

FLEYDO ENGLISH SCHOOL

Story Material

The Wall

A powerful story about a teenage street artist who fights to save a community mural wall and proves that art can transform a neighbourhood.

Level: B1 (Intermediate)**Age Group:** Teens (11-16)**Skill:** Reading**Topic:** Art & Community**Duration:** ~45 minutes**Pages:** 24 story pages

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Read and understand a B1-level story about street art and community
 - ✓ Learn 20 vocabulary words highlighted in context
- ✓ Practise reading comprehension with multiple-choice questions
 - ✓ Understand themes of art, identity, and community activism
- ✓ Discuss whether street art is vandalism or valuable expression

*Note: In the online version, **highlighted vocabulary words** have hover definitions.*

Part 1 — The Story

Chapter 1: The Grey Estate

Nobody called it by its real name. The official name was Riverside Gardens Estate, but there was no river, no gardens, and nothing that deserved to be called an estate. Everyone who lived there called it the Grey Estate, because everything about it was grey: the concrete tower blocks, the car park, the sky above it, and the mood of the people who walked its corridors. It was a housing estate in Hackney, east London, built in the 1960s and **neglected** ever since. The lifts were always broken. The playground had been locked for years. The nearest shop was a twenty-minute walk away.

Jay had lived on the Grey Estate his entire life. He was fourteen years old, quiet at school, average at most subjects, and completely unremarkable in every way — except one. Jay could draw. Not the kind of drawing that got you a gold star in art class. The kind of drawing that made people stop walking and stare. He had been drawing since he could hold a pencil, filling notebook after notebook with characters, landscapes, and portraits that seemed to leap off the page. But notebooks were not enough for Jay. He wanted something bigger. He wanted something permanent. He wanted a wall.

Chapter 2: The First Mural

The wall stood at the back of the estate, behind the row of garages that nobody used any more. It was twelve metres long and three metres high, made of ugly grey concrete that was cracked and stained with age. One Saturday morning in March, Jay woke up at five o'clock, put six cans of spray paint and a bag of brushes into his backpack, and walked to the wall. By the time the estate began to wake up four hours later, the wall was no longer grey. Jay had painted a **mural** that stretched from one end to the other: a scene of the estate as he imagined it could be, with trees growing between the tower blocks, children playing in green spaces, and a river running through the middle where the car park used to be. The colours were extraordinary — deep greens, bright blues, warm golds — and the detail was astonishing.

The first person to see it was Mrs. Obi, an elderly Nigerian woman who lived on the ground floor of Block C. She stood in front of the wall for five minutes without speaking, then turned to Jay, who was sitting on an upturned milk crate, exhausted and covered in paint. "You did this?" she asked. He nodded, suddenly nervous. Was she going to report him? **graffiti** was illegal. He could get fined, or worse. But Mrs. Obi smiled — the biggest smile Jay had ever seen on her face. "It is beautiful," she said. "It is the most beautiful thing on this estate. Do not let anyone tell you otherwise." By lunchtime, half the estate had come to look at the wall. Some people took photographs. Some just stood quietly, looking at the colours as if they had forgotten that colours existed.

Chapter 3: The Reaction

Not everyone was pleased. On Monday morning, Jay found a notice pinned to the wall from the **council**: NOTICE OF ILLEGAL GRAFFITI. PROPERTY OF HACKNEY BOROUGH COUNCIL. THE PERPETRATOR IS ADVISED THAT DEFACING PUBLIC PROPERTY IS A CRIMINAL OFFENCE PUNISHABLE BY FINE OR IMPRISONMENT. Jay's stomach dropped. He had known the risk, but seeing the official notice made it real. He considered painting over the **mural** himself, before the council did it for him. But when he went back to the wall that evening, he found something unexpected. Someone had removed the council's notice and replaced it with a handwritten sign that read: THIS IS NOT **vandalism**. THIS IS ART. LEAVE IT ALONE.

Over the following weeks, the wall became the most talked-about thing in the neighbourhood. Local newspapers wrote about it. A photography student from a nearby university took pictures and posted them online, where they were shared thousands of times. People started visiting the estate specifically to see the mural — something that had never happened in the Grey Estate's sixty-year history. Jay worked **anonymously** at first, signing his work only with a small gold star in the bottom corner. But his identity did not stay secret for long. His art teacher, Miss Chen, recognised his style immediately. "I know that is your work, Jay," she said after class one day. "And I think it is extraordinary. But you need to be careful. The council is not happy."

