

What is American Music and Where Did it Come From?

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Overview:

As a music educator, I strive to make general music classes relevant to my students and reflective of their cultural experiences in hopes of inspiring their understanding of and desire to create music. It is vital that students understand the overwhelming influence and impact music has on their daily life, and that they are informed how to process the meaning and effects of the music around them. In working with students from kindergarten through college I have found that while every age group brings different perspectives, the themes and concepts I address are consistent regardless and lessons are successful when based on a foundation of the students' interests. This curriculum unit has been developed to provide a structured platform for students to explore these critical concepts and categorized into three overlapping units: *Music Today - Culture, Society, & Music in Everyday Life*; *American Music History*; and *Fundamentals & Elements of Music*.

Rationale:

Throughout the past century, musical decades have defined generations and have impacted many social ideas and actions. In the first unit, students will explore the concept of music in everyday life and media literacy, and how it translates to their everyday experiences. With their new tools, students will conduct a self-analysis of today's culture and explore the current state of American popular music and the cultures surrounding it, with an emphasis on Pop, Hip Hop, and Rock. Students will also explore music and the entertainment industry's influence and impact on marketing and mass media. Projects will include dissecting and creating retail environments and jingles, as well as observing marketing behaviors and trends. Students will also learn to actively listen to and analyze their favorite music, while learning to compose their own.

The history unit will explore American Music History since the Revolutionary War, focusing on the decades and genres of the 20th Century as it descends from today back to the Negro Spirituals, and the branches along the way including gospel, blues, jazz, rock, and hip hop. Students will also identify similarities in themes of these different genres and the role and influence of African American music throughout. Along with using music's significance in history and social studies to serve as a catalyst for discussing historical and sociological content, this unit will address the cultural identities of each period, developing tools and language to categorize similarities and differences in each, such as the theme of rebellion. Students will follow these trends through today and develop a vocabulary and skill set to explore music and the current culture.

Finally, in building their music vocabulary, students will learn fundamental music elements including melody, harmony, rhythm (basic notation, simple drum set patterns, 2/4 Snare Drum), song form, Blues and I-IV-V chord progressions, instrumentation (acoustic and digital) and composition (songwriting, basic music programming, and scoring). These lessons will be integrated within the historical, philosophical and psychological discussion so that students will understand the direct relationship between their study and their musical experiences. This will be carefully designed to insure the utmost success of student engagement and interest.

All three units are designed to be overlapping, and as such teachers should feel free to move around or insert aspects of various units whenever necessary, based on the flow of the class, interest of the students, relevance to the topic of study, or necessity to facilitate and activity.

Background:

Unit 1 – Music Today – Culture, Society, and Music in Everyday Life

Music Everyday & Personal Music Survey

From kindergarten on, every student brings with them a personal music experience. Some will be cultural or religious experiences from their family, while others may have been educational settings, and more still through television and games. Students often fail to realize the significant connections with their musical interaction or understand the power of music and in how hearing it can help change a mood or evoke old memories and feelings.

In order to help each student connect to the remainder of the lessons outlined in this unit, it is vital that extra attention be given to determining these connections in the beginning of this instruction. While often students fail to realize the abundance of their

musical interactions, a simple walk through their morning routine coming to school should identify a few.

A typical response may include, “Woke up, took a shower, ate a bowl of cereal, got in my mom’s car, dropped off at the bus stop, caught the bus, and came to school.” The educator should follow this up with questions such as, “When you woke up, was it an alarm clock? Did the alarm beep or did a radio station come on?” “While you were eating, did you turn on the t.v.? Did you see any commercials? Was there a jingle? Did the cartoon have music behind it?” “When you got in your mom’s car, was the radio on? Was it music? Was it commercials? Jingles?” “On the bus, did anyone around you have their headphones obnoxiously loud? Could you hear the lyrics? Did you nod your head along? etc.” By the time students have arrived to homeroom, they should be able to recount multiple interactions with music.

