



Developed with Nicole Elizabeth Roth, M.A., K-12 Art Educator, Somerville, NJ

Volume 96 | Gr. 8+

**Time: 15 Days**  
(45 min. class periods)

# Tag it

## Graffiti art inspired self-portraits



### 1.1.12.D.1

Distinguish innovative applications of the elements of art and principles of design in visual works from diverse cultural perspectives and identify specific cross-cultural themes.

### 1.2.12.A.1

Determine how dance, music, theater, and visual art have influenced world cultures throughout history.

### 1.2.12.A.2

Justify the impact of innovations in the arts on societal norms and habits of mind in various historical eras.

### 1.3.12.D.4

Analyze the syntax and compositional and stylistic principles of two- and three-dimensional artworks in multiple art media and interpret themes and symbols suggested by the artworks.

### 1.3.12.D.5

Identify the styles and artistic processes used in the creation of culturally and historically diverse two- and three-dimensional artworks, and emulate those styles by creating an original body of artwork.

### 1.4.12.A.3

Develop informed personal responses to an assortment of artworks across the four arts disciplines using historical significance, craftsmanship, cultural context, and originality as criteria for assigning value to the works.

### 1.4.12.A.4

Evaluate how exposure to various cultures influences individual, emotional, intellectual, and kinesthetic responses to artwork.

## Overview

During a three-week unit of study on graffiti art, students will learn about the history and cultural context of graffiti while creating their own graffiti art-inspired self-portraits. Students will start by creating a high-contrast photograph or “selfie” of themselves. The image will then be translated into a stencil and used to create a graffiti art-inspired self-portrait.

## Objectives

*Students will be able to...*

- Use art materials such as cutting knives and spray paint in a safe and responsible manner
- Create or design imagery that is historically relevant or personally meaningful to them
- Understand the historical background and cultural context surrounding graffiti art as well as the past and present political concerns about the art form
- Create a successful graffiti art-inspired self-portrait that utilizes the elements, techniques, and principles of art and design
- Understand the materials and processes associated with graffiti art

## Day 1

1. Show past examples of graffiti art-inspired projects and give a verbal step-by-step explanation of what students will do to create their own.
2. Show students a PowerPoint® presentation that pairs imagery to the seven steps listed below:
3. Step 1: Create a high-contrast self-portrait.
4. Step 2: Layer your self-portrait behind a sheet of tracing paper. Carefully trace your portrait, making sure to create bridges.
5. Step 3: Select two colored pencils. Use one colored pencil to color in the positive space and the other to color in the negative space.
6. Step 4: Using graphite paper, retrace and transfer your self-portrait onto your stencil paper.
7. Step 5: Using a cutting knife, carefully cut out your stencil.
8. Step 6: Collage, print, or paint your background.
9. Step 7: Carefully layer your stencil onto your finished background and spray away!



## Day 2

1. Provide a space for students to take selfies. The light source in this space should be able to be controlled. A windowless supply closet works well for this. The idea is for the area to be dark and the light source to be provided by a smartphone.
2. Demonstrate how to use a flashlight on one smartphone to cast a shadow in a downward direction while using another smartphone to take a high-contrast selfie (self-portrait). Students should then take their own selfies.
3. Students should use their smartphone's editing features to play with the contrast and saturation levels (you might want to demonstrate this first). Certain apps, such as Instagram or BeFunky, also can be used to adjust filters and saturation levels. Selfies should have a high-contrast, black-and-white coloring with little to no gray tones.
4. Students should either print out their self-portraits or email them to you so you can print them out.



## Day 3

1. Give an in-depth demonstration on how to identify the positive and negative space in a self-portrait and how that space will affect the quality of the finished stencil.
2. Students should use one colored pencil to identify the positive space in their self-portrait and another colored pencil for the negative space. This will help them understand which parts they will cut out and which parts they will keep when creating their stencil. Students may need to create bridges in their stencils or rework some of the lines on the portrait to ensure it will create a cohesive piece.
3. Students are now ready to trace their self-portrait onto the stencil paper. They should place the stencil paper on the bottom, a sheet of graphite paper in the center, and the traced and colored-in self-portrait on the top. When they trace the self-portrait, the graphite paper will transfer the imagery onto the stencil paper, leaving students with a smooth, clean line to cut from.



## Day 4

1. Go over cutting knife safety, expectations, and procedures. Be sure to demonstrate how to safely and carefully use the cutting knife to cut out the negative space.
2. Students should place their stencil on a cutting board, then use one hand to hold the stencil and the other hand to carefully cut their lines. Be sure to circulate around the classroom to ensure students are using the cutting knives correctly.

## Days 5-10

1. Demonstrate how to mix liquid watercolors, water, and a small amount of Elmer's® glue to create a colored wash, then tell students that they will use their colored wash to "sandwich" torn newspaper pieces.
2. Students should apply a smooth, even layer to the canvas board background, place the newspaper, then finish the sandwich with a final layer of colored wash. Newspaper pieces should be the size of a quarter or smaller. NOTE: Cardboard can be used instead of canvas board.





