



N.W.A in March 1989

N.W.A: Straight Outta Compton

1988

N.W.A (Niggaz With Attitude) was an American hip hop group from Compton, California which was active from 1986-1991. Compton is a ghetto area in Los Angeles where many African Americans live. The group is considered one of the most influential groups in the history of hip hop, representing West Coast hip hop and gangsta rap. It consisted of the following artists: Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, Eazy-E, DJ Yella and MC Ren. The debut album of the group, *Straight Outta Compton*, marked a new era for the gangsta rap genre. N.W.A was the first to use the rap genre to express dissatisfaction with many social issues, in particular with how blacks were treated by the police. Also, N.W.A was the first group to make rap music popular and broadly accepted. Despite the fact that "Straight Outta Compton" is a fairly old rap song, it is considered highly important to the genre.

PRE-READING 1

In pairs/small groups, watch the "Straight Outta Compton" music video and answer the following questions:

1. Is the video what you would expect of a gangsta rap video? Why/why not?
2. Are the lyrics consistent with what is seen in the video? Why/why not?

PRE-READING 2

In pairs, read aloud the following definitions of West Coast hip hop and gangsta rap.

Hip hop

West Coast hip hop is a subgenre of hip hop music that came into being during the 1970s. It involved artists and groups that originate in the Western part of the US, more specifically from Los Angeles to the San Francisco Bay area. It is generally thought that the hip hop genre originated only on the East Coast of the US, especially in New York City, and that it afterwards spread to the West Coast of the country as well. It is, however, also likely that this type of music developed simultaneously in both parts of the country and that the different areas influenced each other.

Gangsta rap

Gangsta rap is a subgenre of hip hop music. It has its origins in the 1980s and became popular in later years because groups like N.W.A made rap interesting for a wider audience. The gangsta rap genre has been criticized by both left- and right-wing commentators for inspiring crime, violence, racism, rape, street gangs, drive-by shootings, vandalism, drug-dealing and more.

Rappers usually defend the genre by stating that it criticizes the contradictions of American society and that it exposes subjects that are usually not addressed by politicians.

The class should watch the beginning (23 minutes) of the documentary *N.W.A – The World's Most Dangerous Group*. Afterwards, discuss what is meant by the following statement: "N.W.A was a voice for the voiceless." (0.45)

Now divide the class into five jigsaw groups. Each group consists of five members and has the responsibility of answering one work question (about 10 minutes). Each student should be able to present the group's answer. Afterwards, group members are split into new groups in which they should present their question/answer as well as hear the other members' questions/answers (about 10 minutes). In that way, each student is responsible for presenting the answer of his/her group and will at the same time gain knowledge about the other work questions/answers. The groups should use both the information above, the information from the documentary and information online to answer the questions.

1. Why did the hip hop genre emerge?
2. What was Compton like in the 1980s?
3. How was N.W.A formed? And what does the group signal with the name Niggaz With Attitude?
4. How did Nancy Reagan become part of "urban warfare"?
5. Who is the target audience of N.W.A's music? Why?

Straight Outta Compton

You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge

[Verse One: Ice Cube]

outta = out of
 Compton forstad til Los Angeles
 call off være meget vred
 sawed off (n.) oversavet gevær
 squeeze affyre
 haul off trække væk
 ya = you
 gonna = going to
 hafta = have to
 yo = your
 punk (adj.) elendig, ussel
 show out spille smart
 niggaz = niggers
 rumble slås
 em = them
 gumbo tyk kreoler-suppe fra Louisiana
 gat forkortelse af et gammelt ord for maskingevær (Gatting)
 be down for have lyst til
 jack move stjæle
 crime record straffe-register
 Charles Manson amerikansk seriemorder
 AK-47 maskingeværmærke
 toe to toe en slåskamp
 out tha box ud af bokseringen
 C-P-T = Compton
 stomp være på stoffer

