A Short History of Graffiti
Task #1:

Independently, define the term “graffiti” in your sketchbook

When everyone at your table has finished, share your definitions with each other, and create the best definition as a group

Be ready to share and explain your definition with the class
Definition: (dictionary.com)
Markings, such as initials, slogans, or drawings, written, spray-painted, or sketched on a sidewalk, wall of a building or public restroom, or the like.

Symbolic form of rebellious art done in a public space; bold color and text; done with spray paint/marker; self-expression and individual voice; inspiration; often has a distinctive style (class brainstorm)
Task #2:

Independently, make a list in your sketchbook of who writes graffiti. Is there a certain type of person that fits the stereotype of a “graffiti writer?”

Task #3:

Independently, list in your sketchbook all of the reasons someone might write graffiti.

Be prepared to share your responses with your classmates.
Graffiti Writers: (class brainstorm)

Rebels, people in cities, teens/young adults, misjudged/misunderstood, people who don’t respect property, people who don’t have other ways to express themselves, people with a message to share

Reasons for Writing Graffiti: (class brainstorm)

Wanting to share a message, to give symbolism/meaning/emotion to a place where people live, freedom of expression, a way to inform/educate or bring attention to controversial issues, because you’re bored or want to destroy something, to make people mad, to show off artistic talent
Origins of Graffiti in the United States:

• **When & Where:** New York, late 1970s - early 1980s

• **Who:** Young African American and Latino males
You’re going to listen to a few songs that paint a picture of the conditions in poor urban communities.

As you listen, write down key words, ideas, or images that come to mind.

What are some of the challenges faced by people living in these communities?

How do these people feel about their neighborhoods?
The Message
Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five
1982

Broken glass everywhere
People pissing on the stairs, you know they just don't care
I can't take the smell, can't take the noise
Got no money to move out, I guess I got no choice
Rats in the front room, roaches in the back
Junkies in the alley with a baseball bat
I tried to get away but I couldn't get far
'Cause a man with a tow truck repossessed my car

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gqky4dSGJnE
Fight the Power
Public Enemy
1989

2nd verse:
As the rhythm designed to bounce
What counts is that the rhymes
Designed to fill your mind
Now that you've realized the prides arrived
We got to pump the stuff to make us tough
from the heart
It's a start, a work of art
To revolutionize make a change nothin's strange
People, people we are the same
No we're not the same

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2WHe5fxS3dA
Fight the Power
Public Enemy
1989

Cause we don't know the game
What we need is awareness, we can't get careless
You say what is this?
My beloved lets get down to business
Mental self defensive fitness
(Yo) bum rush the show
You gotta go for what you know
Make everybody see, in order to fight the powers that be
Let’s take a walk through the deepest part of the hood
I wanna know who it was that said it was all good
He must’ve never been to the corner
And spend the half an hour or longer
Where you could smell reality stronger
Where they sell you grease in a box and hope that you die quicker
And if you’re old enough to walk to the store you can buy liquor
Where you can find a dice game at any time of the night

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_My0kV5v_0M
Take a Walk
Masta Ace
2001

And somebody gets shot or stabbed every time there’s a fight
Where cats die in the blue sky and the sunlight
And ya bound to get clowned for not holdin ya gun right
By little kids with great game cause they learned to take aim
At a young age and elude police with a fake name
He’s tellin ‘em “I’m Bobby Jackson from 3-B”
When the fact is he’s really Rashawn from 4-D
Hey this is going out to your hood straight from mine
Let’s take a walk in blue skies and sunshine
Take a moment to reflect on what you’ve heard

Are these kinds of issues still present in our communities?

Have you ever had a personal experience that was related to poverty, race, or social class?

How would you feel if you lived in the kinds of communities you heard described in the previous songs?

What type of “power” is Public Enemy talking about?

FREE WRITE – Anything and everything that comes to mind, get it down in writing or sketching in your sketchbook. Your responses will remain private and I will only check for participation – I won’t read anything if you don’t want me to.
Photo Essays: Gritty New York in the 1970s


New York in the 1970’s – What conditions led to the rise of B-Boy Culture?

• City was nearly bankrupt
• Urban decay (abandoned and boarded-up buildings)
• Crime was rampant, especially in subways
• Population loss
• Times Square and Central Park plagued by prostitution, muggings, and rape
• High rates of homelessness and unemployment
• Corruption in the police force
• High rates of drug use, especially crack and heroin