In our previous lesson we had a precise look on the iron and copper tools and weapons. We discussed how were these things made and what were they important for. (this is just a summary).

This week we will talk about the pottery and the Lydenburg heads.

What is pottery?

Pottery refers to pots shaped from moist clay and hardened by heat. This is one of the remains from the past found by the Archaeologists while they were doing their study about the first African farmers. Human and animal skulls, bones and artefacts such as pottery can tell us a lot about the African farming society. Women made pottery and it was very important in the daily lives of a farming society. It was used for many different purposes. It was used for carrying and storing milk and water as well as for cooking food especially porridge. Other uses included brewing beer and storing food. Women made pots from clay, in different styles and shapes and painted them in different colours. They polished and decorated for a decent presentation. These were very strong, they could use them for cooking on open fires without cracking. Some African women still make clay pots today. They make them in the same way as they did in the past. Except for the uses in the past, today clay pots are used for decorations in some households. The pictures below show us how do clay pots look like.
The Lydenburg heads

The Lydenburg heads are also important artefacts that can tell us a lot about African farmers. These were some of the pots decorated with patterns and had a special meaning. Archaeologists found broken pieces of clay pots near the town of Lydenburg in Mpumalanga Province in the early 1960’s. The Archaeologists carefully put the pieces together, and when they were put back together, they formed human heads so they were than known as Lydenburg heads. These human head sculptures were big enough to have been worn as masks. These heads can still be seen today in the South African Museum in Cape Town.

What were the Lydenburg heads used for?

Archaeologists believe that the Lydenburg heads were used during the initiation ceremonies, where teenagers were accepted as adults. In these ceremonies, ancestors were asked to accept theses young people as full members of their communities. These heads were believed to make contact to the ancestors in the spirit world. At the end of the initiation, these heads were broken and buried as they were believed to be dangerous.

Below is the picture of the Lydenburg heads.
Learners’ activity

Complete the following task using the above given information or read through the textbook from page 122-124 or use any other sources of information.

1. Research and define the following terms: artefacts, pottery, initiation and ancestors.
2. What were the pots used for?
3. What were pots made from?
4. In which province were the Lydenburg heads found?
5. Where can these heads be found today?
6. What were these heads used for?