



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs



Parthenon: Fair speech, the adventures of the sculptures

**Online educational program for students of 1st - 3rd grades
Senior High School**

Educational resource



Table of contents

Introduction	3
Description of the program.....	3
Program Objectives - Museum education methods of implementation	7
Guidelines for Using the Educational Material	8
 BEFORE THE PROGRAM	 10
Information	11
❖ <i>The Acropolis</i>	11
❖ <i>The Acropolis Museum</i>	15
The Dispersal of Antiquities	20
Visual Means	27
 AFTER THE PROGRAM	 30
Suggested Activities.....	31
Selected Bibliography	33



Introduction

The organization and preparation of the school's participation in an educational program delivered remotely by the archaeologists of the Acropolis Museum's Department of Educational Programs, are key factors in ensuring a successful and meaningful learning experience.

Beyond exploring, digitally, the Museum's galleries and introducing students to the objects on display, their history, artistic significance, and the world in which they were created, it is equally important to create the conditions that encourage students to engage with, deepen, and build upon the knowledge and experiences they gain during their visit. With this in mind, we have prepared the following educational material for you to use in the classroom both before the online educational program, in order to help students, prepare for and make the most of their learning experience, as well as after the program, to support the further development and consolidation and enrichment of the knowledge they acquire of their knowledge.

Description of the program

You have selected the educational program entitled "*The Parthenon: a just argument – the Adventures of the Sculptures*", designed for students in the **1st - 3rd grades Senior High School**. The program was developed to present a holistic understanding of the concept of the dispersal of antiquities, using the renowned Parthenon Sculptures as its starting point. Beyond their significance as outstanding works of art, the sculptures constitute an integral part of an architectural ensemble and acquire their full meaning within the context for which they were originally created.

The program aims, on the one hand, to address key questions concerning the circumstances and causes that led to the fragmentation, removal and subsequent dispersal of the architectural sculptures of this emblematic monument of classical antiquity, while also recounting the stories of selected objects and highlighting the adventures they have experienced over the centuries.

On the other hand, the program aims to foster essential skills and values among students, including the importance of dialogue, the ability to develop and articulate reasoned arguments in support of a position, the use of an evidence-based methodology, and the value and potential of collaborative work.



Throughout the program, students engage in a discussion of the ongoing debate surrounding the reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, more than two centuries after their removal. Particular emphasis is placed on direct and personal observation, encouraging students to examine the works closely, even though they can only view images of them, and to draw conclusions based on their own observations. Through this experiential and participatory approach, students are expected, among other things, to develop the ability to:

1. Distinguish between different types of sculptural decoration, including relief sculpture, sculpture in the round, two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms.
2. Identify the differences between the original sculptures, carved from Pentelic marble, and their plaster casts, through close observation of their material, form and surface characteristics.
3. Understand the significance of preserving the original sculptures as a unified whole, within the architectural and spatial context for which they were originally conceived and created, rather than encountering them in fragmented form, dispersed among different museums and collections.
4. Develop reasoned and evidence-based arguments concerning an act of injustice, such as the violent and traumatic removal of the Parthenon Sculptures, drawing upon systematic observation, critical thinking and the interpretation of evidence.

The program has a total duration of 60 minutes and is structured as follows:

1. Program Introduction:

Before the day of the presentation, and once all the necessary arrangements for booking the online educational program have been completed, you will receive a link to join the program via the Google Meet platform. This means that you will need to have a Gmail account, which will allow you to access and connect to the platform¹. An introductory presentation follows: the archaeologist introduces the program to the participants, explaining its content, objectives and the way in which it will be conducted, providing also general information about the Acropolis Museum and the archaeological

¹ If you do not have a Gmail account, the necessary arrangements will be made during the booking process.



site of the Acropolis. Students are introduced to the multifaceted significance of the Parthenon as a monument, as well as to the significance of its sculptural decoration as an integral component of its architectural and symbolic whole. Particular attention is drawn to the fact that the sculptures were conceived and created as part of a specific architectural context, rather than as independent works of art.

This introductory discussion provides the necessary historical and conceptual framework for the activities that follow, encouraging students to consider the meaning of cultural heritage, the consequences of the dispersal of antiquities, and the importance of understanding works of art within their original context.

2. Digital Tour of the Museum:

The group 'visits' the third floor of the Museum and the first stop is the small-scale model of the Parthenon, located at the center of the atrium. The archaeologist explains that both the atrium and the Parthenon Gallery, which the group will visit subsequently, have been designed to replicate key characteristics of the ancient temple, including its dimensions and orientation. The ancient monument itself is located approximately 300 meters away. Using the model as a visual reference and as a means of gaining an overall understanding of the monument, the group discusses the historical, economic and socio-political conditions that prevailed at the time of its construction. Additional information is provided on the architectural features of the Parthenon and its sculptural decoration, helping students to understand the monument as an integrated architectural and artistic whole.

