

Public Art Argumentative Performance Task (11th Grade)

Issue:

There has been much debate about the role of government-funded public art. Your local city council is holding a meeting to decide if city funds should be used to finance public art in your town.

Before you attend the meeting, you do some initial research on this topic and uncover four sources (two articles, a website and an editorial) that provide information about government-funded public art.

After you have reviewed these sources, you will answer some questions about them. Briefly scan the sources and the three questions that follow. Then, go back and read the sources carefully to gain the information you will need to answer the questions and write an argumentative letter.

In part 2, you will write an argumentative letter on a topic related to the sources.

Directions for beginning:

You will now examine several sources. You can re-examine any of the sources as often as you like.

Research Questions:

After examining the research sources, use the remaining time in Part 1 to answer three questions about them. Your answers to these questions will be scored. Also, your answers will help you think about the research sources you have read and viewed, which should help you write your argumentative letter.



Practice Test, May 2013

Source #1: article

The History of Public Art

Experiencing the world of art can sometimes seem out of reach for the average person viewing such iconic paintings as Leonardo de Vinci's "The Mona Lisa," Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night," or Grant Wood's "American Gothic" requires a visit to the Louvre in Paris, the Museum of Modern Art in New York, and the Art Institute of Chicago, respectively.



American Gothic

Michelangelo's sculpture "The Pieta" is in St. Peter's Basilica in Vatican City; his sculpture of David resides at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. Clearly, for most people, seeing these masterpieces takes some effort, and for many it is a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Does this mean that the enriching beauty of art is meant for only certain people? Fortunately, the answer is no.

Public art is artwork that is displayed in a public or open space and can be viewed by the general population free of charge. Just as the masterpieces found in the world's most famous museums have a long and interesting history, so does the public art that we enjoy on a daily basis.



Statue of Augustus

The ancient Greeks designed beautiful temples and statues to grace their magnificent metropolises, and the ancient Romans built larger-than-life statues to honor the mighty leaders of the empire. These monumental structures helped unite the citizens of the communities in which they stood by providing a concrete focus for national identity and pride.



The Parthenon in Greece

Through the years, countries around the world have used public art to reflect national pride. In France, the Arc de Triomphe monument is a national symbol of French patriotism, and in England the Queen Victoria Memorial honors the queen who ruled England from 1837-1901. Monuments such as these are generally sources of great pride. Unfortunately, sometimes such monuments also have had their difficulties.

In 1832, to commemorate the centennial of George Washington's birth, the United States Congress commissioned a statue by the sculptor Horatio Greenough. Greenough's depiction of Washington was based on an ancient Greek sculpture. The statue, despite its exquisite attention to detail and imitation of life, was immediately scorned by the public for portraying the father of the nation draped in a toga¹, with his bare chest exposed. An embarrassed Congress quickly removed Greenough's statue from its prominent place in the Capitol's rotunda. Today it resides on the second floor of the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History in Washington, DC.



Horatio Greenough's statue of George Washington



Mural in Philadelphia

Today, public art is as varied as the communities in which it is situated. In many urban areas, murals have been used to revitalize inner-city communities. Philadelphia, for example, has so embraced the concept of murals to combat graffiti that the city has been dubbed, "The City of Murals." Artists and community members have painted over 3,000 murals on the sides of buildings in neighborhoods throughout Philadelphia since the program was initiated by city officials in the 1980's. Hailed as a successful public/private venture, the program has also turned lives around by enabling graffiti writers to use and develop their talents for constructive rather than destructive purposes.

¹toga: a loose one-piece outer garment worn in public by male citizens in ancient Rome

Other communities have used public art to raise funds for worthy causes. For example, in North Carolina, artists decorated the famous “winged horses” to commemorate the historic flight of Orville and Wilbur Wright. Many of the horses were auctioned off with the proceeds going to a number of local charities. Others have become tourist attractions.



Winged horse sculpture

Ranging from monumental structures to manipulations of the Earth to temporary installations in well-known places, public art has continued its important role in community identity and enrichment. The role of the artist continues to change as the community identifies its needs and desires for the art that graces its open spaces.

Source #2: page from public art website

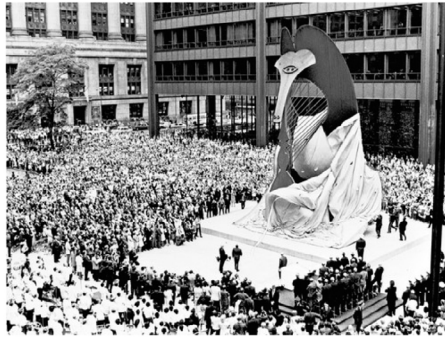
Create For All: A Foundation for the support and growth of public art www.createforall.com

OUR MISSION

Create for All is dedicated to cultivating opportunities, awareness and funding for public art. As a collection of artists, engineers, designers, and social activists, we strive to empower the community and artists by providing space and opportunities for cultural interaction. We are dedicated to the advancement of public art as a platform for creative dialogue and a reflection of the community’s cultural values, history and environment. Public art makes art available to many people who might not typically have the time or money to visit museums or art galleries. Public art can also transform dull or rundown public spaces and inspire the people who live and work there. We believe that art is educational and belongs to all people. We endeavor to produce creative projects that engage citizens, beautify public spaces, and challenge expectations.

Chicago's Picasso Sculpture By Alan G. Artner

Mayor Richard J. Daley (closest to the sculpture) unveils the Picasso "with the belief that what is strange to us today will be familiar tomorrow." The sculpture celebrated art rather than civic achievement.



