

SOCIAL STUDIES

Hip-Hop Timeline: Past, Present, and Future

Related Subjects:

Economics
Language Arts

Objectives:

- o Analyze the evolution of Hip-Hop as a musical and cultural movement
- o Evaluate the current state of Hip-Hop
- o Predict how Hip-Hop will evolve in the future

Materials:

(each of the following articles can be downloaded from the Web site)

- o “My Culture at the Crossroads” (by Kevin Powell)
- o “Is Hip-Hop Dead?” (by Walter Dawkins)
- o “The End” (by Bakari Kitwana)

Resources:

VH-1 History of Hip-Hop video

Introduction:

This lesson is intended to have students examine where Hip-Hop came from and predict where it's going. The current state of Hip-Hop looks very different from its early days when urban youth had no access to mainstream media and were searching for an outlet for their creativity. Today, it's a multi-billion dollar international force, with new artists being churned out almost daily. In addition, today's artists are packaged and marketed in a way that reflects the massive media influence on youth culture and that produces huge profits in return.

Activity:

First, have students read and discuss the articles, as well as the **Brief History of Hip-Hop** in the Introduction section of this guidebook. Engage students in a general discussion about the evolution of Hip-Hop. (Make sure that the discussion doesn't put them in a position of having to defend the current state of Hip-Hop, but rather prompts larger conversations about how the culture and music has changed since its inception.) Possible questions include:

- o What do you know about the history of Hip-Hop?
- o What are the important milestones for Hip-Hop?
- o How has it changed over its thirty-year history?
- o What defines the current state of Hip-Hop?

Production Activity:

Break students into small groups and have each group construct a Hip-Hop timeline. (You can also assign the groups different periods to focus on so that the class creates one comprehensive timeline.) Students should start at the beginning of Hip-Hop and identify the key people and events that mark the evolution of the music and culture.



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Related activity:

Phase 1: The early days

Based on the timelines that were created, have each group select one artist from the early days of rap and Hip-Hop. Students should spend some time researching the artist and chart his/her climb to notoriety. They should then present their findings back to the class. Some questions include:

- o Where is the artist from?
- o What message was the artist trying to convey through his/her lyrics?
- o What cultural forces were at work that resulted in this artist gaining a following?
- o Were their songs played on the radio or were they part of an underground movement?
- o Which record label were they signed to?
- o Were they also making political statements?
- o How were they received by the mainstream media?

Students should incorporate examples of the music into the presentation, as well as other elements like clothing or fashion from the artist. What did their original artwork on the CD's or tapes look like? Was the group responsible for any fashion trends (such as the fat laces and Adidas that Run DMC made famous)?

Phase 2: Today's world

Next, have the groups identify a current Hip-Hop artist. Have students use the same set of questions to examine this artist. Questions include:

- o What are the predominate messages in the music and videos?
- o What fashion contributions has the artist made?
- o How does the music reflect our current societal issues?
- o How is the artist being marketed?
- o Which record label are they signed to?

Phase 3: The artist of tomorrow

The final step is to have students use what they know about the evolution of Hip-Hop to predict what the artist of tomorrow will look and sound like. Tell students that they are the senior staff at a major record label. Explain to them that this is where the image of the artist is created. Students should then design a whole campaign for the artist. What kind of lyrics and images will the artist use? What fashion statement will they make? How will they be marketed and promoted?

Note: We suggest devoting one class session per phase. We also suggest having each group make a short presentation to the class after each of the three phases. At the end of the presentations, have the class reflect on what they have just seen and heard. Do some common threads start to emerge? How would they characterize the different time periods? How has the music and culture evolved over time? What constants have remained throughout?