

Say the word “graffiti,” and most people think of young men tagging their territory in the middle of the night, and of thousands of dollars spent to cover the tags over. Yet artists from Jean Michel Basquiat to Banksy (of the 2010 movie “Exit Through the Gift Shop”) practiced their craft on the street before their work was exhibited at any major museum. “Street art” might best describe art that is painted in a public space rather than on a piece of canvas. Moreover, a simple written message which appears in a public space (such as a stencil) might not always be considered graffiti.

Here’s a good example: <http://boingboing.net/2010/08/26/snapshot-bike-lane-i.html>

Really, this is a piece of street art which delivers a message which nearly anyone in any community in the United States would be willing to rally around. In this Media Lit Moment, your students will be challenged to re-think their conceptions of art which appears in public spaces, and they’ll also have the opportunity to work on the initial stages of a piece of street art which could grace the wall of their own school.

Ask students to write or illustrate a concept for a piece of street art which delivers a public service message.

AHA!: I can create art in public spaces that makes a positive difference in my community!

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #4 for Producers: Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view in my content?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view

Grade Level: 7-9

Materials: pencil, paper, imagination

Activity: Start a discussion with students about the differences between tagging and street art. As you do so, you may want to share additional examples: A mural with a message in Milwaukee: <http://scaryideas.com/content/9108>

A somewhat more traditional mural in a New York City middle school: http://www.groundswellmural.org/Public_Art_Projects/2008/2008_Nonviolence.html

After you finish this discussion, ask students to write a creative concept for a piece of street art which is also conceived of as a service to the public. This could be as simple as coming up with some creative lettering for a message, or it could involve sketching out a piece of representational art (like a mural). Also, their concepts don't necessarily have to call for the use of permanent materials. Chalk art on a playground with an anti-bullying message could also fit the bill.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy's MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, © 2002-2011, Center for Media Literacy, <http://www.medialit.com>