

Street art: a modern trend, an opportunity for self-expressions or a form of art?

English Language Acquisition Phase 6 Summative Assessment Task

Important Reminders

Unit title

Telling Tales from different cultural perspectives

Key concept

Creativity

Related concepts

Stylistic choices

Purpose

Global context

Personal and cultural expression: *Artistry, craft, creation, beauty*

Statement of inquiry

Narratives are creatively and purposefully crafted to express oneself and one's culture.

Instructions to students

Study the following sources below

"Graffiti is ugly, stupid and threatening – there's more creativity in crochet."

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/mar/13/graffiti-ugly-stupid-threatening-ruining-world-david-lynch> accessed 12 February 2016

"Mobile lovers by Banksy." <http://www.stencilrevolution.com/banksy-art-prints/mobile-lovers/> accessed 10 February 2016

"Paintings on the face of brick" by Javairia Henry. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/weekly-poem-graffiti/> accessed 10 February 2016

Image

<https://theartstack.com/artist/banksy/mobile-lovers>

Answer the following questions in the space provided. Use your own words as much as possible.

Refer as closely as possible to the texts, justifying your answers and giving examples when asked.

Dictionaries are not allowed to be used in this task.

Answer the questions in English.

You have 70 minutes to complete the task.

Assessment

Criterion B: Comprehending written and visual text, phase 5

Source

Middle Years Programme Language Acquisition Guide. © International Baccalaureate Organisation, 2014, p.p. 83-84

Achievement level	Level descriptor
0	The student does not reach a standard described by any of the descriptors below.
1-2	The student: i. has difficulty analysing information or main ideas and supporting details; is not able to draw conclusions ii. has difficulty analysing basic conventions including aspects of format and style, and author's purpose for writing iii. engages minimally with the written and visual text by analysing few ideas, opinions and attitudes; has difficulty making a response to the text based on personal experiences and opinions from a global perspective. The student shows limited understanding of the content, context and concepts of the text as a whole.
3-4	The student: i. analyses adequately and draws some conclusions from information, main ideas and supporting details ii. analyses some basic conventions including aspects of format and style, and author's purpose for writing iii. engages adequately with the written and visual text by analysing some ideas, opinions and attitudes and by making some response to the text based on personal experiences and opinions from a global perspective. The student shows some understanding of the content, context and concepts of the text as a whole.
5-6	The student: i. analyses considerably and draws conclusions from information, main ideas and supporting details ii. analyses most basic conventions including aspects of format and style, and author's purpose for writing iii. engages considerably with the written and visual text by analysing most ideas, opinions and attitudes and by making a response to the text based on personal experiences and opinions from a global perspective. The student shows considerable understanding of the content, context and concepts of the text as a whole.
7-8	The student: i. analyses thoroughly and draws conclusions from information, main ideas and supporting details ii. analyses basic conventions including aspects of format and style, and author's purpose for writing iii. engages thoroughly with the written and visual text by analysing ideas, opinions and attitudes and by making a response to the text based on personal experiences and opinions from a global perspective. The student shows thorough understanding of the content, context and concepts of the text as a whole.

Source 1

“Graffiti is ugly, stupid and threatening – there’s more creativity in crochet.”

<http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/jonathanjonesblog/2015/mar/13/graffiti-ugly-stupid-threatening-ruining-world-david-lynch> accessed 12 February 2016

David Lynch, that champion of the arts, says graffiti is ruining the world. And he’s right – this hypermasculine display is destroying our environment

It’s a familiar scenario. Older person gets angry with modern world and rages against the visual white noise of graffiti that is, well, everywhere these days.

Only this time the angry old man is film director David Lynch, whose surrealist pedigree and bizarre sense of style make his condemnation of graffiti difficult to dismiss as mere grey-haired grumpiness. Lynch says graffiti is ruining the world and making our planet ugly. He’s right, of course. The fame of street artists like Banksy and a general sense that graffiti is the natural art expression of the kids crushes dissent about this guttural art form. We are all subdued by it. We go along with it, so as not to seem uncool, daddyo.

But how much graffiti actually adds anything to the world? It takes someone – a sunshakably avant garde in his credentials as Lynch – to state the obvious, that scrawled and spray-painted inchoate messages on every corner of every city do not actually enrich our world.

The vast majority of graffiti is ugly, stupid and vaguely threatening. A tiny portion of it is witty or creative. It is the dreck, not the rough diamond art, that most of us encounter most of the time. And we have learned to put on a forced grin and tell ourselves it is the look of our time.

Graffiti is a pretentious subcultural backbeat that is replicated everywhere in much the same style, the same chunky lettering and coded messages. It is boring and expresses a generalised contempt for community, kindness, and the weak. How can leftists like this stuff? After all it is so blatantly hypermasculine, aggressive and destructive of people’s desire for a decent environment. It is in fact proof that men are still in charge of the world. There is far more creativity and craft in, say, crochet but because that is traditionally seen as a “feminine” activity no one bends over backwards to praise it as art. But graffiti, associated as it is with alienated young men, is treated with absurd reverence by people who should know better.

