



All Ears English Episode 133:

ESL Hip Hop: A Glimpse into Black American Culture through Music

Gabby: This is an All Ears English Podcast, Episode 133: “ESL Hip Hop: A Glimpse into Black American Culture through Music.”

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Welcome to the All Ears English Podcast, where you’ll finally get real, native English conversation with your hosts, Lindsay McMahon, the ‘English Adventurer’ and Gabby Wallace, the ‘Language Angel,’ from Boston, USA.

[Instrumental]

Gabby: Lindsay, I’ve been reading our reviews on the iTunes store and I’m so happy.

Lindsay: Oh.

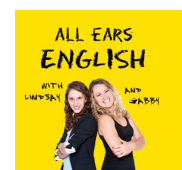
Gabby: (I mean), I love hearing what our listeners think about the podcast.

Lindsay: Oh, it’s amazing. It makes everything feel so worth it. We work so hard, we work hard for you guys and we really want to know what you think.

Gabby: Absolutely. And, it’s a great way to practice your English, right...

Lindsay: There you go.

Gabby: ...typing us a little message on iTunes. We love to see it.



Lindsay: So, please go ahead on over to your iTunes store and leave a review for All Ears English. We'll be checking for them. Thanks guys.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: In today's show, Stephen Mayeux, from ESL Hip Hop, will show you the three Hip Hop songs that you must know to improve your English pronunciation.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: Hey, Gabby. How's it going?

Gabby: What's up Lindsay?

Lindsay: I'm feeling awesome today. We have Stephen Mayeux from ESLHipHop.com. Welcome Stephen.

Stephen: What's up guys? Thanks for having me.

Gabby: Yeah, our pleasure.

Lindsay: So you're here to talk to us today about how you use, (um), Hip Hop to teach English. That's so cool.

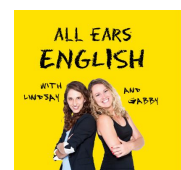
Stephen: Yeah, I, I, (uh), I, I, first fell in love with Hip Hop in college and (uh), and (uh), I really listened to a, a lot of different artists and as I became an English teacher, I thought, 'Hey, (you know), why not take this, (uh), this music that I'm so passionate about, music for my classroom?' So about a year ago, I blogged about it and, (uh), it's been very successful since.

Lindsay: I like that.

Stephen: So, (uh), yeah, I'm happy to talk about it.

Lindsay: I like that.

Gabby: Yeah, and I think a lot of our listeners are curious about how to use Hip Hop to learn English too and it's, it's just, it's a fun (kind of) music and,



(you know), from the US, you can learn about culture. (I mean), it's great, it's a great idea.

Lindsay: Definitely. So what are two or three songs that you would recommend for students to actually listen to to learn English.

Stephen: Okay, (um), I'll present my top three songs in, in order of difficulty. So I'll start with the easiest one for (like) a beginner, and then (uh) leading up to the most difficult. So, (uh), back in the '80s, (uh), there was this, (uh), (uh), female, (uh), duo – (uh), well there was actually three of them, but they're called Salt-n-Pepa.

Both: Yeah.

Stephen: This one song called "Push It." And that's great for beginners because it's rather slow for Hip Hop and it's very repetitive. So, you don't have to, (uh), memorize a lot of different lyrics. It's just a short amount of language, (uh), and you can really appreciate it. (Uh), it's just so energetic and fun too.

Gabby: Can I say I get really excited when that song comes on.

Lindsay: I like that song too. It's fun, it's fun.

Stephen: It's a great summer song too.

Both: Right.

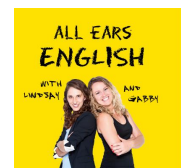
Stephen: We're right around the corner from Memorial Day – so, (uh), whenever the weekend, (you know), comes up, it's Friday, (uh), yeah, blast it on "Push It" by Salt-n-Pepa.

Gabby: Yeah.

Stephen: And it's really good stuff.

Gabby: Excellent.

Stephen: (Um), I, I also love the underground artists, (uh), so A Tribe Called Quest.



Lindsay: Okay.

Stephen: They're a little more difficult, but they're very lyrically gifted.

Gabby: Yeah.

Lindsay: (Um).

Stephen: And, (uh), they have one song called, "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo."

Gabby: Oh, yeah.

Lindsay: I love that song.

Gabby: Yeah, that's a great song.

Stephen: Classic song. It's a, it's great for, (uh), storytelling. They're, they're telling a, a basic story how he left his wallet in this small California town.

Gabby: Yep.

