NEWS LESSON

Hidden Under the Stairs: How Two Renoirs Came Home



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Why do some paintings become worth millions?
2. Would you rather own a famous picture or one you simply love?
3. What makes a real-life theft different from a film heist?

2 Key words

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

1	**breakthrough**	☐	A	people who go into a place without permission
2	**intruders**	☐	B	fills or uses a place or building
3	**haul**	☐	C	an important discovery that helps solve a problem
4	**immense**	☐	D	the happy feeling when a worry has gone
5	**convictions**	☐	E	money and other things a person or group can use
6	**relief**	☐	F	extremely large
7	**occupies**	☐	G	official decisions in court that someone is guilty
8	**resources**	☐	H	a large amount of things that someone has taken

3 Read

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

The burglars fled when the alarm sounded, dropping half their haul and a cover carrying DNA. That mistake led police to six arrests.

1 Shortly before six in the morning, an alarm sounded at a quiet museum on the French Riviera. By the time the local police arrived, two intruders had disappeared, leaving behind a confused scene and two paintings they had apparently intended to steal. Two other works by Pierre-Auguste Renoir were missing. It was 8 September 2026, and a museum devoted to one of France's best-known painters had become the centre of an international art-theft investigation. The haul the thieves got away with was later valued by the Marseille prosecutor at approximately €4.2 million.

2 The setting made the robbery particularly striking. The Renoir Museum in Cagnes-sur-Mer occupies the artist's former home, a place that attracts visitors interested in his life as much as his paintings. French officials said the intruders cut through a garden fence and entered through a window. They targeted four works, but the alarm forced them to abandon two during their escape.

3 The paintings that vanished were Portrait of Madame Colonna Romano and Young Woman at the Well, both on loan from the Musée d'Orsay in Paris. For weeks, investigators had no public answer to the obvious question: where had they gone?

4 The breakthrough was less glamorous than the theft itself. Police found DNA on a protective cover left behind at the scene. It matched a man already known to investigators, whose vehicle was being monitored in another inquiry. Tracking information, communications evidence and further surveillance helped officers piece together movements after the burglary. Rather than guessing which collector might secretly want a Renoir, investigators tracked down the suspects through the ordinary mistakes they had made.

5 Then the case became more urgent. Police observed that one suspect had visited the Maeght Foundation, another institution with important works of art. Prosecutors believed a second theft might be imminent. Officers closed in on the suspects and arrested them before it could happen. Six people were arrested in total, and four men received preliminary charges connected with the theft or handling stolen goods. Those charges were allegations to be tested through the legal process, not convictions.

6 The missing paintings were recovered from behind a concealed wall beneath a staircase in a house. Their survival came as a relief, though one had suffered a tear and the other damage to its frame. The French Ministry of Culture announced that specialists would examine the works in Marseille before they returned to Cagnes-sur-Mer. The paintings had escaped permanent disappearance, but not the consequences of being handled as criminal property.

7 The investigation reopened an uncomfortable debate about museum security. A small cultural institution can hold works of immense financial and historical value without having the resources of a national gallery. Meanwhile, the criminals face a practical difficulty of their own: famous paintings are extraordinarily difficult to sell openly. In this case, a carefully planned break-in ended with abandoned evidence, suspected preparations for another robbery and two priceless objects hidden in a wall. It was hardly the elegant operation imagined in an art-heist film.

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. One suspect was traced partly because his vehicle was already being watched in another inquiry. T F NG
2. The Maeght Foundation was robbed before the arrests were made. T F NG
3. The stolen paintings were insured for their full value. T F NG
4. The paintings on display belonged to a private collector. T F NG
5. The writer thinks the break-in was less skilful than an art-heist film would suggest. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

abandon	allegations	concealed	imminent	monitored	occupied	suffered	vanished

1. The alarm forced the burglars to _____ part of what they had stolen.
2. Detectives were sure a second theft was _____ , so they acted quickly.
3. Officers _____ every journey the van made and kept detailed records.
4. A thief who hides stolen goods in a secret place has _____ them from view.
5. The charges are only _____ , and the court has not decided anything yet.
6. She _____ a serious injury in the accident but recovered fully.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Police _____ DNA on a protective cover left at the scene. (FIND)
2. The ministry announced that specialists _____ the works in Marseille. (EXAMINE)
3. If the alarm hadn't sounded, the thieves _____ all four paintings. (TAKE)
4. Before the police found them, the paintings _____ behind a wall for several weeks. (HIDE)
5. Six people _____ in total. (ARREST)

7 Language focus: prepositions

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Many adjectives and verbs need one fixed preposition. Learn the whole phrase, not just the adjective.

at	by	for	from	of	on	with

1. The Renoirs on display were on loan _____ a larger museum in Paris.
2. Prosecutors were suspicious _____ the suspect's visit to another gallery.
3. The thieves were responsible _____ the damage to the fence.
4. Detectives relied _____ DNA evidence to find the suspect.
5. Experts compared the DNA found at the scene _____ police records.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. What does a museum owe visitors as well as the objects it protects?
2. Would a stolen painting be worth anything if you could never show it?
3. Should museums display a convincing copy when an original is missing?

9 Role-play: more money for museum security

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

Student A · the museum manager

A small museum has just lost two paintings. You want money for a better alarm and a night guard. Explain why it matters and say what will happen if you get nothing.

Student B · the town councillor

The town has a small budget and many other needs. Ask how much the museum wants and why. You can say yes, no, or give some of the money.

Useful phrases

We'd like to ask for some extra money.

It's not just about the paintings, it's about the visitors.

How much would it cost?

I'm afraid we can't afford all of it.

Could we start with the alarm?

That's a fair point, I'll think about it.

Afterwards, tell the class: how much money did the museum get, and was it fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 F · 5 T

5 Vocabulary

1 abandon · 2 imminent · 3 monitored · 4 concealed · 5 allegations · 6 suffered

6 Verb forms

1 found · 2 would examine · 3 would have taken · 4 had been hidden · 5 were arrested

7 Language focus

1 from · 2 of · 3 for · 4 on · 5 with

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