

# KNEECAP

En film af Rich Peppiatt

- et undervisningsmateriale



Fag: Engelsk, mediefag og musik

Overordnede temaer: Nordirland, The Troubles, hiphop som et redskab for at italesætte social ulighed, kampen for at bevare det irske sprog

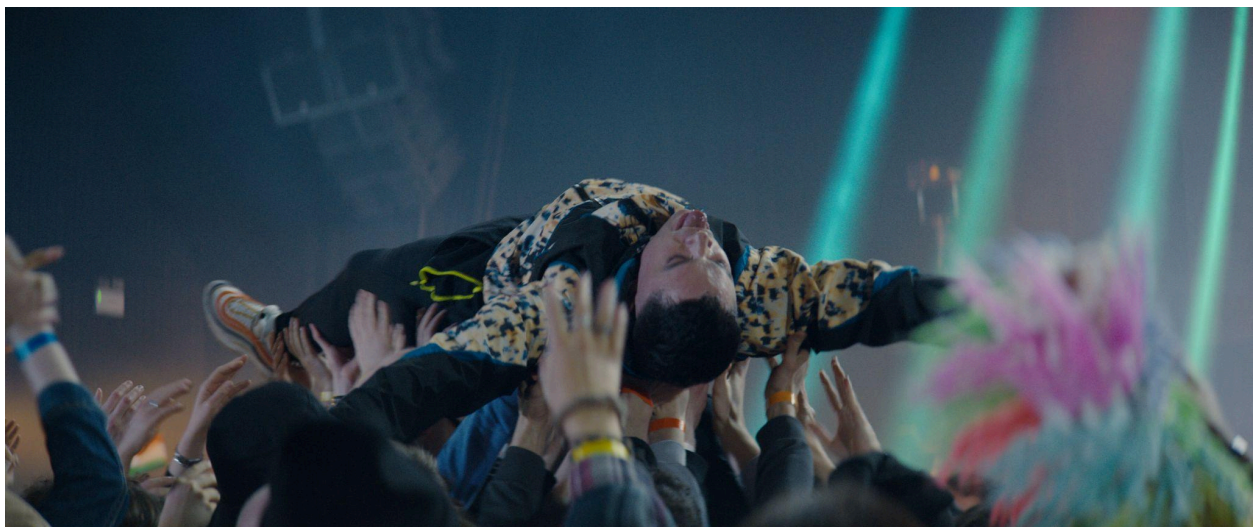
## 1. Introduction

There are 80,000 native Irish speakers in Ireland. 6,000 live in the North of Ireland. Three of them became a rap group called Kneecap.

This is the real life story of how this anarchic Belfast trio became the unlikely figureheads of a civil rights movement to save their mother tongue.

In post-troubles Belfast, the riotous rap trio Kneecap emerges, setting the stage for the Irish language's resurgence against the establishment. Self-proclaimed 'low life scum' Liam Óg and Naoise, along with school teacher JJ, become a political symbol and the defiant voice of Ireland's restless youth.

As they struggle to make their mark on the world, and family and relationship pressures threaten to pull the plug on their dreams, the trio weave a narrative that transcends music. A true-life fable about the intrinsic urge for identity and a passion for life, KNEECAP is a thrilling ride pulsating with hip-hop beats.



## 2. The roots of hip hop and rap culture

Hip hop and rap music first emerged in the 1970's and to this day, hip hop is as relevant as ever, and its potential for generating political discourse has not faltered.

Enter the Northern Irish rap trio Kneecap, who rap in a language most people in Northern Ireland barely speak - Irish. As you will have seen in the film, their lyrics are (extremely) potent and brimming with political messages.

## Discussions questions:

- Look into the history of hip hop and rap. Where did it all begin? And why do you think it started there?
- Look at the lyrics to '[The Message](#)' (1982) by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. How does Grandmaster Flash use hip hop to shine a light on political issues?
- Now look at current hip hop artists, e.g. Lil Baby's song '[The Bigger Picture](#)'.
  - What issues are being addressed today?
  - Have things changed for the better or the worse?
  - What are the similarities and differences between 'The Message' and 'The Bigger Picture'? Look at the lyrics, the sound, the delivery, tone of voice, anything else you can think of.
  - Do the lyrics to 'The Message' still apply today?
- As a group, Kneecap also have a very political focus. In groups, discuss the message that Kneecap want to get across to their listeners. How do they express this message and other struggles in their lives through their lyrics?
- If you were to write a political hip hop song about Danish society, what areas would you focus on?

### 3. The Troubles in Northern Ireland - past and present

The Troubles was a conflict in Northern Ireland, which took place between the years of 1968 and 1998. The conflict was mainly a clash between the Protestant unionists (also known as loyalists), who wanted Northern Ireland to remain a part of the United Kingdom, and the Catholic nationalists (also known as republicans), who wanted Northern Ireland to become a part of Ireland again.

Over the course of the 30 years of the Troubles, around 3.600 people were killed and more than 30.000 people wounded. Some liken the conflict to a civil war, as the British army and other military organizations often clashed with the Irish Republican Army (IRA), who approached the struggles as a guerilla war for independence from the United Kingdom.

The Troubles came to an 'official' end in 1998, where the Good Friday Agreement (also known as the Belfast Agreement) was signed by both the UK and the Irish government.

The agreement put an end to 30 years of bombings, shootings, intimidations and unlawful arrests carried out by armed groups from both sides of the struggle.

- Discuss the beginning of the film 'Kneecap'. How do films usually depict the Troubles? And why does the film want to set itself apart from other depictions of the Troubles?
- The Troubles are alluded to throughout the film, although Kneecap grew up after the Good Friday Agreement and haven't experienced the Troubles firsthand. How do they address the Troubles? What is the tone of voice when discussing the Troubles - funny, sad, angry?
- Ask your students to identify references throughout the film to the Troubles. For example, Margaret Thatcher's picture on the dart target, kneecapping, DJ Próvaí's name, 'Bobby Sandals', being a Fenian c\*nt, etc.
- Discuss Móglaí Bap's parents Dolores and Arló as characters in relation to the Troubles. How do they deal with the past? Do they remember it differently?
- Arló has previously been an IRA fighter and has now gone into hiding to avoid going to prison. How is he spoken about in his family and in the community (think of the scene with his 'funeral')? Are his actions remembered as heroic? If not, how are they remembered?
- Does 'Kneecap' present a different way to protest injustice than the violence interlaced with the Troubles?
- [Read this blog post from the European Centre for Minority Issues for further inspiration.](#)



#### 4. Language rights in Northern Ireland - an ongoing struggle

The Irish language (called Gaeilge in Irish) is a Celtic language and indigenous to the island of Ireland. Until the 19th century, it was the main language spoken in all of Ireland, but due to colonization and linguistic imperialism from the United Kingdom, the number of Irish speakers has significantly dwindled since.

Irish is only spoken by 6.000 people in Northern Ireland. As of 2021, 1.9 million people live in Northern Ireland, which only means 0,3% of the population speak the language.

In the film, Kneecap mainly speak Irish with each other and even begin making rap music in Irish, which causes quite a stir in Belfast and embroils them in a civil rights fight to preserve the Irish language.

Irish is considered an endangered language in Ireland and Northern Ireland alike. However, there are many forces fighting to preserve and invigorate the language. Over 1.1 million people are learning Irish on Duolingo, and in 2022, the Identity and Language (Northern Ireland) Act was put into action, which officially recognized the status of the Irish language in Northern Ireland.

- As of 2024, around 3.000 languages were considered endangered, which is nearly half of all spoken languages. Make your students define what an endangered language is and what a living language is.
- Make your students look into the history of the Irish language in Northern Ireland. What sort of discrimination did (and still do) Irish-speakers face? And why do they think it is no longer spoken as widely before in both Ireland and Northern Ireland?
- In the film, we are shown different ways to fight for your language rights, personified by Caitlin's more traditional activism and Kneecap's more chaotic activism.  
Compare the group Kneecap's way of protesting with the character Caitlin's. Which do you think is most effective? What are the pros and cons of Kneecap and Caitlin's (very) different ways of protesting?
- It is clear to many of the characters in the film that the Irish language carries enormous weight to their idea of Irish culture. Make your students look into the many ways culture and language are intertwined - what examples can they think of where language defines culture?
- As a thought experiment, make them debate how the world would look if everyone spoke English and no local languages existed anymore. Would it be better? Would it be worse?