Chapter 4: The Threat

In May, the council announced its plans for the Grey Estate. A property developer called Meridian Homes had submitted a proposal to build two hundred luxury apartments on the site of the old garages and car park. The project would bring investment, jobs, and new housing to the area. It would also require the **demolishing** of several structures, including the wall. The announcement was made at a public meeting in the community centre. Councillor Barrett, a large man with a confident voice, presented the plans with enthusiasm. "This is an exciting opportunity for **regeneration**," he said, pointing at a glossy architectural drawing. "Modern, high-quality homes that will transform this neighbourhood."

A woman in the second row raised her hand. It was Mrs. Obi. "What about the wall?" she asked. "The mural that the young artist painted. It has brought more life to this estate than anything the council has done in thirty years. Are you going to destroy it?" Councillor Barrett smiled the kind of smile that politicians use when they want to seem sympathetic without actually caring. "I understand the attachment, Mrs. Obi. But the mural is, technically, **vandalism**. And it is painted on a structure that is scheduled for demolition. Progress requires sacrifice." Jay, sitting at the back of the room, felt anger rising in his chest. He wanted to stand up, to shout, to tell the councillor that his wall meant more to this community than a hundred luxury apartments. But he stayed silent. He was fourteen. Who would listen?

Chapter 5: Finding Allies

Someone would listen, it turned out. Her name was Zara Hussain, and she was a documentary filmmaker who had seen the photographs of Jay's mural online. She arrived at the estate on a rainy Tuesday morning with a camera, a microphone, and a business card

that read: ZARA HUSSAIN — INDEPENDENT DOCUMENTARY. She found Jay after school and asked if she could make a short film about the wall and the threat it faced. "I want to show people what is really happening here," she said. "The council is calling it **regeneration**, but it looks more like destruction to me. Your mural is the heart of this community. People need to see that."

Over the next three weeks, Zara filmed everything: the wall, the estate, the residents, and Jay at work. She interviewed Mrs. Obi, who talked about how the mural had changed the atmosphere of the estate. She interviewed children who said the wall was their favourite place. She interviewed a retired teacher who explained how art could transform **neglected** spaces. She also interviewed Councillor Barrett, who repeated his line about progress and sacrifice, and the developer, who refused to appear on camera but sent a written statement describing the project as "essential urban development." Jay's older sister, Khadija, who was studying law at university, helped them research the legal options. "The council cannot just **demolish** the wall without a proper consultation process," she said. "And if we can prove the mural has cultural value, we might be able to get it protected."

Chapter 6: The Community Responds

The documentary, titled "The Wall," was uploaded in June. It was twelve minutes long, beautifully filmed, and emotionally powerful. Within a week, it had been viewed over half a million times. The response was overwhelming. Other street artists from across London came to the estate to show their support. A famous **graffiti** artist from Bristol, who worked under the name ECHO, painted a companion piece on the adjacent wall — a giant pair of hands holding a paintbrush, with the words: ART IS NOT A CRIME. Local businesses donated supplies. A crowdfunding campaign raised twelve thousand pounds for legal fees in four days.

But the most powerful response came from the estate itself. Residents who had lived on the Grey Estate for decades — people who had never spoken at meetings, never signed **petitions**, never believed that their voices mattered — began to organise. Mrs. Obi led a group of elderly residents who wrote letters to their MP. A group of teenagers set up a social media campaign. Parents formed a committee. The **petition** to save the wall gathered over two thousand signatures in a single weekend. Jay watched all of this in quiet amazement. He had painted a picture on a wall. He had never imagined it would start a movement.

Chapter 7: The Hearing

The council agreed to hold a formal public hearing on the future of the wall. It took place in July, in the same community centre where Councillor Barrett had first announced the demolition plans. This time, the room was packed. Television cameras lined the back wall. Journalists filled the press area. The **controversial** case had become a national story about the value of community art and the meaning of urban **regeneration**. The developer's lawyers spoke first, presenting economic arguments: jobs, tax revenue, housing supply. They were polished and professional, with colour-coded graphs and financial projections that filled the screen.