## Day 10

**NOTE: You will need to be able to go outdoors for this part of the activity, as students will be applying spray paint.**

1. Briefly explain the hazards associated with breathing in spray paint, as well as reminding students that spray paint does not wash out of clothing. It might be a good idea to tell students the day before to wear older clothes just in case. Make sure students realize that spray paint mist gets everywhere and that additional open spaces will need to be covered with scrap paper.
2. Demonstrate the spray paint procedure to the students. If demonstrating indoors, be sure to wear a protective mask/respirator.
3. Once students are outside, their stencils are secured, and open spaces are covered, they may begin to apply spray paint. Students should hold the can about 6" to 8" above their stencil and gently move the can back and forth while spraying the paint.
4. As students are spraying, make sure they are not spraying an excess of paint in one area or spraying paint on an angle, as the latter method will flood under the stencil. For a smooth, crisp image, students must pay attention to detail and technique so they do not overspray the stencil.

## Days 11–15

1. This time serves as open studio time for students to continue working. This is a great time to work one-on-one with struggling students. Students who finish early may choose to make an additional piece to create a series. The stencils are usually good for a few sprays, allowing students to create a collection of backgrounds while using the same stencil.
2. Students may also choose to incorporate an inspirational or personally meaningful quote on their piece. If they choose to do this, they can use Photoshop® or Microsoft® Word to play with the font style and size. They should then print, cut out, and collage their quote onto their finished work. Alternatively, they can hunt down each letter in a magazine to create their own patchwork-style collaged quote.

## Closure

1. Display the artwork so it is ready when students come to class.
2. Hand out the critique worksheet to students (online lesson plan download), then review the main themes of critiquing artwork (describing, analyzing, interpreting, and judging/evaluating) while going over the worksheet and your expectations. Make sure students understand that they can't just say that they like or don't like someone's piece; they need to explain what works or doesn't work, or how the artist could improve on the piece.
3. Give students 10-15 minutes to begin working on their worksheets, then go down the line of paintings and conduct an oral critique on each painting. Open the critique by saying a few words about the piece, then open the floor for other students to comment. Each critique should take about 3-6 minutes. When the oral critique is complete, the artist of the piece can choose to stand up and talk about their work. This is not mandatory, however, and should be left up to the student whether or not they wish to speak.
4. Students may use any leftover class time to complete the worksheet. They may either hand it in at the end of the period or at the beginning of the next class period.

## Modifications

1. Students that have difficulty understanding what qualifies as a high-contrast self-portrait and how to identify the positive and negative space within one may create a stencil of a silhouette. This makes identifying the positive and negative space much easier and gives these students an opportunity to play with the stencil, the cut-out piece, or both.
2. Students that need help with completing the worksheet may come in during resource time, lunchtime, or before/after school.

## Evaluation or assessment

Students will be evaluated on their finished work of art, ability to participate appropriately during in-class critique, and the written responses given on their critique worksheet. Additionally, students are assessed on their ability to treat other students and the art materials with respect.

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Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

**Critique Worksheet**

**What is a critique?** A critique is an oral or written discussion about a work of art. The goal of a critique is to describe, analyze, interpret, and judge or evaluate a work of art.

**Activity:** For each section, select a different work of art. Carefully analyze and interpret this work of art. Once you have developed an understanding, describe and evaluate the work while answering the questions below.

**Description** – Select a work of art and describe it using descriptive words, for example: the elements of art (shape, form, value, line, color, space, texture) or the principles of design (balance, emphasis, movement, pattern, repetition, proportion, rhythm, variety, unity).

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**Analysis** – Select a work of art and analyze it by identifying themes that exist throughout the work. You can analyze how it was planned or constructed, the colors used to create, ideas about color theory, or the relationships that exist between the colors (complementing and contrasting colors).

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**Interpretation** – Select a work of art and describe how it makes you feel. Use expressive language to describe its qualities and your emotional reactions. Does this work remind you of an event in your life or something you've learned about in another class?

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**Judgement or evaluation** – Select a work of art and describe what you feel to be successful about the work. If you do not like the work or something about the work, give the artist a suggestion on something they could do differently. In addition to your likes or dislikes, you can discuss originality of the work and how it compares to other works of art or design.

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## Materials list

- Canson® Tracing Paper Pads, 50 sheets, 9" x 12", 25 lb. (9704157)
- Sally's Artists' Graphite Paper, box of 12, 18" x 24" (9731892)
- Ticonderoga® Sharpened No. 2 Pencils, pkg. of 30 (9730407)
- Lyra® Kneaded Erasers, box of 20 (9740673)
- Scotch® Blue™ Painter's Multi-Surface Masking Tape, 3/4" x 60-yd. roll (9725705)
- Wax-O® Stencil Paper, pkg. of 12 (9724163)
- Nasco Canvas Board, 11" x 14" (9716135)
- Nasco E-Z Hold Knife with Cap [9708350(A)]
- Krylon® Indoor/Outdoor Paint, 12 oz. (9734962)
- Crayola® Colored Pencils, pkg. of 24 (9705759)
- PRANG® Oval Pan Watercolor Set, 16 colors (9708307)
- Elmer's® Glue-All Multipurpose Glue, 16 oz. (9732678)
- Royal Brush® Clear Choice™ Tray of 72 Brushes (9727722)
- Eco-Friendly Paper Palettes, pkg. of 10 (9737132)
- Critique worksheet (included with this download)
- Past examples of other projects
- Smartphones, computers, and printers



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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