

The Message

Using Hip-Hop Pedagogy as a Literacy Building Tool for Grade 8

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DESCRIPTION

This unit, *The Message: Using Hip-Hop as a Literacy Building Tool*, was designed for students with varying abilities in grade 8. The cycles of lessons will be organized as follows to build students' understanding of hip-hop and its relationship to social justice issues:

- The origin and history of hip-hop
- Merging cultural ideas, talents, and circumstances that influence the music style

- Understanding the fundamental source of hip-hop's existence

(Note: The teacher-leaders of this unit were careful to select song lyrics that *do not* contain mature language but rather examine mature subject matter, exploring social justice issues such as poverty, community violence, and lack of quality education.)

BACKGROUND

Hip-hop is a phenomenon that has changed the landscape of popular culture in the past 30 years. It has had a notable influence on fashion, art, language, and the politics of mainstream Western society. In the last decade alone, there has been increased emphasis and elevated interest in critical hip-hop pedagogy. Bolstering this view, Hill (2009) stated, "There has been a growing body of scholarship that examines the intersection of hip-hop culture and classroom pedagogy" (p. 3). The reality that hip-hop is a growing presence in the classroom is obvious to

any casual observer (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2005).

Propelling this view, Gee (1989) added the idea that culturally responsive teaching, combined with the use of culturally relevant multimedia, provides a bridge between the subculture of the student and subculture of school (as cited in Leonard & Hill, 2008, p. 24). Similarly, Aikenhead (2001) contended that teachers can use cultural brokering to help students move fluidly between the students' culture and mainstream culture (as cited in Leonard & Hill, 2008, p. 24).

THE INTERSECTIONALITY OF HIP-HOP EDUCATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Central to hip-hop is a storytelling narrative about the political, social, and economic challenges faced by people living in poor communities. In the 1990s, during what is historically termed the “Golden Age,” American rapper Tupac Amaru Shakur (also known by his stage names 2Pac and briefly as Makaveli) released “Brenda’s Got a Baby,” a track about child abuse and teenage pregnancy. In the same period, rapper Peter Phillips (better known by his stage name Pete Rock), in collaboration with C.L. Smooth, debuted the chart-topping hit “They Reminisce Over You (T.R.O.Y.).” This song was inspired by the artists’ mutual friend Troy Dixon, who died tragically after an accidental fall. Most recently, drawing added attention to the issue of police brutality, hip-hop artist J. Cole released a track dedicated to teenager Michael Brown, who was killed by police in

Ferguson, Missouri. The messages couched in these songs further illuminate the potential for teachable moments in the classroom. And, while investigating topics such as the construction of identity and its use as a tool for social change, hip-hop pedagogy relates more to the realities of these students’ world.

Student participants in this unit will explore and examine some of these themes, along with poverty, gun violence, resilience, and overcoming obstacles. This examination will be accomplished as students engage in close reading activities, whole-group and small-group discussion, independent reading, and reflection writing. In this way, hip-hop is used as a literacy building instrument while revealing the realities faced by people living in urban areas and furthering awareness of their struggles.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In developing the conceptual framework, the teacher-leaders believe there is an interpretive lens most fitting to organize and view the gathered data. This framework is Critical Hip-Hop Pedagogy (CHHP; Akom, 2009; Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). CHHP is participatory, youth driven, and cooperative, where students’ contributions are treated equitably (Akom, 2009). The theory aims to address deep-rooted ideologies as well as social inequalities by using hip-hop as a tool for social justice in teacher education and student engagement (Morrell & Duncan-Andrade, 2002). In order for CHHP to be successful, there must be a balance between critical thinking (Lambert & Cuper,

2008; Snyder & Snyder, 2008), reflection, analysis, and action (Minkler, 2004). For the purposes of this unit, CHHP will be used to explore how hip-hop education can be used as a vehicle for the improvement of student learning.

Thus, the aim of this unit is to provide students across race, class, gender, and ability markers with a student-centered hip-hop-inspired educational program that meets their diverse learning needs and improves academic performance in language arts. Ginwright (2004) explained it this way: To be effective with members of the hip-hop generation, curriculum must relate more to the realities of these students’ world.

