Tag Free Kiwi

Years 9–10 Focus area 1

This section of the **Tag Free Kiwi** programme contains one of the following focus areas for students at years 9–10 (ages 13–14):

1. **A history of expression**
2. Graffiti – what does it mean?
3. Consequences of graffiti vandalism
4. Is it art?
5. Making a difference
6. Pride in your community
7. Being creative

Focus area 1: A history of expression

Contents

Focus area 1: A history of expression

Curriculum links

Key Competencies: Using language, symbols and texts; Thinking; Relating to others

Learning areas: History; The Arts

Resources

Photopack: **A History of Expression** (available from your School Community Officer)

Background Information for Teachers

A History of Expression: Background Notes

Copysheet: **The Wall**

Learning outcomes

At the end of this learning experience students will be able to:

- explore some of the ways in which people have expressed themselves through time
- create a legitimate form of personal expression.

Learning experience 1: Expressing yourself legitimately

Activities

1. Forms of expression

Talk about how people throughout time have needed to find ways to express themselves. These expressions may be, for example, political, spiritual, or cultural; they may demonstrate feelings or power; or they may reflect the environment or music. Throughout time people have found ways to express themselves, using the methods and materials that were available to them.

Either:

Show the photopack **A History of Expression**. With each picture:

Ask: When do you think this was made?
Who do you think made it?
What messages do you think the maker (or makers) was trying to give?
How do you think it was done?
How permanent do you think it is?
Do you think it is art or vandalism?

With each picture give background information from **A History of Expression: Background Notes**.

Or

Divide students into groups. They view each of the pictures in turn and answer the questions above. Take feedback and then give students information about each photo taken from **A History of Expression: Background Notes**.

2. Recording your message

Give students the following information.

> You have been given permission to record a legitimate expression on a wall in the community. This must be suitable for the community in which you live. What messages do you want to give? What words, symbols, or pictures will you use?

Give each student Copysheet: **The Wall** on which to complete a prototype of their wall design. Once students have completed their 'walls', they answer the following questions honestly.

> Will your creation on the wall stand the test of time?
>
> Will people admire your work?
>
> Will it still be on the wall in 2000 years?

Display the finished creations in the classroom. Students view all creations and decide what messages each is giving.

Assessment

View students' 'walls' and written questions. Ask students what they have learnt about the reasons why people create graffiti now and in the past.

Background information for teachers

Helen Mehaffy (adapted)

What graffiti expression has meant in history

Since the dawn of time, people have been leaving their mark on natural and manmade structures around the world, in different ways: with sharp stones, pointed tools such as daggers, paint, and – more recently – spray-paint. They did this for a number of reasons: spiritual wellbeing, severe political oppression, superstition, pop culture, artistic expression, social comment or protest, or even boredom – there are plenty of examples of Roman graffiti along the lines of 'Marcus was here', 'Will the rain ever stop' (in Britain) and 'Gaius loves Flavia'.

The word 'graffiti' means 'inscriptions or drawings scribbled, scratched, or sprayed on a surface'.[1] (There is also 'physical graffiti', the Hip-Hop dance form that evolved in the 1970s as break dancing.) 'Graffiti', the commonly used form of the word, is actually the plural; 'graffito' is the singular, though rarely used.

It is important to understand what constitutes graffiti, now and in the past, but this is not an easy task. There are many arguments over what is 'art' and what is 'vandalism' within the full spectrum, covering both positive and negative, that we label 'graffiti-expression'. The difference between most ancient and modern graffiti expression is in its purpose. There is a massive divide between expression that began around the 1970s and expression before that time. Graffiti as it is mostly done today, without permission, is a product of antisocial behaviour, usually done for attention or simply for thrills.

