



Urban Canvas:

WHY GRAFFITI SHOULD BE
ENCOURAGED IN CITIES

WRITING PROMPT

Should cities encourage and embrace graffiti as a form of urban art and expression? Write a persuasive essay arguing in favour of this position, addressing potential counterarguments. Use at least 5 vocabulary words from the list in your writing.



INTRODUCTION

Graffiti is often seen as vandalism, but what if it's actually a vital form of urban art and communication? This unit challenges the conventional view of graffiti, exploring arguments for why cities should encourage and embrace this controversial art form. Students will be encouraged to think critically about art, freedom of expression, and the use of public spaces.

PERSUASIVE OUTLINE

1. Graffiti as a Form of Cultural Expression
2. The Economic Benefits of Graffiti
3. Graffiti's Role in Urban Renewal and Community Building
4. Legal and Ethical Considerations
5. Balancing Artistic Freedom and Public Space Management

GRAFFITI AS A FORM OF CULTURAL EXPRESSION

- Historical significance of wall art
- Graffiti as a voice for marginalised communities
- The evolution of street art techniques and styles



EXEMPLARS:

1. Graffiti is not a modern phenomenon; humans have been leaving their mark on walls since prehistoric times. From ancient cave paintings to political slogans in times of revolution, wall art has long served as a powerful medium for cultural expression and historical documentation. In our modern cities, graffiti continues this tradition, offering a raw and unfiltered glimpse into the thoughts, struggles, and aspirations of urban communities.
2. For many marginalised groups, graffiti serves as a crucial outlet for expression when traditional channels are inaccessible. In neighbourhoods where residents may feel voiceless, a spray-painted mural can speak volumes about local issues, celebrations, and concerns. By encouraging graffiti, cities can amplify these voices and foster a more inclusive dialogue about urban life and development.
3. The techniques and styles of graffiti have evolved significantly, transforming it from simple tags to complex, large-scale murals that rival traditional art forms. Artists like Banksy and Shepard Fairey have demonstrated how street art can convey powerful messages and provoke thought on a grand scale. Encouraging graffiti could lead to further innovations in public art, pushing the boundaries of creativity in our shared spaces.

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF GRAFFITI

- Graffiti tourism and its impact on local economies
- Job creation in the arts and related industries
- Reducing costs associated with graffiti removal



EXEMPLARS:

1. Cities that embrace graffiti often see a surge in tourism as art enthusiasts flock to view famous murals and discover hidden gems. The vibrant street art scenes in places like Melbourne, Berlin, and São Paulo have become major tourist draws, boosting local economies through increased visitor spending on accommodations, food, and souvenirs. By encouraging graffiti, cities could tap into this lucrative form of cultural tourism.
2. A thriving graffiti scene can create numerous job opportunities, not just for artists but also for tour guides, art supply shops, and event organisers. Cities could sponsor graffiti festivals or competitions, attracting artists from around the world and stimulating the local economy. Additionally, businesses might hire graffiti artists for advertising or decoration, further legitimising the art form and creating paid work.
3. The constant battle to remove unwanted graffiti costs cities millions each year. By designating certain areas for legal graffiti and working with artists rather than against them, cities could significantly reduce these costs. The money saved could be redirected into community programs or used to fund public art initiatives, creating a more vibrant and economically efficient approach to urban aesthetics.

GRAFFITI'S ROLE IN URBAN RENEWAL AND COMMUNITY BUILDING

- Transforming neglected spaces into points of interest
- Fostering community pride and identity
- Graffiti as a tool for social cohesion and youth engagement



EXEMPLARS:

1. Graffiti has the power to breathe new life into forgotten urban spaces. Drab concrete walls, abandoned buildings, and dreary underpasses can be transformed into captivating works of art that attract visitors and instil a sense of place. This renewal effect can spark wider neighbourhood revitalisation, encouraging further investment and care for previously neglected areas.
2. When communities are involved in creating or commissioning graffiti art, it can foster a strong sense of local pride and identity. Murals depicting local history, culture, or aspirations can become cherished landmarks, strengthening residents' connection to their neighbourhood. This sense of ownership and pride often leads to better care of public spaces and a stronger community bond.
3. Organised graffiti projects can serve as powerful tools for youth engagement and social cohesion. By providing legal spaces for young people to express themselves through art, cities can channel creative energy positively, potentially reducing illicit tagging. These projects can bring diverse groups together, fostering cross-cultural understanding and cooperation as people collaborate on shared artistic visions.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- Redefining vandalism laws to accommodate artistic expression
- Property rights versus public space utilisation
- Establishing guidelines for appropriate content and locations



EXEMPLARS:

1. Encouraging graffiti would require a significant shift in how we view and legislate public space use. Cities would need to carefully redefine vandalism laws, perhaps creating a distinction between unauthorised tagging and sanctioned street art. This could involve establishing a permit system for artists or designating specific areas as 'free expression zones' where graffiti is explicitly allowed and encouraged.
2. The tension between private property rights and the use of public spaces for art would need to be carefully navigated. Cities might need to incentivise property owners to allow graffiti on their walls, perhaps through tax breaks or by offsetting maintenance costs. Alternatively, cities could focus on encouraging graffiti primarily on public property, transforming municipal buildings and infrastructure into ever-changing canvases for urban expression.
3. While encouraging graffiti promotes freedom of expression, cities would still need to establish guidelines to ensure that content remains appropriate for public viewing. This might involve community review boards to approve larger murals or setting standards for non-offensive content. Balancing artistic freedom with community standards would be a delicate but necessary aspect of any pro-graffiti policy.

