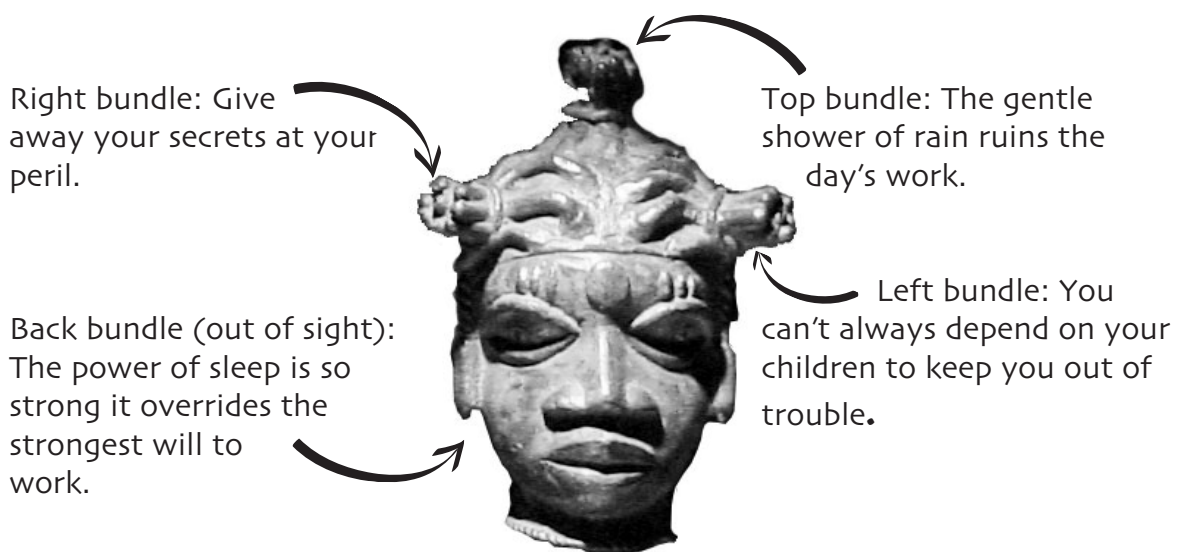
The Oba tried all the answers he could think of, but they were all wrong. So that night the Oba sent a beautiful woman to visit the priest. She gave the priest sweet, strong palm wine to drink and soon he told her the answers to the riddles. In secret she sent the priest's stepson to the Oba Ewuare's palace with the answers.

The next day, the priest went back to the palace. To his horror the Oba reeled off the answers to his riddles and had him thrown into prison. The priest could do nothing but wait for his execution.

Suddenly it began to rain. While the executioners waited for the shower to stop they drifted off to sleep, lulled by the sound of falling raindrops. The priest saw his chance and sneaked off.

Scared they would get into trouble for letting a prisoner escape, the executioners smeared their swords with chicken's blood. They showed their bloody swords as proof that they had obeyed their orders and executed the priest.

The Oba Ewuare was none the wiser until a few weeks later. To his surprise the priest turned up at the palace, wearing his hair tied up in bundles. He told the Oba what they meant:



Uwangué Osokhirikpa:

Uwangué the flamboyant and proud one

Headdress
made of coral beads.

Men wearing
European-style
clothes and hair.
They are probably
Portuguese traders.

The Oba is
reaching out with
the right hand of
friendship.

May be an
iron spear (made in
Benin) or a sword.

Coral collar
and necklace.

Wrap-around
skirt made of
decorated Benin
cloth with tassels
and brocade.

Anklet
with bells

Engraved
armlet

The hats the
traders wear may be
Benin straw hats, or
they may be leather
hats decorated with
parrot feathers, which
were fashionable in
15th century Portugal.

We're not sure.
What do you think?

Brass manilla
(a bracelet shaped
piece of brass traded
for other goods).

A big fish
(probably a shark)
links the trader to
the Oba.



> This plaque was made
in the 15th century.

> It shows the Oba,
holding out the right
hand of friendship.

> The other 2 men are
traders from Europe.

The man in the centre of this plaque is Chief Uwangué who lived during the reign of Oba Ewuare. In this plaque he is meeting two Portuguese traders, as he acting as the Oba's representative.

The Portuguese men are easy to spot because their clothes and body decoration are different to the chief's.

We can see that the Oba wanted to make trade links with the Portuguese. The chief is holding out the right hand of friendship to one of the traders, and he is linked to the other by a royal fish motif.

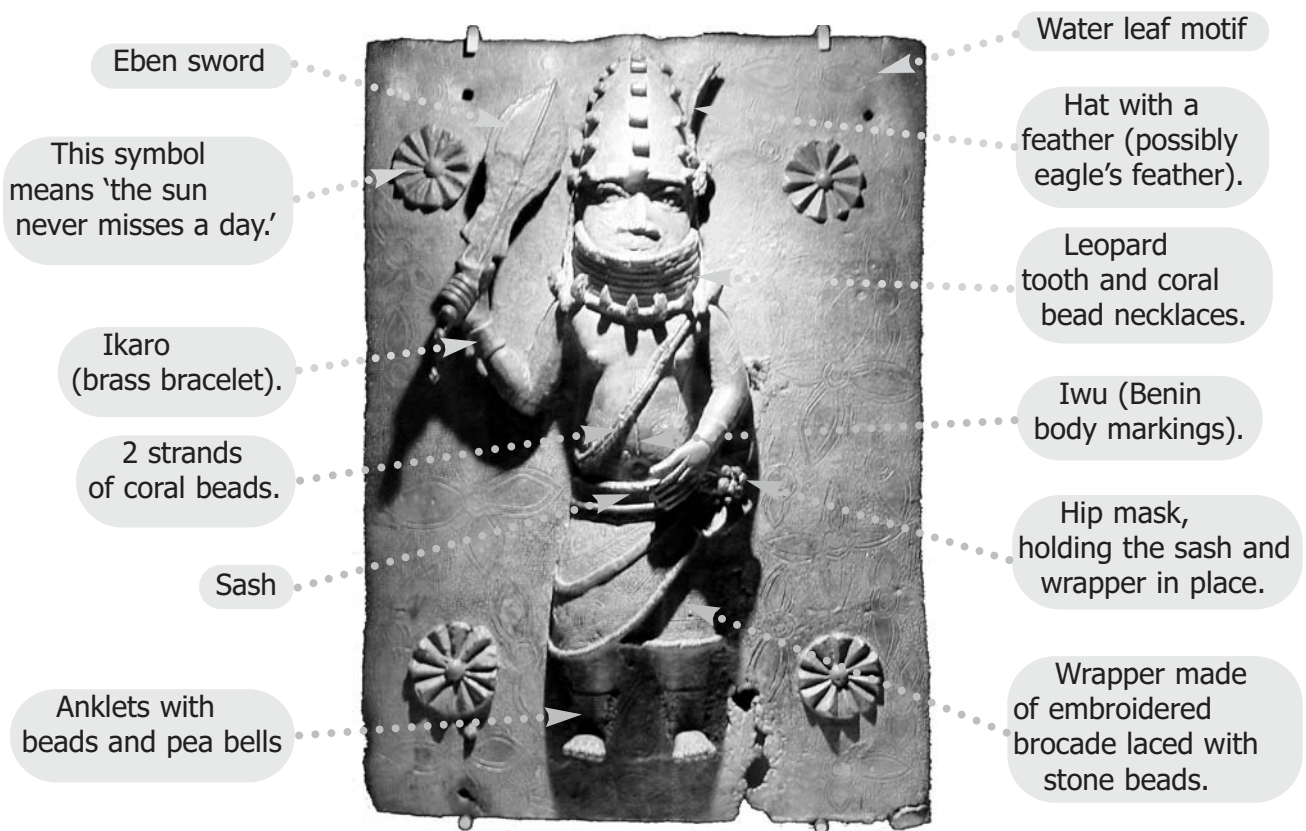
The Portuguese man on the right holds a brass manilla, which the Portuguese brought to trade with the people of Benin.



**In the handling
area in the
Aquarium** (near
the entrance)

you can touch a cowrie
shell. Cowrie shells like
this were used as money
for trade in Ancient
Benin.

Edogun n'Ibwe N'ekhua



- > This plaque was made in the 13th century.
- > The man on the plaque is a friend of the Oba.
- > He carries a sword to show his power.



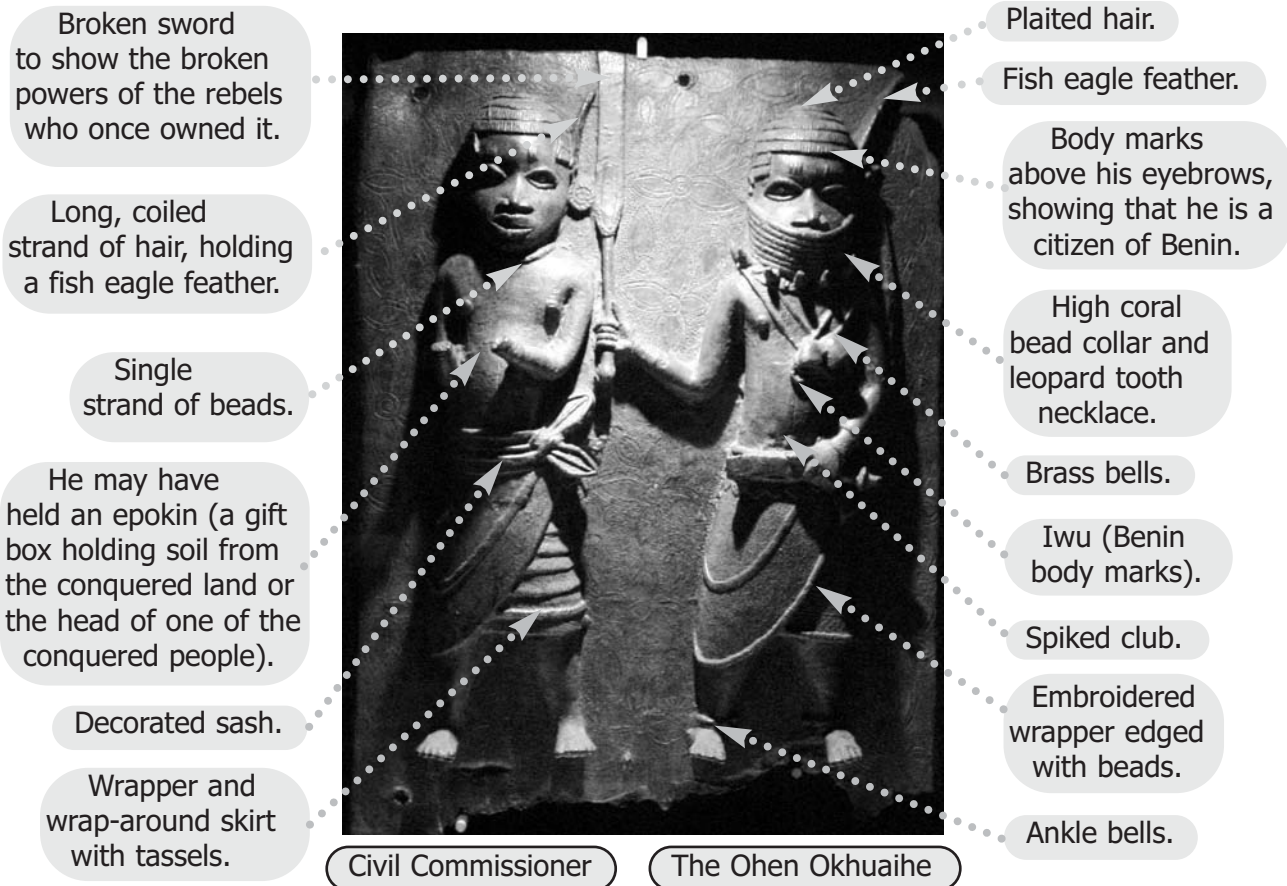
In the Natural History Gallery you can find a leopard's skull, in case 59. Leopards' teeth were thought to give protection in battle.