Students fail to realize how often music is in the background, overhead, or intentionally directed at influencing a mood or decision. Describing a trip through any mall can help depict this, as students will have ideas and experiences as to which stores, selling which type of items, to which clientele, will select certain genres of music. Allowing the class to discuss these experiences will help demonstrate not only their preconceived ideas regarding stereotypes, but the marketing and entertainment industry’s as well (**see Activity 1 – Mall Store Project**).

Music as a Cultural Identity

An important concept that many students fail to realize while others consciously choose, is the idea that musical selections often determine a social categorization. Referring to and discussing the earlier mentioned stereotypes will help students grasp and begin to process these thoughts. These stereotypes should be discussed, and used as a stepping point to painting a picture of the cultural landscape of America today, as well as within your individual schools. Later in the unit, students will begin to see similarities and better understand differences between the various genres of music available, as well as the idea that these concepts and varying viewpoints have existed as long as American music.

It must be noted that many students will consider their music very personal and fear judgment for liking music outside of the popular opinion causing them to avoid participating in a class discussion. To further engage each student, some type of personal music and media survey will allow the students to respond open and honestly (**see Appendix B**). It is also advisable to express to the students that these responses will dictate the content used in the classes discussions and lessons.

Pop Culture Trivia - Quizzo

A fun way to tie up each lesson's concepts as well as the students' interests is to incorporate a Pop Culture Trivia/Quizzo game in which students compete in teams to answer trivia questions related to music, television, and movies. Many of the questions can come from the students' personal surveys or recent class discussions. This serves as a great break from class work and discussions, while providing assessment for the teacher. Students usually enjoy the competition and prizes can be provided to the winners.

Marketing & Media Literacy

Often, the reactions from the students when discussing their daily encounters with music serves as a great introduction to the use and power of music in marketing through jingles, videos, product placement, celebrity endorsements, etc. Students very often fail to realize the influence it has taken over them as consumers. As an example, I like to ask the students to finish my song, and then begin the first few words of a jingle. A favorite at this time is, "800-588" to which the class replies, "2-3-hundred, Em-pire" referring to the overplayed Empire Carpets jingle. I then poll the students as to how many of them have had to purchase carpet for their home, and why they would retain this store's phone number, as it is useless to them. While they mostly all laugh, it leads to an interesting conversation about the ability of the advertising and marketing industry to "brainwash" them.

The value of students understanding the influence and intention of marketing is important, not only for them to make wise, educated decisions as general consumers, but as consumers of music and the entertainment industry. In the next few activities, students are engaged as the Marketers, observing roles in Advertising, Sales, and Market Research critically analyzing how these techniques are used (**see Appendix C**). Students will create a product and Brand Identity, develop marketing plans, construct retail environments, and compose jingles (**See Activity 2**). This is a great opportunity to collaborate with professionals in marketing industries in your community.

Unit 2 - American Music History

Making Connections/ Building Vocabulary

Music history has the potential to be one of the more boring topics to cover with students regardless of age, as they often fail to make connections outside of their experiences. As means to engaging, I *deeply* stress the concept of working backwards. Allowing kids to talk about things they like excites them and provides the confidence to speak intelligently and informed. To introduce music history and genres, we begin with a list of artists and songs that the kids suggest are popular, good or bad, and liked or disliked. Along with

this, we must begin to develop a vocabulary for identifying and explaining why music is good or bad and liked or disliked.

As this will undoubtedly spark a debate, the website www.billboard.com provides a current list of “popular” songs across a variety of categories. This list can be referenced to indicate that personal taste and popularity are not necessarily hand-in-hand. It is also a great opportunity to introduce genres, and the concept of “Popular Music.” At this point, it may be beneficial to assess the students’ knowledge and compose a list of various music genres.

With the genre list complete, return to the list of songs constructed earlier and identify each song’s genre or genres as it may apply. A follow up to this activity may be a discussion of similarities in basic music concepts (rhythm, form, lyrical content, etc.) It is also a great time to introduce themes in music popular across all genres (love, heartache, money, cars, etc.)