What graffiti expression means today

Graffiti is a multimillion dollar problem every year in New Zealand. In Auckland alone, the annual cost of removing graffiti is estimated to be $5,000,000. The law is clear: if a person 'defaces any building, structure, road, tree, property, or other thing by writing, drawing, painting, spraying, or etching on it, or otherwise marking it, (a) without lawful authority, and (b) without the consent of the occupier or owner or other person in lawful control',[2] they are committing vandalism. If caught, offenders face a community-based sentence and/or a fine of up to $2,000. Being in the possession of 'graffiti implements' is also an offence. The sale of spray-paint to anyone under the age of 18 is illegal, unless the buyer can prove that they require spray-paint 'to undertake the work of his or her course' either at school or in tertiary study. Shop-keepers must keep spray-paint under lock and key, and face a $1,500 fine if they fail to do so.

Spray-painted graffiti became so serious a problem that some paint shops no longer sell spray-cans. Let us be clear: it is a crime, and therefore illegal, to apply graffiti to any surface without the explicit consent of its owner. The place doesn't matter; whether graffiti happens in a school, park, derelict house, or anywhere else, no consent means that it is a criminal offence. Police, communities, and schools are sick and tired of this ongoing problem.

Graffiti-expression affects us all, whether we realise it or not. In 2003, the Auckland City Council published a pamphlet on graffiti vandalism stating that graffiti is a community problem 'which can lower property values and encourage more vandalism and other types of crime'. The pamphlet argues that if graffiti is left, it attracts more graffiti.

I certainly found much evidence to support this claim. Areas in Auckland where tagging was left

became absolutely covered with graffiti. Communities where graffiti is removed as soon as it appears, have little graffiti when compared with other suburbs. Quick removal and commissioned murals seem to greatly help this problem. During my quest to photograph as many types of graffiti expression as I could I came across two tags that covered half of the city. I also saw clearly that commissioned murals, provided they are not dilapidated, do **not** get marked with graffiti. There seems to be a code amongst graffitists that it is not OK to ruin someone else's work.

You should call 111 if you see a graffitist in action. **Any** details you can give them about the offender(s) are valuable. The local authorities and Police keep a central tags database, so recording tags and other illegal graffiti is crucial.

Don't feel intimidated. Offenders get away with graffiti because it's usually done at night, and offenders travel with their friends (their 'crew'). People fear retribution, but in reality this is extremely rare. If you are seriously concerned, or have been threatened, it becomes a much more serious issue for the Police to deal with.

If you are a not-for-profit organisation or a school representative, you can apply to Resene for paint through their PaintWise programme.

Illegal and legal art-forms

The consensus between the Police, schools, communities, businesses, local councils, and genuine artists is that most graffiti expression is **not** art.

The most common form of graffiti is tagging. A tagger invents a name and a stylised signature, and applies this to as many places as they can. The goal is simple: fame. The more dangerous or difficult the spot, the more fame the tagger receives.

There is a chain reaction that happens when someone vandalises an area by tagging. It immediately intimidates the community, and this intimidation creates a real feeling of powerlessness. Property values decrease, crime rates increase. Tagging is mainly teenage behavior, often linked to gangs.

There are also legal, and respected, forms of wall art, completed with permission within the legal constraints, generally by older and more mature artists. These include Photorealism (in which artists paint amazingly true-to-life faces on walls) and Urban Art murals. These artists tend to have more respect for personal property than taggers, and often petition local mayors for legal spots. Many of these artists recognise that illegal graffiti is not art, and is a very negative form of self-expression. Some go so far as to argue that it's not even expression, but rather a reflex, or a form of mob behaviour – urban expression at its most juvenile core.

But graffitists have their own opinions, too. As one artist said, 'If the work was taken out of context, placed on a canvas, given a hefty price tag and hung up in a gallery, it is likely those same people that viewed it as vandalism would see it as art.'

What can we do as a community?

Allowing young people to decorate public facilities so that they come to feel a sense of pride and ownership of the amenities has had some success. This is an expression of art but, more importantly, it is also an expression of ownership, and something that young people can legitimately show their families and friends to get recognition. Commissioning artists to draw actual pieces of art on walls keeps other expression such as tagging away. Swift responses to illegal graffiti also have a tremendous impact.