So congratulations to Mr. Lynch. He knows how to aim a grouch. It was high time someone stood up to the vile oppression that is graffiti.

Source 2

Image

<https://theartstack.com/artist/banksy/mobile-lovers>

Text

"Mobile lovers by Banksy." <http://www.stencilrevolution.com/banksy-art-prints/mobile-lovers/> accessed 10 February 2016



In this piece Banksy shows the common trend in society with smart phones and relationships. Mobile lovers is an extremely popular piece which is ironically received massive exposure on social media.

The story about the piece is pretty interesting as Banksy painted it outside of a boys club in Bristol and the piece was sold shortly thereafter. Talk about having a good day when Banksy stops by to drop some work on your front door. The work sold to a private collector for the incredible sum of £403,000, yeah you read right. Banksy never seems to amaze, the "Mobile Lovers" work is no different.

Source 3

“Paintings on the face of brick” by Javairia Henry.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/weekly-poem-graffiti/> accessed 10 February 2016

Tell the story of a man and this chick
He loved her but she could not see
That the street was his canvas
His part of history
He ran to his place in the darkest of night
Ready with his paint to take on the fight
Tell about the memories of the friend he had
Who fell victim to violence from a fellow gang lad?
Carving the names of the fallen ones
Who were put down by the blast from a gun?
Senseless, foolish he thought in his head
So many young ones, so many dreams lost
Dead
Over to this neighborhood notorious for
Going to any length to settle their score
He sprays “Peace and Harmony”
But they only know brutality
He runs to the side of this house he love
Where he paints the face of a thousand doves
He hopes these doves will show this city
That killing each other is just plain silly
Crying for the brother that he knows
Who will never be the same because of his foes
Crying for the daughter he hears at night
Who will never know her father because of a hood fight?
This street historian leaves a piece of his heart
With every spray stroke of his street art

He runs to a park where he once played
And goes to the bench where he once laid
He remembers the stories of the people he knew
There are not many left, just so few
We go back to the building with the story of
The street artist and the girl that he loves
Going out on his night time visits
To paint his personal city exhibits
The District of Crimes as they call it now
The street artist depicts this the only way he knows how
He shows the city as no one knows
The festivals, the lights, the cultural shows
The diversity, the love, the mixing bowl
The love of his city as a whole
The piece of his heart, the art of his soul
We follow the artist back to the brick
Where he tells the story of him and this chick
The nighttime life that she didn't know
Where the artist put on his art show
The street he loves
The city he craves
Tells the artist that is unknown
This is the life
This the art
Through the graffiti
This is his heart

Word count: 913 words

Strand i

Evaluate and draw conclusions from information, main ideas and supporting details

1. Compare the three texts above. What conclusions are made by the authors about graffiti? Refer to the texts to support your judgements. (3 points)

Despite expressing contrasting opinions about the phenomenon in question, the authors of the three texts share a common topic writing about graffiti as a popular youth trend. Being controversial in itself, graffiti raises predictably controversial opinions from different commentators, with these texts being no exception. The author of Source 1 text (“Graffiti is ugly, stupid and threatening – there’s more creativity in crochet”) has developed a strong negative opinion about graffiti and goes as far as pinning down the majority of this art form as “ugly, stupid and vaguely threatening”. Being in a fierce opposition to graffiti as a form of art, the author writes as though he had suffered from graffiti himself, which does make the text highly opinionated. Source 2 combines the visual image of one of the most well-known pieces of graffiti artist Banksy entitled “Mobile lovers” with some condensed background textual information. The author of this text also seems to question Banksy’s popularity by making conclusion on “Mobile lovers” as making “no difference” in the artist’s unwillingness to amaze, which may be interpreted as Banksy’s preference to follow a well-trodden path, which is also financially profitable. In contrast to Source 1 and source 2, the author of Source 3 text, which is a poem, is a committed pro-graffiti activist endowing this form of art with a healing opportunity for a restless human soul.

2. Based on the visual image (Source 2) what do you think about the “common trend in society with smart phones and relationships”? How culturally specific is the trend? (2 points)

Except for technologically underdeveloped communities, using social media as a substitution of face-to-face interactions and real feelings is overwhelming trend in society that has a pervasively eroding effect on the authenticity and integrity of human relationships. From this perspective, Banksy's piece is no more than a reflection of the universal trend that has no cultural borders and limits. In fact, opportunities provided by mobile technologies are progressively expanding making our life more technologically dependent and "mobile", with the latter being interpreted as "artificial" as far as human relationships are concerned.

