

MEMBERSHIP

LOVE IS IN THE BIN



About this activity

The story of the first artwork in history to be created live during an auction

- ▶ **Language level:** B1 / B2
- ▶ **Age of learner:** 14 years to adult
- ▶ **Duration of activity:** 30 minutes approx.
- ▶ **Tasks:** Speaking, critical thinking
- ▶ **Topics:** Banksy, art, auctions, ethics & friendship
- ▶ **Language focus:** Words & phrases related to art & the art industry



For this activity, you will need the following:

- **A video** which is available on YouTube (see below)
- **A Canva slideshow** which contains all texts and media (this is optional)

Note: For all materials and discussion, go to the corresponding page in the Resources section:

<https://membership.lessonstream.com/resources/love-is-in-the-bin/>

The story & the video

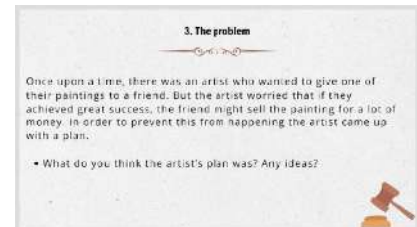
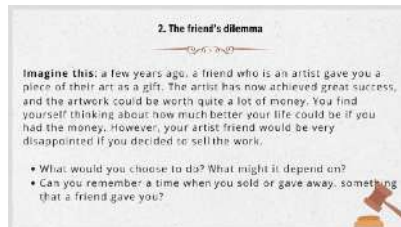
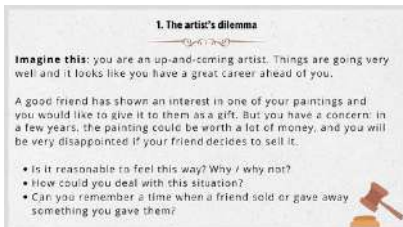
On 5th October 2018, a Banksy artwork went on sale at Sotheby's auction house in London. It was titled "Girl with Balloon" and it was sold to an anonymous buyer for just over £1 million. But moments after the hammer fell, something unexpected happened: the canvas began to slide through a shredder which was cleverly concealed in the bottom of the frame. In a statement, Sotheby's referred to it as "the first artwork in history to have been created live during an auction". The moment was captured on video and can be viewed on YouTube.



Tell the story or use the slides?

This activity makes use of an interactive story which is divided into eight parts. Each part is followed by a discussion.

All eight parts of the story are incorporated into the accompanying slide show, with one story part per slide.



There are different ways to deliver the story parts to students. Here are two possibilities:

For lower level students:

- i. **Show the slide:** Start by displaying the slide for everyone to see.
- ii. **Tell the story:** Read aloud the text on the slide, including the discussion questions.
- iii. **Clarification:** Find out if anyone has any doubts, uncertainties or questions before the discussion.

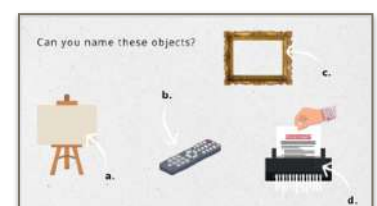
For higher level students:

- i. **Tell the story:** Read aloud each story part, including the discussion questions.
- ii. **Clarification:** Find out if anyone has any doubts, uncertainties or questions.
- iii. **Show the slide:** Just before students start the discussion, display the corresponding slide for everyone to see.

Tip: In some cases, you might decide not to show the slides at all so that students have to focus on listening. In this case, I would read aloud each slide at least twice.

Pre-teaching language

Please note that the accompanying slideshow includes ideas for introducing students to key words and phrases in the story text.



Part one: the artist's dilemma

Find out if anyone in the class has a real piece of art on display in their home (an original and not a print or reproduction). If so, ask them to tell you about it. Where did they get it? Why did they choose it? What's the story behind it?

Now give students the following situation:

Imagine this: you are an up-and-coming artist. Things are going very well and it looks like you have a great career ahead of you.

A good friend has shown an interest in one of your paintings and you would like to give it to them as a gift. But you have a concern: in a few years, the painting could be worth a lot of money, and you will be very disappointed if your friend decides to sell it.

- Is it reasonable to feel this way? Why / why not?
- How would you deal with this situation?
- Can you remember a time when a friend sold or gave away something you gave them?

Tip: Students might want to know how much the painting is worth. If so, tell them that it is impossible to know at this stage.



