

The Sankofa – Hip Hop Connection

Karen L. Brinkley

Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School

Overview

Rationale

Objectives

Strategies

Classroom Activities

Annotated Bibliography/Resources

Appendices-PA Standards

Overview

“In the Twi language of the Akan ethnic group of Ghana, West Africa, the Twi word *sankofa* (Sank-O-fah) means either: ‘you can return and correct your mistakes’ or ‘looking back to your own traditions and culture to know the past, define the present, and determine the future path.’”
(Ashanti 1)

The *sankofa* concept is paramount to my curriculum unit, which will focus on the importance of music in students’ lives with an examination of hip-hop’s historical and contemporary perspective. Also, the psychological process of *sankofa* based on the second definition noted above will be an integral part of students’ analysis of hip-hop. The unit will incorporate rap music as a curriculum tool to expand student critical thinking skills, improve reading comprehension and strengthen written expression.

The resources to accomplish my goal will include books, music, primary source documents, movies, and technology such as PowerPoint presentations. Student final projects will incorporate a comparative analysis of rap musical lyrics. Students will complete a research project to analyze and critique how hip-hop can be a vehicle to promote cultural pride and a literary project to enhance written expression and application of figurative language concepts.

Potential enrichment projects will include inviting guest speakers to discuss the business and educational component of hip-hop. Students will participate in field trips to music studios and radio stations. They will synthesize information from multiple sources to create a video to encourage community involvement.

This curriculum unit is intended for 7th and 8th grade students. The content and the lyrics will reflect the age group to ensure relevance. The unit should take approximately ten 50-minute lessons. Additional time is necessary to plan for student research and follow-up.

Rationale

Today's focus on the entertainment industry has escalated to an enormous proportion. Recently, a radio station polled teenagers regarding their role models. The majority of the respondents indicated peers were number one, with parents, teachers, and religious leaders at the bottom of the list. On the other hand, when similar questions were asked in the early 1980s teenagers indicated that parents, teachers, and religious leaders were at the top of the list. Teenage attitudes reflected in this questionnaire support the grave need for role models to mentor teenagers to address many of the social ills that are constantly mounting at a rapid pace. Consequently, what better way to develop positive student relationships than through music? Because I instruct 3rd to 8th grade special education students in reading and math, my resource room would be an ideal academic learning environment to generate student participation in my hip-hop curriculum unit. Also, the resource room includes at risk students who scored below proficient in the state assessments.

This curriculum unit is intended for 7th and 8th grade students. It will focus on rap music as a vehicle to extend students reading comprehension skills specifically in the areas of critical thinking, figurative language and vocabulary development. In addition, lesson activities will provide students with practice to improve written expression. Students need to analyze various types of lyrics and they need to respond critically to rap artists based on the developed evaluation criteria. Figurative language is a difficult concept, but students need a basic understanding of the figurative language elements to write lyrics for a class song-writing project. Written expression assignments are a significant component of the unit because students will need to apply the writing process.

The unit encompasses skills in the Pennsylvania literacy and social studies standards: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Specifically, a few of the standards included in the unit will require students to demonstrate fluency and comprehension in reading (1.1H); use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced (1.2B); write with a sharp, distinct focus (1.5A); organize, summarize and present the main ideas from research (1.8C); and political and cultural contribution of individual groups (8.3A6). See the appendix for a detail list of the standards applicable to this unit.

The unit is important to my students for several reasons, which I have categorized into six essential hip-hop elements: critical thinking, diversity, exposure, non-violence, figurative language, creativity, and bridging gaps.

Critical Thinking

The unit provides an opportunity to incorporate critical thinking and debates regarding lyrics. For example, it will encourage students to ask, "What do you think about violent and derogatory language written in the majority of rap lyrics?" Providing questions for quality thinking and discussion will improve student oral communication skills. Reading comprehension will improve because students are intrinsically motivated to read topics of

interest.

Diversity

There is a role for diverse learners. The unit incorporates various learning styles and abilities, which is an educational approach for ways of learning that was developed by Howard Gardner in his classic work *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. (Gardner) Because students arrive in the classroom with numerous strengths and deficits, educators are encouraged to incorporate differentiated instruction as part of the routine learning environment.

Exposure

The unit will expose students to a multiplicity of musical genres and artists. I plan to select both mainstream and underground artist to include in the lessons.

Non-Violence

Music is a non-violent way to express emotions. People use music to help them through life positive and negative emotional experiences. Listening to your favorite song may improve your mood. There are programs that use music therapy to help people deal with traumatic events. During stressful events, music is recommended to soothe or calm the nerves.

Figurative Language

Since lyrics incorporate some form of figurative language, students will become proficient with this comprehension skill. Artists are extremely creative in composing lyrics, which may include alliteration, rhyme, imagery, irony, hyperbole, metaphor, simile, allegory, and assonance.

Creativity

The unit gives students a chance to demonstrate creativity in an individual and group setting. The lesson plans are written to access student innate strengths. Also, students will have several opportunities to help classmates achieve success. Feedback from my students has shown that they are excited about learning through music. The unit will allow students to take ownership of their learning.

