

Banksy

Banksy is an anonymous street artist, political **activist** and filmmaker from Bristol who is famous for his stencilled graffiti art.



Unknown Identity

Banksy rose to fame in the early 1990s and has managed to conceal his identity for over three decades. His artwork will often appear, without warning, for the public to discover. Despite being famous across the globe, he does not take part in media interviews and has never shown his face. There has been much intense speculation about the mysterious artist's true identity but these theories are yet to be proven.



Voicing His Opinion

Banksy often uses his artwork to convey political messages and has shown that he isn't afraid to take risks to make his voice heard. He is considered to be a political activist because his art can be seen as a way of campaigning for social and political change.

His artwork often refers to issues such as greed, poverty, the government and war.

Artistic Style

Banksy's artwork is commonly sprayed onto the sides of buildings or other surfaces. Stencilled images are Banksy's **signature** style, often accompanied with slogans; it is said that Banksy was influenced by the French graffiti artist, Blek le Rat. He draws an outline onto card or acetate sheets and then cuts the shapes out by hand. Banksy then sprays paint over the stencil to create the graffiti.



Glossary

activist: A person who works hard to try and bring about change.

commercial: To make money or profit from.

signature: Something (such as a style, or logo) that identifies someone.

Photo by JoelnSouthernCA (@flickr.com) is licensed under CC BY 3.0.

The artist has commented previously that he uses stencils because they are quicker which means he is less likely to be caught.

Vandalism or Art?

Graffiti is writing or drawings scribbled, scratched or sprayed secretly on a wall or other surface in a public place. It is generally considered to be vandalism and is against the law.

Banksy's artwork is highly valuable and, once discovered, is often protected and preserved for others to see. However, there is a debate about whether this is fair when other graffiti artists are prosecuted for doing the same thing.

Some people think Banksy's popularity will mean that others may imitate him and start painting in areas around cities and towns where they are not permitted.



Banksy's Work

Banksy has influenced many other artists and there have been many attempts to sell items containing images of his work. However, Banksy encourages people not to buy his artwork and doesn't like copies or photographs of them being used for **commercial** purposes.

In 2018, a piece of Banksy's artwork entitled 'Girl With Balloon' went up for auction in London. It sold for over £1m but, moments after the hammer fell, the canvas painting suddenly began to shred itself. The artist had concealed a shredder within the frame. The partially-shredded artwork was then retitled as 'Love is in the Bin' and is said to be more valuable than the original piece.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a piece of Banksy's artwork entitled 'Game Changer' was left in the foyer of a hospital in Southampton. It showed a young boy playing with a superhero nurse doll. The painting was a departure from his usual, stencilled graffiti style. 'Game Changer' was sold and raised over £16m for an NHS charity. Banksy left a note with the painting that read: "Thanks for all you're doing. I hope this brightens the place up a bit, even if it's only black and white."

Later that year, Banksy embarked on his 'Great British Spraycation': his work began appearing in various British seaside locations in the south-east, including Lowestoft, Great Yarmouth and Cromer. These included images that showed an elderly couple dancing above a bus stop and a large seagull eating from a skip.

Photo by Young shanahan (@flickr.com) is licensed under CC BY 3.0.

Questions

1. Graffiti is writing or drawings scribbled, scratched or sprayed secretly on a wall or other surface in a _____ place. Tick one.

- ☐ secret
- ☐ public
- ☐ private
- ☐ popular

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they happened in.

- ☐ 'Game Changer' was left in the foyer of a hospital in Southampton.
- ☐ Banksy rose to fame.
- ☐ Banksy embarked on his 'Great British Spraycation.'
- ☐ 'Girl With Balloon' went up for auction in London.

3. Give **two** locations where Banksy's artwork has been discovered.

- _____
- _____

4. Where is Banksy from?

5. Find and copy a phrase from the text which shows that lots of people have tried to guess Banksy's identity.

6. Explain what the word 'prosecuted' means.

7. Explain why you think that 'Love is in the Bin' is said to be more valuable than the original 'Girl With Balloon' painting.

8. **The painting was a departure from his usual, stencilled graffiti style.**

Discuss why you think Banksy chose to paint, rather than use stencils, when creating 'Game Changer'.

9. Do you think that Banksy's work is vandalism or art? Explain your answer.
