



# Benin Animal Art

Benin plaques didn't just feature people, but animals as well. These animal plaques still had the job of telling the people about their king. The Oba liked to associate himself with certain animals—animals that showed strength or certain special powers.

## **One was the mudfish.**

**Ask the children:** What could a mudfish tell the people about their Oba? It wasn't ferocious, like a shark, or powerful, like a whale. But the mudfish had other abilities. It was a creature that could move across land as well as water. Did this special prowess reflect the *Oba's* ability to swim as well as walk? No, it symbolized his ability to transfer between two realms—the earthly and the spiritual, between life and death. The mudfish became a symbol of the king's divinity.

**The leopard** was another symbol of the *Oba* of Benin.

**Ask the children:** Why did the king associate himself with the leopard? What qualities does a leopard have that the king of Benin would like people to think he had? Strength, cunning, speed and daring.

