

Gang mayhem grips LA

Level 2 • Intermediate

1 Key words

Fill the gaps using key words from the text.

backfires
summit

bury
turf

to ruin
unprecedented

a crackdown
impoverished

a gang
to mourn

- _____ is a group of young people who spend time together and often cause trouble.
- When you _____ a person, you put his or her dead body in the ground.
- _____ is to feel sad because someone has died.
- _____ is an area that a group considers to be their own.
- _____ is a strong action taken by the authority to stop a particular activity.
- When leaders hold a _____, they have a meeting or series of meetings.
- If something is _____, then it has never happened or existed before.
- If a plan _____ then it has the opposite effect you intended.
- If you are _____ then you have little or no money.
- _____ something is to destroy or seriously damage it.

2 Read quickly

Skim the text and choose the correct answer.

- a) Father Boyle buried Jonathan Hurtado.
b) Father Boyle killed Jonathan Hurtado.
- a) In LA there is a new race war between Hispanic gangs and white gangs.
b) In LA there is a new race war between Hispanic gangs and black gangs.
- a) Cheryl Green was killed by police.
b) Cheryl Green was killed by gang members.
- a) There were less gang-related crimes last year than the year before.
b) There were more gang-related crimes last year than the year before.
- a) The gangs have published a list of the worst gangs.
b) The police has published a list of the worst gangs.
- a) Homeboy Industries helps young people leave gangs.
b) Homeboy Industries helps young people join gangs.

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Paul Harris
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- 1 Father Greg Boyle keeps a count of the young gang members he has buried. Number 151 was Jonathan Hurtado, 18 – fresh out of jail. Now the 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 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 new 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 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 rising and spreading across America.
- 6 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 gone up.
- 7 Green’s death made the public aware of the gang war between ‘brown and black’. 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.
- 8 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 promised 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.
- 9 Publishing the ‘hit list’ could backfire. “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.
- 10 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.
- 11 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 crime: poverty, abuse and unemployment. It is staffed almost entirely by former gang members and has created a bakery, a silk-screen printers and a restaurant.
- 12 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.

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13 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.

14 LA is a city of two worlds – Hollywood and gangs. On a two-lane highway that goes through the middle of Harbor Gateway, a few hundred

yards from where Cheryl Green was shot, 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

Find information in the text and write short answers to the questions.

1. What was Jonathan Hurtado's mistake?
2. How are Boyle's Los Angeles and the Beckhams' Los Angeles different?
3. How is the view of LA gangs changing?
4. What are two consequences of Cheryl Green's killing?
5. Why do some people think the hit list is a bad idea?
6. Why do people join gangs, according to Visuet?
7. What does Homebody Industries do to help ex-gang members?
8. What is Sons of Hollywood?

4 Vocabulary 1: Expressions

Order the words in italics to make expressions.

1. *count of keep to something* = to remember or record a number as it changes over time
2. *make home your to somewhere* = to live somewhere
3. *there all the are signs* = something is sure to happen in the future
4. *they seen all it before have* = they are used to it
5. *doing edge the on of something* = about to do something
6. *fantasy nothing a than more* = not real

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5 Vocabulary 2: War vocabulary

Find words relating to war and conflict in the paragraphs. The first letter has been given.

1. s _____ (Paragraph 2)
2. b _____ (Paragraph 4)
3. w _____ (Paragraph 4)
4. t _____ (Paragraph 4)
5. f _____ (Paragraph 5)
6. o _____ f _____ (Paragraph 5)
7. k _____ (Paragraph 5)
8. w _____ (Paragraph 5)
9. v _____ (Paragraph 11)
10. c _____ (Paragraph 13)
11. b _____ (Paragraph 13)

6 Vocabulary 3: Phrasal verbs into nouns

Look at the following example from the text.

Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, who has referred to his city as “the gang capital of America”, has launched a crackdown on the new threat.

The noun *crackdown* comes from the phrasal verb *to crack down*.

Complete the sentences with nouns made from the following phrasal verbs.

black out blow up stop over hand out clean up lay off

1. On our flight to London we had a two-hour _____ in Frankfurt.
2. The family had several candles in the house in case of a _____.
3. The company was losing money and there were many _____.
4. He's forty and he still lives on _____ from his parents.
5. On the wall is a big _____ of a photo of a football player.
6. After the oil spill, the government launched a large _____ operation.

7 Discussion

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