

Where Do the Elgin Marbles Belong?

Grades

● 6–8

Teacher-In-Residence

● Isabella Pircio

Subjects

● Social Studies, English
Language Arts, Art History

Carnegie
Museum of Art

Goals

Students will create a thoughtful argument either supporting the return of the Elgin Marbles or defending the retention of the Elgin Marbles.

Objectives

Students will be able to...

- Understand the history of the Parthenon, the Elgin Marbles, and their importance in the history of Ancient Greece.
- Explain the arguments for keeping the Elgin Marbles in the British Museum and returning them to Greece.
- Analyze primary and secondary sources related to the Elgin Marbles to create an informed opinion on the argument.
- Create and present an organized oral presentation arguing to either keep or return the Elgin Marbles from the perspective of a group of stakeholders.

Standards

PA Standards—Social Studies:

- **Social Studies 8.1.6.B** Explain and analyze historical sources: Literal meaning of a historical passage; Data in historical and contemporary maps, graphs and tables; Author or historical source; Multiple historical perspectives; Visual evidence; Mathematical data from graphs and tables.
- **Social Studies 8.4.6.A** Identify and explain how individuals and groups made significant political and cultural contributions to world history.
- **Social Studies 8.4.6.D** Explain how conflict and cooperation among social groups and organizations affected world history.

PA Standards—English Language Arts:

- **ELA CC.1.2.6.B** Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and/or generalizations drawn from the text.
- **ELA CC.1.2.6.G** Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.
- **ELA CC.1.2.6.L** Read and comprehend literary nonfiction and informational text on grade level, reading independently and proficiently.
- **ELA CC.1.4.6.C** Develop and analyze the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- **ELA CC.1.4.6.H** Introduce and state an opinion on a topic.
- **ELA CC.1.4.6.S** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts

Standards

to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.

- **ELA CC.1.5.6.A** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions, on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.
- **ELA CC.1.5.6.D** Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

Materials

- Images of the Elgin Marbles and the Parthenon plasters
- Recent image of the Parthenon
- See/Think/Wonder Handout
- Scholastic Article “The Parthenon Marbles” by Rebecca Katzman
- National Geographic Parthenon Battle YouTube Video
- The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture? Handout
- British Museum Website
- Acropolis Museum Website
- Computer and projector
- Speakers
- Student technology (Chromebook, iPad, etc.)

Vocabulary

- Advocates
- Athena
- Contested
- Earl of Elgin
- Marble
- Preserve
- Repatriation
- Stakeholders
- The Elgin Marbles
- The Parthenon
- Unanimously
- UNESCO

Artworks



The Parthenon; Acropolis, Athens, Greece;
Original, Greek, 447-432 BCE, Iktinos and
Kallikrates, architects, Present location: original
site, Modelmaker: Laurence W. Hitt

Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art

Artworks



The West Front (Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)



The East Front (Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)



Recent image of The Parthenon for comparison

Artworks



Casts of sculptures from the pediments of the Parthenon, Site: Acropolis, Athens, Greece, Original: Greek, 438-432 BCE; Iktinos and Kallkrates, architects, in collaboration with Phidias, sculptor, Present location: British Museum, London (Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)



From left to right:
Horse of Selene, East Pediment of the Parthenon
Selene Torso, East Pediment of the Parthenon
(Images Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)

Artworks



Two goddesses [Dione and Aphrodite], East Pediment of the Parthenon (Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)



Torso of Nike, East Pediment of the Parthenon (Image Source: Carnegie Museum of Art)

Lesson

Day I—Introduction

- Introduce and present the Elgin Marbles with the See/Think/Wonder activity and handout. Allow students time to complete this activity independently. Ideally, students would have access to the images on a device that allows them to zoom into details.

- Guide a class discussion by asking Art Engagement Methodology open-ended questions, engaging students in deeper thinking.

What do you see in this artwork?
What do you see that makes you say that?
What else can we see/find?

