

Name: _____

Period: _____

THE ELGIN MARBLES:

A LOOK INTO THE NEVER-ENDING BATTLE OVER THE PARTHENON SCULPTURES
Much of the sculpture that once enhanced the Parthenon in Athens was brought to London by a man named Lord Elgin 200 years ago. Was this the act of a savior or a vandal? Take a look at the story behind this fierce argument.

Before Reading: Answer: *Who owns great works of art? Do great monuments of the world, such as the Parthenon in Greece, the Colosseum in Rome, or the Statue of Liberty in America, belong to the whole world? Or is it possible that they could belong to a single country... or person? Write your opinion in the box below.*



While Reading: *Actively read the following article: summarize; make connections; ask questions; mark your confusion, etc. in the margins. Also, complete the task in each box.*

What was the Parthenon? 2,500 years ago, the city of Athens was attacked by soldiers from Persia, forcing the Athenians to abandon their city. Eventually they managed to defeat the Persians but Athens was now in ruin and had to be rebuilt. **The man who took charge of rebuilding Athens was Pericles.** He got all the best architects, sculptors and other craftsmen together and they slowly rebuilt Athens. It was full of beautiful buildings, but arguably the most beautiful building of all was the *Parthenon*.

#1.

Outside the Parthenon, high up on its four walls was the frieze, or the series of sculptures that went all the way round the building. These sculptures were not simply added to the building. Rather, the sculptors actually cut the frieze out of the very stone which formed the walls of the building. Archeologists around the world agreed that the Parthenon's frieze was one of the most captivating works of art ever created.

What happened to the Parthenon? The Parthenon did not remain a temple to Athena forever. As Christianity spread throughout Europe, the temple was turned into a Christian church and the statue of Athena was destroyed. Later, a group of people called the Turks took over Athens and turned the Parthenon into a *mosque*, or a Muslim place of worship. Still, the building survived for hundreds of years.



Then, in 1687, troops from Italy, who were at war with the Turks, fired on the Acropolis. The Italians knew that the Turks were using the Parthenon as an *arsenal*, or a place where large amounts of weapons are stored. At this particular time, the Parthenon was full of gunpowder. One of the shells fired by the Italians landed inside the Parthenon, causing all of the gunpowder to explode. This

did terrible damage to the Parthenon. The roof was blown off and everything inside was destroyed, but, as if by a miracle, the frieze survived. Now, the once grand Parthenon

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Summarize the events that occurred to the Parthenon from the beginnings of Christianity to the 19th century in four statements.

the story. It is because of his actions that this debate still goes on today.

Who was Lord Elgin? Elgin was a member of the British government and was recently appointed ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (the area that once was ancient Greece was now part of this Ottoman Empire). One task that Lord Elgin frequently focused on was finding some ancient Greek statues to decorate his mansion in Scotland. He travelled in Greece, looking for objects to send back to Britain. When he came to the Acropolis he was given permission to remove anything that was lying on the ground. But instead, Elgin decided to take the statues of the Parthenon frieze and send them back to England.

As explained above, this frieze was actually part of the building. It wasn't simply stuck on. So, in order to take the frieze, Elgin had to get workmen to saw the frieze off the building. It also involved destroying parts of the building in order to lower the sculptures to the ground. Therefore, Elgin caused much damage to the Parthenon.

Elgin took about half of the frieze and some other sculptures from the Parthenon. He sent them back to England. After that things went very badly for Elgin. He found himself so short of money that he decided to sell the Parthenon Marbles to the British government. Some members of the British government thought that Elgin had done a terrible thing by removing the Parthenon Marbles. Eventually, it was decided to buy the Parthenon Marbles from Elgin and put them in the British Museum, in London. It is there that they have stayed ever since.

Why didn't the Greeks stop Elgin? When Elgin took the Parthenon Marbles, Greece was not an independent country; rather, it was part of the Ottoman Empire. The Turks ruled in the lands of the Greeks. Therefore, the Greeks were not able to stop Elgin from taking the Marbles. Twenty years later the Greeks started a war of independence and soon Greece became an independent country. The first thing the newly formed Greek government did was demand the return of the Parthenon Marbles from Britain. Their request was refused.