A strong community response sends a clear message that tagging will not be tolerated. Members of the community should:

- ring 111 immediately to report someone tagging to Police
- quickly remove tagging from their property
- take action to protect property from tagging
- take part in 'paint-outs' and adopt-a-spots.

Notes

[1] *The New Zealand Oxford English Dictionary*, 2005.

[2] Summary Offences (Tagging and Graffiti Vandalism) Amendment Act 2008, Part 1, ss 11A–B.

A History of Expression: Background Notes

Helen Mehaffy (adapted)

Note: *This presentation should be read in conjunction with Photopack:* ***A History of Expression*** *(available from your School Community Officer).*

The goal of this presentation is to provide an outline of the history of expression, loosely classified as graffiti. The creation of images goes back far into our prehistoric past. Then as now, people recorded what was important to them. Cave paintings and pictographs had ceremonial and sacred functions for their communities. Some later inscriptions were to please the gods; others were declarations of love; some were magic spells; others expressed disagreement with religion and politics. For us, all these images provide a link to our past.

Our historical tour has been organised in chronological order. We begin in Australia, looking at ancient Aboriginal cave art from 40,000 years ago. We then move to Roman graffiti from 2000 years ago; Maori cave art from roughly 1000 years ago; Verona, the Italian city that inspired William Shakespeare's most famous play *Romeo and Juliet*; graffiti in Kilmainham Jail, in Dublin, Ireland; Auschwitz, the deadliest concentration camp during World War II; the Berlin Wall that divided East and West Germany; Abbey Road Studios in London, England; the murals of the New York subways; general tagging; and finally, Urban Art.

Photo 1: Aboriginal cave painting - Western Arnhem, Australia

Aborigines are the native or indigenous tribal people of Australia. There were lots of different tribes, and each had its own language and customs. One custom that many tribes shared was to make cave paintings.

The oldest Aboriginal cave paintings date back 40,000 years. Because they are so old, it's impossible to know exactly why they were made, but we do know some important things about this art: the paintings have enormous spiritual significance. This means they were not drawn just for fun; they were drawn to show the important spirits that each tribe believed controlled the rain, storms, and

floods. Each new generation would learn about these spirits from the paintings. Some Aboriginal tribes believe that these paintings were drawn by the spirits themselves, not humans.

Photo: John Miles/Survival; http://www.survival-international.org

Photo 2: Roman graffiti - stone carving of gladiators in the Imperial Forum

The ancient Roman empire has given us some of the earliest records of political expression in the world. One example found in Pompeii was: "Elect Gaius Julius Polybius aedile [a Roman official]. He bakes good bread." Even then campaigns didn't always stick to the issues!

Other favourite themes were wine, money and, of course, sport. This example from around 2000 years ago shows two gladiators in the Imperial Forum. The one on the left, a secutor, wears heavy armour and has the Roman short sword; his opponent, a retiarius, has only light armour and fights with a trident and net.

Photo: Dorling Kindersley, DK Images.

Photo 3: Māori rock drawing - Opihi River area, New Zealand

New Zealand's rock art dates back to the 16th century. It is recorded that the rock art paint was made from animal or bird fat mixed with vegetable gum and soot or kokowai (red ochre) to make black or red paint. The pigment created in this way was known to be particularly long-lasting, and was referred to as 'an ink that would stand forever'. Drawings often showed animal symbols or aspects of daily life.

Rock art may appear to be one of the most durable surfaces on which to apply art, yet drawings of charcoal and ochre are perhaps the most vulnerable in existence. They are vulnerable because the materials used to create the art are perishable, and few other art works are required to stand the punishment of the elements, wind borne dust, animal rubbing, changes to the environment and, indeed, time. Despite its seeming durability, limestone, the favoured rock surface on which the art was produced, is notoriously unstable and easily eroded.

