

# ETCETERA

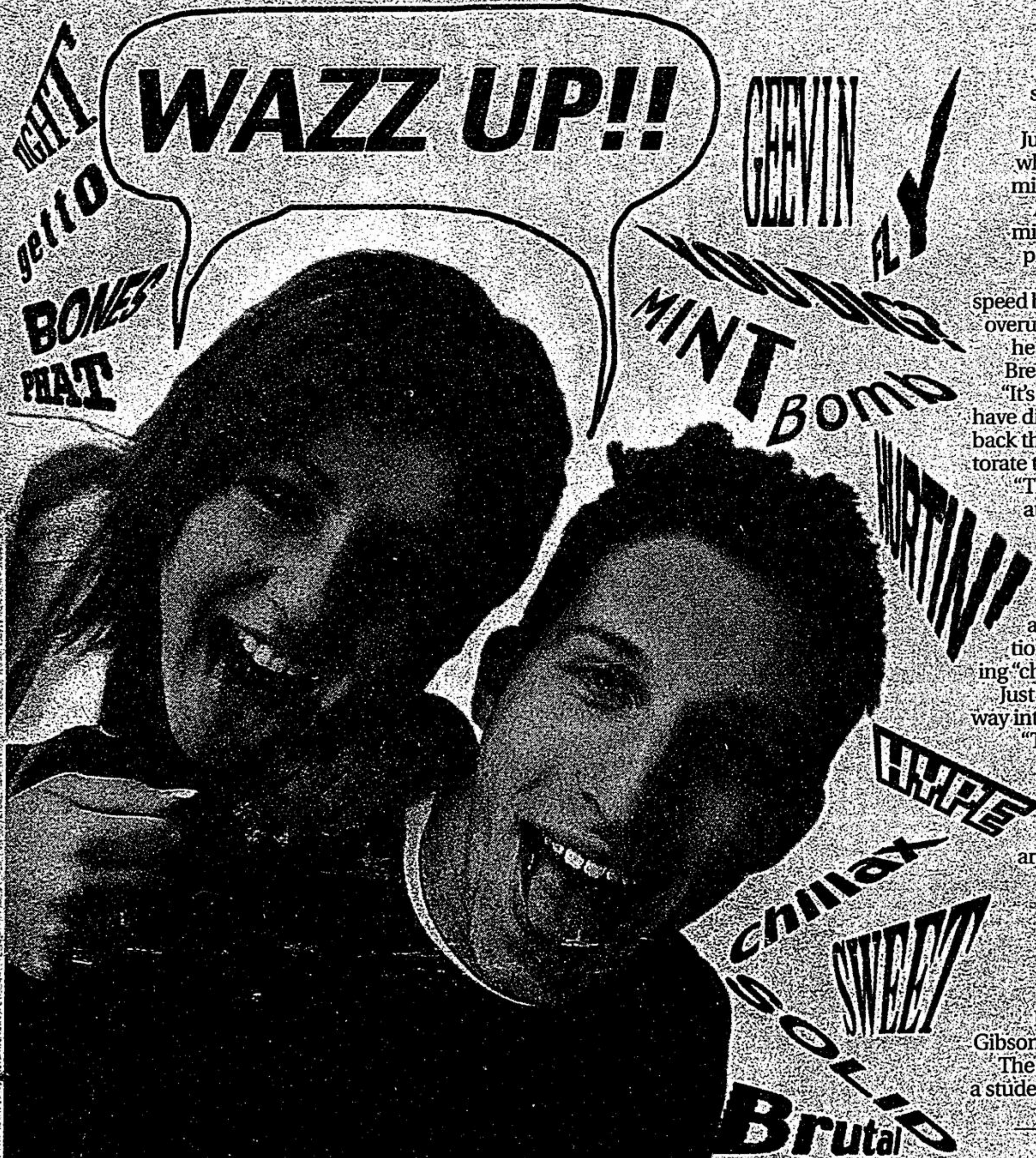
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16 c

WHAT TEENS TODAY ARE SAYING

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Staff Writer

## Talkin' the talk



When Renee Branton-Brown and Caitlin Valloeu attended a high school leadership conference last year, they learned more than what it means to be a good mentor. The two Sutton District High School students learned the lingo being spoken in other high schools across York Region. "I learned every kind of talk," said Branton-Brown, 18. "I learned so many words and the different meanings to those words." "I came home talking differently because I picked up on those words from the people around me," added Valloeu, 16, referring to such words as "tight", "ghetto", "that's hype", "mint" and "chillax". It has long been known that among themselves, teens speak a language all their own, gobledygook to the over-19 set.

Although current trendy words, such as "ill", "sick", "phat", "geevin" or "bate" appear to be foreign words, experts agree slang words are just creative variations of familiar slang or words with opposite literal meanings. Teens from across the region say the primary influences on the way they talk are not poets or celebrated authors, but the music they hear, the TV shows and movies they watch, their culture and friends.

In the recently released motion picture *Save the Last Dance*, for example, Julia Stiles' character is corrected by a friend when she uses the word "cool" instead of "slamin'" to describe an outfit. And the words that are hip and "cool" one minute can quickly become yesterday's catchphrase.

The words update themselves at lightning speed because teens get tired of using them or they are overused or become mainstream, said Biagio Aulino, head of the moderns department at Father Bressani Catholic High School in Woodbridge. "It's like fashion, (the words) come and go. They have different meanings but the same words were 'in' back then, too," said Aulino, who is working on a doctorate thesis on teen talk.

"They speak like that because they want to draw attention to themselves. They like to have their own little language," said Aulino, adding teens are often offended when adults try to talk their talk.

Through his studies, Aulino found young adolescents use a lot of interjections, exclamations, emotional states, acronyms and coin words to form one word, combining "chill" and "relax", for example, to create "chillax". Just like the Internet has reinvented the communications world, it has found its way into teen lingo.

"Teens are starting to talk through abbreviations because of the Internet," said Aulino, who has also studied teen talk in Italy. "That makes them harder to understand." Although it may appear to hamper their oral or written skills, the catch phrases and slang teens use does not hinder them from becoming articulate adults, Aulino believes.

"It could affect them, but I think the majority know when to use proper language," he said. "There's a transition period, but some can be in their 30s and still be speaking like a teen," said Aulino, remembering a time when he was waiting in line and heard an adult asking his friend for "sticks", as in cigarettes.

However, Grade 12 Brother Andre Catholic High School student Amanda Gibson disagrees. The 17-year-old Markham student tutors English and has found slang can affect a student's writing skills.

### SLANG DICTIONARY

- Ghetto: urban
- That's hype: exciting
- Mint: cool
- Chillax: relax
- Ill, Sick, Phat, Sweet, Solid: good
- Geevin': don't care
- Bate: asking for trouble
- You dig?: Do you understand?
- Brutal, Hurlin': bad
- Bones: Money

See LINGO, page 17.

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