

A Short History of Hip Hop

PRE-READING

INDIVIDUALLY 

- Take a pencil and take a piece of paper or use your computer to make a drawing based on the associations you get when you hear the word hip hop. Your drawing should be as detailed as possible.

IN PAIRS OR GROUPS OF THREE 

- Take turns presenting your drawings. Explain what you have included and why. When you are finished, discuss whether your drawings have anything in common.

IN CLASS 

- Talk about the things that were included in your drawings. What are some of the clichés or familiar motifs of hip hop?

READING INSTRUCTIONS

INDIVIDUALLY 

- Make a timeline from 1978-2014 with some of the most important events in hip hop history.
- The text "A Short History of Hip Hop" has been divided into an introduction and four different phases: 1. Old School Hip Hop, 2. The Golden Age of Hip Hop, 3. Mainstream Hip Hop and 4. New Millennium Rap. You have to read the whole text, but will be assigned a particular phase (1-4) on which you should focus. You should be able to account for every detail in the phase you are assigned.

A SHORT HISTORY OF HIP HOP

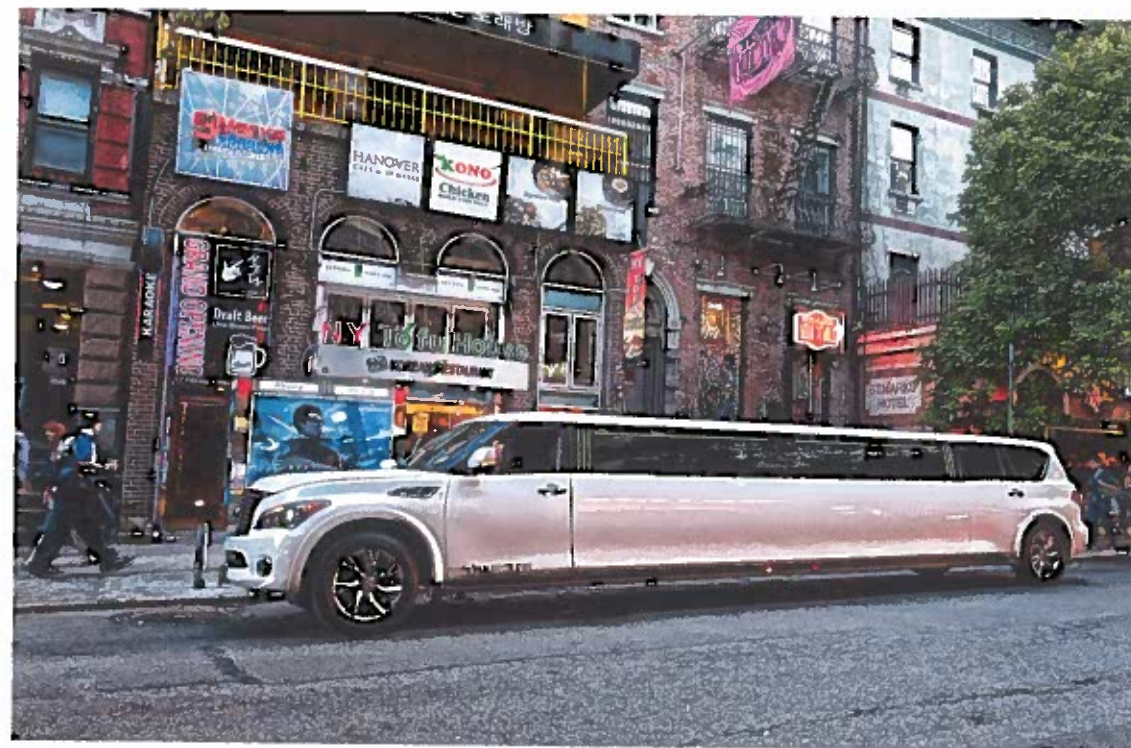
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chain gang (subst) - betegnelse for en gruppe fanger, der er kædet sammen, mens de arbejder

bebop (subst) - en genre inden for jazzmusikken

community (subst) - fællesskab

In his rap, simply titled "Hip Hop", the rapper Mos Def sums up the history of hip hop in two lines: "We went from picking cotton, to chaingang line chopping / To be-bopping, to hip-hopping." Here, Mos Def sees himself as a part of a community and the "we" he is talking about are the black people of America, who started out as slaves picking cotton on the cotton fields and worked as prisoners in chain gangs. Later came music, with blues, jazz and bebop, and according to Mos Def, it all evolved into hip hop.



