

# Graffiti

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## Brief History

Graffiti has been around for centuries in many different forms. Cavemen placed some graffiti on large stones and in caves on the walls. Political activists used graffiti to make statements. Gangs use graffiti as a way to mark their territory and communicate.

Several authors providing a history of graffiti all seem to agree that the modern artwork known as graffiti originated in Philadelphia during the mid – 1960s. Later in that same decade, writers began to be recognized individually as writing became more prevalent.

Naturally, graffiti art migrated to other cities, especially New York City. Some of the first artists to be acknowledged were Cornbread and Cool Earl, both of whom wrote all over the city. Once Cornbread emerged in New York City, other writers followed in the Washington Heights area of New York City. TAKI 183 became one of the pioneers of writings on the subway. TAKI, whose real name is Demetrius and who lived on 183<sup>rd</sup> Street, was a messenger who used the subway frequently. Because of his accessibility to the subway, he began his career by doing “motion tags.” The New York Times did an article about TAKI and his work because of his unusual tags, name and number. Although he wasn’t the first writer, he was the first to be identified as part of this new subculture.

Friendly Freddie kicked off the writing trend as the graffiti movement migrated to Brooklyn. This is significant because it started an inter-borough competition.- everybody could see everybody else’s work on *moving trains*. The writers tried to outdo each other.

Writing began to consist of “tags” and the goal was to have as many as possible traveling around the city. These writers would ride the trains attempting to tag as many cars as possible. Conversely, tagging trains in train yards and railroad lay-up yards is referred to as “Bombing.” It is a faster place to work with less chance of being caught. It became important for each writer to make his / her tags unique.

In the mid – 1970s when New York City was broke, the transit system was poorly maintained. The heaviest bombing occurred during this period in history. Entire cars began to be designed. The “throw up,” as it was called, was a style that was introduced as a way to make letters quickly. The letters were outlined and barely filled in. The “wars” between writers were peaking at this time, too.

One of the last big waves of bombing occurred in the late 70s. Then financial times got better for major cities, including New York. The Metropolitan Transit Authority (MTA) started to enforce the elimination of writing all over New York City.

By the 1980s, many writers ceased writing to begin real life careers. These artists and others flocked to art galleries that introduced graffiti art overseas. This was also a time when the culture of writing was diminishing in many ways and for many reasons. The streets were becoming very tense and very unsafe because of drugs, guns, and violence. Laws were enacted restricting the sale of paint to minors. Many stores were locking up paint, which virtually eliminated shoplifting. Train yards and lay-up yards were more closely guarded as

were other “ideal” painting areas. Graffiti removal programs were in full effect. All of this made many artists quit. For others, it made them more motivated. Because areas to write were so scarce, violence became more prevalent in protecting and defending these “territories.”

The Metropolitan Transit Authority declared victory over graffiti in May 1989. In what has become known as the Clean Train Movement, the MTA effectively removed all marked cars from running.

Many writers believed that tagging on trains meant you were a “real writer.” If you tagged walls, freight, and scraps, you were labeled as “a fake.” Throughout the years, writers have kept fighting the MTA.

In more recent times, writers have been gaining recognition and have been featured in various media. Magazines have been created graffiti and writers and a series of movies were produced in the late 1980s in New York City. These movies were the first organized videos that documented writing by writers.

In 1994, web sites emerged that focused on documenting writing as an art form. Media exposure significantly increased a few years later. This further pushed graffiti as an art form in a manner that took it off the streets and into galleries and museums.

### Script & Calligraphic Styles

Many tags consist of script and calligraphic styles. Some writers use objects that are symbolic of their lives. Others simply use patterns or other elements for design purposes. One of the most famous tag styles was done by Stay High 149. He drew his name with a smoking joint as the cross bar in the letter “H” and included a stick figure. As tags became more complex and more detailed, they became bigger and more noticeable.

Because the spray nozzle has a very small orifice, the only way for writers to make their tags larger was to increase the thickness of the letters and do additional outlines. Writers realized that by using nozzles from different aerosol products that they could get bigger and wider spray. As thicker letters increased the effect, writers imaginatively designed the inside of the letters, too.

