

A P A R E N T ' S
T O
G U I D E

Drake

axis

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Drake is an interpreter, in other words, of the people he is trying to reach—an artist who can write lyrics that wide swaths of listeners will want to take ownership of and hooks that we will all want to sing to ourselves as we walk down the street.

—Leon Neyfakh, “[Peak Drake](#),” *The FADER*

Does Drake have you in your feelings about how much your kids are listening to him?

John Lennon famously said the Beatles were bigger than Jesus, but Aubrey Graham, aka Drake aka Drizzy, is now the best-selling solo male artist of all time. He has [surpassed Elvis and Eminem](#), with over \$218,000,000 in total record sales. Not only that, he was [Billboard's 2018 Top Artist](#) and [Spotify's most-streamed](#) artist, track, and album of 2018.

[Described by one writer](#) as having “the Midas touch when it comes to making hits and singles,” it seems as though everything Drake does is successful. He appeals to those who like “harder” rap, but still excites a One Direction level of infatuation in young girls. Other rappers can take [shots at his son and his parents](#) [warning: strong language] without doing real damage to his career. He's able to transform up-and-coming artists into superstars just by featuring them on his albums or being featured on theirs.

With all of his influence on both his fans and the culture at large, it's important to understand who Drake is, what he stands for, and what he's teaching, both explicitly and implicitly, the people who listen to him. By doing so, we will not only know how he's impacting our kids, but also what conversations to have with them as we disciple them. (Note: Many of Drake's songs are explicit, so any song we mention in this Guide could be vulgar.)

—— Who is Drake?

Drake was [born in 1986 in Toronto](#) (making him an older Millennial) to a white, Jewish mother and a black, Catholic father. Of his identity, Drake says, ““At the end of the day, I consider myself a black man because I'm more immersed in black culture than any other. Being Jewish is kind of a cool twist. It makes me unique.”” His mother raised him after his parents divorced when he was five years old.

Drake first became famous on the teen drama, [Degrassi: The Next Generation](#). He played high school student Jimmy Brooks, who is eventually shot by another student and then bound to a wheelchair. Drake started on *Degrassi* in 2001 and began pursuing his hip hop career while on the show. His musical career had not yet taken off when he was cut from the show seven years later. However, rapper Lil Wayne unexpectedly reached out to him. Drake ended up signing with Lil Wayne's label, Young Money, and the rest is history.

—— What does he sing about?

Before we answer this question, we want to point out that you can't truly understand an artist without listening to his/her music. If your kids love Drake, reading this Guide and other reviews is helpful, but it's important that you also listen to at least some of his music—no matter how you feel about it.

Some of the things Drake sings about are:

- being supportive toward women (“Nice for What”)
- romance (“Best I Ever Had,” “In My Feelings,” “Take Care”)

- being the greatest ever (“Forever”)
- having sex with tons of women he doesn’t care about (“The Motto”)
- overcoming hard circumstances (“Too Much,” “Worst Behavior”)
- how he feels sad and unfulfilled (“Marvin’s Room”)
- social media (“Emotionless”)
- how everyone is against him (“Energy,” “I’m Upset”)
- helping people/his legacy (“God’s Plan”)
- people who are authentic (“Started from the Bottom”)
- people who are inauthentic (“Fake Love,” “Hotline Bling”)
- living for the moment (“One Dance”)
- controlling relationships (“Controlla”)

Both vulgar and romantic, arrogant and thoughtful, Drake is full of contradictions. He is able to promote competing messages while still presenting himself as authentic. He can regularly call women “b****es” and still be perceived as a gentleman. He once [paused in the middle of a concert](#) to tell a man in the audience to stop harassing the women around him.

“God’s Plan” is a great example of behavior that seems alternately humble and self-absorbed. The music video shows Drake using his wealth and influence to help people who are in financial need. The song is about the legacy Drake wants to leave; the “plan” in question is his. Even though Drake is comparing himself to God, it’s hard not to be moved by the reactions of the people who receive the cash, free groceries, and toys he donates. Notably, the song [broke streaming records](#), with 60 million plays on Apple Music during the first week of its release.

—— How has he influenced hip hop?

It used to be that hip hop artists started on the streets and then became wealthy and famous because of their hip hop careers. The difficult experiences of their roots gave them authenticity and credibility. This was not the case with Drake, who became famous on *Degrassi* before rising as a hip hop star. To be fair, Drake has said that [he did have difficulties as a child](#), even though he grew up in a wealthy part of Toronto (which he raps about on “Started from the Bottom”). Not only was he biracial and Jewish, but he “grew up with a mom who was deep in debt because she wanted best for family.”

Yet within hip hop, authenticity is more important than where someone comes from. So in recent years, artists like Drake and Childish Gambino have been able to achieve success as artists and maintain credibility even though they were celebrities before they started their musical careers. This in itself is a notable difference in modern hip hop compared to a few decades ago. But it’s not the only change or innovation we can associate with Drake.

Leveraging the cosign

As we’ve noted, Drake became successful because he had Lil Wayne’s help. Fuse’s series [The Drake Effect](#) points out that, since then, Drake has strategically networked and collaborated with other musicians, to their advantage as well as to his own.

