

REPATRIATION

Purpose

Reflecting on the importance of cultural heritage in a globalized world will help you better understand the challenges some communities face today.

Process

1. Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow:

In 1770, the British explorer James Cook landed at Botany Bay, Australia. Cook and his crew were met with resistance by two Aboriginal warriors. When Cook fired his musket, the warriors fled, leaving behind their spears and a shield. The spears and the shield, known to some as the Gweagal Shield, were collected by someone in Cook's crew and transported to England, where they are currently on display at the British Museum.

Rodney Kelly, a descendant of one of the Aboriginal warriors, has been trying for years to get the museum to return the shield to Australia. "Not for himself, but so it can sit in an Australian museum. A symbol of that first contact, of resistance, of dispossession, of colonialism. A symbol of survival."¹

There are questions about whether the Gweagal Shield is actually from this first encounter between Cook and the Aboriginal warriors at Botany Bay. Studies have shown that it could be a shield from northern Australia. But regardless of whether it's from Botany Bay or from farther north, the shield is most certainly from one of the earliest meetings of Europeans and Aboriginal peoples, and it is definitely an Aboriginal artifact.

2. Do you think museums should be required to return artifacts to the communities they came from? Why or why not?

3. Why do you think Indigenous communities want cultural artifacts returned?

¹ Quote from Marc Fennell and Nick Wiggins, "A Shield, Some Spears, and the Symbolism People Find in the Stuff the British Stole," [Australian Broadcasting Corporation](#), 24 January 2021.