

George Michael – a controversial TV interview

Contributor's Notes

This is a literacy reading-based lesson that has worked well with an E2E (Entry to Employment) group. I found the discussion that resulted to be very interesting and rounded indeed (surprisingly, most were critical of Michael's stance on drugs).

It's a bit controversial as it deals with George Michael and his smoking of cannabis on a television programme. Having said all that, the lesson is a chance to introduce the concerning and important topic of drugs into class in a non-threatening way, and will be useful for those teaching disaffected teenagers in particular.

1. Set the scene. Explain that today's lesson is on the topic of drugs, but that you are not there to pry or to try and work out which students know the most about them. It's been chosen as an interesting and important topic for discussion. This should hopefully encourage an open lesson.

2. From here, I set a few ground rules for discussion, e.g.

- a) Everyone has a right to an opinion, and all opinions should be respected
- b) Everyone should have a turn at speaking
- c) When someone else is speaking, you listen

I referred back to these during class when anyone showed signs of forgetting about them

3. Question 1, which introduces the topic of drugs, can now be completed. It's perhaps best done as a group on the board. Don't spend too long on it, or try and get a definitive list; it's there merely to activate schemata.

4. Ask if anyone has heard of George Michael, and elicit what is known about him. Ask if anyone has heard about his recent television interview (i.e. the one he smokes cannabis in). Give them the article to read, but not any questions.

5. From here students can work through the other parts of the worksheet, grouping back together for a discussion towards the end of the session. I handed out each section individually, which prevents stronger students from racing ahead and makes checking each section easier.

I did this lesson with a mixed ability class, containing students from Entry 3 to Level 2. It's an activity that caters for all of these levels (and possibly higher), but I think Entry 2 students would struggle with the text.

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Credits

Both the article and the quotes come from the Daily Mail, though the version I used for the lesson is an edited one. The full article and more quotes can be found at http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/showbiz/showbiznews.html?in_article_id=411560&in_page_id=1773 Pictures are also from The Mail, except the cannabis plant which is from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cannabis>

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1. Rate these drugs in order of their 'hardness' i.e. the ones which have the most dangerous effects at the top of the list, the ones with the least dangerous effects at the bottom:

| | | | |
|----------|----------|---------|----------|
| Cannabis | Heroin | Speed | Ketamine |
| Ecstasy | LSD | Crack | Cocaine |
| Caffeine | Nicotine | Alcohol | Aspirin |

Compare your list with your neighbours. Do you have similar or different ideas?

2. Now read the article about the singer George Michael and answer the questions:

a) Why were the photographs of George Michael 'astonishing'?

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b) Has he been in trouble with the police before?

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c) Why might George Michael's comments upset parents and anti-cannabis campaigners?

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d) What are some of the positive and negative points of view he expresses about cannabis?

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e) Is he happy with his life?

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George Michael openly smokes joint in TV interview

Astonishing photographs today showed George Michael openly smoking a cannabis joint during a television interview.



The 43-year-old star, who has twice been cautioned for possessing the drug after being found slumped in his car, lit up backstage in Madrid and defended his use of it.

Michael said of his fondness for cannabis, which is still illegal in Britain: "This is the only drug I've ever thought worth taking..."

"This stuff keeps me sane and happy. I could write without it...if I were sane and happy. I'd say it's a great drug - but obviously it's not very healthy. You can't afford to smoke it if you've got anything to do."

Michael's comments, reproduced in today's Daily Mirror, are bound to upset many parents and anti-cannabis campaigners.

They come as fears grow over the use of super-strong cannabis, such as skunk, by increasing numbers of young people.

Skunk has been linked by police to a rise in street violence and burglaries in parts of London.

But during the in-depth TV interview, to be screened on the South Bank Show on 31 October, Michael said cannabis was "very good for creative people."

However, he added a note of caution, stating: "It can be a terrible, terrible drug."

"You've got to be in the right position to take it. You've got to have achieved most of your ambitions because it chills you out to such a degree that you could lose your ambitions."

Michael, who last month was cautioned for possession of the drug after he was found slumped at the wheel of his car near his north London home, said he had dabbled with other drugs, but regretted using all of them except cannabis.

He said: "There's not another drug in my life that I'm glad I took, but grass. I think my life might be somewhere else if I'd chosen another avenue. Alcohol for instance. Christ if I drank as much as I smoked. My God, I'd be like Keith Richards."

The interview was filmed over the past two months as Michael prepared for his first world tour in 15 years.

At the start of the programme a message is flashed on screen, reading: "George Michael wishes to inform viewers that he has never tested positive for drink or drugs whilst driving."

As well as referring to the most recent incident this is also a reference to an incident in February, when he was cautioned when found asleep at the wheel of his car near Hyde Park.

Two months later he hit three parked cars and in July he was caught having sex on Hampstead Heath.

Of this Michael tells interviewer Melvyn Bragg: "The public think I'm a man on the brink of a breakdown because I fell asleep in my car, I hit a parked car and because I cruise as a gay man."

But he insisted that far from losing control of his life he "feels good". "I'm happy with the music I'm making and I'm still loaded," he added.

The Daily Mail, Oct 2006.

http://www.dailymail.co.uk/pages/live/articles/showbiz/showbiznews.html?in_article_id=411560&in_page_id=1773

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3. Look at the following sentences, then work out the meanings of the underlined words. You can use a dictionary if you want.

i) Astonishing photographs showed George smoking cannabis

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ii) Michael said of his fondness for cannabis...

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iii) This stuff keeps me sane and happy

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iv) He was found slumped at the wheel of his car

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v) He had dabbled with other drugs

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vi) The public think I 'm a man on the brink of a breakdown

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vii) I 'm happy with the music I 'm making and I 'm still loaded

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4. The following are some readers' comments on the story from the Daily Mail website. Are they generally positive or negative?

Only dopes smoke dope, sad people who cannot cope with the life they created for themselves.

- **Rod, UK**

Well done George for having the guts to stand up and be counted in these days of the new plague of Reefer Madness.

Winston Matthews LCA. Legalise Cannabis Alliance.

- **Winston Matthews, Gatwick, Sussex**

He's obvious just out to shock these days. Cheap publicity. Grow up!

- **Mark, Chester, England**

Well done George, another nail in the coffin for this country.

- **Andy, Andy, England**

This sad chap is a fantastic advert for being drug free!

- **Tony, Newcastle-upon-Tyne UK**

George has opened up that he smokes Cannabis. That's his choice! He can afford it and is doing nobody any harm. But I believe that if you have to take any type of drug or drink to feel 'Normal' then I'm afraid something is wrong or missing in your life!

So come George be honest with yourself!

- **Helen, West Bromwich**

He obviously doesn't have a thought for all those parents trying to educate children against drugs.

Why do these celebrities insist on glamorising it!

- **Jane, Street, Somerset**

Cannabis is for idiots.

And there's the proof.

- **MJF, Liverpool**

He looks rough, and not in a good way.

- **Kitty, Essex, UK**

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5. What is your own take on this story? Write a few lines of your opinion, then discuss with other people in your group:

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6. Imagine you are going to speak to some top people in the government who want to know the opinions of young people when it comes to drugs. Write some ideas for them.

- What laws would you change with regards to cannabis/alcohol/cigarettes/any other drugs?
- What do you think is wrong with the attitude of the police/politicians when it comes to these issues?

Try to write 5 ideas.

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v)

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