

Wider World Unit: Africa 1000 -1900: Kingdom of Benin Case study

Lesson Enquiry Question	Main disc. focus	Substantive knowledge covered	Key terms
‘To speak of that which you know nothing’: How can we find out about African history?	Evidential understanding Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kingdom of Benin was known for producing many plaques and bronzes. These were symbolic, and offer insight into the ideas and beliefs of the Obas of Benin. The Obas held significant power, although they ruled with the help of chiefs. Trade with other African kingdoms and with outside powers such as Portugal helped Benin to establish its power. The Kingdom of Benin seems to have enjoyed a ‘golden age’ during the 1400s and 1500s, as trade flourished and wealth increased. 	Pre-colonial, Oba, kingdom, trade, military, ritual, chief, symbol
Is it true that Benin enjoyed a ‘golden age’ during the 15th and 16th centuries?	Interpretations Causation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Kingdom of Benin seems to have enjoyed a ‘golden age’ during the 1400s and 1500s, as trade flourished and wealth increased. This golden age did not rely on a trade in slaves. The Obas of Benin lived in lavish palaces, which were extravagantly decorated with bronzes and plaques to illustrate past glories. Trade with other African kingdoms and with outside powers such as Portugal helped Benin to establish its power. Skilled workers (like artists) enjoyed real prestige and status. 	Prestige, culture, Oba, guild, divine, Bight of Benin, colonise.
Did the Obas of Benin really rule through superstition and fear?	Interpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Obas held significant power, although they ruled with the help of chiefs. The Obas lived in lavish palaces, which were extravagantly decorated with bronzes and plaques to illustrate past glories. The Oba’s mother played an important role in the Kingdom of Benin: she held both real and symbolic power. Ordinary people were deeply religious, and believed in multiple gods. 	superstition, democracy, representation sacrifice, chiefs.
Why did the Obas of Benin participate in the slave trade?	Causation, Change and continuity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Although some African kingdoms did participate in the trans-Atlantic slave trade from an early stage, the Kingdom of Benin helps to show that this was not a universal story. Benin partly relied on the slave trade to re-establish its power and wealth after a period of economic decline. Often, slaves were prisoners seized by the Obas of Benin during wars with other African kingdoms. Slaves from Benin were traded with European powers like Portugal, in exchange for things like weapons. 	sacrifice, adultery, captive, abolitionist, oral tradition.
How much can we learn from Mahommah Gardo Baquaqua’s slave narrative?	Diversity Interpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Slaves from Benin (and other African kingdoms) were traded with European powers like Portugal, in exchange for things like weapons. Slaves faced horrific conditions, both on the Middle Passage and on the plantations to which they were often sent in the Americas. Some slaves were able to earn their freedom. Some became actively involved in the abolitionist movement, although continue to face prejudice and hardship. 	branding, fortress, slave auction, scramble, abolitionist, conversion.
Could you bring Sir Harry Rawson to justice for the Benin Massacre?	Significance Causation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In the second half of the nineteenth century, the ‘scramble for Africa’ saw European powers begin competing for control of African colonies. Britain seized control of places like Benin through force and brutality. During the Benin Expedition of 1897 (also known as the ‘Benin Massacre’) cultural products like the Benin Bronzes were looted. 	massacre, invasion, looting, colonise, civilised, sacrifice, abolitionist.
Should the British Museum return the Benin Bronzes?	Substantive knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> During the Benin Expedition of 1897 (also known as the ‘Benin Massacre’) cultural products like the Benin Bronzes were looted. Debate continues over whether the Benin Bronzes ought to be returned to Africa. 	Benin Bronzes, colonialism, ambush, hierarchical, descendant

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How well-connected was early modern Africa?	Interpretations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • During the 'early modern' period, Africa was very well-connected, with different African kingdoms trading and communicating in sophisticated ways. • African rulers also established links with Europe and Asia, and there was a trade in goods, ideas and people (in the form of slaves). • The Kingdoms of Mali, Benin and Asante became wealthy through trade in things like gold, ivory and salt. 	trade, empire, slavery, export, settler, merchant.
How accurate is Professor Olupona's interpretation about the influence of Islam in Africa?	Interpretations Significance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The influence of Islam in Africa was widespread and varied, impacting on belief, lifestyles, art, architecture and learning. • When powerful European countries began colonising parts of Africa, Islam played a key role in African resistance to this take-over as Muslim leaders called for Africans to resist European rule. 	Islam, Mecca, Moors, mosque, Swahili, colonise.
How and why was Africa 'invented' in the 19th century?	Change and continuity, Causation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the second half of the nineteenth century, the 'scramble for Africa' saw European powers begin competing for control of African colonies. • The colonisation of Africa was accompanied by (or perhaps caused) new ideas about African genetic inferiority and 'backwardness'. 	colonialism, Social Darwinism, savage, missionary, abolitionist.