

## Painting peace

1 What do you think about graffiti? Do you agree with either of these statements?

2a Read the article about two street artists. What are they trying to do through their art?

"Graffiti brings art to everyone."

"Graffiti is not art, it's vandalism."

**GRAFFITI** has a negative connotation for many, as it brings to mind rude slogans sprayed on neighbourhood walls. However, there is a growing body of street artists who are producing a new kind of graffiti that is legal and spreads a message.



**e L Seed** is an artist who joins Arabic letters with graffiti to produce a new art form he refers to as 'calligraffiti'. He is Tunisian but was born in France and grew up in Paris, speaking both Arabic and French. A chance meeting with a graffiti artist inspired him to paint in Arabic. His calligraphy is very much his own; it doesn't follow the classical style as he never learnt to write calligraphy formally, and he enjoys the freedom his own style offers him. He used social media to show photos of his work online. This led to commissions on buildings around the world containing quotes from famous people. On a wall in London is a quote by English philosopher John Locke, "It is one thing

to show a man that he is in error and another to put him in possession of the truth"; the verse "You forgot how to love your people, to love your country, country of the poor, country of the black" from the poet Gabriela Torres Barbosa on a roof in a Brazilian favela; and Nelson Mandela's words "It always seems impossible until it's done" on a wall in Cape Town, South Africa. These are hard-hitting messages that contain hope and peace. Although people can't always make out what he's written, they still find his work eye-catching, and it's the beauty of his calligraphy which makes his art popular with people of different cultures. However, once they know the meaning of the words they usually look again and take a minute to ponder the message, which can only be a good thing.

**S hamsia Hassani** was born in Iran but came from an Afghanistan family. She started doing graffiti after attending a workshop in 2010 and became hooked. She feels it is the perfect art form for Afghanistan as it is freely available to both artists and viewers, especially as a lot of people are unable to visit art galleries or museums as they are scarce in Afghanistan. It can also spread a message without words, which is key in a country with low literacy rates. On a practical note, there are lots of blank walls in the cities.

She also wants to point out that Afghanistan women have changed and they are stronger. In her graffiti series entitled 'Secret', she has outlined female figures in burqas playing guitars. The instrument represents her ability to express herself and she has used red because it is a colour that is traditionally used to highlight important things in Afghanistan. She has also painted in LA where she did a series called 'Birds of No Nation'. Hassani believes that "art is a kind of friendly way to fight with every kind of problem." She hopes that she can get through to women; that they will see her pictures and think "she is a woman and I am a woman, I can do things too."



These are just two examples from a host of successful street artists who have joined the friendly fight against problems. The good news is the movement is growing in strength and success. Next time you see some street art, stop and take a moment to think if there is an important message the artist is trying to convey.

**2b Read the article again and write eL Seed or Hassani.**

- 1 The artist believes art is a good way to face up to problems. ....
- 2 The artist wants to show how people have grown stronger due to the problems they've faced. ....
- 3 The artist paints specially designed messages of hope and peace. ....
- 4 The artist hopes that their work will give others the confidence to believe in themselves. ....
- 5 The artist isn't concerned about following the academically correct style. ....
- 6 Audiences don't always understand the artist's message at first. ....

**2c Read the article again and choose the best alternative to complete the sentences.**

- 1 eL Seed paints Arabic calligraphy on buildings
  - a and he follows the classical style because this is what he was taught.
  - b but he uses his own style of writing because it allows him more freedom.
- 2 eL Seed's choice of language for his art
  - a was clear from the start, he knew he wanted to paint in Arabic.
  - b wasn't planned, it just happened by chance.
- 3 People appreciate his work because
  - a the designs are vibrant and appeal to everyone even if they don't understand the words.
  - b the art is colourful and the messages are very clear, strong and full of hope.
- 4 Hassani believes street art is
  - a well suited to Afghanistan because there aren't any art galleries or museums there.
  - b a good way for people to see art because they can't visit the galleries or museums.
- 5 Hassani wants her work to show
  - a that Afghanistan women are happy with their way of life.
  - b that Afghanistan women have undergone a transformation and grown tougher.
- 6 Both artists believe that street art
  - a is a good way to stand up to problems of racism and intolerance.
  - b is a good way for them to show their work to a wide audience.

**Gateway to culture**

**3a Work with a partner and discuss the questions.**

- 1 Are there any street artists in your town? If so, what's their work like?
- 2 Do you think street art can spread messages? Why/Why not?
- 3 Do you think art can be displayed anywhere or should it always be in a specific place?

**PROJECT**

**3b You are going to work on a presentation about street art in two different countries. Read the questions and prepare your research.**

- 1 Work in groups and brainstorm different street artists and countries.
- 2 Choose two street artists from different countries and find out about their work. Make sure you consider the following:
  - Where do they display their artwork?
  - What type of artwork do they produce? Does it reflect their culture?
  - What messages do they want to convey?
  - Are they successful in their own country? Abroad? Why/Why not?

**3c In your groups, give a presentation to the class. Describe the work of both artists and compare and contrast them. Highlight how their work reflects their culture. Your presentation should be around three minutes long.**