NEWS LESSON

The Ancient Sculptures Dividing Athens and London



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	**remarkable**	☐	A	connected with one country ruling another
2	**trustees**	☐	B	unusual and worth noticing
3	**civilisations**	☐	C	an agreement to work together
4	**partnership**	☐	D	a large building or statue from the past
5	**colonial**	☐	E	what makes a person or a country special
6	**injustices**	☐	F	a group of people who look after an organisation
7	**monument**	☐	G	unfair things that happen to people
8	**identity**	☐	H	large groups of people with their own culture and history

3 Read

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

The Parthenon sculptures have been in London since the 1800s. Greece says it is time they went back, and Britain is still deciding.

1 Visitors to the British Museum in London can admire a remarkable collection of ancient Greek sculptures. For centuries, these marble figures and decorative panels formed part of the Parthenon, a temple on the Acropolis in Athens. Today they are better known as the Parthenon Marbles, or sometimes the Elgin Marbles. Their beauty is rarely disputed. Who should own and display them is another matter entirely.

2 The disagreement began more than 200 years ago. In the early 1800s, Greece was under Ottoman rule when Lord Elgin, a British diplomat, arranged for sculptures to be removed from the Acropolis. He maintained that he had permission from Ottoman authorities, though the exact limits of that permission have been debated ever since. The British government bought the collection in 1816, and it became part of the British Museum.

3 Greece argues that the surviving pieces should be reunited in Athens, close to the building they once decorated. For Greek campaigners, the issue is not simply about where tourists can see valuable works of art. The sculptures are part of the country's history and identity, and removing them from their original setting splits up parts of a single monument. The modern Acropolis Museum was designed with the possibility of displaying them together in mind.

4 The British Museum argues that displaying objects from different civilisations side by side encourages visitors to make connections across cultures. Its trustees also regard the marbles as legally held. Under legislation passed in 1963, the museum is generally unable to hand over objects from its collection. This makes a permanent return difficult without a change to the law or some other agreement.

5 Discussions have dragged on for years and have included proposals for a partnership involving loans or the temporary movement of objects between London and Athens. In October 2026, British Museum chairman George Osborne expressed hope that an arrangement could still be reached, suggesting that the sculptures might spend periods in both countries. Such a plan could bring the pieces to Athens, but Greece has resisted any deal that appears to require it to recognise British ownership.

6 The dispute reflects a much wider question facing major museums. Many collections include objects acquired during wars, colonial rule or periods when local people had little political power. Returning them may help put right historic injustices, while international museums argue that their collections have educational value. There is no solution that satisfies everyone. At the heart of the Parthenon debate is a question about who tells the story of an object.

Sources: ARTnews. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

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

1. The Parthenon Marbles are known by more than one name. T F NG
2. The British Museum received the collection as a gift in 1816. T F NG
3. Lord Elgin was paid by the Ottoman authorities for his work. T F NG
4. Greece may refuse a deal that seems to accept British ownership. T F NG
5. The 1963 law makes it simple for the museum to return objects permanently. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

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

assembled **campaigners** **disputed** **inspectors** **legislation** **maintained** **resisted** **reunited**

1. The family has _____ the old farmhouse carefully for four generations.
2. The ownership of the land has been _____ in court for decades.
3. New _____ will make it illegal for shops to give out free plastic bags.
4. The town council _____ pressure to sell the building to a developer for years.
5. The two brothers were finally _____ after twenty years on different continents.
6. Environmental _____ gathered outside parliament to demand stronger action on climate change.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. By the time we reached the gallery, the guide _____ his talk. (FINISH)
2. The new gallery _____ by the mayor next spring. (OPEN)
3. If I _____ the director of the museum, I would return the sculptures. (BE)
4. The curator _____ for the museum since 2015. (WORK)
5. She said she _____ the exhibition the following week. (VISIT)

7 Language focus: phrasal verbs

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Some phrasal verbs take an object, and some do not. Check whether the sentence needs a noun after the particle.

break	draw	pull	put	stand	turn	work

1. Both sides need time to _____ out the details of the agreement.
2. The museum had to _____ off the opening because of the building work.
3. The lawyers will _____ up a contract before the meeting.
4. The gallery had to _____ down the offer because the law does not allow it.
5. Talks could _____ down if neither side is willing to compromise.

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

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 maintained · 2 disputed · 3 legislation · 4 resisted · 5 reunited · 6 campaigners

6 Verb forms

1 had finished · 2 will be opened or is going to be opened or is to be opened · 3 were or was · 4 has worked or has been working · 5 would visit or was going to visit

7 Language focus

1 work · 2 put · 3 draw · 4 turn · 5 break

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