

# Graffiti art: perceptions and connections

Secondary (ages 11 – 14)

Visual arts

Students find out about graffiti art, explore different attitudes towards this form of art, and develop and express their own viewpoint. They analyse how graffiti art is related to other art forms, such as cave art. The activity will end with the production of a written statement and a pictorial representation of the connection between these two art forms.

*NOTE: This activity can be implemented independently or as part of a longer project comprising also the activities “Graffiti art: styles, iconography and message” and “The Duke of Lancaster: a graffiti case study”.*

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**Time allocation** 4 lesson periods

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**Subject content** Art theory (theory of representation)  
History of art (cave art, graffiti art)  
Interpreting and using visual arts elements  
Using different visual arts techniques

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**Creativity and critical thinking** This unit has a **critical thinking** and **creativity** focus:

- Play with unusual and radical ideas
- Challenge assumptions
- Generate ideas and make connections
- Produce, perform or envision something personal

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**Other skills** Collaboration, Communication

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**Key words** graffiti; cave art; representation; art forms

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## Products and processes to assess

Students participate in discussions and produce and present both a poster and a piece of artwork showing connections between graffiti and cave art. Students demonstrate a willingness to explore and challenge a variety of ideas about the nature of art. At the highest levels of achievement, they consider and challenge several ways of formulating and answering the question of the relationship between graffiti, art, and cave art, and show clear understanding of the strength and limitations of their chosen positions, as well as alternative positions. They show an openness to the ideas, critiques or feedback of others and a willingness to change their own views and outputs in response to new materials or ideas. Their posters and pieces of artwork are both imaginative and personal and they do not shy away from taking risks in the formulation, techniques, composition or content of outputs.

## Teaching and Learning plan

This plan suggests potential steps for implementing the activity. Teachers can introduce as many modifications as they see fit to adapt the activity to their teaching context.

Step	Duration	Teacher and student roles	Subject content	Creativity and critical thinking
1	Lesson period 1	<p>Students are divided into groups and discuss the following topics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is graffiti?</li> <li>• Have you seen any local graffiti?</li> <li>• Why do people make graffiti?</li> <li>• Is it art? What skills does someone have to have to make you decide their graffiti is art?</li> <li>• Where do you think graffiti is popular in the world/the local area?</li> </ul> <p>After an initial discussion students report back to the class to share the answers they came up with.</p> <p>The teacher circulates among the groups and, if needed, facilitates the discussion by providing background information (e.g. making students aware of the existence of different art theories that propose different concepts of art). The teacher helps students become aware of the divergences and the connections between the answers provided by the different groups.</p>	<p>Developing knowledge of modern art forms and art theories</p> <p>Demonstrating aesthetic awareness</p> <p>Developing Knowledge of artistic movements and their socio-cultural context</p> <p>Articulating and presenting views about art</p>	<p>Finding multiple perspectives (aesthetic, technical, sociocultural, representational) to interpret a piece of art and compare them</p> <p>Challenging art theories (e.g. find reasons for and against considering graffiti an art form)</p>
2		<p>The teacher then presents a series of resources such as online galleries and short films (see Resources) about the nature of graffiti art and its history.</p> <p>The groups are asked to go back to the initial set of questions to see if they come up with different answers (or nuanced ones) on the basis of the examples and the videos they just saw.</p> <p>Students report back to the class and explain whether their view on graffiti art changed (and why) after watching the videos and seeing the examples of graffiti art. For instance, they explain whether they had any preconceptions that changed after listening to people talk about why they do graffiti art.</p> <p>The teacher will help students become aware of the thought processes that lead to the formation of artistic opinion, and of how opinions can change by integrating a diversity of perspectives.</p>	<p>Developing knowledge of artistic movements and their historical context</p>	<p>Identifying the weaknesses and strengths of own and others' perspectives on graffiti art</p> <p>Checking the accuracy of own interpretation of graffiti art (on aesthetic or sociocultural grounds)</p> <p>Justifying own opinion on graffiti art while acknowledging the uncertainty of the endorsed opinion</p>
3		<p>In groups, students do online research to answer the following question: "Is graffiti a new art form? What is the oldest graffiti you can find?"</p> <p>After the group discussion, students present their hypotheses to the class.</p>	<p>Developing knowledge of ancient forms of art</p>	<p>Making connections (e.g. between ancient forms and new forms of art/graffiti)</p>

