NEWS LESSON

Where Should the Parthenon Marbles Be Displayed?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would you rather see an ancient object where it was made or in a big world museum?
2. What gives an object a sense of belonging to a place?
3. Would a perfect copy offer the same museum experience?

2 Key words

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

1	**celebrated**	☐	A	the control of a country by foreign soldiers
2	**authorisation**	☐	B	famous and admired by many people
3	**heritage**	☐	C	objects made by people in the past, often found in museums
4	**artefacts**	☐	D	the act of bringing separated parts together again
5	**reunification**	☐	E	official permission to do something
6	**disposal**	☐	F	the history and traditions of a country that are passed down
7	**occupation**	☐	G	not supporting either side
8	**neutral**	☐	H	the act of getting rid of something or giving it to someone else

3 Read

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

Greece wants the Parthenon sculptures back in Athens. The British Museum says it holds them legally and that showing them in London has value of its own.

1 The Parthenon Marbles are among the British Museum's most celebrated objects, yet their continued presence in London is inseparable from one of the institution's most persistent controversies. Carved for the fifth-century BC temple on the Acropolis, the surviving sculptures are now divided principally between Britain and Greece. Greece wants the surviving pieces reunited in Athens. The museum's trustees point to ownership law and the value of showing objects from different cultures together. Those arguments lead to a simple question with no easy agreement: where do the sculptures belong?

2 The dispute traces back to the early nineteenth century, when Lord Elgin arranged for sculptures to be removed from the Acropolis under Ottoman rule. He asserted that he had obtained the necessary permission, but historians and campaigners continue to dispute the scope and legitimacy of that authorisation.

3 In 1816, the British state purchased his collection and placed it in the museum. Its defenders argue that the transaction was lawful by the standards of the period; critics reply that the Greek population had no meaningful control over the decisions being made about its heritage. Successive Greek administrations have pressed for the sculptures' return ever since, and the campaign has never entirely died down.

4 Greek governments have long maintained that the marbles belong with the remaining architectural sculpture in Athens. The argument is unusually strong because the pieces were not independent artefacts assembled from different locations: they formed an artistic programme associated with one identifiable monument. The Acropolis Museum offers a setting in which the surviving elements could be interpreted together, with the temple itself visible nearby. Reunification, in this view, would restore a context that a divided collection cannot fully provide.

5 The British Museum counters that its international displays place ancient Greek civilisation in dialogue with other cultures. Trustees also face a significant statutory obstacle. The British Museum Act 1963 severely restricts the disposal of objects from the collection, meaning that a permanent transfer would be legally complicated. Successive discussions have therefore explored partnership arrangements, including reciprocal loans. In October 2026, chairman George Osborne outlined his hope for a rotating arrangement under which sculptures might spend time in both Athens and London.

6 The practical appeal of such a compromise is clear, but it does not iron out the central disagreement. A loan generally assumes that the lender owns what it is lending, an assumption Greece has been reluctant to accept. The dispute is consequently about language and recognition as much as physical possession. An agreement that appears generous in London could still seem to Athens like a demand to legitimise an earlier removal. Neither side can afford to be seen backing down, which is why one initiative after another has stalled at precisely the same point.

7 The broader implications extend through museum collections worldwide. Artefacts acquired under empire, unequal treaties or military occupation come under renewed scrutiny, while arguments about universal access retain genuine force. Each case has its own legal and historical circumstances, making sweeping solutions difficult. What the Parthenon debate reveals is that museums are not neutral storehouses of the past. Their collections record decisions about power and possession, and those decisions stay open to challenge.

Sources: ARTnews. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

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

1. Greece's hesitation over loans is linked to what a loan would suggest about ownership. T F NG
2. The 1963 Act rules out any temporary movement of the sculptures from London. T F NG
3. Critics of the 1816 purchase claim that it broke British law. T F NG
4. Proposals have repeatedly failed to progress partly because neither side wants to look as if it has given way. T F NG
5. The writer treats the Greek case for reunification as weak because the pieces came from several different monuments. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

asserted	persistent	pretext	reciprocal	retracted	scope	stalled	statutory

1. The minister _____ that the policy had been approved, although no one could find the paperwork.
2. Negotiations have _____ over the question of who should pay for the repairs.
3. The two companies signed a _____ agreement: each would share its technology with the other.
4. The council has a _____ duty to inspect every restaurant at least once a year.
5. Rumours of a merger proved remarkably _____, resurfacing every time the company denied them.
6. The inquiry was criticised for its narrow _____, which left out the most serious complaints.

6 Word forms

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

1. Lawyers questioned the _____ of the contract, which had never been properly signed. (VALID)
2. The report was criticised for its _____, since it praised the scheme in one chapter and condemned it in the next. (CONSISTENT)
3. Historians warn against the _____ of complex events into a single dramatic story. (SIMPLIFY)
4. The minister's _____ to discuss the matter publicly only fuelled speculation. (RELUCTANT)
5. Critics saw the move as political _____ rather than a principled stand. (EXPEDIENT)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. At this level many phrasal verbs are fixed and figurative. Learn the particle with the verb, and watch the tense or form the sentence needs.

bring	brush	held	ruled	swept	tone	turned

1. Under pressure, the authors agreed to _____ down their criticism.
2. The committee refused to _____ aside the objections of its own members.
3. Her defiant speech was _____ up as proof that reform was possible.
4. Ministers have not _____ out further talks, though they expect little from them.
5. The new law could _____ about changes that few people predicted.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

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

1. What would a fair agreement over the sculptures look like?
2. Does easy access for visitors settle where an object should stay?
3. Who should help tell the story beside an object in a museum?

9 Role-play: Grandmother's painting

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

Student A · the cousin who wants to keep it

You and your cousin have inherited a valuable painting from your grandmother. You want to keep it in the family home, where she hung it. Explain why it matters to you, and listen to your cousin's idea.

Student B · the cousin who wants to lend it

A local museum has asked to show the painting for a year. You think more people should see it. Explain your idea, and try to find an arrangement you can both accept.

Useful phrases

I'd hate to see it leave the family.

That's a fair point, but more people could enjoy it.

What if we lent it for six months?

I don't think it's right to give it away.

We'd still own it, wouldn't we?

Let's try to find a compromise.

Afterwards, tell the class: where did the painting end up, and was it a fair decision?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 asserted · 2 stalled · 3 reciprocal · 4 statutory · 5 persistent · 6 scope

6 Word forms

1 validity · 2 inconsistency · 3 simplification · 4 reluctance · 5 expediency

7 Language focus

1 tone · 2 brush · 3 held · 4 ruled · 5 bring

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