Musical Decades and Cultures

In a follow up class or assignment, students should fill out a timeline of music genres from early America throughout the 20th century and today (**See Appendix D**). This timeline should serve as a reference for the remainder of your historical backtracking, and be retained by the students and adjusted/completed throughout the course. As you begin to work backward through the various decades with your students, be sure to identify the popular music of each and major cultural experiences surrounding them. Students should have an aural and visual picture of each decade and the various music and culture within. Each of these cultural pictures should also be related to the earlier discussion of today and the students’ current cultural experience. Teacher’s (based on personal interest and student body) should use their discretion to expand on the various cultures and historical connections. This also offers great opportunity for cross-curricular learning and collaboration. As you move forward in this unit, you will develop tools to help tie the past decades to the students’ experience and the world today.

Rebellion

The concept of rebellion should serve as a standing theme as you transition from decade to decade. It could be pointed out that as each generation grasps new and emerging genres and styles of music, it is constantly rejected by the previous generations. This theme will exist with certain genres as well (such as Jazz – swing to bebop) and should also be explored and discussed as a means to understanding the similarity in differences.

Family Tree/ Six Degrees of Separation

As we are still trying to make connections for our students as they work back through history, a great approach is to create a family tree for their favorite musicians. A simple activity is to have each student select an artist/musician that they like today, and determine one influence that artist cites. The students can create a short paragraph for each artist, identifying the time they were relevant and the genre of music they performed. If they repeat this three more times, they will have covered five artists, and likely reached back into the early decades of the 20th century. Part of the fun is identifying when the students no longer recognize the older artists, yet have a first-hand account of the connection to the music they like. As a class, the students can plot their trees and create a master tree to accompany their earlier timeline. This also allows a visual representation of how different artists connect.

Students love the concept of “Six Degrees of Separation,” in that every artist, or person for that matter, can be linked in six steps. Analyzing their family trees, students will be able to make connections between artists they did not think possible. For example, the rapper Lil Wayne ties to Easy E, Tupac, Nirvana, The Beatles, Black Sabbath, and Elvis Presley (**See Activity 3**).

Another opportunity to demonstrate this concept is using the Internet Movie Database at www.imdb.com, where you can visually point out the concept of how actors in Hollywood all connect through shared roles.

**While it is the determination of the teacher (based on prior knowledge and commitment to research/resources available) and based on the population and age of the students how much time will be dedicated to each decade/genre of music, this next particular section is to touch on Hip Hop’s growth and influence in America, as it will be of particular interest to students in urban classroom settings. All other decades/genres can be expanded on at the teacher’s discretion.*

Hip Hop History

There are many great resources available to research how Hip Hop arose in the Bronx in early 1970’s. Most important in covering this with students is to include the four major components of breaking, graffiti, MCing, and beat-boxing/DJing/Scratching, and the positive, storytelling nature of its inception as an expression of the youth of the time. A great documentary to learn/ identify many of the key contributors in early hip hop music and dance is “*The Freshest Kids- a history of the b-boy*” (see - www.imdb.com/title/tt0361638/). A great depiction of the storytelling element and a classroom discussion catalyst is Grandmaster Flash’s *The Message*.

While the 70's provided the early growth of Hip Hop, the 1980's brought expansion and eventual commercialization. The movie *Krush Groove* is a fantastic visual depiction of this, along with featuring the major, relevant artists of the time in actual performance footage, the story of Russell Simmons' Def Jam records (referred in the movie as Krush Groove), and the collaboration of Simmons and Rick Rubin to establish the genre (note – film should be previewed for questionable content/age appropriateness – language, love scenes). An interesting program note is that while the film uses cursing in the dialogue, no foul language is included in the music.

