

**Directions for Writing**

Write a letter to your mayor in which you take a position on whether the city should maintain or remove graffiti in public spaces.

Your essay must be based on ideas, concepts, and information from the passage set.

Manage your time carefully so that you can

- read the passages;
- plan your response;
- write your response;
- and revise and edit your response.

Be sure to

- include a claim;
- address counterclaims;
- use evidence from multiple sources; and
- avoid overly relying on one source.

Your response should be in the form of a multi-paragraph essay.

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**SOURCE 1 Graffiti Is Always Vandalism**

*by Heather Mac Donald, DECEMBER 4, 2014*

1 Anyone who glorifies graffiti needs to answer one question: If your home were tagged during the night without your consent, would you welcome the new addition to your décor or would you immediately call a painter, if not the police?

2 No institution that has celebrated graffiti in recent years — like the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles or the Museum of the City of New York — would allow its own premises to be defaced for even one minute. Graffiti is something that one celebrates, if one is juvenile enough to do so, when it shows up on someone else’s property but never on one’s own.

3 The question “When does graffiti become art?” is meaningless. Graffiti is always vandalism. By definition it is committed without permission on another person’s property, in an adolescent display of entitlement. Whether particular viewers find any given piece of graffiti artistically compelling is irrelevant. Graffiti’s most salient characteristic is that it is a crime.

4 John Lindsay, the progressive New York politician who served as mayor from 1966 to 1973, declared war on graffiti in 1972. He understood that graffiti signaled that informal social controls and law enforcement had broken down in New York’s public spaces, making them vulnerable to even greater levels of

disorder and law-breaking. A 2008 study from the Netherlands has shown that physical disorder and vandalism have a contagious effect, confirming the "broken windows theory."

5 There is nothing "progressive" about allowing public amenities to be defaced by graffiti; anyone who can avoid a graffiti-bombed park or commercial thoroughfare will do so, since tagging shows that an area is dominated by vandals who may be involved in other crimes as well.

6 New York's conquest of subway graffiti in the late 1980s was the first sign in decades that the city was still governable; that triumph over lawlessness paved the way for the urban renaissance that followed.

**SOURCE 2 Graffiti is art, not vandalism**

*by Rae Burach, 16 January 2018*

7 Graffiti, like the many murals around Philadelphia, is a form of art and should be appreciated, not condemned.

8 I come from a small town in New Jersey with polished sidewalks and pristine buildings. During my college search, I was drawn to Philadelphia because of its elaborate street art. I love the parts of the city that are splashed with color, from large-scale murals to graffiti-filled alleyways.

9 And even though I regularly see creative graffiti throughout the city, many people fail to recognize it as a viable art form. Instead of being considered a meaningful expression, graffiti is seen as vandalism. This is an unfair label to give to something that requires the same creativity and hard work as other forms of street art.

10 "I think people automatically jump to conclusions that it's illegal and not artistic," said Dermot Mac Cormack, the chair of Temple's Graphic Arts and Design department. "These forms of artwork are very valid in their own right. You just have to see it in a different way."

11 "I think if it's aesthetically pleasing and playful and adventurous, I really appreciate that," he added. "I see it as a form of expression."

12 For me, graffiti is interesting and eye-catching. The blank wall of a building or an untouched alleyway becomes something brand new with the addition of graffiti. It becomes the expression of an individual's artistic vision.

13 According to the Mural Arts Philadelphia website, the city's first legitimate effort to eradicate graffiti began with the formation of the Anti-Graffiti Network in the 1980s. In response, artist Jane Golden launched the Mural Arts Program, which encourages graffiti artists to use their talents for "constructive public art projects." Golden is now the executive director of the program.

14 The existence of a legitimate street art collective is a positive form of expression in Philadelphia — but it shouldn't discredit independent graffiti art.

15 Graffiti offers something that other forms of street art can't. Because of the lack of control or direction from outside influences, it conveys a raw, uncensored message.

## Graffiti Passage Set

*Credit to SHS teacher, Abby Beck, for text and prompt set.*

16 Banksy, an anonymous graffiti artist based in England, comments on controversial social issues in his work, like violence and homelessness. He's able to communicate his thoughts to the public without anyone's approval. This is what makes graffiti an incomparably powerful kind of art.

17 A 23-year-old art education major, who works under the nickname Gunk, has been creating graffiti art for nearly a decade. The Temple News is withholding the student's name because his art is considered vandalism.

18 He was introduced to graffiti in high school, he said, and it eventually became a regular hobby.

19 "I don't look at it as me doing something illegal," Gunk said. "I think of it as me being in a competition with my surroundings. I'm not a criminal by any means. I'm not a violent person. I just enjoy making art."