Letters changed from the traditional thin style to bubbly, block, and leaning letters. Letters were manipulated by the addition of characters such connections and curls. Arrows were added to the ends of letters. This style of lettering became known as mechanical or wild – style lettering. One writer, Phase 2, developed most of the new lettering styles through which graffiti became recognized as an art form.

The following are the lettering styles used by writers:

小虫女小  
去上女化  
出云化山  
外化虫空  
虫夜虫中  
化虫化父  
虫虫

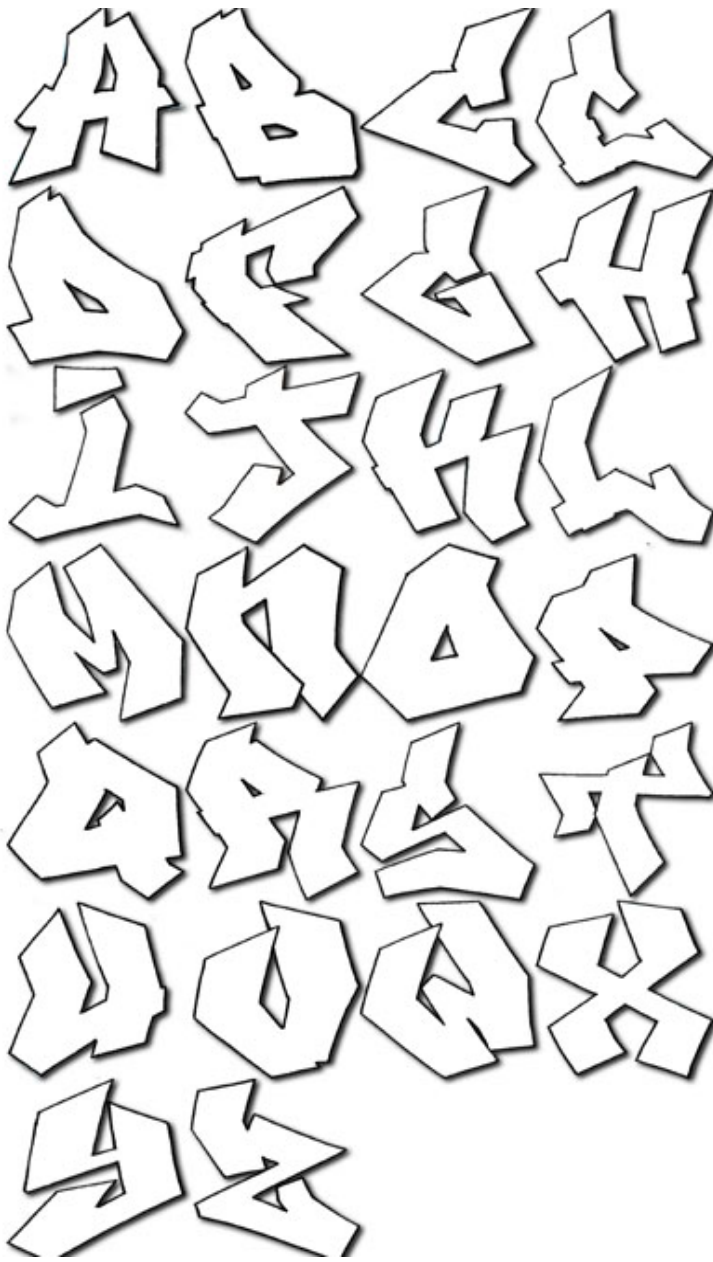
Bubble Style



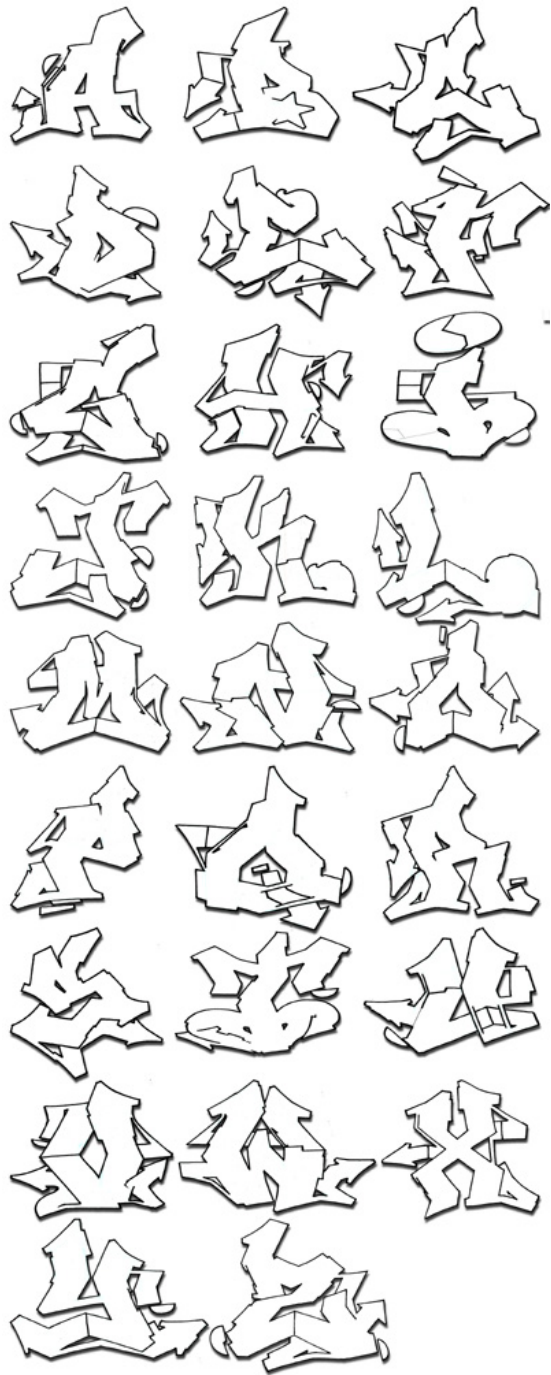
Simple Wavy