One interviewee in the series describes Drake's fan base as "ridiculous" (as in, ridiculously large). If he gives another artist a boost, it can really make a difference in that person's popularity. He has a knack for recognizing artists who are talented and whom people will like and has had a hand in helping the careers of Kendrick Lamar, A\$AP Rocky, ILoveMakonnen, the Migos, and Tinashe, among many others.

In *The Drake Effect*, Rob Markman of [Genuis.com](#) observes that when Drake helps other artists, he also helps himself because he's able to stay in the spotlight without having to drop an entire album. As [one writer says](#), "Drake's ability to collaborate with numerous artists, along with having so many positive relationships throughout the industry, has allowed him to touch so many singles that have topped the charts, that for a while anything he was on was a smash."

Leveraging the mixtape

Drake changed hip hop through how he leveraged the mixtape. While the line between what defines a mixtape and what defines an album is blurrier than it's ever been, [a mixtape is](#) "usually a compilation of songs or remixes that artists put out to their fans as a promotion, or to ease the anxiety from a long period of silence. They are produced with the chief purpose of creativity and social buzz, released to the public's ears for free." If an artist wants to sample another artist's song, he has to get permission to do so in order to put that song on an album, but does not need this permission when putting the song on a mixtape.

Of course, mixtapes aren't anything new. What's new is how Drake has marketed and presented his. *So Far Gone* [felt like a real album](#) and was promoted as though it were one. It had music videos and radio play, and two of the songs became hits on the charts. Drake later successfully repackaged that mixtape as a real album and has since repeated this strategy with two of his other albums, *If You're Reading This It's Too Late* and *What a Time to Be Alive*.

Blending styles

Drake raps, yes, but he also sings. Blending the two within his music is another of his innovations. Markman says that because of Drake, "sing-songy rap" is now popular (for example, with artists like Future and Fetty Wap). Even R&B artists, who typically sing, are rapping more.

— Why do people love him so much? Why is he so much bigger than many other hip hop artists?

Besides what we've already mentioned, there are a few other reasons.

1. *Degrassi* made him famous.

Degrassi made Drake famous in Canada and gave some [Americans an awareness of him](#). One Millennial we talked to remembers watching parts of *Degrassi* while he was in high school because the show addressed various issues relevant to teenagers, such as school shootings, sexuality, and depression.

2. He appeals to multiple demographics.

[A writer at Complex says](#), “If there is a Drake song you don’t like, he’s sure to have something that’s more your speed waiting in the chamber.” [Sidney Madden of NPR writes](#), “Any fan of Drake—or even just a casual Drizzy sympathizer—knows by now that this man has made a career out of shape shifting.”

[Some people say Drake is “soft”](#) [warning: strong language] because he sings as well as raps and because he sings love songs that appeal to women. But he also has “harder,” more traditional rap songs. So if you’re looking for a song about being awesome and sleeping with tons of women, Drake has a song about that. If you’re a teenage girl who wants a guy to tell you that you’re pretty even when you have no makeup on, Drake has a song about that.

Another key to Drake’s success is his ability to cross cultural barriers. He partners with artists of other ethnicities and even [sings songs in other languages](#), allowing him to reach a diverse audience.

3. He networks.

Drake’s networking goes far beyond collaborating with other artists. He knows famous people from [many other areas of life](#). He’s partnered with the Jordan brand and Canada Goose. He has steadfastly supported his home city of Toronto and has been the global ambassador for the Toronto Raptors. He’s friends with LeBron James.

4. Rivalries work to his advantage.

Even Drake’s public fights with other rappers only seem to help him. For example, he got into a feud with Meek Mill (who claimed Drake [didn’t write his own tracks](#)) and a feud with Chris Brown (over Rihanna). [Spin magazine calls](#) Drake’s feud with rapper Pusha T “one of the most full-bodied and entertaining rap beefs of this decade, if not this century.” Pusha T recently dissed Drake for (among other things) having a son with a porn star.

Yet Drake isn’t losing fans over these disputes. One Drake enthusiast we talked to says he’s observed that Drake’s fans will support him no matter what and that this is a level of influence that other rappers do not have.

5. He leverages other cultural trends.

Drake has an uncanny sense of when to capitalize on a cultural moment. For example, “Nice for What” is a song about empowering women and came out after the #MeToo movement picked up steam.

[According to Billboard:](#)

The “Nice for What” star has crafted the formula for keeping his finger on the pulse of cultural trends and figured out when to hop out of the shadows of his recording studio to pounce on said trends. It’s awe-inspiring how Drake knows just the right time to unleash a song that encapsulates a specific mood, a political topic or a shift in rap music’s climate. That perfection of timing is what makes him so invincible.

It’s not necessarily easy to point at exactly what cultural trend Drake is either following or setting with every song he releases. But he certainly has a knack for at least being

involved in these trends.