UNIT OVERVIEW

Week	Grouping	Central Ideas	Objectives	Teaching and Learning Activities	Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved	Texts Used
1	Individuals, Whole Group	Origin and history of hip-hop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will understand essential concepts about the five art forms of hip-hop. Students will use their understanding of the five hip-hop art forms to reflect on the influence of art in connection to hip-hop culture. Students will understand and assess their individual prior knowledge about hip-hop. Students will understand the geographic importance of the place where hip-hop originated. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Preassessment survey, used as baseline K-W-L Chart and introduction to art forms of hip-hop, to lay groundwork for future lessons 	SL.8.6 L.8.3 W.8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Message" preassessment survey K-W-L Chart Word study on the art forms of hip-hop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deejaying Emceeing Breakdancing Graffiti Beatboxing Texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexton, A. (1995), <i>Rap on Rap: Straight-Up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture</i> Chang, J., & DJ Kool Herc (2005), <i>Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation</i>
2	Individuals, Whole Group, Small Group	Origin and history of hip-hop	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will use their understanding of the history and origin of hip-hop and apply this knowledge during small-group discussion and the journal quick-write activity. Students will understand the historical background of hip-hop and its origin in the South Bronx. Students will use their understanding of the historical context of hip-hop during small-group discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Message" PowerPoint, to provide students with historical context of hip-hop culture and its origin <i>Brown Sugar</i> film clip viewing (10 minutes), to provide students with additional background information about geographic region and further set the tone for the unit 	RL.8.2 RL.8.4 SL.8.1 SL.8.1.c W.8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Message" PowerPoint presentation <i>Brown Sugar</i> (2002) film clip Texts: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sexton, A. (1995), <i>Rap on Rap: Straight-Up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture</i> Chang, J., & DJ Kool Herc (2005), <i>Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation</i> Student journals
3	Whole Group, Small Group	Merging cultural ideas, talents, and circumstances that influence the music style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will use their understanding of the five art forms of hip-hop and discuss their picture choices collaboratively during research. Students will use their understanding of the hip-hop art forms and apply this knowledge when recording responses on the Picture Walk worksheet. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher reviews art forms and shows images for each Students research pictures in cooperative groups and share with the whole class 	RL.8.2 SL.8.1 SL.8.2 L.8.6 W.8.4 WHST.6-8.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board Digital images of five hip-hop art forms Picture Walk worksheet
4	Individuals, Whole Group, Small Group	Understanding fundamental source of hip-hop's existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly to respond to journal entry text-based inquiries. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day 1 Close Reading Activity: Introduction of text "The Breaks" by Kurtis Blow; students annotate using Text Coding Guide Day 2 Close Reading Activity continued; students complete text-based questions 	RL.8.1 RL.8.4 W.8.2.a, b W.8.2.d, e W.8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board Hard copies of rap song lyrics for entire class

(continued)

UNIT OVERVIEW (CONT.)

Week	Grouping	Central Ideas	Objectives	Teaching and Learning Activities	Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved	Texts Used
5	Individuals, Whole Group	Understanding fundamental source of hip-hop's existence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly to translate the text into their own words. Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly as well as what has been reviewed to respond to the final text-based question. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Day 3 Final day for Close Reading Activity; students synthesize text into their own words and complete the last of the text-based questions 	RL.8.1 RL.8.4 W.8.2.a, b W.8.2.d, e W.8.4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "The Message" Postassessment Survey Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board Hard copies of rap song lyrics

TEXTS

Reading Aloud

Chang, J., & DJ Kool Herc. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. New York, NY: Picador-Macmillan.

This text underscores the historical setting of hip-hop—the South Bronx, New York—and how the music style has become a generation-defining global movement. There is in-depth analysis concerning the transformational impact of hip-hop music during the post-civil rights era and how it gave and continues to give voiceless youths a chance to address seismic changes.

Sexton, A. (1995). *Rap on rap: Straight-up talk on hip-hop culture*. Quince Cottage, UK: Delta ELT.

An anthology of essays, editorials, and criticism by Anna Quindlen, Nathan McCall, Sister Souljah, Ice-T, and William Safire, among others, providing a provocative study of the diverse forms and meaning of rap music and the culture that spawned it.

Whole-Group Instruction

Chang, J., & DJ Kool Herc. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. New York, NY: Picador-Macmillan.

Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip hop generation: Young Blacks and the crisis of African American culture*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas.

The Hip Hop Generation is an eloquent testament for black youth culture at the turn of the century. The only in-depth study of the first generation to grow up in postsegregation America, it combines

culture and politics into a pivotal work in American studies.