Do monuments such as the Parthenon belong to the whole world? Some say that Elgin was a selfish aristocrat, seeking sculptures to decorate his personal home. Some say that he was genuinely concerned to rescue these works of art. But the main difficulty lies in the much bigger issue of '*cultural property*' in general. Who owns great works of art? Do monuments such as the Parthenon belong to the whole world? And what does that mean in practice?

Make a connection or write a question about as topic on this page.

Name: _____

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In London, the Elgin Marbles started a new chapter of their history -- as museum objects. Bringing the sculptures from Athens to London had bankrupted Elgin, and he was eager to sell them to the government. In 1816, Parliament bought the sculptures from Elgin. From that point on the sculptures have been kept in the British Museum in London. Over the last 200 years they have come to 'belong' in the British Museum. One can say that they are now historically rooted in London as well as in Athens.

THE TWO SIDES: Both sides of this debate have strong arguments. Below you will find a brief summary of some of the main points from each side. **Review them and decide who has the stronger argument. In the boxes, rank each side's arguments- 1 being the STRONGEST and 3 being the WEAKEST.**

The British Museum's Arguments

1. *The Marbles Renewed Interest in Greek Culture.* The arrival of the sculptures in London had a profound effect on the European public, renewing interest in ancient Greek culture. Since 1816, the sculptures have all been on display to the public in the British Museum. Each year millions of visitors, free of charge, admire the artistry of the sculptures and gain insight into how ancient Greece influenced – and was influenced by – the other civilizations that it encountered.

2. *Many museums around Europe have artifacts from Greece, so why single out the British Museum?* The British Museum isn't the only location that has artifacts from the Parthenon. About 65% of the original sculptures from the Parthenon survive and are located in museums across Europe. The majority of the sculptures are divided between the Acropolis Museum in Athens and the British Museum in London (about 30% each), but important pieces are also held by other major European museums in Paris; Rome; Copenhagen; Vienna; and Munich.

3. *Returning the Marbles Would Do More Harm Than Good.* Since the early 1980s Greek governments have argued for the permanent removal to Athens of all the Parthenon sculptures in the British Museum. We believe this would be a bad idea. The British Museum is a unique resource for the world. The Parthenon Sculptures are a *vital* element in this world collection. They are a part of the world's shared heritage and transcend political boundaries.

The Greek's Arguments:

1. *It's The Right Thing to Do.* The return of the Parthenon Marbles is a fair request of all the Greeks. It is a request of all the people, regardless of nationality, who see the reunification of a mutilated (harmed) monument belonging to the world cultural heritage. The plunder (stealing) of the Marbles and the "banishment" of masterpieces of Greek artifacts is like someone stealing the heritage of the Greek people. Bottom line: Greece has the *right* to receive them back.

2. *The New Acropolis Museum is the Perfect Place for the Marbles.* The creation of the New Acropolis Museum in Athens is the latest reason that supports our argument. Greece is now a free and independent country, with the ability to provide protection and safe display of such unique works of art to the world community.

3. *Returning the Marbles would help unite Europe even more.* We also believe that the return of the Elgin Marbles to Greece would be a key move in promoting Europe's

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common cultural heritage, so this move would not only benefit Greece, but the
entire Europe continent.

Questions: For each questions below, **highlight** the appropriate section of text that would “*answer*” the question. Then, write the number of the question next to that highlighted section. Number one is done for you as an example.

1. Who was responsible for rebuilding the Parthenon?
2. When did the Parthenon turn into a mosque?
3. What was Elgin given permission to remove from the Acropolis?
4. How did Elgin cause damage when removing the frieze from the Parthenon?
5. Add one argument to either the British Museum side or the Greek side. Write it in the space below.
6. Imagine that it was up to you to decide where the Marbles would spend the rest of time. What would your decision be? Explain your choice.
7. The images below are part of a new project in Greece to make citizens more aware of this debate. What are these posters trying to do? Do you think they will be effective? Why or why not?

