

3.6 GRAFFITI AND POLITICAL EXPRESSION

How can art reflect and shape politics and culture?

C3 Framework Indicator	<p>D2.Geo.4.3-5. Explain how culture influences the way people modify and adapt to their environments.</p> <p>D2.Geo.5.3-5. Explain how the cultural and environmental characteristics of places change over time.</p> <p>D2.Geo.6.3-5. Describe how environmental and cultural characteristics influence population distribution in specific places or regions.</p>	
Staging the Compelling Question	<p>In this inquiry, students will explore the history of graffiti in Berlin and determine how street art has been used to express political beliefs and protest.</p>	
Supporting Question 1 What is graffiti, and how was this art form viewed in the United States and Germany in the 1980s?	Supporting Question 2 How was graffiti used to convey thoughts and feelings about the Cold War?	Supporting Question 3 What current issues does street art represent in Germany?
Formative Performance Task Students will watch a video on graffiti as art or vandalism.	Formative Performance Task Students will engage in a “gallery walk” and view graffiti and street art images from Berlin that were created by artists before the fall of the Berlin Wall.	Formative Performance Task Students will watch a video on street art in Germany. In groups, they will examine different images of street art in Germany, and then answer questions on how they represent current issues.
Featured Sources Source A: Handout 3.6.1 Source B: <i>Is graffiti art? Or vandalism?</i>	Featured Sources Source A: Handout 3.6.2 Source B: <i>Berlin Wall Art - The Wall Before the Fall</i> Source C: <i>This photographer’s collection of Berlin Wall graffiti photos show the politics of paint</i>	Featured Sources Source A: PowerPoint 3.6 Source B: Handout 3.6.3 Source C: <i>Street Art Germany</i>
Summative Performance Task	<p>Argument: Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from historical or contemporary sources, while acknowledging competing views.</p> <p>Extension 1: Students will investigate U.S. cities that have pieces of the Berlin Wall displayed as art. They will create a physical or Google map that pins the locations in the United States that have pieces of the Berlin Wall.</p> <p>Extension 2: The walls of the Reichstag, the home of Germany’s parliament, are still covered with graffiti left by the Red Army when it entered Berlin in 1945. Using the links below, learn about the discussion to keep this graffiti or to remove it.</p>	
Taking Informed Action	<p>Understand: Graffiti is an art form that can be perceived as street art and vandalism.</p> <p>Assess: Examine the laws around graffiti in your local town or city.</p> <p>Act: Create a map that displays the locations of graffiti and/or street art galleries in your area and share with others.</p>	

? COMPELLING QUESTION

- How can art reflect and shape politics and culture?

INQUIRY OVERVIEW

In this inquiry, students will explore the history of graffiti in Berlin and determine how street art has been used to express political beliefs and protest.

TEACHER BACKGROUND

Graffiti can be described as words, drawings, and marks painted on walls or surfaces in mostly public spaces. It has existed since ancient times beginning with the ancient Romans as a method of communication to mark territory and to express social, political, or creative ideas. Some people consider graffiti a form of art, while others consider it vandalism. Notable artists have used elements of graffiti in their work, such as Jean-Michel Basquiat of the United States, and graffiti has often been associated with the emergence of hip-hop culture. Graffiti and tagging is a phenomenon seen all over the world, but how it is regarded and dealt with varies depending on your location. In Berlin, Germany, graffiti has a history of being signs of both lawlessness and freedom of expression. In fact, Berlin has been referred to as the “graffiti capital of Europe” due to the massive amount of graffiti and street art within the city.



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The roots of graffiti culture can be traced back to West Berlin in the early 1980s, when the American-occupied west side of the wall was filled with graffiti and the east face of the wall was orderly and gray. In East Berlin, the Stasi police kept graffiti under wraps, and graffiti writers in the East risked imprisonment or worse if they were caught red-handed with spray cans—assuming they could even obtain spray paint. However, all that changed with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which opened up new blank walls virtually overnight. Artists, musicians, and young people flooded East Berlin, shifting youth culture from West to East. In modern day Germany, graffiti is mostly viewed as street art with minimal enforcement punishing artists. In the United States, public opinion on graffiti is mixed with proponents that believe graffiti is an art form that should be allowed if licenses and permissions are secured, while others hold that graffiti is a public nuisance and should be removed in American cities.