Source #3:
article from *Chicago Tribune* newspaper,
1967

Just after noon, Mayor Richard J. Daley pulled a cord attached to 1,200 square feet of blue-green fabric, unwrapping a gift "to the people of Chicago" from an artist who had never visited--and had shown no previous interest in--the city. The artist was Pablo Picasso, who at age 85 had dominated Western art for more than half a century.

He had been approached by William E. Hartmann, senior partner of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, one of the architectural firms collaborating on Chicago's new Civic Center; Hartmann wanted a sculpture for the plaza bordered by Washington, Randolph, Dearborn and Clark Streets. The architect visited Picasso at his home in southern France, presenting several gifts (including a Sioux war bonnet and a White Sox blazer) plus a check for \$100,000 from the Chicago Public Building Commission. Picasso responded not with an original design but one from the early 1960s that he modified, combining motifs from as far back as the start of the century. The result was a forty-two-inch maquette, or model, for a sculpture made of Cor-Ten steel, the same material used on the Civic Center building. The American Bridge division of U.S. Steel in Gary, Indiana, translated the maquette into a piece that weighed 162 tons and rose to a height of 50 feet. It was the first monumental outdoor Picasso in North America. Daley said at the unveiling: "We dedicate this celebrated work this morning with the belief that what is strange to us today will be familiar tomorrow."

The process of familiarization brought trouble. Picasso's untitled sculpture proclaimed metamorphosis¹ the chief business of an artist by crossing images of an Afghan dog and a woman. However, the effort at first did not count for much, in part because Chicago's earlier monuments--statues of past leaders--commemorated a different idea: civic achievement. Col. Jack Reilly, the mayor's director of special events, immediately urged removal of the sculpture. Ald.² John J. Hoellen went further, recommending that the City Council "deport" the piece and construct in its place a statue of "Mr. Cub . . . Ernie Banks³."

In 1970, a federal judge ruled that since the full-size sculpture was technically a copy of the maquette, it could not be copyrighted. This opened the way to countless reproductions that bred familiarity, the first step toward love. The name-brand quality of the sculpture inspired other commissions--from Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall, Joan Miro, Claes Oldenburg, Henry Moore⁴--that found easier acceptance among Chicagoans. As much as the Water Tower⁵, the Picasso became a symbol of the city.

¹ metamorphosis: a dramatic transformation of one thing into another

² alderman: member of a city council

³ Mr. Cub.... Ernie Banks: professional baseball player for the Chicago Cubs from 1953 through 1971

⁴ Alexander Calder, Marc Chagall, Joan Miro, Claes Oldenburg, Henry Moore: renowned 20th-century artists

⁵ Water Tower: a castle-like tower built in Chicago in 1869 for pumping water from Lake Michigan; now an art gallery

SOURCE #4: editorial from Finance and Culture magazine

**Art for Art's Sake:
The case against government funding for public art**

As the fiscal year comes to a close, it's well worth our time to take a close look at the way local governments are budgeting tax dollars. With high unemployment and rising rents and food costs across the nation, every one of those dollars matters immensely—and none of them should be wasted on funding for public art.

I'll be the first to admit that, even during difficult economic times, people need the arts to offer commentary, philosophy, and amusement. I am, in fact a great supporter of the arts, and I regularly donate to arts organizations. The arts need money; they just don't need government money.

Cutting government funding for public art frees up tax dollars for indispensable government necessities that protect the safety and well-being of citizens, such as road building and maintenance, healthcare, housing and education. Directing would-be arts funding into other programs is not only beneficial for those areas in need of more crucial government support; it is also good for artists and the art itself.

Art is, by its very nature, expressive and controversial. The best art represents an individual point of view that is critical, imaginative, and eye-opening. This kind of ingenuity requires freedom and independence on the part of the artist. When the government provides funding for public art projects, the artist loses freedom. When using public funds, the artist is constrained by the need to represent the point view of the government and to gratify the general public. There are countless stories of public art pieces being altered, censored, or even destroyed when the public exerted its authority over the work. Naturally, this situation results in a loss of personal freedom for the artist and an abundance of mediocre public artwork.

The financial solution to producing high-quality, provocative art is private funding. If we allow the market to drive the production of art, artists and art-lovers will have a greater influence on the art being created and show to the public. Already, private funding accounts for most art being created in America. In 2008, a record-breaking 858 million public dollars was spent on the arts by local governments in the United States. This sum pales in comparison to the 12.79 billion private dollars donated to the arts in the same year. And the high number of private dollars donated to artists is of course supplemented by the money that collectors spend on buying art in auction houses and galleries. Statistics show us that art can and does flourish without public funding. In fact, for centuries great masterpieces have been created without government money. Masters such as Shakespeare and Leonardo da Vinci had private funders, and their masterpieces continue to influence generations around the world.

In light of this evidence, I offer a strong suggestion for the coming fiscal year: Let's stop the move towards government-funded public art projects and encourage private donors to invest in the creation of high-quality, uncensored art. We don't need public art pieces that incite controversy, upset some of the taxpayers who helped pay for them, and give the government the power of censorship. We need public funding to provide the necessities of health, safety, and education to our nation's citizens. We also need a thriving private art market that allows artists financial independence and freedom of expression.

1. As a mission statement, Source #2 makes some general claims about public art. One of these claims states:

“Through government partnerships, public art can also transform dull or run-down public spaces and inspire the people who live and work there.”

Identify another source that addresses this claim and explain **two** ways in which that source supports the claim.

2. According to what you have learned from your review of the sources, what are some potential challenges artists might face when creating public art pieces that are government-funded? Provide **three** challenges from at least two sources.

3. The sources you reviewed provide conflicting information about the benefits of government funding for public art.

Using information from two different sources, provide **two** pieces of evidence that support the claim that public art should be government-funded.

4. Using information from two different sources, provide **two** pieces of evidence that support the claim that public art should be privately funded.

