Critical Analysis
Music Video

The Carters

Aim:
To become aware of the creation and representation of role models in public spaces, like museums. The critical analysis of the music video “Apesh**t” is focussed on underrepresentation or misrepresentation of black people in museums.
Question 1: Relate video to role models

• How can you relate Beyonce and Jay-Z to the topic of role models?

• How can you relate the content of the video to the topic of role models?

The video clip was shot in the Louvre, which is a museum in Paris, the capital of France. Much of the art in the museum derived from the Napoleonic era. Napoleon Bonaparte was the emperor of France from 1804-1815, During this time, France colonized major parts of the world. The art in the Louvre is celebrating this period in time, but who are Beyonce and Jay-Z celebrating?

Question 2: Analyze art references in the video

Two black women sit before a painting of Madame Récamier in the video. The women wear a durag, just like Marie-Guillemine Benoist on her portrait (also featured in the video).

• Connect the hairstyle of the women in the video with the portrait of Marie-Guillemine Benoist.
Beyonce dances directly in front of a Josephine, who is crowned as emperors by Napoleon on the painting.

• What is the message of Beyonce and her dancers?


Beyonce and Jay-Z stand before one of the most famous paintings in the world.

• What do you think is the message they want to convey (send)?


The statue behind Jay-Z and Beyonce is the Greek goddess Nike, who represents victory.

• Why are they standing before this statue?


• What is the role of the color in this image?
Question 3: Content of the song

Read the excerpt from the chorus, and look at the snapshots from the video.

I can't believe we made it (This is what we made, made)
This is what we're thankful for
(This is what we thank, thank)
I can't believe we made it (This a different angle)

• What do you think the text is referring to?

Question 4: Connecting the video to the outside world

Art depicted the ones in power; representing money and dominance. Therefore, the ones celebrated and glorified on paintings were the ones with authority and wealth. Kehinde Wiley commented on this by recreating historical paintings, see images below.

• What is the purpose of Kehinde Wiley’s paintings?
Question 5: Connecting art with role models

- Using the picture on the right (a portrait of Michelle Obama), how is art connected to role models?

- How can Michelle Obama be a role model?

Question 6: Variety of role models

This aim of this critical analysis of the music video “ApeS**t” was to become aware of how role models are created and presented in public spaces, like museums. This critical analysis was focussed on underrepresentation or misrepresentation of black people in museums.

- Which other groups can you think of that are not our obvious role models in our public spaces?

- Why do you think that is?

Find from one of these groups, someone who can be labeled a role model. (see last page for assignment)
Background Information

Background Text #1
Constance Grady “The meaning behind the classical paintings in Beyoncé and Jay-Z’s “Apeshit”. Why it matters that the video takes place in the Louvre.”, Vox, 19 -06-2018.

“I can’t believe we made it,” sings Beyoncé in “Apesh*t,” the first single from her surprise joint album with Jay-Z, Everything Is Love. And to prove that she and her husband have made it, in the song’s accompanying video, Beyoncé delivers this line from the Louvre.

As the New York Times has pointed out, it is not actually that expensive to shoot a video in the Louvre (about $17,500 for a full day’s shoot). But music videos aren’t about numbers; they’re about how things feel — and there’s no place on earth that feels as lavish, as rich with accumulated cultural power and wealth and colonialism, as the Louvre. If you want to show that you have made it, that you are rich and powerful and one of the greatest artists of your generation, you go to the Louvre.

[...]

So when Beyoncé shoots at the Louvre — taking on by turns the poses of Venus de Milo and Victory — she’s continuing an artistic project of recontextualizing classical Western art, of making herself the aesthetic object on which so much wealth and cultural capital has been spent. And coming from a black woman, that’s a radical statement.

“In a way, Beyoncé is exploiting/marketing her blackness as creativity — as a kind of weapon — within and against the very Eurocentric system of culture and consumption from which she has benefited,” says James Smalls, a professor of art history at the University of Maryland Baltimore County.

That’s an especially radical statement to make in the context of the Louvre, where little of the art features people of color in positions of strength and power. “From the Middle Ages up to the 19th century, works of art that showed black people usually represented them as servants or secondary figures,” explains Smalls. “They were not deemed worthy subjects of paintings, sculptures, or other kinds of cultural works.”

Background reading #2

We spoke to several sociologists and researchers about the power of representation, and what the lack of it might mean for people who don’t see themselves up there on the screen. Since the 1960s, research has found expressions of unequal power in media that, according to Michael Morgan, can be “very dangerous” and “very damaging” to people watching.

“I think the moral argument is self-evident. Stories matter,” Morgan, former professor emeritus at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and author of dozens of reports on media effects, told HuffPost. “Stories affect how we live our lives, how we see other people, how we think about ourselves.”
In the 1800s, European nations acquired great wealth and power by conquering foreign lands. The inhabitants of these new colonies were forced to labor for their European rulers. Imperialists used ideas about the inferiority of nonwhite races to make their control seem acceptable and even noble.

The slave trade also shaped Europeans' low opinion of Africans. In time, Africans came to be seen as primitive and almost subhuman. Blackness became "synonymous with inferiority," Du Bois [important human rights activist and scholar] wrote, and Africa became "another name for bestiality and barbarism." These prejudices later made it easier for Europeans to explain and excuse their colonization of Africa.

Africa changed dramatically during the last 25 years of the 19th century. The continent was taken from its own people. In 1875 only 10 percent of Africa was under European control. By 1900, nearly all of the continent was ruled by European powers.

For a recent exhibition I was confronted with the choice of how to caption this painting. The painting was done by Adriaen Hanneman and was later given the title "Portrait of Mary Stuart I (1631 - 1660) with a servant".

The painting was to be included in an exhibition about feathers; in the caption therefore I highlighted the feather cape that was draped across Mary Stuart’s [monarch 17th century in the Netherlands] left shoulder. However, in doing so, I completely neglected to acknowledge the presence of the enslaved boy standing by Mary Stuart’s side. By doing so, I perpetuated the long history of ignoring the presence of Black people in Western art. Used to reinforce the status of the White person sitting for the painting, through their representation as property, […] Black subjects remained unnamed, and further made invisible in much of study and representation of Western art within museums.
Role Models

Write down for your chosen role model:
✓ Characteristics of this person
✓ Reasons why you picked this person as a role model
✓ A quote
✓ IB Learner Profile attributes of this person