Bridging Gaps

Music bridges generational and cultural gaps because teenagers sometimes believe they have very little in common with adults and cultures different than their own. Every culture has some form of music that is unique to their environment. Historians have documented the importance and the variety of music in the world. Furthermore, Kool

Herc's profound remarks in *Can't Stop Won't Stop* are aligned with my sentiments on the importance of hip-hop music:

“I think hip-hop has bridged the culture gap. It brings white kids together with black kids, brown kids, with yellow kids. They all have something in common they love. Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force.”
(Chang xi-xii)

Global Perspective

What is the influence of hip-hop on today's urban youth? Based on the initial research and observation of teenagers, hip-hop is an integral aspect of the American culture. S. Craig Watkins article in *Foreign Policy* emphasizes that the expansive role of corporations did not exist in earlier forms of music such as jazz, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, etc. I believe that S. Craig Watkins accurately summarizes the impact and the role of corporations in the subliminal seduction of hip-hop:

“No youth trend is more visible around the world today than hip-hop. But part of the uniqueness of hip-hop's growing presence can be attributed to the rise of global media conglomerates. Record companies such as Universal Music and Sony have packaged and sold hip-hop with a ferocity that is bold and intense as the movement itself. And because hip-hop isn't just music—it's also attitude and culture—these global media companies partner with fashion labels, beverage brands, and sports franchises to sell a total hip-hop lifestyle. In addition, hip-hop has been an equally astonishing source of youth expression and empowerment.”
(Watkins 63)

History of Hip-Hop

Kurtis Blow writes eloquently in the *Network .com* article about the power of hip-hop. “Hip-hop is the voice of a generation that refused to be silenced by urban poverty, a local phenomenon fueled with so much passion and truth it could not help but reach the entire world.” Blow's statement captures the qualities that are unique to hip-hop.

Prior to my current research for this unit, I was ignorant of the many complicated facets that are associated with hip-hop. I am probably not alone in the assumptions that I have made regarding hip-hop. For instance, I thought hip-hop and rap were synonymous. When I questioned my students, they held the same belief. Therefore, to thoroughly benefit from this unit, students needs to have some background knowledge about hip-hop. According to Davey D. hip-hop is an art form that includes deejaying (cuttin' and scratchin'), emceeing/rapping, break dancing, and grafitti art. Hip-hop originated in New York City, South Bronx around the 1970s. It is a lifestyle with its own language, style of dress, music, and mindset that is continuously evolving. As break dancing and graffiti

are no longer as prominent, the words “rap” and “hip-hop” have been used interchangeably. All of hip-hop’s major facets emerged out of the need for self-expression. The driving force behind all these activities was people’s desire to be seen and heard. “The crucial point is that hip-hop is the culture from which rap emerged.” (D. 4)

History of Rap Music

Nelson George presents an interesting view of rap music history because in his book *The Death Of rhythm & blues* he does not include Kool Herc as one of the instrumental forces behind rap music:

“Because the big boys were asleep at the wheel, rap would spend most of its young life promoted and recorded by independent labels run by hustling entrepreneurs. Rap started in discos, not the midtown glitter palaces like Studio 54 or New York, New York, but at Mel Quinn’s on 42nd Street and Club 371 in the Bronx, where a young Harlemiter who called himself D.J. Hollywood spun on the weekends.” (George 189)

Kurtis Blow states that to understand the history of rap you need to know two things: First, rap is talking in rhyme to the rhythm of a beat. Second, hip-hop is a culture, a way of life for a society of people who identify, love, and cherish rap, break dancing, DJing, and graffiti. On the other hand, when I compare Blow to George and other research sources reviewed for this unit, again I think Blow is able to identify the core of the debate regarding rap music by asking two simple questions:

“The history of rap. How can we truthfully tell this story? There are so many different versions. Who is correct? There were approximately ten different pioneers, each of whom stakes a claim as the originator: Pete DJ Jones, Kool DJ Herc, DJ Hollywood, Eddie Cheeba, "Love Bug" Starski, Grand Master Flash, Afrika Bambaataa, Kurtis Blow, the Sugarhill Gang, and Run DMC. The names fit together like pieces to a puzzle. And as we assemble the puzzle, we have to give equal props to all, because it is the individual contributions, pieced together, that explain the true history of this billion-dollar-a-year phenomenon.” (Blow 1)

Rap Music Timeline

The following rap music timeline was based on information provided by Henry Adaso’s *Hip Hop Timeline* for the time period 1925 – 2007.

1925 – 1956

Two significant people were born during this time period such as Earl Tucker (aka Snake Hips) a Cotton Club performer and Clive Campbell who was known as the father of hip-hop. Earl Tucker’s dance style would later inspire break-dancing a key element of hip-hop. Also, deejay battling became popular.

1960s

James Brown drummer Clayton Fillyau influenced the break beat sound, which later became an inspiration to break dancers who would include the b-boy movement in their dance routines at block parties (Adaso 1). Clive Campbell changed his name to Kool “Herc”, which was short for Hercules, due to his physical size. Kool Herc was an influential person in the creation and expansion of hip-hop.

