

Graffiti

WORKSHEET A

1. This page has been attacked by vandals who have damaged the final words in some lines. Read the story and see how many words you can 'repair'.

The very mention of the word graffiti today conjures up images of New York street kids decked out in hip-hop clothing, clutching a spray can. But this style only emerged as it was in the 1970s, while graffiti goes back much further. The name derives from the Greek word *graphein*, which means to scratch or write. This evolved into the Latin noun *graffito*, meaning a drawing, scribbling or piece of writing on a flat surface. Graffiti is the plural form of *graffito*.

The first recorded evidence of graffiti was found in Egypt near the Saqqarah Pyramid. The scribed hieroglyphics, probably made by an Egyptian tourist around 3,500 years ago, read 'I am very impressed by Pharaoh Djoser's pyramid'.

Since then every generation has wanted to leave its mark on the walls of public buildings. The Greeks and Romans did and even the Vikings left their runes (mystical Norse alphabet) on walls stretching from England to Constantinople.

However, although graffiti itself dates back 3,500 years, the research into it started much more recently. In Antonio Bosio's *Subterranean Rome* (1632), he describes the 'non-official inscriptions' he discovered in the catacombs of Rome. He even left his own little *graffito*, his signature, on the wall of the Priscilla catacomb.

In 1731, a book published in London and called *The Merry Thought* brought us the first record of graffiti on toilet walls. Naturally enough, the author of such a taboo document remained anonymous, preferring the pseudonym Hurlo-Trumbo.

During the French Revolution and in the following years, there was a marked growth in political graffiti. Between 1820 and 1830, the name of Josef Kyselak became a familiar sight on walls all over the Austrian Empire, his most popular *graffito* being 'Kyselak war hier!' (Kyselak was here).

In 1856, archaeologist Raphael Garucchi was probably the first to use the word graffiti in the sense we now use it. During his excavation of Pompeii, he divided the inscriptions he found into two categories; official inscriptions and inscriptions (graffiti) made by common people. During World War II, the slogan 'Kilroy was here' started appearing in countries throughout Europe and the Pacific. The slogan was thought to have been written by one American soldier but it would have been impossible for him to have been to all the countries in which it appeared in such a short time. Hitler set up a detachment to seek out the elusive Kilroy, believing him to be a dangerous spy. Stalin also found himself in a toilet which had been previously visited, and signed, by him.

Today, the oldest art form continues to thrive in public conveniences all over the world.

2. Here are some examples of graffiti found on the walls of public conveniences. Match the first part of each piece of graffiti with its ending. Always look for the element that links the two parts (e.g. *indecisive* and *not so sure*).

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| 1. I used to be indecisive | a) - start doing things on purpose |
| 2. Reincarnation | b) is the only disease I haven't got |
| 3. Prevent accidents | c) but now I'm not so sure |
| 4. I used to be arrogant | d) is making a comeback |
| 5. Hypochondria | e) even when you don't mean it |
| 6. Nostalgia | f) but now I'm perfect |
| 7. Insanity is hereditary | g) is a thing of the past |
| 8. Please make sure your brain is engaged | h) - you get it from your children |
| 9. Just as I was getting used to yesterday, | i) Or get married and do both! |
| 10. Always be sincere | j) Snore and you sleep alone! |
| 11. Make love, not war. | k) before you put your mouth into gear |
| 12. If we learn from our mistakes | l) what you can avoid altogether |
| 13. Never put off to tomorrow | m) along came today |
| 14. Laugh and the world laughs with you. | n) then I am getting a great education |