The man on this plaque is called Edogun. Edogun helped the Oba Ewedo become Oba. The large amount of beads he wears and the Eben sword he holds show us he was a very powerful and important man in the palace.

The Eben is a state sword, carried by chiefs and other powerful people in ceremonies. Dropping the sword would make the ancestors, and the Oba of Benin, who represents them, angry.

Egodun wears a leopard tooth necklace. The Oba had his own leopard hunters, and only they were allowed to kill or tame leopards. The Oba would give leopards' teeth to the commanders of his armies. They wore the teeth on necklace to show that they obeyed the Oba and were loyal to him.

Ohen Okhuaihe N'Ogheghe: the chief priest of the river god 'Okhuaihe' at Ogheghe



- > The date this plaque was made is unknown.
- > The men command the Oba's army.
- > They carry proof that they have defeated some rebels.



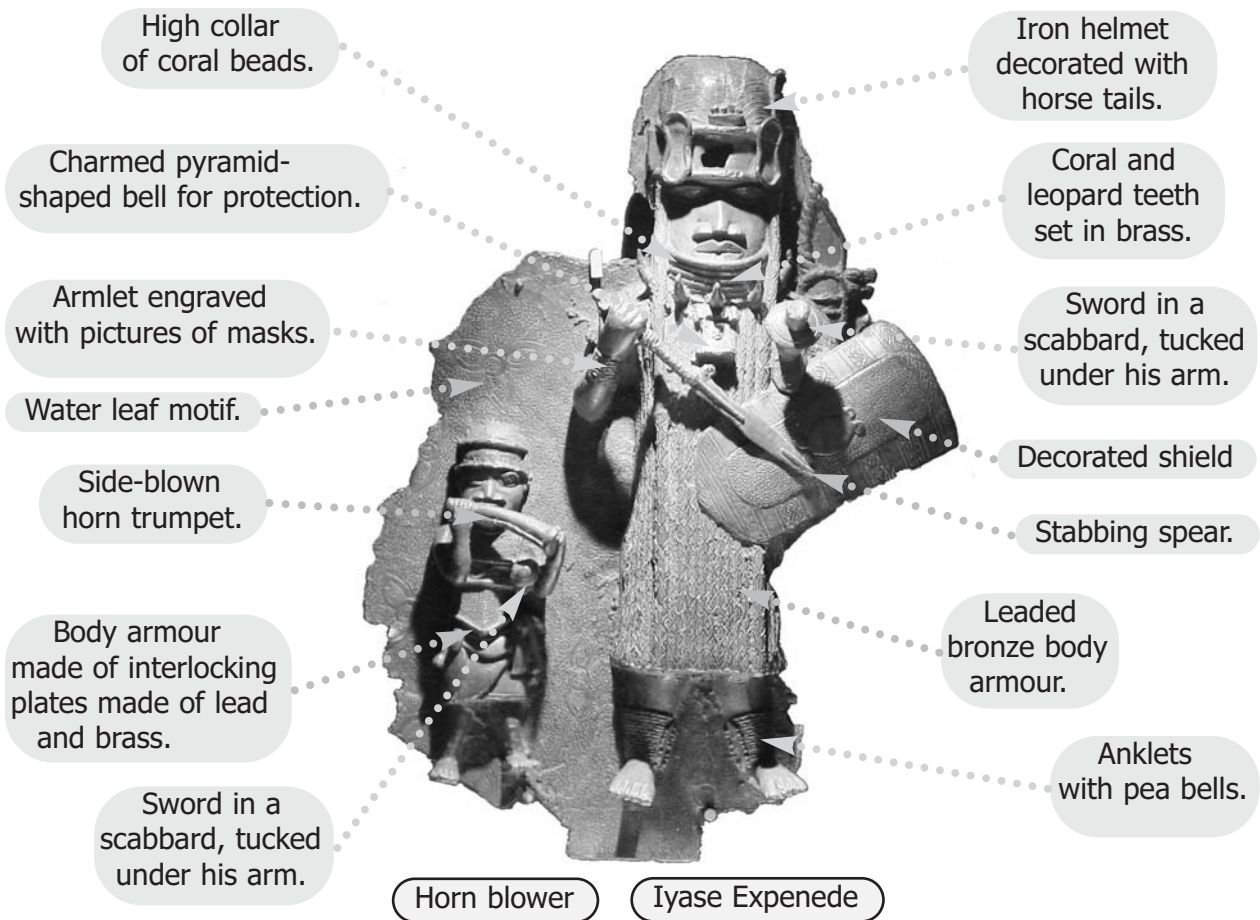
In the Aquarium you can see coral that is similar to (but not exactly the same as) the red coral used to make beads like the ones the Ohen Okhuaihe wears.

The man on the right of this plaque is the Ohen Okhuaihe, the High Priest of the army. On the left is the Oba's Civil Commissioner.

The Ohen Okhuaihe was an important part of the army. He was in charge of the medical team: bone-setters and menders, herbalists and traditional doctors.

These two men are bringing the news of a victory over a group of people who had been rebelling against the Oba. The Ohen Okhuaihe carries a sword that once belonged to one of the rebels. It has been broken to show that the rebel's powers have been broken. The Civil Commissioner probably carried an epokin, which has been broken off the plaque. The epokin could have held the head of a rebel leader, to prove that he had been defeated.

Ekpenede, Iyase of Benin



- > This plaque was made in the 16th century.
- > The larger figure is the commander-in-chief of the army.
- > The smaller figure is his hornblower.



In the Music Gallery you can find a side-blown horn similar to the one played by the hornblower. Horns were blown when the army went into battle, and to signal victories.

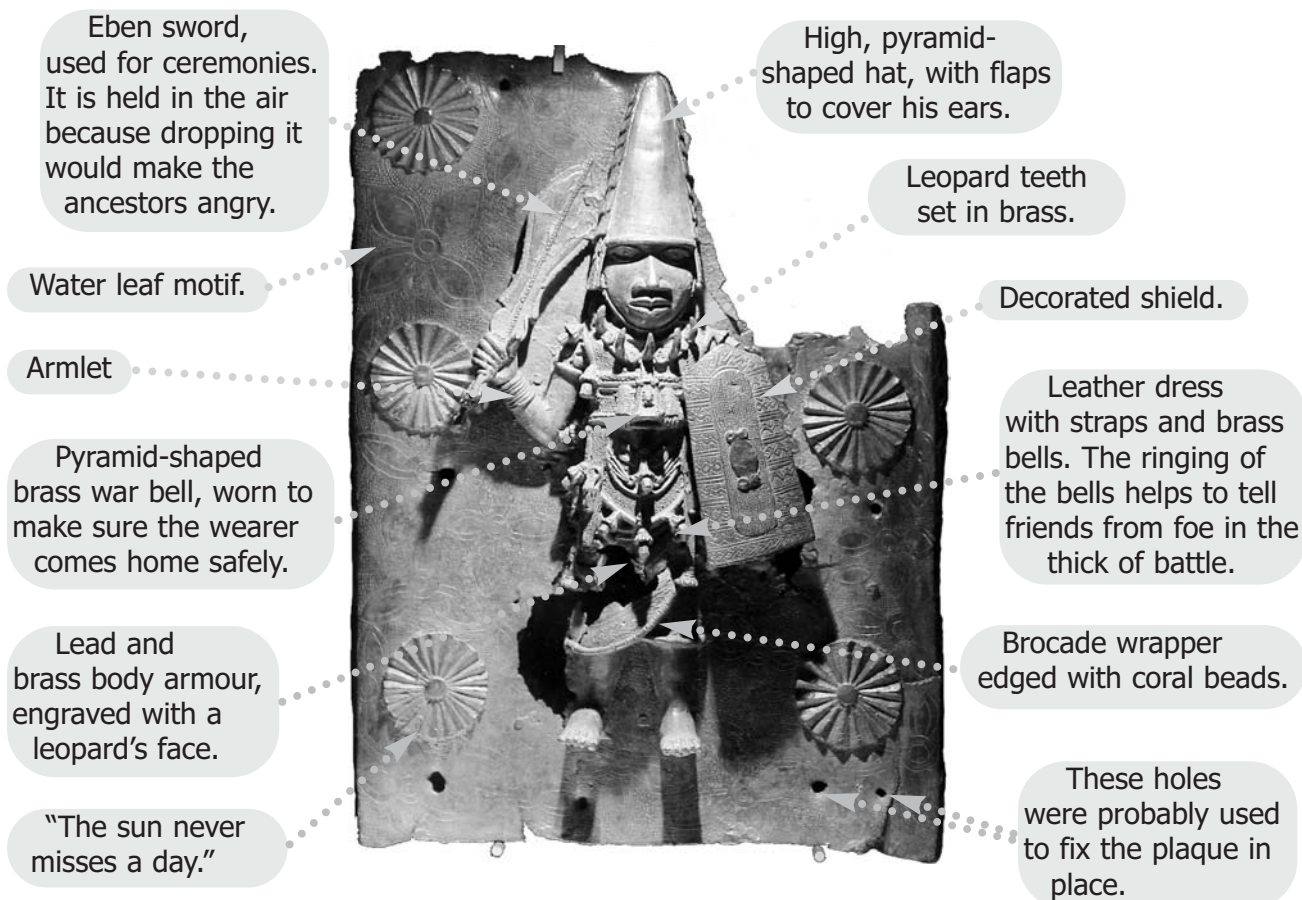
The biggest figure on this plaque is the commander-in-chief of the Benin army (known as the Iyase). Ekpenede was the Iyase during Oba Orhobua's reign and he was married to the Oba's daughter.

Once the Iyase left Benin leading an army he could never go back. It made no difference whether the army won or lost.

The Iyase Ekpenede is wearing all his formal military clothes and weapons. These protect his body in battle. He also wears a charmed bell so that the ancestors will protect him.

The smaller figure is probably Iyase Ekpenede's horn blower. He is also wearing all his formal military clothes. It seems that the horn is being blown to celebrate one of the Iyase's victories.

Ezomo Agban: Deputy commander-in-chief of the Benin army



- > This plaque was made in the 16th century.
- > The man is the deputy commander-in-chief of the Benin army.
- > He seems to be doing a victory dance.



In the Music Gallery you can find a pyramid-shaped brass bell similar to the one the Ezomo Agban wears. Bells like these were worn for protection and to announce victories.

The deputy commander-in-chief of the Benin army was called the Ezomo. The Ezomo on this plaque is probably a man called Agban.

In this plaque Ezomo Agban is wearing all his formal military clothes. From the position he is standing in we can guess that he is dancing a victory dance at the victory parade after defeating an enemy.

Ezomo Agban was sent by Oba Orhogbua to stop a rebellion. The war lasted 2 years. Ezomo Agban returned to Benin City in triumph, bringing war booty and captured rebel chiefs.

You can read the legend of Ezomo Agban on the next page.

The legend of Ezomo Agban



Ezomo Agban, Deputy Commander-in-Chief of the Benin army, was sent by Oba Orhogbua to stop a rebellion. The war lasted 2 years. Ezomo Agban returned to Benin City in triumph, bringing war booty and captured rebel chiefs.

When Ezomo Agban was telling the Oba about his victory in the war, he was interrupted by a clap of thunder. This made Ezomo Agban so angry that he declared war on the Sky.

He built wooden scaffolding, two miles high, and tied on containers of palm oil. Then he set fire to the scaffolding. As the scaffolding blazed there were more claps of thunder and a heavy rainstorm. This, Ezomo Agban decided, was a sign of his victory over the Sky.

The scaffolding fell down as it burned. Where the pieces fell, people made shrines to Ezomo Agban, which are still visited by Benin chiefs today.

This photo was taken at an Edo ceremony in 1998. The Ezomo (at the centre) is leading an attack. He is followed by men holding shields and blowing ivory horns.



