

THE TICKET PRICE PROBLEM

Getting concert tickets has become nearly impossible for many young fans. Who's to blame—and what can be done to fix the ticket sale system? BY MARY KATE FRANK

Kaya Roy couldn't believe her luck. Her favorite singer, Taylor Swift, was going to be performing in a nearby city. The show would be the night before Kaya's 15th birthday. Kaya's family planned to give her tickets as a gift.

The day tickets went on sale, Kaya was in school. Her mom went online to buy seats. The website kept crashing. Four hours went by. Kaya's mom *still* had no tickets. The concert sold out.

Later, Kaya searched for tickets on ticket

resale sites. The cheapest seats were \$800 each. "I just gave up at that point," she says.

Kaya is not alone. Many young music fans say getting concert tickets has become almost impossible. Websites crash before you can check out. Tickets to top shows are more expensive than ever. And if cheap seats *are* available, ticket resellers often scoop them up. Then they resell the tickets, usually at higher prices.

Who's to blame for this broken system? And can it be fixed?

VOCABULARY

exclusive: available to only a few people

guarantee: to make something certain

demand: people's need or desire to buy a certain product or service

exorbitant: far beyond what is fair, reasonable, or expected

competition: other businesses that sell the same goods and services



PAUSE AND THINK: Why couldn't Kaya's mom buy concert tickets online?

Then and Now

Buying concert tickets wasn't always so tricky. In 1964, the Beatles were the biggest band in the world. Screaming fans followed them everywhere they went. Tickets to their shows usually cost no more than \$6. (That's about \$58 in today's money.)



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TAYLOR
SWIFT
LIVE IN
CONCERT

\$215

That was the average ticket price for Taylor Swift's most recent tour.

To get tickets, you lined up at the ticket office. Sometimes people camped out overnight to get a good spot. Waiting with other fans was part of the fun.

Today the way we buy concert tickets is very different. Most tickets are sold online by a company called Ticketmaster. It's the country's biggest ticket seller.

Many events have **exclusive** presales, or early sales. To get into a presale, you might need a certain credit card. Other times you might have to buy the musician's newest album first.

Getting into a presale doesn't **guarantee** a seat either. Websites might crash when **demand** gets high.

Plus many tickets are bought by ticket resellers. They use bots—computer programs that can buy hundreds of tickets in seconds. The

resellers then sell the tickets again—often at **exorbitant** prices.

PAUSE AND THINK: How has the way we buy concert tickets changed?

Too Powerful?

Let's say you *did* score a Taylor Swift ticket. At checkout, you might have noticed that the final price was higher. Why? For years, ticket companies have added service charges and other fees. These fees could add as much as 32 percent to the final cost.

Many fans are angry about ticket prices. They blame Ticketmaster. They say the company doesn't have enough **competition**. Fans don't have much choice about where they buy tickets. So Ticketmaster can charge high fees.

Does Ticketmaster have too much power? The U.S. government is looking into that question. Ticketmaster says no. The company says it still faces competition. It blames bots and high ticket demand for fans' troubles.

PAUSE AND THINK: Why do fans blame Ticketmaster for high prices?

Fixing the Problem

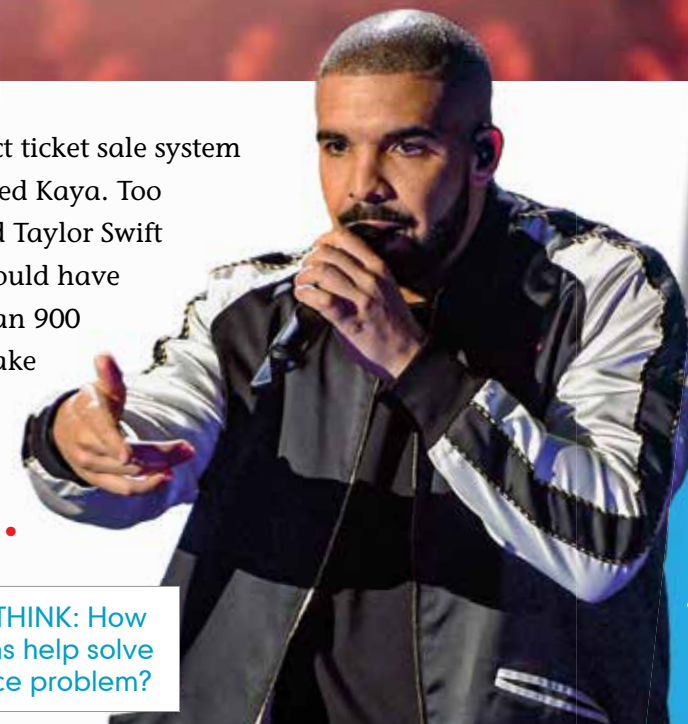
Can anything be done to make buying tickets fairer? In June, Ticketmaster said it would start showing a ticket's total cost from the start. That means no more surprise fees at checkout.

Eric Budish teaches business at the University of Chicago. He also studies ticket sales. Budish thinks showing a ticket's full price is a good idea. He says musicians could also ban the resale of their cheapest tickets. Then ticket resellers won't be able to resell \$49 seats for \$500.

But even a perfect ticket sale system might not have helped Kaya. Too many people wanted Taylor Swift tickets. The singer would have had to play more than 900 stadium shows to make every fan happy.

Sometimes there just aren't enough tickets to go around. •

PAUSE AND THINK: How can musicians help solve the ticket price problem?



DRAKE
LIVE IN
CONCERT

\$69.50

That was the lowest ticket price for Drake's summer tour. (Many of those tickets were resold for hundreds of dollars.)

BEYONCÉ
LIVE IN
CONCERT

\$1,200

That's how much a floor seat cost for a recent Beyoncé concert.



5 Questions About Concert Tickets

WHAT TO DO: Answer the questions below. Use full sentences.

GO FURTHER!
Find more activities online.

WHO?

1. Who is Kaya Roy?

WHAT?

2. What was Kaya supposed to get as a gift for her 15th birthday?

WHEN?

3. When did Kaya realize she wasn't going to get that gift?

WHERE?

4. Where do most people buy concert tickets?

HOW?

5. How do ticket resellers buy hundreds of tickets in seconds?

Answers are in the Answer Key at Action Digital.