1970s

The 1970’s were significant formative years when hip-hop expanded into the global market. First, Kool Herc deejayed throughout New York and his popularity grew due to his unique style of using two turntables and mixing in both records before the break ends (A break is where all elements of a song, except for percussion, disappeared for a time). Second, other deejays got their initial start such as Brandmaster Caz, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa (formerly known as Kevin Donovan). These deejays emulated Herc’s technique and they made adjustments based on their individual style. Third, it was during this time period that deejay/emcee Lovebug Starski referred to this culture as “hip-hop.” This information was supported by Yvonne Bynoe who stated that Afrika Bambaataa credited DJ Lovebug Starski with first using the term *Hip Hop* to describe the new music and subculture (Bynoe 171). Fourth, “DJ Grand Wizard Theodore accidentally invented “the scratch” while trying to hold a spinning record in place in order to listen to his mom, who was yelling at him. The scratch is a basic technique that has been incorporated in modern deejaying” (Adaso 2). Fifth, the first battle events took place between Afrika Bambaataa and Disco King Mario. Finally, several influential rap groups were formed such as The Furious 5 including Grandmaster Flash, The Cold Crush Four, and the Sugarhill Gang. *Rapper’s Delight* created by Sugarhill Gang was the first known rap hit, reaching #36 on Billboard.

1980s

The expansion of rap music resulted in changes with regards to artist exposure. Rap artists such as Africka Bambaata and Grandmaster Flash released records that went on to sell more than a million copies. These groups success elevated hip-hop into a musical phenomenon that not only blacks listen to, but moved hip-hop into another level of big business. The interest in hip-hop provided access to national television appearances for successful groups. Also, hip-hop groups expanded to film. A popular hip-hop movie *Wild Style* was the inspiration for subsequent hip-hop movies. The spreading out of rap music stimulated other aspects to take form, as noted below. Quite a few rap genres would gain popularity such as gangsta, southern, and politically conscious rap. “Ice T helped pioneer gangsta rap in the west coast with his rapcore singles *Body Rock* and *Killers*” (Adaso 2). Later, southern rappers gained notoriety. A well-known southern rap group was The Geto Boys. Public Enemy created a politically conscious album *Yo! Bum Rush The Show*. In addition, a significant breakthrough was the Russell Simmons and Rick Rubin’s formation of Def Jam Record label, which became one of the most financial lucrative labels for hip-hop. By 1988, hip-hop had its own show in MTV, *YO! MTV Raps*.

1990s

Two of the most controversial rap artists were introduced into the business of hip-hop, Tupac and The Notorious B.I.G. Simultaneously, mainstream female rappers were not as well known. Eventually, Queen Latifah won a Grammy award for her hit *Unity* and Missy Misdemeanor Elliott surpassed hip-hop expectations with her first album, *Supa Dupa Fly*. Missy became the highest selling female rapper of all time (Adaso 2). In addition, Jay-Z was recognized as one of the musical geniuses in the hip-hop and dropped his debut *Reasonable Doubt*. The rap industry's violence in the later phase of the 1990s resulted in two horrible deaths: Tupac Shakur on September 7, 1996 and The Notorious B.I.G. on March 9, 1997.

2000s

Rap music continued to evolve. Lawsuits emerged due to the invention of the MP3 player and access to music via the Internet. In addition, there were debates regarding the violent and sexual inference contained in rap lyrics. "Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney held the first Hip-Hop Powershop summit to address the various political, economic, and social issues affecting the youth" (Adaso 4). In addition, the battling that occurred in the early days of rap continued in the new millennium with well-known rap artist such as Jay-Z vs. Nas, Nelly vs. KRS-One, Eminem vs. The Source magazine, and Jermaine Dupri vs. Dr. Dre, etc. participated in feuds. A positive component of hip-hop was generated when P.Diddy started a campaign to encourage young people to vote in the November 2004 U.S. Presidential elections.

Pan-African Studies Community Education Program (PASCEP)

I participated in PASCEP, a 10-week hip-hop workshop held at Temple University. The workshop focused on rap music. I was intrigued by the extensive knowledge and expertise of the young men and women who participated in the workshop. These young people have validated the need to use hip-hop as a technique to motivate and teach students. The experience at the workshop was one of many that clearly demonstrated how educators could revive student interest if lessons were presented in a thoughtful manner. In addition, the goal was for students to make the association that constant negative exposure to words and images unconsciously affect their life choices. Ultimately, I hope students will apply the knowledge learned through this unit and become aware of the vast options to lead a positive life.

More importantly, the goal is for students to epitomize the idea of sankofa, which is the essential psychological foundation of the unit. My 7th and 8th grade students will be transformed through the reflective participation in their learning. Students will have opportunities through critical thinking lessons to take ownership and apply what they have learned when they approach future assignments. I want students to understand the sentiments expressed by Nelson George "so while I love hip hop's spirit and rhythmic intensity, I often find myself at odds with some of its values and how those values are expressed" (George x). It is this value system that students will address through the "Cultural Pride" lesson plan (see below), which will help them become conscious human beings with regard to their thoughts and choices.

Objectives

The overall goal of the unit is to expand students' critical thinking skills, improve reading comprehension and written expression. Students will be able to gain insightful information about the contemporary and African history of hip-hop music. They will learn that although music changes, there are connections between old and new songs. Sankofa will become more than just a word, but a concept that students will infuse in how they process the world around them. Students will discover cultural pride through a contribution to their own learning and through the examination of conscious rap music that communicates positive messages. They will become active listeners and participators in social awareness through critical analysis of the lyrics.

