

Robert Harrigan

Alex Mueller

English 611

## **Introduction**

### **Context and Audience**

This unit will be for high school seniors or freshman college. Probably college because of the content of the music wouldn't get approved for high school, but, I think that it would kick ass in the high school class room. We'll assume college for this lesson time line though. The entire curriculum would be over the semester, but this snippet is just going to focus on one aspect, the aspect of race, over 4 weeks, and including 1 transitional lesson for the next unit on gender.

### **Essential Questions**

**How are race, gender, and class represented in Hip Hop music? How is Hip Hop portrayed in the media? What are your own personal opinions about Hip Hop music (this question will be asked twice, before the first unit and after the final unit) and how have they changed?**

### **Unit Objectives**

- Students will broaden their scope of what Hip Hop music is
- Students will be able to listen to lyrics, and make new meanings
- Students will make claims about the song lyrics/videos, using evidence from the lyrics or the image to back up whatever claims they make.
- Students will be able to see how media portrayal isn't always accurate, and will be encouraged to make their own opinions about Hip Hop music as well as news/ads/etc.
- Students will have a better understanding of Audience and how they are targeted

### **Rationale**

Education is tough, and we are always trying to find the most effective way to reach students. I don't know if this is the most effective way, but I do believe that using Hip Hop in the classroom is much more effective than the traditional classroom. Let's face it, English teachers love novels, and some students will too, but that number is dwindling and digital texts, and visual media is at the forefront of the youth's daily intake. As much as I would love to convince my students to enjoy reading a nice book in the wood, or by a lake, that just isn't the probable outcome of using traditional novels in the classroom. I believe that "good" students will do the reading as required, but the "average" student will look for the summary of a text, or a YouTube clip that will do the hard work for them. So, my thought is, "chuck it in the fuck-it bucket" and use what we've got. Hip Hop is the most listened to genre of music. That isn't to say that we can't use other musical genres in the classroom, but Hip Hop is not only extremely popular, but it also has a tremendous history and has more words in one verse than other genres typically use in the entire song; giving us more to work with and find meaning within. These kids are probably persuaded by

mainstream media to listen to nonsensical forms of Hip Hop and are missing the powerful messages and deeply moving songs that were once revered, and now are hidden amongst the mumble rap bullshit we have today. Let's remedy that.

### **Unit Texts**

- Grandmaster Flash – The Message (1982)
- NWA – Fuck The Police (1988)
- Tupac – Trapped (1991)
- Tupac – Changes (1998)
- Nas – One Mic (2001)
- Macklemore – White Privilege II (2016)
- Jay Z – Story of OJ (2017)
- Childish Gambino – This is America (2018)
- MLK's Letter from Birmingham Jail
- Women in Hip Hop

### **Lesson #1 Topic:** Introduction to the Unit

**Lesson Question:** What are your opinions about Hip Hop music? How does the media portray it? Who is your favorite rapper, or if you don't have one, who is a rapper that you have heard of?

**Context:** This will be the first lesson, either day 1 or 2 of class, and it will be used to get an idea of Hip Hop knowledge in the classroom, and so that I can know who likes trash rappers, so I can tease them for having poor taste in my genre. Just kidding...a little.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 minutes

### **Objectives:**

- Students will take note of the music they are listening to or are familiar with
- Students will express their ideas of how the media portrays Hip Hop and/or how they view it based on what they've seen/heard.
- Students will have the "critique" seed planted in their minds, leaving the classroom questioning the songs they like.

### **Materials:**

- Just a good ol' pen and paper (or device they can write on, computer, tablet, etc.)
- **Artifact #1 – Printout of the origins of Hip Hop, defining where it was located, the theorized definition of the word Hip Hop, and also the 4 elements that make up Hip Hop (MC, Dj, Breakdancing, Grafitti)**

### **Procedure:**

1: Students will write down their answers to the questions, which will be written on the board. "Good questions engage students to attend to the particular dimensions, ideas, and specifics that illuminate each text." (S.A.W, 76.)

2: Students will volunteer (or be voluntold) to share their answers to these questions.

3: Organic discussion will ensue, and I'll end by encouraging students to be aware of what they think is cool and question why they think what they think.

### **References:**

Smith, Michael W., Deborah Appleman, and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. *Uncommon Core: Where the Authors of the Standards Go Wrong about Instruction and How You Can Get It Right*. Corwin Literacy, 2014.