Sexton, A. (1995). *Rap on rap: Straight-up talk on hip-hop culture*. Quince Cottage, UK: Delta ELT.

Small-Group Discussion

Chang, J., & DJ Kool Herc. (2005). *Can't stop won't stop: A history of the hip-hop generation*. New York, NY: Picador-Macmillan.

Kitwana, B. (2002). *The hip hop generation: Young Blacks and the crisis of African American culture*. New York, NY: Basic Civitas.

Sexton, A. (1995). *Rap on rap: Straight-up talk on hip-hop culture*. Quince Cottage, UK: Delta ELT.

Self-Selected Reading

Edwards, P., & Kool G. Rap. (2009). *How to rap: The art and science of the hip-hop MC*. Chicago, IL: Chicago Review.

Clipse, Cypress Hill, Nelly, Public Enemy, Remy Ma, Schoolly D, A Tribe Called Quest, and will.i.am offer tips and advice in this compelling how-to.

Hall, D. (2007). *Will work for peace: New political poems*. New York, NY: Zeropanik.

A multicultural, cross-generational anthology of new political poetry by 144 living poets from every continent.

Sitomer, A.L. (2004). *Hip-hop poetry and the classics*. Los Angeles, CA: Milk Mug.

Hip-hop's literary artistic merits are compared with classic poetry.

TEACHING AND LEARNING ACTIVITIES

Week 1: Origin and History of Hip-Hop Essential Questions

- What is hip-hop?
- How do we define hip-hop?
- In what ways does art reflect as well as shape hip-hop culture?

Group Description

These lessons are designed for individual and whole-group instruction.

Goals

- Students will understand essential concepts about the five art forms of hip-hop.
- Students will use their understanding of the five hip-hop art forms to reflect on the influence of art in connection to hip-hop culture.
- Students will understand and assess their individual prior knowledge about hip-hop.
- Students will understand the geographic importance of the place where hip-hop originated.

Materials

- “The Message” Preassessment Survey
- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board
- Markers
- In-class technology
- Timer
- K-W-L Chart
- Class copies of *Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*
- Class copies of *Rap on Rap: Straight-Up Talk on Hip-Hop Culture*

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- That the development, organization, and style of coherent writing are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
- That formal English requires a command of its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening
- That speech can be adapted to a variety of contexts, using verbs in the active and passive voice and in

the conditional and subjunctive mood to achieve particular effects (e.g., emphasizing the actor or the action, expressing uncertainty or describing a state contrary to fact)

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 8, Standard 6](#)

[Language, Grade 8, Standard 3](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Introduction

Prior to launching the unit, give students a five-question preassessment survey (see Figure 1) to evaluate their prior knowledge about hip-hop. This instrument will be used as a baseline to modify and enhance future learning activities.

The teacher will then begin the lesson by saying, “Today, we will begin a unit of study to look at the history and origin of hip-hop and its significance to people who live in poverty.”

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. First, write the question “What is hip-hop?” on the SMART Board.
2. Then, distribute K-W-L charts to students, and have them individually complete the chart. (Emphasize a minimum of three entries per each column; see [Figure 2](#).) Move around the room to check for student focus.
3. Next, ask for student volunteers to group-share their responses. Write their responses on the K-W-L SMART Board graphic.
4. After that, introduce students to the five art forms of hip-hop and provide them with a definition for each term—deejaying, beatboxing, emceeing, graffiti, and breakdancing—using both reference books. (Students will be directed to specific pages in the text.)
5. Say, “These elements evolved out of a cluster of cultures, ideas, talents, and circumstances of the urban youth in the United States, specifically New York, in the 1970s,” as evidenced in Chang and DJ Kool Herc (2005) and Sexton (1995).
6. Then, using a classroom map, teacher will reference the geographic location of New York and ask the

FIGURE 1. "The Message": Preassessment Survey

Name: _____
Home Base: _____
Date: _____

Please read and answer the questions honestly and carefully. Circle Yes or No for these response questions. Where you are asked to elaborate, please use the space provided to tell me more about your experiences.

1) Have you ever studied hip-hop?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, please tell me a little bit more about what you studied.

2) Do you have some background knowledge about hip-hop?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, tell me a little bit about what you know about hip-hop.

3) Do you have some background knowledge about how hip-hop is used for learning?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, please tell me more about your knowledge.

4) Have you had any teachers who used hip-hop to teach you?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, tell me about this experience.

