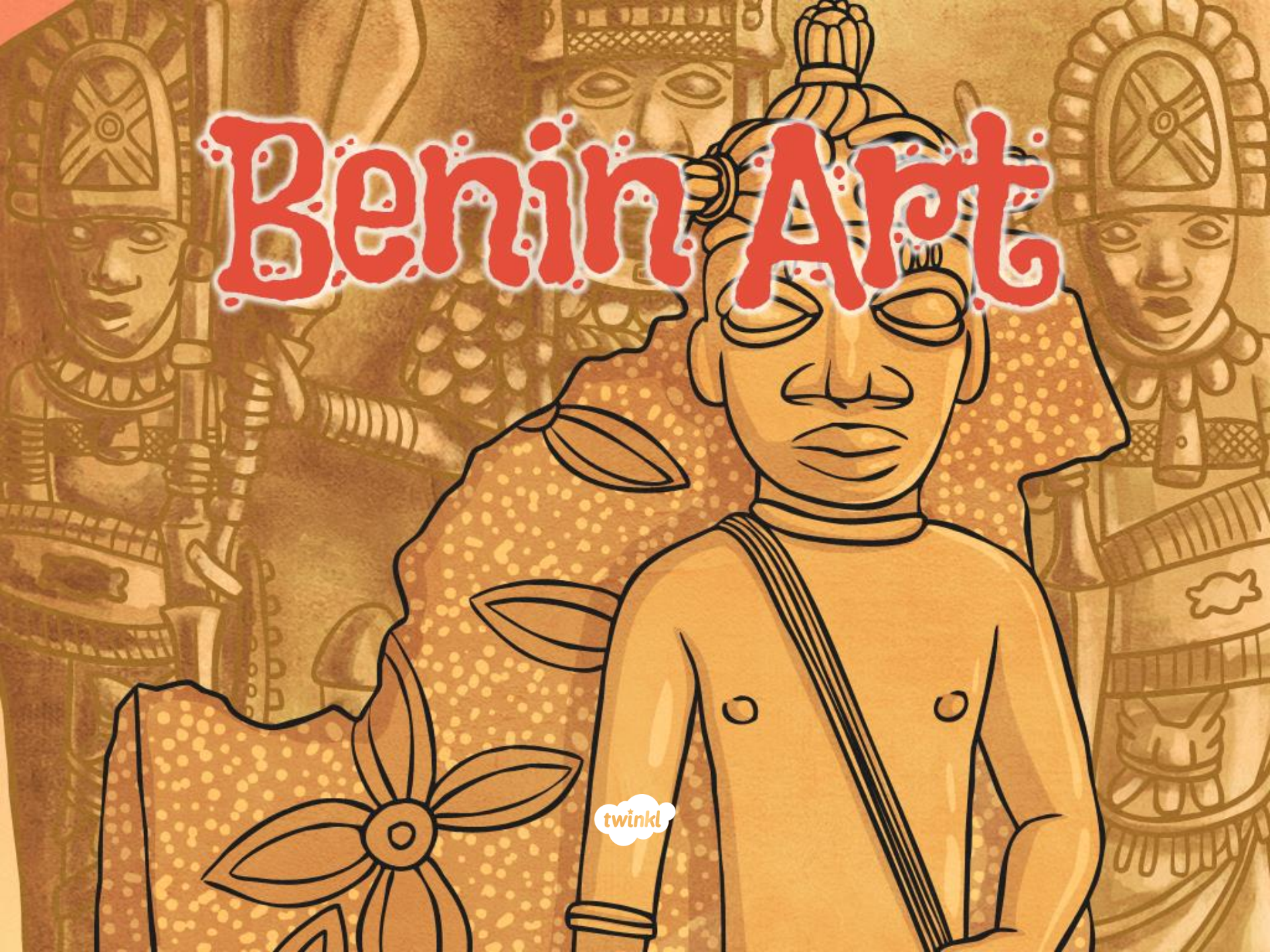


Benin Art



twinkl

Raising Questions

If the answer to a question was 'the Oba', what could the question be?



Antiques Shop:

An antiques dealer found a dusty old chest in the back of his shop when he was tidying up one day.



Photo courtesy of Eran Menashri (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

His shop was in village, not far from the forest in the Country of Nigeria, where the ancient Kingdom of Benin once existed. He sent the chest off to the local history museum.



Photo courtesy of Eran Menashri (@flickr.com) - granted under creative commons licence - attribution

When they had cleared off the cobwebs and dust the historian at the museum opened the chest. It was the first time it had been opened for over 1,000 years.



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Antiques Shop

When they cleared off the cobwebs and dust, the historians at the museum found a bronze plaque, with wonderful engravings and carvings.

Look!

What questions could we ask about this object?



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Benin Art

When people in Europe saw artworks from the **Benin and Ife Kingdoms**, they were shocked. They didn't believe that African people could make such beautiful objects! They also couldn't believe that African people were clever enough to have invented such difficult art techniques!

“It need scarcely be said that at the first sight of these remarkable works of art we were at once astounded at such an unexpected find, and puzzled to account for so highly developed an art among a race so entirely barbarous.”

