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| sjks | Name: Raphael Lopes Cardoso |
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| | Reading assessment: Hip-hop and depression |
| | Teacher: S.Hennebel |
| | Score: 10 / 10 |

Hip-hop and depression

Read the article and answer the questions.

- 1 In your own words, what do you think the author means when he says 'To Pimp a Butterfly isn't a "good-time barrel of laughs"'? /2
That the album isn't about good times
and it's sad.
- 2 Why is the song 'i' different than 'u'? /2
The song 'i' is filled with confidence and isn't
sad.
- 3 How might the fact that Earl Sweatshirt is at 'a traditionally introspective age' influence the tone of his music? /2
He uses swearing and what he talks
about is actual.
- 4 What is one of the reasons why this more 'emotional' style of rap hasn't been popular in the past? /2
Because rappers tend to portray themselves as
emotionally impenetrable.
- 5 How has Kanye West been pivotal (crucial) in the increasing popularity of this style of rap? /2
He has never been shy about trumpeting
his greatness. Many of their work have been
inspired by his songs.

Hip-hop's blue period: how rappers are tackling depression

Kendrick Lamar's *To Pimp a Butterfly* is the most-praised album of the year, but a good-time barrel of laughs it is not. One of the most prominent issues it wrestles with is depression. If you thought dominating hip-hop in the past few years would have put Lamar in a good mood, you'd be wrong. As he raps on 'u', referring to himself: 'You ain't no brother, you ain't no disciple, you ain't no friend/A friend never leave Compton for profit or leave his best friend.' Such feelings are natural and healthy, considering, as Lamar has explained in interviews, his 'survivor's guilt' about getting out of his hometown while others he's close to have suffered.

Then there's 'i', *To Pimp a Butterfly*'s counterpoint to 'u', which is filled with confidence. ('I love myself!' goes the chorus.) Tracks like 'i' - full of self-love and celebrating making it out of dire circumstances - have long dominated hip-hop. This narrative remains a part of rap's DNA, as common as the 12 bar chord progression is to blues music. But, as 'u' indicates, rapping about one's low moments has become increasingly popular. MCs like Earl Sweatshirt, J Cole, and Drake are going to emotional places where rappers once rarely ventured.

Earl Sweatshirt's *I Don't Like Shit, I Don't Go Outside* sets the tone with its title. Having dealt with the death of his grandmother, substance issues, medical problems, and general growing pains that come with getting successful at a young age, he probes deep within himself on the album, particularly on tracks like 'Grief': 'Lately I've been panicking a lot/Feeling like I'm stranded in a mob, scrambling for Xanax out the canister to pop.' Considering his previous albums, his collaborations with the oft-mopey Tyler the Creator, and the fact that Earl is 21 years old (a traditionally introspective age), this vein isn't surprising, but it's indicative of a hip-hop landscape where rappers are no longer shy about crying on the listener's shoulder.

It wasn't always like this. As Combat Jack has said on his show, therapy has often gotten a bad rap in the black community, which may be why rappers tend to portray themselves as emotionally impenetrable, whatever pain may lay beneath the surface.