African History of Hip-Hop

It is vital that students research the history of hip-hop music because understanding the origins of hip-hop will help students to appreciate the rich history of music in the African tradition. Music is an innate representation of who and what the students represent. James McBride's research is profound in this regard because it provides evidence that hip-hop music is not a compilation of noise. Hip-hop music is a creative entity that is grounded in historical tradition.

“The long history is that spoken-word music made its way here on slave ships from West Africa centuries ago: Ethnomusicologists trace hip-hop's roots to the dance, drum, and song of West African griots, or storytellers, its paring of word and music the manifestation of the painful journey of slaves who survived the middle passage. The ring shouts, field hollers, and spirituals of early slaves drew on common elements of African music, such as call and response and improvisation.” (McBride 101)

McBride credits Amiri Baraka, a beat poet out of Allen Ginsberg's Greenwich Village scene as the person who laid the foundation for contemporary rap music. McBride mentions that Baraka performed with shrieks, howls, cries, stomps, verse floating ahead of or behind the rhythm, sometimes in staccato syncopation. Furthermore, McBride supports the African history of hip-hop music with the following reference:

“Speech-song has been part of black culture for a long, long, time, says Samuel A. Floyd, director of the Center for Black Music Research at Columbia College in Chicago. The “dozens,” “toasts,” and “signifying” of black Americans—verbal dueling, rhyming, self-deprecating talks, and stories of blacks outsmarting whites—were defensive, empowering strategies. You can point to jazz musicians such as Oscar Brown, Jr. Edgar “Eddie” Jefferson, and Louis Armstrong, and blues greats such as John Lee Hooker, and easily find the foreshadowing of rap music in the verbal play of their work.” (McBride 101)

Critical Thinking

Students' critical thinking skills need rejuvenation to help them analyze the lyrics. Often, students unconsciously listen to lyrics without any scrutiny or reflection on the type of information that is transmitted to the brain. If average students were polled to determine the reason for listening to a particular song, many would respond that the beat was the main attraction. Although people listen to music for many different reasons other than to analyze lyrics, I think it is important to understand what you are listening to and why you are listening to particular type of music. My goal is for students to become cognizant human beings and to lead meaningful purposeful lives. A step to facilitate this wholesome life is critical thinking. The first part of the unit asks students to analyze and discuss the topic of rap music using the following questions: What is most important in a rap song, the form or the lyrical content (form refers to the sounds, beats, instruments, creativity, and rappers style; lyrical content refers to the words)? What theme do the words express? What emotions do the words elicit from the listener? What positive or negative message do the words send to students?

Cultural Pride

The tremendous amount of violence that exists in the African-American community demonstrates the need to promote cultural pride. There are numerous rap artists who perpetuate negative stereotypes about African-Americans. This negative aspect of hip-hop is clearly stated in Zenobia L. Hikes article *Hip-Hop Viewed Through the Prisms of Race and Gender*.

“Whether by blatant depiction or by thinly veiled innuendo, some rap music imagery has, and continues to be instrumental in driving respect for Black culture to an all-time low. The ultimate tragedy of this paradigm is that young children who do not have the cognitive ability to differentiate between illusion and reality are continually exposed to a genre of “entertainment” that serves as the predominant and prevailing expression of African American culture. For non-Black children, it creates gross misrepresentation of the Black experience. But its impact is exceedingly worse for Black children, particularly for young Black girls whose self-worth and self-esteem are frequently being shaped by these unrealistic and harmful images of Black womanhood.” (Hikes 40)

To combat these negative effects, students will examine social conscious rap lyrics to encourage cultural pride. Ultimately, students will recognize that their future path is full of extraordinary possibilities.

Strategies

Cook-Wissahickon Elementary School is an urban public school that features a small learning environment with an instrumental music program, prep music classes, and visual art classes. I teach several resource level classes for grades 3-8, with a focus on literacy. These classes are organized into five 50 minutes periods per day. Due to the numerous

students who are required to receive special education services, grades 3 and 4 and grades 5 and 6 are combined. This literacy block will enable me to incorporate the hip-hop unit over the course of 4-8 weeks or one grading period. The unit will be taught primarily during my literacy block. However, the unit will extend across the curriculum and include social studies, writing and performing arts. Furthermore, I will collaborate with our music teacher to obtain scholarly input on technical music elements.

I want to teach lessons that have students utilize meta-cognitive skills (think about why you do what you do). I will incorporate hands-on interactive lessons to reach the various categories of learners that Howard Gardner describes in his book *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences* such as visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. The approach is to select relevant lyrics and help students become intrinsically motivated to analyze the type of music they listen to. Simultaneously, the goal is to encourage students to read and write so that they will improve their comprehension, vocabulary, and written expression skills.