Mos Def emphasises that hip hop is linked with the history of Afro-Americans and their search for identity and freedom. The use of language is a part of this search and when rappers refer to themselves or fellow rappers as "niggers" or "dogs", it is a reminder of the history of slavery and racist language. This history is a sensitive topic, but early on, hip hop was rebellious and told uncomfortable truths about the past and the present.

Another way of using language as rebellion is the use of grammatically incorrect language and slang that makes it clear that hip hop does not want to conform to a politically correct society. The lyrics have their own code and it can be hard to break because it is not necessarily meant to be understood by others outside the hip hop community. It is not academic language or the language of the establishment. Instead, hip hop started out as a black subculture, the voice of people from the ghetto, and it is still an art form that understands itself as being in opposition to mainstream culture - even though it has now become a part of it.

The transition from underground to mainstream can be traced in the history of hip hop that can be divided into four phases: 1. Old School Hip Hop (1978-1984). 2. The Golden Age of Hip Hop (1985-1992). 3. Mainstream Hip Hop (1993-1999). 4. New Millennium Rap (2000-2014).

sensitive (adj) - følsom
rebellious (adj) - oprørsk

conform (vb) - tilpasse sig, rette ind

establishment (subst) - det etablerede samfundssystem. Her menes der især dem, der sidder på magten.

subculture (subst) - subkultur. En gruppe der har en anden opførsel og et andet værdisæt end flertallet. Subkultur står i modsætning til mainstreamkultur.

re'strict (vb) - begrænse
 interre'lated (adj) - sammenhængende
 'oral (adj) - mundtlig
 'aerosol (subst) - spraydåse
 e'merge (vb) - opstå
 de'molish (vb) - ødelægge
 'relocate (vb) - omplacere
 'refugee (subst) - flygtning
 pro'long (vb) - forlænge
 rouse (vb) - opildne
 chant (subst) - messen
 MC (subst) - forkortelse for "master of ceremonies". Hentyder til rapperens rolle som en vært, der skal sørge for at underholde og opildne publikum. MC eller emcee bruges ofte ensbetydende med ordet rapper, men fremhæver rapperens rolle som entertainer
 'socially 'conscious - socialt bevidst, det vil sige bevidst om de problemer, der er i samfundet

Old School Hip Hop (1978-1984)

When talking about hip hop, it is important to underline that it is a term that is not restricted to music. According to the *Encyclopedia of Rap and Hip-Hop Culture* it represents at least four different, interrelated art forms:

MCing, or rap - the oral element; B-boying, break dancing, as it is commonly known - the dance element; DJing - the musical element; and graffiti, or aerosol art - the visual element (Bynoe: 2006: xix)

Hip hop culture emerged in the 1970s in the demolished Bronx district of New York City. City planner Robert Moses' Cross-Bronx Expressway Project meant that around 60,000 homes were torn down on account of being slums. People, predominately Black and Latino, had to be relocated and their communities were broken up. Hip hop offered an alternative identity, a new community, for the people who had become strangers and refugees in their own city.

One of the manifestations of the new hip hop culture was the neighborhood parties where everyone from the block could come and enjoy themselves. A DJ simply brought a sound system and played music. A practice began where the DJ would use two turntables to prolong and isolate instrumental passages in a song: the beats. DJ Kool Herc was the pioneer in this field and is often mentioned as one of the founding fathers of hip hop, along with Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa who named the culture. While Kool Herc made his instrumental breaks, he would rouse the crowd with little raps and call and response chants, and dancers, known as the b-boys, would perform complicated dances.

In the beginning, the DJ was also a rapper, but the roles of MC (short for Master of Ceremonies) and DJ would later be separated. Some MCs recorded solo projects, like Spoonie Gee and Kurtis Blow, but rap groups dominated. It was also a group called The Sugarhill Gang that released "Rapper's Delight" in 1979. It was a worldwide hit that is considered the first rap record. Another group, Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, had a more lasting influence. The song "The Message" from 1982 is a masterpiece and is arguably the first rap song that incorporates an element of social criticism. The group, with its rapper Melle Mel, would go on to influence the socially conscious music that was created in the Golden Age of Hip Hop.

The Golden Age of Hip Hop (1985-1992)

Sugar Hill Records, founded by husband and wife Joe and Sylvia Robinson in 1979, was responsible for releasing some of the most important records in the early years of hip hop, including "Rapper's Delight" and "The Message," but it was another label that became synonymous with the period that is known as the Golden Age of Hip Hop: Def Jam Records.