Stephen: And the hook, the chorus, is also very easy and repetitive, so I like using that one in class. And then finally, one that I, (uh), present to a lot of people, (uh), it, it's, (uh), it's politically conscious and it's a bit more on the serious side. It's not like party music like, (uh), "Push It", but it's got wonderful, minimal pairs

Gabby: (Hm).

Lindsay: (Uh-hm).

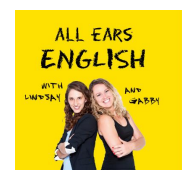
Stephen: ...(uh), that demonstrate the difference between the "f" and "v" consonants.

Gabby: Great.

Stephen: This song is by a great guy and his name is KRS-One...

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Stephen: ...and the song is "Sound of the Police."



Lindsay: Oh, perfect. And did you want to, (uh), to demonstrate for us how you would, (uh), work with students to show the differences between the “f” and the “v” using that song?

Stephen: Yeah, absolutely. So, (uh), you, you can, (uh), find this lesson on my website at ESLHipHop.com, it’s available as a student version and a teacher version. (Uh), but basically, (uh), I have a worksheet available and perhaps this is (uh) a download you can, (uh), provide to accompany this podcast.

(Uh), but KRS-One, he does something, (uh), very intelligently with the two words, (um), that, that appear, (uh), a lot in this song. (Uh), let me give you some background information first. So, KRS-One, he was an artist that started in the South Bronx...

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Stephen: ...of New York City.

Lindsay: (Um).

Stephen: And, (um), (you know), New York, it has many different neighborhoods and South Bronx is, (uh), where Hip Hop originated.

Gabby: Yeah.

Stephen: And in the ‘80s, it was a very tough place to be.

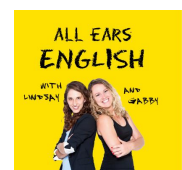
Gabby: Yeah.

Stephen: There was a lot of violence, and crime, and (uh), and, and, and poverty. It was not a good place to be.

Gabby: Right.

Stephen: So KRS-One, he saw this around him and he also saw a less than positive experience from, (uh), the police.

Gabby: (Uh).



Stephen: And he thought (uh), (you know), (you know), police, but also other reasons were destroying his community.

Gabby: Right.

Stephen: So he got sick of it and instead of taking a violent approach and (uh), you, (you know), (uh), you, (you know), flipping over cars or setting fires, (uh), he used his voice, he used his intelligence, he used his music...

Lindsay: (Hm).

Stephen: ...to, (uh), to convey his (uh), (uh), (you know), why he's so upset. So, he creates this song called "Sound of the Police" and what sound does the police make, it's like a "Woop, woop." It's like a siren sound.

Lindsay: Right.

Gabby: Yeah, yep.

Stephen: So, normally that's a sound of a, (you know), comfort, or help is on the way.

Lindsay: (Uh-huh).

Stephen: But in this community, it was a, it was a frightening sound.

Lindsay: Oh.

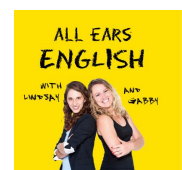
Stephen: He said that's the sound of the beast. And he calls and he, he (sort of), (uh), compares a police *officer*, the *officer* that has the "f" sound, with, (um), with the (um) – he compares them to an overseer.

Lindsay: (Huh).

Stephen: And an overseer, if you're familiar with US history, that has a, a connection, an association to, (uh) to slavery.

Gabby: (Uh-huh).

Lindsay: (Um).



Stephen: So somebody watches and, (uh), and (kind of) manages and controls the slaves on a plantation.

Gabby: Right.

Stephen: He's saying that even though it's 200 years later, a police officer is just a modern version of an overseer.

Gabby: Overseer.

Lindsay: Oh.

Stephen: And he uses these two words interchangeably throughout the song and in one part, right in the middle of the song, he does this brilliant thing with his mouth, and, (uh), it, it's, (uh), it's really hard to keep up with, but, (uh), my students loved it. And if (uh) – I, I don't have any speakers available on my end, but if you can queue that up on YouTube, (uh), then we can give them a little sampling of, (uh), of what it sounds like. Is it possible to do that?

Lindsay: Yeah, we can try that out.

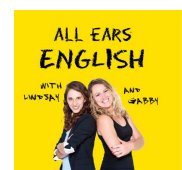
Gabby: Yeah, we can try.

Stephen: Okay, great.

Lindsay: (Um), we'll, we'll definitely embed it into our blog post for sure, but we'll see if we can find it.

