

Hip Hop - a linguistic teaching tool: How to Engage students in lively classroom discourse and writing.

A Methodology for Instructors

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Establish a conversational terrain

- ◆ Ask students what they know about the music.

This allows you to recognize areas where students may lack information or ways they can be critically informed about the topic.

Conversations to consider

- ◆ Hip Hop began as a form of social gathering in the ruins of improvised Bronx communities in 1970's New York City.
- ◆ By the 1980's poor living conditions, a pervasive drug epidemic, and lack of economic and educational opportunity further blighted urban communities. Young people aired their frustrations about these social ills through conscious hip hop with themes that spoke to police brutality, gang violence, drugs and political injustices.
- ◆ Hip Hop is a culture and a lifestyle and it is separate from commercialized genres of Rap.
- ◆ Spoken work is the basis for Hip Hop.

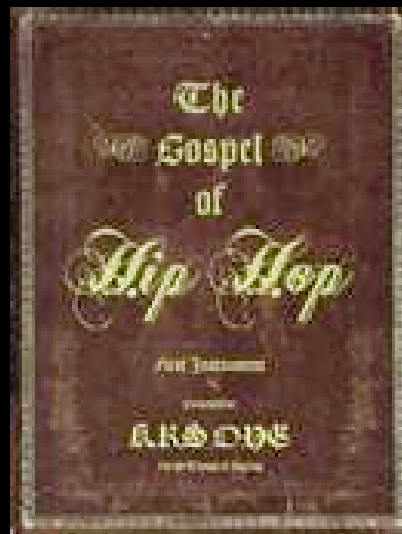
HIP HOP IS ...

- ◆ A culture
- ◆ Dress, art, music, belief
- ◆ A language
- ◆ A Lifestyle



Dropping knowledge

- ◆ Hip Hop is a spoken word narrative and a rhythmically infused art form born from the experiences of everyday people - it speaks to the psychological pain, disillusion, and sometimes the joys fashioned from “hard knock” lives.



But what came before Hip Hop?

Spoken Word and Rhythm Masters . . .

- ◆ Conscious poets whose art spoke to the political, economic and culture of marginalized people.

Examples:

- ◆ Gil Scott Heron - Poet, writer and musician whose work is rooted in bluesology - music from the pain and struggles of downtrodden peoples.
- ◆ The Last Poets
- ◆ The Watts Poets

Narrow the focus to a particular aspect of the previous points

- ◆ You can focus on the linguistic aspects of the genre.
- ◆ As a cultural conversation, you can focus on the genre's material and visual culture e.g. clothing, graffiti or how Hip Hop has worked as a catalyst for community grassroots activism.

The Language of Hip Hop

- ◆ Spoken word
- ◆ Poetic form
- ◆ Lyrical composition

Lyrics

- ◆ Provide examples (refer to your handouts)
- ◆ Have students work in groups and develop their own analysis of the songs.
- ◆ Develop a discussion that deconstructs and places the selected songs within a cultural, historical or political context.

Spoken Word

- ◆ Explain how Hip Hop has its origins in spoken word poetics.
- ◆ Discuss how the spoken word relies on rhythmic meter and timing to impact the messages conveyed through the words.
- ◆ Provide specific examples.
 - A spoken word selection: The Last Poets - Take Your Time

Poetic Form

- ◆ Analyze the poetic constructions of the lyrics.