Take dance culture, which has helped Drake in his rise to fame. “In My Feelings” was [helped to top of the charts](#) after its corresponding dance challenge came out. Another cultural trend that made this song so palatable is the fact that it’s now less stigmatized to talk about one’s feelings. Our culture also puts a lot of value in being authentic, something that Drake speaks to. And in general, he sings about topics that are relevant to people, like relationships or even social media.

6. The internet and social media have helped him tremendously.

Drake both sings about and benefits from social media. At least on the surface, Drake didn’t have anything to do with the “In My Feelings” dance challenge; [Instagram comedian Shiggy](#) was the one who started it, causing the trend to take off and the song to indirectly get a boost. (Drake, of course, capitalized on the dance challenge by incorporating it and Shiggy into the music video for the song, which has over 173M views at the time of writing.)

It’s interesting to note, [as Complex does](#), that “in spite of all Drake’s skepticism about social media, he’s adept at leveraging it. So when he’s condescending to women for hiding behind a digital smokescreen, he’s critiquing something he does. Often.” (His Instagram account @champagnepapi has 52.8M followers, while his Twitter @drake has 37.8M at the time of writing.) People love creating memes about Drake, which obviously just brings him more attention. You’ll notice that [a lot of these](#) [warning: strong language] are inspired by his music video for “Hotline Bling.”

Finally, as we’re considering why Drake is popular, it doesn’t hurt that he can be both [charming and funny](#) or that he has taken advantage of the [ability to stream music online](#).

—— Is it bad if my kids listen to his music? Is there anything valuable about it?

Few things in life simply boil down to being either “good” or “bad.” Some of the ideas Drake is communicating are great. Some are not. Obviously, we can’t recommend that younger kids listen to him for many reasons, but if your older kids are already fans or asking you if they can start listening to him, we think your best approach is to become familiar with Drake’s music, learn from your kids why they like it, then teach them how to be discerning about what they consume.

You might find this challenging because some of his lyrics are pretty vulgar. If you start looking into Drake’s music and happen upon a song with extremely vulgar language, it’s important that you don’t immediately react and come down hard on your kids over what they’re listening to. First, they might not be listening to those particular songs. Second, it will be a lot more effective if you *don’t* start with an emotional reaction and *do* start by calmly ascertaining what they like and what they find valuable about Drake’s music. After listening well, ask good questions. See if you can help them think through for themselves what Drake is saying and the

implications of his messages. Then express any concerns you have. The goal is not to be their conscience for them, but rather to properly train their consciences and their ability to hear the Holy Spirit.

So what's good and/or valuable about Drake and his music? We've mentioned some positives above. In addition to that, the fact that he seems to genuinely want to help people, that he has some motivation to support women, and that he's pointing out some true problems with social media are all good. Wherever you can, emphasize the positives about his music as you help your kids think through the negatives. Remember that, for Gen Z, it's not just about the music; it's also about the person behind the music, the status listening to that artist brings, and how they feel when listening. So if we attack an artist, it can often feel like we're attacking a close personal friend or a part of their identity. For more thoughts on talking to your kids about music, see our [Parent's Guide to Gen Z's Love of Music](#).

Discussion Questions

- Why do you like Drake?
- What are your favorite songs by him and why?
- What do you think he values?
- Does he ever contradict himself in his music? Give some examples.
- Does his social media or life ever contradict his music? Give some examples.
- Do you think it matters if Drake is sending conflicting messages? Why/why not?
- How do you think Drake's music, social media, and life are impacting you?
- Is it better to talk about sex in a vulgar, sometimes degrading way (as many hip hop artists do) or to be silent and say nothing about it at all (as the church often does)?
- Do you think Drake is an "authentic" person? Why or why not?
- Does the fact that Drake can appeal to so many types of people make him inauthentic, or is he being smart by growing his audience?
- Do you think it matters what music you dwell on? Do you notice that Drake's music affects you in any particular way?

Conclusion

Artists who have influence in our society have the ears and often the hearts of the people who are listening to them. Drake has an immense amount of influence at the moment.

One person we talked to believes that hip hop is able and willing to speak to a lot of the tensions that young people are wrestling with, whether that's faith, sexuality, or something else entirely. Even while some of the ideas in hip hop are misleading, it's important that someone speaks to these issues, and the church is often reluctant to do so.

That's where you come in. By listening to your kids, trying to understand why they enjoy the music they do, and by caring about them, you earn the right to speak into some of the most important aspects of life, thereby becoming the most important "influencer" in their lives.

Related Axis Resources

- [Parent's Guide to Gen Z's Love of Music](#)
- [Parent's Guide to Kendrick Lamar](#) (coming soon!)
- [Parent's Guide to Swearing](#) (coming soon!)
- [Parent's Guide to Influencers](#) (coming soon!)

Additional Resources

- "[Hip Hop is born at a birthday party in the Bronx](#)," History.com
- "[Sorry, Drake And Nicki, But Hip-Hop Is Changing](#)," *Vibe*
- "[3 Reasons Why Christians Can Appreciate Drake's 'God's Plan' Video](#)," Christ and Pop Culture
- [Hip Hop Evolution](#), Netflix documentary [rated TV-MA, but helpful for understanding the world of hip hop]

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