

Your Shortcut to K-Pop

"They've sold out stadiums across the globe. They've topped charts in countries where people don't even speak their language. And right now... there's a very good chance someone in your class knows every lyric, every dance move, and has a favourite member.

This is your Squiz Kids Shortcut to K-Pop — the podcast where we explore the who, what, when, where, why, and how of the wonderful world around us. I'm Christie Kijurina."

And I'm Bryce Corbett. [Huffing and puffing..Oh Yeah!]

Bryce, sorry, I have to ask... are you dancing?

That's right, Christie. I'm doing the Dynamite choreography... BTS... Very famous...

You're... pointing at the ceiling... flicking your hair...

They're the moves...

You've been doing that... for five minutes.

It looks a lot easier in the video. There's also a hip thing I'm working on.

Right. Well, here's something you should probably know before you hurt yourself... what you're attempting, took the BTS members years of professional training to perfect.

..Years? Okay, that actually makes me feel better. And that's the perfect place to start... because today we're asking what K-pop actually is, how someone becomes a K-pop idol, and why the rest of the world can't get enough. So grab your light stick, warm up those dance moves... and let's get started.

And listen carefully. There's a S'Quiz at the end.

WHAT

To understand K-pop, you might need to forget everything you think you know about pop music, because K-pop isn't just music. It's a full-blown entertainment experience.

I can back that up. I thought it was just catchy songs and cool dancing.....and it is those things. But it's also much bigger. The "K" stands for Korean — K-pop comes from South Korea — but what makes it different is how everything is built together.

The music, the dancing, the fashion, the storytelling, even the way performers look at the camera... it's all carefully planned and practised. Imagine practising the same 10-second dance move... over and over... every day... until your body can do it without even thinking.

Which explains why my ceiling-pointing move is... not quite there yet.

"Uh huh. And K-pop groups aren't like regular bands either. Think of them more like a team, where everyone has a role.

There are main vocalists, lead dancers, rappers..."

...and even something called the visual — the member known for their eye-catching look.

And then there's the maknae (mak-nay) which means the youngest member. Fans always have a soft spot for the maknae. Every group has one. BLACKPINK, one of the world's biggest K-pop girl groups, has four members: Jisoo (jee-soo), Jennie (jen-nee), Rosé (roh-zay) and Lisa (lee-suh).

And they're not all from the same place either. Lisa is from Thailand, and Rosé was born in New Zealand and grew up in Australia. So K-pop has been global from the start.

But K-pop is actually part of something even bigger — something called the Korean Wave, or Hallyu (hal-yoo (rhymes with "value")). Think of it like this: K-pop is the music... but the Korean Wave is the entire ocean.

It includes TV shows, movies, fashion, food — all spreading from South Korea to the rest of the world. Shows like Squid Game, and films like Parasite — which was the first non-English film to win the Oscar for Best Picture. And, of course, K-Pop Demon Hunters, the animated Netflix film that became the most-watched movie in Netflix history in 2025. All part of the same wave. Which leads to a pretty big question... if the wave is that powerful — how do you actually get on it?

HOW

Bryce, if you want to become a K-pop idol... get ready for one of the toughest paths in entertainment anywhere in the world.

...Uh oh.

It all starts with something called the trainee system. Three companies — SM Entertainment, JYP Entertainment and YG Entertainment — built this system from scratch in the mid-1990s. The entertainment companies hold auditions, sometimes online, sometimes in person, sometimes they even scout kids at school or on the street. And they're not just looking for perfect singers, they're looking for potential. A quality the Koreans call star energy

And some of the kids auditioning are very young — often between ten and fourteen.

Gosh that's young! If you're chosen, you become a trainee... and your life changes completely. Because imagine this: you go to school during the day...and then instead of

going home to relax...you spend your afternoon and evening doing dance classes, singing lessons, fitness training, language lessons, and media training.

Every single day?

Every. Single. Day.

That sounds... intense.

It is. And every month, trainees are evaluated... they perform in front of company staff who decide if they're improving fast enough. And if they're not, they can be cut. Just like that.

Wait — so you could train for years... and not make it?

Exactly. Some trainees spend years chasing a debut that never comes. Jihyo (JEE-hy-Oh) from the group TWICE trained for ten years. She started at age eight.

Ten years. That's basically your entire school life.

Pretty much. And even after all that training, the company decides everything — who goes into which group, what their role is, what the group looks like, sounds like... even what it's called. Which sounds tough — and honestly, it is. But when it works... the results are incredible.

Groups who've trained together for years move in perfect synchronisation, like they're reading each other's minds. Every step, every breath, every expression... completely in sync.

The Big 3 Entertainment companies between them they've launched some of the biggest acts in K-pop history, including BLACKPINK, TWICE and GOT7.

Which explains why my version looks like... interpretive confusion.

Aww..That's a very kind way to describe it.

But here's the amazing part, these performers are filling stadiums all over the world... often singing in a language their fans don't even speak. So, Christie, why is K-Pop such an international success?

WHY

Bryce, for a long time, people believed there was one rule for global pop stars: You had to sing in English. And then... that rule got smashed

Oooh, I know... 2012... A song called Gangnam Style and PSY doing that horse dance!

Yes! You might not understand the words... but you definitely know the dance. Psy and his team uploaded the music video to YouTube, and within six months, it became the

first video in history to reach one billion views. So many views, in fact, that YouTube had to update its counter.

Wow! And the song was entirely in Korean. Which proved something huge... you don't need to understand every word to feel the energy of a great song.

And then came BTS. Seven young men from Seoul who became the first Korean act to hit number one on the Billboard Hot 100... the biggest music chart in the United States.

They did it with a song called Dynamite in 2020.

That's right and experts estimate that BTS brings in about five billion US dollars a year to South Korea's economy. It's a giant business... powered by music.

But, Christie, what really makes K-pop special is the fans. K-pop fans aren't just listeners. They're part of the experience. Every group gives their fans a name. BTS fans are called ARMY. BLACKPINK fans are called BLINKs. And at concerts, fans don't just watch, they perform too.

They have official light sticks... glowing wands unique to each group. They learn fan chants, perfectly timed cheers shouted during songs. Imagine being in a crowd of tens of thousands of people... all chanting the same words at the exact same moment. It's like the audience becomes part of the show.

And that connection has spread far beyond music. In 2025, an animated film called K-Pop Demon Hunters — about a K-pop girl group who secretly fight demons — became one of the most-watched movies on Netflix. Its soundtrack took over the charts and made history at the Academy Awards with the song Golden becoming the first K-pop song ever to win an Oscar, which just shows, K-pop isn't just music anymore. It's a global phenomenon.

THE S'QUIZ

"This is the part of the podcast where you get to test how well you've been listening...

1. True or False — Gangnam Style was the first music video in history to reach one billion views on YouTube.

[TRUE]"

"2. K-pop groups have a member called the maknae. What does that mean? Is it:

- a) The main dancer
- b) The youngest member
- c) The one with the best hair

[b) The youngest member]"

"3. K-Pop Demon Hunters made history at the Academy Awards. What was the first ever K-pop song to win an Oscar? Was it:

a) Dynamite

b) Soda Pop

c) Golden

[c) Golden]"

That's all we have time for today. Thanks for joining us as we explored the who, what, how, where, when, and why of K-pop

Now get out there... be propaganda aware...., and have a most excellent day!

Over and out.