Part two: the friend's dilemma

Imagine this: a few years ago, an artist friend of yours gave you one of their paintings as a gift. The artist has now achieved great success, and the painting could be worth a lot of money. You find yourself thinking about how much better your life could be if you had the money. However, your artist friend would be very disappointed if you decide to sell the painting.

- What would you choose to do, and why? What might it depend on?
- Can you remember a time when you sold or gave away something that a friend gave you?

Tip: Students' decisions might depend on any of the following:

- How they feel about the painting all these years later.
- Whether or not they are still close to the artist.
- How much they need the money.
- Whether they could sell the painting without the artist finding out (see **note i** below)
- How much they will get if they sell the artwork (see **note ii** below)

Note i: Students might choose to sell the painting secretly to prevent the artist from finding out. However, this would be very difficult. Famous artists typically have extensive networks within the industry and this would increase the likelihood that news of the sale would get back to them, especially if it was sold at an auction.

Note ii: The last factor will probably be the most important one. In this case, ask students to think of a figure: what is the minimum amount of money that they would sell the painting for? In other words, what is the price of a friendship? €100? €1000? €10,000? €100,000? €1 million? €10 million?

Part three: the problem

Once upon a time, there was an artist who wanted to give one of their paintings to a friend. But the artist worried that if they achieved great success, the friend might sell the painting for a lot of money. In order to prevent this from happening the artist came up with a plan.

- What do you think the plan was? Any ideas?

Part four: the plan

The artist installed a hidden shredder at the bottom of the frame. Once activated, the canvas would slide through the shredder and be destroyed. If the friend ever decided to sell the work, the artist could activate the shredder with a remote control.

- What do you think of this idea?
- Can you imagine any way that it might go wrong?

Tip: The words 'shredder' and 'canvas' are key to this part of the story. It is important that students know the words before they get here.

- Elicit 'shredder' with the following question: *Imagine you have some paper documents with personal information that you don't want other people to see. You have to get rid of the documents. How would you destroy them?*
- Elicit 'canvas' with the following question: *What do you call the material that an artist paints on? It's flat and it's stronger than paper.*

Tip: The Banksy story received widespread media coverage and students might recognise it at this stage. This is not a problem. In fact, when students realise that the story is real, it can increase their engagement and interest in it. You can find out what they know about Banksy and what they remember about the story. Then continue as planned.

Part five: the auction

In 2018, the artist discovered that the painting was going to be sold at an auction. The artist attended the auction and sat in the audience.

Soon it was time for the painting to go on sale. There was an intense battle between bidders, some who were in the room and others who were on phones. The artist waited patiently for the final bid, which was just over £1 million.

As soon as the auctioneer hit the hammer, the artist pressed the button on the remote control.

- What happened next? Can you guess? Perhaps you know. Did things go as planned?

Tip: Make sure students are familiar with the words 'auction', 'auctioneer', 'hammer', 'bid' and 'bidder' before this part of the story.

Part six: the outcome

Show students the image of “Girl with Balloon” and ask if they can identify the artist.

(**Answer:** Banksy, one of the most famous living artists in the world, whose identity is a mystery.)



Tip: If students are familiar with Banksy, ask them to write a list of words and phrases that are associated with the artist. Then let students share and explain their answers. The following suggestions came from ChatGPT:

Anonymous	Unknown identity	Mysterious	Bristol, UK
Street artist	Stencil murals	Graffiti	Underground
Satire	Political commentary	Social justice	Dark humour
Public spaces	Controversial	Criminal	Activist
Film maker	Stunts	Anti-establishment	Subversive
Flower thrower	Kissing policemen	Iconic	Palestine

Now show students the video from Sotheby's auction house in London and let them see what happened when “Girl with Balloon” was sold in 2018.



When the auctioneer hit the hammer, an alarm inside the painting started to sound and the canvas began to slide through the shredder and come out of the bottom of the frame.

But when the canvas was halfway through the shredder, it stopped working. Half of the canvas was left inside the frame, and the shredded part was left hanging out the bottom.

- Do you know what happened next in this story?

Part seven: what happened next?

Banksy released a video in which he said, “A few years ago, I secretly built a shredder into a painting in case it was ever put up for auction.” He also said that the canvas should have been completely shredded.

According to Sotheby’s, this was “the first artwork in history to have been created live during an auction”.

The artwork was renamed as “Love is in the Bin”. Three years later, in 2021, it was sold at auction, again at Sotheby’s in London.

- Do you know / can you guess how much it was sold for? (Answer = just over £18 million)
- Do you have any opinions about this story?
- Do you have any unanswered questions about the story?