Def Jam Records was founded by Rick Rubin and Russell Simmons and released its first official single in 1984. "I Need a Beat" by rapper LL Cool J became a huge hit and made him a superstar at the age of 15. Success continued when the white rap group, the Beastie Boys, released their debut album *Licensed to Ill* in 1986. The album, which fused hip hop and rock, became a bestseller and paved the way for white artists in hip hop.

In terms of success and sales, few rap groups could match Run-DMC. Their collaboration with rock group Aerosmith on "Walk This Way" (1986) became hip hop's first Top 5 pop single and resulted in massive airplay on MTV. Rap's growing popularity on the music channel was also reflected by the creation of a show in 1988 dedicated solely to hip hop: *Yo MTV Raps*. The same year also saw the beginning of the influential music magazine *The Source*, the first hip hop publication.

The Golden Age of Hip Hop was characterised not only by increased visibility and success in sales, but by stylistic diversity and artistic quality. Experimental rap groups like De La Soul and A Tribe Called Quest emerged and the female hip hop group Salt-N-Pepa rapped about the condition of women while artists like Rakim, Guru, Big Daddy Kane and Kool Moe Dee set new standards for rap with their impressive technical skills, and Slick Rick and Kool G Rap perfected the element of storytelling.

Social criticism was still present and came to the fore on the albums from the group Public Enemy whose influence could be felt on Run-DMC, especially on the song "Proud to Be Black" (1985) that was a call for education, black brotherhood and togetherness.

A call for black togetherness was needed. Violent conflicts between black gangs were a problem in the ghettos and a new genre called Gangsta Rap chronicled the tough life of gangsters. Schoolly D and Ice-T were pioneers in this genre and rap songs like Ice-T's "6 'N the Mornin'" (1987) and "Colors" (1988) had a crucial influence on one of the most seminal rap groups in Gangsta Rap: N.W.A whose music popularised the genre. The group and especially its key member, Dr. Dre, would continue to influence rap as it moved into the mainstream period.

synonymous (adj) - ensbetydende
 fuse (vb) - smelte sammen
 pave the way - bane vejen for
 'solely (adv) - udelukkende
 visi'bility (subst) - synlighed
 con'dition (subst) - tilstand
 'chronicle (vb) - nedskrive
 pio'neer (subst) - foregangsmand, bannerfører
 'crucial (adj) - afgørende
 'influence (subst) - indflydelse
 'seminal (adj) - skelsættende

lo'cality (subst) - sted
 'milieu (subst) - miljø
 'crew (subst) -
 mandskab (i rapmusik
 medlemmer af en
 gruppe)
 'posse (subst) - bande
 'ample (adj) - rigelig
 inter'section (subst) -
 gadekryds
 'parking lot (subst) -
 parkeringsplads
 de'piction (subst) -
 fremstilling
 en'vironment (subst) -
 omgivelser, miljø
 spawn (vb) - afføde
 con'spiracy (subst) -
 sammensværgelse
 drive-by 'shooting
 (subst) - beskydning
 fra en bil, der kører
 forbi
 thug (subst) - hulle

Mainstream Hip Hop (1993-1999)

The stories from the streets told by rap groups like N.W.A emphasise that rappers come from a particular neighborhood. Locality is also the focus of many rap music videos, as the hip hop scholar Tricia Rose says:

Nothing is more central to rap's music video narratives than situating the rapper in his or her milieu and among one's crew or posse (...) Rap music videos are set on buses, subways, in abandoned buildings, and almost always in black urban inner-city locations. This usually involves ample shots, favorite street corners, intersections, playgrounds, parking lots, school yards, roofs, and childhood friends (Rose: 1994: 10)

The rapper shows who s/he is through the depiction of his/her environment and the language that is spoken in this particular environment. The grammar mistakes often found in rap point towards rap as an oral genre that reflects how language is spoken and not how it is taught in school. The use of dialect, slang and geographical references helps the rappers to highlight where they come from.

Locality helps to create identity and it is connected to originality and authenticity. You cannot rap about the ghetto if you do not come from the ghetto. However, locality can also provoke conflicts where rappers from different neighborhoods fight each other. Conflicts can also spread out geographically and the mainstream period spawned one of the most famous territorial conflicts in rap history: the rivalry between the East Coast and the West Coast.

