

NEWS BREAK

Article: **Vatican pledges to return Indigenous cultural items to Canada**

Section: **MAIN, A14**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, November 16, 2025**, of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

****Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.****

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning Objectives:

The main learning objective is to inform the reader about the Vatican's decision to return 62 Indigenous cultural items to Canada and the complexities surrounding this repatriation process, which is part of an ongoing effort to reconcile with Canada's Indigenous peoples following the Church's role in the residential school system.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A **context clue** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

“His Holiness Pope Leo XIV desires that this gift represent a concrete sign of dialogue, respect and **fraternity**,” the Vatican said in statement, referring to the current pope.

Fraternity Guess:

Fraternity Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. The Vatican said Saturday it will return dozens of cultural items in its museums that were taken from Indigenous communities in Canada more than a century ago, including an _____ once used for whale hunting.
2. The announcement followed a yearslong campaign by several Indigenous groups — which was supported by the Canadian government — for the repatriation of the _____ items originally sent to Rome for a 1925 exhibition sponsored by Pope Pius XI.

3. The call for the items' return was part of a process in which Pope Francis apologized to Indigenous people in 2022 for the church's role in operating residential schools that a national truth and reconciliation commission in Canada characterized as a form of "_____."
4. Thousands of children died at the schools from what?
5. Cody Groat, a Kanyen'kehaka member of the Six Nations of the Grand River and an assistant professor of history and Indigenous studies at Western University in London, Ontario, said he was dismayed. Why?
6. We've seen a lot of First Nations articulating that the church wants to maintain _____ in this relationship."
7. A "100% _____ - _____ process" will determine the origin of the artifacts and determine where they will ultimately be held and displayed, she said.
8. The items being returned are currently being held in an ethnological museum that holds about 80,000 relics from the 1925 "_____", including artifacts from Africa, the Americas, Asia and Oceania.
9. During a visit to the Vatican Museums in 2022, Indigenous representatives were shown the kayak and a variety of other items, including what artifacts?
10. The Vatican describes the items as gifts made to the papacy a century ago. Groat said that while some of the items were freely given to the Vatican, "that's obviously the _____ situation for a lot of these items."

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

Historical Context: The items were sent for a 1925 exhibition, and the Vatican describes them as "gifts." How does this historical context conflict with or align with modern interpretations of how such items were acquired from colonized peoples?

Repatriation as Dialogue: The Vatican calls the return a "concrete sign of dialogue, respect and fraternity." What evidence in the article suggests that the dialogue and fraternity are still incomplete or contested?

The Role of the Church: The article explicitly links the repatriation to the Church's apology for the residential schools and "cultural genocide." How does

the Church's historic role in Canada make the return of these cultural artifacts a necessary, rather than just a symbolic, step?

Defining "Cultural Genocide": Based on the context of the residential schools (death from neglect, disease, abuse), why did the truth and reconciliation commission characterize the system as a form of "cultural genocide"? How do cultural items fit into this concept?

Agency and Power: Why is the specific transfer method—from the Vatican to the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops rather than directly to Indigenous communities—so concerning to figures like Cody Groat? What does this suggest about the dynamic of power in the relationship?

The Role of Museums: The artifacts were part of a Vatican ethnological museum holding 80,000 relics. Discuss the ethical responsibilities of major global museums (like the Vatican's) regarding items acquired during colonial periods, especially when the originating communities call for their return.

Defining Cultural Item Value: How does the value of these 62 items change—from being a historical exhibit in a Vatican museum to being restored to the communities from which they were taken? Consider the difference between monetary/historical value and cultural/spiritual value.

Global Precedent: Do you believe this repatriation sets a precedent for other countries or museums holding cultural items from colonized nations (ex: artifacts from Africa, Asia, and Oceania, which were also part of the 1925 exhibition)? Explain why or why not.

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