Hip hop in the 90's should include the evolution of Gangsta Rap (N.W.A, Public Enemy, Ice-T) and the East Coast vs. West Coast epidemic (Biggie and Tupac), as well as the continued commercialization, popularization, and eventual exploitation of the genre. Students should reflect on the state of the genre today and how it relates to previous decades.

Unit 3 – Fundamentals and Elements of Music

Notation and Musicianship

In this section, students will learn the fundamentals of music, developing the tools to effectively analyze, create, and critique in terms of Melody, Rhythm, and Harmony.

Rhythm

Students should begin with basic notation from whole notes through sixteenth notes. While students typically retain interest in simply clapping rhythms to begin, an immediate goal should be guiding the students to creating simple drum set patterns replicating the basic 2-4 beats of Rock and Hip Hop. Utilizing three students, patterns can be replicated by students via *Human Drum Set*, in which a stomp replicates the bass drum, a clap replicates the snare, and patting replicates the hi hat. This can be done with three separate students or individually as students advance. Teachers also have the option of incorporating real drums or digital keyboards set to drum sounds, which will come into necessity later during digital composition.

Melody

Students should approach melody as the familiarity of the “tune” of music. A great example is the tune of Twinkle, Twinkle or the ABC song. Students will identify it as either one, and begin to understand the organization of notes into a melody. They should also be taught the concept of the musical alphabet only consisting of A-G. For most students, lyrics will be the most familiar and relatable melodic concept to grasp. Through analysis and discussion, students will learn the meanings and ideas of popular songs they can often recite yet can't explain. This is also a great opportunity to discuss literary elements in reading material the students enjoy. Allowing them to bring in songs will

provide a personal investment, and even negative selections (at the discretion of the teacher) provide a great opportunity for discussion and redirection. From this, teachers may move into songwriting and compositions, having the students create their own melodies, lyrics, and songs.

Harmony

In teaching the concept of harmony to beginning musicians, it is preferable to address the concept of multiple notes, and focus on how it pertains to their listening experience. Students easily grasp the idea of more than one voice, and the sound of a chorus as harmony. They also quickly pick up the idea of Major/Minor as happy or sad, and distinct intervals such as Minor 2nd – Jaws, 5th – ABC/Twinkle, etc. Additionally, it is an opportune time to discuss popular music instrumentation (explaining that often all sounds are produced by synthesizers) as Drums, Bass, Guitar and or Keyboard, Vocals, and possibly strings or horns. Students will relate this concept to their experience with games like *Rock Band* or *Guitar Hero*. Here the teacher can explain each instruments’ role not only in harmony, but it’s relationship to melody and rhythm as well, and the role that each plays. Students will address harmony experientially later in Keyboard studies, as they learn to play Triads and the 1-4-5 Chord progression, commonly found in popular American music.

Song Form

Students will identify and learn popular song forms including 12 Bar Blues and Radio Format - Intro-Verse-Chorus-Verse-Chorus-Bridge-Chorus-Ending. Students should choose songs to listen to and identify variations of the form.

Keyboard

Five Note Scales

Students begin by learning to locate “Middle C” (or any C on a keyboard, depending on size). Placing their Left Pinky or Right Thumb on C, they learn the Right and Left Hand Five-Finger-Positions in C Major.

Left Hand

Pinky – Ring – Middle – Pointer – Thumb
C D E F G

Right Hand

Thumb – Pointer – Middle – Ring - Pinky
C D E F G

Students should perform each hand separately then both together

C Major Chord

Students should then learn the concept of constructing a 1-3-5 Major Triad Chord performing them first as arpeggios (one note at a time) and then together as chords, once again performing each hand individually and then both together.

Left Hand

Pinky – Middle - Thumb
C E G

Right Hand

Thumb – Middle – Pinky
C E G

Ode to Joy

Students are now able to learn and perform *Ode to Joy* in the C Major Five-Finger-Position, beginning on E (middle finger). Students should once again play each hand individually then both together.

