



**RIVER VALLEY HIGH SCHOOL**

General Certificate of Education Advanced Level  
Higher 1

**JC2 Preliminary Examination**

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**GENERAL PAPER**

**8807/02**

Paper 2

**1 September 2021**

INSERT

**1 hour 30 minutes**

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**READ THESE INSTRUCTIONS FIRST**

This Insert contains the passage for Paper 2.

*Archie Viszt considers the value of museums.*

- 1 The report commissioned by French President Emmanuel Macron was frank: continuing to hold artefacts taken from Africa amounts to depriving their people of the “spiritual nourishment that is the foundation of their humanity”. This report concluded that French museums should return the thousands of artefacts taken during colonialism. It went on to argue that “Africans find themselves struggling to recover the thread of an interrupted memory”. Macron endorsed the report, and started to act by returning 26 artworks to the Kingdom of Benin, effective immediately. 5
- 2 The report added fuel to an ongoing debate about the housing of artefacts in museums miles away from their place of origin, often taken by colonial authorities or acquired through other unjust means. This was a conversation that the UN started in 2007 with Article 11 of its Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which urged countries to restore “cultural, intellectual, religious and spiritual property” taken from indigenous people without their “prior and informed consent or in violation of their laws, traditions and customs”. Indeed, all around the world, ex-colonialists continue to display their spoils of conquest in gleaming glass cabinets and resplendent pedestals. While some bask in the reverence of these artefacts, for others, they suffer the indignity of having to knock on the doors of thieves to catch only a glimpse of what had been stolen from them. For those with the resolve to build themselves up, museums continue to harbour the spectacle of their past humiliations, reminding them of their place in the world. The multitudinous plundered relics of China’s Old Summer Palace continue to sit (mockingly) in the halls of the British Museum, as protests from an ascending China continue to fall on deaf ears. 10 15 20
- 3 Some may argue that the importance of withholding and preserving the world’s cultural artefacts remains a sensitive issue. This comes after the destruction of the ancient Assyrian archaeological site of Nimrud in Iraq, and then of Palmyra in Syria by ISIS. Syrian archaeologists are currently experiencing uncertain conditions while struggling to restore the ruins at Palmyra, recently reclaimed by Syrian and Russian forces. Meanwhile, the Syrian government continues to face an uphill task to recover artefacts stolen and sold on the black market by ISIS. Such events, some argued at the time, should serve as a “wake-up call” to Western museums to be protective of their collections and unapologetic in disputes over contested remains. According to them, important antiquities should be treated as the common property of mankind. In fact, there is a strong case to be made where artefacts are better off cradled in the loving arms of museums. 25 30
- 4 Through decades of consolidation, valuable artefacts can be better protected from potential harm and neglect in museums with the necessary infrastructure and support. For example, fragile papyrus documenting ancient Egyptian writings has to be stored within a climate-controlled room in which the temperature and humidity are maintained at a constant level, and with UV light protection, lest its ink fades away into oblivion. Faithful patronage from wealthy benefactors also allowed some museums to assemble a team of world-renowned paleontologists to study and preserve the fragile remains of fantastic beasts from millions of years ago. Museums also have access to experts who are more than capable of carrying out restoration works, particularly on delicate works of art. One need only look at how an ill-advised private art collector in Valencia hired a furniture restorer to have the picture of the Immaculate Conception cleaned. The job did not go as planned, of course, and the face of the Virgin Mary was left unrecognisable despite two separate attempts to restore it to its original state. Simply 35 40 45

put, some countries just do not have the resource nor infrastructure to care for these artefacts.

- 5 Beyond safekeeping and restorative works, museums also allow us to safely ponder 50  
upon the artefacts of long-forgotten civilisations that transcend the jurisdiction of  
today's countries. Looking at relics from the vast Mongolian Empire, which once  
stretched from the Volga River in Russia to the Yangtze River in China, who can truly  
lay claim to these artefacts? Why not let a museum be the steward for these artefacts,  
instead of offering them to a single country and inadvertently opening a geo-political 55  
can of worms? In fact, let the museums take a closer look! After all, technological  
advancements have also allowed us to glean further back into history and catch that  
which our eyes cannot see.
  
- 6 From addressing key social issues to transforming how we see the future, museums 60  
have the power to shape our society. While no museum can claim to provide a  
complete picture, the lessons we can learn from the past, both its wonders and  
tragedies, are priceless. This is especially true in these tumultuous times, when it is  
impossible to ignore the escalating tensions between nations and even communities.  
Museums help people establish a common ground and to see that we are not too 65  
different from one another. The modern study of history has also made us more aware  
of how narratives inform our realities, and as such, museums tend to be more mindful  
of portraying history in as objective a manner as possible. While state-sponsored  
museums may get in the way, more often than not, we see museums build bridges  
rather than allow chasms to widen. Through intellectual discourse, we learn how to 70  
bring humanity forward.
  
- 7 Museums are also an oasis from the blaring metropolis that overwhelms us. The  
stillness of the air in a place where time has stood still allows people to collect their  
thoughts unhurriedly. It is amidst these wondrous and profound artefacts that a weary  
soul can derive some inspiration and motivation before returning to the suffocating 75  
world outside. Beyond seeking reprieve, museums can also be a space where we can  
meet like-minded people and build new acquaintances. With talking points found at  
every turn, a day with a friend at the museum can fly by without us noticing. Special  
exhibitions with high-tech bells and whistles can also help sustain regular footfall and  
introduce different demographics to the museum. With activities keeping it busy all year 80  
round, from the curator to the part-time gift shop assistant, to the baristas at the  
adjacent cafes, museums also contribute significantly to local employment.
  
- 8 Indeed, museums are a nexus for reflection and change. However, we cannot forget  
that what gives museums their soul are these artefacts. As we nourish our minds with  
their reverence, we need to remember that somewhere else, halls would continue to 85  
ring hollow in their absence. This means that we should work to cultivate an  
environment that is safe for the repatriation of these artefacts as long as these artefacts  
have a safe place to go. By working closely with governments and institutions in the  
home countries of these artefacts, museums can share their expertise, and in doing  
so, foster good will, while leaving room for greater collaborations in the future.
  
- 9 Even when museums give back what they have taken, they would not lose too much. 90  
After all, while their exhibition halls are rich with relics put up for display, a richer trove  
lies hidden away in storage rooms, never to see the light of day. Perhaps the best way  
for us to treat artefacts as "the common property of mankind" is to truly flourish as the  
stewards that we were meant to be.

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