

Success Pre-Intermediate
Speaking: Is Graffiti Art?

Is Graffiti Art?



FEATURES For, Against or On The Fence

A Sandra Jameson, art critic of The Times

The other day I saw some graffiti on an old factory wall. It was absolutely fantastic: imaginative and beautifully done. Much better, in fact, than a lot of art that you can see in art galleries and exhibitions. Unfortunately, not all graffiti is so beautiful. Although it is true that some talented artists started their careers by painting on walls, most graffiti has no artistic merit at all. It's just people shouting to the world, 'I exist!' I understand why they do it. Young people don't own any buildings, and spraying walls is a way of 'owning' a piece of where you live. But it's a pity it's often so ugly. I think we should tolerate graffiti on old abandoned buildings. After all, they can't look any worse than they do. But it's wrong to paint graffiti on the walls of buildings where people live or work.

B Teresa Powell, Member of Parliament for East Swindon

Everywhere you go, you see walls covered in stupid names and swear words. I don't know anyone who thinks it is attractive. More importantly, graffiti is a crime. Where do these so-called graffiti artists paint? On private property. And that means they're breaking the law. I'm sure they wouldn't like it if I spray painted 'Teresa is cool!' on their living room walls. So why do they think it's alright for them to paint anywhere they want to? Sociologists talk about the 'Broken Window Syndrome'. When a building is covered in ugly graffiti, it's an invitation for young people to vandalise it even more. So graffiti encourages more crime. And finally, it's dangerous – many artists climb high walls or buildings or vandalise trains at night. When they have an accident, we all have to pay their hospital costs. Graffiti is not acceptable and it should be stopped.

C Mike Lees, graffiti artist

A politician recently said that graffiti artists were vandals and that graffiti was a crime. I totally disagree. Graffiti is an art form. It's been with us for thousands of years. Graffiti has been discovered in the ruins of Pompeii, and it tells us more about ordinary life than statues and monuments do. And today graffiti gives colour to our grey city centres. It is true that some graffiti is limited – 'Terry loves June' is not exactly creative. But a lot of graffiti is brilliant and imaginative. It's radical, it's fun, it's beautiful ... and it's free. Many artists in history have been misunderstood. When Vincent Van Gogh was alive, nobody wanted to buy his paintings, and critics said he was a maniac. Today, his masterpieces are sold for millions. One day people will understand that some of the greatest art of our time isn't in galleries, but on factory walls and urban trains.

READING AND SPEAKING

1. In pairs, answers the questions.

Is graffiti common in your town or city? Where?
What do you think of it? Is it beautiful or ugly?

2. Read the texts A-C opposite. Then match the writers with points of view 1-3 below.

- A Sandra ____ 1 against graffiti
B Teresa ____ 2 for graffiti
C Mike ____ 3 on the fence (can see both sides of the argument)

3. Work in groups and follow the instructions.

Group A: Read text A, and circle the correct words in sentences 1–5.

Group B: Read text B, and circle the correct words in sentences 6–10.

Group C: Read text C, and circle the correct words in sentences 11–15.

Group A

- 1 The best graffiti is sometimes *better / worse* than 'official' art.
- 2 *Only a few / Many* graffiti artists produce beautiful works of art.
- 3 Most graffiti is *attractive / ugly*.
- 4 Graffiti allows young people to express *political opinions / their identity*.
- 5 Graffiti is alright in some places, but not on *buildings which are in use / old buildings*.

Group B

- 6 You can find graffiti *everywhere / in some places*.
- 7 Most people think graffiti is *beautiful / ugly*.
- 8 Graffiti is *important / illegal*.
- 9 People may commit other crimes because they *don't like / have seen* graffiti.
- 10 Some graffiti artists risk their *health / jobs* when they paint.

Group C

- 11 Graffiti is an art form which has existed for a *short / long* time.
- 12 Graffiti from the past can give us information about *ancient cultures / crime*.
- 13 Graffiti is *colourful and attractive / funny*.
- 14 Some graffiti is fantastic and you don't have to *go far / pay* to see it.
- 15 People will *never understand / understand one day* that graffiti is great art.

4. Form new groups with one student from each group in Exercise 3. Tell each other the text you read.

5. Read the article again and circle the best answers.

- 1 Sandra Jameson:
a was impressed by the graffiti she saw.
b saw the graffiti in an art gallery.
c thinks there should be an exhibition of graffiti.
- 2 Sandra thinks that it is alright to paint graffiti on buildings where:
a the graffiti artists live.
b nobody lives.
c people live.
- 3 Teresa Powell:
a doesn't think graffiti artists would like graffiti in their own homes.
b often paints 'Teresa is cool!' on walls.
c sometimes paints graffiti in her living room.
- 4 The 'Broken Window Syndrome' means:
a people only paint graffiti on buildings with broken windows.
b that one crime can lead to another.
c sociologists invite young people to commit crime.
- 5 Mike Lees thinks that graffiti such as 'Terry loves June' is:
a limited. b quite creative. c imaginative.
- 6 Mike thinks Van Gogh's paintings:
a are the work of a maniac.
b were only popular with critics.
c are more popular today than when he was alive.

6. Find words and phrases in the text for these definitions.

- 1 A building where people can see pieces of art. [text A]
- 2 An adjective to describe someone who is very good at something. [text A]
- 3 Impolite or offensive words. [text B]
- 4 To use an aerosol can to write on walls. [text B]
- 5 Describes art that is new and very different. [text C]
- 6 The best examples of a great artist's work. [text C]

7. In groups, discuss if you think graffiti is art or vandalism.