

Hip-Hop Influence on Art and Society

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Art is the desire of a man to express himself...

~ Amy Lowell, *Tendencies in Modern American Poetry*

INTRODUCTION

Walk into almost any school in the United States and you will hear Hip-Hop music, see the latest clothing line embedded with the names of well known Hip-Hop artists, and hear Hip-Hop slang like “You Go Girl,” “That’s Tight,” “Word,” “Hey Boo,” or “I’m Straight.” Hip-Hop is a booming industry, and it has become a societal subculture whose members include juveniles from every walk of life.

There is hardly an institution in America that has not been influenced by the power of Hip-Hop. The influence was very evident in the 2004 Presidential election. The election was a hot topic among major Hip-Hop artists. P. Diddy promoted his tee-shirt with the slogan “Vote or Die!” Local Hip-Hop radio stations were very active in campaigns to register young voters, and deejays encouraged them to take part in the political process. Hip-Hop is so influential amongst our youth that many religious institutions have opted to change how they conduct services. They are revamping their music department to include songs with more upbeat tunes that appeal to the younger generation. Without this change, it would be hard to keep many youth coming to houses of worship. Similarly, the traditional attire worn by males has been replaced with baggy pants, hats worn in reverse, and tee-shirts sporting the latest slogans or the face of an award-winning (money making) Hip-Hop artist. I cannot begin to describe the attire worn by females who are part of the Hip-Hop craze, but I guess “Look at me!” sums it up in a phrase. To mainstream adult groups, this most often means, “What were you thinking when you put that on?!” But to the Hip-Hop types, it probably translates to, “I need an outfit just like that but in another color.”

Whether you are dining out, sitting in an airport, attending worship services or shopping in a mall, you will have a Hip-Hop encounter. Hip-Hop artists are marketing cash cows that are advertising everything from fast food chains to gold chains. The ABC television network changed the introduction to Monday night football to include hip-hop artists along with country music star Hank Williams, Jr. in asking, “Are you ready for some football?” German automaker Daimler-Chrysler (maker of Mercedes Benz) considered a marketing arrangement with rapper Snoop Dog who would have certain Chrysler vehicles featured in videos by him. Hip-Hop paraphernalia is an inventory “must” in most major department stores. Hip-Hop appears to be here to stay!

Since Hip-Hop is so prevalent in today’s society and “black music is – and always has been – the most important single socializing element of black culture” (Sidran, xv), I have decided to create a curriculum unit that will help students in my sixth grade Language Arts classes explore its effect on society as an art form. We will attempt to answer the question Cynthia Freeland poses in her book *But Is It Art?*

I will create a twelve-day curriculum unit that will use the lyrics from Hip-Hop songs and the graphics and designs created by Hip-Hop artists to help students examine how art and society has

evolved because of the Hip-Hop influence. My students will analyze the “message in the music” and how certain groups, namely females, are depicted in both the message and the visual performance (music videos) of the message. They will attempt to answer the question, “Is it mere propaganda and exploitation or is there value in the message?” Additionally, we will take to the runway and look at how Hip-Hop has influenced what’s “the bomb” in fashion and how the fashion industry has capitalized on the Hip-Hop mania. We will examine other components of Hip-Hop, like graffiti. There is an old saying, “What comes around goes around.” Students will investigate whether there is validity to this statement when they compare and contrast Hip-Hop and Old-School (Rhythm and Blues songs that preceded Hip-Hop). We will read poetry written during the Harlem Renaissance and observe some similarities and differences in the messages. Finally, we will look at Hip-Hop vernacular and compare it to traditional English.

STUDENT POPULATION

I teach sixth grade Language Arts at an inner-city school in Houston, Texas, with a student population of about 800. Approximately 90 percent of the students are African American, and the remaining 10 percent are Hispanic. Since most of the Hip-Hop artists are African American, the student appeal to this unit should be great. I surveyed my current year’s students for the names of the “top” Hip-Hop artists and the titles of the hit songs by these artists. They were quite eager to provide me with the information, and they seem intrigued that I wanted to know something about their world.

To my surprise, the students I surveyed provided me with the names of some local (neighborhood) rap artists whom many of them knew personally. The ones they listened to most often are Mike Jones, 5th Ward Boyz, and Lil Flip. I listened to one of Mr. Mike’s “songs,” and I knew one topic that had to be analyzed in this unit would be the depiction of females in rap songs and music videos. An *Essence* magazine article about the girls who appear in music videos stated, “Women here (those waiting to appear in a video) have one job only: to portray every shade and variation of a girl enthralled, enslaved by and beholden to a rapper-pimp. It’s the ho show” (Amber 164). However, in bell hooks’ book *Outlaw Culture: Resisting Representations*, she makes it clear that this is an accepted practice because “Mainstream white culture is not all concerned about black male sexism and misogyny, particularly when it is mainly unleashed against black women and children” (hooks 122).