20 Just like anything else that's created by humans, graffiti can be used negatively. And even when it's not the artist's intention to cause a disruption, there will always be people who disapprove. But censoring artwork of any kind is complicated and problematic. Leaving graffiti to the artists' discretion is what makes it beautiful and uninhibited.

21 "You can take your own power in it," Gunk said. "I don't have to ask anybody to do this, I just go and do it."

22 I'm a strong advocate for any visual and artistic display of character, and I think graffiti is a perfect example of this. The world is a canvas, and strokes and sprays of paint make any city more stimulating and colorful.

23 Graffiti is no less artistic than the murals in Center City or the painted trash cans down South Street. It should be embraced and encouraged, not denounced. I don't believe Philly would be the same without it.

### **SOURCE 3 A Lesson in Street Art: how a movement morphed out of graffiti and into the art world**

*By Art Critique, 2019*

24 As early as the first century BCE Romans were scribbling curses, names, comments on their favourite gladiators and other thoughts onto the walls of buildings while Mayans were doing similar things at the same time halfway around the world. While some were not fond of the practice, including the Greek philosopher Plutarch, it was widely done and accepted as a form of expression and communication. It wouldn't be until the French Revolution that these acts began to be associated with the destruction of property and by at that time, graffiti became more commonly thought of as vandalism.

25 Just after the French Revolution came to an end, graffiti in the United States began to pop up on railroad boxcars. Heading into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly in the midst of the Great Depression, graffitied boxcars grew in numbers as drifters, who often wrote on the sides of the cars, rode the railroads from coast to coast. In the 20s and 30s, gangs that used graffiti were on the rise in southwestern cities in the US like Los Angeles. During World War II, soldiers found comradery through a graffiti-esque tag that read 'KILROY WAS HERE!' and was commonly accompanied by a drawing of a long-nosed man peering over a wall.

26 Though graffiti was happening in various parts of the world in rather humble ways, the reasons behind them were communal and they persist to graffiti today. They were a form of making sure that your presence, however miniscule it might feel, would be known by someone.

## Graffiti Passage Set

*Credit to SHS teacher, Abby Beck, for text and prompt set.*

27 In the 1960s, though, graffiti was about to take on an entirely new era that was more or less shaped by kids and teenagers. At that time, graffiti took on a new life primarily centering on New York City and Philadelphia. The simpler tagging styles of the 60s would soon morph into more complex graffiti writing typically associated with the 70s and from that, street art was born. In the 1980s, graffiti and Hip Hop, both of which were countercultural movements, fed one another and during 80s and 90s, street art developed as a subset of graffiti. Today, street art has mostly been accepted into the art history cannon with works by artists dubbed as street artists (think Banksy and KAWS) being among some of the most sought-after in today's market.

28 Graffiti, as we know it today, owes its status to kids and teens who wanted to make their mark, to say 'I've been here.' TAKI 183 and Cornbread are widely accepted as the first taggers. Both tags are pseudonyms for their owners and they began to crop up as a way for their writers to mark where they'd been. TAKI 183 was active in the 1970s; his pseudonym was born out of his name, Demetrius, which is sometimes shortened to Taki, and 183, which was his house number in New York. TAKI 183's full name has never been revealed, which isn't unusual as graffiti writers have often stayed in the shadows to elude law enforcement. Around the same time, Derryl 'Cornbread' McCray was tagging buildings around Philadelphia with his nickname, Cornbread. Before he was 20, Cornbread had become a well-known graffiti figure in Philly and in 1971, he tagged an elephant in the Philadelphia zoo, a stunt that landed him in jail.

29 Ultimately, graffiti became like a sport to see who could tag their name where and what territory they could take. It was often a form of communication best understood by fellow graffiti writers. What it all had in common, though was that it was illegal. As graffiti transitioned into the 70s, simple tags began to get more complicated. Lettering was becoming more intricate and stylized and graffiti writers continued to push the boundaries of where they put their works. Different levels of intricacy led to their works being denoted as 'throw ups' (usually bubble letters of one colour with a bold outline in another), 'pieces' (more than three colours, a background, and an occasional character), or 'productions' (a group of works by different artists usually with a cohesive colour theme). The ultimate canvas became New York's subway cars because a completed work would be seen by more and more people but also tagging a subway car was among the riskiest moves a graffiti writer could make as it increased their chances of being caught.

30 The illegal nature of graffiti meant graffiti writers were underground. This created a layer of mystery around graffiti and excitement as one day a wall might be blank and the next, it might have a new work on it. Its mysterious nature led to more people taking note and that, in turn, led to some graffiti writers to want to make their works more accessible to the masses. This would be the foundation on which street artists would develop.