Straight outta Compton crazy motherfucker named Ice Cube
 From the gang called Niggaz With Attitudes
 When I'm called off I got a sawed off
 Squeeze the trigger and bodies are hauled off
 5 You too boy if ya fuck with me
 The police are gonna hafta come and get me
 Off yo ass that's how I'm goin out
 For the punk motherfuckers that's showin out
 Niggaz start to mumble, they wanna rumble
 10 Mix em and cook em in a pot like gumbo
 Goin off on a motherfucker like that
 with a gat that's pointed at yo ass
 So give it up smooth
 Ain't no tellin when I'm down for a jack move
 15 Here's a murder rap to keep yo dancin
 with a crime record like Charles Manson
 AK-47 is the tool
 Don't make me act the motherfuckin fool
 Me you can go toe to toe, no maybe
 20 I'm knockin niggaz out tha box, daily
 yo weekly, monthly and yearly
 until them dumb motherfuckers see clearly
 that I'm down with the capital C-P-T
 Boy you can't fuck with me
 25 So when I'm in your neighborhood, you better duck
 Coz Ice Cube is crazy as fuck
 As I leave, believe I'm stompin
 but when I come back, boy, I'm comin straight outta Compton

punk skidt knægt
 smoke dræbe med skud
 rep = reputation
 pussy ass svag
 I'ma = I am going to/I will
 snap penge
 jack stjæle
 crop afgrøde, (her)
 cannabis
 pack bære rundt på et
 våben
 o' = of
 pussy fisse, kusse, pige
 show koncert
 ho = whore luder
 be composed to være
 bygget til
 legit = legitimate i orden
 (egentlig lovlig)
 tear up smadre
 automatic automatisk
 pistol
 static gøre vrøvl
 raw rå
 villain skurk
 killin = killing mord
 on the scope sigtekorn
 take it as a trip vildfarelse
 (være høj)
 on a gangsta tip være
 gangsta

[Chorus:]

City of Compton, City of Compton

5 [Eazy E] Yo Ren

[MC Ren] Whassup?

[Eazy E] Tell em where you from!

[Verse Two: MC Ren]

10

Straight outta Compton, another crazy ass nigga

More punks I smoke, yo, my rep gets bigger

I'm a bad motherfucker and you know this

But the pussy ass niggaz don't show this

15

But I don't give a fuck, I'ma make my snaps

If not from the records, from jackin the crops

Just like burglary, the definition is 'jackin'

And when illegally armed it's called 'packin'

Shoot a motherfucker in a minute

20

I find a good piece o' pussy, I go up in it

So if you're at a show in the front row

I'm a call you a bitch or dirty-ass ho

You'll probably get mad like a bitch is supposed to

But that shows me, slut, you're composed to

25

a crazy muthafucker from tha street

Attitude legit cause I'm tearin up shit

MC Ren controls the automatic

For any dumb muthafucker that starts static

Not the right hand cause I'm the hand itself

30

every time I pull a AK off the shelf

The security is maximum and that's a law

R-E-N spells Ren but I'm raw

See, coz I'm the motherfuckin villain

The definition is clear, you're the witness of a killin

35

that's takin place without a clue

And once you're on the scope, your ass is through

Look, you might take it as a trip

but a nigga like Ren is on a gangsta tip

Straight outta Compton ...

40

[Chorus:]

City of Compton, City of Compton

smother knalde
 raise hell skabe postyr
 make bail komme ud af
 fængsel mod kaution
 dodge undgå
 lay low holde sig under
 radaren, være ubemærket
 creep (vb.) krybe
 punk (sb.) fyr, bølge
 roll køre rundt
 seize tilbageholde
 ruthless ubarmhjertig,
 skånselsløs
 unload læse af, aflade
 hesitation tøven
 penetration indtrængen
 gust of wind vindpust
 jet "være høj", være
 påvirket
 sucker fjols
 dope fed, sej

[Dr. Dre] Eazy is his name and the boy is comin ...