The group then 'enters' the Parthenon Gallery, where the direct visual connection with the ancient temple, through the gallery's glass windows, allows students to observe its current state of preservation and to explore the events and transformations that have shaped its history over the centuries. The gallery houses the architectural sculptures of the monument. Students are first introduced to the sculptures as a whole before proceeding to examine the individual objects selected for closer observation.



At each of the six objects examined during the program, students are encouraged to interpret the depicted scene, assess the object's state of preservation, and engage in close visual observation in order to distinguish the surviving original elements from the replicas, as well as to identify the sections of the sculptures that have been broken or lost. In each case, the group investigates the circumstances under which the object was fragmented or separated and traces the whereabouts of its surviving components today. Through this process of close observation and enquiry, students are encouraged to reconstruct the history of each object and to understand the impact of its fragmentation and dispersal on the integrity of the original monument.



Program Objectives - Museum education methods of implementation

Objectives

The students:

- Become familiar with the Parthenon and understand its significance through the study of its sculptural decoration.
- Understand the processes of deterioration that affect monuments over time, whether caused by human intervention or natural factors.
- Gain an introduction to the world of Ancient Greek Classical art and develop an appreciation of its artistic and cultural significance.
- Recognize the importance of preserving cultural identity while approaching issues of cultural heritage without fanaticism or bias.
- Become informed about the history and ongoing debate surrounding the dispersal of the Parthenon Sculptures, as well as the current call for their reunification.
- Understand the relationship between the part and the whole, and appreciate the significance of an individual part to the integrity and meaning of the whole—an idea that finds expression in numerous aspects of contemporary social life.
- Develop skills such as close observation, methodological enquiry, creativity, critical thinking, the ability to consider different perspectives, and evidence-based argumentation.
- Develop a methodological approach to the investigation of historical and cultural issues, evaluating different perspectives and objectively considering multiple factors before reaching a conclusion.
- Learn how to analyze an object as a historical source and use the evidence it provides to evaluate and compare different perspectives.
- Develop the ability to formulate and support arguments through observation, evidence and critical analysis, while engaging constructively with alternative viewpoints.

Museum education methods

➤ Discovery learning

- Directed discussion,
- Questions and answers,
- Observation and exploration of authentic ancient artifacts.



Guidelines for Using the Educational Material

The material below provides concise information on the subject explored during the educational program, as well as on the Acropolis and the Acropolis Museum. It also includes visual resources and links to additional information, should you wish to explore the topic further. An indicative bibliography is also provided for those who would like to conduct further research or expand their knowledge of the topics presented.

The purpose of the material provided is to familiarize students with the place, historical period, and subject matter of the program, while allowing them enough time to develop and engage with the idea of 'visiting' a cultural institution. In this way, we hope to foster their interest and desire for a more meaningful encounter with the Museum and to encourage them to deepen and enrich their knowledge.

You are free to decide how best to use the material according to your students' educational needs and interests. As additional suggestions, we propose the following ways of working with the material:

1. Read the texts carefully and explore the suggested links yourself before presenting them to your students, so that you can plan the best way to communicate the information in the classroom. The aim of the program is not only for students to gain knowledge about the subject, but also to engage in an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience. At the same time, we seek to contribute to the development of skills such as observation and collaboration, as well as to foster respect for cultural heritage as a record of collective memory and history. Through active participation, students become engaged participants in cultural life and heritage.
2. Watch the suggested short videos together with your students in the classroom. In this way, students gain an initial acquaintance with the Museum and its collections and, through this process of familiarization, become emotionally and intellectually engaged with the Museum and its exhibits.
3. Use the introductory text for the Acropolis Museum and the Acropolis and encourage students to explore the history of the Sacred Rock and the Museum further on the internet or on social media. In this way, they will be able to use a medium familiar to them, new technologies, to explore beyond the boundaries of the educational process.



4. Discuss the dispersal of antiquities in the classroom: What does the removal of antiquities mean for the culture from which they originate, as well as for the global cultural heritage community? Under what circumstances does such dispersal occur, and what are the relevant ethical and legal considerations?



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

BEFORE THE PROGRAM



Information

The Acropolis

The Acropolis, meaning “the upper city,” is a low rocky hill that dominates the center of modern Athens. Its history stretches back into the depths of time. Although today it is most commonly associated with the magnificent monuments built as part of Pericles’ architectural program in the mid-5th century BCE, the sacred hill underwent many changes over the course of the centuries.



One goddess – many cults

The worship of the goddess Athena on the Acropolis was not one but several, as the goddess had many hypostases. Thus, in each era there were more than one temple and altar for her. Her two main cults were those of Athena Polias - protector of the city - which is placed on the north side of the hill and Athena Parthenos or Promachos – the warrior Athena - which is located on the south side. She was also worshipped as Athena Nike, Athena Ergani, Athena Hygeia etc.