Then it was the community's turn. Khadija presented the legal case: the council had failed to conduct a proper environmental and cultural impact assessment, and the mural met the criteria for protection under local **heritage** regulations. Professor Adeyemi, an art historian from the University of the Arts London, gave expert **testimony** that the mural was "a significant work of contemporary public art with genuine cultural and social value." Zara played clips from her documentary. Mrs. Obi spoke about what the wall meant to her and to her neighbours: "This mural is the first beautiful thing that has happened on this estate in my lifetime. You want to talk about **regeneration**? This wall is regeneration. Real regeneration starts with making people feel that their home matters."

Chapter 8: Jay Speaks

Finally, Jay stood up. He was terrified. He had spent his whole life expressing himself through pictures, not words. But Khadija had told him that his voice was the most important one in the room, and he believed her. "I am fourteen years old," he began, his voice shaking slightly. "I am not a professional artist. I do not have a degree or a studio or a gallery. I have spray cans and brushes that I buy with my pocket money. But I painted that wall because I was tired of looking at grey. I was tired of living in a place that looked like nobody cared about it. I was tired of feeling invisible."

He paused and looked around the room. "When I painted the mural, I was not trying to start a movement. I was just trying to make one ugly wall less ugly. But something happened that I did not expect. People started talking to each other. Neighbours who had never spoken began having conversations in front of the wall. Children started drawing on paper and showing me their pictures. An old man told me it was the first time in twenty years he had felt proud to live here." He took a breath. "You can **demolish** the wall. You can build your luxury flats. But you cannot build community with concrete and glass. Community is built by the people who live in a place and care about it. That wall is proof that we care. Please do not take it away from us." The room erupted in applause.

Chapter 9: The Decision

The hearing panel deliberated for two weeks. During that time, the story continued to grow. International street artists posted messages of support. Art galleries offered to host exhibitions of Jay's work. A famous architect wrote an open letter arguing that the mural should be incorporated into any new development, not destroyed by it. The panel's decision was a **compromise**. The development would go ahead, but on a significantly reduced scale. The wall would be preserved and incorporated into the new design as a permanent public art space. Jay would be **commissioned** to paint a new mural on the largest wall of the new building, and a community art fund would be established to support future projects on the estate.

"It is not perfect," Khadija admitted as they walked home from the hearing. "They are still building some of the flats. The estate will change." "But the wall survives," Jay said. "And the community has a voice now. That is what matters." Councillor Barrett, to his credit, approached Jay after the hearing and shook his hand. "I underestimated you," he said. "And I

underestimated this community. I will not make that mistake again." Jay nodded. He did not need an apology. He needed paint.

Chapter 10: The New Wall

The new mural took Jay three months to complete. He did not work alone this time. Artists from across London came to **collaborate**: ECHO painted a section, Miss Chen contributed a design, and even Mrs. Obi painted a small flower in the bottom corner, guided by Jay's steady hand. The finished piece was twice the size of the original — a **vibrant**, sprawling celebration of the Grey Estate and its people. Every face in the mural was based on a real resident. Every building was recognisable. Every colour told a story.

The unveiling ceremony was held on a Saturday afternoon in September. The sun was shining, which felt like a small miracle for Hackney. Over five hundred people attended, including the local MP, Professor Adeyemi, Zara with her camera, and residents from every block on the estate. Jay stood in front of his wall, paint still under his fingernails, and looked at the faces looking back at him — some from the mural, some from the crowd, all of them real, all of them part of this place. Mrs. Obi found him afterwards, as people were eating cake and children were running between the new benches that had been installed along the wall. "You know what you have done, don't you?" she said quietly. "You have given this place a soul." Jay smiled. "I just painted a wall, Mrs. Obi." She shook her head. "No, my boy. You painted a home."

The End

*Art does not ask for permission. It does not wait for approval or funding or a committee meeting. It appears on walls, in notebooks, on pavements, and in the spaces that the world has forgotten about. Sometimes it is messy. Sometimes it is **controversial**. Sometimes it is technically illegal. But it is always necessary. Because art is how communities speak when nobody else is listening. It is how a grey wall becomes a story, and how a forgotten estate becomes a home. Pick up a brush. Find your wall. Start painting.*

Part 2 – Key Vocabulary

Words shown in **orange bold** in the story are listed below.

