NEWS LESSON

A Name at Last for the Man in the Barrel



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	**exposed**	☐	A	hidden on purpose
2	**remains**	☐	B	a list of events in the order they happened
3	**concealed**	☐	C	ideas that try to explain why something happened
4	**forensic**	☐	D	what is left of a dead body
5	**victim**	☐	E	the facts and conditions around an event
6	**timeline**	☐	F	no longer covered, so that people can see it
7	**circumstances**	☐	G	using science to help solve a crime
8	**theories**	☐	H	a person who is hurt or killed in a crime

3 Read

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

Four years after boaters found the remains, DNA gave the victim back his identity. The murder itself is still unsolved.

1 On 1 May 2022, boaters exploring Lake Mead near Las Vegas spotted a rusted barrel on a newly exposed stretch of shoreline. Prolonged drought and falling water levels had revealed areas that had remained underwater for decades. The discovery seemed unusual, but the contents were far more disturbing: human remains. Someone had put a body inside the barrel and left it in the lake. Decades later, a changing landscape had brought a possible murder back into the light.

2 Investigators established that the victim had been shot in the head. His clothing and shoes suggested he had died in the late 1970s or early 1980s. The case immediately attracted attention because Las Vegas had a notorious history of organised crime. A body sealed inside a barrel seemed to belong in a gangster film, and rumours began to spread. Detectives, however, stressed that the dramatic circumstances did not prove any connection with the Mafia.

3 The biggest difficulty was simpler: nobody knew who the victim was. Without a name, investigators could not easily build a timeline or work out where he had last been seen. Traditional clues had taken them only so far. Specialists therefore turned to DNA, using material recovered from bone to search for family connections. Forensic genealogy can sometimes link unidentified remains to relatives, even when there is no direct match in a police database. Gradually, the investigation began to move forward.

4 In October 2026, officials announced a breakthrough. The man was Edward Lelburian Jackson, who was known to his family as Buddy and came from Arkansas. He had been in his mid-to-late fifties when he died. His relatives had last seen him during the early 1980s, but because he was accustomed to travelling independently, they had not reported him missing. A family story that had remained uncertain for decades could now be connected to the body discovered beside the lake.

5 There was still a gap between identifying Jackson and understanding his death. Police knew that he had been shot and concealed, but the motive remained unclear. His history included some minor criminal matters, yet investigators said there was no evidence establishing a mob connection. It would have been easy to fill the empty spaces with dramatic theories about old Las Vegas. Responsible reporting, however, requires separating what is known from what merely sounds convincing.

6 The case is also a reminder that new discoveries can emerge from unexpected places. The falling water level was an environmental warning for communities that depend on the Colorado River. At the same time, it exposed a long-buried crime. Modern scientific techniques supplied a name that the barrel itself could not reveal. For Jackson's family, that identification mattered enormously, even though it could not answer every question. The mystery of who killed him remains open, waiting for someone to provide the final missing piece.

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. The barrel appeared on land that had been underwater for decades. T F NG
2. The victim was named more than four years after the barrel was found. T F NG
3. Jackson's family reported him missing in the early 1980s. T F NG
4. Forensic genealogy only works when there is an exact match in a police database. T F NG
5. Police have named a suspect in the killing. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

alibi	breakthrough	convincing	motive	prolonged	rumours	stressed	witness

1. Residents suffered during the _____ drought, which lasted for several years.
2. After the film came out, _____ about the actor's private life spread quickly.
3. Scientists announced a major _____ in the treatment of the disease.
4. The robber's _____ was never clear, since he had taken nothing of value.
5. The spokesperson _____ that nobody should jump to conclusions.
6. Her explanation was so _____ that nobody doubted it.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. When the boaters spotted the barrel, the lake _____ for years. (SHRINK)
2. The barrel _____ in the lake decades before the water level dropped. (LEAVE)
3. If the investigators had known his name earlier, they _____ his family sooner. (CONTACT)
4. By October 2026, his relatives _____ him for more than forty years. (NOT SEE)
5. Specialists _____ material taken from the bone to search for family links. (USE)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Verbs and nouns often need one fixed preposition. Learn the pair together: depend on, turn to, a gap between.

at	between	from	of	on	to	with

1. Specialists turned _____ DNA when traditional clues were not enough.
2. Responsible reporting means separating fact _____ speculation.
3. Many communities along the river depend _____ it for their water.
4. There was still a gap _____ identifying a victim and understanding a death.
5. It would have been easy to fill the empty spaces _____ dramatic theories.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 T · 3 F · 4 F · 5 NG

5 Vocabulary

1 prolonged · 2 rumours · 3 breakthrough · 4 motive · 5 stressed · 6 convincing

6 Verb forms

1 had been shrinking or had shrunk · 2 had been left or was left · 3 would have contacted · 4 had not seen or hadn't seen · 5 used

7 Language focus

1 to · 2 from · 3 on · 4 between · 5 with

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