

Spray-painting the wall

Learning outcomes

- ◇ To analyse a selection of graffiti
- ◇ To categorise given examples of graffiti
- ◇ To justify selections
- ◇ To create their own graffiti

Lesson in brief

Students will analyse graffiti from the Wall in the West Bank and read an article on it, developing an understanding of the role that graffiti can play in such a situation.

National curriculum

1.1c, 1.1a, 1.1b, 1.1c, 2.1c

Materials: Powerpoint for starter, powerpoint for exercise, photocopies of articles, student worksheet

Lesson Plan

Starter

- ◆ Ask students to call out words that they associate with graffiti. Tell the class you are going to be looking at graffiti in a particular context.
- ◆ Explain to the students what the Wall is and that according to the International Court of Justice it is illegal as it eats into the West Bank.

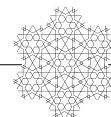
You may find all or part of the powerpoint prepared by the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs useful. See [here](#) for a list of their presentations—the relevant one for this lesson is from March 2007

- ◆ Show the class the powerpoint of photos of graffiti on the wall, and as a group try to decide whether each photo is:
 - ◇ Graffiti by the local population
 - ◇ Graffiti by visiting internationals
 - ◇ Graffiti by artists

N.B. Some of the pictures will include more than one kind of graffiti and some may not be easy to categorise

Main activity

- ◆ Give students time to read the articles (or one of the articles depending on the ability of the class) and to answer the questions in pairs
- ◆ Links to see the articles in their original locations: [first](#) article by Fred Schlomka, [second](#) article by Sam Jones, and [third](#) article by Ghazi Hamad. Please note that the final article is about graffiti in Gaza **not** the West Bank, but it is useful in seeing how graffiti is used in the Palestinian context. It is a long article and parts have been omitted to make it a suitable length for this lesson.
- ◆ Ask students to work in pairs/groups of three. Give each group one piece of graffiti. Ask them to answer the questions on the worksheet
 - ◇ what can be seen
 - ◇ what message the artist wanted to convey
 - ◇ how effective it is
 - ◇ the impact upon the viewer
 - ◇ how this challenges the power of the oppressor



Plenary

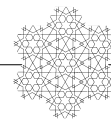
- ◆ Go through the photos and ask each group to share their thoughts in a class discussion

Discuss the following questions

- ◆ Can art challenge the powerful? Can art challenge injustice? Are there limits to the power of art?
- ◆ What is a 'culture of resistance'?
- ◆ When Banksy thanked an old man who had said to him that the wall was beautiful he said "We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall. Go home." What do you think about this?

Homework

- ◆ Students could produce their own piece of graffiti that they would like to put on the wall
- OR
- ◆ Write answers to the questions discussed in class



Wall Graffiti in Bethlehem

Fred Schlomka

One of the most interesting aspects of any Bethlehem tour is seeing the graffiti on the Israeli West Bank Barrier which almost completely surrounds the city. Whether you take a guided tour or a public bus, wandering around the neighbourhoods where the wall is ever present is truly a profound experience. The graffiti generally falls into three categories.

- * Graffiti by the local population
- * Graffiti by visiting internationals
- * Graffiti by artists

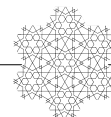
The Wall has become a narrative of peoples' feelings about the occupation and the Barrier in particular, and has given rise to a vernacular art, some of which is pure venting, while others demonstrate the power of a people to continually challenge their overlords.

Sometimes the power of the gun can be subordinated to the power of art, of creative expression that transcends the any attempt to repress the spirit of the people of Palestine. Good examples of this are Project Hope in Nablus and the Freedom Theater in Jenin.

Vernacular— plain, everyday, ordinary
Transcend—to rise above or go beyond
Repress—to control, keep down
Subordinated—to be made to have less power

Questions

- ◆ How do we know that the writer's sympathies lie with the Palestinians?
- ◆ What do you think the writer means by "vernacular art"? How would this be different from other kinds of art?
- ◆ He says that some of the art demonstrates "the power of a people to continually challenge their overlords" and that the power of the gun can be made to have less power through art. Do you agree that art can challenge those in control? Why or why not?



Spray can prankster tackles Israel's security barrier

Sam Jones

Israel describes it as a vital security barrier, while the UN says it's illegal. But as far as the guerrilla graffiti artist Banksy is concerned, the 425-mile long barrier that separates Israel from the Palestinian territories is a vast concrete canvas too tempting to resist.

The subversive dauber, who has terrorised galleries on both sides of the Atlantic and who last year installed a very sexed-up bronze spoof of the Old Bailey's statue of Justice in central London, has ventured further afield for his latest project.

Packing his stencils and spray cans, he went to the Middle East to share his vision with those living on the Palestinian side. His visit is recorded in the nine stencilled pictures, some surreal, some poignant, he left on the gigantic barrier. His latest work was on his website yesterday, labelled "holiday snaps".