At the beginning of its history, during the **Late Neolithic period (4000–3200 BCE)**, the inhabitants of Attica chose the summit and slopes of the hill as a place to settle. The rock provided a natural defensive position, while natural springs at its foot supplied fresh drinking water. Later, **during the Mycenaean period (1600–1100 BCE)**, a palatial complex was built on the summit of the rock for the local ruler. It included administrative buildings, residences for members of the elite, and sanctuaries dedicated to the goddess Athena. To strengthen the Acropolis’s defenses, a massive fortification wall was added around the middle of the 13th century BCE. Around the **8th century BCE**, the Acropolis was transformed into an exclusively sacred space, with the worship of the goddess Athena becoming predominant, as evidenced by the few surviving remains of the mudbrick temples dating to the Geometric period (1100–700 BCE).

During the **6th century BCE**, the hill began to reflect the gradual development and flourishing of Athens. New monumental stone temples were erected in place of the earlier structures, and the site became filled with votive offerings dedicated by the Athenians to their beloved goddess.

At the dawn of the **5th century BCE**, the Athenians found themselves facing the greatest army of the time: that of the Persian Empire. Immediately after their victory at the Battle of Marathon, the Athenians began constructing a new temple dedicated to Athena in her aspect as Promachos, or Parthenos, on the site of



the earlier 6th-century BCE temple. In doing so, they sought to thank the goddess for the assistance she had provided them in battle.

On the Persian disaster

[The Persians destroy the Acropolis of Athens, 480 BC \(video\)](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

Ten years later, in **480 BCE**, this unfinished temple, along with the entire Archaic Acropolis, was destroyed by the Persians when they invaded the Greek city-states for a second time. Despite the destruction of the Acropolis, the Persian Wars marked a turning point in history, transforming Athens into the leading power of the

Aegean and the Delian League. Thus, **33 years later**, under the leadership of Pericles, the Athenians embarked on the construction of new and more magnificent temples. These would not only replace the destroyed Archaic monuments, but also proclaim the greatness and power of Athenian democracy throughout the Greek world.

Great monuments such as the **Parthenon, the Erechtheion, and the Temple of Athena Nike** were constructed during the second half of the **5th century BCE**.

Other Cults on the Acropolis

In addition to Athena, other deities were worshipped on the Acropolis both on the rock and on the slopes. Some of them were Artemis Brauronia, Aphrodite, Zeus, Poseidon, Pan, Apollo, etc.

[The Acropolis caves and its findings \(video\)](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

[The sanctuaries](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

The people of Athens would climb the Acropolis to take part in the great festivals

held in honor of the goddess Athena and to offer her gifts. These offerings ranged from small and inexpensive objects to highly valuable ones, such as marble statues. Through these offerings, they either asked the goddess to stand by them in times of difficulty or expressed their gratitude for the help she had given them when they called upon her.

In addition to the great sanctuaries dedicated to Athena on the Acropolis, two other important sanctuaries were established on the southern slope, among others, dedicated to different gods.

More about the temples of the classical era

[The Parthenon Gallery](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

[Athena Parthenos. The inscriptions](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

[The temple of Athena Nike](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

[The Erechtheion](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

These were the **Sanctuary of Asclepius**, which also served as a healing center, and the **Sanctuary and Theatre of Dionysus**, where dramatic competitions were held during the Great Dionysia.

Following the age of Pericles, the Acropolis remained the most important sanctuary of the city, continuing to be dedicated to the goddess Athena until the spread of Christianity. In the **early 6th century CE**, the Parthenon was converted into a Christian church. The eventful history of the Acropolis continued in the

On the adventures of the Parthenon

[The adventures of the Parthenon marbles in modern times \(video\)](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

More about the history of the Acropolis and its monuments:

[Timeline \(interactive application\)](#) | [Acropolis Museum](#) | [Official website](#)

<https://www.acropolismuseum.kids.gr/en/video/86-a-bizarre-walk-on-the-acropolis.html>

http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/eh351.jsp?obj_id=2384

http://odysseus.culture.gr/h/3/eh3530.jsp?obj_id=2384

13th century, when, following the Fourth Crusade, the Franks took control of Athens. They converted the Parthenon into a Catholic church and adapted the other buildings for use as palaces.

During the Ottoman rule (**1456-1833**), the Ottoman garrison was installed on the Acropolis and the Parthenon was converted into a mosque.

The year **1687** marked a decisive turning point in the appearance of the Acropolis rock. During the Venetian–Ottoman War, the Venetian army, led by General



Morosini, laid siege to the Acropolis. During the siege, the Venetians directed their cannons towards the Parthenon and bombarded it.

The Ottomans had stored gunpowder inside the temple, and the impact of Morosini's cannon fire proved devastating. A direct hit caused the gunpowder to explode, resulting in the catastrophic destruction of the Parthenon.

When the gunpowder exploded, most of the temple was destroyed.

The Venetians managed to maintain control of Athens for a year, after which the city and the Acropolis were recaptured by the Ottomans.

It was also during this period that the removal of parts of the Parthenon's sculptural decoration to various European countries began. Following the explosion, numerous fragments of the Parthenon's sculptures were scattered across and around the Acropolis rock, allowing Morosini's mercenaries to collect pieces of



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

ancient sculpture and transport them to their private collections in different parts of Europe.

