

LANGUAGE ARTS

The Lyrics of Language

Related Subjects:

Media Literacy
Social Studies

Objectives:

- o Interpret the meaning of a rap song and write a critique of its content
- o Compose a rap/poem about an important social issue
- o Produce a video or storyboard

Materials:

- o Lyrics of a song that your students bring in (you will want to check content to make sure that it's appropriate)
- o Storyboard Sample (handout)

Resources:

www.ohhla.com and www.dapslyrics.com — you can view and print out the lyrics to nearly every song at these free sites

Introduction:

Although the lyrics of Hip-Hop are often fast paced, it's important to slow them down and give students the time to delve into the content of the message. In addition, where lyrics are concerned, there is no one-size-fits-all. On one end of the spectrum are Hip-Hop artists who see themselves as poets, continuing in the rich oral tradition of the Griot, West African storytellers who use their words to inform and educate the community. On the other end of the spectrum are Hip-Hop artists who use their words to promote products or perpetuate simplistic stereotypes. It's important for students to critically examine this range of styles and substance, as well as understand how lyrics have evolved within Hip-Hop.

Activity:

Break students into small groups and pass out the lyrics to a song (or songs) that either you or the class has chosen. Have each group identify the words and images that stand out and write them on a piece of paper. Bring the class back together and lead a discussion about their responses. Some questions can include:

- o What is the artist saying? What is the main message?
- o What images are referred to?
- o What lyrical devices are used (alliteration and metaphor, for example)?
- o Are they speaking too quickly to fully understand the message?
- o Are there references to specific products?
- o Are there any stereotypes reinforced? If so, which ones?

Production activity:

Break students into their groups and have them each construct an original rap or poem about a meaningful topic (school, relationships, poverty, violence, etc.). Once each group has completed its rap/poem, they should pass it along to another group. The new group will take the rap/poem and develop a storyboard (or produce a video, depending on available time and resources), without the consent or input from the group that wrote it.

After the storyboards (or videos) are complete, have the groups share them with the class. Get the reaction from the group that wrote the piece. Did the group members like how the rap/poem was visually represented? Did they have something else in mind when they wrote it? If so, how would they have visually represented it?