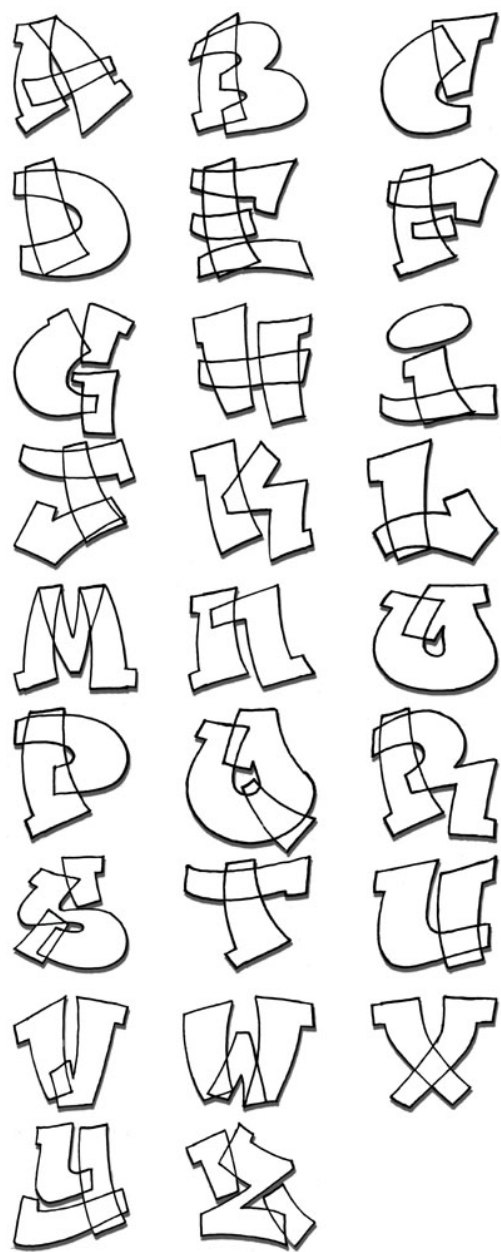
Wiggles BWay



**Jagged Style**

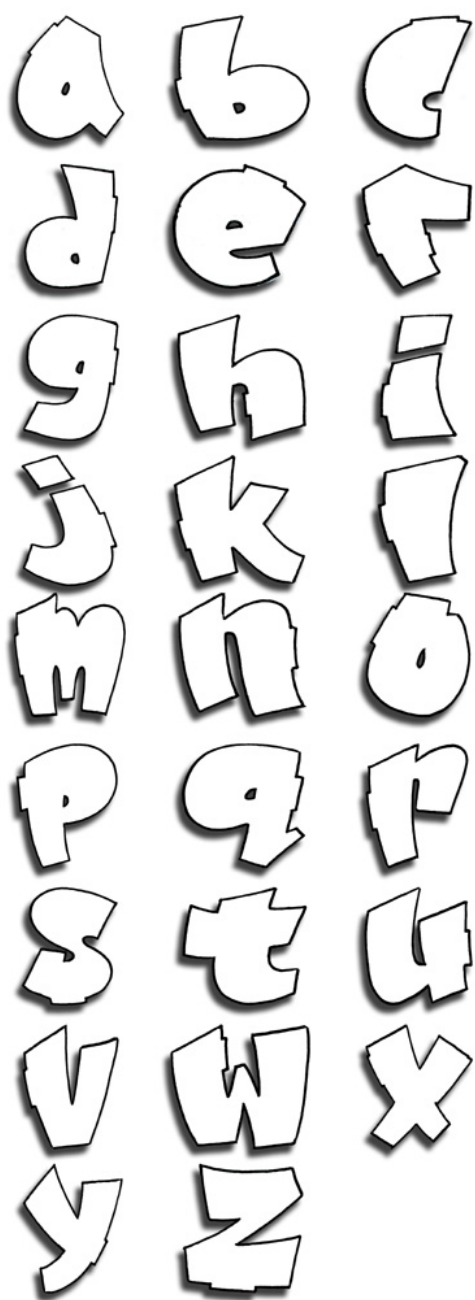


Hook Ups



**Transparent**





**Comic Book**

[ Complete by showing several photos of railroad graffiti. ]

Here are some examples of graffiti painted on railcars. Notice how each tagger stylizes his / her own work. Also note the lettering types and variations.



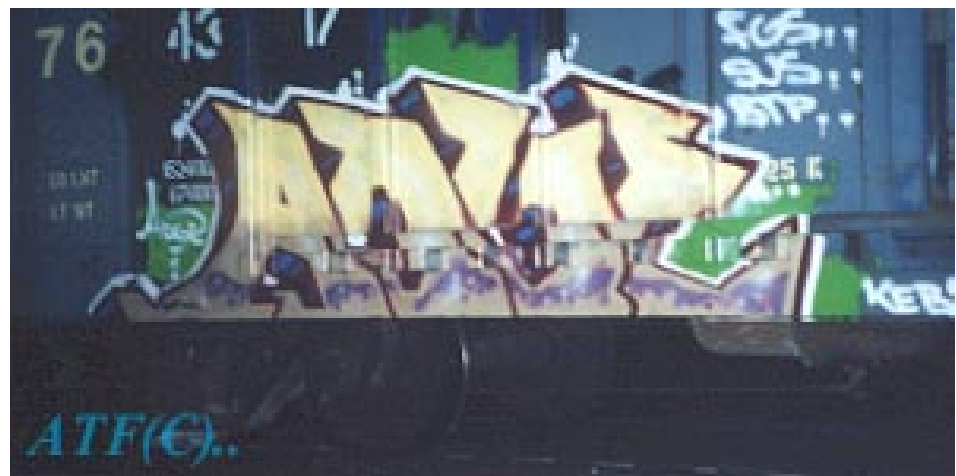
**This simple outline appeared on a boxcar in Cedar Rapids recently.**



**This is the work of Air – DME.**



This tag (above and below) are the work of ADGE.





Ashe did this work. It is very artistic in its orthographic style.



This work compliments of Chsme.





Audios.



Baba is the artist on this piece. His signature is to the far left just above the side sill.



Diego was here.



This tag was done by Dizoe. Notice the contrasting colors and how the tag jumps out or appears brighter on a cloudy day.



Tag by AmeAwe.



Send in Clowns.





Devr painted this gem. Note the triple outline first in white, then in red, then in white again. The yellow carries through from letter to letter adding to this very stylized tag.



This photo was taken in southwest Cedar Rapids near the CRANDIC's Rockford Road yard, also known as CRANDIC, Iowa on the timetable.