Aotearoa's rock art heritage includes the earliest records created by this country's first inhabitants, and they are provided with very little protection against damage, either by natural forces or vandalism. The drawings were often of human figures, moa and bird-like figures, fish, taniwha, and the huge extinct pouakai.

These Māori rock drawings, from the Opihi River Area in Canterbury, show the dreamtime dog and lizard and are between 700–1000 years old.

Source: Te Ana Māori Rock Art; http://www.teana.co.nz

Photo: Theodorus Johannes Schoon (1915-1985) 1948. Copyright Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington , NZ.

Photos 4 and 5: Romeo and Juliet's door and balcony - Verona, Italy

Legend has it that William Shakespeare wrote his most famous play based on the story of Juliet, who may have lived in this 14th-century house and used this balcony. Whether this is true or not, every year thousands of people flock to Casa di Giulietta (Juliet's house) in Verona to write the names of the person they love on the wall. In fact, if you are looking for someone to love, then visiting this place is supposed to give you luck with finding someone!

Photos: Graffiti on and around Romeo and Juliet's balcony and statue, Verona, Italy, 2000; photos by

H. Mehaffy.

Photo 6: Kilmainham Jail, Dublin, Ireland

The Irish had suffered years of oppression from the British government and were sick of it. Some brave men and women decided to act. They made an army, they gathered supplies, and they were prepared to die for what they believed in. On Easter Monday, 1916, they began their rebellion. Just five days later these people were forced to surrender, and the leaders of the rebellion were imprisoned at Kilmainham Jail, where they were all executed.

Patrick Pearse was the leader of the Easter Rising. Before he was executed he engraved this sentence, from a poem he had written called 'The Rebel', on a wall of the prison: "Beware of the risen people that have been harried and held, Ye that have bullied and bribed."

It means that one day those who have been oppressed will rise up against their enemies. This piece of expression and the life Pearse lived changed the future of Ireland forever. The sentence that he carved on the wall is still there nearly 100 years later. It says: "Beware of the risen people that have been harried and held, ye that have bullied and bribed".

Photo by H. Mehaffy.

Photo 7: Concentration Camp - Block 11, Auschwitz, Poland

Established in 1940, Auschwitz became the deadliest concentration camp of World War II. Adolf Hitler, the German leader during the war, believed that the most superior race in the world was the Aryan 'Master Race' – the blond haired, blue eyed, and fair skinned people of ancient German history.

Hitler particularly hated the Jews. He was responsible for the murder of 11 million people, mostly Jews, but also 4 million non-Jews.

As Nazi-Germany's empire quickly spread across Europe, the 'undesirables' were packed into trains and taken to concentration camps where they were selected to work if they could; otherwise, they were killed. Those that lived suffered unbearable conditions. They were tattooed with a number on their forearm to identify them. Any gold fillings they had were removed to be used for other things, their hair was cut off and used as pillow stuffing, they were so starved they looked like walking skeletons, and they witnessed acts of brutality such as public executions.

We can only make an informed guess at the number of victims at Auschwitz. Corpses were thrown into mass graves, cremated, or just left where they fell. There are literally thousands of people who will never know what happened to their family, their wife or husband, their children. Auschwitz is the final resting place for: 1,100,000 Jews; 150,000 Poles; 23,000 Gypsies (Roma); 15,000 Soviet prisoners of war; and 25,000 others.

The victims sometimes left messages in the concentration camp. The one shown in this photo was left in Block 11. The inscription says: "On 1 November 1944 Wladyslaw Swiergala and his wife from the village of Wilkowice, house no. 595, were sentenced to death."

Photos 8 and 9: The Berlin Wall

After World War II Germany was divided into two nations. The Soviet Union took possession of the East, which became the German Democratic Republic, and the United States, Britain and France took control of the West, which became The Federal Republic of Germany.

Unfortunately, living conditions in the East were extremely poor, and people had to do what the government told them to.

The Soviets did not want people to try and escape back into West Germany, so they built a massive wall to divide the two nations. The construction of the Berlin Wall began on August 13, 1961.