Students will complete the following assignments, assessments and performance tasks in the course of this unit:

PowerPoint/Video

Students will complete a K-W-L exercise before the PowerPoint presentation. This strategy will allow students to review prior knowledge, create questions, and discover answers throughout the unit. The teacher will introduce the history of hip-hop via a PowerPoint presentation to spark student interest in the topic. Students will watch a video of early hip-hop pioneers to reinforce the initial presentation. Students will continue to review and update the K-W-L. The video and PowerPoint will be ideal for auditory and visual learners.

- K- what they know – prior knowledge
- W- what do they want to know – questions
- L- what have they learned – answers

Carousel Brainstorm

Students will answer a series of questions that are related to their favorite rap artist, song, video, etc. The information will help them to determine specific areas of interest. Students will work in small groups to answer questions on chart paper. They will rotate to each section to record a response and a group leader will share responses with the class.

Interviews

Students will interview grandparents, parents, and relatives about their favorite 80s/90s rap artists and songs. They will improve questioning and communication skills and make a personal connection to family elders. The information obtained from the interviews

will help them to realize the universality of music through the ages. Students will recognize that music is timeless.

Journal

Students will maintain a reflection journal to document thoughts and ideas as we complete the curriculum unit. Also, they will respond to teacher generated journal prompts that relate to current music.

Glossary

Students will maintain a glossary of music terms and facts covered in the course of reading and analyzing hip-hop. They will complete activities to demonstrate their comprehension of terms. Students will write the formal definition and then include a written definition or illustration to help them take ownership for the term. This strategy will help students to improve their vocabulary.

Anticipation Guide

The purpose of the anticipation guide is to activate student prior knowledge and help them focus on the most important concepts. Students will search for evidence that support their answers. They will read excerpts from books written for youth about hip-hop and critique the primary source documents.

Guest Speaker

The teacher will invite a guest speaker to the class. Guest speakers may include rap artist, deejay, graffiti artist, etc (several PASCEP participants are aspiring rap artist).

Graphic Organizers

Students will use the organizers to review figurative language common elements, for example metaphor, personification, onomatopoeia, simile, hyperbole, alliteration, and irony.

Discussion

Students will listen to teacher-selected lyrics and the teacher will model how to analyze lyrics. The teacher will provide students with a list of the comprehension, writing, and specific figurative language skills that will be emphasized. Students will listen to teacher-selected lyrics and in small groups they will analyze the lyrics. They will listen to teacher-selected lyrics and individually analyze lyrics. Students will then select appropriate lyrics of their own and analyze them.

Cooperative Groups

Students will create a positive rap song. They will develop their criteria of essential lyrics that a positive rap song should include. Every student will be responsible for 5 lines of the songs. In small groups, students will collaborate to compose a single class song. A potential extension activity will be for students to construct a short video.

Assessments

Students overall assessment will be based on the portfolio of the above assignments and the lesson plans that follow.

Rubrics

- 5- Outstanding
- 4 - Very Good
- 3 - Good
- 2 - Making progress
- 1 - Needs Improvement

Following Directions

- 5 - I followed the directions, stayed on task and helped other students
- 4 - I followed the directions but I had to be reminded to stay on task.
- 3 - I was frequently off task.
- 2 - I did not follow the directions.
- 1 - I did not listen to the directions, so I did not know what to do.

Use of resources

- 5 - I was able to complete my work independently.
- 4 - I was able to complete the project with help from others.
- 3 - I was able to find most of the material I needed to work on the project.
- 2 - I was able to find some of the material I needed to work on the project.
- 1 - I was unable to find the information I was looking for.

Classroom Activities/Lesson Plans

Presented here are 2 sample lesson plans to be used in this unit. Teachers can use the ideas for a single lesson or plan the entire integrated unit based upon the objectives and strategies aforementioned.

Sample Lesson Plan 1

Title: Lyrical Form versus Lyrical Content

Duration: Two – Four 50-minute class periods

Grade level: 7-8

Subject area: Literacy (Reading and Writing)

Standard(s): Pennsylvania literacy standards: reading, writing, speaking, and listening: demonstrate fluency and comprehension in reading (1.1H); use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced (1.2B); write persuasive pieces (1.4C); and listen to selections of fiction and/or non fiction literature (1.6B).

Objectives:

Students will write a persuasive paper to support their opinion.

Student will be able to debate their point of view.

Students will be able to critically analyze lyrics.

Materials:

Musical CD and written lyrics of suggested artist (Tupac & Kanye West), Suggested songs: Tupac “Changes”; Kanye West “Slow Jamz (new version), ” CD player or Internet, Persuasive writing graphic organizer, Lyrical check list

Procedures:

Critical Thinking Question: What is more important, lyrical form or lyrical content?

Teacher reviews the definitions of lyrical form and lyrical content. The form refers to the sounds, beats, instruments, creativity, and rappers style. The lyrical content of a song refers to the words.

Students form small groups to review their understanding of the terms. To verify student understanding of the terms, they will be required to write a title of a song that meets the lyrical form overall criteria and a positive song that meets the lyrical content criteria. Student responses will be documented on chart paper to be reviewed and discussed with the class.

Teacher reviews the lyrical checklist with students. This checklist has detail elements of the evaluation criteria (for example, alliteration, anagram, breathe control, cadence, etc). The lyrical checklist has complex terms that may be unfamiliar to students. Therefore, to accommodate struggling learners the teacher will provide examples of each lyrical term. For instance, the teacher plays short segments of rap songs to highlight a specific term.