This covered hopper carried grain to Quaker Oats in Cedar Rapids.



This photo was shot in northeast Cedar Rapids at the Holcim Cement facility.



This tank car was photographed in downtown Cedar Rapids. Quaker Oats is in the background.



This tag was painted by Freek. This is very artistic.





Giant Fire.



JAYT.



• TGS •



Cosoe Canada 97





Iowa Terminal boxcar resting near International Ingredients in Cedar Rapids.



Is this a gang threat? DEAD HORROR CITY.



GAME.



iCh.





Joker. [Sorry about the fence.]



Jogso.



These tags, above and below right, are the work of Kaput.



Ker.





**“Rest in Peace, Ben” is the work of Kasino & Spike.**



**Kingcat.**



**Love End to End.**



MEDIA.



MSG Production





Myth (above and below).

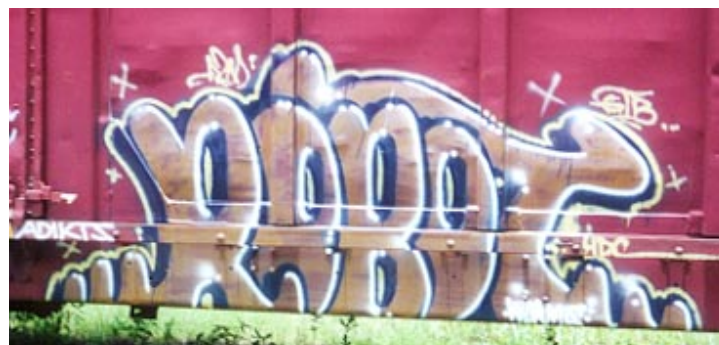




Revr



Reys Camp



Robot





PIECE BY "JISM" (HTK)-EGRET AND ALL LANDSCAPE BY "SAIGON" (WLS / HTK / BNSFL)



PANDAS ALL LANDSCAPE BY "IRO" (WLS / DMK / BNSFL)-EGRETS AND TIGER PAINTED BY "SAIGON": (WLS / HTK / BNSFL)



Saigon & Pinky



Saigon & Hippo



PIECE BY "BUKET" (DMK / BNSFL)-EGRET BY "SAIGON" (WLS / HTK / BNSFL)

Graffiti artists have had a great deal of freedom since the crack down several years ago before municipal and other public budgets became extremely tight. However, government is again fighting graffiti. Several cities are considering or have passed anti-graffiti laws. Many of these laws make it illegal for merchants to sell spray paint and broad tip markers to individuals under 21 years old. Some of these new laws make it illegal for individuals under 21 to possess spray paint and broad tip markers. Others yet have combined the two making it illegal to sell to and possess.

Artists are fighting back. Prominent people, such as Mark Ecko, a former graffiti artist turned clothing and media magnate who founded New York-based Ecko Unlimited, is funding legal proceedings fighting these new laws. Ecko and his artist friends claim these bans are unconstitutional because they limit free speech. In time, the courts will decide who wins and what happens.

#### Types Of Graffiti:

- MURAL: Large and often called a “masterpiece.” Motivation is artistic. Illegal murals are a small percentage of graffiti.
- GANG: Not highly repetitive or artistic, designed to convey a message about territory or a threat. Usually confined to specific areas, so amount of vandalized property is generally low.
- TAGGING: Most graffiti falls in this category. Taggers are individuals or groups, called crews. Taggers often leave initials or crew names. Can be artistic or not. Highly visible and dangerous locations are prized.
- TOYS: Refers to young people who are just beginning to tag.

#### **FOR THE MODEL RAILROADER**

For the model railroader, there are several things to think about when considering graffiti, such as:

- Where will you place graffiti?
  - Will you “tag” walls of buildings or retaining walls?
  - Will you tag rolling stock?
- How do you acquire the graffiti?
  - Do you purchase graffiti decals from a supplier such as Champion Decal Co., Microscale, or Blair Line?
  - Do you plan to hand paint your graffiti?
  - Will you have someone produce the artwork for you?
  - Will you make your own decals?

That will all be discussed in a follow-up article when I discuss these and many more questions in *“Graffiti for Model Railroading.”*