Chords

As students should now be more adept and moving their fingers up and down, they should one again play the C Major Triad, this time moving the chord up and down the 5-Note-Scale. This should be identified as Chords 1 through 5 of the C Major Scale

I	II	III	IV	V
C Major	D Minor	E Minor	F Major	G Major
C-E-G	D-F-A	E-G-B	F-A-C	G-B-D

Students can now play the chords up and down to perform the song *Lean On Me*.

1-4-5 Chord Progression

When students are comfortable moving their chords up and down, they can learn the 1–4–5 (I-IV-V) chord progression, the most commonly used chords in American popular music. Students should experiment to create different combination of the 1-4-5 and try to play familiar songs, as well as begin creating their own.

Digital Music

Sound Editing

In this section, students will explore editing and manipulating sound waves using digital editing software such as:

- Audacity - free download at www.audacity.sourceforge.net
- Garage Band – free on any Apple Computer or available as an iPad app
- DAW (Digital Audio Workstation) Software - Cubase, Cakewalk, Logic, etc.
- DJ Software – Virtual DJ, Torq, Serato Scratch. Etc.

Students will explore basic techniques in editing such as Splitting, Trimming, Beat Matching, adding Effects, Fading in and Out, and Manipulating Frequencies. The following brief project descriptions offer some ideas to engage students.

- Mixing Songs – Students choose two or more songs and edit them together to flow from one into the next seamlessly, accounting for tempos, flow, etc.
- Sound Effects Story – Students create an audio story using only sound effects from Sound Effect CD's or various free sound effect websites (www.A1freesoundeffects.com, www.soundbible.com, etc.)
- Mad Libs- Students create a digital Mad Lib, recording a story and leaving certain words blank. A partner then chooses and records the missing words and edits them into the story.
- Radio Morning Show segment – Students combine songs, skits, and sound effects to create their own radio morning show type segment
- Commercial Scoring – Students remove the sound from TV commercials available in the public domain and insert their own sounds and score.

Digital Sequencing and Composition/Songwriting

Students will combine their knowledge of fundamentals, keyboard skills and editing capabilities to compose “beats” or musical tracks consisting of Melody, Harmony and Rhythm. Using the instrumentation discussed earlier, projects should contain a rhythm or drum track, bass line, chordal instrument (Guitar or Keys), and a melody (vocal or other instrument). Students should combine all prior knowledge such as song form and lyrical analysis to create as mature of a composition as possible. These tools may also be combined with the marketing units to create original jingles and commercials.

Objectives:

Students will be able to determine a timeline of genres in American music history and recognize key events and persons who have contributed.

Students will identify similarities and themes across musical genres and time periods comparing genres familiar and new.

Students will develop basic musicianship and demonstrate their abilities by performing on keyboards, drums, and digital sequencers.

Students will understand general characteristics of popular music including form, instrumentation, and song length and demonstrate through composition.

Students will understand music's role and influence in marketing and demonstrate their ability to create a marketing plan incorporating music

Students will demonstrate knowledge and competency in creating and manipulating music and sounds using current digital technology

Strategies:

Class Discussions – Teacher lead discussions will help students to identify their current knowledge of the discussion topics, as well as deliver the missing information. Class discussions will be used minimally simply for the purpose of delivering necessary content.

Group Projects – Students will spend the majority of their time working collaboratively to explore the new concepts, creating and presenting projects to demonstrate their knowledge and proficiency of the concepts

Self-Exploration – Students will spend time working independently, practicing new skills and acquiring proficiency individually.

Classroom Activities:

Activity 1 Mall Store Project – Creating a Retail Environment

Create and design a retail store for a mall. Create a power point Business Plan explaining the design and layout of your mall retail store. Slides should include visual demonstrations of the stores personality and culture, as well as portraying your target demographic profile.

Be sure to include:

Store Name

Merchandise

Price Range
5 Songs Playing
Target Age and Demographic
Theme / Visual Displays
Interactive Media

Additionally, choose a local mall or retail area in a neighborhood that suits your target audience demographic, and research the current rate of commercial real estate for your store.

