



## Tag, You're It!

Learn about urban art, artists, and social responsibility while creating a graffiti-style "tag" **(art + social studies)**

Graffiti has existed since ancient times, and so has the controversy surrounding it — is it vandalism or is it art? Often, the only difference is a matter of gaining permission from the property owner. "Street artists," or "urban artists" are terms that are often used to differentiate those whose intentions are to create artwork from those who are intentionally being destructive. Whatever the intentions may be, the legality of creating it is the first and most important question to be raised.

Today, moreso than ever before, graffiti-style street art is being recognized around the world as a true art form. The artists who create it publish books, videos, and films and sell prints and photographs of their work. Many prefer to remain anonymous, to be recognized only for their work. The notorious street artist Banksy has created art all over the world, been nominated for an academy award, and been shown in major galleries ... all while remaining mysteriously unknown.

One of the first pieces artists in this genre will create is his or her own personalized signature, also known as

their "tag." This is the most common form of graffiti. A good tag will showcase an artist's talent and skill.

This project can provide an opening for a discussion about an artist's responsibility when creating "public art" versus vandalizing public property. The discussion can be expanded by inviting participation by local authorities as well as urban artists.

Students are invited to design a signature using lettering of their own design, then express themselves collectively on a temporary wall installation. Vibrant colors "sprayed" onto paper designs give the look of an aerosol spray painting without the danger or mess.

### GRADES 3-12

Note: Instructions and materials are based upon a class size of 24 students. Adjust as needed.

### Materials (required)

Blick® Liquid Watercolor, assorted colors including glitter, metallic, and fluorescent colors (00369-); share at least three colors across class

Holbein® Watercolor Atomizer Bottle, 2 oz (02912-1003); share 12 across class

Hygloss™ Bright Tag Paper, package of 48 sheets, 11" x 17" (13103-1009); need one sheet per student

Sharpie® Neon Markers, assorted colors (19916-);

Sharpie® Fine Point Markers, Black, 5-pack (21316-2005)

Pacon® 2-Ply Tag Board, package of 100 12" x 18" sheets (13111-1007); need one per student

### Optional Materials

Pacon® Fadeless Design Roll, Tu-tone Brick, 48" x 50 ft (12743-2015)



## Preparation

1. Pour liquid watercolor into small spray bottles and test spray. A small amount of water may be added if the spray is clogging or too coarse. Glitter watercolor will not work in a spray bottle — it must be brushed onto the paper.

## Process

1. For the first part of the lesson, students look at examples and create a sketch for their tag. Names, nicknames, carefully chosen words, or phrases can be selected.

Graffiti lettering styles are widely varied. Beginning artists may imitate an existing style, but most expand upon and adapt lettering to their own personal expression.

**Bubble letters** are often the first style an artist begins with — overlapping letters that are often fat and rounded.

**Block letters** are basically the same, without the rounded appearance. Both are often rendered with shadows to make them look 3-dimensional.

**Wildstyle lettering** is intricate and complex, usually with interlocking letters and designs that are difficult for the average viewer to read.

**"Fat Cap"** is quick, spontaneous writing usually done with a broad spray can and used for quick tags.

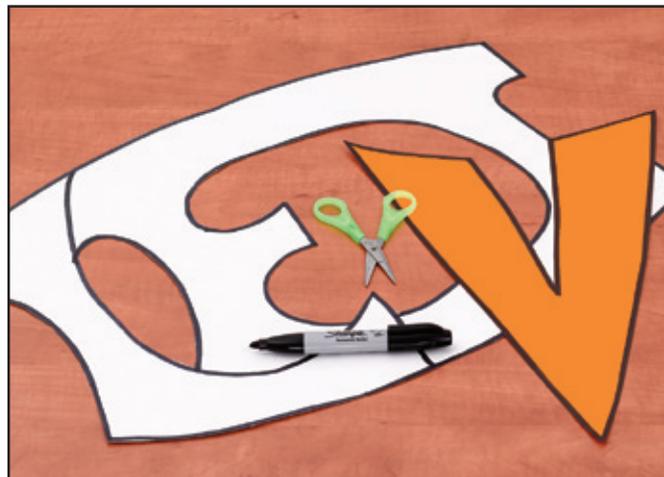
**"Calligraffiti"** is a very artistic style that adapts traditional calligraphy lettering and is usually done with a fine spray.

Because graffiti lettering has become so mainstream, digital fonts are widely available for planning graffiti pieces on a computer before they are actually created.

2. Serious graffiti artists will keep a **"Blackbook,"** basically a sketchbook containing ideas for art they might create on a wall someday. Sometimes blackbooks are exchanged as a means for groups to share ideas.

Students can create their own blackbook of ideas, then trade them or pass them around.

3. Once a design is decided upon, render it in permanent marker on tagboard using the full area of the sheet. Cut it out and keep scraps.
4. Place the tag on newspaper or cardboard to catch overspray. Apply liquid watercolors to the design using a mister bottle. Create shading, gradations, or just random spots of color. Allow to dry flat.
5. Design one or two more layers to place beneath the original tag. These can be outlines, shadows, and further extensions. Use brightly colored paper, neon markers, or paint — or more spray paint. Glue the tag and layers together.
6. Display graffiti tags on a wall. For added impact, create a brick wall using pre-printed Fadeless Design paper roll.



*Step 1: Design a "tag" signature in permanent marker and cut it out.*



*Step 2: Spray liquid watercolor onto the tag to create shading and color.*



*Step 3: Design multiple layers to be placed beneath the tag.*



## National Core Arts Standards - Visual Arts

### **Creating**

#### **Anchor Standard 1:**

Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work.

#### **Anchor Standard 2:**

Organize and develop artistic ideas and work.

#### **Anchor Standard 2:**

Refine and complete artistic work.

### **Presenting**

#### **Anchor Standard 5:**

Develop and refine artistic techniques and work for presentation.

#### **Anchor Standard 6:**

Convey meaning through the presentation of artistic work.

### **Responding**

#### **Anchor Standard 7:**

Perceive and analyze artistic work.

#### **Anchor Standard 9:**

Apply criteria to evaluate artistic work.

### **Connecting**

#### **Anchor Standard 11:**

Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

## National Standards for Visual Arts Education

**Content Standard #1** — Understanding and applying media, techniques, and processes.

**K-4** Students describe how different materials, techniques, and processes cause different responses.

**5-8** Students intentionally take advantage of the qualities and characteristics of art media, techniques, and processes to enhance communication of their experiences and ideas.

**9-12** Students conceive and create works of visual art that demonstrate an understanding of how the communication of their ideas relates to the media, techniques, and processes they use.

**Content Standard #2** — Using knowledge of structures and functions.

**K-4** Students know the differences among visual characteristics and purposes of art in order to convey ideas.

**5-8** Students employ organizational structures and analyze what makes them effective or not effective in the communication of ideas.

**9-12** Students demonstrate the ability to form and defend judgments about the characteristics and structures to accomplish commercial, personal, communal, or other purposes of art.