5) Please share a few of your thoughts about hip-hop.

students about the significance of its location and the migration of people. (Note: The merging of cultural ideas ultimately influenced the music.)

7. Close the lesson with students completing the L column of the K-W-L Chart.

Homework/Follow-Up

Students will respond to the third essential question: "In what ways does art reflect as well as shape hip-hop culture?"

Assessment

Informal

- Completion of "The Message" Preassessment Survey
- Student participation, group discussions

Formal

- Completion of K-W-L Chart

Week 2: Origin and History of Hip-Hop Essential Questions

- In what ways does art reflect as well as shape hip-hop culture?
- How do circumstances (poverty, community violence, lack of equitable education) influence hip-hop?

Group Description

This lesson is designed for individual, whole-group, and small-group instruction.

Goals

- Students will use their understanding of the history and origin of hip-hop and apply this knowledge during small-group discussion and the journal quick-write activity.
- Students will understand the historical background of hip-hop and its origin in the South Bronx.
- Students will use their understanding of the historical context of hip-hop during small-group discussion.

Materials

- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board
- Markers
- In-class technology
- Timer
- Student journals or lined paper
- Poster-sized paper
- Highlighters
- Sticky notes
- Class copies of *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*
- Class copies of *The Hip-Hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis of African American Culture*
- ["The Message" PowerPoint presentation](#)
- *Brown Sugar* film clip (Note: *Brown Sugar* is a 2002 American romance film written by Michael Elliott and Rick Famuyiwa, directed by Famuyiwa, and starring Taye Diggs and Sanaa Lathan.)

FIGURE 2. K-W-L Chart

Name: _____

K What You Know	W What You Want to Know	L What You Learned

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- The meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone
- The importance of engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly
- The significance of posing questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and responding to others’ questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas
- That the development, organization, and style of coherent writing are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

- [Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)
- [Speaking and Listening, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)
- [Speaking and Listening, Grade 8, Standard 1c](#)

[Language, Grade 8, Standard 6](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Introduction

The teacher will reiterate the importance of learning about the origin and history of this genre of music because it will help students gain an understanding of the fundamental cause or source of its existence. Reference Chang and DJ Kool Herc (2005) and Kitwana (2002).

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. Students will view “The Message” PowerPoint presentation and take notes in their journals. (Note: Consider a minilesson on how to take notes.)
2. Given that slide 8 of the presentation includes discussion questions, students will dialogue about the two inquiries as a whole group.
3. Students will then view the first 10 minutes of the movie *Brown Sugar* (2002). The purpose of viewing the beginning of the movie is to provide students with a baseline of the historical background and setting of the music style.

- Next, ask students to complete a quick-write in their journals reflecting on the PowerPoint presentation and the film. Students' Table of Contents entry should read "Quick-Write: Hip-Hop PowerPoint/Movie." Possible questions: "What did you find interesting in this lesson about the history and origin of hip-hop? What did you learn about hip-hop that you did not know prior to this lesson?" (Note: Students should write a minimum of two paragraphs.)
- Have students group-share their journal quick-write entries.

Homework/Follow-Up

Students will respond to the essential question, "How do circumstances (poverty, community violence, lack of equitable education) influence hip-hop?"

Assessment

Informal

- Student participation in group discussions
- Accurate student notes from "The Message" PowerPoint presentation

Formal

- Journal entry

Week 3: Merging Cultural Ideas, Talents, and Circumstances That Influence the Music Style

Essential Questions

- How do artists use different art forms of hip-hop (deejaying, beatboxing, emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti) to convey their intended message?
- What feelings do the various images evoke?

Group Description

This lesson is designed for whole-group and small-group instruction using images obtained from Internet sources that students research themselves.

Goals

- Students will use their understanding of the five art forms of hip-hop and discuss their picture choices collaboratively during research.
- Students will use their understanding of the hip-hop art forms and apply this knowledge when recording responses on the Picture Walk worksheet.

Materials

- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board
- In-class technology
- Picture Walk worksheets

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- The importance of engaging effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly
- The purpose of information presented in diverse media formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and evaluating the motives (e.g., social, commercial, political) behind its presentation and accurately use grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression
- Producing clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 2](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)

[Speaking and Listening, Grade 8, Standard 2](#)

[Language, Grade 8, Standard 6](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

[Writing Standards for Literacy in History/Social Studies, Grade 6-8, Standard 8](#)

Procedures

Introduction

Show students pictures (from the Internet) of the art forms of hip-hop:

- Deejaying
- Emceeing
- Breakdancing
- Graffiti
- Beatboxing

Remind students to refer to their notes about the five art forms of hip-hop.