The wall divided families and friends. Anyone caught trying to escape from East Germany was shot. People on the Western side drew their thoughts and expressions all over the wall. The picture on the right is one of the most famous murals painted on the wall. It depicts the failure of Communism – the system that East Germany and the Soviet Union tried to use on their people. On November 9, 1989, protestors gathered in their thousands and began pulling down the wall. By October 3, 1990, East and West Germany were united again.

Photo 8: Leonid Brezhnev [the leader, or more accurately, the dictator of the Soviet Union 1964-1982] and Erich Honecker [the leader of East Germany 1971-1989] are depicted here kissing, in a mural on the Berlin Wall. Photo - Associated Press.

Photo 9: Graffiti on the Berlin Wall 2004.

Photos 10 and 11: Abbey Road Studios, London

Any music fan from any music genre will have heard of the Beatles – the most successful pop group in the history of recording. If you are a fan, you will know that they recorded 90% of their music at Abbey Road Studios, in the heart of London. Their most famous album cover (and the last album they made together) is of the four of them [can you tell me their names?] crossing the zebra crossing outside the studios.

Every year, thousands of fans come to Abbey Road to take self-photos that recreate the album cover on the zebra crossing, and to write their names on the wall outside the studios. So many people sign that the wall has to be repainted every couple of months, to make way for new signatures. Fans even write their favourite lyrics – such as 'I am the Walrus' on the wall and the surrounding poles. You can go online 24 hours a day and watch the live webcam that shows every person who turns up outside.

When I visited, a family of four had come all the way from America. They had dressed up in the **same** clothes and hairstyles that the Beatles wore on the Abbey Road album, and spent 30 minutes walking back and forth across the crossing until they got the photo just right!

Some of the world's most successful movie soundtracks have been recorded here, including the music for *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, *Harry Potter*, *Shrek*, and *Gangs of New York*. Groups that have recorded at Abbey Road include U2, Coldplay, The Red Hot Chilli Peppers, and hundreds more. Musicians know they have truly made it when they come here to record an album.

Photos: Abbey Road Studios, London, 2000; photos by H. Mehaffy.

Photo 12: Graffiti art - Melbourne, Australia

Photo 13: Commissioned mural on a dairy wall - Mangere, Auckland

Photo 14: Commissioned mural - Onehunga, Auckland

Urban Art was born somewhere around the late 1960s and early 1970s, reportedly in New York, although some dispute this. It was called 'writing' or 'hitting', and those who did it sought the means

to express themselves through art. Urban Art was 'discovered' in the 1980s, when the media suddenly took an interest in what became known as 'Hip-Hop'. This permanently changed Urban Art from a subculture to something very mainstream – much to the annoyance of true artists. There are many different types of expression in Hip-Hop. Writing is just one of them. A few aspects are dancers who express themselves through physical graffiti; photo-realists who paint the most incredible life-like faces on walls, and murals such as the one below.

This art form spread from New York to Australia and on to New Zealand.

Photo 12: Graffiti art in Melbourne, Australia; photo by Jeff Goldsbury.

Photo 13: This mural was featured on the wall of a dairy in Mangere, Auckland, and was created, and photographed with the permission of the owner; photo by Helen Mehaffy.

Photo 14: Commissioned mural by Phat1 in Onehunga, Auckland; photo by Helen Mehaffy.

Photos 15 and 16: Tagging in children's playground - Porirua, Wellington; and Manukau, Auckland

Graffiti vandalism is the defacing, damaging or destruction of private and public property (including buildings, structures, road signs, and other kinds of property) by writing, drawing, painting, spraying or etching on it, or otherwise marking it without permission of the owners. Graffiti vandalism is found all over the world.

Photo 15: Children's playground, Porirua, Wellington; photo by Susi Maxwell.

Photo 16: Moonies Bridge, Manukau, Auckland; photo by Manukau Beautification Trust.

Copysheet: The Wall