After giving this some thought, I realized that rap music (or any genre of music) could not make it to the airways or to the retail market unless someone was listening to the music and someone was making money. I now understand that the accepted practices of female (particularly black female) exploitation in some rap music and videos are “values created and sustained by white supremacist capitalist patriarchy,” (hooks 116) since these individuals are usual the ones controlling the music labels that employ many of these artists. Alone, Warner Music Group is home to Atlantic, Bad Boy, Elektra and Lava Records. Sean “P. Diddy” Combs, who formed Bad Boy Records in 1994, “has sold more than 75 million records worldwide and its Grammy Award-winning catalog and roster of multi-platinum artists include B5, Boyz N Da Hood, Mase, Carl Thomas, 8 Ball & MJG, Mario Winans and P. Diddy himself” (Warner Music Group). Trying to get sixth graders to understand this philosophical view would be a painstaking endeavor.

Nevertheless, I quickly learned that what appears to be appropriate to students does not come close to what would be considered appropriate in an academic setting. This was somewhat disturbing, but it validated the need for a unit to analyze Hip-Hop’s influence on society.

RESEARCH

Before I could begin to create a unit using Hip-Hop as the theme, I had to find rap songs that were appropriate for the students I teach. I began by listening to the songs recommended by my

students. This became a daunting task because many of the songs, although played on many Hip-Hop radio stations, were not in the realm of what would be considered appropriate for school age children. The process included many translations from Hip-Hop vernacular to mainstream English. Ultimately, I found several songs in the *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. The first is a 1970 recorded poem by Gil Scott-Heron titled “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised.” The second is a song by Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five titled “The Message.” I continued my search for age and academically appropriate songs using several online websites.

I have learned that students rarely know all of the words to a rap song. When I asked my students to lend me “clean” rap CD for this project, I received an unexpected response. Many of my students said, “We just like the beat; we don’t listen to the words.” I was curious about this phenomenon, so I asked my students if it is difficult to listen to a “song” over and over again and not know what is being said (sung). I reflected on the question that I had asked, and I answered it myself. Some of my students have a problem remembering what was taught/learned the previous week. My guess is that the real intent of rap music is to get people dancing not singing.

I quickly had to make a point to my students, so I asked them, “How much time would you spend reading a book you could not understand?” Of course, I received an unequivocal “No time!” with many explanations to accompany the initial response.

The fashion part was easy. The Internet contains main sources that provide information about the unique fashion characteristics of Hip Hop culture. [About.com](http://about.com) and daveyd.com were two of my primary sources for this part of the unit.

The second task I had to contend with was finding graffiti. I want to include both commissioned and noncommissioned works. I know that this is a common attraction in many cities in the eastern part of the country, but Houston appears to have dodged the bullet on this facet of Hip-Hop culture. Although I did see areas with graffiti written using ambiguous (a least to me) words and phrases, I wanted to include works that had a cultural, social, or political statement. I also wanted to include some art by some contemporary artists whose works, although on canvas, have characteristics that are commonly found in graffiti. One such artist is Jean Michel Basquiat. The Brooklyn Museum of Art has a website (<http://basquiatonline.org/>) that provides a plethora of information about Basquiat. It also includes three features that I will use in the lesson plan: Explore the Painting, Create an Artwork, and Who Was Basquiat.

I also found a website that includes many of the well-know graffiti artists of New York (<http://rap.about.com>). This website was also instrumental in providing me with additional support and resources for my unit. I also visited New York and took pictures of graffiti that I found on the walls in Chinatown (Canal Street area). As a project, I will also ask my students to take pictures of graffiti in and around their neighborhood, and we will analyze the photos from their artistic perspective.

WHAT IS HIP-HOP?

Hip-Hop has been defined many ways, but the one that I thought best encompassed the entire genre is the one given by Davey D. He defines Hip-Hop as:

...the culture from which rap emerged. Initially it consisted of four main elements; graffiti art, break dancing, dj (cuttin' and scratching) and emceeing (rapping). Hip hop is a lifestyle with its own language, style of dress, music and mind set that is continuously evolving.

For the most part, everyone includes rap music, which centers on a unique vocabulary, and graffiti in their definitions of Hip-Hop. The pre-mentioned are the Hip-Hop art forms that will be the focal points of my unit.

