



National
Qualifications
2025

X824/76/11

English
Reading for Understanding,
Analysis and Evaluation — Text

WEDNESDAY, 7 MAY

9:00 AM – 10:30 AM

Total marks — 30

Read the passages carefully and then attempt ALL questions, which are printed on a separate sheet.



The following two passages discuss the street artist Banksy.

Passage 1

Read the passage below and attempt questions 1 to 8.

In the first passage, Paul Gough writes a profile of the street artist Banksy.

Prankster, activist, painter: Banksy is the world's most famous street artist. For many years, the question of Banksy's identity has been as intriguing to the press and public as the unconventional quality of his work or the price that dealers, celebrities and other wealthy fans are prepared to pay for it. One of his greatest triumphs has been his ability to keep his identity cloaked in
5 mystery. Anonymity is, however, less important than the impact of his art, which is more than likely created with a group of collaborators. At least that is what we think we know. These are the known unknowns.

'The New Yorker' magazine describes how Banksy tries to 'ignore the art world . . . and begs it to notice him at the same time'. Banksy has built up a remarkable reputation for his controversial,
10 wittily political interventions. He has painted peace motifs in areas of international conflict; secretly installed an inflatable figure of a political prisoner in Disneyland; and hung hoax artefacts in the greatest museums in the world.

It was no surprise that he chose an aggressive title for his blockbuster show: 'Banksy versus Bristol Museum'. This encouraged hundreds of thousands to queue patiently to enter, possibly for the
15 first time, the grand pillars and marble halls of Bristol Museum. Visitors were greeted by a burnt-out ice cream van, which acted as an information booth for the show. Banksy's work was secreted throughout the labyrinth of rooms, hidden amongst the fossils and the museum's notable collection of Chinese pottery. Most visitors were delighted and invigorated. Not only had Banksy radically re-mixed the permanent art collection but he had produced a show of surprise and
20 humour. There were walls of ingeniously modified paintings and a menagerie of life-sized animated beasts, including a rabbit applying lipstick and a cheetah transformed into a fur coat. There were classical statues laden with Gucci shopping bags; aquariums full of wriggling fish fingers; a full-size policeman clad in riot-gear gently bobbing on a child's rocking horse.

Over 300,000 people flocked to the six-week long event in Bristol. Most had queued for an
25 average of just under three hours. Popular reviews were ecstatic. Visitors from all over the UK, from Europe and beyond spoke enthusiastically about the humour and the trickery, the sarcastic edge, the colourful attack on established ideas.

Through exhibitions and interventions, Banksy shows contempt for traditional art. Many critics disapprove, one describing his artworks as 'one-dimensional jokes without any poetic feeling.
30 Lacking ambiguity or mystery, everything he creates is unengaging.' Some people also have little time for cocky graffiti artists with their mindless scribble and their uncaring vandalism of 'innocent' property. To many citizens, Banksy's work is far from cosy: it is held to be offensive by some, criminal damage by many. Banksy is also criticised by many street artists and graffitiists. They regard Banksy's position as heavily, and irreversibly, compromised, because he earns
35 considerable sums from the sale of his work. Commercial success has long been regarded as a mark of failure for a graffiti artist. To his former allies, his subversiveness does rather diminish as his prices rise. A common complaint amongst his peer group is that 'Banksy has ruined graffiti'.

His work has also given rise to a flood of imitators saturating the world with anaemic copies. Not only is their work generally shoddy and uninspired, but their behaviour is considered completely
40 shameful in most graffiti circles. These Banksy wannabes are doing nothing more than pirating the work and stylings of another artist. Banksy's own art on walls and buildings — in the UK, the Middle East, the USA and Europe — has been relentlessly vandalised, ripped off and removed. It can then re-appear in auction rooms or in backstreet sales lots, invariably at stratospheric prices. More recently, Banksy's global reputation has been enhanced by his ability to create huge art

45 spectacles. In Bethlehem, he brought together the work of a diverse group of important artists to
revitalise tourism in the troubled town. This exhibition raised a significant sum for charitable
causes. A few years later, Banksy staged his largest-scale extravaganza, 'Dismaland', which
featured over 58 artists from 17 countries. A satire on theme parks, 'Dismaland' attracted some
50 150,000 paying customers, to wander the installations of a 'family theme park unsuitable for
children'.

Notoriously mysterious, darkly humorous, Banksy is now a global phenomenon. He remains an
enigma within the world of art but it is important to remember just what Banksy has achieved. He
has been praised as the standard bearer for a new movement in modern art. He has positioned
himself at the front of a significant population of street graffiti artists. Thanks to him, a
55 movement of hooded rebels spraying and scrawling on downtown surfaces has crashed through
the wall, off the streets and into public consciousness. We should praise Banksy as a creative
individual, who uses art to comment on key social issues. We should praise Banksy for constantly
pushing at the limitations of his own capability to be both disruptive and meaningful.