3. Which craft form is compared to graffiti and why is this craft form not praised as art? (1 point)

Crochet is compared to graffiti and the author of Source 1 text gives the former preference in its right of being referred to as "art" for a higher degree of creativity and craft compared to graffiti. However, crochet is highly unlikely to be ever praised as art due to being traditionally associated with a "feminine" activity

4. Analyse the texts to explore on three commonly shared aspects that illustrate the importance of street art as an urban cultural phenomenon. (4 points)

Answers vary, but the depth of students' exploration of the three commonly shared aspects that illustrate the importance of street art as an urban cultural phenomenon should be considered in the point allocation for this question:

- graffiti as a form of artistic expression; although admittedly not accepted as an art form in Source 1 text, it is still viewed as "the natural art expression of the kids" in its primitive technique. As far as Source 2 text is concerned, despite the predominantly utilitarian perspective, "Mobile lovers" is described from, it still remains a form of art used by Banksy to express his attitude to a "burning" community issue. For the unknown character of Source 3 text "street is a canvas" that opens boundless opportunities for self-expression;*
- masculinity as opposed to femininity as a dominating message of graffiti. The message, however, is not restrictive to the choice of the content of graffiti work which is versatile, but it does depict the stereotyped image of a graffiti artist as a man who has faced all imaginable hardships of surviving in streets of a metropolitan city and is yet "ready with his paint to take on the fight" and win (Source 3 text). The author of Source 1 text interprets graffiti as "blatantly hypermasculine, aggressive and destructive of people's desire for a decent environment", thus confirming the shared nature of this underlying aspect. It also does not seem coincidental that Banksy, as Source 2 text informs, painted "Mobile lovers" "outside of a boys club in Bristol";*

- graffiti as a comparatively modern trend. It is stated quite explicitly in Source 1 text, as the author claims that most of us encounter with “the dreck, not the rough diamond art most of the time” and compares it with “visual white noise that is, well, everywhere these days”; and rather implicitly in Source 3 text, with an implication of history as being created by the street artist immediately “with every spray stroke of his street art”. In its turn, a massive recognition received by “Mobile lovers” on social media provides a clear indication of the time the piece was created.

Strand ii

Interpret the author’s choice of style, format and ideas to suit an intended audience and purpose

5. How may the reader’s perception of Banksy’s work be influenced by the reference to “the fame of street artists” made in Source 1? (2 points)

Claiming that the reader’s perception of Banksy’s work may be strongly influenced by the reference to “the fame of street artists” made in Source 1 would be an understatement. The author seems to force his opinion upon an average suckling viewer using blatantly straightforward definition of graffiti as a “guttural art form”.

6. What is the tone of “Paintings on the face of brick” by Javairia Henry and what does it tell us about the meaning and the creator’s attitude towards street artists? (2 points)

The tone of “Paintings on the face of brick” by Javairia Henry is discreetly pessimistic as the story appears to aim at providing the unknown street artist’s response to the hardships he has had to face and losses he has had to witness in his life and his aspiration to find a way to attract the attention of the community at large towards patterns of injustice that happen daily and that the majority of people have developed an immunity against. The character’s memories of the “chick” who did not appear to recognize his talent, of a friend who had fallen “a victim to violence from a fellow gang lad”, the message of “peace and harmony” he had sprayed seem sufficient in the author’s justification of graffiti as a self-expression form and an effort to reach out people’s hearts and minds rather than vandalism and the built environment destruction.

7. Comment on the author’s vocabulary choice in the following extract from “Graffiti is ugly, stupid and threatening – there’s more creativity in crochet”: “Graffiti is a pretentious subcultural backbeat that is replicated everywhere in much the same style, the same chunky lettering and coded messages”. How does the vocabulary choice suit the intended audience and purpose? (3 points)

The author's vocabulary choice indicates his indignation about, and contempt towards, graffiti, therefore, he/she is not concerned about any "politically correct" phraseology; on the contrary, he/she is straightforward and opinionated in pinning graffiti down as a "pretentious subcultural backbeat" – an affirmation the author does not bother himself to provide evidence to.

Strand iii

Engage with the written and visual text by evaluating ideas, opinions and attitudes and by making a response to the text based on personal experiences and opinions from a global perspective

8. If you were reciting "Paintings on the face of brick" by Javairia Henry, what tone would you choose and why? (1 point)

It would likely to be an emotional and passionate reciting, similarly to popular rap compositions, as the emphasis on social issues made in "Paintings on the face of brick" by Javairia Henry perfectly fits this style.

9. What is your perspective on the street art? Refer back to the points made and examples given in the texts, as well as your personal experiences, to illustrate your opinion. (3 points)

Answers vary, but students are expected to provide well-grounded justification and reference to the texts to extend on the points made and examples given in the text. Thus, students may explore on opportunities for self-expression, which are evident in the street art, or a reflection of contemporary issues young people are facing. Additionally, street art may take various forms, including graffiti and stray musical or theatrical performances. On the other hand, there is often a fine line between self-expression and acts of vandalism, which is easily crossed by anarchistic community fans, where provocative behaviour, epatage and damaging property disguised as "installations" become dominating motives.

10. What important message would you communicate to the people of your age in the city you are living if you were given this opportunity? Would you use graffiti or any other art form to communicate the message? How would your final product look like? Please, specify. (3 points)

Student's own answer, which should be justified and contain convincing evidence of careful consideration of the target audience's needs. The student is expected to describe his/her final outcome and state the reasons of using the chosen art form in communicating the message.