BALANCING ARTISTIC FREEDOM AND PUBLIC SPACE MANAGEMENT

- Rotating exhibits and temporary installations
- Integrating digital technology with physical graffiti
- Education and workshops to promote responsible street art



EXEMPLARS:

1. To keep urban spaces dynamic and offer opportunities to many artists, cities could implement a system of rotating exhibits. Certain walls or areas could be designated for temporary installations, with new artworks replacing old ones on a regular basis. This approach would keep the urban environment fresh and exciting, continually offering new points of interest for residents and visitors alike.
2. The integration of digital technology with physical graffiti opens up exciting possibilities for interactive and evolving street art. Augmented reality apps could allow viewers to see digital overlays on physical graffiti, or projection mapping could turn entire buildings into canvases for ever-changing digital art. By embracing these technologies, cities could position themselves at the cutting edge of public art and urban design.
3. To ensure that encouraged graffiti remains a positive force in the community, cities could offer education programs and workshops on street art techniques, safety, and ethics. These programs could target youth, fostering a new generation of responsible street artists who understand how to create impactful art while respecting community standards and public safety.

VOCABULARY LIST

1. Aerosol art: Another term for spray paint graffiti
2. Banksy: Pseudonymous England-based street artist, political activist, and film director
3. Buff: To remove graffiti, or a person who removes graffiti
4. Burner: An elaborate, more complex type of graffiti piece
5. Commissioned piece: Graffiti or street art that is requested and paid for
6. Crew: A group of graffiti artists who work together
7. Fading: The gradual disappearance of graffiti due to weather or time
8. Graffiti tourism: Travel motivated by the desire to see street art and graffiti
9. Guerrilla art: Art that is created and displayed in public spaces without official permission
10. Installation art: Art that is created for a specific location, often incorporating the surrounding environment
11. Mural: A large-scale painting applied directly to a wall or ceiling
12. Paste-up: A form of street art where an image is created on paper and then pasted onto a surface
13. Permission wall: A wall where graffiti is legally allowed
14. Piece: Short for masterpiece, a large, complex, and colourful work of graffiti
15. Public art: Art that is displayed in public spaces and is accessible to everyone
16. Stencil: A technique in graffiti where a design is cut out of a material and then spray painted through
17. Tag: A stylised signature of a graffiti artist
18. Throw-up: A quickly executed piece of graffiti, usually consisting of outlined letters
19. Urban canvas: The concept of viewing city surfaces as potential spaces for art
20. Wheat pasting: A liquid adhesive used to stick paper artwork to walls

EXEMPLAR RESPONSE

Cities should absolutely encourage and embrace graffiti as a vital form of urban art and expression. Far from being mere vandalism, graffiti transforms our urban canvas into a vibrant, ever-changing gallery that reflects the pulse of the community.

Graffiti has deep historical roots, from ancient cave paintings to modern street art. Today, it serves as a powerful voice for marginalised communities, allowing them to express their ideas, concerns, and aspirations in public spaces. By encouraging graffiti, cities can amplify these voices and foster a more inclusive dialogue about urban life.

The economic benefits of embracing graffiti are substantial. Cities with thriving street art scenes, like Melbourne and Berlin, have seen a surge in graffiti tourism. Visitors flock to these urban galleries, boosting local economies through increased spending on accommodations, food, and souvenirs. Moreover, a pro-graffiti stance can create job opportunities not just for artists, but also for tour guides, art supply shops, and event organisers.

Critics might argue that encouraging graffiti will lead to uncontrolled vandalism. However, by establishing permission walls and guidelines for appropriate content and locations, cities can channel this creative energy positively. This approach can actually reduce illicit tagging by providing legal alternatives for expression.

Graffiti plays a crucial role in urban renewal and community building. A well-executed piece or mural can breathe new life into neglected spaces, transforming drab concrete walls into points of interest. When communities are involved in creating or commissioning street art, it fosters a sense of local pride and identity.

To implement a pro-graffiti policy, cities could designate certain areas as 'free expression zones' and establish a permit system for larger works. They could also integrate digital technology, using augmented reality to create interactive experiences with physical graffiti.

In conclusion, by embracing graffiti, cities can create more vibrant, economically thriving, and socially engaged urban environments. It's time to see beyond the outdated notion of graffiti as vandalism and recognise its potential as a powerful tool for urban revitalisation and community expression.