Gabby: So, I think, just as I'm pulling this up, I just want to make a comment. These songs are such good choices, because these groups are really cultural references. I think that, (you know), most young-ish Americans are gonna (going to) be pretty familiar with, with most of these groups, (you know), Salt-n-Pepa, A Tribe Called Quest, KRS-One. And so it's really a good thing to be, at least to know of these names, (you know).

Lindsay: For sure. They're icons.



Stephen: And it's a little bit faster, (uh), so, (you know), if you go to my website, you'll have the lyrics to follow around. But even when I use this with beginning students, I tell them, "Okay, only focus on these two words, "overseer," and "officer." Everything else doesn't matter because we're only focusing on this aspect of the language. And I think a lot of teachers and, and students too, they think, "Oh, I have to understand everything..."

Lindsay: Right.

Stephen: "...to appreci-(aht), appreciate Hip Hop," and you don't. You can, (uh), understand just a fraction of it and still have a good time with it.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Stephen: So...

Gabby: Okay.

Stephen: You want to start around 50 seconds and then.

Gabby: So start around 50 seconds?

Stephen: And then play it for about 30 to 40 seconds.

Gabby: Oh, okay. Here we go.

Lindsay: Okay.

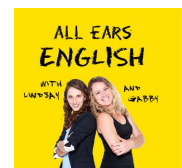
["Sound of the Police" by KRS-One]

...be ya

Be a officer? You wicked overseer

Ya hotshot, wanna get props and be a saviour
First show a little respect, change your behavior
Change your attitude, change your plan
There could never really be justice on stolen land

Are you really for peace and equality? Or when my car is hooked up
You know you wanna follow me, your laws are minimal
'Cause you won't even think about lookin' at the real criminal



This has got to cease
'Cause we be getting hyped to the sound of da police

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Stephen: The really cool part is coming up.

[Song continues]

Woop, woop, that's the sound of da police
Woop, woop, that's the sound of da beast

Now, here's a likkle truth open up your eye
While you're checking out the boom box, check the exercise
Take the word "Overseer," like a sample
Repeat it very quickly in a crew for example

Overseer, overseer, overseer, overseer
Officer, Officer, Officer, Officer, yeah, officer from overseer
You need a little clarity? Check the similarity

The overseer rode around the plantation
The officer is off patrolling all the nation
The overseer couldn't stop you what you're doing

Stephen: ...difficult to understand when he stops saying "overseer" and begins saying "officer", but, (uh), how he does it is just brilliant. So I use this a lot in my listening and pronunciation classes.

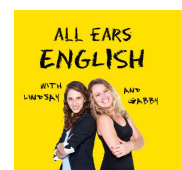
Gabby: I love it, I love it.

Lindsay: Great choice. Very cool. Very interesting. And you've given us a, some insight into American history as well.

Gabby: Absolutely.

Stephen: Yes.

Gabby: Great reference.



Stephen: Yeah, that's one thing that I hate, (uh), (you know), hearing, is that, (you know), Hip Hop is violent or it glorifies, (you know), gang life. But, (you know), for a lot of these artists, they're not glorifying it, they're just the voice of violence.

Gabby: That's right.

Stephen: They're just...

Gabby: They're just expressing what happening, that's right.

Stephen: Yeah, they're just expressing what's happening around them. So...

Gabby: That's right.

Stephen: ...(you know), without that context, it's easy to misinterpret, (uh), but, but yeah, this, this, (uh), this particular song gives insight to (you know), (sort of) race relations, and that's, (you know), serious stuff that, that happens in the United States, even today.

Lindsay: Perfect. Thank you so much Stephen. This has been great. Thanks for coming on. And so where can our listeners find you online. Where can they go?

Stephen: (Uh), I'm on online everywhere. I'm very prolific. (Uh), my main blog is ESLHipHop.com. (Uh), you can also, (uh), connect to all of my social media outlets from there. I'm on Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, LinkedIn, you name it, I'm probably on there. (Uh), but the main website is ESLHipHop.com.

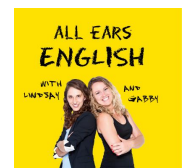
Lindsay: Perfect.

Gabby: Perfect.

Lindsay: Thanks for coming on. Thanks so much Stephen, and have a...

Gabby: Stephen, that was great.

Lindsay: Have a great day.



Stephen: My pleasure. Thanks ladies.

Gabby: See ya' (you).

Stephen: Bye.

Lindsay: Bye.

[Instrumental]

Lindsay: If you wanna (want to) put your ears into English more often, be sure to subscribe to our podcast in iTunes on your computer or on your smartphone. Thanks so much for listening and see you next time.