Blau, Sheridan. *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Reader*. Heinemann, 2003

### **Lesson #1 Artifact: History and meaning of Hip Hop** (I would create this document)

**Lesson #2 Topic:** Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five – The Message (1982)

**Lesson Questions:** What is being said? What does the video show? What does this song tell us about race in the 1980's?

**Context:** This will be the second lesson of the unit

**Rationale:** Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five are legends in the Hip Hop community, and sadly, many teens won't even know who they were or what they've done for Hip Hop. This song, rapped by one of the Furious Five, Melle Mel, is one of the most influential rap songs of all time. Students should be exposed to this song and interpret its meaning. Even though this song isn't the first Hip Hop song to be recorded or receive mainstream success, I chose this one because of the lyrics and of the impact on the genre. This seemed like a good place to start the chronological time line of Hip Hop music with a message.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 minutes

### **Objectives:**

- Students will be exposed to one of the most influential songs of all time
- Students will think critically about the lyrics and meaning of this song
- Students will be able to mark down a starting point in Hip Hop history for where "conscious" rap began.
- Students will feel a sense of pride and belonging to a group that they may not have known how to enter before. The Hip Hop community is vast and true fans won't accept outsiders that don't know at least some of the legends. My students will be able to contribute to the ongoing conversation about the state of Hip Hop and the impact it has on the youth.

### **Materials:**

- Students will need to have something to write with and on.
- Students would need internet access, at least at home for a homework pre-listen
- **Artifact #2 – Link to wiki page about Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five.**

**Procedure:**

- Students will have listened to this song for homework and would have taken double entry notes about what they've noticed. They would also have read a little background information about Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.
- We will begin by having a discussion about what students were noticing about the song and video at home. We will have the video displayed on the projector, so we can listen along as we discuss.
- We will then move into a discussion about race and the song's portrayal of race in the 1980's. This could bleed into a conversation about class, which is ok.
- This will be a read/discuss activity as Blau's *My Papa's Waltz* activity (61)

**References:**

Blau, Sheridan. *The Literature Workshop: Teaching Texts and Their Reader*. Heinemann, 2003

Grandmaster Flash – The Message (1982)

**Lesson #2 Artifact – Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five Wiki Page**

Context: This [wiki](#) would be on our classroom website (schoolology or Google drive) and they would be required to read this page for homework. The link to the song will be on the page as well as a folder with the lyrics to all of the songs we go over, which I will provide too.

**Lesson #3 Topic: NWA – Fuck Tha Police (1988)**

**Lesson Questions:** Why is this song titled this way? What are they saying beyond the obvious statement of “Fuck Tha Police?” How is NWA’s approach to the topic of race different than Grandmaster Flash and The Furious Five’s? Why do you think that is?

**Context:** This is the 3<sup>rd</sup> lesson of the unit

**Rationale:** This song is arguably one of the most famous songs in Hip Hop history. It is highly likely that most or all of the students have heard this song, or at least heard of it. However, it is doubtful that all of them have truly listened to the message in this song and understand the anger behind the lyrics. Students also may not know the impact this song had at the time and the backlash that it received from law enforcement and even the FBI. This will help students understand the power this genre holds, hopefully gaining it more respect amongst them and further sparking their critical mind set.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will have a better understanding of the origins of this song and the culture around it
- Students will get a deeper respect for the power of this genre
- Students will begin to think critically as to why Hip Hop has changed so much over the years and why they don't hear songs like this today.

**Materials:**

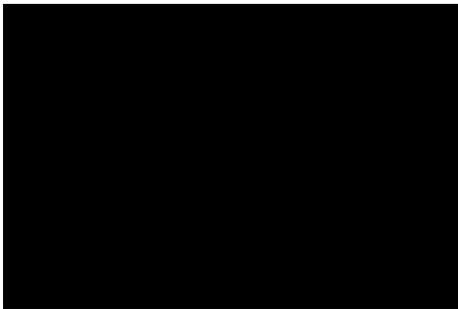
- Something to write with and on
- Printout of the lyrics or access to them online
- **Artifact #3 – Letter from FBI about NWA**

**Procedure:**

- Students will have listened to this song for homework, always accompanied by a double entry notebook to help fuel discussion.
- Students will break into small groups and discuss what they've noticed about the song.
- Students will discuss, and write down their answers as a group to the questions I will have written on the board
- After 5-10 minutes, we will discuss these answers as a class. Using the projector and song to reference as we talk.
- I will pass out the FBI letter to each group, and they will have another 5-10 minutes to read and discuss the letter, which we will then discuss as a class

