



# TEENAGE GANGS

A TALKING POINTS ENGLISH LESSON FOR  
READING, SPEAKING, WRITING & VOCABULARY

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## Introduction

Does your country have teenage gangs?

What do these gangs do?

Why do teenagers join these gangs?

## Teenage Kicks

***Read Kevin's account below:***

When I was a teenager I got in with the wrong crowd.

I was all right until I reached about fourteen and then I changed completely. I started hanging out with this group of lads who were not doing well at school. They kind of made me a member of their gang and before I knew it we were out roaming the streets every night.

It drove my mum and dad mad.

They had no idea what had happened to me and they didn't like who I was hanging out with but they couldn't control me.

In the beginning, we just played stupid games on the street near where we lived. Like going up to people's doors and knocking really loudly then running away.

People would get so angry with us but we would just laugh and run away.

But then two of the lads in our gang asked me to meet them on a Saturday. We went into the town centre and they said they were going to look at some sports shoes in this big department store.

I went with them and we wandered around looking at these expensive sports shoes.

Then one of them just picked up a pair in his size and put them under his jacket. He smiled at us and winked — then ran out of the store. The other guy ran out quickly too and I tried to follow them but by then the floor staff saw what was happening.

A member of staff — a really big man — caught me. Then they took me to this small office at the back of the shop and called the shopping mall's security. The security guards arrived and they said they have everything on camera. They said if I give them the names of the other two guys then I would not have any trouble as I had not stolen anything.

But if I refused to help them they would call the police and the police would talk to my parents — and maybe my school.

I sat in the chair with three adults staring back at me. I didn't know what to do. If I told them the names of the two other lads, I would have serious trouble from them.

This is like a secret code in all gangs — you never tell on others. You never grass on your gang mates.

So I said nothing and they called the police. The police arrived and they spoke to me. They said the same thing — if I give them names, I can go.

But I was too scared of what would happen to me.

Then we left and went back to my home. My parents saw me arriving back home with the police and it was just terrible.

My dad just shook his head but my mum burst into tears.

We went inside and the police told my parents what had happened. After some time I told the police the names of the other boys — I felt like I had no choice.

Now I have to wait and see what happens when I go back to school.

## Reading Comprehension Questions

At what age did Kevin meet the wrong crowd?

What did Kevin join?

Were his parents happy about this?

What game did Kevin and his friends play?

How did people respond to this game?

What did Kevin and his friends think of the game?

Where did two of Kevin's friends ask to meet him? And on what day?

What did they look at?

What did one of Kevin's friends do with a pair of shoes?

What happened to Kevin?

Where did the staff take Kevin?

Who did the staff call to help them?

What did the people ask Kevin?

Did he help them with their questions? Why/why not?

What is the 'secret code' in the gang?

Who arrived next? What did they ask Kevin?

Where did the police take Kevin?

How did his father react? What about his mother?

What did Kevin tell the police?

How does Kevin feel now?



## Essential Vocabulary

the wrong crowd	hanging out	lads
not doing well	gang	roaming the streets
to drive (sb.) mad	knocking really loudly	town centre
department store	wandered around	expensive
picked up	a pair	winked
floor staff	security staff	refused
staring	secret code	to grass
gang mates	scared	terrible
shook his head	burst into tears	no choice

### Exercise

Write down all the words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look in your dictionary and find the meaning of each word. Write the definition next to each word.

Then make up your own sentences using each word or phrase.

For example:

**Notebook**—*a small book with pages of blank paper that students use to make notes when studying.*

***“I left my notebook at home so I was unable to make any notes in my English class.”***

## Discussion Questions

Why do you think Kevin got in with the wrong crowd? What were his reasons for doing so?

Do teenagers in your country/culture behave badly sometimes? Give some examples.

What was the game that Kevin and his friends play together? Why do you think this was funny to them?

Why do you think two of the gang members invited Kevin to join them to go to the department store? Were they trying to trick him? Or was it a test of some kind?