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. Provide students with the Picture Walk worksheet (see Figure 3). Instruct them to research pictures of the music forms in small groups of up to five students.
2. This will be followed by students sharing the results from the Picture Walk.

Homework/Follow-Up

Respond to the essential question, “How do artists use different art forms of hip-hop (deejaying, beatboxing, emceeing, breakdancing, and graffiti) to convey their intended message?”

Assessment

Informal

- Student participation in group discussions
- Participation in small group

Formal

- Poster and Oral presentation using a rubric: Picture Walk share

Week 4: Understanding Fundamental Source of Hip-Hop’s Existence (Close Reading Day 1)

Essential Questions

- How does the author use different story elements to establish mood?
- What is the author’s message to his or her reader?

Group Description

This lesson is designed for individual, whole-group, and small-group instruction.

Goal

- Students will use their understanding of what the text explicitly says to respond to journal entry text-based inquiries.

Materials

- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board

FIGURE 3. Picture Walk Worksheet

Name: _____	
Photo 1	Photo 2
Describe what you see and feel	Describe what you see and feel
Write a caption or heading	Write a caption or heading
Write a question you have	Write a question you have
Photo 3	Photo 4
Describe what you see and feel	Describe what you see and feel
Write a caption or heading	Write a caption or heading
Write a question you have	Write a question you have
Photo 5	
Describe what you see and feel	
Write a caption or heading	
Write a question you have	

- Markers
- In-class technology
- Timer
- Student journals or lined paper
- Hard copies of rap song lyrics (see YouTube links) or lyrics of “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow
- Text Coding Guide

Additional Sources

- [YouTube: Kurtis Blow, “The Breaks”](#)
- [YouTube: Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”](#)
- [YouTube: “The Origins of Hip-Hop/Rap, Part 1” or “The History of Hip-Hop \(1981\)”](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Dance](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Music \(Rap Music\)](#)

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- How to cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly in grade 8 texts
- The meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyzing the impact of specific word choices on analogies or allusions to other texts
- That the development, organization, and style of clear and coherent writing are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2a, b](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2d, e](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Introduction

Prior to distributing hard copies of song lyrics to students, teacher will establish that the purpose for reading is *to be informed*. Instruct students to read the text independently. Refrain from frontloading

FIGURE 4. Text Coding Guide

Name: _____

Symbol	When to Use It
+	Confirms what you thought
X	Contradicts what you thought
?	Raises a question you would like to discuss with others
??	Confuses you... You go back and reread
<	An unknown word or a word that gets repeated
*	Something very important, even if you aren't sure why
!	Is new, interesting, or surprising

and giving background information. Distribute Text Coding Guide (Figure 4).

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. Demonstrate by modeling how to annotate the lyrics of “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow during reading; this should include highlighting unfamiliar or unknown words and phrases, noting important or powerful points and details, asking questions that students will discuss or research further.
2. As the students read the excerpt, use teacher anecdotal notes to monitor student notes to ensure that the work of Anchor Standards 1 and 2 is being completed properly.
3. After the students have finished the first reading, direct them to engage in a partner talk or small-group activity to discuss the text and any annotations they made. The discussions should include a retelling of the main information and ideas presented and should follow the correct sequence of the text. Students should also discuss the unfamiliar words and phrases they identified and can work together to determine meanings. To guide their discussion, have students ask and answer the following questions in their journal. Students’ Table of Contents entry should read “Close Reading 1.”
 - What is the author’s message to his or her readers?
 - What ideas in the text support or validate the author’s message?
 - What did you learn after reading the lyrics?

Homework/Follow-Up

Respond to the essential questions “How does the author use different story elements to establish mood?”

and “What is the author’s message to his or her reader?”

Assessment

Informal

- Student participation in group discussions
- Participation in small group
- Anecdotal notes

Formal

- Response to essential questions

Week 4: Understanding Fundamental Source of Hip-Hop’s Existence (Close Reading Day 2)

Essential Questions

- In what ways do artists express what they think and feel?
- What comparisons (similes, metaphors, personification) do you notice in the text?
- How do these comparisons help you understand the text?

Group Description

This lesson is designed for individual, whole-group, and small-group instruction.