Although the paintings themselves are not overtly political, his feelings about the wall are apparent from his statement: "The Israeli government is building a wall surrounding the occupied Palestinian territories. It stands three times the height of the Berlin Wall and will eventually run for over 700km - the distance from London to Zurich. The wall is illegal under international law and essentially turns Palestine into the world's largest open prison."

But he concedes: "It also makes it the ultimate activity holiday destination for graffiti writers."

One of the pictures shows two gleeful children with bucket and spade standing beneath a hole in the wall that opens on to a vista of a tropical paradise. In another, he has transformed the wall into a cosy sitting room complete with two enormous armchairs and a window that frames an alpine landscape.

Other pictures show a little boy kneeling at the foot of a rope ladder that snakes to the top of the wall and the silhouette of a girl rising through the air clutching balloons.

The barrier, which is made of concrete walls and razor-wire fences, has been cited as illegal by the UN, which has ordered it dismantled, though Israel says the wall protects it against suicide bombers.

Jo Brooks, his spokeswoman, said there had been some hairy moments at the barrier. "The Israeli security forces did shoot in the air threateningly and there were quite a few guns pointed at him."

Banksy also records on his website how an old Palestinian man said his painting made the wall look beautiful. Banksy thanked him, only to be told: "We don't want it to be beautiful, we hate this wall. Go home."

Subversive—undermining official views

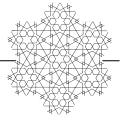
Surreal—unreal

Poignant—moving or touching

Overtly—openly

Questions

- ◆ What adjective does the writer use to describe the barrier/Wall? What does this imply to you about the author's position?
- ◆ Why would Israeli soldiers threaten a graffiti artist?
- ◆ Think about the exchange that is mentioned at the end of the article. What do you think of the views of the old man? Would you reconsider painting on the wall after an exchange like this?



Writings on the wall by Ghazi Hamad (extracts)

This is a long article. [...] means that this is a part that has been taken out

It is impossible to enter any Palestinian refugee camp, village or city without noticing the vibrant colours and meticulous calligraphy of graffiti on most every wall. In some places it is like an unending open-air art gallery that stretches along the entire length of a street onto a school wall or a factory gate and then into the narrow alley of a refugee camp or a wide main street like the Omar Al Mukthar Street in Gaza City.

But the graffiti is not there for aesthetics primarily. "The walls have become a daily notice board for us," says Saad Hassan from the Shati' Refugee Camp in Gaza. "It saves you the bother of reading the newspapers or leaflets being distributed here and there."

On this "notice board" one can read about almost every aspect of everyday Palestinian political and social life. [...] But it is not only political messages that are posted on Gaza's walls. Palestinians in Gaza also share their personal joys and enmities through graffiti. Many times one can find congratulatory messages for a newlywed couple or congratulations to a Muslim returning from the Haj, the pilgrimage to Mecca. Some messages convey congratulations to a person who has received an official position in government. [...]

Part of the Intifada

Professor of journalism and media at Al Najah University, Farid Abu Dheir, says graffiti constitutes a healthy phenomenon in society as well as being an inexpensive way of expressing opinions. Graffiti, says Abu Dheir, provides an outlet for everyone at a time when official media have been monopolised. Semi-official outlets do not always do justice to everyone's opinions. [...]

Graffiti in Palestinian culture originated in the years before the first Palestinian revolt in 1936, and can be traced as far back as 1931. Perhaps the most famous incident of what could be called "revolutionary graffiti" was what one Palestinian wrote on the walls of his Acre prison cell in black coal, moments before his execution by the British Mandatory government in 1936:

*"To my brother Yusuf:
Look after our mother.
To my sister: Do not grieve.
For the homeland I sacrifice my blood,
And this for your eyes,
O Palestine."*

However, graffiti didn't take on its collective and public character until the first Intifada in 1987. [...] During the first Intifada, graffiti, however, came to be considered an effective and influential method of resistance because of its necessity at the time in relaying messages to the people in the absence of other forms of communication available to Palestinians. A similar reasoning applies to the art's resurrection during the Aqsa Intifada, though some argue that with the advent of the internet, various media outlets such as radio stations, land and satellite television channels, and many free publications, graffiti's importance as a means of communication is less today.

Most Palestinian factions, however, say that these "wall journals" serve to raise educational, factional and national awareness and even if other methods of communication have improved over the years, graffiti still has an enormous impact on the Palestinian street and is part of the culture of resistance.

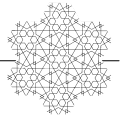
Aesthetics—about how things look

Intifada—Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation. The first one was in 1987 and the second one known as the Aqsa Intifada started in 2000.

British Mandatory Government—Britain ruled Palestine between the First World War and 1947

Questions

- ◆ What sort of things are written on Gaza's walls—are they political or non political or both? Why do people write their opinions on the walls and not in newspapers?
- ◆ Why does the author say graffiti became more important during the first intifada?
- ◆ What do you think is meant by a culture of resistance. What role might graffiti play in a "culture of resistance?"



Look at your picture and answer these questions with your partner

What can you see?

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What message do you think the artist wanted to convey?

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Is it effective?

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What is the impact on the viewer?

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Does this challenge the power of the oppressors?

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