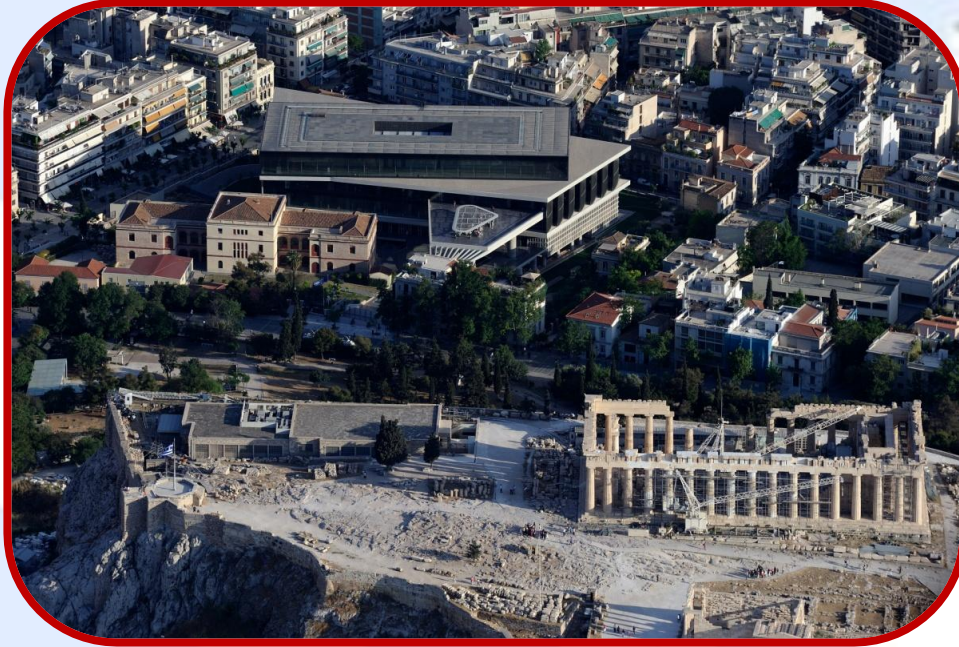
The removal of antiquities from the Acropolis continued over the following centuries, culminating in the forcible removal of approximately half of the surviving sculptural decoration of the Parthenon by the team of Thomas Bruce, Lord Elgin, in the **early 19th century**.

Today, the Acropolis is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Its monuments are preserved and restored based on systematic research carried out by archaeologists, architects, and conservators, using appropriate materials and techniques to safeguard their preservation and enhance their cultural significance.



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

The Acropolis Museum



The Acropolis Museum opened its doors to the public in the summer of **2009**. It is a thematic archaeological museum, meaning that all its collections originate from a single area: the Athenian Acropolis and its slopes. It replaced the old museum, which was founded on the Sacred Rock in **1865** and could no longer adequately

accommodate or display the vast number of finds unearthed during the **nineteenth-century excavations** on the Acropolis, the numerous architectural sculptures that had been removed from the ancient monuments to protect them from air pollution, as well as the ever-increasing number of visitors.

The architectural design of the new building was based on the proposal by Bernard Tschumi and Michalis Fotiadis, who won the fourth architectural competition held in **2000**.

Both the choice of location and the design of the building were dictated by the need to maintain visual contact with the archaeological site of the Acropolis, located just 300 meters away; by the need to provide sufficient space for the full display of the architectural sculptures, particularly those of the Parthenon; and by the need to

More about the Acropolis Museum:

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/museum-history>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/museum-building>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/virtual-tour-acropolis-museum>



preserve and incorporate into the building's architecture the section of the ancient city that was uncovered at the construction site.

The exhibition spaces are arranged across three floors of the Museum, while an additional exhibition area extends across its base:

1. First exhibition area

The first exhibition area of the Museum is located on the ground floor and features finds from the slopes of the Acropolis. The floor of the gallery is made of glass, allowing visitors to view the ancient neighborhood beneath the Museum, while its upward slope evokes the ascent to the Acropolis Rock.

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/gallery-acropolis-slopes>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/multimedia/virtual-tour-gallery-acropolis-slopes>



2. Second exhibition area

The second exhibition area is located on the first floor, where visitors follow the history of the Acropolis summit in a circular route, from 1400 BC to the 7th century AD.

At the top of the staircase leading to the gallery, visitors are greeted by the sculptures of the Hekatompedon, the first monumental temple built on the Acropolis, in 566 BC.

However, the tour begins to the left of the sculptures, where display cases contain objects associated with the Acropolis's distant past.

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/early-history-acropolis>





Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

On the southern side of the floor is the **Archaic Acropolis Gallery**. It is a spacious, light-filled gallery where architectural sculptures and votive offerings from the Acropolis dating from the 6th and early 5th centuries BC are displayed. The natural light entering through the large glass windows and skylights in the roof creates a sense of being outdoors, evoking the open-air spaces of the Acropolis sanctuary, where the sculptures originally stood in antiquity.