Goals

- Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly to respond to three new journal entry text-based inquiries.
- Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly as well as what the teacher has explained and further reviewed to respond to text-based questions.

Materials

- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board
- Markers
- In-class technology
- Timer
- Student journals or lined paper
- Hard copies of rap songs (see YouTube links) or lyrics of “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow
- Text Coding Guide

Additional Sources

- [YouTube: Afrika Bambaataa, “Planet Rock”](#)
- [YouTube: Kurtis Blow, “The Breaks”](#)
- [YouTube: Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”](#)
- [YouTube: “The Origins of Hip-Hop/Rap, Part 1” or “The History of Hip-Hop \(1981\)”](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Dance](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Music \(Rap Music\)](#)

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- How to cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly in grade 8 texts
- The meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on analogies or allusions to other texts
- That the development, organization, and style of clear and coherent writing are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2a, b](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2d, e](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Introduction

Read the lyrics aloud as students follow along independently or paired.

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. Review with students any questions they had or unfamiliar words or phrases discussed during the read-aloud.
2. In addition, review with students any questions they had or unfamiliar words or phrases discussed during partner talk after the first reading. This quick assessment will determine whether the students fully understand the message of the text.

3. Introduce at least two new text-based questions after reading the text aloud to address author’s craft and Bloom’s for analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of text. Remember to model how to respond to one of the text-based questions.

Students’ Table of Contents entry should read “Close Reading 2.”

1. What realities (poverty, community violence, lack of quality education) find their way into this piece?
2. What is the writer’s point?
3. What comparisons (similes, metaphors, personification) do you notice in the text? How do they help you understand the text?

Homework/Follow-Up

Provide each student with a copy of the lyrics of “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Have them annotate the texts as a measure of follow-up and write a reflection based on the first essential question, “In what ways do artists express what they think and feel?”

Assessment

Informal

- Student participation in group discussions
- Participation in small group
- Anecdotal notes

Formal

- Response to essential questions

Week 5: Understanding Fundamental Source of Hip-Hop’s Existence (Close Reading Day 3)

Essential Questions

- What is the writer’s point?
- What can the writer see that perhaps the reader and others cannot?
- What can’t the writer of the piece see?
- What comparisons (similes, metaphors, personification) do you notice in the text? How do they help you understand the text?

Group Description

This lesson is designed for individual and whole-group instruction.

Goals

- Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly to translate the text into their own words.
- Students will use their understanding of what the text says explicitly as well as what has been reviewed to respond to the final text-based question.

Materials

- “The Message”: Postassessment Survey
- Interactive whiteboard/SMART Board
- Markers
- In-class technology
- Timer
- Student journals or lined paper
- Lyrics of “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow (see YouTube links)
- Coding guide

Additional Sources

- [YouTube: Afrika Bambaataa, “Planet Rock”](#)
- [YouTube: Kurtis Blow, “The Breaks”](#)
- [YouTube: Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, “The Message”](#)
- [YouTube: “The Origins of Hip-Hop/Rap, Part 1”](#) or [“The History of Hip-Hop \(1981\)”](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Dance](#)
- Rio Rinaldi, [Share About Arts: The History of Hip Hop Music \(Rap Music\)](#)

Objectives

Scholars will understand the following:

- How to cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly in grade 8 texts
- The meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on analogies or allusions to other texts
- That the development, organization, and style of clear and coherent writing are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2a, b](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2d, e](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

Introduction

Students will translate the text (lyrics provided in Week 4) into their own words in one or more sentences. The third reading will allow your students, now familiar with the text, to explore deeper concepts and activate higher order thinking skills.

Modeling, Guided Practice

1. The teacher-leaders of this unit encourage introducing a paired text or outside media source for deeper understanding and text-to-world connection.
2. Prior to the beginning of the third reading, pose text-dependent questions to guide students' analysis. You may decide to use some of the discussion points from the second reading that were not addressed.

3. Have students complete a Close Reading-Writing Task (Performance Assessment).

4. Pose this question: "Using evidence from the text and prior knowledge, how does the author's message speak to the struggle of those living in poverty?"

Homework/Follow-Up

Class Talk: Students will research a rap song of their choice (excluding songs with expletives and sexually explicit content) and present the information to the class in five minutes. Criteria for the research includes the artist's name, the song title, the message of the song, and the student's rationale for the choice. Students will be encouraged to use visual aids (pictures, posters, objects, or props) to support their statements.

