



Artwork by Alex Davis, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, High Tech High North County

## Writing on the Walls

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Through this multidisciplinary project, students at HTH North County will explore and address an issue of concern in their community: the prevalence of tagging and graffiti. Students will research the history and lasting influence of gangs in California, conduct an ethnographic study of tagging and graffiti in the city, maintain video blogs as a form of on-going reflection, and create photo essays of their experience. They will study the difference between tagging as vandalism and graffiti as an art form—putting their learning into service by painting over tags that have damaged property and by creating their own graffiti-style art for a gallery show at the Escondido Arts Partnership museum.

### Essential Questions

What is the difference between graffiti and tagging?

How can we change the negative perception about graffiti in society?

### Student Reflection on the Transition from Tagger to Artist

I have broken the law. Vandalism is the destruction or damage of property, and I used the aerosol can as my tool. I knew it was against the law to paint on private property, but this style of art was a way to express myself and a way to relieve the stress of my mind, ignoring everything but the adrenaline rush that came from being afraid of getting caught.

But then there was the canvas. I had never used a canvas before. My canvas had been the empty walls in the streets. Using a canvas and acrylic paint gave me another way to get out of this world and be set free into my own world. I never knew I was an artist until I had my first art teacher in high school. She has helped me turn my life around.

### Teacher Reflection

I'm excited about this project because it's a great integration of Language Arts, Social Studies, Technology and Fine Art. It allows students to get inside the lives of others—by reading *Always Running* by Luis Rodriguez and investigating the history of gangs and graffiti—and to connect those lives to their own through writing and art.

—Shani Higgins

To learn more about this project and others, visit the HTH Digital Commons and Shani Higgins' and Jenny Pieratt's digital portfolios at

<http://www.hightechhigh.org/>  
<http://hthnc.hightechhigh.org/~shiggins/> and <http://hthnc.hightechhigh.org/~jpieratt/>