► Sources

- Curry, G. (n.d.). Graffiti Art. *Britannica*. <https://www.britannica.com/art/graffiti-art>.
- Lafrance, A. (2016, March 29). *The Graffiti at Pompeii*. <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2016/03/adrienne-was-here/475719/>.
- Tzortzis, A. (2008, March 2). “Bombing” Berlin, the Graffiti Capital of Europe. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/03/travel/03iht-04graffiti.10654044.html>.

 **TIME:** One to two 45-minute class periods

INSTRUCTIONAL RESOURCES

- German Street Art (**PowerPoint 3.6**)
- Video Worksheet on the History of Graffiti (**Handout 3.6.1**)
- Artful Thinking: Graffiti Gallery Walk Worksheet (**Handout 3.6.2**)
- Street Art in Germany (**Handout 3.6.3**)
- Art at the German Bundestag – Cyrillic Graffiti. *Bundestag*. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/394562/e9b7fac699d80e1d5e2ec78813d15e62/flyer_graffiti-data.pdf.
- Berlin Wall Art. (n.d.). *Berlin Wall Art – The Wall Before the Fall*. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from www.berlinwallart.com.
- Carter, E. (2017, June 27). The Walls of the German Parliament Are Still Covered in Soviet Graffiti. *Atlas Obscura*, www.atlasobscura.com/places/soviet-graffiti-reichstag.
- Dundon, R. (2017, October 27). *This Photographer's Collection of Berlin Wall Graffiti Photos Show the Politics of Paint*. Timeline. <https://timeline.com/berlin-wall-photos-graffiti-bc62b7ccc62>.
- StoryTravelers. (2021, May 1). *Germany's 10 Best Street Art Cities*. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us7_bfK-dfQ. (5:10)
- TED-Ed. (2016, September 8). *Is Graffiti Art? Or Vandalism? – Kelly Wall*. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/4GNoUYZhrT0>. (4:31)



www.goethe.de/top/letsexplore

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY

Ask students to respond to the following: “What are the various forms of art?”

Students should share responses such as painting, sculpture, and photography. Prompt students to share the type of art they are most drawn to and to share how they interacted with the art form. For example, students may share their experience creating a certain type of art, visiting a museum, handling a piece of art at home, or seeing art displayed on a poster or on television.

After students have shared their responses, explain to the class that they will learn about the art form of graffiti and how this art form has influenced culture in the United States and Germany.

SUPPORTING QUESTION 1

What is graffiti, and how was this art form viewed in the United States and Germany in the 1980s?

► Formative Performance Task

Explain to students that graffiti has been around for thousands of years, to convey social and political messages. In the late 1970s and '80s graffiti was deemed a nuisance in large urban centers that had graffiti sprayed on subway cars, bridges, and city walls. Graffiti in New York City during this time period emerged as a way to mark territories and were artful expressions of city youth. The Berlin Wall was constructed in 1961 to separate West Berlin and East Berlin during the Cold War. If students are unfamiliar with the Cold War, the teacher will need to briefly explain the post–World War II standoff that left Germany split into a democratically ruled West Bloc and a Soviet Union Eastern Bloc. Berlin, the capital of Germany was split with a wall and the differences between East and West Germany made the wall the perfect place for people to express their opinions (for more background information on the Berlin Wall see **Inquiry 2.5**).

Students will complete **Handout 3.6.1** as they watch the TED-Ed video (4:31). Pause the video in segments to ensure students have an understanding of the content.

Once the handout is complete, ask students the following question: “Why do you think West Berliners continued to write graffiti on the wall if East Germans could not see it?”

► Resources

- Video Worksheet on the History of Graffiti (**Handout 3.6.1**)
- TED-Ed. (2016, September 8). *Is Graffiti Art? Or Vandalism?* – Kelly Wall. YouTube. <https://youtu.be/4GNoUYZhrT0>. (4:31)

? SUPPORTING QUESTION 2

How was graffiti used to convey thoughts and feelings about the Cold War?