**References:**

NWA – Fuck The Police (1988)



The FBI agent who hunted NWA

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/the-fbi-agent-who-hunted-nwa>

**Lesson #3 Artifact – FBI Agent Letter**



U.S. Department of Justice

Federal Bureau of Investigation

Washington, D.C. 20535

August 1, 1989

Mr. Gui Manganiello  
National Promotions Director  
Priority Records  
Suite 800  
6430 Sunset Boulevard  
Hollywood, California 90028

Dear Mr. Manganiello:

A song recorded by the rap group N.W.A. on their album entitled "Straight Outta Compton" encourages violence against and disrespect for the law enforcement officer and has been brought to my attention. I understand your company recorded and distributed this album, and I am writing to share my thoughts and concerns with you.

Advocating violence and assault is wrong, and we in the law enforcement community take exception to such action. Violent crime, a major problem in our country, reached an unprecedented high in 1988. Seventy-eight law enforcement officers were feloniously slain in the line of duty during 1988, four more than in 1987. Law enforcement officers dedicate their lives to the protection of our citizens, and recordings such as the one from N.W.A. are both discouraging and degrading to these brave, dedicated officers.

Music plays a significant role in society, and I wanted you to be aware of the FBI's position relative to this song and its message. I believe my views reflect the opinion of the entire law enforcement community.

Sincerely yours,

Milt Ahlerich  
Assistant Director  
Office of Public Affairs

100-55511

#### **Lesson #4 Topic:** Tupac – Trapped (1991)

**Lesson Questions:** What do you know about Tupac? What is this song saying about race in the early 90's? Is it different than what Melle Mel was saying almost 10 years prior? What are some similarities and some differences that you notice in how Tupac is suggesting his audience to deal with race relations vs what "The Message" was saying?

**Context:** This will be the 6<sup>th</sup> lesson of the unit (I have one for 1989 and 1990 before this one)

**Rationale:** Tupac Shakur is a legend in the Hip Hop community. His life both inside and out of the music industry can be a whole lesson plan of its own. His family ties to the Black Liberation Army and the Panthers is fascinating. His background and success is captivating, and his death is one of the craziest unsolved mysteries, with many speculations and theories around it. Needless to say, we can't mention Hip Hop without mentioning Tupac Shakur. I chose this song because it is one of his lesser known tracks, but it deals with such a relevant topic and is perfect for showing how race relations were still similar in the 90's as in the 80's. This will hopefully lead to an awareness of how long African Americans have been making their case about inequality in this country, and that today's talk of "racism returning" isn't actually true, but it has been here the whole time.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 minutes

#### **Objectives:**

- Students will have a deeper understanding of how long African Americans have been mistreated in this country
- Students will see the change in delivery, the gradual increase of complexity in Hip Hop lyrics, and the change in attitude behind the lyrics.
- Students will nourish the seed that I've planted, encouraging them to question the lyrics of the music they listen to and see on the internet/tv.

#### **Materials:**

- Something to write with and on
- Internet access
- **Artifact #4** Tupac Interview <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMXzLhbWtmk>

#### **Procedure:**

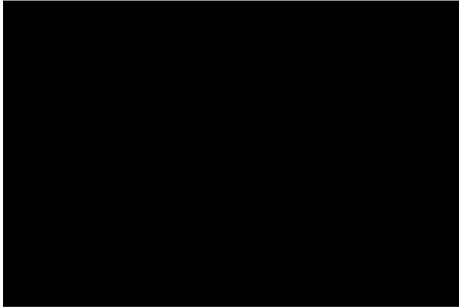
- Students will begin with a free write about what they know about Tupac Shakur
- Then they will break into groups and answer the rest of the questions
- We will come together for a class discussion
- We will watch the interview in class, and depending on time, we will have group discussions or class discussion about it

#### **References:**

Tupac Interview

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMXzLhbWtmk>

Tupac – Trapped (1991)



**Lesson #4 Artifact – Tupac Interview**



**Lesson #5 Topic:** Tupac – Changes (1998)

**Lesson Questions:** What is this song saying? What are some lines that stand out to you? Why? What relevance does this song have in 2018?

