

A Brief History: Teaching Graffiti and Street Art Through A Lens of Geography

You can organize your Graffiti and Street Art curriculum chronologically and have students examine the evolution of styles and techniques through a geographical lens. Here are some important city hubs for the development of American Graffiti.

Los Angeles:

- Writing in Los Angeles developed far before Philadelphia or New York, and had its own unique style.
- Gang territory marking tags were prevalent in L.A. before NY style writing developed here, so people already had a negative connotation with graffiti.
- Chicano gangs used Old English style fonts, others used boxy writing styles.

Philadelphia:

- Writers began popping up 15 years before writers in NY, they developed a very specific style of script writing that was totally unique.
- Writing style was simplified with single color line written tags. No colorful shading or use of over stylized typography.

New York:

- 1971-1975 was largely believed to be the beginning of NY style writing, and the writing piled up in transportation hubs.
- Taki 183 was one of the first, notable writers in NYC.
- NY style writing began as simple single-color line writing, and developed rather quickly into the large, intricately designed, and colorful pieces that influenced many other areas.
- Writers' Corner 188 on Audubon Avenue was a popular hangout spot for writers from many different areas to come together.

New Jersey:

- Due to its proximity to NY, and the connection by public transit, NY style writing naturally developed in New Jersey.

Baltimore:

- Writing in Baltimore developed in the fall of 1979 with Dr. Revolt (a student at MICA who had moved from NY).
- The Loft, a punk venue, was a popular hangout for early writers in Baltimore.
- MOBTOWN crew came together at the Loft.
- The unique writing style that developed here was jagged and scratchy, which resembled the writing style on many punk show flyers and posters.

Boston:

- Hip hop and Graffiti writing was brought to Boston from NY (so the style was influenced by New York writing styles).
- The above-ground train system made painting trains risky, but didn't stop writers.
- Fun fact: Jordan Knight from the boy band New Kids on the Block was a graffiti writer under the name POPEYE.

Washington D.C.:

- The earliest forms of graffiti in D.C appeared during the riots following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.
- Crew culture in D.C. was centralized around "Go-Go" music (a style of funk created by Chick Brown).
- The first DC writers who developed NY style writing were SER and REK.

Miami:

- Graffiti writers began in Miami around 1983.
- The first writers in Miami came from NY, and brought NY style writing with them.
- Penits (half finished, and abandoned buildings) were a hotbed for graffiti writing in Miami, targeting these locations was first started in Miami.

Chicago:

- Graffiti in Chicago, like Los Angeles, began with Gangs marking their territory.
- Gangs in Chicago developed "flipping" - instead of crossing out a rival gang's tag, they'd write it backwards and upside down.