



Pulling out the go-to insult of high schoolers everywhere, a girl nearby questioned their sexuality. “Y’all be into Lil Wayne so much you sound like girls,” she said.

They just kept listening. Then one of the boys was simply overtaken by a lyrical turn. He stood up, threw up his hands, and began hollering. “I don’t care!” he shouted. “No homo, no homo, but that boy is cute!”

## 13.

Lil Wayne on making it: “When you’re really rich, then asparagus is yummy.”

Lil Wayne on safe sex: “Better wear a latex, cause you don’t want that late text, that ‘I think I’m late’ text.”

Lil Wayne on possibly less safe sex: “How come there is two women, but ain’t no two Waynes?”

## 14.

Okay, but it’s not any one line, it’s that voice. Just the way he says “car in park” in his cameo on Mario’s “Crying Out for Me” remix; it’s a soft growl from another planet. It sounds like a threat and a comfort and a come-on all at once.

## 15. I am just a Martian, ain’t nobody else on this planet

Right before you become a teacher, you are told by all manner of folks that it will be (1) the hardest thing you’ve ever done, and (2) the best thing you’ve ever done. That seems like a recipe for recruiting wannabe martyrs. In any case, high stakes can blind you to the best moments. One day, I was stressing over what I imagined was my one-man quest to keep Darius in school and out of jail, and missed that a heated dispute between two fifth graders was escalating. Finally, I asked them what was wrong.

“Mr. Ramsey,” one of the boys pleaded, “will you please tell him that if you go into space for a year and come back to Earth that all your family will be dead because time moves slower in space?”



## 16. And to the kids: drugs kill. I’m acknowledging that. But when I’m on the drugs, I don’t have a problem with that.

On one of his best songs, the super-catchy “I Feel Like Dying,” Lil Wayne barely exists. He always sounds high, but on this song he sounds as though he has already passed out.

A lot of the alarmism about pop music sending the wrong message to impressionable youth seems mostly overwrought to me, but I’ll cop to feeling taken aback at ten-year-olds singing, “Only once the drugs are done, do I feel like dying, I feel like dying.”

First time I heard a fifth grader singing this in falsetto, I said: “What did you say?”

He said: “Mr. Ramsey, you know you be listening to that song. Why you tripping?”

My students always ask me why I’m tripping at precisely the moments when the answer seems incredibly obvious to me.

## 17.

After Michael cussed out our vice principal, I did a home visit. Michael was one of the biggest drug dealers in his neighborhood, and also one of my best students.

His mother was roused from bed. She looked half-gone, dazed. Then she started crying, and hugged me, pulled my head into her body. “No one’s ever cared like this,” she said. “Bless you. Thank you.”

Michael smiled shyly. “I just want to get in my right grade,” he told me. “We’ll find a way to make that happen,” I told him.

A few weeks later, I gave him a copy of a *New Yorker* piece on Lil Wayne.

“Actually, that was good,” he said, later. “You teach me to write like that?”

## 18. Born in New Orleans, raised in New Orleans . . .

You live here as a newcomer and locals are fond of saying “this is New Orleans” or “welcome to New Orleans” by way of explanation. They use it to explain absurdity, inefficiency, arbitrary disaster, and transcendent