

YOUTH STUDIES AND CRIMINOLOGY: 'PROSECUTING RAP'

TALKING POINTS

COMPREHENSION

1. What reasons are given for why the use of rap as evidence is unfair towards the defendant?
2. How has the rate of imprisonment changed in the UK since the 1980s?

APPLICATION

3. What are the main methods used by the Prosecuting Rap researchers? Which method would you use to find out:
 - (a) the type of rap most often used in court cases, and why?
 - (b) attitudes of young people and adults towards rap culture?
4. If you were on the jury for a trial where rap was used as evidence, what would you say to the other jurors to help them come to a fair conclusion?

ANALYSIS

5. Why might rappers fabricate or exaggerate the extent of crime or violence in their lives? Which other types of popular culture present themes of crime and violence?
6. Why does Eithne think the use of rap as evidence in courts risks being racist?
7. What do you think Eithne means about rap creating a "menacing courtroom soundtrack"? Why is this a problem?
8. What might be the problem when prosecution seeks to conflate the rap author and first-person narrator in the lyrics?
9. When do you think it might be appropriate to use rap as evidence in court cases?

EVALUATION

11. Is it appropriate for police investigators to be the main interpreters of rap evidence in court? Why/why not?
12. Do you think it would be best to ban the use of rap evidence altogether? Or do you feel there is a better solution? Why?

ACTIVITIES

1. HOLD A DEBATE ABOUT ONLINE TRIALS

Debating is a crucial skill for lawyers, as well as being useful in many other professions. A debate is a structured discussion, where arguments are heard in favour or against a particular idea or 'motion'. A judge listens to the arguments and decides which side put forward the strongest case and wins the debate.

You could hold a simple debate in class by splitting up into two teams, and having your teacher play the role of the judge or chairperson. Each team nominates a speaker who will argue its case. Then, study this motion:

- All trials should be held online instead of in courtrooms

Flip a coin to see which team is in favour and which team is against the motion. One of the challenges in debating is to put aside your gut feeling if you have one, so you can focus on the facts. In your teams, spend time researching and writing down as many arguments as you can think of. Remember to anticipate what the opposing team will say.

Once you are ready to start debating, the speakers then have three minutes each to present their arguments. After this, each team has 20 minutes to challenge the other's arguments and ask them questions. Try to give everyone in your team a chance to speak. At the end, the judge makes a short speech saying what arguments they thought were best, and who was the winner of the debate.



2. MAKE A PRETEND CASE TO PROSECUTE AN AUTHOR OR POET

This exercise will help to show just how problematic, even absurd, it is to assume rap lyrics are simply autobiographical.

Find a book, story, song or poem you have read in which the narrator performs some kind of crime. Our example is from Roald Dahl's book, 'The Magic Finger'. Other good starting points could be the lyrics from Taylor Swift's 'No Body, No Crime', Johnny Cash's 'I Shot a Man in Reno' or Bob Marley's 'I Shot the Sheriff'.

Now, by referring to the text and taking it completely literally, write a case against the author, accusing them of a crime. For example:

We recommend Roald Dahl is arrested immediately for causing extreme distress to his neighbours by using the magic finger to turn them into pigeons. Mr Dahl is clearly a regular offender, having admitted in his writing to have "PUT THE MAGIC FINGER ON THEM ALL!".

As with this example, feel free to be creative and use humour, but finish by writing a short reflection about how this kind of evidence is used – and could be misleading – in serious court cases.

MORE RESOURCES

- George the Poet is an award-winning rapper, author and social commentator. Listen to his brilliant podcast 'Have You Heard George's Podcast?': www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p07915kd
- What impact does the language we use have? How do words convey cultures and values? Watch Akala's fascinating TEDx Talk on Hip-Hop music and Shakespeare: www.youtube.com/watch?v=DSbtKLA3GrY
- Here is a short NPR music documentary from America called 'The Racist Roots of Rap on Trial: Louder than a riot', which features the research of Professor Erik Nielson: www.insession.news/the-racist-roots-of-rap-on-trial-louder-than-a-riot-npr-music

• WIDENING ACCESS PROGRAMMES

The **University of Manchester** has a widening participation programme, which includes campus visits, taster sessions and information on access programmes: www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/social-responsibility/social-inclusion/widening-participation

The **LSE Law School** runs a two-year Pathways to Law scheme with the **Sutton Trust** which provides mentoring and work experience, as well as university taster sessions. This is a great way to prepare for university and a potential career in law: www.lse.ac.uk/study-at-lse/Undergraduate/Widening-Participation

As part of its widening participation strategy, **The Open University** runs Access modules to provide a taster of distance learning and to help you decide which course is right for you: www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/access