Read the passage. Then answer the questions that follow.

**The Mystery of the Missing *Mona Lisa***

*by John Martinsson*

1 The *Mona Lisa* may be the most famous picture ever painted, an image known to people throughout the world. But that was not always so. The painting had been recognized as a valuable work of art since the early 1500s, when it was created by the great Renaissance genius Leonardo da Vinci. However, it wasn’t until just over 100 years ago—1911, to be exact—that the painting became the cultural icon it is today. What did it take to launch the *Mona Lisa* into everlasting, worldwide fame? It had to be stolen, right off the wall, from the world’s most famous museum, the Louvre in Paris. Then it had to disappear without a trace, for years, in what was considered to be the greatest art theft in history.

2 The actual theft likely took place in the early morning hours of Monday, August 21, 1911. But in a strange turn of events, the painting was gone for an entire day before anyone realized it had been stolen. When the museum opened that Monday, and the wall where da Vinci’s masterpiece had hung was bare, no one thought anything of it at first. The museum had been photographing many of the works in its massive collection. So for some time, important paintings had been routinely disappearing from their usual places and taken to the roof, where they could be photographed in bright sunlight.

3 It wasn’t until the next day that the theft was discovered, somewhat by accident. An art student had planned to paint in the gallery that day, using the *Mona Lisa* as an element in his picture. He asked the guards when it would be returned, so they went to check with the photography staff. Imagine the shock of all involved when they discovered that the painting was nowhere to be found!

4 The museum immediately locked its doors—with visitors inside, at first—and the search began. In those days, the Louvre was the largest building in the world, with more than 1,000 rooms. For nine days, the French police swarmed the place, interrogated staff, and searched for clues. At one point, as many as 60 detectives worked the case. Though no one could piece together what had happened, everyone seemed sure of one thing: the theft could only be the work of a criminal mastermind. One of the suspects questioned was a 29-year-old Spanish artist who had been implicated in another art heist. The young artist was certainly a genius, but not at crime. His name was Pablo Picasso.

5 When the museum announced the theft, it was an international media sensation. Newspapers around the world ran headlines about the missing *Mona Lisa*. When the museum reopened, thousands of people poured into the gallery—to see the empty wall! In the end, all the investigations, theories, and public furor led nowhere. It appeared that the *Mona Lisa* had disappeared forever.

**Go On**
That all changed two years later, in December of 1913, when a man contacted an art dealer named Alfredo Geri in Florence, Italy. The man told Geri he was in possession of the *Mona Lisa* and that he wanted to sell it. Geri was skeptical, but he arranged a meeting and brought along the director of the famous Uffizi Gallery to determine if the painting was real. But Geri himself was no criminal. He also contacted the police, who promptly arrested the man.

His name was Vincenzo Peruggia, an Italian who had worked as a housepainter and carpenter in France for many years. Among his many jobs had been one installing glass cases in the Louvre. Peruggia claimed that he had stolen the painting only to return it to its rightful home, Italy. He argued that the *Mona Lisa* had been wrongly taken from his homeland by the famous French general Napoleon. This strategy made him a folk hero in Italy even though his story just wasn’t true. Da Vinci himself had brought the painting to France, where it was purchased after his death by King François I. Peruggia was convicted of the theft, but his popularity may have helped him get off with just a few months in prison.

How had Peruggia pulled off “the greatest art theft in history”? Accounts vary, but whatever actually happened was probably fairly simple. In one version, Peruggia simply walked into the Louvre, where he was still known by many of the guards. When the gallery was empty, he lifted the *Mona Lisa* from the wall, hid in a nearby staircase, took the painting from the frame, and then walked out with it rolled up under his workman’s smock. In another version, he had accomplices who helped him, two Italian brothers named Vincenzo and Michele Lancelotti. The three hid out in a small storeroom in the Louvre that Sunday night. When the museum closed, they dismantled the case, removed the painting, and left when the museum reopened. Whatever happened, the one thing Peruggia hadn’t anticipated was that his theft would make the *Mona Lisa* the hottest property in the world—too hot to sell. So for two years, Peruggia had hid it in a trunk with a false bottom, which is where it reportedly was when he revealed it to Geri in Florence.