4	Lesson period 2	<p>The teacher then points students to two online resources about cave art (see Resources) and asks them to observe cave paintings and to discuss the similarities/differences between cave art and graffiti. The teacher may suggest focusing on colour, materials, shape, text, imagery, purpose, motivation, and context.</p> <p>Students are asked to consider to which extent their previous hypothesis on whether graffiti is a new art form changes based on the new information provided by these resources.</p> <p>Each group then reports back to the class, highlighting the connections as well as the differences between cave art and graffiti art. Students explain whether their answer to the question “Is graffiti a new art form?” has changed or has been nuanced.</p>	<p>Observing, analysing and describing a piece of art</p> <p>Interpreting a piece of art within its historical and sociocultural context</p>	<p>Explaining and justifying their own perspective on the basis of relevant criteria</p>
5		<p>Students go back to their groups and are asked to write a collective statement about the differences and similarities between graffiti and cave art. Their statement should be displayed as a poster that they will present at the end of the lesson. The teacher will make students aware that by presenting ideas through different formats (e.g. written text, poster, audio recording) they can reach different audiences.</p> <p>Students give each other feedback on the posters and they explain how they would take into account the feedback received to improve their posters.</p>	<p>Presenting ideas about visual arts using different formats (written, visual) to reach different audiences and in a structured way</p>	<p>Combining and synthesizing different perspectives into a collective statement</p>
6	Lesson period 3	<p>Students are asked to build on the knowledge gained in the previous lessons to produce either of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a.) a piece of contemporary graffiti based on a piece of cave art,</li> <li>b.) a piece of cave art based on a piece of contemporary graffiti.</li> </ul> <p>Students are given 15 minutes to explore possible ways of implementing option a or option b and they will produce a sketch of their envisioned work.</p> <p>In pairs, they will have 15 minutes to present their project to each other and give and receive feedback.</p> <p>They will then have 15 more minutes to work individually and produce a new version of the sketch on the basis of the discussion with a classmate.</p> <p>During the last 15 minutes students present their final sketches to the class explaining how their artwork represents the connection between graffiti and cave art.</p>	<p>Developing knowledge of techniques and materials used in different art movements</p> <p>Developing presentation skills in a visual arts context</p>	<p>Envisioning an artistic output by making connections between techniques of different art movements and thinking about how to combine in a single artwork</p> <p>Producing a meaningful artistic output (e.g. pictorial interpretation of the relationship between two art forms)</p>
7	Lesson period 4	<p>Students create their artwork based on the sketch produced in the previous lesson.</p>	<p>Being able to use a variety of techniques and materials to produce an artwork belonging to a specific style</p>	<p>Creating art with expressive qualities (by combining techniques of different art movements into a single artwork)</p>

## Resources and examples for inspiration

<b>Web and print</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Graffiti Gallery (<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p023yhcf/p023yk52">http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p023yhcf/p023yk52</a>) – this gallery of images in New York in the 1970s and today could be used as a starting stimulus</li> <li>➤ Tate Modern (<a href="http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art">http://www.tate.org.uk/whats-on/tate-modern/exhibition/street-art</a>) – 2 films (of 5 and 9 minutes duration)</li> <li>➤ Tate Modern (<a href="http://www2.tate.org.uk/streetart/index_hd.html">http://www2.tate.org.uk/streetart/index_hd.html</a>) – Interactive tour of Street Art Exhibition</li> <li>➤ Interview of young people with street artist (<a href="http://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore">http://www.tate.org.uk/kids/explore</a>)</li> <li>➤ The Why Factor (<a href="http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p033l4gg">http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p033l4gg</a>) – Radio 4 programme exploring why people do Graffiti(15mins)</li> <li>➤ Wild Style (1983) (<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQQyGkWkTNU">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IQQyGkWkTNU</a>) First /American hip hop feature Trailer (Preview to check suitability for your group)</li> <li>➤ Style Wars (1983) ( <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9KxbaSU-Eo">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f9KxbaSU-Eo</a> )– American documentary on hip hop culture and its American roots, with emphasis on graffiti, although b-boying and rapping also included. Full movie (you may want to select clips).</li> <li>➤ Graffiti from an artist’s perspective (<a href="https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/08/marcus-barnes-graffiti-art-can-be-a-positive-force-train-tagging">https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2015/nov/08/marcus-barnes-graffiti-art-can-be-a-positive-force-train-tagging</a>) - Newspaper article</li> <li>➤ Cave art: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Bradshaw Foundation image gallery, Chauvet Caves: <a href="http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/chaudet/chaudet_cave_art.php">http://www.bradshawfoundation.com/chaudet/chaudet_cave_art.php</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Lascaux Cave Paintings: <a href="https://vimeo.com/40849516">https://vimeo.com/40849516</a></li> </ul>
<b>Other</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Computer and internet access</li> <li>➤ Digital camera / iPad / mobile phone to take photos</li> <li>➤ Art and design materials for creating graffiti designs</li> </ul>
<b>Opportunities to adapt, extend, and enrich</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ A longer project could also involved the activities “Graffiti art: styles, iconography and message” and “The Duke of Lancaster: a graffiti case study”.</li> </ul>