Students listen to the entire song. Emphasize students only listen to the lyrics.

Teacher distributes the written lyrics for the above songs.

Students listen and read the lyrics to identify the specific components from the lyrical checklist. Students check-off the elements that resonate with their opinion.

Teacher brainstorms with students to document the components that are present in the selected song.

Students write a persuasive essay to support their viewpoint to answer the critical thinking question.

Extension Activity:

In small groups, students create terms that can be added to the lyrical criteria checklist.

Adaptations:

Teacher provides a simplified lyrical checklist to assist students who may become confused by too many choices.

Teacher provides students with a sample-completed lyrical checklist with explanations.

Discussion Questions:

Describe the emotions you feel when you listen to the songs. Does the song make you laugh, cry, sing, dance, tap your fingers, etc?

How does your favorite song compare or contrast with a social conscious rap song?

What could you change in the song to improve the lyrical form or lyrical content?

What are the similarities and differences in the various artists?

What theme do the words express in the song?

Why do you listen to rap music?

Sample Lesson Plan 2

Title: Can We Settle The Debate? Who Is The Greatest Rapper?

Duration: Four – Six 50-minute class periods

Grade level: 7-8

Subject area: Literacy (Reading and Writing), Social Studies

Standard(s): Pennsylvania literacy and social studies standards: reading, writing, speaking, and listening: demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction (1.1G); use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced (1.2B); read and respond to nonfiction and fiction including poetry and drama (1.3F); write multi-paragraph information pieces, for example letters, descriptions, reports, instructions, essays, articles and interviews (1.4B); and political and cultural contribution of individual groups (8.3A6).

Objectives:

Students will be able to present a 5-minute oral overview of their selected rapper.

Students will be able to critique their selected rap artist.

Students will be able to research and organize material.

Students will read and understand informational text.

Students will improve public speaking skills.

Materials:

Video- history of hip-hop- suggested video

Television/DVD

Research Graphic Organizer

Project Outline

Procedures:

Critical Thinking Question: Who is the Greatest Rap Artist?

Students complete the KWL exercise to determine what they know and what they want to learn about hip-hop. This strategy prompts students to review prior knowledge, create questions, and discover answers throughout the unit.

Teacher presents a PowerPoint presentation documenting the history of hip-hop. Also, books will be available for student review. The goal is to inform students that hip-hop consists of four basic elements, graffiti, deejay, break dancing, and emcee (rap). After the presentation, students review the KWL to evaluate what they have learned thus far. One of the comprehensive resources for this presentation is the book *Vibes History of Hip Hop*.

To reinforce the history of hip-hop, students will watch a movie video of early hip-hop pioneers. Suggested movie videos are: *Beat Street*, *Breakin'*, *Krush Grove*, *Rap: Looking for the Perfect Beat*, and *Wild Style*. Additional movie are listed in the annotated filmography. Throughout lesson 2, students will watch video clips of influential rap individuals and groups. Students will evaluate the quality and creativity of the video.

Students will research the history of hip-hop music. Student will be required to write an overview of key elements that are noted on the teacher created "What is hip-hop music outline?" For example, who created the term hip-hop? Who and where did hip-hop music begin? What critical factors advanced the popularity of hip-hop music?

Students will be presented with a list of popular and underground rap artists. The teacher will present a brief bio of some of the rap artists to expand student exposure. Before students select their rap artist for research, they would have several opportunities to apply the above lyrical checklist.

Students will research the lyrics utilizing a project outline.

Adaptations:

The video is ideal for my auditory and visual learners.

Teacher simplifies the project outline.

Discussion Questions:

How do you think negative lyrics affect your thinking?

Can a female artist compete with a male artist?

Why are underground rap artist overlooked?

Annotated Bibliography, Citations and Resources

Teacher Resources

Adaso, Henry, "Hip Hop Timeline," 13, Feb 2008.

<<http://rap.about.com/od/hiphop101/a/hiphoptimeline.htm>>. This e-paper provides a concise history of hip-hop that is easy for teachers and students to understand.

Ashanti, Kwabena F., "The Power Principal : Sankofa Nyansa Tumi, " 20, Jan 2008.

<www.kwabenaashanti.com/Syndicated_Columns/Power_Blocks_Article_for_Public.htm> This e-paper presents an extensive definition of sankofa and the author's perspective on the importance of leadership and power for African people.

