

Graffiti

Graffiti artists, or “graffers”, operate in many British towns. They often work at night, covering walls, trains and railway stations with brightly painted murals or scrawls in spray paint and marker pen. Some people regard graffiti as a form of vandalism and menace. London Underground says that rail-users find it ugly and offensive. It spends two million pounds a year dealing with graffiti, and has even introduced trains with graffiti-resistant paint. “We don’t think it’s artistic or creative – it’s vandalism, it’s a huge nuisance to our customers”, says Serena Holley, a spokeswoman for London Underground. “It creates a sense of anarchy and chaos”, says Richard Mandel, a barrister who prosecuted a graffiti gang. British Transport Police has a graffiti unit, designed to catch graffers in the act. Graffiti art can also be a dangerous pastime. London Underground says that some teenagers have died in accidents during nocturnal graffiti “raids”. However, others say that graffiti at its best is an art form. Art galleries in London and New York have exhibited work by increasingly famous graffiti artists. Even some of those who think graffiti is wrong admit that graffers are talented. Graffiti took off in Britain in the mid-1980s. It became fashionable and designers, pop stars and nightclub owners used it for decoration and display. Graffiti artist William Pengelly says most graffers are male, although there are some women among them. “It’s a sub-culture ...it has its own rules,” says Pengelly. That means not spraying over someone else’s work. There’s an information network warning people about the police”. “There is a difference between good graffiti and vandalism,” says Dean Colman, a 24-year-old graffiti artist. “I’d never spray private property, like someone’s house. Some graffiti are disgusting. There’s a big difference between that and graffiti which can brighten up grey walls”. Dean sees himself as an artist, and thinks that graffiti art does not get due recognition. “There’s no graffiti art in the Tate Gallery and there should be. Graffiti is as valid as any other art form”, he says.

From: “Graffiti – The Art of Vandalism”, France Chateau, London, new edition 2005 (abridged)

Annotations:

- 1.3 a scrawl – sth written fast and carelessly
- 1.9 a barrister – a lawyer (in English law)
- 1.9 to prosecute – to bring a criminal charge against sb in a court of law
- 1.12 a raid – a surprise attack
- 1.26 due – here: right, proper
- 1.27 The Tate Gallery – one of the most important museums of modern art in London
- 1.27 valid – here: worthwhile

I. READING COMPREHENSION

Questions on the text

Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Keep to the information given in the text, but do not quote.

- I. 1. According to the text, why do large numbers of people regard graffiti spraying as a criminal activity?
- I. 2. What is the “graffiti scene” in London as presented in the text?
- I. 3. What is the attitude of Dean Colman towards graffiti?

II. COMPOSITION

Choose *o n e* of the following topics.

- II. 1. Discuss if graffiti can be seen as art or vandalism?

OR

- II. 2. Since June 2005 spraying on walls of private property against the will of the owner has been considered to be an act of crime in Germany.
Discuss the pros and cons of this anti-graffiti law.

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- I. 1.- Graffiti is seen by many people as a form of vandalism.
- They feel offended and menaced and consider the paintings to be ugly and disgusting.
 - Others even feel that the sprayers disturb public order.
 - Private property is damaged by this form of vandalism.
- I. 2. According to the text,
the so-called graffers generally are male teenagers.
- The scene is regarded as a sub-culture with its own laws.
 - They sometimes spray at night in the London Underground.
 - They sometimes might get “a kick” from this dangerous pastime.
 - But some graffers have become famous artists whose work has been exhibited in some art galleries.
- I. 3. - Dean Colman considers graffiti to be a form of art that has not yet been recognized properly.
- That is why this form of art has not yet been shown in the London Tate Gallery.
 - But he also admits that not all graffiti paintings to be seen on walls are of great value. He differentiates between good graffiti and vandalism.

II. Aufgabe 1

(Bei der Anwendung der nachfolgenden Kriterien ist zu berücksichtigen, dass besonders gelungene Argumentationen eine bessere Bewertung rechtfertigen bzw. das Fehlen anderer Aspekte aus dem Erwartungshorizont ausgleichen können):

a) Gute inhaltliche Leistung (11 Punkte)

Different attitudes towards graffiti should be discussed:

- The term “graffiti” as an art form was first recognized in the 1970s and 1980s when graffiti artists sprayed on subway trains.
- Its general use on subways, bridges and buildings is often gang tagging or scribbling and spraying of swear words on private property and can thus be seen as vandalism.

- However, some urban authorities welcome graffiti as an art form of decoration to replace depressing city walls.
- Some painting on walls is recognized as “murals” these days and has become a tourist attraction
- graffiti as an art form can also be found on-line
- some schools deal with the art of graffiti as part of their art lessons

b) Ausreichende inhaltliche Leistung (5 Punkte)

- 2 or 3 aspects should be mentioned, such as:
 - graffiti can be seen as vandalism when private property is destroyed
 - graffers are also called artists these days, the city council offers them special walls they can use for their art.

II. Aufgabe 2

(Bei der Anwendung der nachfolgenden Kriterien ist zu berücksichtigen, dass besonders gelungene Argumentationen eine bessere Bewertung rechtfertigen bzw. das Fehlen anderer Aspekte aus dem Erwartungshorizont ausgleichen können).

a) Gute inhaltliche Leistung (11 Punkte)

Different aspects which led to the “graffiti law” should be discussed:

- One has to distinguish between different forms of graffiti. Some people regard graffiti, especially tagging and scratching, as vandalism and as a threat to society.
- They feel that it makes the city look ugly and run-down.
- Therefore society has to be protected from scrawls and scribbles on the walls of houses, underground stations, trains and tunnels.
- The removal of the damage caused costs taxpayers’ money.
- Youngsters must be prevented from risking their lives during nocturnal graffiti “raids”.

But:

- Graffiti painting is also an art form.
- Some walls of houses are artistically painted with graffiti (e.g. parts of the remains of the Berlin Wall) and brighten up the city.
- Graffiti art should get due recognition and graffiti techniques should be taught in schools.
- Exhibitions of graffiti paintings should be presented.
- An anti-graffiti-law might not prevent youngsters from painting on walls, more young people might be criminalized.

b) Ausreichende inhaltliche Leistung (5 Punkte)

two or three different aspects should be discussed, such as:

- the reasons that led to the “anti-graffiti-law”
- vandalism in the city
- protection of youngsters
- costs for the taxpayers
- graffiti as an art form