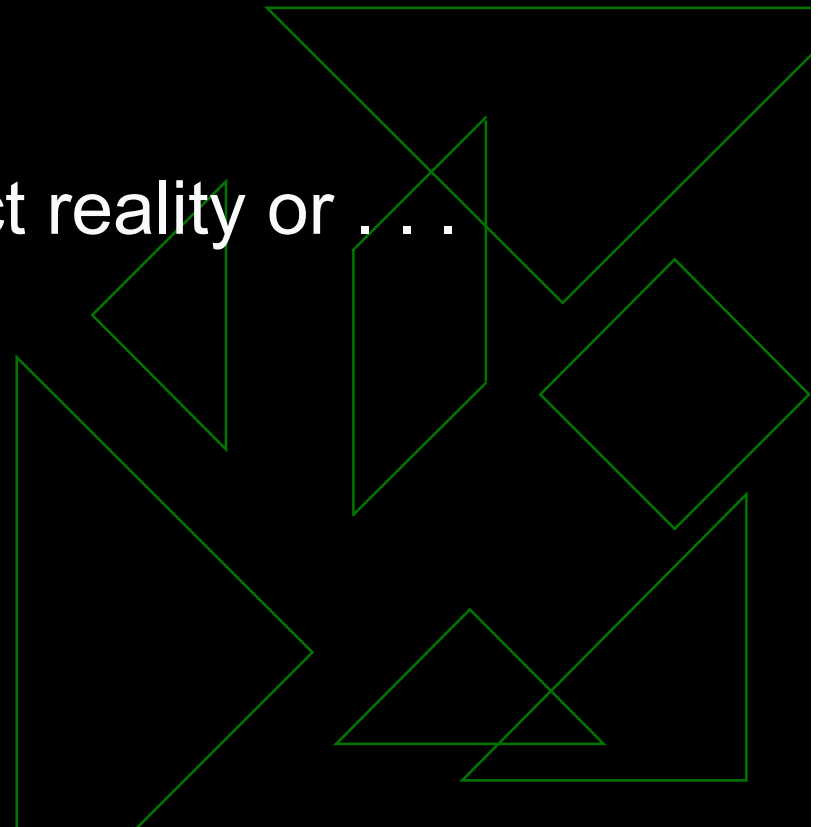
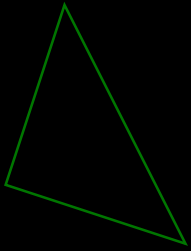
Many Hip Hop songs rely upon verses with end rhyme couplets that are often set in four line stanzas.

Hip Hop lyrics are not, however, not limited to the end rhyme or couplet form. In Hip Hop, you will find complex poetic forms that range from free verse to Villanelles.

Provide example: Gil Scott Heron - "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised"

How does Hip Hop create pictures and meaning in the music?

For example to reflect reality or . . .



. . . reflections of social ills or
where



... metaphor meets reality



. . . by creating metaphor and meaning

- ◆ Hip Hop conveys its messages through word imagery that most often reflects a particular social or political condition?
- ◆ Hip Hop creates a context for the listener in the ways he/she understands the musical message?
- A musical selection: The Message

WHY HAS RAP BECOME A GLOBAL MUSICAL PHENOMENON?

- ◆ It allows people to tell their own stories.
- ◆ It's gives everyday people a voice in society.
- ◆ It can be a music for political protest and social change.
- ◆ It confronts the ills of humankind.



Closing Comments



- ◆ Contemporary rap is far different from the early political focus of Hip Hop. Rap lyrics today focuses primarily on material wealth, sexual boasting and party times. It makes no effort to educate, inform or recognize societal ills.
- ◆ Rap today is big business and the most popular performers are packaged and produced products likened to any other commercial commodity. These musical personalities or 'Hip Pop' performers should be distinguished from conscious Hip Hoppers.
- ◆ Contemporary 'Hip Pop' performers have no ties to Hip Hop culture and the genre's original intent. Unfortunately, this is one reason for the overwhelming misconceptions that surround the music.



Other discussions and contexts where Hip Hop can articulate a particular point of view

- ◆ To discuss gender and sexual identity
- ◆ To discuss environmental issues
- ◆ To discuss commerce
- ◆ To discuss national and geo political issues
- ◆ To discuss the history and struggles given to individual nations.

GROUP EXERCISE

Part I.