THE HISTORY OF HIP-HOP

Dee-Jaying, Breakdancing, and Early Rap Artists and Influences

The thing I found intriguing about the history of this art form is that every Hip-Hop artist wants to be “the first” at some trend that led to the immense popularity of rap music. I’d imagine that this is true with most artists. I did manage to find conclusive evidence that the Hip-Hop culture began in the boroughs of New York City. A “deejay” by the name of Kool DJ Herc introduced “break-beat dee jaying” at parties to the city’s blacks and Latinos using turntables and LP (Long Playing) records. Kool DJ Herc “would only play the musical break part of these records (the part between the verses of a song), and he would repeat the break part.” (Stancell vii). Using this technique essentially made Kool DJ Herc the first rap deejay. So, one may conclude, the rap deejay preceded rap music.

During Kool Herc’s parties, dancers would take to the floor doing acrobatic dance routines with splits and leg sweeps. Kool Herc named these dancers his “b-boys.” This dance form is later called “break dancing.” Additionally, Herc would have an MC (microphone controller) preside over his party. The MC would use a microphone and nonsensical phrases to encourage the crowd to dance. These cadences were called “MC’ing” and would later be called “rapping.”

Later, a disco deejay named DJ Hollywood added the rhyme to MC’ing or rapping. One of his rhymes contained the words “hip-hop.” Hip-Hop would later be synonymous with the “music of rap and the culture of those who participated in Kool Herc’s parties” (Stancell vii).

The Sugar Hill Gang is given credit for recording the first rap hit single in 1978, “Rapper’s Delight.” Kurtis Blow went on to record the first rap single to go gold titled “The Breaks.” The early rap recordings often addressed “issues of deep concern to the African American community, from racism to politics to violence in the streets” (Stancell ix). The rap known as “gangster” rap came later. In this later addition to the Hip-Hop culture, the lyrics became more vulgar and violent.

Michael Jackson paved the way for rap music videos. Jackson’s “Thriller” video “was the first video ever actually purchased by MTV (all earlier videos had been given to MTV free of charge as promotions to sell records...)” (Haskins 168). After the “Thriller” video was received so well by the public, MTV began to show other videos by African-American artists.

Rap Music

The Norton Anthology of African American Literature defines rap as:

An in-group ritual music, performance music, and dance music, designed to make its dancers move together to its boom-box-busting drumlines and machine-gun-like firings of chanted sound. It is animated music that celebrates black verbal and musical style; but it is also music that rejoices in the poetry of the human body in soulful, dance-hall-rocking motion. (Gates 60)

After listening to more rap music than one (particularly one who loves easy listening music) can stand, I am convinced that keeping a tune or sounding “angelic” is not the goal of most rap musicians. However, I can hear, in some cases, the poetic and blues influences from the Harlem Renaissance and some other modern black poets. I can hear the words of Langston Hughes’ “Children’s Rhymes”:

By what sends
the white kids
I ain't sent:
I know I can't
be President... (Adoff 43)

I can also hear the words of Ray Durem in this excerpt from his poem “You Know, Joe”:

You know, Joe, it's a funny thing, Joe!
You worried most of your life about me,...
Always afraid I'd wanna love your sister,
Or that she might love me. (Adoff 43)

Graffiti

Graffiti preceded both dee jaying and rap music in the creation of the Hip-Hop culture. As with most cultures, written expression is a way to document a group's values and beliefs. This is also true with graffiti.

Ife' Oshun defines graffiti as “...underground urban art boldly displayed in public areas, usually sides of buildings or walls. It was used by citizens to make political and social commentary, as well as gangs to mark territory” (Oshun, *Graffiti History*). Another definition given by George Stowers describes graffiti as:

Different wall writings ranging from cave paintings, bathroom scribbles, or any message that is scratched on walls. In reference to present day graffiti, the definition is qualified by adding that graffiti is also any unsolicited marking on a private or public property that is usually considered to be vandalism. (Stowers)

Whatever the definition, we can all agree that it is “writing or pictures” on walls.

Fashion

As with dee-jaying, rap, and breakdancing, Hip-Hop fashion got its start in the ghettos of New York City. Hip-Hop enthusiasts were ready to debut their new music form, and new dance moves, and they were ready to make a fashion statement. “Clothes expressed individuality, but also had a functional purpose: Fat-laced Pumas and cool sweatsuits looked fly (good), but they were also perfect to wear while creating and performing difficult breakdance moves” (Oshun, *Rap/Hip-Hop*).