Word	Type	Definition
mural	<i>noun</i>	a large picture painted directly on a wall
graffiti	<i>noun</i>	writing or drawings made on walls in public places
demolish	<i>verb</i>	to completely destroy a building or structure
vandalism	<i>noun</i>	the crime of deliberately damaging public or private property
commission	<i>noun/verb</i>	an official request to create a piece of art; to formally request work
neglected	<i>adjective</i>	not given proper care or attention over a period of time
petition	<i>noun</i>	a written request signed by many people asking for change
council	<i>noun</i>	a group of people elected to govern a local area
regeneration	<i>noun</i>	the process of improving an area by building new things or repairing old ones
controversial	<i>adjective</i>	causing disagreement or argument among people
anonymous	<i>adjective</i>	with a name that is not known or not made public
collaborate	<i>verb</i>	to work together with others on a shared project
heritage	<i>noun</i>	traditions, buildings, or objects that are part of a community's history
vibrant	<i>adjective</i>	full of energy, colour, and life
advocate	<i>noun/verb</i>	a person who supports a cause publicly; to argue in favour of
resilience	<i>noun</i>	the ability to recover from difficulties; mental toughness
perspective	<i>noun</i>	a particular way of thinking about something; a point of view
testimony	<i>noun</i>	a formal statement about something you know or have experienced
compromise	<i>noun</i>	an agreement where both sides give up something they want
legacy	<i>noun</i>	something left behind by someone that continues to have an effect

Part 3 — Comprehension Quiz

Answer these questions about the story.

Question 1

Why was the housing estate called the Grey Estate?

- It was built by a man called Mr. Grey
- Everything about it was grey and neglected
- It was near a grey river
- The buildings were painted grey deliberately

Question 2

What did Jay paint on the wall?

- Abstract shapes and patterns
- The estate as he imagined it could be, with nature and colour
- A portrait of himself and his family
- A copy of a famous painting

Question 3

How did Mrs. Obi react when she first saw the mural?

- She reported Jay to the police
- She complained about the noise
- She said it was the most beautiful thing on the estate
- She ignored it completely

Question 4

What did the council plan to do with the wall?

- Paint it grey again
- Demolish it to build luxury apartments
- Turn it into a car park
- Sell it to a private collector

Question 5

Who was Zara Hussain?

- A council officer
- A property developer
- A documentary filmmaker who wanted to tell the story
- Jay's art teacher

Question 6

What did the community petition achieve?

- Nothing at all
- Over two thousand signatures in one weekend
- It was rejected by the council
- Only ten people signed it

Question 7

What expert testimony was given at the hearing?

- A scientist said the wall was structurally unsafe
- An art historian said the mural had genuine cultural value
- A lawyer said all graffiti should be illegal
- A developer said the wall was worthless

Question 8**What was the hearing panel's final decision?**

- Complete demolition with no compromise
- The wall would be preserved and incorporated into a reduced development
- The developer would leave the estate entirely
- The mural would be moved to a museum

Question 9**Who helped Jay paint the new, larger mural?**

- Only professional artists from galleries
- Artists from across London, including Miss Chen, ECHO, and Mrs. Obi
- Nobody — he worked entirely alone
- A team hired by the council

Question 10**What did Mrs. Obi say Jay had given the estate?**

- A new playground
- A lot of trouble
- A soul
- A reason to move away

Answer Key

#	Ans	Question
1	B	Why was the housing estate called the Grey Estate?
2	B	What did Jay paint on the wall?
3	C	How did Mrs. Obi react when she first saw the mural?
4	B	What did the council plan to do with the wall?
5	C	Who was Zara Hussain?
6	B	What did the community petition achieve?
7	B	What expert testimony was given at the hearing?
8	B	What was the hearing panel's final decision?
9	B	Who helped Jay paint the new, larger mural?
10	C	What did Mrs. Obi say Jay had given the estate?

Thank you for reading! Visit www.fleydo.com for more stories and materials.