**Context:** This is the 9<sup>th</sup> lesson of the unit. There will have been two units before this one.

**Rationale:** This song is probably Tupac's most famous song. The unbelievable fact is that most of what he is saying in this song is still relevant today. That, to me, makes this one of the most powerful songs in all of Hip Hop and such a tremendous teaching tool to discuss race and inequality.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will continue their ongoing discussion about race inequality in America
- Students will now have a full grasp as to the severity of inequality and how long it has been so
- Students will begin to think about their first major assignment

**Materials:**

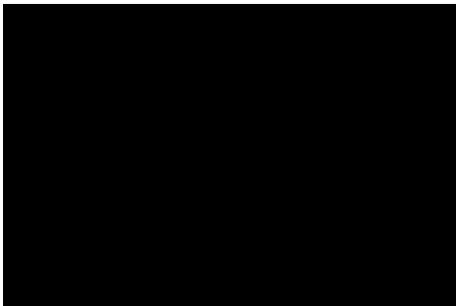
- Something to write with and on
- Internet connection
- **Artifact #5 – Essay Assignment and MLK's Letter**

**Procedure:**

- Students will begin class by breaking into groups and discussing what they've noticed about the song. They will have an organic discussion about it, but I'll have my questions on the board to help facilitate.
- We will come to a class discussion about the song
- I will hand out Artifact #5 and answer any questions they have about it
- Students will have the rest of the class period to pick a Hip Hop artist that they want to use for their essay. I will have to approve of all choices. They will read MLK for homework

**References:**

Tupac – Changes (1998)



MLK's Letter

[https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)

**Artifact #5 Essay Assignment (I'd create, but it would have students make a connection between MLK's Letter and Hip Hop artist of their choice in relation to race inequality of the time. They'd focus on method of delivery, and noting effectiveness of each.) and MLK's Letter [https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles\\_Gen/Letter\\_Birmingham.html](https://www.africa.upenn.edu/Articles_Gen/Letter_Birmingham.html)**

**Lesson #6 Topic:** Nas – One Mic (2001)

**Lesson Questions:** What is Nas saying? What stands out to you? Why?

**Context:** This is the 10<sup>th</sup> lesson in the unit

**Rationale:** I chose this song because Nas is also very influential in the Hip Hop community and has spoken out on many issues regarding race, class, gender, etc. At this point, the focus is on the paper, so the videos from here on out, until the paper is due, are just more exposure.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students by now will see the pattern. They will have read MLK's letter and begin making connections between the Black Rights Movement of the 60's to the Hip Hop movement since the 80's.
- Students will know that Hip Hop is a powerful tool for communication and see the impact that it has caused
- The students that I've learned on the first day that love mumble rap will begin questioning their life decisions and wonder how they could have been so lost.

**Materials:**

- Something to write with and on
- Internet connection
- Access to MLK's Letter

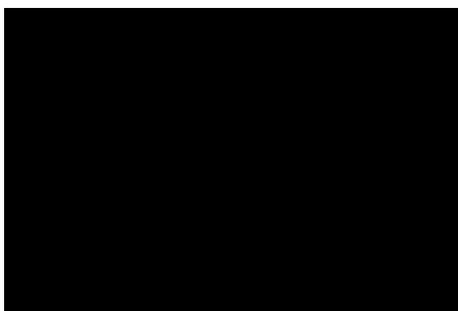
**Procedure:**

- We will have a discussion about Nas' song, and I'll let that ride out as long as it is organic.
- Students will have the remainder of class time to work on their paper. I'll be available for mini-conferences at the front of the room for students who want to talk to me or have any questions

**References:**

Nas – One Mic (2001)

**Artifact #6 – Nas – One Mic Video**



**Lesson #7 Topic:** Macklemore – White Privilege II (2016)

**Lesson Questions:** What is Macklemore saying here? What is the importance of this song? Do you have suggestions or answers to his questions about his place in the Black Live’s Matter movement? What does it say about the rate of progress that this song was made in 2016?