Color and imagination are the staples of Hip-Hop fashion. Since in the 1970s (and still today) money was in limited supply in ghettos, “B-boys and B-girls created a unique sense of style that required imagination in the face of limited resources” (Oshun, *Rap/Hip-Hop*). Items that are generally associated with Hip-Hop fashion are fat laced tennis shoes, Kangol hats, big gold (in color) jewelry, and sweat suits – all relatively inexpensive during the pioneer days of Hip-Hop. As rap artists began to emerge as “stars” in the music industry, their fashion began to generate “capital” in the fashion industry. “African-American entrepreneurs/designers had instant clientele not only within the rapidly expanding rap industry, but also among everyday people who were coming of age in the Hip-Hop culture” (Oshun, *Rap/Hip-Hop*). Rap celebrities began to offer their own clothing lines. Russell Simmons introduced his Phat Farm clothing label, while his wife added the Baby Phat line. The Wu Tang Clan went on to create their Wu Wear, and the notable FUBU (For Us By Us) line was the inspiration of Daymond John of Hollis, Queens. The FUBU line is endorsed by LL Cool J who “began wearing the brand in 1993 and it wasn't long before his face became synonymous with the clothing” (Chartattack). One notable characteristic with all of these clothing lines is that the band names are prominently displayed using a symbol or lettering (sometimes both). Those wearing the clothes become walking

advertisements. Most of the Hip-Hop designers have expanded their clothing lines to include other commodities like colognes and perfumes, watches, shoes, and purses, to mention a few.

It didn't take long for other designers to take notice of the winds of change in the fashion industry. Companies like Tommy Hilfiger began to create designs that also appeal to the Hip-Hop culture. "The more popular and lucrative the Rap industry became, the more profitable it was for companies to offer the same looks you saw on your favorite Rap celebrities" (Oshun, *Rap/Hip-Hop*). Designer Ralph Lauren began using black male model Tyson Beckford in 1993 after he was seen in the hip-hop magazine *The Source* in 1991. He was hired to represent Lauren's Polo Sport line.

HIP-HOP VERNACULAR

The language of Hip-Hop is ever changing. It seems that my students are constantly introducing me to new words in their (Hip-Hop) vocabulary. As with any "foreign" language, if you hear it enough, you learn what it means. This has been my experience with learning the vernacular of Hip-Hop. After reading Ben Sidran's book *Black Talk...*, he suggests, "the lyrics to work songs was underground material, that seemingly innocent words had multiple meanings, and that therefore the music was more than it seemed" (13). Although the work songs sung by slaves were "qualitatively different" (13), I think the Hip-Hop cultures' tendencies for an idiomatic language is a manifestation from this period in history.

To further assist with my "word acquisition" skills, I used Lois Stavasky and Dani Reyes Mozeson book *A 2 Z: The Book of Rap & Hip-Hop Slang* as my dictionary. Unfortunately, I quickly found that the book was out-dated. A lot has changed and many words have been created since the book was published in 1995. Again, I went to my students for assistance with the translations.

Some of the words they have added to my repertoire are:

- Chicken Head – A girl who lives in the ghetto who is not desirable
- My Bad – It's not my fault
- That's Stupid – That's really, really good
- That's Tight – That's really good
- Posse – A group of people I hang out with
- Props – Give me respect or give me credit for what I have done
- 186 and 187 – Police term for a murder or homicide. To be on the lookout for someone who is trying to kill you.
- Drizzles – Women. Broads.

An additional resource that I found to be very helpful is the online "Rap Dictionary" found at <http://www.rapdict.org/Category:Terms>.

HIP-HOP ARTISTS

I cannot begin to name or listen to a fraction of the music that falls into the Hip-Hop genre. Instead, I will only include those individuals or groups whose music will be analyzed in this unit. The individuals or groups will not necessarily be the most popular with today's youth, but they will have lyrics that contain appropriate language for use in a middle school classroom. In most cases, I've dissected the songs to extract the central theme of the artist.

UNIT OBJECTIVES

Students will participate in activities that focus on the following skills/objectives.

- Students will *write* to determine what they know about art and art forms including Hip-Hop.

- Students will *view* different types of art.
- Students will *create* a piece of wearable art using “My Graffiti” as the theme.
- Students will *listen* to rap, blues, and ballads to analyze the message in the music.
- Students will *read* and *write* poetry.
- Students will *compare* and *contrast* poetry to the lyrics in rap music.
- Students will *speak* intelligently about the idea of Hip-Hop as an art form and its influence on society.
- Students will *analyze* how the vernacular of Hip-Hop has changed the way people communicate.
- Students will *create* a portfolio to store their work.
- Students will be *assessed* on what they have written and what they have created.

UNIT LESSONS

A week or two before starting the unit, it will be necessary to secure permission from the students’ parent/guardian.

Sample Letter

March 1, 2006

Dear Parent/Guardian:

One of the goals of education is to ensure that students receive culturally diverse instruction that is stimulating. Additionally, it is important for students to feel their interests are being addressed in the classroom.