- *Read and Dalton 1898*



Benin Art

These African craftspeople must have learnt their craft from European people.



Benin Art

These crafts are not African. They are from another civilisation, a European one, like Atlantis.



Benin Art

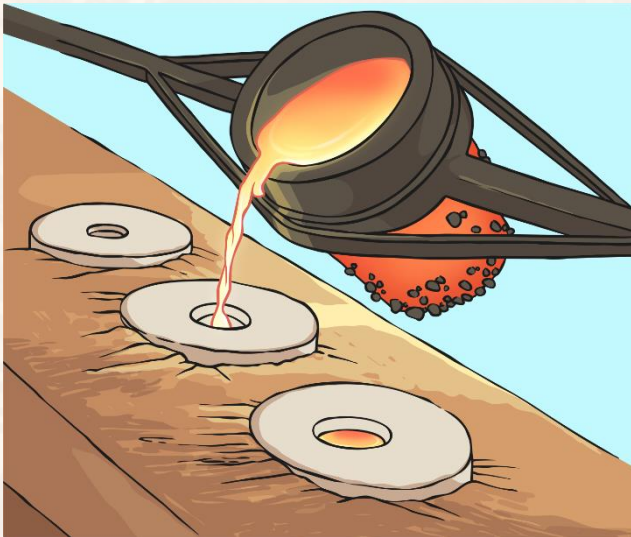
These crafts must have been brought to the Kingdom of Benin by the Portuguese when they arrived here in the 15th and 16th centuries.



Benin Art

We know that art was very important to the people of the Kingdom of Benin because the Oba kept control of it. He supervised wood and ivory carving, and the casting of brass. The people would make plaques, heads and statues. The artists made their work only for the Oba and he rewarded them with gifts in return.

Some of the artwork records events, Oba activities (trading, warfare and ceremonies) and day to day life in Benin. Other artworks honour the Oba and show how wonderful he was.



Benin Art

When the British army removed the Oba from power in 1897, the Bronzes started popping up all over the world. Many of Benin's Bronzes were stolen by European people. Some of the stolen Bronzes ended up in New York, some in Northampton, some in London and some in Germany.



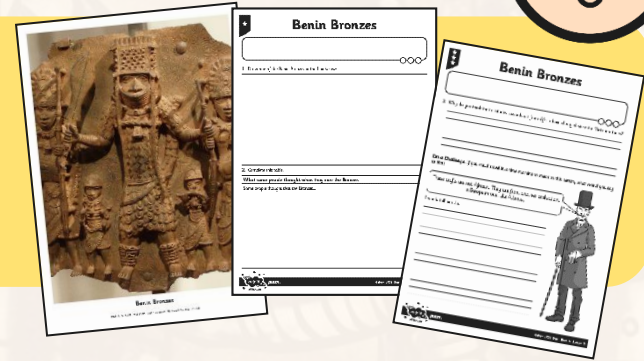
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Benin Bronzes



Activity

1. Use the Benin Bronzes Photocards
2. Complete an Activity Sheet.
3. Draw one of the Benin Bronzes.
4. Make comments in the table below about:



What some people thought when they saw the Bronzes	What the Bronzes really tell us about the Benin Kingdom



Reply

Forward

The New York Gallery of Art

The New York Gallery of Art wishes to exhibit artworks in a show named 'Art of Africa' next year.

The show intends to teach people about ancient work that was made by our ancestors from this talented continent.

One of the famous Benin Bronzes is missing.

We are prepared to offer \$10,000 for the return of this magnificent work so that it can join the other pieces in this group.

If you have any information about the Bronze and it's whereabouts, please contact cally.broadworth@nyga.org.uk.

Thank you!

Antiques Shop: Part Three



Think about these questions in relation to previous email:

The New York Gallery of Art

1. Should the Bronze be returned?
2. Where should it be returned to? Nigeria or New York?
3. Who owns the Bronze?
4. The exhibition wishes to educate people about ancient African art. Is this a good enough cause to sell it to?
5. Should it be reunited with the other Bronzes?
6. How might the \$10,000 be used?

Comparing Benin to Europe

The reason why people were so shocked when they saw the Benin artworks was also because the art of Benin was so much more detailed and complicated compared to European medieval art made at the same time.



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Comparing Benin to Europe

Nigerian Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka said in 2009:

“When I see a Benin Bronze I immediately think of the mastery of technology and art – the **welding** of the two. I think immediately of a **cohesive** ancient civilisation. It increases a sense of **self-esteem** because it makes you understand that African **society** actually produced some great civilisations, established some great cultures.”

Glossary

Welding – joining together

Cohesive – working together

Self-esteem – confidence in own abilities

Society – a community of people



Wole Soyinka is celebrating the fact that the Benin Bronzes are evidence that the ancient African people were talented, capable, powerful people.

Comparing Benin to Europe



Imagine that the Benin Bronzes had been found in a chest today, in the 21st century.

Write a newspaper headline about the discovery.

What do you think the headlines sounded like in Victorian times?