It was a conflict between two cities, New York and Los Angeles, two record companies, the East Coast based Death Row Records and the West Coast based Bad Boy Records, but most of it all, it was a battle between two of the most important rappers of all time: 2Pac and The Notorious B.I.G. Many myths and conspiracies surround their rivalry and tragic ending, but the fact remains that in 1996, 2Pac was shot in Las Vegas, Nevada and only a year after, The Notorious B.I.G. was killed in a drive-by shooting. They both had an image as gangsters and thugs, but the rap songs "Brenda's Got a Baby" and "Ten Crack Commandments" show how different they could be in style and subject. The former is a piece of social criticism, focusing on the problems of poverty, child pregnancy and incest, while the latter is a cynical list of advice for upcoming drug dealers.

a'bundance (subst) -
 overflod
 'skilled (adj) - dygtig
 post'modern (adj) -
 postmoderne. Et
 komplekst begreb, der
 blandt andet dækker
 over, at identitet
 ikke er noget fast,
 men udtryk for flere
 forskellige roller
 man kan påtage sig.
 I forbindelse med
 musik forbindes det
 med genreblanding,
 hvor der ikke er tale
 om rene genrer, men
 blandingsgenrer, hvor
 nyt og gammelt sættes
 sammen
 per'sona (subst) - en
 rolle, som en person
 tager på sig
 ob'sessive (adj) - besat

After the death of 2Pac and The Notorious B.I.G., other rappers continued to fight about the title as the greatest MC. Two of the most prominent were the bestselling rappers Jay-Z and Nas, but they were not alone, there was still an abundance of talent that continued to flow, including the technically skilled Busta Rhymes, Ras Kass and the soulful rapper Common.

Rappers like Foxy Brown, Lauryn Hill, Lil' Kim, The Lady of Rage, Mia X and Missy Elliott underlined a strong female movement in rap and group constellations continued as well with The Roots, The Fugees, The Wu-Tang Clan and Outkast. The single most influential producer in the period was Dr. Dre, a former member of N.W.A, who launched the career of the rapper Snoop Dogg. He was a guest on Dre's classic album *The Chronic*, which defined the sound of West Coast G-Funk. Dre was also responsible for bringing rap into the new millennium when he shaped the sound of *The Slim Shady LP* (1999), the debut album from a promising white rapper called Eminem.

New Millennium Rap (2000-2014)

The movie *8 Mile* (2002) tells the story of the white rapper Jimmy 'B-Rabbit' Smith who tries to make it in an environment dominated by Afro-Americans. In the beginning of the movie, he is humiliated in a battle, but gradually he fights back and in the end he gets a new chance and comes out as a winner. The role as Smith is played by the rapper Eminem, and he basically tells his own story in the movie, which also included his rap song "Lose Yourself," which won an Oscar in the Best Song category - something that hasn't happened for a hip hop artist before him.

Eminem is not the first white solo artist to achieve mainstream success in the genre, a rapper like Vanilla Ice sold millions of records in the 1990s, but he was not respected in the hip hop community. Eminem has achieved both success and respect, and he has renewed the genre with his postmodern play with personas. It is not a new thing in hip hop that a rapper takes on a persona, but Eminem plays with several personas in his music where the narrator shifts between Marshall Mathers (his birth name), Eminem and Slim Shady. Eminem's original use of point of view comes to the fore in the rap song "Stan," whose point of view changes between the obsessive fan Stan and the rapper Slim Shady.

Eminem has also showed his skill as talent scout when he signed the gangsta rapper 50 Cent, whose style has influenced many rappers.

'critically ac'claimed -
røst af pressen

contro'versial (adj) -
kontroversiel

explo'ration (subst) -
udforskning

Ku Klux Klan (prop) -
En højreekstremistisk
organisation i USA,
der blev dannet i
1866 i Tennessee.
Den er berøgt for
racisme og forfølgelse
af afroamerikanere.
Dens medlemmer
har en karakteristisk
beklædning med hvide
kapper og hætter

ac'company (vb) -
 ledsage

as'sociate (vb) -
forbinde med

mi'sogyny (subst) -
kvindelhad

ex'plicit language -
anstødeligt sprog

offensive (adj) -
krænkende

do'mestic violence -
vold i hjemmet

role re'versal - en
situation, hvor en
person påtager sig
en rolle, der står i
modsetning til den
rolle vedkommende
normalt har i relation
til sin omverden.
Et eksempel er en
kvinde, der opfører sig
som en mand

