

Semester project

Wings

by Macklemore



MA Language Productive and Receptive Skills

**Mag. Dr.phil. Ulla Fürstenberg
adapted by Christina Egger, BEd**

**by
Lisa Wilding
Summer term 2022**

Background

Who is Macklemore?

The American rapper Macklemore was born as Ben Haggerty in June 1983 in Seattle, Washington. Early on the young man of Irish origin was fascinated by Hip Hop music and even started writing his own songs when he was a teenager. His mother, a social worker, raised him to be an open-minded human being and supportive of differences (cf.

Macklemore Biography, 2019). Her influence might be the reason why he joined a program called Gateways for Incarcerated Youth, where he organized music workshops to reach the younger generation through his music (cf. Macklemore Biography, n.d.).

Just like the musician Jimi Hendrix, Macklemore attended Garfield High School, where he first got in contact with drugs and alcohol. In 2008 he successfully entered a rehab program. However, drugs and drug abuse have repeatedly been a topic in his life since then. He openly speaks about and criticizes the US government and pharmaceutical industry, for example in his song *Drug Dealer* ("My drug dealer was a doctor, had the plug from Big Pharma") (YouTube. Macklemore, 2016). The artist's first major hits that made him known all over the globe were in collaboration with Ryan Lewis, called *Thrift Shop* and *Can't Hold Us*.

Wings

As already indicated above, Macklemore is a guarantor for speaking up about substance abuse but also for equality and same sex love (Youtube. *Same Love*. Macklemore, 2012) or, in this case, marketing driven consumerism. In his song *Wings* (2011, feat. Ryan Lewis) he raps about young peoples' search for identity under the scope of consumerism and about being trapped in the pursuit of a materialistic ideal. In the music video the brand Nike can be identified. The rather expensive shoes are seen as status symbol and a symbol of being part of the group and fitting in, especially for teenagers around the world.

The song accompanies a young man through the process of getting his first pair of Nike shoes, being proud and cool, but then realizing that it is "just another pair of shoes" (YouTube, Macklemore, 2011, 5:16).

Wings

by Macklemore & Ryan Lewis, 2011

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAg3uMINyHA>

1 I was seven years old, when I got
my first pair

And I stepped outside

And I was like, momma, this air
bubble right here

It's gonna make me fly

5 I hit that court and when I
jumped

I jumped, I swear I got so high

I touched the net, mom, I
touched the net

This is the best day of my life

Air Max's were next

10 That air bubble, that mesh

The box, the smell, the stuffin',
the tread

At school, I was so cool

I knew that I couldn't crease 'em

My friends couldn't afford 'em

15 Four stripes on their Adidas

On the court I wasn't the best

But my kicks were like the pros

Yo, I stick out my tongue

So everyone could see that logo
20 Nike Air Flight, book bag was so
dope

And then my friend Carlos'
brother

Got murdered for his Fours, whoa

See he just wanted a jump shot

But they wanted his Starter coat,
though

25 Didn't wanna get caught, from
Genesee Park to Othello

You'd get clowned for those Pro
Wings, with the velcro

Those were not tight

I was trying to fly without leaving
the ground

'Cause I wanted to be like Mike,
right

30 Wanted to be him

I wanted to be that guy, I wanted
to touch the rim

I wanted to be cool, and I wanted
to fit in

I wanted what he had, America, it
begins

I wanna fly

35 Can you take me far away?

Give me a star to reach for

Tell me what it takes
And I'll go so high
I'll go so high
40 My feet won't touch the ground
Just stitch my wings
And pull the strings
I bought these dreams
That all fall down

45 We want what we can't have
The commodity makes us want it
So expensive, damn, I just got to
flaunt it
Got to show 'em, so exclusive,
this that new shit
A hundred dollars for a pair of
shoes

50 I would never hoop in
Look at me, look at me, I'm a cool
kid
I'm an individual, yeah, but I'm
part of a movement

My movement told me be a
consumer

And I consumed it
55 They told me to just do it
I listened to what that swoosh
said

Look at what that swoosh did
See it consumed my thoughts

Are you stupid, don't crease 'em
60 Just leave 'em in that box

Strangled by these laces, laces I
can barely talk

That's my air bubble and I'm lost
if it pops

We are what we wear

We wear what we are

65 But see I look inside the mirror
And think Phil Knight tricked us
all

Will I stand for change or stay in
my box?

These Nikes help me define me

But I'm trying to take mine, off

70 I wanna fly

Can you take me far away?

Give me a star to reach for

Tell me what it takes

And I'll go so high

75 I'll go so high

My feet won't touch the ground

Just stitch my wings

And pull the strings

I bought these dreams

80 That all fall down

It started out with what I wear to
school

That first day, like these are what

make you cool
 And this pair, this would be my
 parachute
 So much more than just a pair of
 shoes
 85 Nah, this is what I am
 What I wore, this is the source of
 my youth

This dream that they sold to you
 For a hundred dollars and some
 change
 Consumption is in the veins
 90 And now I see it's just another
 pair of shoes

Language Analysis

1 Vocabulary – Colloquialism / Slang

One characteristic that can be found in the song *Wings* is the use of slang words. In my opinion, this is a rather frequently occurring language feature in (American) Rap and Hip Hop. Nevertheless, it is often challenging as a teacher to pick out songs that contain slang for classroom use, because of the increased occurrence of swear words and inappropriate language. In this case, however, the song with its original lyrics could be used for language teaching without major limitations or modifications. Solely the word 'shit' in line 48 would have to be censored. Furthermore, I think that the four words I suggest in the following are most likely known among students anyway, which might make a discussion livelier and more interesting.