**Context:** This is the 11<sup>th</sup> lesson in the unit.

**Rationale:** The discussion so far has been about the struggle of African Americans in America. However, this song gives a nice perspective, almost response, from a White American who wants to help but doesn’t know how. This is a very important piece of the conversation. Many students in the classroom, depending on location, will be white. They will have been thinking these thoughts but maybe not sure how to express them. This song is a great way to build a bridge between races that want to make a difference, but don’t know where they fit into the equations. I can imagine that this song, mixed with the discussions we’ve had already, will lead to a lengthy, possibly uncomfortable discussion about white people’s role in the equality of other races in America.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will begin to wonder their role in the future of our countries divide.
- Students will think about ways that they can bridge the gap between races
- Students will have an understanding of both sides of the race divide
- Students will navigate an uncomfortable subject in a respectful manner. I’ll make sure of that

**Materials:**

- Something to write with and on

**Procedure:**

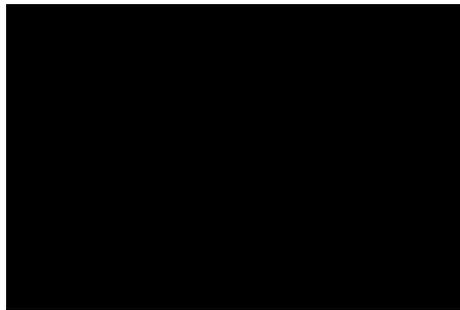
- Students will begin by small group discussion about this song
- Then we will regroup as a class to have a very uncomfortable discussion about white people’s role and place in today’s Black Right’s movement.

- If there is any free time left, students will be able to work on their papers.

**References:**

Macklemore – White Privilege II (2016)

**Artifact #7 Macklemore – White Privilege II**



**Lesson #8 Topic:** Jay Z – Story of OJ (2017)

**Lesson Questions:** What does this song say? Who is Jay Z’s audience? What advice is he giving? What does the video say? What do you notice about the visual choices that Jay Z made? How does it strengthen or hurt the point of the song?

**Context:** This is the 12<sup>th</sup> lesson in the unit

**Rationale:** When I heard this song, I was blown away. I think my students would be too. The chorus is “light nigga, dark nigga, fo nigga, real nigga, rich nigga, po nigga, house nigga, field nigga...still nigga” That last “still nigga” line makes an otherwise “simple” and pointless chorus into one of the deepest hooks of all time. It’s uncomfortable, which I love, and it’s so powerful to have one of the richest, and most influential Black Americans tell us that even he falls into this category of “still nigga” which I wouldn’t even have considered because of his wealth. He then gives advice to the audience, “I’m tryna give you a million dollars worth of advice for 9.99” This song gave me a whole new respect for Jay Z and I am anxious to see what students think. Also, the video uses references to Jim Crow era animations and sort of Mickey Mouse like. That will have some juicy discussion for sure.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will dissect visual media as well as lyrics and see how a video can strengthen an artist’s point.
- Students will see the change of tactic, from King’s letter asking for understanding, to the 90’s era of demanding fair treatment or else... To the conversation about White privilege and a dialogue beginning to form between races, to Jay Z’s advice for how Black people can pull themselves out of poverty and into the wealth of white America, while acknowledging that they will still be seen as the “other” for now, but the next step in solving this race equation is to level the financial playing field. It’s pretty awesome to see this developing timeline over such a long period.

**Materials:**

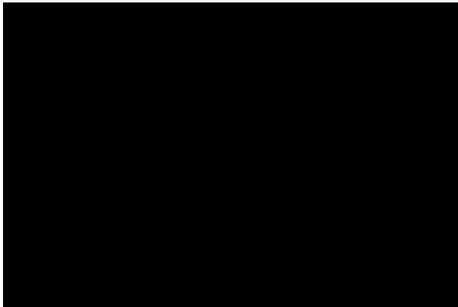
- Something to write with and On

**Procedure:**

- Students will begin by writing down what they’ve noticed about the video.
- They will write down their answers to the questions I’ve posed
- They will then break into small groups and exchange ideas
- We will come together for a larger discussion
- Any time left, they can work on their papers which will the first draft will be due next class meeting

**References:**

Jay Z – Story of OJ (2017)



**Artifact #8 – Jay Z – Story of OJ**

**Lesson #9 Topic:** Childish Gambino – This is America (2018)

**Lesson Questions:** What do you notice about this video? How is the message different if you just hear the audio? What is Childish Gambino saying? Do you think this is an accurate depiction of America?