Assessment

Informal

- Student participation in group discussions

Formal

- Performance Assessment (see writing rubric in Figure 5)
- "The Message": Postassessment Survey (see Figure 6)

FIGURE 5. Writing Rubric

	Superior	Strong	Adequate	Partial	Limited	Inadequate
Score	6	5	4	3	2	1
Content and Organization	Opening and closing Single, distinct focus evident throughout Unified and coherent Well-developed Details effective, vivid, explicit, or pertinent	Opening and closing Single, distinct focus evident throughout Unified and coherent Well-developed Details appropriate and varied	Generally has opening, closing, or both Single focus Ideas loosely connected Transitions evident Uneven development of details	May lack opening, closing, or both Usually has single focus Some lapses or flaws in organization Repetitious details	May lack opening, closing, or both Attempts to focus Attempts organization Details lack elaboration that could highlight paper	May lack opening, closing, or both Minimal response to topic; uncertain focus No planning evident; disorganized Details random, inappropriate, or barely apparent
Usage	Very few, if any, errors	Few errors	Some errors that do not interfere with meaning	Errors/patterns of errors may be evident	Numerous errors	Severe/numerous errors
Sentence Construction	Very few, if any, errors	Few errors	Some errors that do not interfere with meaning	Some errors	Numerous errors	Assortment of incomplete or incorrect sentences
Mechanics	Very few, if any, errors	Few errors	Some errors that do not interfere with meaning	Pattern of errors evident	Numerous serious errors	Errors so severe they detract from meaning

FIGURE 6. “The Message”: Postassessment Survey

Name: _____
Home Base: _____
Date: _____

Please read and answer the questions honestly and carefully. Circle Yes or No for these response questions. Where you are asked to elaborate, please use the space provided to tell me more about your experiences.

1) Have you learned more about the challenges faced by inner-city people from studying hip-hop?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, please tell me a little bit more about what you learned.

2) Have you learned more about the background of hip-hop?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, tell me a little bit about what you know now.

3) Do you now think that your background knowledge about hip-hop and its use for learning has changed?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, please tell me more about those changes.

4) Have the teachers of this hip-hop unit taught you in a way that helps you understand the content?
(Yes) (No)
If yes, tell me about this experience.

5) Now that we have completed the unit, please share a few of the thoughts you have about hip-hop.

Assessments

Week 1

A preassessment survey will be given to evaluate students’ knowledge about hip-hop. To further evaluate this lesson, the teacher should walk around the room and monitor students’ written responses to informally evaluate student understanding. Completion of the K-W-L Chart is the formal assessment.

Week 2

Accuracy of student notes from “The Message” PowerPoint presentation will serve as the informal assessment. Formal evaluation will consist of each student independently writing about his or her reflections from the PowerPoint presentation and film clip based on the four-point open-ended writing rubric.

Week 3

Informal assessment consists of student participation in group discussions and their participation in small groups as they canvass the room during the Picture Walk activity. The formal evaluation involves the use of a poster assessment rubric and oral presentation rubric to assess students’ understanding of the hip-hop art forms.

Week 4 (Close Reading Days 1 and 2)

To evaluate these two lessons, student participation in group discussions, participation in small groups, and anecdotal notes will serve as the informal assessment, with the primary assessment tool being teacher observation. Response to assessment questions is the formal assessment and will be recorded using a four-point open-ended scoring rubric.

Week 5 (Close Reading Day 3)

Teacher will require students to discuss their anecdotal findings as a whole group (or may require discussion in small groups instead). These discussions may be used to informally assess students’ skills.

Next, the teacher will collect the formative assessment handouts (lyrics) to assess students’ skills of identifying text structure and its impact on the central idea. The writing performance assessment is the formal evaluation and will be marked using a six-point writing rubric. At the end of Week 5, students will be given the postassessment survey to self-assess their learning.

Culminating Project

This two-part project is designed for students to synthesize their learning across all texts, media resources, and other references in the unit using the central ideas. The project begins with whole-group instruction, though small-group instruction is the primary method of teaching.

Goal

- Students will use their understanding about the big ideas of the unit to inform their development and completion of the performance task.