- ◆ Each group will get a handout of a famous Hip Hop song. As a group, you will examine the lyrics and try to understand its meaning and intent.
- ◆ Each group will present a summary of the song and its context and discuss some of the layered meanings in the lyrics.
- ◆ You must decide if the song is a produced product or if it fits with Hip Hop's original intent. Address why or why not, and point to specific lyrics that support your conclusion.

Group Exercise

Part II.

- ◆ Each group will compose a short lyrical song that focuses on a specific topic of your choosing that is composed as:
- ◆ a,b,a,b couplets with an end rhyme.
- ◆ This is a collective assignment which means **ALL** group members are expected to participate in the final presentation.

Basic (ab,ab) poetic verse construction in lyric form

- ◆ Song lyric construction with an end rhyme

Verse 1

Verse 2

Chorus (the portion of the song that loops twice and it is typically the part that most people remember)

Verse 3

Verse 4

Example: Public Enemy - "That's the Sound of the Police"

Final Words and Instructional Notes

Those of you who attended the workshop will recall the challenges that you experienced when instructed to de-code the embedded meanings of the songs. This should remind you that students will also experience this difficulty, but this is the point of this teaching exercise. This methodology utilizes a musical genre (Hip Hop) as a tool to enhance English language proficiency, comprehension, and provide context for serious discourse. In the slides that follow, I have provided some song selections that are less challenging to deconstruct and others that are more challenging in content.

Finally, I wish to say thank-you for your interest and participation in this methodology as a new teaching initiative. If anyone has additional inquiries, you are welcomed to contact me at the following email address: debra.collins@dai-heidelberg.de

Kind regards,
Debra Collins

Selected Songs and Resource Links

- ◆ GRANDMASTER FLASH – THE MESSAGE (This is a classic Hip Hop song that was seminal in placing the genre in the public consciousness.)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O4o8TeqKhgY&feature=email>

De La Soul - My Brother's a Basehead - This selection speaks to the growing American drug epidemic in the late 1980's -90's.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G71x2Yq-5A8&feature=related>

Snoop Dogg – Murder Was the Case - This is an early West Coast song that was seminal in pioneering Gangsta Rap. The song speaks to a young man's mortality.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qRMU8oHHQnc&feature=related>

Coolio - Gangsta's Paradise - This song is also a seminal to West Coast Gangsta Rap

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4IUN-e0nie0&feature=related>

Die Antwort - Oida Wos - This is a German Rap Group and it also demonstrates the world-wide diversity of the Hip Hop genre.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrfXMJJGnsw&feature=email>

Selected Songs and Resource Links

Lyrics - Summertime (Note: This is not the original version, but the lyrics are simple as the song is a summer anthem about friends, family and community)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=76A54IHdKkA>

Video (Summertime - Instrumental)

This is the original video that places the theme of the song within its original context that speaks to youthful fun, family and friends.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Duu5y5HqLHE&feature=related>

The lyrics might be easy to understand for younger classes.

Selected videos and links

- ◆ The following selections are serious in theme and some of the language and visual images are strong in content, and perhaps more suitable for older students.

- ◆ Immortal Technique - "Leaving the Past"

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jjp8yuEBjxs&feature=email>

LOWKEY and Immortal Technique - Voices of the Voices

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fiF8Hvx9Zvg&feature=related>

LOWKEY - Revolution Music

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jwZB8bXXZcA&feature=related>

Spoken Word Selections

Emmanuel Jai - The Music of a War Child

http://www.ted.com/speakers/emmanuel_jai.html

http://www.ted.com/talks/emmanuel_jai_the_music_of_a_war_child.html

Kate Tempest - Icarus

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yv5fggapRwQ&feature=related>

Gil Scott Heron - Your Soul and Mine

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sESkfMfqEeQ&feature=related>

Lyrics links

- ◆ You can access these site for song lyrics.
- ◆ <http://www.lyricsty.com/>
- ◆ <http://www.lyrics.com/search.php?what=all&keyword=llive%20crew&page=40>