Passage 2

Read the passage below and attempt question 9. While reading, you may wish to make notes on the main ideas and/or highlight key points in the passage.

In the second passage, Blane Savage writes about the opening of Banksy's solo exhibition 'Cut & Run' in Glasgow in June 2023.

A new solo exhibition by Banksy, the UK's most famous street artist, has opened in Glasgow at the
Gallery of Modern Art. The graffiti artist was drawn to exhibit in Glasgow because of his interest
in the symbolism of 'Conehead', the red traffic cone permanently adorning the head of the Duke
of Wellington statue that stands on a plinth outside the gallery. It is, Banksy says, his 'favourite
5 work of art in the UK'. The red traffic cone has historically been placed on Wellington's head by
revellers to signify a great night out in the city and is now an iconic part of Glasgow's heritage and
marketing. It holds great meaning for Glaswegians in its anti-elitist and anti-establishment
message.

The show, 'Cut & Run', spans the artist's career. Banksy has become a major player in the urban
10 and contemporary art world, generating controversy and publicity through his distinctive and
creative approach. Popular with the public and highly valued by the art world, Banksy's works
convey powerful messages via simple but arresting images. His early unconventional artwork was
seen by some as vandalism, but for many others, Banksy is an important counter-culture voice.

The Bristol-based artist is a humanitarian and peace activist, using his wealth to benefit many
15 charitable causes. His artworks raise awareness of political unfairness and challenge social
injustices, such as refugee crises, homelessness, global warming, and police violence. These are
invariably set within a satirical, witty style that often confronts those in power.

The connection between Banksy and Glasgow runs deep. Both have a history of actively
supporting humanitarian causes. Glasgow was the first anti-apartheid city to support Nelson
20 Mandela with a street near the South African consulate renamed to honour him while he was still
in prison. It also has a proud reputation for welcoming and defending refugees. Glaswegians are
known for their friendliness and irreverent humour which resonates with Banksy's works. The city
has actively resourced artists as part of its cultural policy and has been named the UK's top
cultural and creative city in a landmark report by the European Commission. The Banksy
25 exhibition will undoubtedly boost Glasgow's reputation as a centre of creative dynamism.

The exhibition starts with a re-creation of his studio space, featuring for the first time the stencils
used to create many of his most famous works. It also features 'Banksquiat: Boy and Dog in Stop
and Search', Banksy's homage to Jean-Michel Basquiat, the American street artist. A critique of

the controversial nature of police stop-and-search powers, it sold in May 2023 for an astonishing
30 £7,646,000. The infamous shredding mechanism of Banksy's 'Girl with Balloon' is also showcased
in the exhibition. In 2018, just after it was purchased at auction for £1 million, the canvas was
passed through a secret shredder hidden inside the frame, leaving the bottom half in tatters with
only the solitary red balloon untouched. Three years later this iconic artwork was renamed 'Love
35 In The Bin' and auctioned at Sotheby's for a mind-bending £18,852,000. A more recent work,
featuring a stencil of a young female gymnast performing a handstand, balancing on a war-torn
building, is also on show.

Banksy has been at the forefront of a new art form that started in street art but has matured to
include a strategic use of different kinds of media — graffiti, film, performance, digital and social
40 media — all of which have the capacity to maximise the impact of his message in real time with a
global reach. It feels significant that Banksy has chosen a gritty, post-industrial Scottish city known
for its celebration of the arts for his first show in more than a decade. A shared sense of humour,
humanitarian values and a disregard for the establishment mean Banksy's show will be well-received
in Glasgow.

[END OF TEXT]

[OPEN OUT]

DO NOT WRITE ON THIS PAGE

[BLANK PAGE]

DO NOT WRITE ON THIS PAGE

Acknowledgement of copyright

Passage 1 – Article is adapted from ‘Banksy: What’s the fuss and why does it matter?’ by Paul Gough, published in *Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences: It’s everyone’s business*, Routledge. 2016. ISBN 978-1-138-20555-0.

SQA has made every effort to trace the owners of copyright of this item and seek permissions. We are happy to discuss permission requirements and incorporate any missing acknowledgement. Please contact question.papers@sqa.org.uk.

Passage 2 – Extract is adapted from ‘Why a Banksy exhibition in Glasgow makes perfect sense’ by Blane Savage, taken from *The Conversation*, June 2023, <https://theconversation.com/why-a-banksy-exhibition-in-glasgow-makes-perfect-sense-207379>. Reproduced by permission of The Conversation Trust (UK) Ltd.