How do you think Kevin felt when he was caught by the department store staff?

If you were in Kevin's place, what would you have done? Would you tell the security staff everything? Why/why not?

What is the 'secret code' that Kevin talks about? Does this code exist in your culture between teenagers? Describe the rules if you can.

How do you think Kevin's parents felt when they saw him arrive home in the back of a police car?

If you arrived home in the back of a police car, how would your parents react? What would they do?

Are teenage gangs common or popular in your country? What do they do together?

## Teenagers: the difference between two countries

Different countries have different cultures. And as such teenagers may behave differently in different countries.

In this exercise, get into small groups of around four students. Then find as many differences between teenagers in your country and another country.

Fill in as much of the information in the table below as you can:

	Your country	Another country
Joining gangs		
Trouble with parents		
Trouble in school		
smoking		
Drinking alcohol		
Refusing to do homework		
sex		
stealing		
Going out in the evening		

In your groups, go through all the categories and try to think of the differences between teenagers in your country and in another country.

For example, you might say:

***In my country, teenagers do not join gangs. But in America, some teenagers join gangs.***

Then you could say why you think this might be so:

***In my country, it is strictly forbidden to join any gangs. Teenagers are encouraged to study hard and do well at school. But in America, teenagers may have too much freedom. They can choose what kind of life they want.***

When you have been through all the categories, present all your information as one group to the class.

## Teenage Gangs: the pros and cons

**This is a class exercise.**

Your teacher will write the words PROS and CONS on the board.

In the class, brainstorm all the advantages and disadvantages of being in a street gang.

Under each word, think of all the different reasons why a teenager would join a gang.

Here are some ideas to get you started:

- prestige
- effect on studies
- being with young people who understand you
- respect
- trouble with authorities
- honour
- a change to the future
- friendship
- good fun

## Debate: Teenage Gangs

**This is a debate activity.**

Divide the class into two teams of equal number. You should also elect or choose a chairperson – this person is responsible for keeping order during the debate and making sure that everyone has the chance to speak.

### Situation

There has been a rise in teenage gangs in your area. Schools are finding that there are gangs forming on their grounds and these gangs are spending a lot of time on the streets after school.

The school's teachers and head staff think this could have an adverse effect on the students' future.

***But others disagree and think it is just harmless fun.***

### Team A

You believe that teenage gangs are a problem.

They could lead to a life of crime, social disorder and poor grades in school. This will then cause the student in the gang to have a poor future. They may find it difficult to find a job.

***You think that schools should clamp down on gangs and disband them whenever they can.***

### Team B

You think that most teenage gangs are harmless.

You believe that banning them is totally unnecessary and could actually lead to more trouble.

Gangs for many teenagers are an essential part of growing up and most teenagers grow out of the gangs by the time they reach their twenties.

***The schools should keep a close eye on the gangs but not ban them.***

In your teams, you should spend some time to come up with strong lines of argument to use in the debate. If you have any personal stories, anecdotes or examples then please use these in the debate too.

***When each group is ready, begin the debate.***



## Role Play

**This is a role play exercise.**

There are two characters in this role play:

### Kevin

You are Kevin from the story at the beginning of the lesson. You have been invited to join a gang in school. The gang members are all bad lads from school, but you think by joining this gang you will get respect from all other students in the school.

It could also be a lot of fun as the gang does many exciting and interesting things in the evening after school.

### Teacher

You are Kevin's teacher.

You have found out that Kevin may join a gang in school. You want to discourage Kevin from joining this gang. You are not angry with Kevin so you do not raise your voice with him.

But you want to point out all the reasons why joining a street gang is not a good idea.

Get into pairs and choose a character. Then take some time to practice your role play.

***When you are ready show the class.***

## Writing

**This is a creative writing exercise.**

Write a short story about a teenager being in a gang. The outline of the story and what happens is entirely up to you – you are the author!

***When you have written your story, you can read it out loud in class. Or give it to your teacher for feedback.***

## Credits

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