- Display the image of the Carnegie Museum of Art Parthenon plaster and provide students with historical context about the structure (name, location, construction, and function), and then display the image of the Parthenon in Greece today. Ask students to identify the similarities and differences that they notice by presenting the images side by side. Guide students to focus on the façade and present the images of the East and West fronts.

- Provide more historical context regarding the connection of the marbles and the Parthenon. Read the Scholastic Article together as a class, stopping to clarify vocabulary and big ideas from the text.

Transition

- Ask students to predict whether they believe the Elgin Marbles have been returned to Greece since the publication of the Scholastic Article.

Day II—Main Activity

- Think, Pair, Share: Ask students to reflect on their responses to the See/Think/Wonder activity from Day I and to share any changes in their initial responses.

- Watch the [Parthenon Battle YouTube Video](#).

- Divide students into groups of 2–4 and give them time to read about the two main arguments in The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture? handout and create a concept map highlighting the major ideas from the text.

Lesson

Transition

- Bring the class back together to review the text and to review the concept map worksheet. This can be done by creating a concept map on the board as a class, or by simply asking for groups to voluntarily share their findings.

Days III & IV—Main Activity

- Students will use these two class periods to work in their groups and prepare their presentations. Each group will be responsible for creating a 2–3-minute oral presentation arguing for either the Elgin Marbles to be kept in the British Museum or for the return of the Elgin Marbles from the perspective of one their assigned roles (stakeholders):

Greek Government Officials
British Government Officials
The Acropolis Museum Staff
Art Historians
UNESCO Officials
Greek Citizens
British Citizens
British Museum Staff
International Lawyers
European Union Officials

- Before allowing students to work in their groups, review the criteria

for the presentation. It must include an introduction, clear argument with at least one piece of evidence from either the Scholastic News Article or The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture? Handout, a rebuttal statement, and a closing statement. Students may also explore the websites of the British Museum and the Acropolis Museum to gain insight and perspective.

Day V—Main Activity

- Allow 2–3 minutes for each group to present their arguments. While students are listening to their peers, they should be writing down any questions they may have, or pieces of evidence that resonated with them.

Transition

- After all groups have presented, give time for students to ask any questions they wrote down during the presentations.
- If time allows, engage students in a reflective discussion and project the images of the Carnegie Museum of Art Parthenon and marbles.

Lesson

Questions

- What do you think would change about the visit to the Acropolis if the Elgin Marbles were returned to Greece?
- How do you think the removal of the Elgin Marbles impact Greece's cultural identity?
- How did your interpretation of the art work change throughout this lesson?
- How might returning the Elgin Marbles help to bridge the gap between Greece and the British Museum?
- What do you think will happen in the future regarding the return of the Elgin Marbles?
- Why do you think there is so much debate and discussion surrounding this topic?

Assessment

Students will be formally assessed on their oral presentations and graded based on:

1. Content (10 pts):

- Includes a clear argument and stance with at least one piece of evidence from either the Scholastic News Article or The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture? Handout
- Acknowledges the opposing view in a rebuttal statement

2. Delivery (10 pts):

- Clear delivery, and tone
- Stays within the 2–3-minute time frame

3. Organization (10 pts):

- Includes an appropriate introduction and conclusion
- The presentation has an organized and systemic flow

4. Participation (10 pts):

- Students used their time wisely and worked on the research, preparation, and presentation during the allotted time given in class.

Lesson Extensions/Modifications

- Introduce the Parthenon with the Secrets of the Acropolis YouTube Video.
- Provide differentiated texts on the Elgin Marbles to accommodate students with varying reading abilities.
- For older students, it is possible to save time by skipping the concept map activity.
- Students can be intentionally grouped together, and the categories of stakeholders can be adapted.
- If necessary, provide students with a graphic organizer to plan their presentations.

See/Think/Wonder Handout

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class Period: _____

What do you see?

What do you think?

What do you wonder?

