

Gang mayhem grips LA

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Key words

Match these key words from the text with their definitions.

backfires to bury a crackdown a gang to mourn
a summit turf unprecedented to vow

1. A group of young people who spend time together and often cause trouble. _____
2. To put someone's dead body in the ground (often in the passive). _____
3. To feel sad because someone has died. _____
4. An area that a group considers to be their own (informal, uncountable). _____
5. A strong action taken by the authority to stop a particular activity. _____
6. A meeting or series of meetings between leaders. _____
7. Never having happened or existed before. _____
8. To promise to do something. _____
9. If a plan _____ then it has the opposite effect you intended.

2 Read quickly

Skim the text to find the answers to these questions.

1. How many gang members are there in LA?
2. What does the expression 'a gang war between brown and black' mean?
3. What two things did Cheryl Green's death provoke?
4. What is the 'hit list'?
5. What does Father Boyle do to help people leave gangs?

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- 1 Father Greg Boyle keeps a grim count of the young gang members he has buried. Number 151 was Jonathan Hurtado, 18 – fresh out of jail. Now the kindly, bearded Jesuit mourns him. “The day he got out I found him a job. He never missed a day. He was doing really well,” Boyle says.
- 2 But Hurtado made a mistake: he went back to his old neighbourhood. While sitting in a park, Hurtado was approached by a man on a bike who said to him: “Hey, homie, what’s up?” He then shot Hurtado four times.
- 3 Boyle’s Los Angeles is a world away from the glamorous Hollywood hills, Malibu beaches and Sunset Strip – the celebrity-drenched city that David Beckham and Posh Spice will soon make their home.
- 4 Boyle’s Los Angeles is where an estimated 120,000 gang members across five counties battle over turf, pride and drugs. It is a city of violence as a race war escalates between new Hispanic gangs and older black groups. Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has referred to his city as “the gang capital of America”, has launched a crackdown on the new threat.
- 5 The latest front is the tiny strip of turf known as Harbor Gateway, a nest of streets between malls and office blocks. It was here, just before Christmas, that Cheryl Green, a 14-year-old black girl, died. As she stood on a corner talking with friends, two Hispanic members of the neighbourhood’s notorious 204th Street gang walked up and opened fire, killing Green and wounding three others. Traditionally, the outside view of LA gangs has been of black youths but Hispanic gangs are now in the ascendant, spreading across America.
- 5 Last year there were 269 gang-related killings in LA. Gang-related crime leaped 15.7 per cent last year, as most other types of crime fell. Hate crimes against black people have surged. With a rapidly growing Hispanic population, LA’s gang culture is shifting. It means that being black in the wrong neighbourhood can get you killed.
- 6 Green’s death brought the gang war between ‘brown and black’ to public awareness. Next week a summit will be held called the Black and Brown Strategy Meeting which aims to head off a race war. “All of the signs are there that a racial war is going to explode in this city,” says Khalid Shah, director of Stop the Violence, one of the groups organizing the meeting. “You are looking at an event which could not only paralyze an entire city but an entire state,” he warns.
- 7 Green’s death sparked Villaraigosa’s crackdown. The police took the unprecedented step of publishing a list of the 11 worst gangs, including 204th Street. They vowed to go after them with police, FBI agents and injunctions to prevent members meeting. But Angelenos have seen it all before. The city’s history is full of anti-gang initiatives.
- 8 Publishing the ‘hit list’ could backfire. In the gang sub-culture, being on the list is a badge of pride. “Putting out a list was a bad idea. Groups that don’t make the list will want to be on it. They don’t exactly think rationally,” said Alex Alonso, a gang historian.
- 9 Yet there is hope. Alfonso ‘Chino’ Visuet, 23, was sucked into the gang life as a teenager. There was the lure of excitement and riches, the push of a difficult home life. “People who join a gang are always running away from something. They flee to the gang,” Visuet says.
- 10 Visuet now works for Father Boyle’s Homeboy Industries, a project that helps people leave gang life. It provides jobs, an education, pays to have gang tattoos removed and gives counselling. It aims to remove the circumstances that lead to

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crime: poverty, abuse and unemployment. It is staffed almost entirely by former gang members and has spun off a bakery, a silk-screen printers and a restaurant.