Tip: Many people have asked questions about the story and whether or not things really did happen as claimed by the artist and auction house. Ideally, students will start to do the same at this stage and start to think critically about it.

Here are some questions that students might ask / you can use to get students thinking:

- Did Banksy really give “Girl with Balloon” to a friend?
- Did Sotheby’s not know about the hidden shredder? Don’t they examine their artworks carefully before selling them?
- After “Girl with Balloon” was shredded, did Sotheby’s have any legal issues to deal with?
- The shredding incident happened in 2018. Exactly how many years before that did Banksy install the shredder inside the frame?
- How did Banksy feel about this new piece of art selling for 18 times more than the original? Was he disappointed? Or was that always the plan?
- “Love is in the Bin” sold for £18 million. Did Banksy get any of that money?
- Did Banksy actually attend the auction and press the button? Or did someone else do that?
- If the canvas had been completely shredded, would things have been different? Was a half-shredded canvas always the plan?

The more questions you ask about this story, the more holes seem to appear in it. You can ask students to go online and explore things for themselves. There are many videos and articles which offer theories.

Part eight: conclusion

In your opinion, what is this story about? Here are some possible ideas:

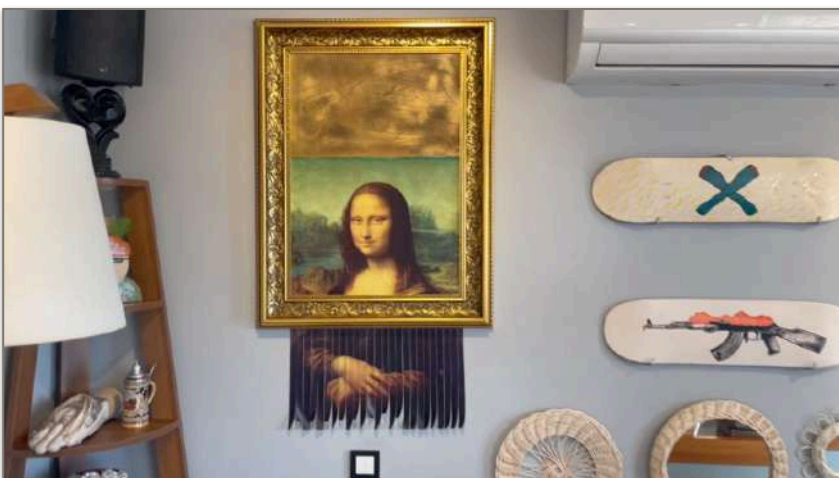
- An artist who wanted to make fun of the art world.
- An artist whose clever idea backfired. In other words, it had the exact opposite effect to the one which was intended.
- A secret collaboration between an artist and an auction house to fool the media and the public, and make a lot of money.
- Something else? (Please say what.)

What can we learn from this story? What do you take away from it?

Follow up

The lesson plan "Fame!" tells the fascinating story of how the Mona Lisa became (arguably) the most famous image in the history of the world. If you have used that activity with your students, ask them to suggest connections between the Mona Lisa and Banksy's "Love is in the Bin". Ask them to consider what they have in common.

- **Story and value:** In both cases, the value of the artwork has increased considerably because of a story.
- **Invisible stories:** A visitor to a gallery could spend all day looking at Banksy's "Love is in the Bin" without knowing how it was created or why it is so famous. In other words, the artwork alone does not reveal its stories. This idea was explored in the Mona Lisa lesson plan.
- **Popular culture:** Both pieces of art have iconic status. They have been referenced, copied, parodied and reproduced in various ways.



Tip: Why not invite students to get creative and think of possible ways to reinterpret or parody "Love is in the Bin"? Will anyone choose to shred the Mona Lisa, as seen in this artwork spotted in Antalya, Turkey?

Notes

- Banksy's original "Girl with Balloon" was a series of stencil murals around London that began to appear in 2002. The framed version in this story dates back to 2006.
- In 2017, the year before the first auction, "Girl with Balloon" was voted the UK's favourite work of art.
- The story in this lesson plan is partly fictionalised. Banksy stated that he installed the shredder in case the painting was ever sold at auction. But it is unclear how this scenario might have occurred. For this reason, I invented the backstory about the friend and the gift.
- The title "Love is in the Bin" is a reference to another work by Banksy: "Love is in the Air" (also called "Flower Thrower") is a 2003 stencil mural in Beit Sahour near Bethlehem in the West Bank, Palestine. It is one of Banksy's most iconic works.

