

# SHOULD IT EVER BE OKAY TO DESTROY A WORK OF ART?

*THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.*

## INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

### **“DEGENERATE ART” EXHIBIT EXPLORES NAZI ASSAULT ON MODERN ART**

PBS NewsHour | June 28, 2014 | Video

4:01 minutes

In the 1930s, the Nazis held an art exhibit of “degenerate art” – art that was so hated by Hitler that he often had it destroyed.

- Hitler hated abstract modern art and instructed Nazi officials to seize examples of it from private collectors, galleries, and museums throughout Europe. While much of this artwork was destroyed, the fate of some pieces is still unknown.
- German art historian Olaf Peters explains that Hitler and the Nazis disliked modern art because it broke away from traditional styles of the time. Artists working in abstract styles sometimes criticized war or other elements of society in their work, while the Nazis preferred work that glorified the party or German history.
- The “degenerate art” exhibit was meant to justify the Holocaust and the “final solution.” Their aim was to convince the public that like the artists destroying traditional art, the Jews were destroying German culture.

### **SHOULD STATUES OF FIGURES WITH COMPLICATED PASTS BE TAKEN DOWN?**

NPR | June 23, 2020 | Audio

5:57 minutes

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 and public demonstrations in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, many statues glorifying Confederate leaders were removed from public display. However, new questions are being raised about other statues of historical figures with complicated histories.

- Sculptures of problematic historical figures have been removed from some public spaces, sometimes by local governments, while others have been forcibly removed by protesters.
- Questions remain as to what to do with sculptures of historical icons, including American leaders, who enslaved people.
- Manisha Sinha, professor of American History at UConn, argues that public monuments to these figures are intended to celebrate their roles in the formation of the United States and not the fact that they enslaved people.
- Sinha distinguishes between the statues of Confederate leaders and Union leaders or former presidents with racist histories, arguing that the former should be removed but the latter should remain standing with added contextualization, saying that “Confederate statues have no redeeming qualities to them, but other statues certainly do.”
- She argues that if sculptures of Union leaders and former leaders begin to be removed, “then it becomes a purely destructive exercise, a way you are simply destroying all monuments and all statues.”

*Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.*

## 'WE JUST GOT BANKSY-ED:' 'GIRL WITH BALLOON' SELLS FOR \$1.4M BEFORE SELF-DESTRUCTING

NPR | October 6, 2018 | Article

493 words

The notoriously mischievous artist known as Banksy shocked the art world when one of his artworks suddenly began to self destruct in front of a crowd of collectors in an auction house.

- In 2018, Banksy's painting *Girl with Balloon* sold at auction for \$1.37 million. Shortly after the sale concluded, the painting began moving within its frame, into a shredder installed at the bottom of the frame, destroying the painting.
- Banksy subsequently posted a photograph of the painting and the caption "Going, going, gone ..." on their Instagram. In another post, Banksy claimed that the act of destruction had been planned all along, revealing in a video the process through which the shredder was installed in the frame.
- Some experts speculate that the price of the artwork might go up as a result of the public display of its partial destruction.

### KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Iconoclasm
- Holocaust
- Degenerate
- Auction

### CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

### DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. [Structured discussions](#) allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the [Code of Conduct](#) with your learners.

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