The French government was delighted to get its painting back. As a goodwill gesture, it let the *Mona Lisa* tour Italy before it returned to its permanent home at the Louvre. An estimated 100,000 people went to see it in its first two days back. A century later, people are still lining up—as many as 8 million a year!—to see the masterfully painted woman with the mysterious slight smile.

Which sentence from the text best explains why more than 24 hours passed before anyone at the Louvre realized the *Mona Lisa* had been stolen?

A  “The actual theft likely took place in the early morning hours of Monday, August 21, 1911.”

B  “When the museum opened that Monday, and the wall where da Vinci’s masterpiece had hung was bare, no one thought anything of it at first.”

C  “So for some time, important paintings had been routinely disappearing from their usual places and taken to the roof, where they could be photographed in bright sunlight.”

D  “It wasn’t until the next day that the theft was discovered, somewhat by accident.”
Which of the following best describes a distinction the author makes between Peruggia and Geri when he describes their meeting in Florence?

A. He suggests that Peruggia tended to be more trusting of other people than the suspicious Geri.

B. He demonstrates that Peruggia was more of a patriot than Geri because Peruggia wanted to return the painting to Italy.

C. He emphasizes that Geri never had any intention of participating in selling the stolen work as Peruggia had hoped to do.

D. He shows that Geri was far less confident than Peruggia in judging whether an old painting was authentic or just a skillful forgery.

42

Closely reread the following paragraph from the text.

When the museum announced the theft, it was an international media sensation. Newspapers around the world ran headlines about the missing Mona Lisa. When the museum reopened, thousands of people poured into the gallery—to see the empty wall! In the end, all the investigations, theories, and public furor led nowhere. It appeared that the Mona Lisa had disappeared, forever.

Why does the author write that thousands of people went to the Louvre “to see the empty wall”?

A. to illustrate that the general public was far more interested in the crime that had taken place than in the actual painting

B. to suggest that most people did not trust newspapers at that time and had to see for themselves if the reports were true

C. to convince the reader that the people of Paris had treasured da Vinci’s painting and wanted to express their grief at its loss

D. to demonstrate that despite all the stories in the newspapers most museumgoers did not even realize that the painting had been stolen
How does the author acknowledge that he is not sure exactly how the *Mona Lisa* was stolen?

A He suggests that it would have been nearly impossible for Peruggia to have managed the theft alone.

B He offers two different versions of the theft that contain some conflicting details about what happened.

C He stresses that no one knew what actually happened because a whole day went by before the theft was discovered.

D He expresses some uncertainty about whether Peruggia was actually smart enough to have committed the theft.

Which statement best summarizes the central idea of the passage?

A The *Mona Lisa* is a painting beloved by people around the world for its great beauty.

B The *Mona Lisa* was easy to steal in 1911 because few people knew about it at the time.

C The *Mona Lisa* was recovered when Alfredo Geri reported its location to the police.

D The *Mona Lisa* was stolen by Vincenzo Peruggia and became a world-famous painting.

When the *Mona Lisa* was stolen, people generally thought the theft had been the work of a criminal mastermind. How did the actual theft compare with what people imagined had happened? Use two details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

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What is the meaning of the term “cultural icon” in the first paragraph of the passage? Use two details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.

In paragraph 1, the author states that the Mona Lisa theft became known as “the greatest art theft in history.” Does the author agree that the theft was the greatest in history? Use two details from the passage to support your answer.

Write your answer in complete sentences.
In the article, the author describes how the theft of the *Mona Lisa* radically changed people’s awareness of and views about the painting. Using specific details from the passage, explain why people took such an interest in the event and discuss whether their interest had more to do with the crime or with the work of art itself.

In your response, be sure to do the following:

- describe how the theft influenced people’s awareness of the *Mona Lisa*
- explain why people took such an interest in the event
- discuss the reasons for their interest
- explain whether their interest was mainly in the crime or the actual painting
- use details from the passage in your response

Write your answer in complete sentences.