In the upcoming weeks, your child will participate in activities that will help him/her examine and understand the impact Hip-Hop has on art and on society. The following is a list of the unit activities and objectives:

- Students will *write* to determine what they know about art and art forms including Hip-Hop.
- Students will *view* different types of art.
- Students will *create* a piece of wearable art using “My Graffiti” as the theme.
- Students will *listen* to rap, blues, and ballads to analyze the message in the music.
- Students will *read* and *write* poetry.
- Students will *compare* and *contrast* poetry to the lyrics in rap music.
- Students will *speak* intelligently about the idea of Hip-Hop as an art form and its positive and negative influence on society.
- Students will *analyze* how the vernacular of Hip-Hop has changed the way people communicate.
- Students will *create* a portfolio to store all work.
- Students will be *assessed* on what they have written and what they have created.

Students will be asked to survey the neighborhood and community for examples of art. For this part of the unit, your child will need access to a disposable camera. Additionally, he/she will need approximate \$2.00 to purchase a t-shirt that will be used as the medium to create a piece of wearable art. In lieu of the \$2.00, you can opt to supply your child with a plain white tee-shirt. All work will be stored in a portfolio, so please provide a (color) three-ring pocket folder and notebook paper.

Before we begin the unit, please sign and date this form that gives your child permission to participate in all of the above mentioned activities. Additionally, you acknowledge that he or she will receive the necessary materials (disposable camera and tee-shirt) on or before (date).

Thank you in advance for allowing your child to participate in this project. If you have any questions, please contact me at (123) 555-7890. I will return your call as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Your Name, Content Area Teacher

Day 1: Viewing

Student Materials

- Pen/Pencil
- Portfolio
- Disposable Cameras

Teacher Materials

Power Point Presentation

I will create a Power Point presentation using the information from the “What is Hip-Hop” and “The History of Hip-Hop” sections of this unit. Included in the presentation will be the history of Hip-Hop, photos of early artists and pioneers of Hip-Hop, current Hip-Hop artists, graffiti art, and Hip-Hop fashion.

Lesson

In the portfolio, students will be asked to title a page “Notes.” Explain to students that they are about to watch a presentation on “Hip-Hop.” They will need to take notes to document important details in the presentation (i.e. how and why did Hip-Hop start, the people who were responsible for the early Hip-Hop culture, where did Hip-Hop start, etc.)

Conduct a whole class discussion using student notes from the presentation.

Day 2 – 3: Writing (2 hours)

Student Materials

- Student Portfolio
- Pen/Pencil
- Paper

Four Square Organizers (A Four Square Organizer can be created by folded a piece of notebook paper twice to form four equal parts.)

1	2
3	4

Example

Teacher Materials

Transparency of Four Square Graphic Organizer to model writing activity

Blank transparency

Lesson

Before you began the unit, explain to students that they will be engaging in activities to support the idea that Hip-Hop is a form of art. Tell them that they will analyze the effects that Hip-Hop has on art and on society. Explain that Hip-Hop includes dee-jaying, rap, slang, graffiti and fashion.

Before starting the first lesson, students will create a portfolio to store all of the assignments for this unit. My preference is a three-pronged pocket folder. Make sure students have enough paper in their portfolios (about 20 to 30 sheets) to complete all assignments for the units.

In advance, have students created about five “four square” organizers to be used throughout the unit. The portfolio will be used to assess students at the end of the lesson. Next, we will complete a writing assignment where students will be asked to define art.

To help students organize their thoughts and ideas, I will use a modified version of Judith and Evan Gould’s *Four Square* writing method. First, I will model the writing assignments for students by using a simple prompt like “Kinds of Pets.” Students will give me at least three animals that will make good family pet. Let’s say they consider dogs, cats, and fish good family pets. A complete sentence indicting their choices will be recorded in square 1. Include a statement to support the first sentence. In square 2, they will write details to support the first choice (dogs), in square 3 they will write details to support their second choice (cats), and in square 4 they will write details to support the third choice (fish). Finally, they will write a conclusion restating a general idea (something that all three animals had in common) about why dogs, cats, and fish make a good family pet.

1. <i>“Three animals that will make good family pets are dogs, cats, and fish. All of these animals can be found locally in a pet store.”</i>	2. <i>“A dog will make a good family pet because...” (record student responses)</i>
3. <i>“A cat will make a good family pet because...” (record student responses)</i>	4. <i>“Fishes can good family pets because...” (record student responses)</i>

Conclusion

Three animals that make good family pets are dogs, cats, and fish. All of these animals can be cared for by children, and parents can use these pets to teach responsibility. If the right dog or cat is chosen as a family pet, they can be house trained. Dogs can even be taught tricks. Fish can help you relax when you watch them swim. Go out and get your family a pet!

