

Graffiti: self expression or vandalism?

Lesson plan description

Students will consider their responses to graffiti and identify what values might be involved in formulating these responses. Students will examine the idea that some values might conflict with others, and will be encouraged to consider balancing values and thus develop an informed opinion.

Working individually, in pairs and as a class, students will investigate some public opinions and the values behind them. The historical, social and political aspects of public debate will be introduced.

Students will be asked to develop and present their own opinion on how they value graffiti.

Year levels

Early Adolescence (12–15 years)

Duration

50 minutes

Explicit values focus

- Respect
- Responsibility
- Freedom

Key Learning Areas

- English
- Studies of Society and Environment
- The Arts

Lesson plan

Getting started

Activity 1: Responding to graffiti

In pairs, and using a Plus, Minus, Interesting (PMI) strategy, students consider the question 'Is graffiti self-expression or vandalism?' Some terms that might help include: *beautiful, expressive, thought-provoking, eyesore, intrusive, destructive, and costly*. Ask students to select relevant values from the nine *Values for Australian Schooling* to support either view, or to suggest other values that are not listed.

For example, if *freedom* is selected as a value, then graffiti may primarily be thought of as self-expression, but if *civic responsibility* is the main consideration, then graffiti may be thought of as primarily an act of vandalism.

Discovering

Activity 2: Finding out about graffiti

Students form into groups of four or five and participate in a Jigsaw activity, whereby they split and form new groups in order to research separate articles about graffiti.

Focus questions for their research could include the following.

- How has graffiti been used historically and politically?
- What types of graffiti are there, and what functions do they serve?
- Are some types of graffiti more acceptable than others? Consider tagging, stencil art, murals, etc.
- Is graffiti vandalism or art?
- What's the difference between visual advertising and graffiti?
- How might graffiti affect the rights of others?
- Does banning graffiti intrude on the freedom of others?
- Whose responsibility is it to manage graffiti?

Use a point of view organiser (see attachment) to record who the different stakeholders in the graffiti issue may be, their values, and what actions may result from these.

Articles to be considered include:

'Seeing the Writing on the Wall, Graffiti in History – from Pompeii to Belfast' by Tony Taylor

<http://hyperhistory.org/index.php?option=displaypage&Itemid=676&op=page>

City of Melbourne Graffiti management plan

www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutCouncil/PlansandPublications/strategies/Pages/GraffitiManagementPlan.aspx

Graffiti hurts Australia: What is graffiti, FAQ

www.graffitihurts.com.au/index.php

'Urban scrawl: shades of grey', Suzy Freeman-Greene, The Age, 12 Jan 2008

www.theage.com.au/articles/2008/01/11/1199988583501.html

'Graffiti or art? Expression in the modern age' Daniel Ziffer, The Age, 14 May 2007 www.theage.com.au/news/arts/graffiti-or-art-expression-in-the-modern-age/2007/05/13/1178994997005.html

'Look, it's a plague of ads', Sydney Morning Herald, 13 September, 2007

www.smh.com.au/small-business/look-its-a-plague-of-ads-20090619-coly.html

'Writing is on the wall. It's moronic', Sushi Das, The Age, 28 May 2005

www.theage.com.au/news/sushi-das/writing-is-on-the-wall-its-moronic/2005/05/27/1117129894340.html

The writing on the wall, [The Guardian](http://www.theguardian.com), Friday 24 March 2006

<http://arts.guardian.co.uk/print/0,,329441748-110428,00.html>

Vocabulary

Students are to identify and share some key vocabulary from articles including terms such as:

- graffiti
- graffing
- mural
- stencil
- community
- eyesore
- deface
- scribble
- scrawl
- vandal
- wilful damage
- reparations
- conviction
- offence
- tagging

Activity 3: When is graffiti self-expression and when is it vandalism?

Ask the class to discuss whether graffiti is self-expression or vandalism if it:

- appears on the graffers own property, such as a folder or pencil case
- is removable, such as on a whiteboard
- is on a wall or fence in a little used lane
- is on the wall of a public building or public transport
- is on the wall of a private house
- is on the wall of your house
- is a tag
- is a stencil?

Bringing it together

Activity 4: Expressing an opinion

According to the law, graffiti is a crime. It is also against the rules of most schools.

Ask the students to write a letter to the editor expressing their opinion on this topic. What consequences should there be for those who get caught graffing school property?

Or,

Ask the students to locate and review their school policy on graffiti and/or to formulate an alternative school policy on graffiti.

Point of view organiser

Point of view of:

Values:

Actions:

