

## Listening Comprehension

### K-POP, MORE THAN JUST A MUSIC STYLE

**Interviewer:** South Korea is known for its festivals, some of which have been celebrated since the 16th century. Due to its rich history, there are also many traditional buildings, such as Buddhist temples and huge palaces. But among young people, South Korea is famous for K-pop. Early in the pandemic, sociologist Chris Resa began watching K-pop videos, largely for fun. Now she's exploring the societal impact of the popular genre. Good morning, Chris.

**Chris:** Good morning. A pleasure to be here.

**Interviewer:** Well Chris, K-pop stands for Korean Pop but now it belongs to the whole world as it has transformed into a global cultural phenomenon. Is it true?

**Chris:** I couldn't agree more. During the 1990s, it was a musical subculture popular in South Korea but K-pop now frequently tops the **billboard charts**, attracts fiercely dedicated online followers, and generates billions of dollars. Its best-known artists, the boy band BTS, were nominated in three different categories at the Grammy Awards last year, and they are the most-listened-to group in Spotify history.

**Interviewer:** UCLA professor Yao Kim, who has also written about the K-pop phenomenon, said, "It's way more than music. It is a total entertainment that incorporates choreography, fashion and lifestyle." Do you agree?

**Chris:** Sure. We used to have very prominent boy bands and girl groups, such as New Kids on the Block, Spice Girls or One Direction. I think K-pop really hits kind of a **vacuum** that Western pop cultural trends left behind.

**Interviewer:** Chris, as a Professor of Sociology and Professor of ethnicity, race, and migration in Yale's Faculty of Arts and Sciences, you have done research on why the genre's rise has been important to so many Asian Americans. You have said that watching a TV programme on Saturday Night Live changed your view of K-pop. How did that performance turn your personal interest in K-pop into an academic one?

**Chris:** I saw that performance, and it stayed in the back of my mind. Then, when we were on lockdown because of COVID, being stuck at home set the stage for having time to watch more K-pop videos. At first, I was just watching them for fun. I knew K-pop was something important, but I didn't know anything about it. I thought "I should educate myself on this." I've always been interested in race and ethnicity and Asian Americans. I knew that K-pop was important, so I started investigating the phenomenon.

**Interviewer:** What kind of research are you doing?

**Chris:** My colleagues and I, we are studying the link between 80s synth-pop and current K-pop. Others have argued that K-pop borrows heavily from American Black music. And it's true, but we're arguing that K-pop has links to many different genres (black music, synth pop, hip hop, new wave synth, even reggae). In another project, with two data scientists, we're looking at Twitter data related to a tweet that BTS posted in 2021, about a week after a gunman in Atlanta murdered eight women, including six of Asian descent. K-pop fans are really well organized, and they may be ready to take political action. K-pop is extremely influential. So, we're looking at how the conversation about the shootings before and after they tweeted changed.

**Interviewer:** Why do you think K-pop is so influential? I mean, yeah, they are really popular in Korea but what about the States, for example? Do you think that K-pop may have a role in American society?

**Chris:** Sure! Think about this. BTS performed on *Saturday Night Live*, NBC's Emmy-winning late-night comedy showcase. Especially people my age in their mid-thirties, we had never seen a bunch of East Asian people on the stage singing in a non-English, non-Western language. I knew that was an important moment regardless of whether or not you like the music or the performance. Asians were visible! BTS made Asian faces more visible. They were on the cover of Time magazine, every major publication. They were everywhere. But it also brought up questions of xenophobia. People were making fun of them because of how they looked. At the time, there was also the extra baggage that comes with being Asian. But any time BTS were attacked, because their fandom is so big and so passionate, their fans would jump on anyone who did anything to them. Then journalists would cover it, and suddenly there were all these stories about how you shouldn't be racist against Asians.

**Interviewer:** Are you saying that BTS fans could stop xenophobia?

**Chris:** Well, many of us who study Asian Americans have observed over time that it often seems acceptable for people to make fun of Asian things. Now, BTS fans are protecting them, and that that gets elevated to the news is a big deal. President Biden invited them to the White House. These are all things I would have had trouble imagining even just five years ago.

**Interviewer:** I have heard that many fans would like to become K-pop idols themselves. But that's not easy at all.

**Chris:** Right. Many go for an audition. If you're chosen, you'll spend up to ten years in South Korea's K-pop training centres, operated by the entertainment companies. It's kind of like a boot camp. You go to your acting class, you go to your singing class, you go to your dance class. Your appearance will also be managed: you get camera tested on every angle, hair and makeup. They change up different hairstyles, different colours.

**Interviewer:** Is there a dark side to it?

**Chris:** When there's a good side, there's always going to be a bad side. It was a pressure of success. While the training camps may sound intense to Americans, that

kind of competitive pressure **pervades** Korean culture. I'm not sure that it's unique to K-pop. It's a societal thing in Korea. There is a lot of pressure on doing well in school. They're all up until whatever time at night, like, studying, doing the work. There is this idea of wanting to do your best, and not disappointing others.

**Interviewer:** I see...but if K-pop idols are often put on extremely strict diets, strenuous training schedules, and are heavily scrutinized, ... no one, no adults criticize this situation?

**Chris:** Well, in fact, last year **a bill was passed** amidst rising concerns from the public about the health and safety of minors in the highly demanding Korean entertainment industry, as companies continue to debut K-pop idols at younger ages. It is a bill to protect underage K-pop idols from exploitation and it is meant to reinforce financial transparency. Previously, entertainers under the age of 15 could work up to 35 hours a week, while those older than 15 were allowed 40 hours a week. Now, entertainers under the age of 12 can only work a maximum of 25 hours a week, up to 6 hours a day. Those aged 12 to 15 are allowed 30 hours a week, while those above the age of 15 can work 35 hours a week, both of these age groups are limited to 7 hours a day. What is more, the law also prohibits any **infringement** of underage entertainers' rights to education by forcing them to be absent from or drop out of school. So, K-pop teenagers must attend school.

**Interviewer:** I see that things are changing for the better. Well, Chris, we do not have time for more. Thanks for your interesting insights into K-pop.

**Chris:** Thank you.

Adapted from:

The rise of K-pop, and what it reveals about society and culture, Yale News, Caroline Huber (August 21, 2023) <https://news.yale.edu/2023/08/21/rise-k-pop-and-what-it-reveals-about-society-and-culture>

Choose the best answer according to the text. Only ONE answer is correct.

[3 points: 0.375 points for each correct answer. Wrong answers will be penalized by deducting 0.125 points. There is no penalty for unanswered questions].

### Clau de respostes

1. Its fans prefer K-pop concerts to online music.
2. K-pop substitutes boy and girl bands.
3. After watching some K-pop videos for entertainment.
4. All statements are correct.
5. K-pop draws attention to Asian people.
6. Asian artists are popular enough to appear in the news.
7. work extremely hard and under a lot of pressure, which is something accepted in Korean culture.
8. The maximum amount they can legally earn.

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