On a transparency, write each square in paragraph format and add the conclusion. Be sure to preserve the model for future reference. I have learned that this is particularly important for students who are tactile and visual learners. To even further support student-writing success, copy the model and distribute it to them to use as a reference.

After the lesson has been modeled for students, they will respond to the prompt “**What is art?**” They must provide at least three details or examples to support their answer. They will write their response in square one (1). After students respond to the initial prompt (square 1.) they will be

asked to expand on each detail or example individually. Squares 2 – 4 are examples of how my sixth grade students may expand on the original prompt.

<p>1. <i>“I define art as creations using paints, using photos, or using performances.”</i></p>	<p>2. <i>“An art creation using paints will be done on a canvas by an artist. The artist will select a subject that sh/e likes and transfer that person, place, or thing to a canvas. The picture can be displayed on a wall for others to see.”</i></p>
<p>3. <i>“An art creation using photos will be done using a camera and film. The artist will take pictures of people, place, and things using a camera. The pictures can be developed and displayed for others to see.”</i></p>	<p>4. <i>“An art creation using performances is done on stage by actors and actress or dancers. A show is rehearsed and later performed in front of an audience.”</i></p>

Conclusion

Have students write a conclusion.

Using the graphic organizer, students will write their responses in paragraph format. Students will be assigned a partner to proofread and edit each other’s work.

Using a word web, I will list as many different responses as the class produces. We will look for key words like paint, photos, and performance to conduct a whole class discussion on the prompt.

I’m almost certain that most students will respond by saying that art can be defined as a “picture or painting.” I will then provide them with some other forms of art explaining that art comes in many mediums. To provide them with visual support, we will read some poetry to examine how imagery is used, see reproductions of paintings, look at photos, talk about ballet, and listen to classical music.

All assignments will be stored in the portfolio.

Day 4: More Writing (1 hour)

Student Materials

- Pen/Pencil
- Paper
- Four Square Graphic Organizers

Vocabulary

- Hip Hop
- Dee-jaying
- Rap Music
- Slang
- Graffiti

Lesson

Students will be given the prompt “**What is Hip-Hop?**” They will use the previously mentioned steps and information to complete this writing assignment.

Day 5 – 6: Create (2 hours)

Student Materials

White t-shirts

Colored Markers

Fabric Paint

Pictures of Graffiti

Traceable Letters (some students may want to do their lettering freehand)

Poem (student’s work)

Teacher Materials

Sample t-shirt to model assignment for students

Power Point presentation with samples of graffiti

Graffiti websites <http://rap.about.com> and <http://basquiatonline.org>

Lesson

Discuss the different roles of graffiti in society being careful to mention that some creations are intended as negative commentaries such as those produced by gangs to mark territories. Make sure students also understand that graffiti can be commissioned to serve as a public display for cultural expression and in some case to camouflage community eyesores.

Before students begin creating their own piece of art, solicit help from the art teacher by telling him/her what your planned project entails. This can serve as a cross curriculum lesson.

Purchasing a book with prints by the famed graffiti artist Jean Michel Basquiat and showing them to students is an alternative to involving the art teacher or when the teacher is not available to assist with the unit. *Worthy Consultants* and *Hollywood Africans* by Basquiat are good choices to introduce to student the artist and his style. It is important for students to understand that graffiti can be created using pictures as well as words. Basquiat “... made language an increasingly important feature of his work. In some cases, words fill the entire canvas, leaving no room for images” (*Basquiat*, Brooklyn Museum).

The Brooklyn Museum has an online presentation about the life and works of Basquiat that can be shown to the class. It also provides some details about what inspired some of the artist’s works. The website also contains a “Create an Artwork” feature which allows students to design their own art. The website is <http://basquiatonline.org/>.

Students will make a piece of wearable art using some of the techniques seen during the presentation.

Provide students with the following guidelines (rubric) before they begin work on their t-shirts:

Example:

Graffiti T-Shirt Rubric

Instructions	1	2	3	4
Student produced a blueprint of their design				✓
Student’s design was approved (a must)				✓
Student’s poem or word expression appeared on the tee-shirt				✓

Instructions	1	2	3	4	
The design was transferred to the tee-shirt neatly, was well organized, and did not deviate from approved design		✓			
The design was original			✓		
TOTAL SCORE X “5”		2	3	12	17(5) = 85

Students should first create the design for their shirt on a piece of plain white paper. It is very important to have some examples available for students to use as a model.

Day 7 – 8: Listening (2 hours)

Student Materials

Pen

Portfolio

Hip-Hop recordings appropriate for use in a classroom

Teacher Materials

Cassette or CD player

*Gil Scott-Heron’s 1970 recorded poem “The Revolution Will Not Be Televised”

*Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five’s 1982 recording of “The Message”

*Queen Latifah’s 1989 recording of “The Evil That Men Do”

(*The words to each of the recordings can be found in *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*, copyright 1997.)

Lesson

1. Have students write down as much as they can while listening to the recordings. Replay the recording once or twice. Tell them to use exclamation (!) marks in the place of any profanity or inappropriate language (there may be a need to explain the difference between profanity and inappropriate language). Explain that “wanna thank your mamma for a ~~back~~ like that” is inappropriate language and “back” should be replaced with an exclamation mark. I think eliminating profanity goes without saying. See how precise students are in their translations. Examine the recording with your students. (Note: The lyrics to these songs are very clean.)
2. Ask students to complete the following activities:
 - a. Count the number of exclamation marks used in the lyrics.
 - b. Count the number of times a male or female was referenced in an inappropriate manner.
 - c. Count the number of times a suggestive body move was referenced.
3. Have students identify their favorite rap song or any song they like. Tell them to write the title of the song at the top of a page in their portfolio. Ask them to write the words to the song. Again, tell them to use exclamation marks (!) in the place of any profanity or inappropriate language.
4. Complete step number 2.
5. Begin a discussion about rap lyrics and music videos. Some topics that need to be discussed are:
 - a. Female depictions in rap songs – Positive or Negative?
 - b. Is there a common element in most rap songs? If yes, what is it?
 - c. Are rap artists typically male or female? Why?

- d. Are there any rap artists that refrain from using profanity? If yes, why?
 - e. What is the appeal of rap music and music videos? Why?
 - f. Can you learn anything by listening to rap music or seeing music videos? What?
6. All response should be documented by the teacher and used as a tool to develop future lessons on critical thinking. My experience has been that many students in the sixth grade have not thought beyond the beat and main chorus of most rap songs.

Day 9 – 11 Read Poetry, Analyze, Compare and Contrast Poems, Create Music

Student Materials

Portfolio
 Pen or Pencil
 Soda can with a penny inside
 Drumsticks
 Whistle
 Scissors

Teacher Materials

Books

Words with Wings: A Treasury of African-American Poetry and Art selected by Belinda Rochelle

Black Out Loud: An Anthology of Modern Poems by Black Americans Edited by Arnold Adoff

Harlem by Walter Dean Myers

Hard copies for each student of *Children's Rhymes* by Langston Hughes and *Idle Chatter* by Charles Cooper

Transparencies with the following poems:

Black All Day by Raymond Richard Patterson

You Know, Joe by Ray Durem

Children's Rhymes by Langston Hughes

Idle Chatter by Charles Cooper

Lesson 1

1. Read the following poems to students:

Black All Day by Raymond Richard Patterson

You Know, Joe by Ray Durem

The two poems appear to speak to one another. My interpretation of *Black All Day* is that Patterson is expressing his discontent with negative black perceptions. His discontentment turns into anger and his demeanor changes when he leaves home. Therefore, what others see is not a true reflection of who he really is but a facsimile of the person he is perceived to be.

On the other hand, Durem is attempting to defuse negative perceptions in *You Know, Joe*. He is telling "Joe" that all of his worries are futile because, at the end of the day, we will all die. More directly, he is saying "Death" does not see color.

2. Have a whole class discussion about the message each poet is trying to convey. Have the students make a note of the similarities and differences using graphic organizers. The graphic organizers should be written in their portfolio.
3. Ask students how these poems differ from rap lyrics. How are they similar?
4. Use an overhead projector to show the poems to the class side-by-side.
5. Combine the two poems to form one poem using the following format:

<i>Black All Day</i>		<i>You Know, Joe</i>
Lines 1 and 2	?	Lines 1 – 6
Lines 3 and 4	?	Lines 7 – 10
Lines 5 – 12	?	Lines 11 – 12

Note: If students want to rearrange the poem once it has been merged, allow them to do so. They should be able to justify their editing.

6. Students should write the poem in their portfolio.
7. Tell students your interpretation of the two poems. Create an opportunity for them to share their ideas and make inferences. Ask them have their interpretations changed since they did item 2.
8. Ask them if the merged poems changed the authors meaning or intent in any way.
9. Student response should be documented in their portfolio.

This activity is designed to make students more proactive listeners. The most important lesson to share with students is that they should approach music the same way. They should dissect songs and attempt to understand the message.

