

HERE IS MY TESTIMONIAL:

I am delightfully appreciative for being a part of this hip-hop and media literacy curriculum pilot! I knew from the start that the majority of my students would be excited to learn more about hip-hop, as they were, because they listen to hip-hop. However, I didn't realize how much impact this project would have on them considering we found out together that they knew very little about hip-hop culture even though they live it on a daily basis.

Students would listen to 50 Cent's "In Da Club," bouncing their heads to the beat and lip synching the lyrics. But they didn't understand why they responded to the music in such a way, let alone didn't know what the lyrics meant or what the message was saying. It was the perfect scenario to explore those reasons, and they did, willingly and open-minded. This was a teacher's bliss; having a lengthy period of time when students didn't complain, "Why do we need to know this stuff anyway?"

A simple question as, "Is hip-hop just for African Americans?" would burst into class discussion and students would freely voice their opinions; they ultimately agreed that hip-hop is for anyone. Or a statement like, "All rap is negative" allowed students to take a moment and really think about what kind of rap was negative and what wasn't. At first I thought students were just defending hip-hop because they loved the music so much. However, what I was actually witnessing was that they were questioning themselves and figuring out themselves as to why they thought what they thought.

Among the activities we were involved in, my students loved inventing a hip-hop product and creating an advertisement for it. They had some wild and creative ideas that impressed me. Students thought it was a fun and interactive activity. Overall, students were most interested when they could express themselves either by writing, such as writing song lyrics (although they complain that they write too much) or by drawing, as we did when creating storyboards for a music video. Something contradicting that I noticed was that students would often mention that if one of their favorite rap or R&B artists would start marketing a product, they would try it. And yet they would talk about how they're not going to drink Coke just because Beyonce is advertising for it when in fact they don't like Coke in the first place. So, their taste buds determine their choices, not celebrity fascination. And oddly enough, when we talked about Nelly marketing Pimp Juice, most students didn't care too much for Nelly, but practically everyone said they would still be interested in trying the energy drink. I'd like to explore this concept more in the future.

Students also enjoyed learning about hip-hop's history and understanding what it was like almost three decades ago. Several students told me that they never knew about the history and that they learned so much from being in the class. Many students were shocked to find out that while rappers may seem to make a lot of money, there is very little of it that they actually see. I think it gave them a new perspective on what they saw in music videos, realizing that the images and scenarios are farther away from reality than they once thought. Even when we analyzed Westside Connection's "Gangsta Nation" music video, students were saying how they never noticed how the women were represented in the video before (as eye candy or sexy ho's serving men). Watching it a few times, analyzing it, and discussing the images kickstarted students' consciousness about what and why rappers are allowing the media to show them; their own critical thinking spread like wildfire.

Thank you for this project opportunity, I am looking forward to teaching my students this hip-hop and media literacy curriculum again in the fall as an elective language arts course, "Hip-Hop Media." Many students said they wouldn't mind taking the class again. And I wouldn't mind educating and motivating students about this subject for life!

Heather Anne BremPELL
Toltecalli Academy
Tucson, AZ

HERE ARE SOME EXCERPTS OF STUDENTS' IMAGES ESSAYS re: their image collages:

"The values that these images show is that it makes money look important, sometimes it makes you want gold teeth, it shows liquor, drugs, and even getting violent with other people. They show sexy girls because probably the rappers want teenagers to be talking about their videos to get more money. ... I think that hip-hop is a part of a teenager's life because they try everything that rappers do, some teens try to imitate the way they dress, and sometimes media can be a really bad influence in their life because it shows things that teenagers want to try to see how it feels."

~Cithel Orduno

"These images say a lot about our culture like style, tattoos, money, and piercings. Media produces and controls these images because that is what teens are expecting to see. The values that media teaches young people are bling bling, girls, and cars. Also, they teach young people to think that life is just about money and sex. ... The only thing that media is teaching teens is to think that sex, drugs, and money are cool. Also that is why some teens get involved with drugs because they

think that is cool. In my opinion, I think hip-hop videos are not appropriate. Not just because of what they say, it's about what they do. ... Drugs and sex are big issues that teens have. I think that is because of media and hip-hop videos. Because the media show the artists living their life and teens try to immitate what they do. And because teens do what they see on the hip-hop videos, like experimenting with drugs."

~ Idalia Robinson

"The values they [media] teach to young adults is that you can treat girls like ho's and money is the most important thing. ... I think the meida creates the images because it's what the people want and what sells instead of what the rapper's want. ... I don't see myself reflected in the media because I don't care what I wear or have a lot of jewelry. ...I think girls appear in music videos just to be in the videos, but they should have more self-respect so that they should stop. But then again, if there were no girls in a music video, then I won't want to see it."

~Jessie Alvarado

"The images say that our culture is very revealing. The images make our culture look disrespectful and degrading; such as the picture of two guys without shirts on. I think that the images were based on African American rappers and didn't include all cultures who should represent hip-hop. ... I think advertisers control these images to get our youth to like their products. Some people use famous rappers to advertise, like clothes for example. Advertisers control the youth image because they take what they need to sell and combine it with what youth are interested in. The values taught are self-respect. I have learned self-respect by knowing I don't have to look like the images I see. It teaches me that the images are only pictures created by a photographer, not by reality."

~Valirie Le