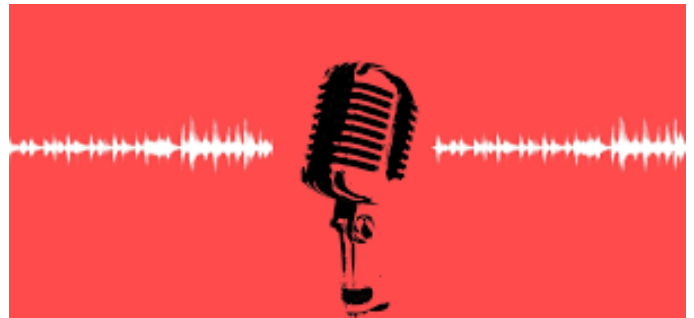


Year 11 classes have been practising various forms of transactional writing in preparation for their GCSE mock exams and final exams in the summer. Here are a couple of powerful examples of speeches from Oliver Llewelyn and Natalya Elden.



## Graffiti – an expression of the self or a criminal offence?

Since when has expressing oneself through the form of art become a punishable offence? Well, according to the Criminal Damage Act, graffiti has been classified as a form of vandalism and therefore a violation of British law since 1971. This means that anyone caught painting on public property can face grotesque fines of up to £10,000 or lengthy prison sentences as long as 10 years in jail. Sure, there are obvious cases where someone is clearly committing vandalism by scribbling or scrawling potentially offensive messages for the public eye to see, but should these crimes belong to the same category as respectable, expressive public artwork? Regardless of your opinion, the law in Britain is determined to do exactly that.

The word ‘graffiti’ is derived from the Italian *graffio*, meaning “a scratch” or inscription. This is often an accurate description for graffiti, as it is common to see phrases or “tags” of certain artists sprayed on brick walls down dingy back alleys. Nevertheless, just like we as people cannot let a single occurrence define us, we cannot allow graffiti to be entirely accounted for by a disgraceful minority. A surprisingly large amount of the time, graffiti can be magnificent artwork completed to a professional standard – the only difference between that and official artwork is that one isn’t produced on a canvas. Dark, dingy streets and industrial estates can be brought back to life by vibrant artwork that is created voluntarily and free of charge, revitalising the cityscape. This may seem like a far-fetched ideal, but it is nothing short of reality for places such as Australia. By no means are graffiti artists allowed to run wild with spray paints on any public property they desire, but the local governments in Australian cities do recognise the crucial role that graffiti plays in aesthetically improving an environment. Due to this, they designate specific areas of the city for graffiti artists to unrestrictedly express themselves. To achieve this, Australian local officials appoint “street art coordinators” to the task of managing which areas are available for graffiti artists to use, informing such artists of these areas by maintaining a close relationship with them, and taking care of illegal graffiti outside of these areas.

Australia’s approach to managing graffiti is as a result of an uncontrollable amount of illegal, shameful graffiti that had spread all over the nation’s cities. Instead of cracking down on these cases with harsher restrictions, the Australian government instead decided to take a gamble in employing the aforementioned method of designated graffiti areas – a gamble which undoubtedly has paid off. The country’s widespread graffiti epidemic has not only decreased dramatically, but these scrawled phrases and “tags” that attempt to claim property as a vandal’s own are gradually being replaced by thoughtful, thought-provoking murals and pieces of art. Moreover, this tactic has had additional unpredicted positive impacts, such as these designated public graffiti spaces becoming well known and

eventually developing into areas of tourist attraction. Since people travelling through Australia often detour to visit these now famous sights, the graffiti helps to bring capital into the area, funding local businesses like cafes and therefore further improving the city.

Furthermore, graffiti can benefit a city in a much more general sense, as having respectable artwork covering walls that never would have stood out beforehand generates a passion for art in the people that regularly view it. The vibrant colours of street art starkly contrast the dirty greys of the inner-city, the bright tones rubbing off onto the morale of passers-by. Much alike this, graffiti can also induce a sense of community within the local population since competition between artists is generated as they battle to produce the most and aesthetically pleasing and influential artwork. As a result of this, the quality of street art around the city drastically improves, especially with the presence of designated graffiti areas allowing higher profile artists to create their own street art without the risk of violating the law. Just like dominos, the benefits of graffiti lead to more benefits which lead to more benefits in a chain reaction. Banksy is technically violating the law by creating artwork on property without the owner's permission, but no one sees an issue with this as their street art is given value by its quality, its portrayal of morals and Banksy's status. In the same way, the more leniency on the laws concerning graffiti, the more Banksy-esque artists make themselves known.

Obviously, street artists should not be permitted to decorate anywhere they please – some regulations must stay in place to control this. That being said, I believe that Britain can learn a lot from the way Australia has tackled its graffiti issue by considering the situation from the artists' perspective, and allowing legal street art to battle its vandal cousin. So I ask you again, how can we allow the expressing oneself through the form of commendable art remain a punishable offence? A wall on a high-street is only worth as much as the value of the bricks and mortar that it was constructed from, but once a respectable artist has embellished it, it becomes a priceless canvas.

Thank you all for listening, and have a wonderful, contemplative evening.

**By Oliver Llewelyn**