The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture?

The Elgin Marbles are a collection of classical Greek marble sculptures that have been a topic of debate for many years. These ancient artifacts were originally part of the Parthenon temple in Athens but were removed by Lord Elgin in the early 19th century. Since then, they have been in the British Museum in London. Some argue that they should be returned to Greece, their place of origin, while others believe they should remain in the British Museum.

The Case for Returning the Elgin Marbles to Greece:

Primary Source Quote:

“To the Greeks, the Parthenon is not just a bunch of stones; it is the embodiment of their identity and their cultural heritage.”

—Melina Mercouri, Greek Actress and Former Minister of Culture

Primary Source Quote:

“Lord Elgin used illicit [illegal] and inequitable [unfair] means [ways] to take and export the Parthenon sculptures, without real legal permission to do so, in an act of theft” —Linda Mendoni, Greek Minister of Culture

Many argue that the Elgin Marbles should be returned to Greece for several reasons. First, the sculptures hold important historical and cultural significance for Greece. They were originally created to decorate the Parthenon, a magnificent temple dedicated to the goddess Athena, and a symbol of Athenian democracy. Returning them to their rightful place would allow visitors to experience the full impact of this ancient masterpiece. The people of Greece would also be able to reconnect with their rich culture. The removal of the Elgin Marbles from Greece has been a source of national protest, fueling a desire for their return. Greece claims that the removal of these sculptures was illegal, and their return would be a symbol of respect, and would fix this historical injustice.

The Case for the Elgin Marbles to Remain in the British Museum:

Primary Source Quote:

“Together, these sculptures truly allow us to comprehend [understand] and appreciate the incredible artistic achievements of ancient Greece, which continue to influence our world today.” —British Museum

The Elgin Marbles: Who Owns Culture?

Primary Source Quote:

“I have made up my mind to bring these sculptures to England, where they will receive greater appreciation and protection, rather than leaving them to decay in Greece.”

—Lord Elgin

Others argue that the Elgin Marbles belong in the British Museum where they can benefit people from all over the world. The museum provides a safe and accessible environment for people to appreciate and study these timeless works of art. By staying in the British Museum, the marbles can continue to educate and inspire visitors from diverse backgrounds, fostering cross-cultural understanding. The marbles have been an important part of British history and culture for over 200 years. Lord Elgin legally bought the sculptures in the early 19th century with permission from the Ottoman authorities ruling Greece at the time.

Resources

THE PARTHENON MARBLES

One of the most contested art repatriation disputes BY REBECCA KATZMAN



The famous sculptures (above) on display at the British Museum in London. They were taken from the Parthenon's ruins (below) in Athens.

The Parthenon Marbles, also known as the Elgin Marbles, are a set of 2,500-year-old sculptures originally from ancient Greece—and the subject of one of the most contested art repatriation disputes. A Scottish nobleman removed them from the ruins of the Parthenon, in Athens, in 1801 and sold them to the British government. London's British Museum has had them on display for nearly 200 years, although the Greek government has repeatedly asked for their return.

The seventh Earl of Elgin, who took the marbles, argued he was helping to preserve them, and the British Museum maintains that it acquired the sculptures legally so it shouldn't have to return them. But advocates for their repatriation argue that the treasures belong in Athens where they originated and where the other half of the Marbles currently reside.

In 2021, a committee from UNESCO, a United Nations agency, voted unanimously to recommend returning the Parthenon Marbles. The United Kingdom initially disputed the decision. But in June, the British Museum's Chairman, George Osborne, said there is a "deal to be done" regarding their possible return.



Young activists in Athens, Greece, call for the return of the Marbles.

TOM JAMESON/THE NEW YORK TIMES SCULPTURES: ARIE MESSING/AP VIA GETTY IMAGES (PARTHENON); NICOLAS KOUTSOS/ISTOCKPHOTO (ACTIVISTS); JIM MACANON (GLOBE)

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