

Benin ArchaeoBox TN v1

Benin was a very rich and powerful kingdom in West Africa from around 1100AD until the arrival of the British in Victorian times. It was situated in what is mostly Nigeria today. When the Portugese arrived in the C15th they were surprised at the skill shown by the craftsmen of Benin in making bronze plaques and ornaments. They believed Europeans must have shown them how to do it! This pack contains a timeline and three replica artefacts:

[1] Plaque,

[2] Leopard head

[3] armlet.

[1] What can you find out about Benin by looking at a single artefact? You can use just one or all of artefacts to do this.

Typical questions you might ask an artefact:

1. *Look closely at the object.* If possible handle it. Draw it and label it - what are the key parts?
2. *How is it made?* What is it made of? Where was it made? Who made it? Is it big/small? Is it heavy/light? How can you tell?
3. *How old do you think it is?* New/Old/older/very old? How can you tell?
4. *What do you think it is/was used for?* How can you tell?
5. *Who would have used it?* Were they rich or poor? Where was it used? How did it change people's lives [significance]? How can you tell?

I'm sure you and your children will be able to think of many more questions. It is important to keep a list of those questions you *can't* answer and use those questions as the basis for further research into Benin.

[2] Taking the collection as a whole; what can we discover about Benin?

1. What can we discover about the clothes the men of Benin wore? What can we discover about the clothes women wore? Why are the three figures dressed the way they are? What are they holding? What do you think they do for a living? Does that mean all Benin males did this for a living?
2. Why is each item decorated so much? What does that tell us about the people of Benin? Do you think they were clever craftsmen? Why do you think so many items like these ended up in museums in Europe?
3. The green item is an armlet. Who might have worn this? Why might they have worn an armlet? Do you think it is for decoration or for protection?
4. Taking all three items together, what can we tell about the people of Benin? What was important to them? What did they do? What did they like? What might they be afraid of?

Finally, pulling it all together.....

Again, you might pull this activity together by making three lists :

[a] what we can definitely tell about Benin from the artefacts

[b] what we can probably tell about Benin from the artefacts

[c] what we still need to find out about Benin despite examining the artefacts

You want the children to begin to draw some conclusions about life in Benin from what they have discovered - even if their main conclusion is that I need to find out more about life at the time before I can reach any strong conclusions. Artefacts can only tell us so much - we need other sources of information to answer some of the questions we have. They should be able to make a list of unanswered questions they want to find the answers to!