**Context:** This is the 13<sup>th</sup> lesson in the unit

**Rationale:** This song is a huge controversy in 2018. They surely have heard of this song or seen the video. I imagine that they want to talk about this song as it is, so I don't think it will be difficult to have a discussion form organically, which as you might have guessed by now, is my favorite type of conversations to have. I believe that learning happens best when things aren't forced, and I let students bring their own thoughts to the conversation and then we discuss them, challenge where we can, and grow together as a class.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 Minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will further their ability to read music videos
- Students will make meaning of the song based on the video and point out evidence from it to get their point across
- Students will have already finished their drafts and will have a deeper insight to the struggle of Black equality in America, so they will have a seasoned mind looking at this video

**Materials:**

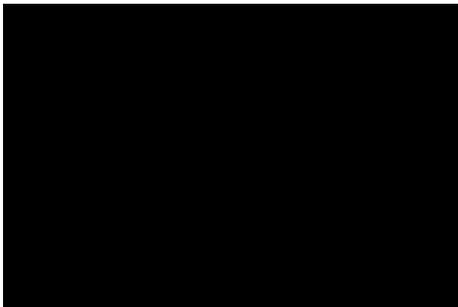
- Something to write with and On
- **Artifact #9 Peer response sheet**

**Procedure:**

- Students will begin with a group discussion about the video, comparing what they have noticed.
- I will pass out Artifact #9 and they will read each other's drafts and fill out the peer response sheet.
- Students will need two peers for their paper and take their notes into consideration for their final draft due next class

**References:**

Childish Gambino – This is America (2018)



**Artifact #9 – Peer Response sheet (I'd create and pass out to class)**

**Lesson #10 Topic:** Women Portrayal in Hip Hop

**Lesson Questions:** How do you see women in Hip Hop? What do think about this video? Do you agree or disagree with what is being said? Why is Hip Hop a male dominated genre?

**Context:** This would be the transitional or 1<sup>st</sup> lesson of the next unit

**Rationale:** Women in Hip Hop is such a vast subject. We wouldn't just talk about women, we'd also talk about gender roles of men, but I'm just opening with women for the sake of transition and since the last unit was all men. Hip Hop has a bad rap (pun intended) for treatment of females and lack of female presence, rightfully so, but I'd like to dig into this subject with students and help them spread awareness of the positivity that Hip Hop has about women and about dope female Emcees of the past to the present.

**Lesson Duration:** 50 minutes

**Objectives:**

- Students will apply the techniques of critiquing lyrics and videos from the first lesson to this second unit, through a different lens.
- Students will be able to hear arguments about women in Hip Hop and contribute their own opinions.
- Students won't even realize it, but I would inform them that these same strategies that we've been going over can be applied to everything they encounter, books, writings, movies, social media, etc. Not just Hip Hop

**Materials:**

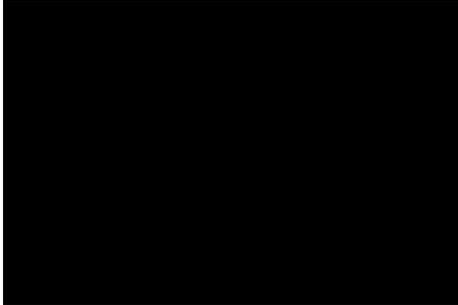
- Something to write with and on

**Procedure:**

- Class will begin by students doing a free write about their opinion of woman portrayal in Hip Hop
- Then I will show them the video
- We will then have a class discussion about women in Hip Hop
- I will then transition the conversation to gender roles in Hip Hop and how are men portrayed

**References:**

## How are Women Portrayed in Hip Hop Videos



### Artifact #10 Women in Hip Hop Video

#### Additional Artifacts: Rubric for the first unit Paper

A work	B work	C work	D work
Thesis is clear	Thesis is clear	Thesis isn't that clear, or maybe isn't consistent in the paper	Thesis is unclear or nonexistent
Connections to MLK are integrated and sophisticated	Connects to MLK, but maybe not integrated. Talks about MLK and Music separately	Doesn't connect to MLK, just talks about the letter and music separately	No connections made, or only addressed either the letter or the music
Uses quotes correctly and in connection with main arguments	Uses quotes correctly and in connection with arguments	Doesn't quote well, or at all	No quotes, or irrelevant quotes

Makes inferences using evidence from MLK and from artist's music	Makes superficial inferences about the text, and perhaps evidence isn't strong, but I can see the effort	Doesn't make inferences about the texts, just echos the obvious points	No inferences, just summarizes the letter or song
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