

# The Arts: The Nature of Art

## Lesson 1: Opening Debate

**Focus:** *Are street art and graffiti legitimate forms of art?*

<p><b>Objectives</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Examine how people justify whether something qualifies as art.</b></li> <li>● <b>Explore how interpretation of street art varies depending on context and viewer.</b></li> <li>● <b>Recognize the role of perspective in shaping artistic judgments and knowledge claims.</b></li> </ul>
<p><b>Activities</b></p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <b>Introduction (5 mins)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Present the central question: “Should street art and graffiti be considered a legitimate form of art, or are they vandalism?”</li> <li>● Introduce the concepts of <b>justification</b> (What counts as a valid reason for calling something art?), <b>interpretation</b> (How does meaning change based on audience, culture, or setting?), and <b>perspective</b> (Whose view is represented in how we define and value art?) in the context of judging different art forms.</li> <li>● Show a short slideshow of contrasting visual works:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Banksy’s “Girl with Balloon” (famous &amp; protected)</li> <li>○ A colorful community mural</li> <li>○ A graffiti tag on a public building</li> <li>○ A classical gallery painting</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Ask students to consider:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Which of these do you consider art? Why?</li> <li>○ Would your answer change if you were the property owner? A curator? A street artist?</li> <li>○ What factors (context, intention, fame, beauty, legality) influence your view?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> <li>2. <b>Debate Setup (5 mins)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Use the Kialo discussion: “<a href="#">Should street art and graffiti be considered legitimate art, or are they vandalism?</a>”</li> <li>● Students will respond to the thesis “Street art is a legitimate form of art, not just vandalism.”</li> <li>● Give students time to examine the starter claims, based on the points below.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PRO: Street art and graffiti express powerful messages and provoke reflection, fulfilling the core functions of art.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: If done without consent, it may cause harm to communities or property owners, reducing its legitimacy.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Can intention and emotional impact justify a work’s artistic status even when it is unauthorized?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ PRO: Street art and graffiti challenge elitism and reclaim public space as a canvas for marginalized voices.               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: Art should go through sanctioned channels to ensure respect for community standards and public order.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Does access to public space make artistic expression more democratic—or more disruptive?</li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ul> </li> </ol>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ PRO: Renowned street artists have transformed public perception and influenced global art discourse. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: Fame does not make an illegal act more ethical or inherently artistic.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Does recognition by galleries or the art market retroactively legitimize work that was once dismissed?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ CON: Street art and graffiti deface property and violate legal boundaries, prioritizing shock over artistic merit. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: Illegality has historically been part of many disruptive art movements that are now celebrated.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Should legality define artistic legitimacy — or is breaking rules sometimes part of creative expression?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ CON: Random tagging lacks artistic intention or aesthetic value and is often seen as visual noise. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: Not all traditional “high art” has clear beauty or message either—art can be messy, provocative, or cryptic.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Who decides what qualifies as intention or value in art, and whose standards are being used?</li> </ul> </li> <li>○ CON: Legitimate art requires institutional validation, critique, or curation to build knowledge and meaning. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Counterclaim: Institutional gatekeeping can exclude important cultural expressions rooted in lived experience.</li> <li>■ Reasoning Question: Can artistic knowledge emerge outside formal structures, or is institutional recognition necessary.</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p><b>Debate (15–20 mins)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Students present initial arguments in the Kialo discussion, drawing on real-world examples such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Banksy’s “Girl with Balloon” and the artwork’s resale after being shredded, Shepard Fairey’s Obey Giant campaign and Hope poster for Obama, and local graffiti examples that vary in intent, complexity, and community response.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● Encourage discussion by asking: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What makes something “art” rather than vandalism — intention, context, or recognition?</li> <li>○ How do different perspectives (e.g., artist, property owner, city official, art critic) shape our interpretation of street art?</li> <li>○ Can a work be meaningful or valuable if it was created without permission?</li> <li>○ Should public approval or expert validation be necessary to justify artistic status?</li> <li>○ How do the TOK concepts of justification, interpretation, and perspective help us make sense of disagreements over street art?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p><b>Reflection Questions</b></p>	<p>Discuss the following reflection questions in open discussion or exit ticket format:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Did your view of what counts as art shift during today’s discussion?</li> <li>● What was the strongest justification you heard for or against street art?</li> <li>● How did someone else’s perspective or interpretation challenge your assumptions?</li> <li>● Which concept — justification, interpretation, or perspective — helped you most clearly understand the debate?</li> <li>● Optional extension: Ask students to find and photograph a piece of street art or graffiti before next class. Write a short note: What do you think it means? Do you consider it art? Why or why not?</li> </ul>

<b>Resources</b>	Kialo Discussion: <a href="#">Should street art and graffiti be considered legitimate art, or are they vandalism?</a> Lesson Slides
<b>TOK Concepts</b>	<p><b>Justification:</b> What reasons or criteria do people use to justify whether street art is “real” art?</p> <p><b>Interpretation:</b> How does the meaning of a street artwork change depending on who sees it and where it appears?</p> <p><b>Perspective:</b> How do different roles (e.g., artist, critic, official, citizen) affect what people believe counts as art?</p>
<b>Critical Thinking Concepts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <b>Confronting Biases &amp; Assumptions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Challenging Legitimacy Bias:</b> Reflecting on the assumption that only art approved by galleries, experts, or institutions is valid, and questioning who enforces those standards.</li> <li>○ <b>Recognizing Legal Bias:</b> Examining how the legality of street art influences whether it is considered art or crime, and how this shapes public perception.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Exploring Contexts</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Stakeholder Analysis:</b> Considering who benefits or is harmed when street art is praised, removed, commodified, or criminalized—e.g., artists, local communities, property owners, city governments.</li> <li>○ <b>Cultural and Social Influence:</b> Investigating how class, race, geography, or subcultural identity affect how street art is created, judged, and remembered.</li> </ul> </li> <li>● <b>Responsiveness and Flexibility of Thought</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>Adapting Judgments:</b> Being open to rethinking personal definitions of art after engaging with unfamiliar examples, interpretations, or perspectives.</li> <li>○ <b>Comparing Interpretive Frameworks:</b> Weighing different perspectives (e.g., artistic, legal, public, institutional) to build a more balanced understanding of what counts as art.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>