

How do we know which animals were most important and least important to Benin people?

Learning Objective

To place animals used by a past society in an order of importance, based on knowledge of how they were exploited.

Learning Outcomes

Pupils will have:

- Ranked images of animals used by Benin society from most to least useful
- Extracted information about the use of animals in Benin Society, from a variety of sources
- Recorded this information for each particular animal
- Created mobiles of animal images in a hierarchy of esteem, based on their exploitation by people
- Justified the order of this hierarchy in discussion
- Created a matching hierarchy, using categories of people in Benin, based on their usage of animals

Resources

Copies of PowerPoint Slides Four to Nineteen

Copies of slides from The Melting Pot Benin Lesson One PPT

String or cotton

Initial Stimulus Activity or Starter

Display the photograph of an African leopard from Slide Two of the PowerPoint. Within a limited time, ask pairs to list adjectives that best describe the animal, and also how it might be useful to humans. Take suggestions from pairs, and add to a class list for display. Then display Slide Three, and repeat the same activity for the image of a domestic African goat. Lead discussion about which animal might be the most useful to humans and why.

Activity One

Give out copies of PowerPoint Slides Four to Eighteen to pairs or trios (these refer to different animals native to West Africa, and include a spider diagram surrounding the image of the animal for later use). Ask the pairs or trios to rank the animals according to how useful they think they might have been to the people of ancient Benin, from most to least useful. Lead discussion, taking suggestions from pairs. Agree or vote on a class order if possible.

Activity Two

Be ready to give out the resources used in activities One, Two and Three of *The Melting Pot: Benin Lesson One*. If this lesson has not been taught, then run off sets for each pair or trio as instructed in the lesson plan. In addition, give out a copy of Slide Nineteen from this PowerPoint, which contains further information on the use of animals by people in Ancient Benin. Within a set time limit, ask them to read or re-read each slide in the turn. Wherever they come across the mention of a particular animal in the slide, add the use of the animal onto the spider diagram for that particular animal (for example, for *Elephant*, add *Ivory for carvings*).

Activity Three

Display Slide Twenty which asks the question “Does useful mean the same as important?”. Lead a discussion in answer to the question, teasing out differences between the terms. For example: a pencil case might be useful to us, but do we think the particular pencil case we are using today is important to us or not? If so why? (Was it a present from someone we love?) If not, why not? (Perhaps because it is an old one? Etc). Ask pairs or trios to re-order the animal slides from most to least important to the people of Ancient Benin, given the pupils’ increased knowledge of how animals were used. Allow time for pupils to make holes at the top of each copy of the animal slides, and thread them onto a single piece of string or cotton, so that all the slides are visible and can be hung up as a mobile. Once complete, ask

selected pairs/trios to explain and justify their order, inviting others to challenge their point of view. What should emerge from this activity is that there is a difference between how Benin people regarded commonplace and domestic animals that provided essential food, compared to prestigious wild animals linked to religious worship or reserved for use by the Oba (King).

Plenary

Display Slide Twenty, which lists in random order categories of people in ancient Benin, labelled from A to F. Within a set time limit, ask pupils to put the categories of people in an order of importance, starting with One for most important e.g. One equals B, and going down to 9. They should use their mobiles of animal slides from the previous activity, and the other information they have been given about life in ancient Benin to help them do this. Once complete, ask selected pairs/trios to justify their order, inviting others to challenge their point of view. The correct list goes something like: the Oba (King), Queen Mother, Chiefs, Priests, warriors and hunters, traders and craftsmen, with poor villagers last. Within society, women were usually secondary in importance to men (apart from the Queen Mother, who had her own court).