Objects used in the 'Introduction to Benin' handling session

Queen Mother head



- > Made of brass.
- > Used to show respect to the Oba's mother.
- > This is a modern copy of an object from Ancient Benin, made in Benin City, Nigeria.

In ancient Benin your head was seen as the source of your success and well-being. Brass sculptures of human heads were usually only made for important, powerful people.

The first powerful Queen Mother was Oba Esigie's mother. She used her magical powers to help Esigie win battles and become Oba. Since then, Queen Mothers have been powerful chiefs and advisors to the Oba.

We can see this Queen Mother is powerful because she wears many coral beads. She has a tall "chicken's beak" hairstyle, covered with a cap woven with coral beads.

The Queen Mother was never allowed to see the Oba, and had to communicate with him using messengers. Queen Mother heads would be put on altars in the palace, so that the Oba can remember and pay his respects to her.

Brass statue (front and back)

- > Made of brass.
- > Used in the Oba's palace.
- > This is a modern copy of an object from Ancient Benin, made in Benin City, Nigeria.

This brass statue may have been put on an altar in the Oba's palace alongside other brass statues, heads and ivory carvings.

This is an important, powerful person, wearing many coral beads and holding a goat skin fan. They are wearing a wrapper and a sash, and, like all people in the museum's pieces of Benin art, have bare feet.



Cowrie shells and brass manilla



- > Made of cowrie shells, brass.
- > Used for trade.

Traders in ancient Benin did not use coins. Cowrie shells, brought over from Asia, were used as currency instead.

40 cowries = 1 chicken.

920 cowries = 1 goat.

Brass was also used as currency. The brass was shaped into manillas, which were easy to transport. The brass was melted down and used to make statues and plaques. European traders brought brass manillas with them when they came to Benin to trade. In 1522 these trade prices were recorded:

1 brass manilla = 3 chickens of cowries.

1 brass manilla = 1 pound (454g) of ivory.

Leopard statue

- > Made of brass.
- > Used in the Oba's palace, to show his power.
- > This is a modern copy of an object from Ancient Benin, made in Nigeria.

Leopards are a symbol of the Oba's power. Leopards were seen as the kings of the forest. The Oba saw himself as master of the leopard, and ruler of the forest.



Leopards were also seen as great leaders, with grace, forcefulness and wisdom. These were all qualities the Oba should have. Oba Ozolua was given the name "the leopard cub with strong claws" because he was a great warrior.

Leopards' teeth can be seen on many of the brass plaques.



Replica brass plaque

- > Made of brass
- > Used for display in the Oba's palace
- > This is a modern copy of an object from Ancient Benin, made in Nigeria.

Many strands of coral beads show that these are powerful men.

This motif is an arm holding a water hyacinth.

This position, holding the Oba's hands, shows these men are of high rank. Perhaps they are chiefs, or commanders of armies.

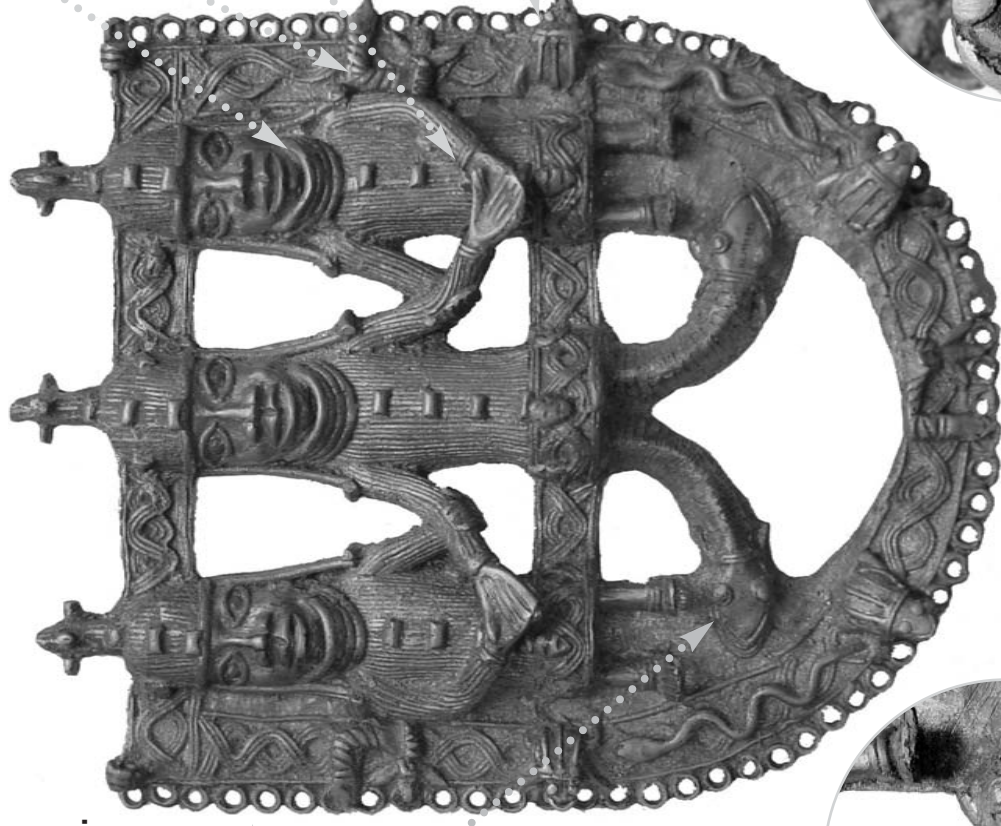
It also shows that they support the Oba and are loyal to him.

Frog motif.

Animals like frogs, crocodiles and snakes often appear on brass plaques.

These creatures can move on land and in the water. This symbolises the Oba's ability to move between the world of people and the world of the spirits.

These creatures also swim with their heads out of the water. The head was seen as the centre of power, and the source of wisdom and judgement. Because of this, these creatures also symbolise good leadership.



This plaque shows the Oba (in the middle) and his two attendants, who are probably chiefs.

The Oba is shown with mudfish for feet.

The mudfish is the royal fish used as a symbol of the Oba's many powers.

Mudfish can move on dry land and can survive out of water. This symbolises how the Oba can move between the worlds of spirits and humans.

Many mudfish can give painful wounds. This symbolises the Oba's ability as a warrior and leader of armies.

Mudfish can give a powerful electric shock. This symbolises the Oba's spiritual and magical power. It was believed that if his feet touched the ground, this power would soak into the earth and cause havoc.



Replica brass plaque

- > Made of brass
- > Used for display in the Oba's palace



Man wearing European-style clothes and hair. He is holding a gun. He is probably a Portuguese trader.

The hat the man wears may be a leather hat decorated with a parrot feather, which was fashionable in 15th century Portugal. Or it may be a Benin straw hat, similar to the one in this photo of one of the Oba's ritual officials, taken in 1998.



Eben (a state sword). It is carried by the Oba, chiefs and other powerful people in ceremonies. Dropping the sword would make the ancestors angry, so it must be held up like this.



Iron helmet decorated with horse tails and fish eagle feathers.

Man carrying a shield and spear, wearing a headdress, coral beads and a pyramid-shaped bell. He may be the commander of an army.

Pyramid-shaped brass war bell, worn to make sure the wearer comes home safely.

Wrap-around skirt and wrapper, made of embroidered brocade with tassels.



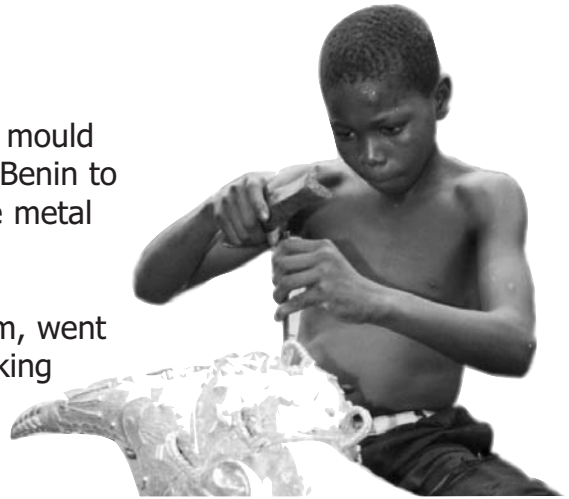
Body armour decorated with a leopard face.

Horn blower

The lost wax process

The lost wax process is a method of casting, using a mould to make an object. The process was used in ancient Benin to make brass plaques and sculptures. People still make metal objects the same way now.

Carolyn Roberts, who works at the Horniman Museum, went to Benin City in Nigeria in 1998 to see craftsmen making objects using the lost wax process. She brought some of their work back to the museum, to show the different stages of the process.



Stage 1

First, the craftsman has to make the mould. He takes some soft clay and shapes it into a large, flat square. Then he uses more clay to make the basic, simple shapes of the picture on the plaque.

Stage 2

Then, he leaves the clay to dry. As the clay dries it becomes very hard and solid.

You can see that this part of the mould is broken. This happened by accident when it was being brought to London. You can see the wires that were put inside the clay to help to keep it in shape.



Stage 3

Next, the craftsman begins to build the picture using wax. He starts by warming up some wax so that it becomes soft. Then he covers the clay with a layer of wax.



Stage 4

Next, the craftsman uses long, thin pieces of soft wax to build the picture. He uses wooden tools to carve and press in the details and decoration.

People in ancient Benin did not use writing, and craftspeople would never put their name on their work. The craftsman in modern Nigeria, however, has carved 'Benin City' so people would know where the plaque was made.

The wax picture is very fragile and crumbly. It was not meant to last a long time. Because it has been in the museum for many years, you can see that some of the very delicate pieces have broken.



Stage 5

Next, the craftsman has to complete the mould. He takes some very, very soft, wet clay. Working carefully, he covers the wax picture with the clay. He takes care to seal up the sides, and makes a hole in the top.

When the mould is finished, the craftsman leaves it to dry, so that the wet clay can harden.

Stage 6

This mould has been wrapped up with wire. The wire makes the mould stronger and helps to hold everything together.

Stage 7

When the mould has dried out and gone hard, the craftsman heats it up in a furnace. This melts the wax, which the craftsman pours out of the mould through the hole at the top.



Stage 8

Next, the craftsman heats some brass in the furnace.

Stage 9

The molten brass is poured into the empty clay mould. The hot metal has to be left to cool down and solidify completely - this can take a few weeks.

Stage 10

When the plaque is ready the craftsman breaks open the mould to reveal the brass plaque.

Stage 11

To finish the plaque off the craftsman neatens up the edges and polishes the brass until it shines.



The finished plaque
from the front . . .



. . . and from the back.

The lost wax process

Carolyn Roberts took photos of craftsmen making brass sculptures using the lost wax process when she visited Benin City in 1998. The way these craftsmen work is probably not very different from the way craftsmen in ancient Benin did.

Stage 1



Making the basic shape of the plaque out of clay.

Stage 2



Leaving the clay to harden.

Stage 3



Covering the clay mould with wax.

Stage 4



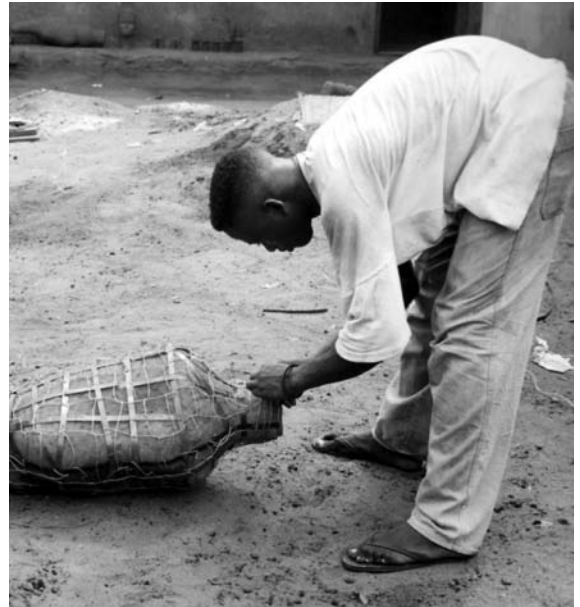
Adding the details with wax.