<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/archaic-acropolis-gallery>

On the western side of the first floor, architectural sculptures and architectural elements from monuments included in the building program initiated by Pericles for the Acropolis in the 5th century BC are displayed. These include the **Propylaia**, the monumental entrance to the Acropolis, the **Temple of Athena Nike**, and the **Erechtheion**.

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/other-monuments-periklean-building-program>



Continuing along the northern side of the same floor, visitors can trace the history of the Acropolis from the 5th century BC to the end of antiquity through votive offerings, dedicatory bases, marble portraits, and inscriptions

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/5th-century-bc-end-antiquity>



3. Third exhibition area



Passing through the second floor, which houses recreational areas and other visitor services, visitors reach the third floor of the Museum, the third exhibition area, which has been specially designed to accommodate the sculptures of the Parthenon.

The **atrium** and the **Parthenon Gallery** follow the orientation and dimensions of the temple itself. The sculpted blocks of the frieze have been incorporated into the exterior walls of the central core of the

building, positioned in the same arrangement as they originally were on the monument, but at a lower height to allow for better viewing.

The metopes are displayed in pairs between the gallery's metal columns, which correspond in number to those of the Parthenon. The figures from the two pediments, placed on plinths

on the corresponding sides of the gallery, as they were on the temple, can be viewed from all sides.

The exhibition combines the original marble sculptures with plaster casts of those housed in the British Museum and other museums abroad. The **glass façade** surrounding the gallery provides natural light and allows visitors to enjoy a direct visual connection between the sculptures and the monument from which they originate, as well as with the modern city, of which the Acropolis Museum is itself a part.

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/parthenon-gallery>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/multimedia/virtual-tour-parthenon-gallery>

4. Fourth exhibition area

At the base of the Museum lie the remains of an ancient Athenian neighborhood brought to light by the **archaeological excavation** that preceded the construction of the Museum.





Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

The excavation, which was opened to the public in June 2019, offers visitors the opportunity to explore at close quarters a neighborhood that was home to human life and activity from the 4th millennium BC to the 12th century AD. Streets, houses, baths, workshops, and tombs form a complex archaeological landscape, with the best-preserved remains dating from Late Antiquity.

The visitor experience concludes at the small **“Excavation Museum”**, which opened in June 2024. Located along the southern edge of the excavation, it presents a selection of the objects left behind by the people who were born, lived, worked, and created in this corner of ancient Athens.



More about the excavation of the Acropolis Museum:

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/exhibit-halls/archaeological-excavation>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/node/25147>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/node/25146>



The Dispersal of Antiquities

The dispersal of antiquities refers to the presence of cultural objects, far from their places of origin and their historical, cultural, social and geographical contexts, in museums, institutions or private collections in other countries. This phenomenon may have occurred through lawful means, for example as part of a scientific expedition, through a long-term loan with a clearly intercultural purpose, or through a legal donation. In many cases, however, the movement of works of art has taken place in violation of the law and international conventions and/or under conditions of unequal power. In such cases, we may be dealing with illicit antiquities trafficking, including illegal excavations at archaeological sites, thefts from museums and other cultural or historical sites, the illegal sale and export of antiquities, colonial practices, or the widespread practice of looting and plunder during times of war. As an illegal activity, the illicit trafficking of cultural objects constitutes one of the most significant issues facing cultural heritage worldwide and represents a complex historical, legal and ethical challenge.

Over recent decades, many countries have increasingly called for the repatriation of cultural objects removed from their territories in violation of contemporary principles governing the protection of cultural heritage. This demand stems from a growing recognition of the fundamental role that archaeological treasures play in shaping cultural identity and historical memory. It is important to bear in mind that a museum does not merely display works of art; through them, it also tells a wide range of stories to the public. Each object on display forms part of a broader narrative, encompassing its own history and journeys, while also contributing, by definition and as part of the whole, to the documentation of the tangible and intangible heritage of the place from which it originates—a repository of history.

Thus, prompted by the reflection that a museum exhibition invites us to undertake, and in order to understand the issue of the dispersal of antiquities in all its dimensions, we need to ask ourselves what an object on display can tell us about the place where it was created and about its value; what is the loss when an artifact is removed from its archaeological context; whether anything is gained when it is displayed in another museum; what value it adds to a new collection; and whether its incorporation into a different collection affects its meaning.



Within this framework, we will examine the case of the reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures, which has become an international reference point in the debate surrounding the repatriation of cultural heritage. The case brings together a range of complex issues, including the legality of their acquisition, the ethical dimensions of their possession, the role of museums, the protection of world cultural heritage, and the importance of preserving the integrity and unity of a monument, among others.

In the Greek context, the removal and dispersal of the Parthenon Sculptures is by no means the only example of this phenomenon. Tracing the origins of such practices takes us back at least to the Roman period, when the fascination with Greek art frequently resulted not only in the copying of renowned sculptures but also in their appropriation and removal.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, however, as interest in ancient Greek art intensified and major European museums were established, the phenomenon became particularly widespread. The acquisition

of antiquities came to represent a symbol of prestige for aristocrats and of national standing for the governments of the major European powers. It was also closely associated with the philosophical, educational and political ideals of Humanism.