- Blow, Kurtis. "The History Of Rap: Vol. 1: The Genesis," 10, May 2008.
< www.hiphopnetwork.com/articles/general/kurtisblowversionofhiphop.asp >. Helpful site containing extensive information on the hip-hop culture.
- Bynoe, Yvonne. *Encyclopedia of rap and hip hop culture*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006. The first comprehensive collection of factual information associated with the development and history of rap and hip-hop.
- Chang, Jeff. *Can't Stop Won't Stop*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005. This book presents a detail view of the hip-hop culture and generation.
- D., Davey. "The History of Hip-Hop," 13, Feb 2008.
<<http://www.daveyd.com/>>. Davey D. is considered a hip-hop expert who has been involved in the movement since 1977. This website provides a variety of sources related specifically to hip-hop such as articles, photo galleries, commentaries, politics, etc.
- Fost, Don. "Reaching The Hip-Hop Generation," *American Demographics*, 15(5): 15-16.1993. The author provides some results from a study completed by a Philadelphia-based Motivational Educational Entertainment (MEE) Productions company regarding Black teenage attitudes and how we can use the study results to positively impact youth.
- Gardner, Howard. *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. 2nd ed. London: Fontana Press, 1993. Document the author's research on different ways that people learn.
- George, Nelson. *Buppies, B*Boys, Baps, & Bohos: Notes on Post-Soul Black Culture*. 2nd ed. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001. In a collection of essays, this book covers contemporary black culture over the past thirty years in music, film, sports, publishing, fashion, and politics.
- George, Nelson. *The Death of rhythm & blues*. United States of America: Penguin Books, 1988. The book tells the story of black music in the last fifty years. The book is based on George's interviews and stories during his journalistic career.
- George, Nelson. *Hip hop America*. 3rd ed. United States of America: Penguin Books, 2005. George is considered one of the most knowledgeable hip-hop writers. This book provides the history of hip from personal perspective. Also, the book examines hip-hop as a music, style, a business, a myth, and a moral force.
- Hikes, Zenobia L., "Hip-hop viewed through the prisms of race and gender," *Black Issues in Higher Education*, 21(13): 40, 2004. The article addresses the negative stereotypes of African-Americans and the impact on young women.

Jasper, Kenji, and Ytaska Womack, eds. *Beats, Rhymes, and Life: What We Love and Hate about Hip-Hop*. New York: Harlem Moon, 2007. A collection of essays and opinions exploring and deconstructing hip-hop music, lyrics, and music-video imagery.

Light, Alan, ed. *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999. The purpose of this book is to document the complex history of hip-hop in a single book. In addition, the book highlights significant people and events. The book includes a variety of photos and references.

McBride, James. "Hip-Hop Planet," *National Geographic*, 211(4): 100-119.2007. The author provides a history of hip-hop in America. Also the article references the influence of rap music around the world and its evolution.

Ogbar, Jeffrey, O.G. *Hip-Hop Revolution: The Culture and Politics of Rap*. Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2007. The book celebrates hip-hop and confronts the cult of authenticity that defines its essential character.

Reese, R., "From The Fringe: The Hip Hop Culture And Ethnic Relations," 13, Feb 2008. <<http://www.csupomona.edu/~rrreese/HIPHOP.HTM> >. The e-paper organizes hip-hop by sections such as historical, language, clothing, crossover appeal, media, and positive messages. This paper could be used to validate the positive impact of hip-hop.

Rose, Tricia. *Black Noise: Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*. Middleton: Wesleyan University Press, 1994. According to Rose, this book examines the complex and contradictory relationship between forces and racial and sexual domination, black cultural priorities, and popular resistance in contemporary rap music.

Shapiro, Peter. *The Rough Guide To Hip-Hop*. 2nd ed. London: Penguin Group, 2005. The guide is formatted like an encyclopedia with hip-hop information organized in alphabetical order. Included are extensive biographies, recommended albums and photos.

Watkins, S.Craig. "Why Hip-Hop Is Like No Other," *Foreign Policy*, 163: 4-5.2007. The author presents the argument that the global growth of hip-hop music is a result of how major records companies have market this product.

Student Resources

Ahearn, Charlie and Jim Fricke, eds. *Yes Yes Y'all: The Experience Music Project Oral History of Hip-Hop's First Decade*. Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2002. The book is an excellent source for primary documents because it contains personal observations, photographs and vintage photos and posters.

Cirelli, Michael and Alan Lawrence. *Hip-Hop Poetry and The Classics*. California: Milk Mug, 2004. Classic poetry is compared to major lyrics created by hip-hop artists.

Eminem. *Angry Blonde*. New York: HarperCollins, 2000. Eminem describes his process for writing rap songs and experiences in the music business. Also, the book contains quality photographs.

Horowitz, Joseph. *Dvorak in America: In Search of the New World*. United States of America: Cricket Books/Marcato, 2003. Written for grades 6-8. Explains how musical forms are created in various traditions.

Light, Alan, ed. *The Vibe History of Hip Hop*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 1999. The purpose of this book is to document the complex history of hip-hop in a single book. In addition, the book highlights significant people and events. The book includes a variety of photos and references.

Ogg, Alex and David Upshal. *The Hip Hop Years: A History of Rap*. United Kingdom: Macmillan, 1999. First hand interviews with popular hip-hop stars.

Shakur, Tupac. *The Rose that Grew From Concrete*. New York: MTV Books/Pocket Books, 1999. Includes Tupac's poetry collection from 1989-1991. Original hand-written poems are accompanied by a typed version.

Shaw, William. *Westside: Young Men and Hip Hop in L.A.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000. Presents the story of seven young men whose aspirations are to succeed in the rap industry.

Toyomi, Icus. *I see the Rhythm*. San Francisco, CA: Children's Book Press, 1998. The book won the Coretta Scott King illustrator award. A picture book that depicts the history of African-American music from Africa to rap/hip-hop.