Stage 5



Covering the wax picture with wet clay.

Stage 6



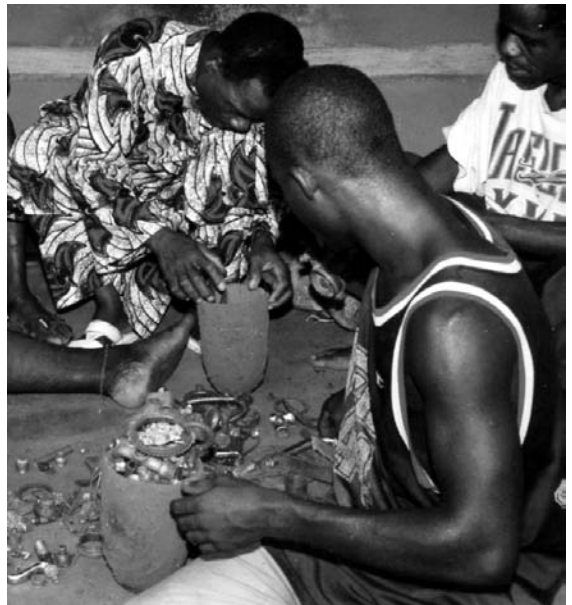
Wrapping the hardened clay mould with wire for extra strength.

Stage 7



Heating the furnace. Heating the clay mould melts the wax, which is poured out of the mould.

Stage 8



Filling crucibles with pieces of brass. The brass is heated in the furnace in these crucibles until it melts.

Stage 9



Pouring the hot, molten brass into the mould.

Stage 10



Breaking open the mould (after the brass has cooled) to reveal the plaque.

Stage 11



Cleaning and polishing the brass plaque.

Stage 12



The finished brass plaque.

This plaque is a modern copy of one made for the Oba in ancient Benin.



Objects used in the 'Introduction to Benin' handling session (objects are not to scale)



Red coral bead



Cowrie shells



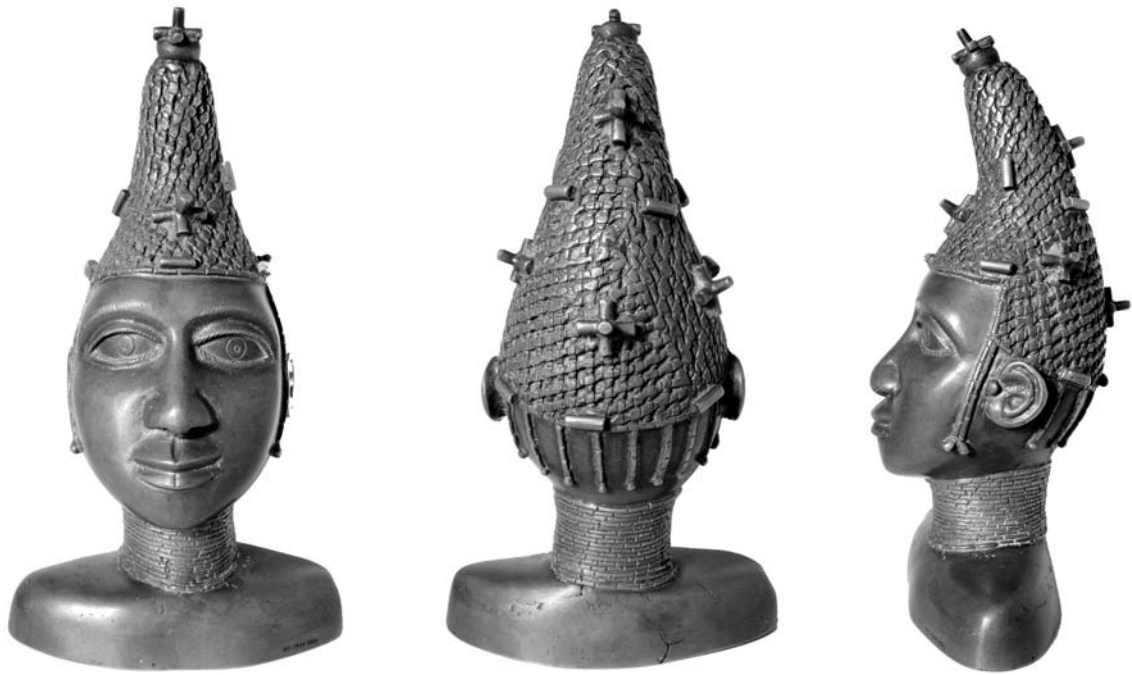
Brass manilla



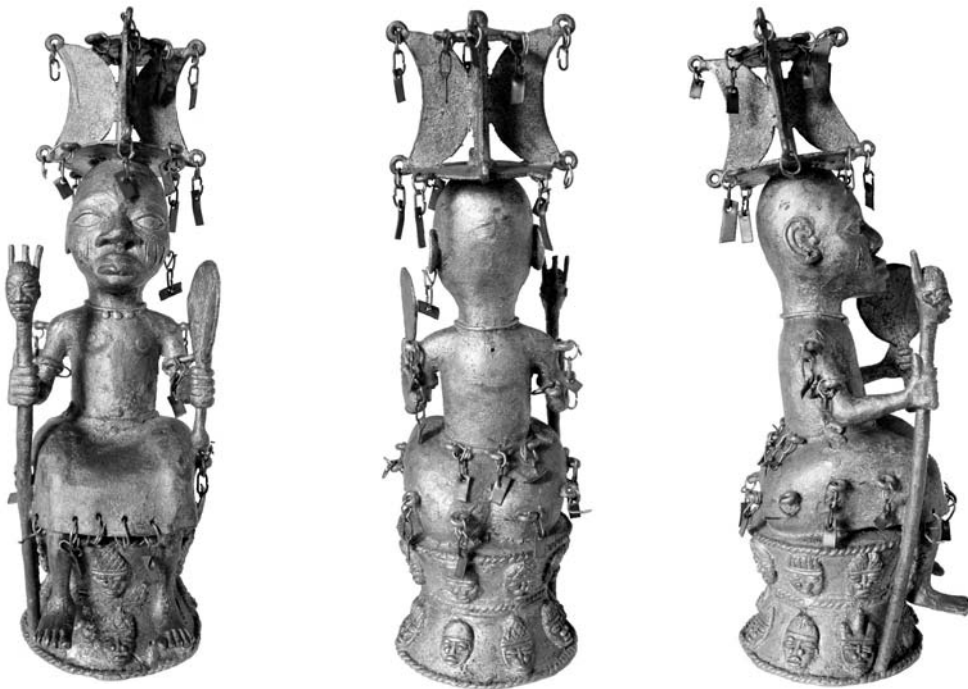
Replica brass leopard



Carved wooden lintel



Replica brass Queen Mother head



Replica brass statue



Lost wax process 1



Lost wax process 2



Lost wax process 3



Lost wax process 4



Lost wax process 5



Replica brass plaque



Replica brass plaque



Replica brass statue



Agogo (from modern West Africa)



Antelope horn (from modern West Africa)

Mini projects: teaching suggestions

Below are some suggestions for short projects with activities for pupils to complete before, during and after their visit.

Sharing information

Design a website, booklet or film for Nigerian school children who have never visited the museum but want to learn about the Benin brass plaques.

Before your visit

Plan your research. What information will you need to collect during your visit?

During your visit

Record information by making notes and drawings.

After your visit

Plan and design your website, booklet or DVD. Think about your audience. What information will you include? How will you present it?

What a performance

Investigate headwear and costume worn in different times and cultures.

Before your visit

Discuss the roles and purposes of craftspeople working in ancient Benin. The background information section of this pack provides information about brass casters and wood and ivory carvers. Talk about how the people of ancient Benin had no written language, so objects the craftspeople made helped to record and tell stories.

During your visit

Explore and collect ideas that children could use as inspiration for their own work.

After your visit

Recap the stories you have learnt about during your visit, and the types of headwear and costume you saw examples of in art works from ancient Benin. Use this as a starting point for designing and making a piece of headwear for a character in a story.

Become a curator

Design a new display for the objects from ancient Benin in the Horniman Museum.

Before your visit

Discuss the role of a curator and how exhibitions are created.

Plan your research - what information will you need to collect during your visit?

During your visit

Record information about the objects. Look carefully at how the objects are displayed. Record your ideas and make sketches.

- Do you like the displays? Are they interesting?
- What would you like to change?
- Who designed the displays?
- How do the displays make you feel? Are the objects important? Ordinary? Special?
- Do you think the labels are written for children? Do you enjoy reading them?

After your visit

Plan and design your new display. Draw and label a picture to show your ideas.

- Think about who your display is for. Is it for children? Adults? People who live in London? Visitors? Nigerian people?
- Which objects will you include?
- How will you communicate information about the objects to the visitors? Will your display have labels?
- How will you light up the display?
- Will you include sound effects or a recorded commentary?
- How will you make your display exciting, attractive and easy for visitors to understand?



*The Benin Brasses
on display in the
African Worlds
Gallery*

Do it yourself

Develop pupil's enquiry skills by asking them to create their own activity sheets to use during their visit.

Before your visit

Choose a topic to investigate (e.g. fashion, hair, weapons, daily life, children, the Oba). Set your objectives for the visit and design your own worksheets. What do you want to find out? Think of 6 questions that will help you find out about your topic. Think about how you will record your findings. Notes? Sketches? Making recordings with a dictaphone?

During your visit

Investigate your topic and complete your worksheet. Is there anything you can't find out that you wanted to? Did you discover anything you didn't expect?

After your visit

If there were any questions you couldn't answer during your visit, think about other ways you can research your topic. Now you know more, think of 6 more questions about your topic that you like to know the answers to. Review the information you discovered. How successful was your worksheet? How would you do it differently next time? Think about how you will present your findings. Below are some ideas:

- Design an exhibition on this topic.
- Create a poster.
- Write a guide book or audio guide.
- Plan a DVD.



Photo: Laura Mtungwazi

Before your visit: suggested activities

The following activity ideas are designed to prepare pupils for their visit to the museum and the "Introduction to Benin" object handling session (if you have booked a session). They will equip pupils with background information on ancient Benin and introduce them to some of the key ideas and themes of the topic.

When?

Create a timeline on a large sheet of paper. Highlight key events in the history of ancient Benin. Ask pupils to add historic events from around the world to the timeline.

Copy the timeline and cut it into pieces. In pairs or groups ask pupils to put the timeline back together with events in the right order.

Useful words

Studying ancient Benin may throw up some unfamiliar vocabulary. It may be helpful to discuss and define the following words before your visit:

Oba	brass casting	symbolism	interpretation
royal court	plaque	evidence	museum
kingdom	altar	artefact	curator
chief	symbol	gallery	exhibition

It might be useful to develop vocabulary by reading the background information sheets in this pack together as a class, identifying and defining key words as you go along.



Photo: Laura Mtungwazi

Where?

On a map of the world look at West Africa and find modern Nigeria and Benin City. Relate their location to where school is, and the countries the pupils' families are from. Talk about how the ancient kingdom of Benin is no longer marked on maps, as it no longer exists. In the past the Oba ruled the kingdom from his palace in Benin City, which was in what is now modern Nigeria.

Using the world map or a larger map of Africa identify rivers, oceans and other water sources in and around the kingdom. Discuss the importance of water to an ancient kingdom, talking about, for example, transport now and in the past.

Using objects as evidence

A museum visit provides a unique opportunity to explore real objects from ancient Benin. Before your visit discuss with pupils how objects can provide clues about the past. If you have booked an 'Introduction to Benin' object handling session discuss what we can find out by touching objects.

