

Japanese Tourists at the Museum
By Lauren Yee

Wright Now Play Later: January

Prompts: Deanie Vallone, “Our ancestors arrive to hold an intervention for us;” and Steven Frymark, “Renovating human roles that were set in place decades or centuries ago to more align with contemporary society.”

Scene

The museum

(OUR GUIDE walks through the museum. One week earlier. She speaks to an unseen tourist)

OUR GUIDE

Ohp! Sorry, crowded!

I love museums!

I love them!

And the funny thing is, I’ve lived here for so long and I’ve never been here, isn’t that weird?

(A Japanese tour group enters, led by a Japanese tour guide. the tour guide speaks to the group)

OUR GUIDE

Ooh, I wonder what they’re saying.

Hold on.

Oh! They’re from Japan. Oh, I love Japanese people! I studied Japanese, you know, when I was—

Oh, I wonder

What is he saying?

He’s saying, uh—

(She translates the Japanese tour guide’s words into the following...)

OUR GUIDE

“This is a museum.

Americans built it.

You can tell because of the way the building is large, how the walls are high, and the ceiling is—something.

America has many museums.

This is one of them.

People who visit this town come to the museum so they can see what life was like in other parts of the world.

This is a part of the museum, you can tell because it has many things in it.

Some of the things are ours,

Some of these things are from other countries.

The Americans have the largest museums in the world because they have the most things.

This is a very good museum because it has a very large number of things in it. And the things in this museum are high quality and very old.

Japanese people live to be very old.

So maybe when you are old, perhaps you will be in a museum, too.

Wouldn't that be exciting!"

(Breaks from translation)

OUR GUIDE

—And now they're all crowding around something, they're all taking pictures of a... huh, what is that? Oh! That's a—

(Translates again)

OUR GUIDE

"This is a traditional artifact from a country far away from ours.
You may have heard about it in the news.
You may have heard and forgot about it."
—Oh, I think it's from my country—

(She cranes her necks to see the item around the Japanese tourists)

OUR GUIDE

They're saying, uh—
"It's a traditional urn from that country"
—that's my country, that's what they call it—
"It was customary in the era for wealthy individuals to have many of these made before death.
The heavier the urn, the wealthier and more status-like the person was."
My mother had one of those!
Only hers was—
Well, hers was pretty similar, actually.
When she was cremated, we put her in there and then we buried it in the ground.
Only hers was missing three stones on the bottom part...
Just like this one.

(She stares at the urn)

OUR GUIDE

They're saying, uh...
"You'll notice that this urn—
Archaeologists estimate this woman was a wealthy woman, privileged, who lived off the suffering of others, who did not work a day in her life, who got what was coming to her—"

(As he speaks, she gets closer to the urn. A guard intercepts her. In her language...)

OUR GUIDE

That.
That's my mother's.
How did you get this?
Where did you get it?
Who said you could take it?
Give me back her urn.
Give me back her body.
They are not for sale.

*You cannot have them.
They do not belong to you,
What is wrong with you?
Mother! Mother!*