Extra Credit:

Provide a cost analysis for the first year of operation in your store including projected rent, utilities, labor, and additional expenses.

Activity 2 Creating an Advertisement

Create an advertisement for a real or fictitious product choosing one of the following:

- *TV Commercial (30 or 60 seconds)* - Use a video camera and Movie Maker to record and edit a commercial and jingle for your product.
- *Radio Commercial (30 or 60 seconds)* - Use Songsmith and/or Audacity to create and record and edit a commercial and jingle for your product.
- *Print Advertisement (Full Page – 8 1/2 x 11 1/2)* - Use Paint or PowerPoint (or any other programs) create a sample package or Print Ad for your product.

Choose the TV Station, Radio Station, or Magazine you will advertise in and research and identify the cost for your ad. Be sure to consider appropriate demographics and for TV and Radio, time of day. The final project should represent a professional advertisement. (Reference - www.srds.com)

Be sure to include:

Product

*Target Age and Demographic (who are you selling to?)

Price Point

Packaging or Print Ad

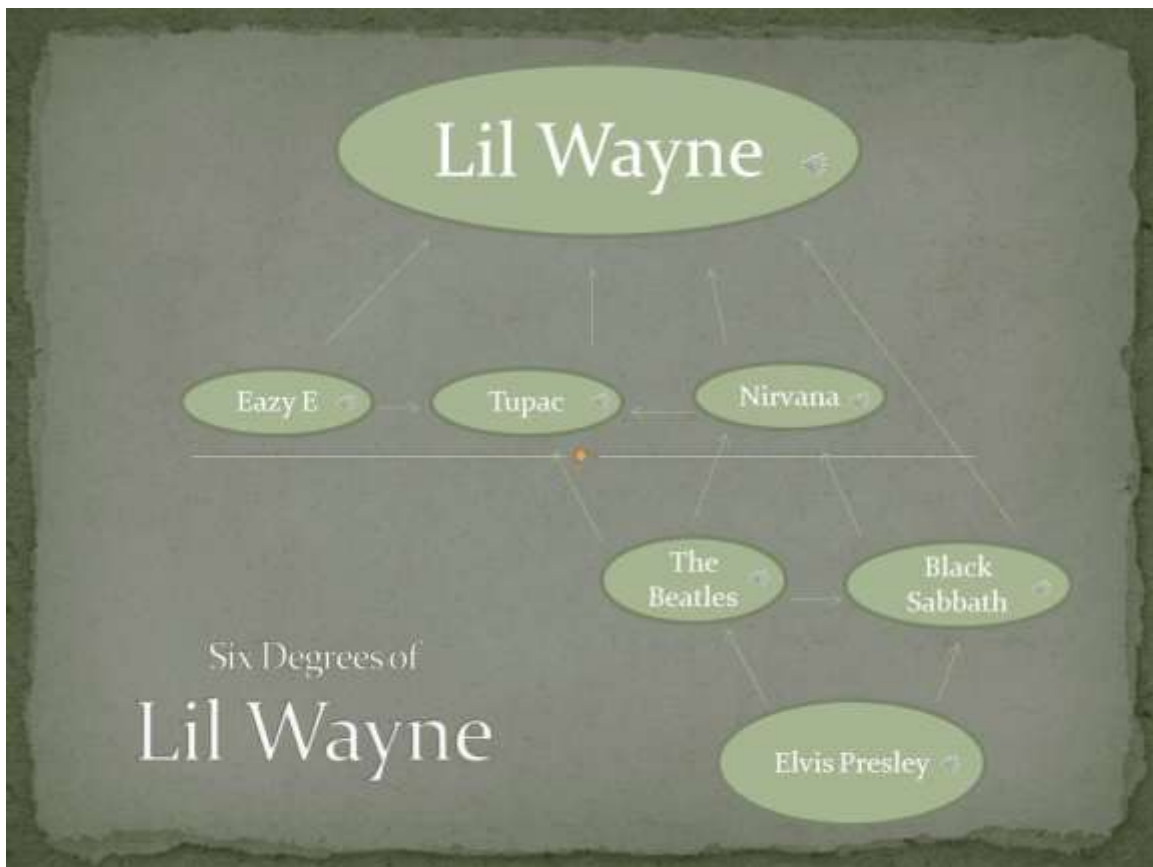
Jingle (catchy and effective)