[Verse Three: Eazy-E]

5 ... straight outta Compton
 is a brotha that'll smother yo' mother
 and make ya sister think I love her
 Dangerous motherfucker raises hell
 And if I ever get caught I make bail
 10 See, I don't give a fuck, that's the problem
 I see a motherfuckin cop I don't dodge him
 But I'm smart, lay low, creep a while
 And when I see a punk pass, I smile
 To me it's kinda funny, the attitude showin a nigga drivin
 15 but don't know where the fuck he's going, just rollin
 lookin for the one they call Eazy
 But here's a flash, they never seize me
 Ruthless! Never seen like a shadow in the dark
 except when I unload, see I'll get over the hesitation
 20 and hear the scream of the one who got the last penetration
 Give a little gust of wind and I'm jettin
 But leave a memory no one'll be forgettin
 So what about the bitch who got shot? Fuck her!
 You think I give a damn about a bitch? I ain't a sucker!
 25 This is the autobiography of the E, and if you ever fuck with me
 You'll get taken by a stupid dope brotha who will smother
 word to the motherfucker, straight outta Compton

[Chorus:]

30
 City of Compton, City of Compton

Damn that shit was dope!

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INTRODUCTORY WORK

Rhyme and rhythm

1. Comment on the rhyme scheme. Are any of the rhymes surprising? Why?
2. Comment on rhymes like:
 - called off – sawed off – hauled off (p. 167, ll. 3-4)
 - mumble – rumble – gumbo (p. 167, ll. 9-10)
 - dancin' – Charles Manson (p. 167, ll. 15-16)
 - daily – weekly – monthly – yearly – clearly (p. 167, ll. 20-22)
3. Are there any repetitions? What are they? What is their purpose?
4. Does the song have a rhythm? What is the effect it creates?

Language

1. How would you categorize the language? See the information box below for inspiration.

Formal and informal language

Formal and informal language are associated with a specific use of grammar and vocabulary.

Formal language is mainly used in serious situations, when talking to people we do not know and for composing serious texts in fiction and non-fiction. In formal language you see the correct use of spelling and grammar.

Informal language is used in relaxed situations among people who know each other well, for some fiction and for writing messages to friends, co-workers, family and others who do not expect a formal tone such as in text messages, postcards, emails, chats and more. In informal language you may experience contractions such as *you're* or *I'm*, acronyms (a word consisting of initials) such as *BFF* (best friend forever) or *NATO*, slang such as "cuz" for "because" or "cousin" and an extensive use of abbreviations such as "air con" for air conditioning.

An example of formal language: "For your information, she is the girl whom I met when journeying through the United States of America".

An informal version of the same sentence would be: "FYI, I bumped into the chick browsing through the US".

Language can also be extremely informal when filled with slang and incorrect grammar. An intensive use of slang can be seen, for example, in rap texts or in very informal conversations and messages between close friends and family. Slang is used as a way of internal communication in groups which differentiates them from others. An intensive use of slang can signal that you do not want to follow the rules that normally structure language.

People that use slang are familiar with the explicit meaning of the word. A slang way of saying woman could for example be *pussy*, *ho* or *bitch*. These words have other meanings, but slang has given them this extra meaning and dimension.

2. Give examples of slang from the text and explain how and why it is used.

FURTHER ANALYSIS

Themes

1. What is stanza 1 about? Individually, write down two to three topics.
2. What is stanza 2 about? Individually, write down two to three topics.
3. What is stanza 3 about? Individually, write down two to three topics.
4. Now pair up with a classmate and read your topics aloud to each other. Based on the stanzas, explain why you have chosen those topics. Are your topics similar to your partner's?

Violence

1. What words in the text can be associated with violence? What role does violence play in this song? Why?
2. How are the police portrayed? Why?

Identity

1. Characterize the rappers Ice Cube, MC Ren and Eazy-E.
2. What identity do the rappers want to express? Why?
3. What role do women play in the rap song? Why?
4. Why is Compton mentioned several times in the text?
5. The song starts by saying "You are now about to witness the strength of street knowledge". Define "ordinary knowledge"? How is "street knowledge" different? What does this introductory sentence mean?

N.W.A

1. Based on the N.W.A documentary and the text, in what way did N.W.A change the rap genre?
2. Based on this rap song, would you say that N.W.A has a social agenda? Why/why not? If so, what is it?
3. Discuss why this song has become so influential.

POST-READING

In pairs/small groups, make a rap song about racism or some other societal issue of your own choosing. Be sure to use the following features for rap texts: rhymes, contractions and slang. Afterwards, perform it for the class.