The collecting of antiquities became fashionable.

The period from the late 17th to at least the early 19th century also witnessed the journeys and dispersal of numerous Parthenon sculptures, which ended up either in private collections or, predominantly, in museums abroad, in Paris, Copenhagen, Würzburg, Munich, Vienna and elsewhere. Aristocrats, artists, architects, antiquarians and travelers of various kinds who visited the Acropolis during

this period removed objects from the monuments of the Sacred Rock, which had already suffered from both natural deterioration and human intervention.

The adventures of the Parthenon

- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/node/25141>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/p/parthenon-south-metope-12-0>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/p/parthenon-west-pediment-kekrops-and-pandrosos-0>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/p/parthenon-south-metope-4-0>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/p/parthenon-east-frieze-block-v>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/p/parthenon-north-frieze-block-xxvii>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/multimedia/detachment-figures-block-iii-south-parthenon-frieze>
- <https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/multimedia/east-parthenon-frieze-block-vi>



In some cases, sections of the sculptural decoration and architectural elements of the Acropolis monuments, both large and small, were forcibly removed. In other instances, interventions were made to the sculptures or architectural members in order to modify them in ways that would facilitate their removal and transportation.

The extensive destruction suffered by the Parthenon as a result of its conversion, at different points in its history, into a place of worship for different religious traditions—and particularly the explosion caused by the Venetian forces under Francesco Morosini in 1687—contributed significantly to the subsequent looting and pillaging of the monument.

A particularly prominent, and controversial, role in this history was played by the seventh Earl of Elgin, Thomas Bruce. Taking advantage of his position as British Ambassador to Constantinople, he removed a large number of sculptures from the Parthenon, as well as from other monuments on the Acropolis, and transported them, together with numerous other antiquities, to London in the early 19th century. As part of this undertaking, he did not hesitate to cause irreparable damage to the architectural structure of the temple. Many objects from this collection were sold by him in 1816 to the British state, which in turn donated them to the British Museum. Today, at the Acropolis Museum, white replicas temporarily fill the gaps left by the sculptures that are housed in other museums, while at the same time highlighting the mutilation of the monument. Many of these replicas are Britain's response to the requests made by the Greek Archaeological Society in 1844–1845 for casts of the sculptures to be sent to Greece.

Why are the Parthenon Sculptures at the center of global attention? These sculptures, which have been involuntarily displaced from their original context, possess not only exceptional artistic value but also play a fundamental role in the architectural and structural composition of the monument. They are not isolated, self-contained works of art that merely depict historical or mythological aspects of religious life and ancestral continuity. Rather, they are constituent parts of an originally indivisible whole, embodying the identity, development and aspirations of 5th-century BCE Athens and its society. Like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, they contribute to the complete picture of the city's greatness, as expressed by those who lived in it, loved it and contributed to its splendor. Can a jigsaw puzzle ever be completed when many of its pieces are missing? Can the full conceptual significance of the sculptures be understood when they are separated



from the monument which, as a whole, has come to symbolize democracy, proportion, freedom of thought, harmony, philosophy, and so many other values and ideas that characterized Athenian society in the mid-5th century BCE? Is it appropriate for these masterpieces to remain in collections around the world simply so that they can be viewed by a large number of visitors? Do they add value to the collections in which they have been incorporated? These are some of the questions that the program seeks to explore and that students are invited to discuss in the classroom, either before or after their visit to the Acropolis Museum.

For several decades, an intense international dialogue has developed around the return of cultural heritage to its countries of origin, with particular emphasis on the Parthenon Sculptures. Greece, together with National Committees in at least 25 countries, including the United Kingdom, as well as the UNESCO Intergovernmental Committee, has advocated for the return of the sculptures to Greece with the aim of restoring justice.

From the establishment of the modern Greek state following Greece's independence in the first half of the 19th century, initial measures were taken to protect the country's antiquities. These included the establishment of the first archaeological museum in Aegina, known as the National Museum, the foundation of the Archaeological Society, and the introduction of constitutional protection for antiquities through legislation enacted under Ioannis Kapodistrias. A series of subsequent legislative measures sought to restrict the export of antiquities and combat their illicit trafficking. In 1842, Alexandros Rangavis submitted the first request for the return of the Parthenon Sculptures. Further efforts followed over the ensuing decades, but the campaign acquired a more formal and international character in 1982, when the then Minister of Culture, Melina Mercouri, officially raised the issue of their return at the UNESCO General Conference in Mexico. In 1984, the International Association for the Reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures was established on her initiative. The campaign for the reunification of the sculptures continues to this day with great determination.