- 11 It worked for Visuet. He starts college this autumn and wants to be a probation officer. "I was on the edge of doing something that would ruin my life, either by doing violence or having it done to me. That's over now," he says.
- 12 Visuet despairs at the conflict. "A brown gang member now just sees a black gang member. What they don't see is how that person comes from the same place they do. They might have a mother who is an alcoholic as well or a father

who beats on them. They have the same story," he says.

- 13 LA is a city of two worlds – Hollywood and gangs. On a two-lane highway that roars through the middle of Harbor Gateway, a few hundred yards from where Cheryl Green was gunned down, there is a billboard for a new TV show called Sons of Hollywood. It shows three rich young men against a backdrop of palm trees. It claims to be a 'reality' show, but for most of the impoverished, racially torn citizens it is nothing more than a fantasy.

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3 Comprehension check

Read again and find the significance of the following names and numbers in the article.

1. Jonathan Hurtado _____
2. Father Greg Boyle _____
3. Antonio Villaraigosa _____
4. Harbor Gateway _____
5. Cheryl Green _____
6. 204th Street _____
7. 15.7% _____
8. Khalid Shah _____
9. 11 _____
10. Alex Alonso _____

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4 Vocabulary 1: Ways of saying increase

Complete the second sentence so it means the same as the first. All the answers are in the text.

1. The city is more and more violent as a race war increases and becomes worse.
The city is more and more violent as a race war e_____.
2. The number of Hispanic gangs is increasing.
The number of Hispanic gangs is o_____ the a_____.
3. Gang-related crime increased a lot last year.
Gang-related crime l_____ last year.
4. Hate crimes against blacks increased rapidly.
Hate crimes against blacks s_____.
5. LA has an increasingly big Hispanic population.
LA has an r_____ g_____ Hispanic population.

5 Vocabulary 2: Hyphenated words A

Complete the sentences with a word from the box.

drenched lane profile related gang culture

1. Much of the crime is gang-_____.
2. Beverly Hills is a celebrity-_____ part of the city.
3. The police are taking anti-_____ measures to reduce the crime.
4. Many gangs have their own sub-_____.
5. The mayor is organizing a high-_____ summit to address the problem.
6. A fast two-_____ highway crosses the centre of town.

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6 Vocabulary 3: Hyphenated words B

Using the words from the exercise above, create new phrases for these definitions. The first one is done for you.

1. A place with a lot of sun. sun-drenched
2. A highway with five lanes. _____
3. Connected to drugs. _____
4. Below zero temperatures. _____
5. Good quality and expensive, of a better class. _____

7 Discussion

What could be the causes of gang-related crime in a city like LA? Are there gang problems in your city?

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KEY

1 Key words

1. a gang
2. to bury
3. to mourn
4. turf
5. a crackdown
6. a summit
7. unprecedented
8. to vow
9. backfires

2 Read quickly

1. 120,000
2. A gang war between blacks and Hispanics.
3. It brought the gang war to public awareness and sparked a police crackdown on gang violence.
4. The list of the city's worst gangs.
5. He helps them find a job, get counselling, remove their tattoos and get education.

3 Comprehension check

1. Jonathan Hurtado is the 151st gang member that Father Boyle has buried.
2. Father Greg Boyle helps gang members get out of a life of crime.
3. Antonio Villaraigosa is the mayor of LA.
4. Harbor Gateway is the latest area of turf war.
5. Cheryl Green was a black girl murdered by gang members.
6. 204th Street is the name of a Hispanic gang in LA.
7. Gang related crime went up by 15.7% last year.
8. Khalid Shah is the director of Stop the Violence and is organizing a summit to try and stop the race war in LA.
9. 11 is the number of gangs on the police 'hit list'.
10. Alex Alonso is a gang historian who disagrees with the idea of a hit list.

11. Homeboy Industries is Father Boyle's organization to help gang members get out of a life of violence.
12. Alfonso Visuet is an ex-gang member who has worked with Homeboy Industries.

4 Vocabulary 1: Ways of saying increase

1. escalates
2. on the ascendant
3. leaped or leapt
4. surged
5. rapidly growing

5 Vocabulary 2: Hyphenated words A

1. gang-related
2. celebrity-drenched
3. anti-gang
4. sub-culture
5. high-profile
6. two-lane highway

6 Vocabulary 3: Hyphenated words B

1. sun-drenched
2. five-lane highway
3. drugs-related
4. sub-zero
5. high-class