Lesson 2

1. Place students groups of four to five. Give each group a soda can with a penny inside, drum sticks, or a whistle.
2. Provide each member of the group with a copy of the following two poems:
 - a. *Children’s Rhymes* by Langston Hughes
 - b. *Idle Chatter* by Charles Cooper
3. Instruct them to cut the poems into strips so that each line appears on a separate piece of paper.
4. Instruct them, as a group, to combine the two poems to form one poem the same as in Lesson 1.

Note: It may be necessary to give them a time limit.

5. Each student is required to write the new poem in his/her portfolio.
6. Using the soda can, drum sticks, or whistle; the students need to create a beat for the new poem.

Note: It will get loud, so if possible, this part is best done outside where students can be spaced out.

7. Have a member from each group recite the group’s poem.
8. Students should be listening for similarities and differences in arrangement.

9. Ask each group the rationale for arranging the poem the way they did.

Lesson 3

1. Each group will be asked to present their poem with beat.
2. Ask students if it possible to create rap music that addresses social issues without using profanity or making derogatory comments about a group.

Day 12: Assessment

Using the following Rubric, assess each student's portfolio.

Hip-Hop Portfolio Assessment

Instructions	2(D)	3(C)	4(B)	5(A)	
Student took notes during Hip Hop presentation?					
Student completed "What is Art" writing assignment?					
Student completed "What is Hip Hop" writing assignment?					
Student designed a tee-shirt?					
Student completed "Listening to Lyrics" assignment?					
Poem 1 and 2 are in student's portfolio?					
Student participated in group activity?					
TOTAL SCORE X "3"					__(3) = __

Note: You can use the rubric to give students one grade or multiple grades. If you are assigning one grade, the highest score a student can achieve is one hundred five (105). Check the appropriate box for each assignment; add the total boxes, and multiple the total score by 3.

If you are giving a grade for each task, 2 = D, 3 = C, 4 = B, and 5 = A. You can then tally all scores and give an overall grade. Using this method will provide students with 8 grades.

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Biographical information about Jean Michel Basquiat including copies of his works.

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This site includes a feature article about LL Cool J's relationship with FUBU's founder, Daymond John.

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One of the oldest online websites that provide social, political, and consumer information about the state of Hip Hop.

Gates, Henry Louis Jr. and Nellie Y. McKay, eds. *The Norton Anthology of African American Literature*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1997.

A comprehensive collection of African American literature including rhymes and songs, ballads, and work songs. It also includes jazz, rap, sermons, and folktales.

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bell hooks provides an account of why she thinks gangsta rap has become popular in mainstream society. She indicates that gangsta rap's views "are a reflection of the prevailing values in our society."

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This article provides historical data on the origins of modern graffiti.

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Although this book was published during a time when Hip-Hop was in its infancy stage, the author provides some views that may help to explain how some of the idiomatic language found in Hip-Hop songs and speech evolved.

Stancell, Steven. *Rap Whoz Who: The World of Rap Music*. New York: Schirmer Books, 1996.

Biographical information about rap performers, producers, and promoters with historical information about rap music.

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<<http://www.hiphop-network.com/articles/graffitiarticles/graffitiart.asp>>

An essay on the history of graffiti and current perceptions about this art form.

Warner Music Group. 13 June 2005. <<http://www.wmg.com/recordedmusic/?promo=23920003>>.

This website contains information about the Warner Music Group and the music labels it controls.

Supplemental Resources

Teacher Resources

Bastfield, Darrin Keith. *Back in the Day: My Life and Times with Tupac Shakur*. New York: The Ballantine Publishing Group, 2002.

A major Hip-Hop artist who suffered a fatal gunshot wound. Much of his music centers around the injustices inflicted upon the black race by non-blacks.

Boyd, Todd. *Young, Black, Rich & Famous: The Rise of the NBA, the Hip Hop Invasion and the Transformation of American Culture*. New York: Doubleday, 2003.

An account of how Hip-Hop has changed some cultural norms in America. Provides insightful information on the attitudes and behaviors of some rich African Americans who have been influenced by the Hip-Hop craze. It also shows how some members of society are retaliating against individuals who have taken on the Hip-Hop persona.

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This is a tool for educators who are dealing with the Hip-Hop influence in the classroom. He challenges educators to "recognize what goes on in the lives of students outside of school."

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A commentary on acceptance.

Gadsby, Jane M. *Hard Hitting Modern Perspective on Hip Hop Graffiti*. 6 Feb. 2005.

<<http://www.hiphop-network.com/articles/graffitiarticles/hiphopgraffiti.asp>>.

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Gunwright, Shaw A. *Black in School: Afrocentric Reform, Urban Youth and the Promise of Hip-Hop Culture*. New York: Teachers College Press, 2004.

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