

K-pop Demon Hunters: empathy and media

Lesson plan for English and media literacy (in English) teachers



Background context for the teachers:

This section gives you the context you need to teach with confidence. No prior knowledge of media studies is required. However, for more engaging discussions we recommend watching the movie together with the students. Few tips before you start:

- Approach students' **discussions with curiosity, not answers**. Your goal is to plant a seed of inquiry.
- If a student gives a strong 'good/bad' judgement, resist the urge to correct immediately. Instead, ask: 'What do you think made that person act that way?' **This opens reflection without confrontation.**
- It is also entirely normal for students (and teachers) to leave this conversation with unresolved questions.

About the film:

K-Pop Demon Hunters (Netflix, 2025) is an animated musical film following Huntr/x - a K-pop girl group who secretly hunt demons threatening the human world. Their latest challenge is a rival boy band whose members are demons in disguise. The film combines vivid action, original pop songs, and genuine emotional depth.

Despite its playful premise, K-Pop Demon Hunters raises surprisingly rich questions: about identity, empathy, the nature of 'good' and 'evil'. It can also be used as an example of how media texts are created.



Why this film is an interesting media text

For Language Learning	For Language Learning
Rich, authentic dialogue at accessible speed (with Korean language elements!) Emotionally loaded vocabulary (shame, empathy, betrayal, identity) Persuasive language in song lyrics and arguments between characters Visual context supports comprehension Students are usually already familiar with K-pop cultural elements	Explores the good vs. evil narrative binary Depicts empathy being offered but then withdrawn Raises questions about who gets a 'human' story Shows how global platforms package culture Invites self-reflection on how we judge others not only in real life but also online

Key terms to better prepare for the discussions



You do not need to teach all of these - they are here so you feel confident if students raise them.

Concept	Plain-language explanation
Moral binary	Dividing the world into 'good' and 'bad' people with no grey area. Stories that use this make it easy to cheer or boo – but discourage deeper thinking about why people act as they do.
Empathy in narrative	A story's choice to give a character feelings, backstory, and inner conflict. Audiences tend to forgive or understand characters they are given empathy for. Notice who gets a full story in KPDH – and who doesn't.
Parasocial relationship	The one-sided emotional bond audiences form with media figures (idols, actors). Viewers feel they 'know' these people, even though no real relationship exists. K-pop fandoms make this dynamic very visible.
Platform text	A film or show shaped not just by its creators, but by the platform (Netflix) that funds, distributes, and profits from it. This affects what stories get told, how they look, and which audiences they reach.
Media ecosystem	The full web of people, companies, and institutions involved in producing, distributing, and profiting from a media product – from directors to streaming platforms to food brands.
Participatory culture	The way audiences don't just consume media but actively create content around it – fan art, cover dances, commentary videos. Students are already part of this culture.



Learning Outcomes:

- Use vocabulary related to emotions, morality, and media (e.g. shame, empathy, villain, platform, fandom)
- Express and justify opinions about characters' motivations using modal verbs and conditional structures
- Identify the 'good vs. evil' binary in a media text and discuss its effects
- Reflect on how empathy is distributed - who a story invites us to care about, and who it doesn't
- Produce a short persuasive text (a social media comment or a short argument) that engages with moral complexity

Warm-up (before the movie):

Write on the board: HERO vs. VILLAIN

Ask: 'What makes someone a hero in a story? What makes someone a villain?' Take 4–5 answers. Then ask: 'Can someone be both? Have you ever seen a story where the villain had a point?'

Tell students: 'Today we are going to watch a film that seems to have a clear answer but actually makes things more complicated. We'll be asking: who does the story want us to care about, and why?'

Helpful discussion vocabulary for students:

Word	Definition	Example sentence
empathy	The ability to understand and share another person's feelings	<i>She showed empathy by listening without judging.</i>
shame	A painful feeling that you have done something wrong or embarrassing	<i>He felt shame after lying to his friends.</i>
hesitation	A pause before doing something, because you are unsure	<i>She hesitated before attacking – something felt wrong.</i>
platform	A digital service (like Netflix or TikTok) that distributes content globally	<i>The film reached millions of viewers through the platform.</i>
fandom	A community of passionate fans who create content around something they love	<i>The fandom made fan art and cover dances within hours of the release.</i>

Discussion after the movie (25 minutes)

- How does the film show the relationship between humans and demons, are they clearly separated into "good" and "bad" sides?
- Are there any moments in the film where demons seem to feel something — fear, shame, or sadness? Which scenes stood out to you?
- The film hints that demons might not be purely evil, but it doesn't follow through on that idea. Why do you think that is?
- What does it tell us about Rumi that she hesitates before fighting, and that she disagrees with the lyrics of Take Down?
- Which characters in the story do we feel sorry for and which ones don't get that treatment? What's the difference between them?
- Based on your answers, do you notice a pattern in how stories decide who deserves sympathy and who doesn't? Can you think of examples outside of films, in the news, on social media, or in stories from your own culture, where the same thing happens?



Behind the Screen (this is an additional activity)

Purpose: introduce the idea of the media ecosystem — who makes, profits from, and is shaped by media.

Quick brainstorm (5 min)

Ask: 'If a film is a huge hit on Netflix, who makes money from it?'

Collect answers on the board. Students typically say: Netflix, the director, the actors. Push further: What about the food brands mentioned? Tourism? The music artists? What about Korean students whose country is being 'represented'?

Ecosystem map (7 min)

In pairs or small groups, students draw a simple map with KPDH in the centre and connect:

- Creators (directors, voice actors, musicians)
- Platforms (Netflix, YouTube, Spotify)
- Businesses (food brands, tourism boards, merchandise)
- Audiences (Korean viewers, international fans, Lithuanian viewers — themselves!)
- 'Invisible' parties (those who do the work but earn less, or whose culture is used but not credited)

Reflection question (3 min)

'Where do you fit in this ecosystem? Are you a consumer, a creator, or both? Have you ever made something (a comment, a cover, a fan post) that became part of a media story?'