This book is a fantastic resource on the subject of using objects as evidence:

Durbin, G, Morris, S and Wilkinson, S, A teacher's guide to using objects, English Heritage, 1983. ISBN 1 85074 259 6

Some useful websites:

www.everyobject.net/static.php?page=learning Every Object Tells A Story has devised a series of classroom activities that will help teachers to explore museum objects with their pupils.

www.museumoflondon.org.uk/learning/features_facts/voh/voh_kit/index.htm The Museum of London's virtual object handling workshop stimulates observation, exploration and enquiry.

www.thesga.org/Early%20Georgia%20Volume%2020%201.pdf Archaeology in the Classroom. Chapter II provides a range of classroom activities that encourage pupils to develop interpretation and analysis skills.

www.geffrye-museum.org.uk/kidszone/clues/ The Geffrye Museum's online game encourages children to use clues from objects to find out about the past.

www.24hourmuseum.org.uk/etc/teah/teahindex_gfx_en.html 24-Hour Museum's Teachers' website draws together resources from museums across the UK.

Interpreting pictures and symbols

Many objects from ancient Benin in the museum incorporate symbols. Define and discuss symbols. Where can symbols be found around us? Why do people use them?

Gather a selection of symbols (e.g. symbols from street signs, the recycling symbol, brand logos, weather symbols, emoticons, symbols on food packaging, symbols used around school). Can pupils identify the symbols - what do they mean? How do you know? Are any of the symbols unfamiliar? What could they mean? Why? Introduce the idea that sometimes one needs to be 'in the know' to understand certain symbols.

Images and symbolism were particularly important in art from ancient Benin because the culture had no written language. Ask pupils to think of ways to communicate without using writing. Ask pupils to draw or cut out pictures to make a poster or letter that communicates a secret message. Ask them to try to interpret each other's messages.

The Benin brass plaques are pictures that tell stories. These activities on the Quentin Blake website build interpretation skills, and provide a useful introduction to reading stories from images:

www.quentinblake.com/resources/QBexercises.asp
download 'Poster' and 'related worksheets.'



During your visit: suggested activities

Below are some suggested activities and ideas to discuss with pupils while you look around the galleries. There are objects from the ancient kingdom of Benin in the African Worlds, Music and Centenary Galleries. Information about almost all the objects from ancient Benin on display is provided in this pack, but in-depth knowledge of the objects is not essential. These activities aim to encourage pupils to observe, investigate and explore for themselves.

Are they real?

Children sometimes ask if the objects in the museum are real. The objects in the galleries are from the ancient kingdom of Benin and are probably between 200 and 500 years old. They were bought at auctions in London by Mr Horniman, who created the museum. They have been studied by the museum's curators, and experts in Africa, who all believe the objects are genuine.

The objects used in the "Introduction to Benin" handling session are replicas made about 10 years ago in Benin City, in modern Nigeria. They are copies of ancient objects.

Below are some questions you might like to discuss when pupils are exploring the objects:

- How do we know if objects are genuine or copies?
- Is it important to see the real thing, instead of (or as well as) replicas?
- Why are replicas useful?
- Can we be 100% certain the objects in the glass cases are genuine?

Sound effects

Explore ideas about how and where objects were used by making sounds. Encourage pupils to look carefully at musical instruments and think about the questions below:

- How does the instrument produce a sound? How do we know?
- What materials is it made out of?
- Would it make a high note or a low note? Is it loud or quiet? How can you tell?
- Does it make one sound or can the sound be changed? How?

Encourage pupils to make the sound they think the instrument might make using their voices, clapping hands, tapping feet or anything else they can think of (remembering to show consideration for other visitors). Discuss how the instrument might have been used:

- Was it used to make music to entertain people or for celebrations?
- Was it used to give signals or warnings to people far away?
- Was it used by ordinary people or special people?
- Was it used every day or for special occasions?
- Where was it used?

Observation and drawing

A great way to encourage pupils to look closely at objects, make observations and record information is, of course, drawing. Below are some suggested drawing activities. There are more ideas on the 'Get Going!' activity sheet. Make sure you bring plenty of paper and pencils!

- Draw an object without taking your pencil off the paper.
- Draw an object using only two lines.
- Draw an object using shapes.
- Draw an object with the hand you don't usually draw with.
- Look carefully at an object for 1 minute. Turn away from the object and draw it from memory, with as much detail as you can remember.
- Zoom in and draw a big picture of a small detail.
- Draw the same object from 2 different angles.
- Choose a letter of the alphabet. Find and draw an object or part of an object that begins with your letter.
- Work in pairs – player 1 to describe, player 2 to draw. Stand back-to-back. Player 1 secretly chooses an object or part of an object and describes it to player 2, giving as much detail as possible. Player 2 draws a picture from player 1's description. Swap your picture with another pair's. Can they work out which object you have described and drawn?

Visit the Drawing Power website for more drawing activities

www.drawingpower.org.uk/Onlineactivities.htm



Photo: Laura Mtungwazi

Explore the Benin brass plaques

The Benin brass plaques once hung on the walls of the Oba's palace. These activities will help you explore them with your pupils. Information about each plaque is provided in this pack.

Explore the plaques: Frozen pictures

Recreate the scenes shown on the plaques using role-play and other drama techniques. Below are just a few ideas:

1. Ask your pupils, working in small groups, to choose a plaque.
2. Discuss who the people on the plaque are and what is happening in the picture.
3. Ask each group to recreate their plaque as a frozen picture. Remind them that frozen pictures are silent and still.
4. One at a time ask each character to speak their thoughts or feelings aloud - just a few words – or ask other members of the group to speak one character's thoughts aloud for them.
5. Ask other members of the group to put one or more of the characters in the frozen pictures on the 'hot seat' by asking them questions about who they are and what they are doing.

Explore the plaques: Reliable evidence?

Ask your pupils - Are the plaques reliable as evidence? Discuss the plaques' value as sources of evidence. Discuss:

- What can we find out about ancient Benin from the plaques?
- What can't we find out?
- Who did the plaques belong to?
- Why were they made? What are they for?
- Who or what is missing from the pictures?

Discuss as a group, brainstorm ideas and complete the table on the 'Reliable Evidence?' activity sheet.

Explore the plaques: Look around

Ask your pupils to imagine the characters on the plaques' surroundings. Are they indoors or outdoors? What can they see around them? Encourage pupils to:

- Create sound effects to accompany each plaque.
- Choose a character on one of the plaques. Imagine and draw what that character can see from where they are standing.
- Choose a plaque with two or more characters on it. Imagine what the characters would say to each other. Write down an imaginary conversation or act it out in a group.

Explore the plaques: Interpretations

Choose one plaque for the group to focus on. Working in pairs, ask pupils to write down what they think are the most important parts of the plaque and what those parts are meant to communicate. Remind them not to discuss their ideas with any of the other pairs.

As a group, compare all the pairs' responses to each other and to the museum labels. Discuss any similarities and differences. Use this as a starting point to discuss how there can be more than one interpretation of an artefact - and what it tells us about the past.

As a group discuss what the following people might tell you about the plaque?:

- the Oba who had the plaque made,
- the artist who made the plaque,
- an ordinary citizen of ancient Benin,
- a Horniman Museum curator,
- a museum visitor who lives in London,
- a museum visitor from Benin City in modern Nigeria,
- Mr Horniman.

Get Going Teacher's notes

The 'Get Going' activity sheet has boxes for drawing in and space below or around each box to write labels for the drawings. You can use the sheet to encourage children to observe the Benin brass plaques and other objects closely and record by drawing.

The aim of the sheet is encourage pupils to draw and to build up their confidence by making lots of quick sketches. You might like to introduce rules or challenges. For example pupils may draw whatever they like (that is linked to Benin) but they must:

- draw pictures that fill up each box (no tiny drawings in the middle of big boxes!); or
- spend no more than 2 minutes on each drawing; or
- include as much detail as possible; or
- draw outlines or simple shapes only.

Below are a few suggestions to get your pupils started using the activity sheet:

- Draw one of the following in each box: a hairstyle, a foot, a weapon, an item of clothing, body art, an eye, an animal, a gift.
- Before drawing on the sheet, write a label under each box e.g. "the Oba," "jewellery," "used by people," "a leopard," "made of a natural material" or "a pattern with stripes." See if you can find and draw objects or details that fit each label. Or swap your sheet with a friend and challenge them to draw pictures that match your labels.
- Draw a small detail or object in a small box. Draw a big detail or object in a big box. Now switch, and fill a big box with a drawing of a small object and a small box with a simple drawing of a big object.
- Find an object with a missing part. Draw it in a box in the middle of the sheet. Fill the rest of boxes with drawings of what the missing part might have looked like.
- Use the sheet to collect different textures, patterns, materials, sounds, smells, sights, feelings or thoughts as you explore the museum.
- Choose your favourite picture on your sheet. What is it? Why is it interesting? Label it.

How to use the trails and activity sheets

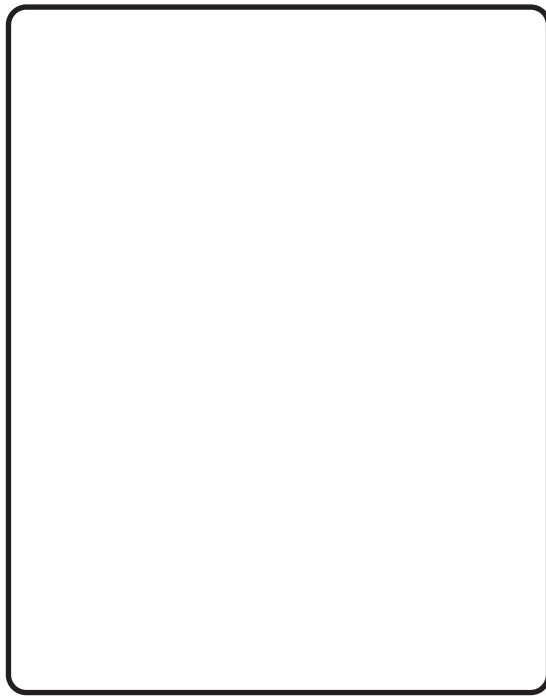
All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for your pupils to work on their own or in small groups before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

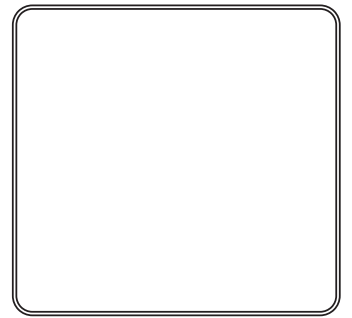
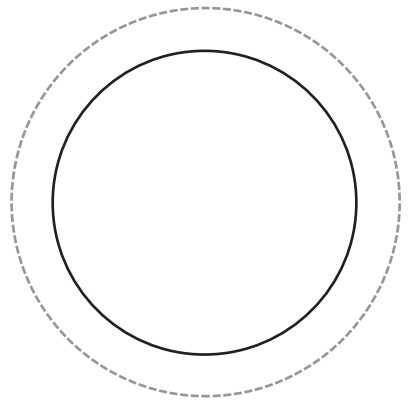
The activity sheets and trails are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

Get going

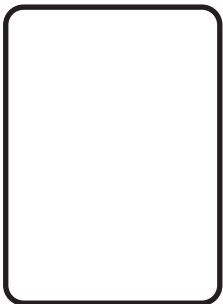
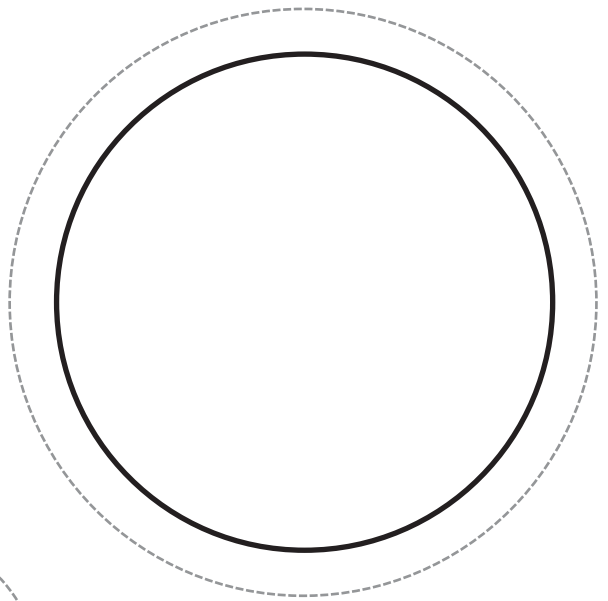
Draw in the boxes and write labels for your pictures on the dotted lines.

