

LISTENING SCRIPT

Exercise 1.

Hello. I'm here today to talk to you about the history of graffiti and how it's become a global phenomenon. Whilst I'm sure many of you consider graffiti unique to modern-day society, it may surprise you to know that it actually dates back millennia.

OK, so, first I'll begin by telling you a bit about its origins. As I've touched on previously, some of the first examples of wall art appeared in caves in prehistoric times. Later, Romans and Greeks wrote poems and other writing and symbols on the walls of buildings to express emotions or political views, and it can be argued that this is still the same today.

Right, now, moving to modern graffiti. As I said, street artists – as they are sometimes called – still use walls to spread their thoughts and ideas. The act, which is often carried out on our streets illegally, is typically undertaken when the streets are deserted and in darkness. However, there are subtle differences between the messages of the past and present, which we'll consider next.

Of course, there have been significant changes in the materials and tools available to the artist – there weren't, for example, cans of spray paint available in Roman times. As a result, graffiti today must be carefully considered and completed rapidly. Designs and artwork, which can be both detailed and vibrant, are becoming extremely commercial.

These days, we find pieces being sold in galleries worldwide for increasingly large amounts. Indeed, many cities regularly hold street art parties and even festivals, where famous artists are invited to design and paint huge murals.

Moving on to the effects of an increase in world trade, the advent of the internet means messages are spread at the touch of a button. New art, appearing, for example, in the UK, can be seen within seconds anywhere in the world wherever there is either an internet connection or mobile coverage.

Finally, I'd like to talk about the controversy surrounding modern-day graffiti. Is it art or vandalism, and who decides? What one person sees as an ugly, offensive and disrespectful act of vandalism, carried out by an empty-headed criminal who has no thought for others, is a beautiful work of art in the eyes of another, worthy of becoming a tourist attraction or being sold in a gallery.

OK, so, we've covered the main areas I wanted to discuss. Are there any questions?

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Exercise 3.

So, I've talked a bit about the history of graffiti, which I hope has been of interest. But, before we come to the end of the lecture, I'd like to talk about the idea of art and culture.

Through the ages, art and culture have coexisted. Artists, who are adept at expressing creativity and imagination, are 'fed' by the culture by which they are surrounded, both globally and locally. What I mean is, art takes inspiration from what's happening in society at the time. Art, which I use to refer to a diverse range of human activities (auditory, visual and performing), provides us with a historical record. Without this, much of what happened before the introduction of the written word would have been lost. We are aware, for example, that the knowledge gained about what life was like thousands of years ago from the primitive drawings found in caves would simply not have been revealed without art. Of course, art today is more technical and, as you've already heard me discuss, commercial. However, it still manages to tell its stories in a way that can capture our attention and fill us with wonder.

Exercise 4.

I'm here today to talk about the phenomenon that is the selfie. Loved by many and hated by some, the rise of taking and sharing self-portraits on social media appears to be here to stay – at least for now. But why are they so popular? Well, let's start by defining what we mean by 'selfie'. Put simply, it is the taking of one's own photograph, usually at arm's-length, with a handheld mobile device. The basic concept is to capture the moment in real time. Think of it as sharing memories immediately. This takes me to the second point I'd like to make, and that is what we do with selfies. Well, the usual idea is that they are shared with thousands of others, some of whom we may be unfamiliar with, using social media via the internet.

Now, moving to the distortion of reality. Of course, the action or sharing generally occurs after our looks have been digitally enhanced using a photo-editing tool. We've all taken a selfie and made small changes, haven't we? Perhaps our eyes were too small or we wanted to hide a spot. Maybe our teeth needed to be a little whiter. And so, we may present a version of ourselves that is slightly false – the person we would prefer to look like. This sounds perfectly innocent, but there are potential risks, which I'll discuss next.

Firstly, as we compare our selfies with those of others, we may question our self-image – from which, we may see a drop in self-esteem. Secondly, we must ask ourselves why we feel the need to present a slightly unreal version of ourselves to the world. And finally, whilst we stop and pose momentarily, either as our dinner arrives or whilst walking around a museum, we might like to ask ourselves if we are going to miss what is going on in the real world.

But enough of the dangers. Let's end by focusing on the benefits, and there are many. As I mentioned initially, the selfie allows us to record what is happening as it happens, and that really is quite remarkable. Just think, we can keep safe a piece of our own personal history, which we can choose to share with whomever we wish, whenever we want. Whether we get tired of selfies remains to be seen, but they have found their place in our society – not to mention in our dictionaries!

Exercise 5.

So, assuming that selfies, as a cultural phenomenon, are here to stay, let's end by giving some consideration to selfie safety, by which I mean physical rather than mental.

People who have wished to take the ultimate selfie have sometimes found themselves in trouble.

When we think of people facing physical danger, there have been several instances when, in our search for the perfect angle or the right light, the sheer act of taking a self-portrait has become life-threatening – for example, leaning over a cliff edge or walking in the middle of the road. A number of countries have even had to run campaigns, which both highlight these dangers and issue recommendations on how to take selfies in a safe and non-life-threatening manner.

Therefore, whilst the association between self-admiration and selfies is more commonly criticised, it may pay us to focus on examining the physical dangers and introduce guidelines on when and how to take selfies. Then, they can continue to be enjoyed and thrive in our societies.