Vibe Magazine. "Hip Hop Divas." New York: Three River Press, 2001. Biographies of old and new school female rappers. Highlights women who were part of hip-hop's evolution.

Waters, Rosa. *Hip Hop: A Short History*. Pennsylvania: Mason Crest, 2007. An easy to read resource guide on the history of hip-hop – 64 pages.

Web Resources

Arts Sanctuary. < www.artsanctuary.org > 13, June 2008. The website is critical due to its community focus in providing programs and services for people who are interested in the arts. The educational resources included an extensive hip-hop curriculum guide. At this time, I have only reviewed the table of contents.

Hip Hop Movies. < www.netweed.com/hiphop/movies/ > 7, Feb. 2008. The website provides a widespread list of hip-hop documentaries, videos, and music sorted in alphabetical order.

Old School Hip-Hop. < www.oldschoolhiphop.com/ > 5, June 2008. Features biographies, recordings, and videos from old school rap artists who performed prior to 1986.

Public Broadcasting Service. "The Hip-Hop Phenomenon: Online NewsHour" 24 Feb. 1999. 7 Feb. 2008. < www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/entertainment/jan-june99/hiphop_2-24.html > Presented by Jim Leher, this link provides interviews with various opinions about hip-hop. Comments are obtained from the general public and famous people such as Ice Cube and Damon Dash.

Filmography

Beat Kings: The History of Hip Hop. By Nature Sounds. Perf. Various Artists. 2007. Video/DVD. Chronicles the history of beat making.

Freestyle-The Art of Rhyme. By Palm Pictures. Dir. Kevin Fitzgerald. 2005. DVD. Includes interviews from with Biggie Small, Tupac, and Mos Def.

Hip-Hop Legends. By Lightyear Video Dir. Mike Corbera, Tracey G. Underhill. Perf. Melle Mel, Scorpio. 2007. DVD. This video is unique because it contains exclusive interviews with original pioneers of hip-hop.

Redefinitions: Hip Hop Roots and Future. By Mvd Visual. Perf. Afrika Bambaataa. 2002. DVD. Focus on the foundation of hip-hop.

Through the Years of Hip-Hop Vol. 1. By Rapentertainment. Dir. Peter Lauer, Marty Thomas, Pam Thomas. Perf. Various Artists. 2007. DVD. Primary sources tell the history of hip-hop.

Appendices: Pennsylvania 7th & 8th grade literacy and social studies standards met by this unit-

Standard 1.1: Learning to Read Independently

1.1F Understand the meaning of and apply key vocabulary across the various subject areas.

1.1G Demonstrate after reading understanding and interpretation of both fiction and nonfiction.

1.1H Demonstrate fluency and comprehension in reading.

Standard 1.2: Reading Critically in all Content Areas

1.2B Use and understand a variety of media and evaluate the quality of material produced.

1.2C Produce work in at least one literary genre that follows the conventions of the genre.

Standard 1.3: Reading, Analyzing and Interpreting Literature

1.3C Analyze the effect of various literary devices.

1.3F Read and respond to nonfiction and fiction including poetry and drama.

Standard 1.4: Types of Writing

1.4A Write short stories, poems, and plays

1.4B Write multi-paragraph information pieces (e.g. letters, descriptions, reports, instructions, essays, articles, interviews).

1.4C Write persuasive pieces.

Standard 1.5: Quality of Writing

1.5A Write with a sharp, distinct focus.

Standard 1.6: Speaking and Listening

1.6B Listen to selections of literature (fiction and/or nonfiction).

1.6F Use media for learning processes.

Standard 1.8: Research

1.8B Locate information using appropriate sources and strategies.

1.8C Organize, summarize and present the main ideas from research.

Standard 8.1: History (Global Connections)

8.1B1 Primary, Document, Materials, Artifacts, and Historical Places

Standard 8.3: United States History

8.3A6 Political and Cultural contributions of Individual Groups

8.3B6 Primary, Document, Materials, Artifacts, and Historical Places

Appendix 2

Lyrical Terms With Definitions

Lyrical Checklist

LYRICAL DEFINITIONS:
YOU CAN'T JUST LIKE A SONG,
YOU GOTTA KNOW WHY YOU LIKE!
(Source: Michael Coard)

- ✓ Alliteration –
two or more words having the same sound
- ✓ Anagram-
word or phrase formed by reordering the letters of another word or phrase
- ✓ Breath Control-
steady, rhythmic delivery
- ✓ Cadence –
vocal rise and fall, modulation, and rhythm
- ✓ Complexity-
original, self-inspired
- ✓ Delivery –
articulation, intonation, inflection, and modulation
- ✓ Flow –
essential ingredient, consisting of fluidity, smoothness, and continuity

- ✓ Graphic Imagery-
verbal picture painting

LYRICAL CHECKLIST:
YOU CAN'T JUST LIKE A SONG,
YOU GOTTA KNOW WHY YOU LIKE!
(Source: Michael Coard)

Evaluation Criteria	Song: Slow Jamz by Kanye West	Song: Changes by 2Pac
Alliteration		
Anagram		
Breath Control		
Cadence		
Complexity		
Delivery		
Flow		
Graphic Imagery		

Write a paragraph to support your point of view.