'em

'em	pronoun	/əm/	informal	a way of saying 'them' in informal speech	<i>Don't let 'em get away.</i>	You should not write this form unless you are copying somebody's speech	Word Origin: Middle English, originally a form of <i>hem</i> , dative and accusative third person plural pronoun in the Middle English; now regarded as an abbreviation of 'them'.
-----	---------	------	----------	---	--------------------------------	---	--

(Oxford Learner's Dictionary, n.d.)

Macklemore uses this word in the following context:

I knew that I couldn't crease 'em

My friends couldn't afford 'em

[...]

Got to show 'em, so exclusive, this that new shit

[...]

Are you stupid, don't crease 'em,

Just leave 'em in that box.

wanna

wanna	/'wɑ:nə/	informal	a way of saying or writing 'want to' or 'want a' in informal speech	<i>I wanna go.</i> <i>Wanna drink?</i>	You should not write this form unless you are copying somebody's speech.
-------	----------	----------	---	---	--

(Oxford Learner's Dictionary, n.d.)

Macklemore uses this word in the following context:

Didn't wanna get caught, from Genesee Park to Othello

[...]

I wanna fly

Can you take me far away?

tight

tight	adjective	/taɪt/	very good, excellent; cool; awesome	Her new car is tight.
-------	-----------	--------	-------------------------------------	-----------------------

(Online Slang Dictionary, n.d.)

Macklemore uses this word in the following context:

You'd get clowned for those Pro Wings, with the velcro

Those were not tight

dope

Macklemore uses this word in the following context:

Nike Air Flight, book bag was so dope

The Online Slang Dictionary suggests six different sections for the definition of 'dope': words meaning drugs; words meaning good, okay, cool, awesome, fun; words meaning information, gossip, speech, talk; words meaning marijuana; words meaning dilute and words meaning unintelligent person, idiot. Assuming that in this song the word is used as an equivalent of good, okay, cool, awesome and fun, it fits perfectly for the language use of teenagers, also in Austria. Currently the word can also be seen on t-shirts of boys and girls at the age of ten to eighteen in schools in Austria. Therefore, the word might be familiar to students.

Teaching Potential

1 Vocabulary – Colloquialism / Slang

In this context the students could be asked to go through the text and highlight words or phrases that they think are not standard language, without discussing what that actually means. Then the words can be collected and worked out in class. This can be used as an inducement for the distinction between standard and colloquial language in general and the different settings in which the respective register is used. Furthermore, 'tight' and 'dope' could be used for dictionary work, to show the students that there are standard dictionaries but also dictionaries for colloquial language.

Going Beyond the Text

In this respect the song, again, has a lot to offer for teaching and language learning purposes. The topics of clothing and fashion, peer pressure, fitting in and bullying, materialism, as well as the powerful impact of advertisement and marketing on young people are relevant and contemporary. Especially for higher secondary English classes there are numerous possibilities to explore these fields. For example, a panel discussion could be organized, which demands the students to operate on a high language level (higher order thinking skills, revised Bloom's Taxonomy by Anderson and Krathwohl, 2001). They would have to dive deeper into the

respective topic, inform and educate themselves and prepare. They would have to collect and organize their line of argumentation for or against a certain commodity (in this case shoes by Nike) but also prepare for possible or certain objection and contradiction they will have to face during the panel discussion.

Sources

Anderson, L. W., Krathwohl, D. R., Bloom, B. S. (2001). *A Taxonomy for Learning, Teaching, and Assessing: a Revision of Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*. London: Longman.

Literary Devices. (n.d.). Double Entendre. In *Definition and Examples of Literary Terms*. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://literarydevices.net/double-entendre/>

Literary Devices. (n.d.). Hyperbole. In *Definition and Examples of Literary Terms*. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://literarydevices.net/?s=hyperbole>

Literary Devices. (n.d.). Personification. In *Definition and Examples of Literary Terms*. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://literarydevices.net/?s=personification>

Macklemore. (2016.). Drug Dealer [video]. YouTube. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fYN14UfO-Uc>

Macklemore. (2012.). Same Love [video]. YouTube. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hIVBg7_08n0

Macklemore. (2011.). Wings [video]. YouTube. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gAg3uMINyHA>

Macklemore Biography. 2019. Biography.com Editors. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://www.biography.com/musician/macklemore>

Macklemore Biography. (n.d.) TheFamousPeople.com Editors. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://www.thefamouspeople.com/profiles/macklemore-33164.php>

Oxford University Press. (n.d.). dope. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/dope_1?q=dope

Oxford University Press. (n.d.). 'em. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/em_1?q=%27em

Oxford University Press. (n.d.). tight. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/tight_1?q=tight

Oxford University Press. (n.d.). wanna. In *Oxford Learner's Dictionary*. Retrieved July 12, 2022, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/wanna?q=wanna>

Rader, Walter. (n.d.). dope. In *The Online Slang Dictionary*. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/meaning-definition-of/dope>

Rader, Walter. (n.d.). tight. In *The Online Slang Dictionary*. Retrieved July 13, 2022, from <http://onlineslangdictionary.com/thesaurus/words+meaning+good,+okay,+cool,+awesome,+fun.html>