► Formative Performance Task

Students will engage in a “gallery walk” and view graffiti and street art images from Berlin that were created by artists before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Students will analyze the images to determine the meaning of the artwork in **Handout 3.6.2** and provide predictions on what life was like for citizens in Germany during the Cold War. A gallery walk reflection log can be used to assess the learning activity.

Teachers may use the following sites to find images appropriate to display for their students:

- *Berlin Wall Art – The Wall Before the Fall*. www.berlinwallart.com
- *This Photographer’s Collection of Berlin Wall Graffiti Photos Show the Politics of Paint*. <https://timeline.com/berlin-wall-photos-graffiti-bc62b7cccf62>

If needed, explain that the Cold War was a political rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union that developed after World War II. The rivalry left Germany split into a democratically ruled West Bloc and a Soviet Union Eastern Bloc. Berlin, the capital of Germany was split with a wall and this became the center for political expression.

► Resources

- Artful Thinking: Graffiti Gallery Walk Worksheet (**Handout 3.6.2**)
- Berlin Wall Art. (n.d.). *Berlin Wall Art – The Wall Before the Fall*. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from www.berlinwallart.com.
- Dundon, R. (October 27, 2017). *This Photographer’s Collection of Berlin Wall Graffiti Photos Show the Politics of Paint*. Timeline. <https://timeline.com/berlin-wall-photos-graffiti-bc62b7cccf62>.

? SUPPORTING QUESTION 3

What current issues does street art represent in Germany?

► Formative Performance Task

Students will watch a video on Germany’s 10 Best Street Art Cities. The video reflects how many Germans do not reject graffiti, but embrace it as an art form enriching city landscapes and allowing artists to have an important voice.

Divide students into seven groups and assign each group an image of German street art from **PowerPoint 3.6**. Distribute **Handout 3.6.3** and ask the groups to answer the assigned questions. Give students enough time to study their images and have discussions on what current issue their image represents. Groups should be prepared to present their findings to the class.

► Resources

- German Street Art (**PowerPoint 3.6**)
- Street Art in Germany (**Handout 3.6.3**)
- StoryTravelers. (2021, May 1). *Germany’s 10 Best Street Art Cities*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=us7_bfK-dfQ. (5:10)

✓ SUMMATIVE PERFORMANCE TASK

How can art reflect and shape politics and culture?

Construct an argument (e.g., detailed outline, poster, essay) that addresses the compelling question using specific claims and relevant evidence from contemporary sources while acknowledging competing views.

⊕ EXTENSION TASK 1 (OPTIONAL)

Students will use the website below to investigate U.S. cities that have pieces of the Berlin Wall displayed as art. They should create a physical or Google Map that pins the locations in the U.S. that have pieces of the Berlin Wall. Ask students to include captions that will include basic information on each site.

► Resource

- 11 US cities where you can see pieces of the Berlin Wall. (November 8, 2019). *USA Today*. <https://eu.usatoday.com/picture-gallery/travel/experience/2019/11/08/berlin-wall-fell-30-years-ago-here-11-us-cities-have-pieces/4165847002/>.

⊕ EXTENSION TASK 2 (OPTIONAL)

The walls of the Reichstag, the home of Germany's parliament, are still covered with graffiti left by the Red Army when it entered Berlin in 1945. Using the links below, learn about the discussion to keep this graffiti or to remove it. Write a position paper sharing your point of view on keeping the graffiti left by the Red Army in this public building or removing it. Provide justification for your point of view.

► Resources

- Carter, E. (27 June, 2017). "The Walls of the German Parliament Are Still Covered in Soviet Graffiti." *Atlas Obscura*, www.atlasobscura.com/places/soviet-graffiti-reichstag.
- "Art at the German Bundestag – Cyrillic Graffiti." *Bundestag*. Retrieved September 29, 2021, from https://www.bundestag.de/resource/blob/394562/e9b7fac699d80e1d5e2ec78813d15e62/flyer_graffiti-data.pdf.

★ TAKING INFORMED ACTION

Understand: Graffiti is an art form that can be perceived as street art and vandalism.

Assess: Examine the laws around graffiti in your local town or city.

Act: Create a map that displays the locations of graffiti and/or street art galleries in your area and share with others.

CONCEPTS LIST

- Graffiti
- Street art
- East Berlin
- West Berlin
- Political expression
- Protest
- Zero tolerance