**Creativity and critical thinking rubric for visual arts**

• Mapping of the different steps of the lesson plan against the OECD rubric to identify the creative and/or critical thinking skills the different parts of the lesson aim to develop

	<b>CREATIVITY</b> Coming up with new ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>	<b>CRITICAL THINKING</b> Questioning and evaluating ideas and solutions	<b>Steps</b>
<b>INQUIRING</b>	Make connections to other visual arts concepts and media or to conceptual ideas in other disciplines	1,3,4	Identify and question assumptions and conventional rules in a piece of visual art (content, style, technique, colour, composition, etc.)	1,3
<b>IMAGINING</b>	Play with unusual and radical visual arts ideas when preparing or creating a piece of visual art	2,5,6	Consider several perspectives on the content, technique or expression of a piece of visual arts	2,4,5
<b>DOING</b>	Create visual art that shows expressive qualities or personally novel ways to engage a subject matter	5-7	Explain both strengths and limitations of a piece of visual arts justified by aesthetic, logical and possibly other criteria	5,6
<b>REFLECTING</b>	Reflect on steps taken in creating a piece of visual art and on its novelty compared to conventions	6	Reflect on the chosen expressive choices of a visual arts piece relative to possible alternatives	2,4

### Definitions and background information for teachers

The word graffiti originates from the Italian 'to scratch' but also derives from Greek, meaning 'to scratch, or draw, write'.

The Tate defines Graffiti art as a term that refers to 'images or text painted usually onto a building, typically using spray paint'.

Further background (into the types, techniques and history of graffiti art) can be found at the following links:

Definition - Graffiti Art: <http://www.visual-arts-cork.com/painting/graffiti-art.htm>

Graffiti Timeline - Graffitiknowhow.com: <https://graffitiknowhow.com/>

British Council Article - Graffiti & Street Art:

<http://learnenglishteens.britishcouncil.org/study-break/graded-reading/graffiti-street-art-level-3>

### Graffiti Terms

**Tag:** an alias or nickname or signature. The most basic form of graffiti 'signature' – usually one colour/ one stroke version of a name.

**Throw-up:** from one to a few letters, usually painted very quickly – no more than 2 or 3 colours. Tag-like but with outlined or bubble letters.

**Piece:** shorthand for "masterpiece". More elaborate and intricate than a tag, large-scale lettering, typically multi-coloured.

A "**blockbuster**" or "**roller**" - a large block-shaped work often made with a paint-roller - to cover a large area, (to stop other graffiti sprayers from painting on the same wall).

**Stencil graffiti:** uses cut-outs to create complex shapes rapidly – by Blek le Rat and Banksy.

**Wildstyle:** complex and elaborate graffiti writing/art with interlocking letters and connecting points, often with arrows, curves and letters - creating a more intricate "tag" or image

**Writer:** someone who paints or writes graffiti

**Dogging:** scrawling a tag or an insult over someone else's piece on purpose.

**Hall of fame:** an area of wall space where graffiti is permitted.