Arguments for Repatriation or for Retention at the British Museum



The arguments in favor of retaining the Parthenon Sculptures at the British Museum or returning them to Greece can be summarized as follows:

- Arguments in favor of retaining the sculptures at the British Museum
 - The sculptures were legally acquired by the British Museum in accordance with the circumstances and legal framework of the time.
 - Their display in a major international museum with high visitor numbers contributes to their preservation, scholarly study and global visibility, making them accessible to a large and diverse audience from around the world. In this way, a significant part of the public has the opportunity to explore the richness, diversity and complexity of human history and our shared humanity through the cultures of the world and the ways in which they have been interconnected—through trade, migration, conquest, conflict, peaceful exchange and cultural interaction.
 - By being removed from the Acropolis, the sculptures were protected from further destruction and have continued to be preserved and displayed in a secure environment.
 - Their transfer to Britain contributed to the development and promotion of the arts, as many artists had the opportunity to study and appreciate what is regarded as one of the greatest achievements of ancient sculpture.
 - The question of ownership should not be considered in isolation from the universal character of art, which may be regarded as part of the shared heritage of humanity.
- Arguments in favor of returning the sculptures to Greece:
 - The Parthenon Sculptures are not independent objects belonging to different collections but integral components of a unified architectural ensemble and of a single monument that has been fragmented.
 - They were removed from the Acropolis under Ottoman rule, in circumstances of unequal political power, when Greece did not exist as an independent state and therefore had no sovereign authority to determine the fate of its cultural heritage.



- The call for their return has acquired a universal dimension and has received support from a broad international movement concerned with the protection and reunification of cultural heritage.
- Antiquities form an integral part of the history and collective identity of their places of origin. As part of our inheritance, they provide a foundation for the intellectual and cultural heritage of future generations.
- Antiquities constitute sources of scientific knowledge precisely within the contexts in which they were created and used. When an ancient object is separated from its original context, it loses much of its evidentiary value as an archaeological record and is increasingly assessed primarily in terms of its aesthetic and, potentially, commercial value.
- The right of a people to the material remains of their ancestors may be regarded as a fundamental principle underlying claims for the protection and preservation of cultural heritage.
- The case for the repatriation of such antiquities is supported by fundamental principles embodied in international conventions, customary norms, and principles of law and ethics that inform the field of cultural heritage protection, irrespective of historical periods or temporal limitations.

Examples of Repatriation

Considering the request for the reunification of the Parthenon Sculptures to be both just and ethically compelling, a number of institutions have returned fragments of the Parthenon to Greece:

- In 2006, the Archaeological Institute of the University of Heidelberg returned a fragment from Block 8 of the north side of the Parthenon frieze.
- In 2022, the Antonino Salinas Regional Archaeological Museum in Palermo returned a fragment from Block 6 of the eastern side of the Parthenon frieze.
- In 2023, the Vatican Museums returned three fragments belonging to the metopes, frieze and pediments of the Parthenon.

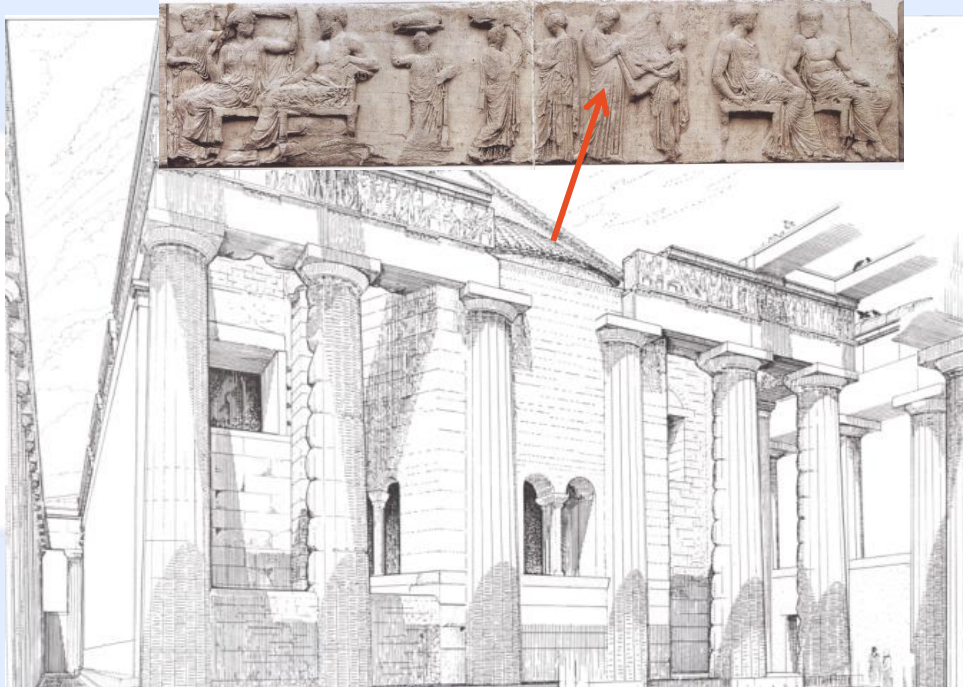


The return of the Parthenon Sculptures, and more broadly the repatriation of cultural heritage to countries of origin, continues to be the subject of international dialogue, debate and, to some extent, cooperation. International organizations such as UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization), ICOM (International Council of Museums), ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites), ICCROM (International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property) and INTERPOL (International Criminal Police Organization) are actively engaged in protecting cultural heritage and combating the illicit trafficking of antiquities. Their work highlights the importance of international cooperation and public dialogue in addressing the complex challenges surrounding the protection and preservation of cultural heritage.