Common Core State Standards and Learning Goals Achieved

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 1](#)

[Reading: Literature, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2a, b](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 2d, e](#)

[Writing, Grade 8, Standard 4](#)

Procedures

All students will use the central ideas they have extracted from each text across the unit along with their written responses to create a synthesis of the three big ideas of the unit:

- The origin and history of hip-hop
- Merging cultural ideas, talents, and circumstances that influence the music style
- Understanding the fundamental source of hip-hop's existence

Students will be informed about the two-prong culminating activity and provided with an assessment rubric along with further explanation about the expectations. Evaluation will be dependent on the depth of understanding conveyed through a visual/graphic display and a rap song. As part of the visual/graphic display, students will create a stand-alone mural in small groups. Student groups will be provided with one 18 × 24 art canvas and paint and instructed to refer to their resources—notebooks, texts, pictures, and other references—to create an art piece to reflect their learning of the big ideas.

For the second half of the project, students will be required to perform a rap song in support of their mural, explaining what they learned about the social justice issues explored during the unit. Students will have approximately one week to complete the performance tasks and will share their project with the class. Additionally, students will have an opportunity to pose questions about the group's project and offer commendations and recommendations after each presentation. A sample project rubric appears in Figure 7. ■

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FIGURE 7. Project Rubric

Name: _____			
Criteria	50	40	35
Visual/Graphic Display	Student's display includes a visual representation for three big ideas.	Student's display includes a visual representation for three of the big ideas, but one of the big ideas is inadequately represented.	Student's display includes a visual representation for only two of the big ideas, or more than one of the big ideas is inadequately represented.
Oral Presentation	Demonstrates strong nonverbal and verbal skills as well as proficient subject knowledge.	Demonstrates comparatively strong nonverbal and verbal skills as well as moderately proficient subject knowledge.	Demonstrates minimal nonverbal and verbal skills as well as minimal subject content proficiency.
Total Score	100	80	70
Content: While students are encouraged to employ creative freedom, they are advised that the lyrical and visual content should be appropriate and free of insensitive and inappropriate content like obscene language or tactless images.			
Visual/Graphic Display	Student's display includes a visual representation for three big ideas.	Student's display includes a visual representation for three of the big ideas, but one of the big ideas is inadequately represented.	Student's display includes a visual representation for only two of the big ideas, or more than one of the big ideas is inadequately represented.
Oral Presentation	Demonstrates strong nonverbal and verbal skills as well as proficient subject knowledge.	Demonstrates comparatively strong nonverbal and verbal skills as well as moderately proficient subject knowledge.	Demonstrates minimal nonverbal and verbal skills as well as minimal subject content proficiency.
Total Score	100	80	70

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Courtne Thomas, EdD, is a grade 6 language arts teacher at Sojourner Truth Middle School in New Jersey. She received her bachelor’s degree in communications from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University, ranked as one of the top 20 historically black colleges and universities. She continued to pursue higher education, receiving a master’s degree in reading and supervision from Fairleigh Dickinson University. In 2009, she made the life-changing decision to return to school in pursuit of a terminal degree, which she completed with the successful defense of her project, titled *Academic Resilience: Narratives of High-Achieving Black Female Middle School Adolescents*. Thomas has received many action research grants and fellowships, and she has been appointed to several review panels and boards, including the American Educational Research Association and the National Association of Professional Women. One of her greatest accomplishments occurred in August 2012, when she received a prestigious Fulbright-Hays Seminar Abroad Fellowship from the U.S. Department of Education. This opportunity enabled her to travel to

Mexico and Colombia for six weeks with 15 educators from across the United States. The purpose of the trip was cultural immersion and understanding.

Other honors include receiving an action research grant from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, which enabled her to travel to Hiroshima, Japan, to research the atomic bombing, and a National Education Association Learning and Leadership Grant to explore how the single-gender classroom format creates opportunities that do not exist in coeducational classrooms. Thomas is an expert in pedagogy, transformative leadership, and servant leadership. She has one published article and plans to collaborate with her professional colleagues.



Mirvetk Tonuzi, EdD, is also a grade 6 language arts teacher at Sojourner Truth Middle School. She holds a bachelor’s degree in economics from Buffalo State College University and a master’s degree in teaching and a master’s degree in educational leadership from Fairleigh Dickinson University. She also received a doctoral degree in educational leadership

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In 2008, Tonuzi received a commendation for her dedicated service to Sojourner Truth students. She also received the East Orange Teacher of the Year Award and Governor’s Teacher Recognition Award in 2009. In 2010, she received a Graduate Merit Award Scholarship from the Executive Women of New Jersey.

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