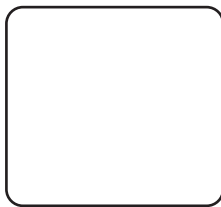


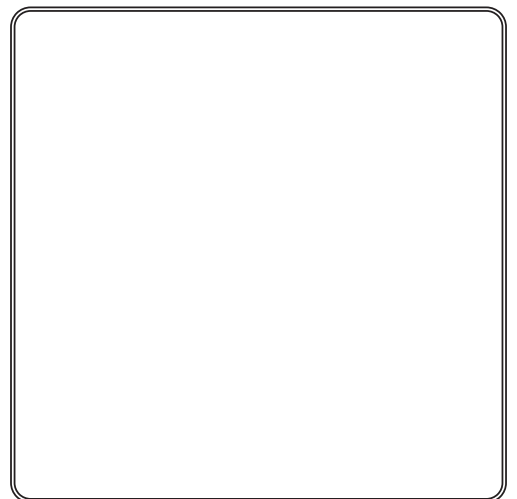
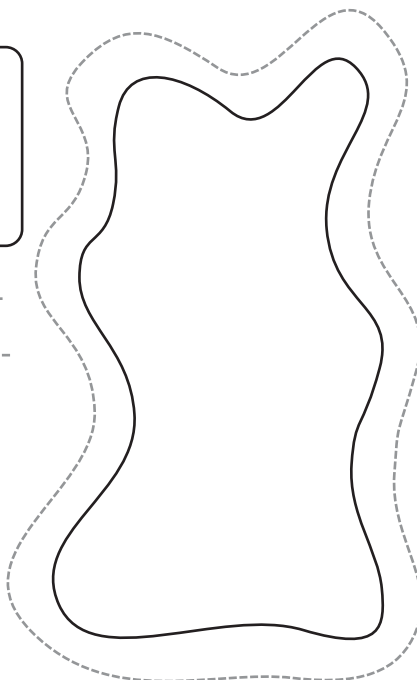














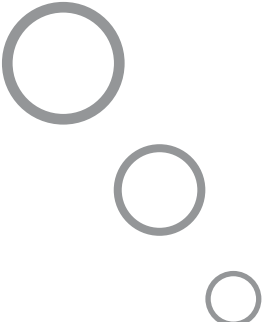
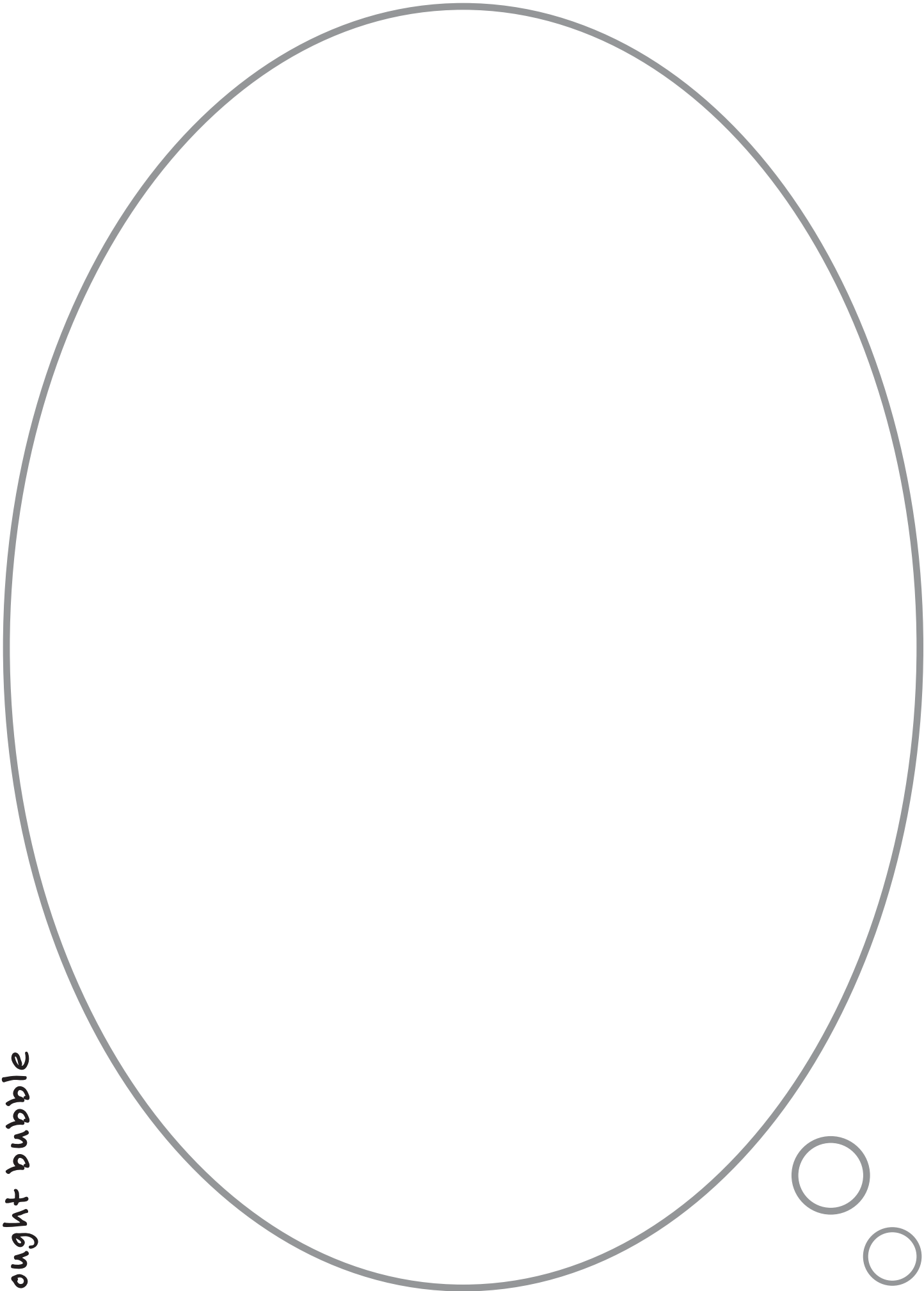
Bubbles Teacher's notes

Print and laminate the thought and speech bubble sheets before your visit and bring some whiteboard pens and an eraser with you. Use the bubbles to encourage children to explore and understand the Benin brass plaques and discuss different people's points of view.

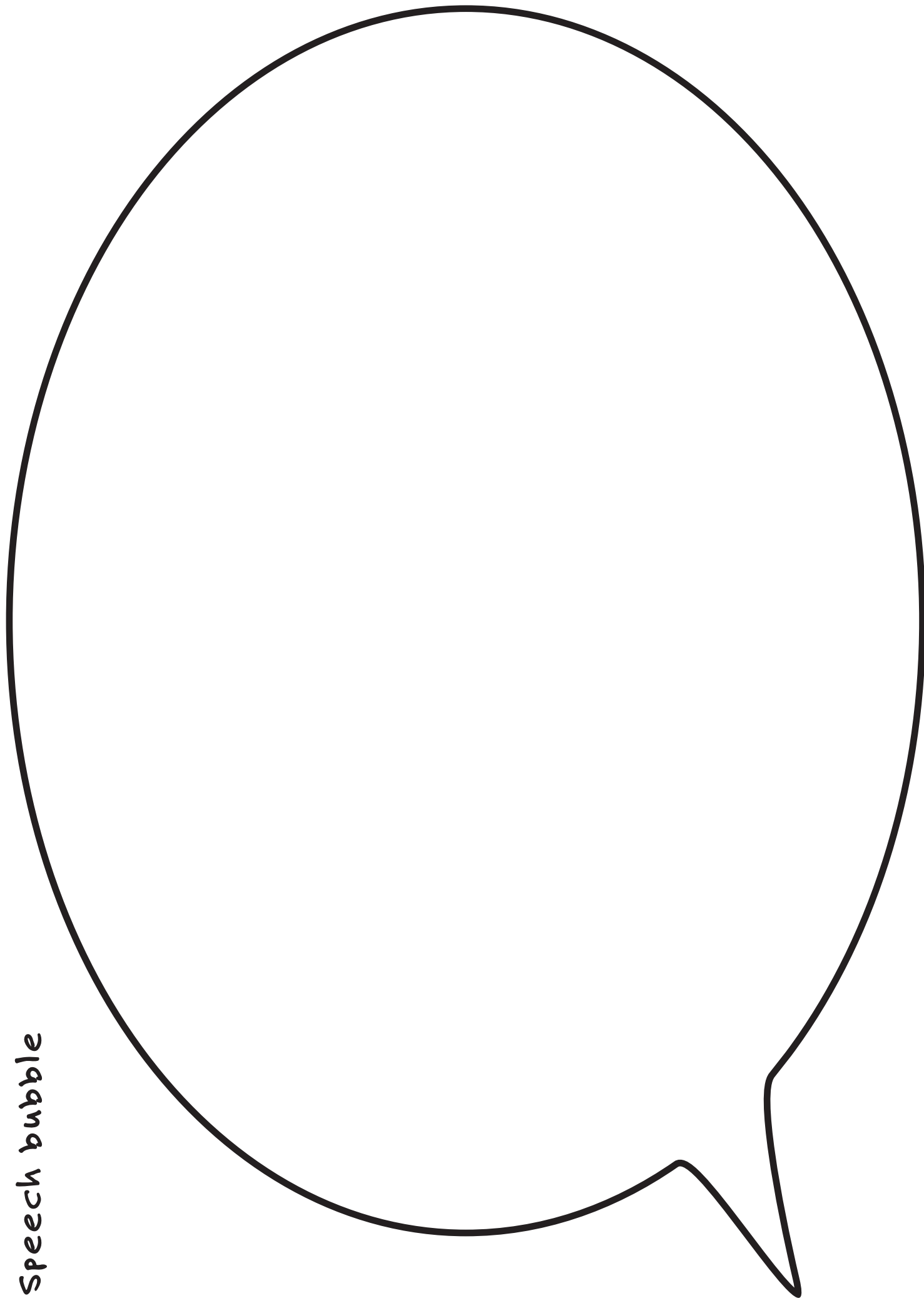
Choose a plaque and discuss who the figures are and what they are doing (use the Gallery Guides to support your discussion).

- Allow pupils to take turns to choose a figure on the plaque, write thoughts or spoken words on a bubble and hold the bubble above the figure to show what they think the figure is thinking, feeling or about to do.
- Write a thought or spoken words on a bubble and ask the children to place the bubble above the figure they think would say or think the statement. Do all the children agree? Discuss their ideas.

Thought bubble



Speech bubble



Extra! Extra! Teacher's notes

Each Benin brass plaque shows an event in the history of ancient Benin (as the Oba chose to have it shown). On this activity sheet, each plaque illustrates a newspaper article about each event. Working in pairs ask pupils to write a headline for each article remembering:

- The headline must refer to what is happening in the picture.
- The headline must be snappy, exciting and grab attention.

After your visit ask your pupils to choose one of their headlines and write the accompanying article. Discuss:

- What details do we know from the evidence the plaque gives us?
- Which details don't we know? Which parts of the article have to be written from imagination only?

How to use the trails and activity sheets

All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for your pupils to work on their own or in small groups before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

The activity sheets and trails are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

Extra! Extra!

Imagine each Benin brass plaque is a picture in a newspaper article. Think about what each plaque shows us and decide what each article would be about. Write a headline for each article in the box at the top of each front page.

