Week 3

LO: To know that the Benin Plaques are cast brass plaques made to decorate the royal palace in Benin City.



Recap…

Can you tell me about this object and where it comes from?



What do you remember about the story of Chiwara

Key Vocabvulary...

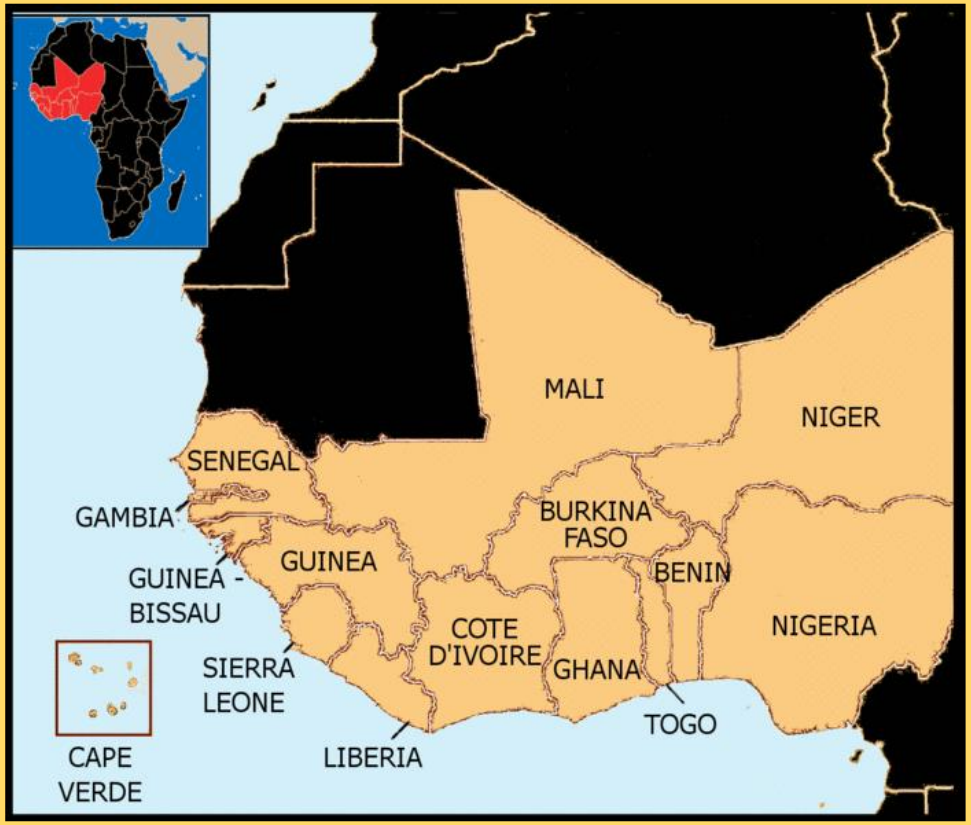
plaque - A flat, decorated slab, often square or rectangle that is fixed, to a wall or other surface and remembers an event or a person.

relief - Where sculptures stick out from a flat surface, rather than being made all the way around

cast - The process of making an object by shaping liquid metal in a mould.

Brass - A metal made by mixing two other metals, copper and zinc.

Can you locate the countries or Nigeria and Benin on these maps?





Benin City is a city in southern Nigeria which flourished from the 14th- 17th centuries as the centre of the Benin Kingdom and home to the Edo peoples.

The Benin Plaques were mostly made between 1550 and 1650 to decorate pillars of the royal palace in Benin.

They are reliefs made from cast brass and are sometimes called the Benin Bronzes.

They show scenes which tell us about the life of the royal palace and the Benin Kingdom.

Animals on the plaques have symbolic importance, often showing the power of the King



The Great Wall of Benin
(Constructed between 800 – mid-1400s AD)



Interesting facts…

They were made mostly between 1550 and 1650 to decorate the pillars of the royal palace in Benin City.

There are around 2800 plaques in existence today, of which around 700 are in the British Museum.

They are often known as the Benin Bronzes but are actually made from brass using the lost wax casting process.

What do these facts tell you about the Benin kingdom? Explain that is shows that they were an advanced, sophisticated civilisation, in particular because the lost wax casting process is a complex one.

The Wax casting process



1. Original sculpture
2. A mould is taken of the original sculpture
3. Liquid wax poured into mould.
4. Once wax is cooled mould removed to reveal wax sculpture
5. Tubes added to wax sculpture for pouring of molten metal
6. Mould made around the wax sculpture
7. Wax melted out of the mould
8. Molten metal (e.g. brass) poured into mould
9. Mould removed and hardened metal sculpture cooled in sand



The man in the plaque is the Benin king, or Oba. He is holding two leopards and around his middle he has a belt made of two mudfish. Leopards were considered to be the masters of the forest. By holding the leopards, the plaque is showing the importance and prestige of the king.

Mudfish live in water but can also exist for some time on land. By showing the mudfish the plaque is indicating how the Oba is both king of the land but also king of the sea. This is significant as the Edo peoples at this time exercised significant trade across land and sea

The Benin plaques show us about life in the royal court, but not about ordinary people living in Benin City. In particular, there are no women shown in the plaques

Task…

- You will be making simplified designs for their cardboard reliefs. (Yours will not be made of metal, like the Benin Plaques, but made of cardboard). The base of your relief will be made from cardboard and the parts that stick out further from the surface will be sections of cardboard stuck onto the cardboard base.
- Use your sketches made last week to draw a large design for your insects using lines. You should simplify your shapes and, at first draw the base layer i.e. the basic outside shape of the insect. You should then indicate which parts of the insect (e.g. parts of the torso or head, and any patterns) will be raised (using layers of cardboard) by shading on the design. You should aim to have three layers of cardboard