

TOEFL Listening Lesson 11

Setting: A college-level *Art History* class.

Questions

1. What is the main topic of the discussion?

- A. How to create sculptures using modern tools
- B. The role and controversy of public art and statues
- C. The financial cost of installing public artworks
- D. The history of art museums in the United States

2. According to the professor, what is a key reason some statues become controversial?

- A. They are made of expensive materials
- B. They are often located in museums
- C. They may honor figures whose legacies are reexamined over time
- D. They are usually created by anonymous artists

3. Why does the professor mention the "Fearless Girl" statue?

- A. To highlight a statue that was removed due to protests
- B. To illustrate a modern example of impactful and debated public art
- C. To show a sculpture that was universally praised
- D. To explain how to get funding for public art

4. Why did the female student bring up murals and sculptures responding to current events?

- A. She wanted to criticize government-sponsored art
- B. She was highlighting how modern public art can engage with social issues
- C. She was confused about how murals differ from statues
- D. She believed modern art avoids controversy

5. Why does the professor say that controversy can be a good thing for public art?

- A. It proves that the artist is famous
- B. It prevents the art from being taken down
- C. It shows that the public is engaging with the artwork
- D. It leads to more funding opportunities for artists

Script

Professor:

Today, we're going to examine public art, particularly statues, and how they function in society. Many of you pass by sculptures and monuments daily—on campus, in parks, near government buildings. But have you ever stopped to consider what message these artworks are sending? Or why some of them become lightning rods for controversy?

Male Student:

Do you mean like when cities decide to remove statues of historical figures?

Professor:

Exactly. That's one of the most debated aspects of public art today. A statue is not just a decoration—it's a public statement, often reflecting the values of the time when it was commissioned. So when values shift, conflict can arise. Let's consider what makes a work of public art controversial. Is it the subject? The style? The location?

Female Student:

I think sometimes it's who paid for it. Like if a government funds something that people see as politically biased.

Professor:

Good point. Funding can suggest endorsement, which can add tension. Another common source of controversy is when statues honor figures whose legacies are viewed differently today. For example, many

statues erected in the early 20th century were meant to inspire civic pride—but now, they're being reassessed under a modern lens.

Male Student:

Isn't that rewriting history, though?

Professor:

An important question. Some argue that removing statues erases history. Others argue that statues are not neutral—they glorify, not just inform. A museum exhibit can explain a person's legacy in context. But a statue in the center of a plaza gives a different kind of honor. That's why some suggest relocating statues to museums rather than destroying them.

Female Student:

But what about new public art? Like murals or sculptures that respond to current events?

Professor:

Yes—contemporary public art often aims to provoke dialogue or highlight social issues. Think of large-scale installations that address climate change or racial justice. These works are deliberately placed in public spaces to make people reflect, sometimes uncomfortably. Public art can invite participation, even controversy.

Male Student:

So would something like the "Fearless Girl" statue be considered controversial?

Professor:

"Fearless Girl" is a perfect example. Some saw it as empowering—a young girl facing down Wall Street's bull. Others criticized it as a marketing stunt. Its location, timing, and backstory all fed into the public reaction. So yes, it was both impactful and controversial, and that's why we still talk about it.

Female Student:

So is controversy a sign that public art is effective?

Professor:

That's a strong argument. Controversy often means people are engaging with the work. They're asking questions, debating meaning, re-examining beliefs. In that sense, public art becomes a kind of civic conversation. And whether it's a centuries-old statue or a temporary mural, the impact depends on how people interact with it.

Professor:

For next class, I'd like you to find an example of a public artwork—locally or internationally—that has sparked public debate. Bring a short description and be ready to share why you think it provoked a strong reaction.

Answers

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C. It shows that the public is engaging with the artwork