



Classroom Graffiti Walls

The idea of giving kids free rein to write on the walls is a pretty scary one. However, with certain controls in place and a lot of enthusiasm for the activity, the graffiti wall may become the top attraction in your classroom. The idea that their thoughts and comments deserve public attention is appealing to kids—along with the “forbidden” aspect of writing on the walls. As a communication-starter, the graffiti wall is a sure-fire winner: Every day, ideas for writing assignments will simply jump out at you and your students.

Step 1

Make sure you have the go-ahead from your administrators to create the graffiti wall. All you will be asking for is permission to repaint the wall repeatedly during the school year. If this is a problem, you can simply line a wall with butcher paper, but this sorely reduces the impact of the activity.

Step2

Pick up a few gallons of paint and some brushes at a local paint store. Explain what you are doing, and ask to see light-colored latex paint they might have mixed that did not turn out to the customer’s satisfaction. These batches usually sell at a very low cost—and you might even be able to get them donated (along with some brushes).

Step3

Dramatize the introduction of your graffiti wall by casually strolling over and writing on it in full view of your students. Ask, “Who’s next?” Then, before actually handing over a marker, pass out a “Graffiti Greetings” sheet on which you have written—in appropriately random form and varied fonts--your rules about writing on the graffiti wall. Some ideas for those rules include the following: NO use of anyone’s name or specific description; NO to profanity or crude language; YES to quotes from song lyrics, poems and books; YES to ideas about what’s positive or negative in your school and community; and so on. If kids have trouble thinking of things to write, point them to the link in Resources, which features thoughtful contemporary quotes.

Step4

Make sure students know at what point during class they are free to write or draw on the graffiti wall. Allow only three or fewer students at the wall at any one time. Keep a supply of markers on a table or file near the wall. Keep a timer there as well, so students can time others who seem to be hogging the privilege.

Step5

Take selected comments from the wall once a week and type them up as free writing assignment ideas. Discuss both viewpoints that pertain to controversial statements, and ask for interpretations of quotes that appear on the wall.