The Daily News

A war chief and a priest came back from a successful mission yesterday. blahblah
blah blah bla blah blah
blahblah blah blah blah
bla blah blahblah blah
blahblah bla blah blah
blah blablah blah bla
blahblah blahblah blah
bla bla blah blah blah
blah blah blahblah blah
blabla blah blah blah
blahblah bla blah blah
blah blah blahblah blah



The Benin Times

Chief Uwangué has held out the hand of friendship to traders from Portugal.

Blahblah blah blah blah
blahblahblah blah blah
blah-blah blah blahblah blah
blah blah blah
blahblahblah blah blahblah
b'lah blah blahblah blahblah
blah bl-ah-blah blah blahblah
blah blah blah blah blahblah
blahblahblah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah



The Chief meeting two traders, yesterday

The Benindependent

The Iyase Ekpenede
returned from battle today
with his hornblower
announcing his victory.
blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah blah blah
blah blah blah bblahblah
blah blah blah blah blah
blahblah blahblah bla'h
blah-blahblah blah blahblah
blah blah blah blah blah
blah blahblah blah blahblah
blahblah-blah blah
blahbla'h blahblah blah
blah blah blah blah blah



The Daily Brass

only
1 cowrie!

The trickster priest of Ugbor village has made the oba look like a fool. (See picture, left).

Cheeky
 blahblah blah
 blah blah blah
 blah blahblah
 blahblah bla'h
 blah-blahblah
 blah blahblah
 blah blah blah



blah blah blah
Secrets
 blah blahblahbla
 blahblah blah
 blah blahblah
 blah blahblah
 blahblah-blah
 blah blahbla'h
 blahblah blah
Laughing
stock
 blah-blah blah
 blahblah blah
 blah-blah blah
 ha ha ha ha ha

Interrogating objects Teacher's notes

The 'interrogating objects' sheet is for teachers, teaching assistants and other adult helpers to use as they lead groups of children around the museum. The questions on the sheet are discussion prompts intended to help adults engage children in the exhibits as they take their group around the museum. No prior knowledge of the museum's collections is needed.

How to use the trails and activity sheets

All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for all adult helpers before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

The sheets are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

Interrogating objects

Use the questions on this sheet to help you discuss the exhibits in the museum with the children in your group. They don't have to write down their answers (they can if they want to). Drawing pictures may be a useful way of answering some questions too.

There are many things children can find out for themselves by looking carefully. These questions aim to help you guide children's own investigations. **As a group, choose an object to investigate together, using some of these questions as your starting point.**

What does it look like?

How has the object been used?

If it could talk what would it say?

What is it made of?

Could it be used in more than one way?

Why has it been put on display in the museum?

Is it well made?

Does it make a noise?

If you made one, how would you make it?

How was it made? By a person or a machine?

Is it for a special occasion or to use every day?

What was it worth to the people who made it?

Has it been decorated? Why? (Or why not?)

Who is it for? A child? A grown up? Someone with a particular job?

What was it worth to the people who used it?

Is it a whole object or a broken piece?

What does it tell us about the place and the time it comes from?

What is it worth to you?

Has it been mended? How can you tell?

How does it make you feel? Is it scary? Funny? Does it remind you of anything?

If it was yours would you keep it, give it away or sell it? Why?

What was it made for?

Does it do anything?

Do you like it?

Encourage the children to find evidence to support their opinions, ideas and interpretations of the objects. Ask: **how do we know what we know?** "What tells us . . .?" is a useful prompt. E.g. what tells us that this person is the Oba?; What tells us that this object belonged to a rich person?

If we can't answer these questions completely just by looking, what research could we do to find out the answers? (Or to find out more?)

Investigation notebook Teacher's notes

The 'investigation notebook' activity sheet can be used with any object in the museum. You may wish to make double-sided copies of the sheet so that pupils can investigate two or more objects.

Use this sheet to encourage pupils to focus on objects, make observations and develop their enquiry skills.

Questions have been kept as open as possible as the thought processes children go through to reach an answer are as important as the answers themselves. Children should be able to complete the sheet based on their observations of the objects rather than label text. However, the gallery guides will provide additional information if you need it.

Discuss pupil's ideas and encourage pupils to find evidence to support their ideas and interpretations of the objects. The suggested questions on the 'interrogating objects' sheet provide some prompts for further discussion.

How to use the trails and activity sheets

All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for the children to work on their own or in small groups before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

The sheets are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

INVESTIGATION NOTEBOOK

When you are exploring the museum you are like a detective. You are investigating the objects to find clues. What can you discover by looking carefully? Choose an object and record your findings here.

What is your object called?

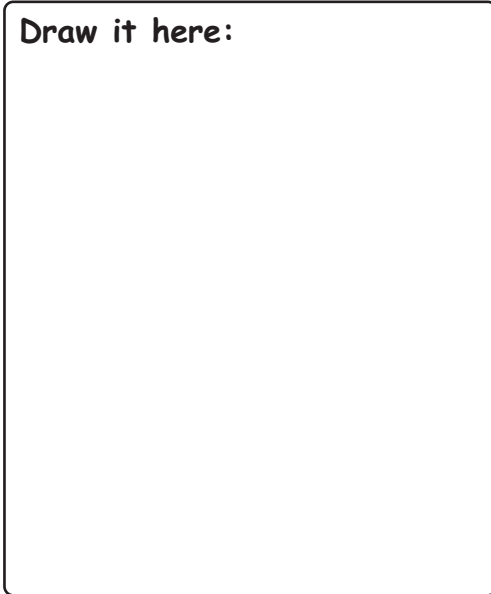
What it is for?

.....
.....
.....

What is it made of?

.....
.....
.....

Draw it here:



Label 3 important parts on your picture. Write your labels here:

1.
.....
2.
.....
3.
.....

Draw arrows to link your labels to parts in the picture.

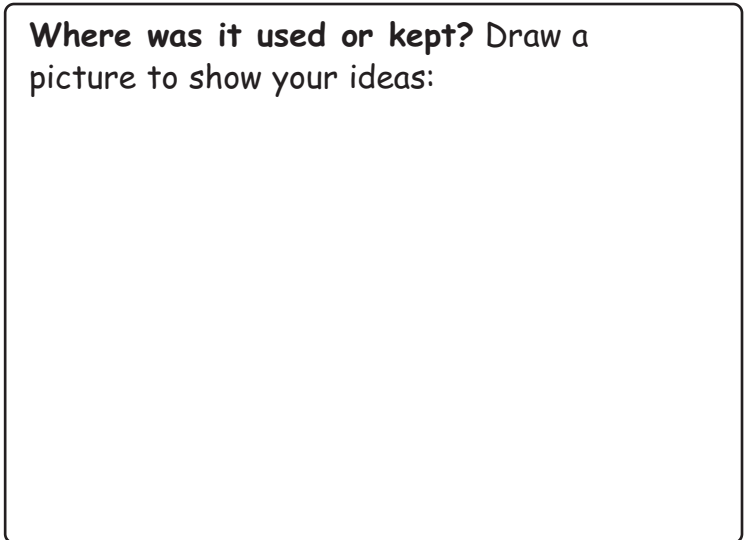
How was it made? Tick the box next to the right answer.

- ☐ It was cut or carved.
- ☐ It was modeled from soft materials that were hardened.
- ☐ It was cast (made in a mould).
- ☐ It was built by joining pieces together.

What shows us it was made this way?

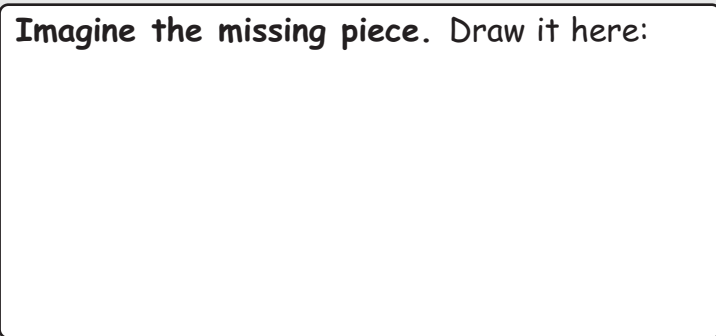
.....
.....

Where was it used or kept? Draw a picture to show your ideas:



Is it whole? ☐ Or broken? ☐

Imagine the missing piece. Draw it here:



How do you think it was broken?
Where could the missing parts be?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Reliable Evidence? Teacher's notes

Are the plaques reliable as evidence? Ask your pupils - what can we find out about ancient Benin from the plaques? What can't we find out? Who did they belong to? Why were they made? What are they for? Who or what is missing from the pictures? Discuss as a group, brainstorm ideas and fill in the table on the activity sheet.

This activity sheet can be used in the classroom after your visit to the museum or in the museum during your visit.

If you are using this activity sheet in the museum, we suggest that you find a quiet space in the African Worlds gallery where your group can sit down to discuss and complete the activity.

How to use the trails and activity sheets

All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for the children to work on their own or in small groups before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

The sheets are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

Reliable evidence?

Do the Benin brass plaques show us what life was really like for everyone in ancient Benin? Are they reliable as evidence?

Write your ideas in this table. We have started the table off with some of our ideas. Do you agree?

Yes, the Benin brasses are reliable as evidence because ...	No, the Benin brasses are not reliable as evidence because ...
<p>They were made by people who lived in ancient Benin.</p>	<p>They only show the Oba and his friends, who were rich, powerful adults. So they don't show us what life was like for ordinary children.</p>

Ancient Benin Treasure Hunt Teacher's notes

This is a trail for children working in small groups (around six children per group). The children move around the museum's galleries to complete the trail, therefore **groups must be accompanied by an adult**. Pupils need no prior knowledge about Ancient Benin to complete the trail. The questions should be answered by carefully looking at and discussing the objects and only very rarely by reading the museum labels.

To make sure pupils can move easily around the museum, and get a better view of the cases, ask each group to start on a different page of the trail.

If you are pressed for time you may wish to:

- ask the children to focus on objects in one gallery, or
- limit the number of pages they complete, or
- ask the children save the bonus questions until the end.

During the trail, pupils will visit these galleries:



African Worlds Gallery



Centenary Gallery



Natural History Gallery



Music Gallery



Nature Base



The Gardens

Use the museum floor plan to help you find them (you can pick these up from the Information Desk or download one from the website). If you get lost one of the museum Visitor Assistants can direct you. The museum is accessible for people using wheelchairs and buggies and there are lifts to every floor.

How to use the trails and activity sheets

All our trails and activity sheets are free and photocopier friendly. Please make enough copies for your pupils to work on their own or in small groups before you visit the museum. Make sure that the children have pencils and clipboards if possible.

The activity sheets and trails are self-directed. However, if you have any problems or queries during your visit, our Visitor Assistants may be able to help.

Ancient Benin Treasure Hunt

Look around the museum to find each object in the treasure hunt.

☒ Tick each object when you find it and answer the questions.



Draw your answer.



Write your answer.



Look carefully.



Watch the movie.

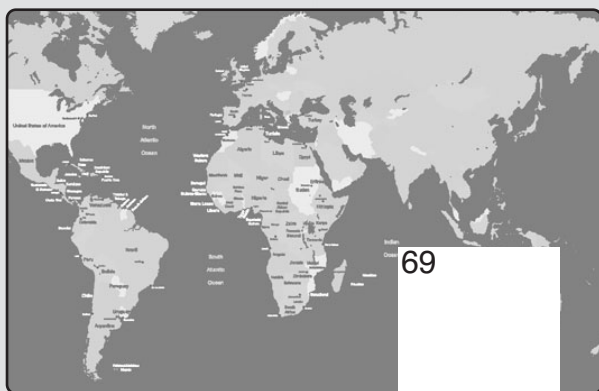


Talk about your ideas.



Info to read.

☐ 1. Map



African Worlds



Draw **Nigeria** on this map of West Africa.



The capital city of the ancient kingdom of Benin was in what is now Nigeria.

☐ 2. The Benin plaques



African Worlds Gallery



When was the oldest Benin plaque made?

Bonus! Work out how old the plaque is.



What are the plaques made of?



