Graffiti

The first drawings on walls appeared in caves thousands of years ago. Later the Ancient Romans and Greeks wrote their names and protest poems on buildings. Modern graffiti seems to have appeared in Philadelphia in the early 1960s, and by the late sixties it had reached New York. The new art form really took off in the 1970s, when people began writing their names, or 'tags', on buildings all over the city. In the mid-seventies it was sometimes hard to see out of a subway car window, because the trains were completely covered in spray paintings known as 'masterpieces'.

In the early days, the 'taggers' were part of street gangs who were concerned with marking their territory. They worked in groups called 'crews' and called what they did 'writing' – the term 'graffiti' was first used by *The New York Times* and the novelist Norman Mailer. Art galleries in New York began buying graffiti in the early seventies. But when it began to be regarded as an art form, John Lindsay, the then mayor of New York, declared the first war on graffiti. By the 1980s it became much harder to write on subway trains without being caught, and instead many of the more established graffiti artists began using roofs of buildings or canvases.

The debate over whether graffiti is art or vandalism is still going on. Peter Vallone, a New York city councillor, thinks that graffiti done with permission can be art, but if it is on someone else's property, it becomes a crime. 'I have a message for the graffiti vandals out there,' he said recently. 'Your freedom of expression ends where my property begins.' On the other hand, Felix, a member of the Berlin-based group Reclaim Your City, says that artists are reclaiming cities for the public from advertisers, and that graffiti represents freedom and makes cities more vibrant.

For decades graffiti has been a springboard to international fame for a few. Jean-Michel Basquiat began spraying on the street in the 1970s before becoming a respected artist in the '80s. The Frenchman Blek le Rat and the British artist Banksy have achieved international fame by producing complex works with stencils, often making political or humorous points. Works by Banksy have been sold for over £100,000. Graffiti is now sometimes big business.

Answer the following questions:

1. The main idea of the text is _____ .

a. graffiti can be a good business

b. the history of graffiti

c. trains covered with paintings

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2. The seventies was an important decade in the history of graffiti because_____.

a. that was when modern graffiti first appeared

b. that was when modern graffiti first became popular

c. that was when graffiti first reached New York

3. According to the text, a 'masterpiece' in graffiti is_____.

a. a high-quality piece of graffiti in an art gallery

b. a work of graffiti showing the artist's name

c. a full piece of graffiti, like those seen on subway trains

4. The main motivation for the first taggers was _____.

a. Showing which streets belonged to them

b. beautify streets with graffiti

c. showing how good artists they were

5. New York city councillor Peter Vallone says that _____.

a. graffiti can be good for cities as long as it is tasteful and conveys positive messages.

b. graffiti can be beautiful if it is done by a skilled artist.

c. graffiti is a crime if the artist does not have permission.

6.The author's final point is _____.

A. graffiti has now become mainstream and can make artists a lot of money.

b. graffiti is not a good way to become a respected artist.

c. some of the most popular graffiti artists end up in prison.

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