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

Visual Means



Extension of the church apse into the interior of the Parthenon (drawing by M. Korres). As part of this work, block 5 of the eastern side of the frieze was removed from its original position.



Drawing representation of the Parthenon's explosion in 1687 (A. Nikas)



The northwestern side of the Acropolis from the Propylaea.
(Edward Dodwell: Views in Greece, London 1821, p. 35)



Removal of a southern metope from the Parthenon by agents of Lord Elgin.
Drawing by the Irish painter, traveller, and writer Edward Dodwell (1767–1832).



The Elgin Room in 1819, oil painting, London, British Museum.



The Duveen Gallery with sculptures of the Parthenon in the British Museum
(<http://gl.ict.usc.edu/Films/Parthenon/ShotByShot/sequence03/>)



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

AFTER THE PROGRAM



Suggested Activities

The school group's involvement in the museum's educational activity after the end of the program helps to transform learning from a mental process into a living experience. At the same time, it offers a break from formal education, raising the interest of children and opening up new horizons. Thus, the museum experience and participation in each educational program are completed more substantially. After the educational program, you can choose to implement in the classroom some of the following activities or anything else you think would suit your group of students:

1. Encourage your class to research the issue of the restitution of the Parthenon Sculptures, as well as the wider phenomenon of the global dispersal of antiquities. Organize a photographic exhibition focusing on the dispersal of cultural heritage, selecting specific countries that have been affected by this phenomenon. Divide the students into groups and assign each group a particular case study. Their task will be to investigate the dispersal of antiquities in the country concerned and collect visual and documentary material—such as photographs, newspaper clippings, official documents and other relevant sources—that will help to “tell the story” of the case.
2. You could invite other students from the school to visit the exhibition or, indeed, open it to the wider public.
3. Organize a mock UNESCO meeting and assign different roles to the students, such as representatives of a museum in the country affected by the dispersal, archaeologists, government representatives from both the country of origin and the country currently holding the antiquities, members of the public, and others. Facilitate a structured discussion in which students present arguments in favor of returning the antiquities or retaining them in the country to which they were transferred.
4. Allow students sufficient time to research and prepare for the activity, and provide them with a set of guiding questions to help structure their arguments, such as:
 - Are all objects subject to the same considerations?
 - Is legality alone sufficient for us to consider an acquisition fair?
 - Can a museum tell the history of an object even when that history includes its violent removal?



- What is the responsibility of museums today?
- What significance does the part have for the whole?
- What is the responsibility of the international community when it comes to the looting, illicit trafficking, dispersal, and destruction of antiquities and monuments?
- What role can international cooperation play in addressing the issue of dispersal?
- What criteria should be established when deciding the fate of antiquities that have been involuntarily displaced? These might include the circumstances of acquisition, the legality of ownership, the object's multilayered value and significance, and public access.

Ask them to propose solutions that would do justice to both sides, with the protection and respect of each people's cultural heritage as the primary consideration. You may record or videotape the discussion.

5. Encourage students to create a map showing the dispersal of antiquities, either focusing on Greek antiquities or taking a global perspective. Following relevant research, they could mark on a map where the antiquities are currently located and tell the story of how they came to be there.
6. Ask students to bring to class an object that they consider very important to their family's history. Discuss why they consider it valuable and how they would feel if the object were destroyed or, without their consent, ended up in an exhibition abroad. What would they do to protect it or preserve it intact?
7. Ask students, individually or in groups, to present a literary work (poem, novel, etc.) that relates to, highlights, or symbolizes the dispersal of people or objects, separation from one's homeland, and the consequences of such displacement.

Note: We hope that the museum experience of school groups, as well as the communication between the Museum and the School, will extend beyond the individual visit. We would therefore be delighted if you could share with us any activities you carried out in connection with the program and in the period following your visit, as well as any thoughts, questions or concerns you may have regarding this educational resource. You can contact the Department of Educational Programs at the following email address: learning@theacropolismuseum.gr



Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

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Acropolis Museum
Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

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Useful links

<https://www.culture.gov.gr/en/parthenonas/SitePages/Home.aspx>

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/blog/introduction-parthenon-and-its-sculptures>

<https://www.britishmuseum.org/about-us/british-museum-story/contested-objects-collection/parthenon-sculptures/parthenon>

<https://www.dailymotion.com/video/xoswat>

<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/multimedia/melinas-campaign-return-parthenon-sculptures>



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Directorate of Collections and Exhibitions
Department of Educational Programs

<https://www.unesco.org/en>

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<https://www.theacropolismuseum.gr/en/karyatids-erechtheion>

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