

NEWS BREAK

Article: **British museum to repatriate colonial-era human**

Section: **MAIN, A4**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, September 6, 2026**, 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:

After reading the article, students will analyze how the repatriation of colonial-era human remains from the Pitt Rivers Museum reflects the lasting impacts of colonialism on Indigenous communities and their cultural traditions. Students will be able to explain why the return of ancestral remains is significant to the Naga people and how repatriation can serve as a process of healing, reconciliation, and cultural restoration. Students will evaluate the ethical responsibilities of museums, universities, governments, and collectors in addressing the removal, display, ownership, and return of Indigenous human remains and cultural belongings.

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.

“The nonprofit forum worked with the museum, which has the world’s largest collection of Naga cultural objects, and Naga tribal groups on the **repatriation** effort.”

Repatriation Guess:

Repatriation Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. After years of negotiations, a British museum has agreed to return a colonial-era collection of human remains to the Indigenous Naga people of the Indian subcontinent, Naga representatives said Saturday. The partial remains — a warrior’s cranium, a woman’s skull, a young person’s jaw and many others — have been far from home in the Pitt Rivers Museum at the _____ for more than _____ years.
2. They were included in an exhibit called “Treatment of Dead Enemies,” under the label “_____,” displayed alongside remains from other Indigenous groups including the shrunken heads of the Shuar people of South America.
3. That changed in 2020, when the museum took down _____ human remains, including those of the Naga, and put them in storage.

4. On Saturday, a Naga delegation announced that the 39 pieces of Naga remains would return to _____, a small northeastern state in India, by the end of the year.
5. Most of the Naga remains in the Pitt Rivers Museum were donated by J.P. Mills and J.H. Hutton, British officers who were posted in the Naga regions of British India during the early 1900s. While some of these were given by Naga as gifts, most were collected under _____ and often against the wishes of the Naga people, anthropologists said.
6. “Every Naga is talking about the human remains,” said Longyang Chang, 28, an artist based in Kohima, the capital of Nagaland, whose work recently featured in an exhibition that explored how Naga cultural objects had been used as “_____.”
7. The exhibition grew out of conversations around the repatriations, said one of its curators, Throngkiuba Yimchungru. In talking about who these people were and why their remains were taken away and put on _____, “the Nagas were revisiting their traumatic past and reconciling with it,” Chang said.
8. Large collections of Naga ancestral remains are still held by other universities and museums across Europe and the United States and by private collectors. In October 2024, a Naga skull was offered at auction for a starting price of 3,500 British pounds (about \$_____) at an event titled “The Curious Collector Sale.” The sale was halted after an outcry from Naga community members. “It is my desire to see such trade being deemed illegal in the U.K.,” Kikon said.

Class Discussion Questions:

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

When you read the quotes below, how does it make you feel?

-“It is the homecoming of our loved ones. A group of our elders are returning.”

-“We bring back the light of our ancestors that was dimmed but never extinguished.”

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

- The article describes how Naga ancestral remains were taken during the colonial era, sometimes under duress. What responsibilities do museums and universities have when objects or human remains were obtained without the consent of the people they came from?

- The Pitt Rivers Museum displayed Naga remains in an exhibit called “Treatment of Dead Enemies” and labeled them as “headhunting trophies.” How might this type of display affect the way people understand or view an Indigenous community? Why might the Naga people consider the exhibit harmful or disrespectful?
- Naga representatives described the return of the remains as the “homecoming” of their ancestors. Why do you think returning human remains can have a different meaning from returning an ordinary historical artifact?
- The article describes repatriation as part of a larger process of “healing and unification.” How can the return of ancestors help an Indigenous community reconnect with its history, culture, identity, and traditions?
- Many of the Naga remains were collected by British officers during the colonial period. How did colonialism influence who had the power to decide what happened to Indigenous people, their ancestors, and their cultural belongings?
- The Naga delegation included community leaders, scholars, artists, and religious leaders. Why might it be important for many different members of an Indigenous community to participate in decisions about the return and burial of their ancestors?
- The article mentions that Naga ancestral remains are still held by museums, universities, and private collectors in Europe and the United States. Should institutions and private collectors be required to return Indigenous human remains to their communities of origin? Why or why not?
- A Naga skull was offered for sale at an auction in 2024 before the sale was stopped after community members protested. What ethical questions are raised when human remains are treated as items that can be bought and sold?
- Dolly Kikon said, “It is a celebration” when discussing the return of the remains. Why might an event connected to such a painful history also be a moment of celebration?
- The article connects the history of the Naga people to colonialism, missionary activity, and conflict with the Indian state. How can learning about the history behind an Indigenous community's struggle help us better understand why repatriation matters today?

- The article focuses on the Naga people, but Indigenous communities around the world have also sought the return of ancestors and cultural belongings. What similarities might exist between the Naga experience and repatriation efforts by Indigenous peoples in other countries?
- Who should have the final authority to decide what happens to Indigenous ancestral remains: museums, governments, scientists, or the Indigenous communities themselves? Explain your reasoning.

Extended Essay Prompts

Examine why the repatriation of Naga ancestral remains is about more than simply returning objects from a museum. Discuss how colonialism, cultural identity, Indigenous sovereignty, and historical trauma are connected to the repatriation process. In your essay, explain why the Naga people view the return of their ancestors as an act of healing and reconciliation and evaluate the responsibilities of museums and other institutions that hold Indigenous human remains.

The article raises questions about who has the right to possess, study, display, or sell Indigenous human remains and cultural belongings. Who should control the history and ancestors of an Indigenous community? Use evidence from the article to examine the responsibilities of museums, universities, governments, private collectors, and Indigenous communities.

Museums have historically collected and displayed Indigenous human remains and cultural belongings, sometimes without the consent of the communities involved. Examine whether museums should continue to hold these materials for education and research or whether they should return them to their communities of origin. Consider both the educational purpose of museums and the rights, beliefs, and wishes of Indigenous peoples.

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