Watch the movie about how the plaques were made.

3. Bee hive



Nature Base



What do bees make for the hive that is used in the Benin plaque making process?



What is it used for in the process?

4. Benin plaque



African Worlds Gallery

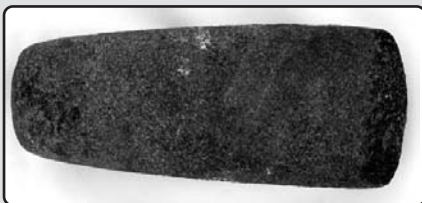


The man on this plaque is a priest or holy man. Find his **celt** - the small object hanging from his waist band.



Draw the celt here.

5. Celt



Centenary Gallery



This celt is not from Ancient Benin, but is similar to the celt on the priest's waist band.



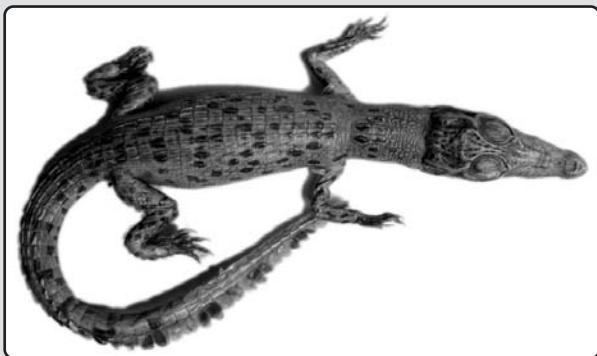
What is it made of?



What do you think it was used for?

Clue: it is near the Native American feather headdress.

☐ 6. Crocodile



Natural History Gallery



Draw the crocodile's head.

☐ 7. Benin plaque



African Worlds Gallery



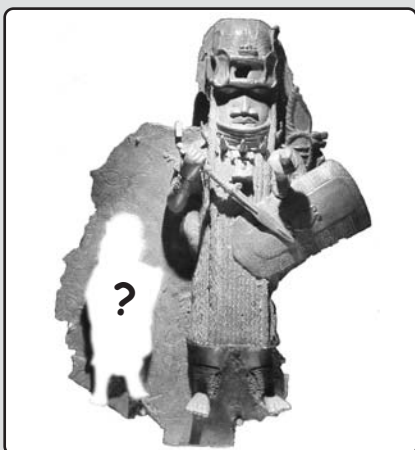
How many crocodile heads can you see on the plaque?

crocodile heads.



Why do you think the Oba (king of Benin) had a plaque made showing himself with crocodiles?

☐ 8. Benin plaque



African Worlds Gallery

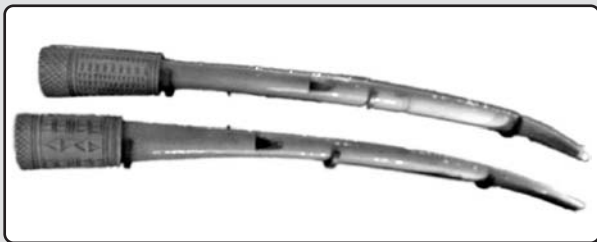


Draw the person on the plaque who is missing in the picture.



On this plaque this person is helping the army's commander celebrate a victory by playing a **horn**.

9. Horns



Music Gallery

Bonus! Practice blowing the way a horn is blown. Press your lips together and make them wobble (like blowing a raspberry).



What do you think the horn sounds like?



Think of two different purposes the horn might have been used for in Ancient Benin.

1. *To celebrate after winning a battle.*

2. _____

3. _____

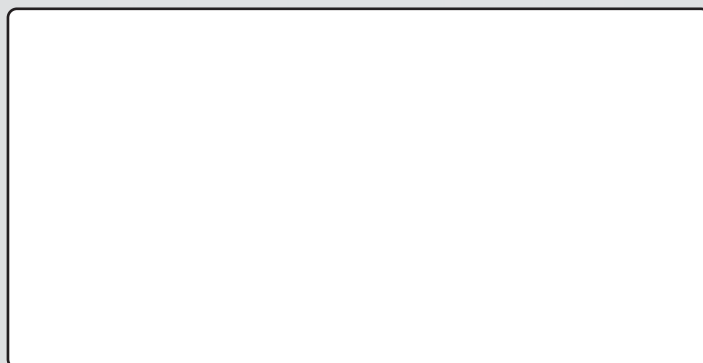
10. Elephant Skull



Natural History Gallery



Draw the elephant skull.



Label the tusks.

11. Armlet



Centenary Gallery

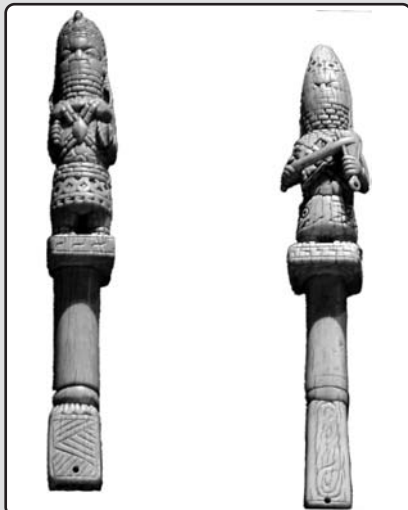


What are they made of?



Why do you think the Oba had things made from this material?

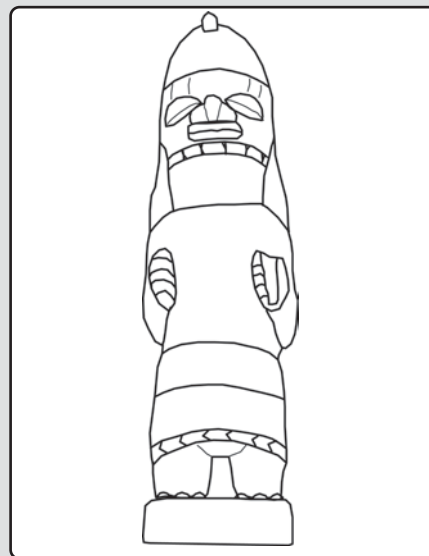
12. Hand clappers



Centenary Gallery



The man on the clapper on the left is probably the Oba. Draw all the coral beads he is wearing onto this drawing. One coral bead collar has been drawn on for you.



13. Bamboo



Gardens

Clue: Look near the big glass conservatory, outside the café.



Draw the woody stems and some of the leaves.



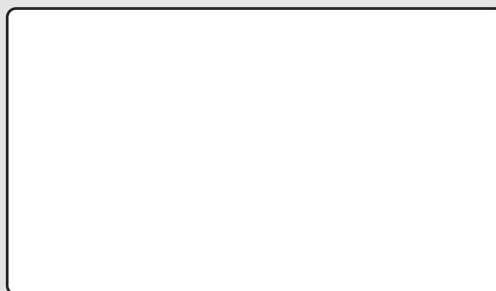
14. Rattle staff



Centenary Gallery



Draw part of the handle.

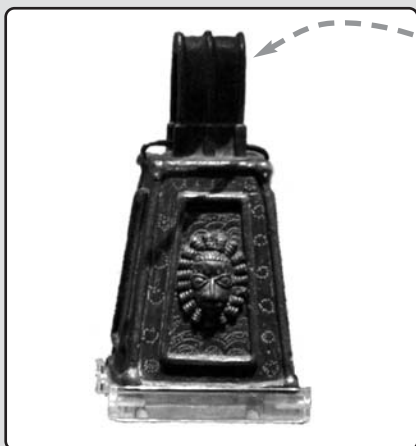


It has been shaped to look like bamboo. Do you think they look alike?

Bonus! Go to the African Worlds Gallery. Can you see a man holding a rattle staff on one of the Benin plaques?

The staff is a musical instrument. How do you think it was played?

☐ 15. Clapper bell



Music Gallery



Describe this part at the top of the bell.



What do you think this part was used for?

☐ 16. Benin plaque



African Worlds Gallery



Find the **clapper bell** on this plaque.



Draw the bell and the piece of jewellery it is attached to.

Bonus! Can you find any other plaques with clapper bells like this on?

The man on this plaque is doing a victory dance because he has won a battle. You have finished this treasure hunt. Do your own victory dance!

After your visit: suggested activities

The following activity ideas are designed to consolidate and build upon the knowledge and experiences your pupils gained from their visit to the museum and (if they had one) their "Introduction to Benin" handling session.

Reversible and Irreversible changes

Photocopy and cut up the casting process sheets in the handling object guide section of this pack on objects used in the handling session and ask the children, working in pairs, to put the stages of the process in the correct order.

Discuss:

- Which changes during the process are reversible? Which are irreversible?
- What materials are used during the process?
- Which materials are heated or cooled? What changes happen to each material when they are heated or cooled?

Creative writing with bundles of hair

In the African Worlds Gallery, the Benin brass plaque 'Ohen N'ugbor n'ome eto ene: the elusive priest of ugbor village' illustrates a story. You can read the story in the section of this pack on objects from Benin in the African Worlds Gallery. The priest on the plaque has his hair tied in four bundles, each with a meaning associated with the story.

Read the story as a class and use it as a starting point for creative work:

- Choose another character from the story and draw a picture of them with their hair tied in bundles. Think about the story from their point of view and label your picture with meanings for their hair bundles.
- Make up four bundles to remind you of four important things you learnt during your visit to the museum (e.g. "there are many ways to tell a story"; "an unlabelled packed lunch may be food for a hungry teacher").
- Choose a well-known children's story (e.g. Little Red Riding Hood). Choose a character from the story and draw a picture of them with their hair tied in bundles. Label your picture with meanings for their hair bundles.
- Write your own story that has a moral or lessons to learn. Draw a character from your story and label their hair bundles.

Newspaper articles

Ask each pupil to choose one plaque to use as the illustration for a newspaper article. Ask your pupils to think about the events their plaque has recorded, imagine they were there and write an article about that event. If you use the 'Extra! Extra!' activity sheet to write news headlines during your visit you may wish your pupils to choose one of their headlines and develop this work.

Discuss:

- What details do we know from the evidence the plaque gives us?
- Which details don't we know? Which parts of the article are written from imagination only?

Should the plaques be returned?

As a class, read the 'should the plaques be returned?' sheet in the background information section of this pack. Discuss the opinions on the sheet and the children's own opinions. Ask pupils to write:

- A balanced report on the issue, presenting arguments for and against repatriating the plaques.
- A persuasive letter setting out their point of view on whether or not the Benin brass plaques should be returned.

Museum visit

Ask your pupils to create a guide for another class who are learning about ancient Benin and are planning their visit to the Horniman Museum. Ask pupils to think about how they can help the class find their way around the museum and make their visit interesting and fun, perhaps by:

- Planning and recording an audio guide, with sound effects.
- Creating worksheets, quizzes and trails.
- Drawing a 'treasure map' that leads visitors to the most interesting objects from ancient Benin.
- Writing 'guide book' entries giving information about objects from ancient Benin on display in the museum.

Computer game

Ask pupils, working in groups, to design a computer game to help children learn about the museum's collections. Some points to think about:

- What do they want people to learn when they play the game?
- What happens on each level? Is there a mystery to solve or things to collect?
- Who are the baddies? What do they do? How do we stop them?
- How does the player move from one level to the next?

Preserving memories

The Benin brass plaques act as mnemonic devices, a record of the past that exists in the present. Ask your pupils to design a plaque to remind them of an important memory that they would like to be kept forever. Discuss what materials you could use to make the plaque so that it would be preserved for a long time.

Write to us!

Teachers are welcome to set pupils the task of writing to the Horniman Museum. In the past children have written to us explaining their point of view on whether the Benin brass plaques should be repatriated, and suggesting improvements to the displays. We will always try our best to send classes a reply if they write to us. Please only send copies of your pupils' work as we cannot always return originals or post them on our flikr site reached from our website www.horniman.ac.uk/schools

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If you bring your pupils to an 'Introduction to Ancient Benin' handling session, we suggest that pupils address their letters to the tutor that led their session.