Points to consider: Memorable Phone Numbers, Website, Celebrity Endorsement, Pricing, Specials, Brand Identity

Activity 3 Family Tree

Students choose a favorite musician and provide a paragraph describing their musician, genre/style of music, period relevant, a notable accomplishment or notoriety (this may be negative), and one influence cited by their artist. Students then repeat this for the influential artist, and repeat until a total of five musicians have been identified, chronologically from current to past. Students may present their Family Tree as a graphic display or PowerPoint presentation, as determined by the teacher.

Sample - Six Degrees of Separation – Lil Wayne



*Note: Utilizing PowerPoint – Each Artist contains a link to a recording/sample of their music.

Annotated Bibliography / Resources

Annotated Bibliography for Teachers

Denora, Tia. *Music in Everyday Life*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000

Ortiz, John M. *The Tao of Music*, York Beach, Maine, Samuel Weisner, Inc., 1997

Ramsey, Guthrie. *Race Music: Black Cultures from Bebop to Hip-Hop*, Berkeley, California, University of California Press, 2003

Personal and historical accounts covering the vast and various terrain of African American music, from bebop to hip-hop.

Peretti, Burton. *Lift Every Voice: The History of African American Music*, New York, New York, Rowman & Littlefield, 2009

Traces the roots of black music in Africa and slavery and its evolution in the United States.

<http://www.b-boys.com/classic/hiphoptimeline.html>

Annotated Bibliography for Students

The Freshest Kids. Dir. Israel with Afrika Bambaataa, Mos Def, and Fab Five Freddy. QD3 Entertainment, 2002

Documentary chronicling the history of the B Boy and its influence and development of Hip Hop culture.

Krush Groove. Dir. Michael Schultz with Sheila E, Joseph Simmons, Darryl McDaniels, and Blair Underwood. Crystalite Productions, 1985.

Biopic based on the founding and rise of Russell Simmons' Def Jam Records and featuring many of the prominent 80's rap figures at that actual time.

www.billboard.com

www.imdb.com

www.audacity.sourceforge.net

www.A1freesoundeffects.com

www.soundbible.com

Appendix A - Content Standards

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Appendix B

Music & Media Arts Survey

Name:

Grade:

Period:

Birthday:

What styles of music do you listen to most?

Who is your favorite music artist(s) or group(s)

What radio stations do you listen to?

Do you play any musical instruments? If yes, which ones and how long?

What TV shows do you watch?

What is your favorite movie(s)?

Where do you like to shop? (what mall, which stores?)

What is your favorite school subject? (other than my music class!)

What do you hope to do after graduating high school?

Tell me something unique or interesting about you....

You are stuck in my class this year.....What should we do???

Appendix C

Marketing Overview

Advertising

Commercials
Jingles
Print Ads
Endorsements

–

Sales

Media Outlets
Network Marketing
(Pyramid Schemes)

–

Market Research

Focus Groups
Buyer Behaviors
Stereotypes

Key Terms

Impulse Buy
Expendable Income
Suggestive Sell
Brand Identity
Demographic
Stereotypes

Appendix D

American Music History Timeline				
Decade	Popular Music	Urban / Rural / Suburban	Notable Artists	Significant Historical Reference
2000's				
1990's				
1980's				
1970's				
1960's				
1950's				
1940's				
1930's				
1920's				
1910's				
1900's and Earlier				