NEWS LESSON

The Lake Mead Mystery Finally Has a Name



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why do unsolved mysteries hold people's attention?
2. Would you watch a mystery if you already knew the ending?
3. When does curiosity about a crime become intrusive?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**homicide**	☐	A	moving back or getting lower
2	**reservoir**	☐	B	using science to help solve a crime
3	**forensic**	☐	C	got rid of
4	**speculation**	☐	D	used power or influence to affect something
5	**acknowledged**	☐	E	a large lake, often made by people, that stores water
6	**exerted**	☐	F	admitted or accepted that something is true
7	**receding**	☐	G	guessing about something without knowing the facts
8	**disposed of**	☐	H	the crime of killing a person

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

Environmental change uncovered what somebody had hidden, and modern science recovered a name that time had almost erased. Neither explains who put him there.

1 On a stretch of newly exposed shoreline at Lake Mead in May 2022, a group of boaters came across an object that looked oddly out of place: a corroded metal barrel. The reservoir near Las Vegas had been shrinking as drought and heavy water use brought down its level, exposing ground that had been submerged for decades. Inside the barrel were human remains. What at first appeared to be a grim curiosity soon became the centre of a homicide investigation reaching back roughly forty years.

2 The victim had suffered a gunshot wound to the head, and details of his clothing suggested a death in the late 1970s or early 1980s. The location and method of concealment inevitably stirred memories of Las Vegas's organised-crime era, when mob figures exerted considerable influence over the city. Public speculation took off almost immediately. Yet detectives repeatedly cautioned that a barrel and a dramatic setting did not constitute evidence of a Mafia connection. Behind the sensational headlines was an unidentified person whose family might still be waiting for answers.

3 Establishing a name proved painstaking. With little conventional evidence to go on, investigators drew on forensic genealogy, analysing DNA recovered from bone and tracing potential links to living relatives. Such methods can reopen apparently hopeless cases by identifying biological connections that were impossible to investigate when the person died. Researchers also examined family records and other leads. The work did not instantly solve the mystery, but it gradually narrowed the possibilities until a credible identification emerged.

4 At an October 2026 press conference, officials identified the remains as Edward Lelburian Jackson, known as Buddy. He was from Arkansas and was believed to have been in his mid-to-late fifties when he was killed. His family had last seen him in the early 1980s. Because Jackson travelled independently, his absence had not resulted in a missing-person report at the time. The announcement supplied the crucial human detail absent from so much of the earlier coverage: the man in the barrel was no longer simply an anonymous victim.

5 Identifying him, however, was not the same as solving his murder. The circumstances of his final days remained uncertain, as did the identity of whoever shot him and disposed of the body. Police acknowledged aspects of Jackson's past that investigators considered relevant, but they had not established a connection to organised crime. A compelling narrative practically writes itself when a body emerges from a desert reservoir near Las Vegas; the challenge is resisting the urge to turn speculation into fact. Investigators still need evidence, witnesses or new leads to reconstruct what actually happened.

6 Receding water revealed what someone had attempted to hide, while DNA analysis recovered an identity that time had almost erased. Neither development could restore the decades that Jackson's relatives spent without answers. Yet giving a name to unidentified remains is not a minor achievement: it returns a life to the centre of a story otherwise dominated by the manner of death. The next chapter, if there is one, will depend on discovering who placed Buddy Jackson in that barrel and why.

Sources: Associated Press. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. More than forty years passed between the family last seeing Jackson and the announcement of his identity. T F NG
2. Investigators remained cautious about a Mafia link even after Jackson was identified. T F NG
3. Naming Jackson allowed investigators to say who had shot him. T F NG
4. The writer regards the identification as a minor achievement because the murder is unsolved. T F NG
5. Other barrels have since been found in the same reservoir. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

anonymous **compelling** **corroded** **fragile** **negligible** **painstaking** **sensational** **submerged**

1. After the flood, the farmland stayed _____ for weeks, and the crops rotted in the fields.
2. Years of salt water had left the iron gates so badly _____ that they crumbled when touched.
3. Restoring the manuscript was a _____ task that took the conservators three years.
4. The defence faced such _____ evidence that the jury could see no alternative to a guilty verdict.
5. The donor, who remained _____, gave the museum a large sum and asked for no credit.
6. The paper was criticised for its _____ coverage, which prized shock above accuracy.

6 Word forms

Use the word in brackets to make a word that fits the gap.

1. The location and method of _____ stirred memories of Las Vegas's organised-crime era. (CONCEAL)
2. Because Jackson travelled independently, his _____ had not led to a missing-person report. (ABSENT)
3. Investigators warned against drawing _____ conclusions from the dramatic setting. (HASTE)
4. Forensic genealogy is _____ in cases where no relatives appear in any police database. (VALUE)
5. Giving a name to _____ remains is not a minor achievement. (IDENTIFY)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level, fixed adjective and verb phrases do not allow a swap. Learn the whole chunk: tantamount to, fraught with, drew on.

about by for in on to with

1. Investigators drew _____ forensic genealogy when conventional evidence ran out.
2. Repeating an unproven theory as fact is tantamount _____ inventing it.
3. A case this old is fraught _____ difficulty, since witnesses may have died.
4. A single announcement can culminate _____ the end of decades of uncertainty.
5. Early reports were dominated _____ lurid theories about organised crime.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What do true-crime stories owe the people involved?
2. Should a mystery stay in the news until it is solved?
3. What makes a crime story worth telling beyond the shocking details?

9 Role-play: should an old case stay open?

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · a friend who thinks the case should stay open

You read about a very old case. Explain why you think the police should keep investigating. Ask your friend two questions about what they think.

Student B · a friend who thinks the money should be used elsewhere

You think police time and money should go to newer cases. Explain your view politely. Ask your friend what could still be found after so many years.

Useful phrases

I think the police should keep trying.

I see what you mean, but it's been a long time.

What could they still find after all these years?

The family deserves an answer, don't you think?

I'd rather they spent the money on new cases.

Maybe we can agree on one thing.

Afterwards, tell the class: did you agree, and what helped you decide?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 H · 2 E · 3 B · 4 G · 5 F · 6 D · 7 A · 8 C

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 F · 5 NG

5 Vocabulary

1 submerged · 2 corroded · 3 painstaking · 4 compelling · 5 anonymous · 6 sensational

6 Word forms

1 concealment · 2 absence · 3 hasty · 4 invaluable · 5 unidentified

7 Language focus

1 on · 2 to · 3 with · 4 in · 5 by

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