self-ab'sorbed (adj) -
selvoptaget

'venomous (adj) - giftig

blend (vb) -
sammenblende

re'fine (vb) - forfine

stage (subst) - stadiet. En
del af et forløb eller en
udvikling

Another influential rap artist in the new millennium is Kanye West who is also a highly successful producer who has defined a new ambitious sound in hip hop. His album *Yeezus* (2013) was critically acclaimed, but also controversial, and included the single "Black Skinhead" whose exploration of the theme of racism and black identity is both inventive and disturbing. With its twists and turns and references to traditional racist imagery and vocabulary, including a reference to Ku Klux Klan in the accompanying video, West takes the role as a black skinhead, who is not dominated, but dominates others. There are also religious references and generally West has not been afraid to associate himself with God or Jesus in his lyrics, but he has also been accused of misogyny and has been part of an ongoing debate about the amoral nature of rap. This debate has existed almost since the birth of the genre. In 1985, the Parents' Music Resource Center was formed (PMRC), and their impact became visible when a law was passed that determined that parents should be warned about explicit language in music. This was done by placing a sticker on the product with the words "Parental Advisory, Explicit Lyrics".

Parents have been concerned about rap for a long time, but many women have also found rap music's language offensive and troubling. Some women have chosen to fight the battle from within. Even though there are still relatively few female rappers in the new millennium, the female perspective on rap continues to flourish with rappers like Eve and Nicki Minaj who use different strategies of feminism. Eve continues the tradition of storytelling on "Love is Blind" where she tells a story about domestic violence. Minaj, on the other hand, is more anarchistic and uses a strategy of role reversal on "Lookin Ass Nigga." The "niggas" she refers to are self-absorbed wannabe gangsters and drug dealers, and she takes on a macho-attitude where she spits venomous words at them.

Like a true postmodern rapper, Minaj plays with many different roles and attitudes and her music, which can be both mainstream and underground, kitsch and hardcore, also reflects the new millennium where genres are blended and music is distributed digitally and shared around the world. Hip hop is no longer a local phenomenon, but a global genre that has spread around the world and it continues to refine itself through the many rap artists who find new ways of expressing themselves. Even though it is a young genre, rap music has gone through several stages and by now it has even become history, but it is also a history that is still in the making. (2015)

Literature:

Bradley, Adam & Andrew Dutton: *The Anthology of Rap*, Yale University Press, 2010

Bynoe, Yvonne: *Encyclopedia of Rap and Hip Hop Culture*, Greenwood Press, 2006

Chang, Jeff: *Can't Stop Won't Stop. A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, Flury Press, 2005

Hess, Mickey: *Icons of Hip Hop. Volume 1*, Greenwood Press, 2007

Hess, Mickey: *Icons of Hip Hop. Volume 2*, Greenwood Press, 2007

Lomax, Cooke: *The History of Rap Music*, Chelsea House, 2001

Rose, Tricia: *Black Noise. Rap Music and Black Culture in Contemporary America*, Wesleyan University Press, 1994

POST-READING**IN PAIRS** 

- Compare your timelines from your reading instructions and help each other fill in any blanks. Discuss what you chose to include and why.

IN CLASS 

- Create the perfect timeline together in class.

IN GROUPS

- You are divided into groups based on the focus you were assigned in the reading instruction. There are four different groups: 1. Old School Hip Hop, 2. The Golden Age of Hip Hop, 3. Mainstream Hip Hop and 4. New Millennium Rap.
- Your job is to retell/transform your part of the text in a creative way. In other words, you should make a creative history of hip hop based on the information you get in the text. You can do this in different ways: Make a cartoon, make an interview with a rapper, make a short video, make a poem, make a rap or something else.
- The only requirement is that every member of the group has to make a presentation of the group's work in a matrix group, and the presentation should be approximately five minutes (reading the poem, playing the interview and so on). This means that if you choose to do an interview, you have to record it so every member can bring the interview with him/her to the matrix group.

IN MATRIX GROUPS

- Get together in the matrix groups so there is a representative from each hip hop phase (1-4). Present your creative hip hop history to each other. Start with Old School Hip Hop and move on chronologically until you have covered all four phases of hip hop history.
- Remember to upload your products in a shared class folder.

IN CLASS 

- Discuss what you have learned about the history of hip hop. Are there any rappers missing in the history? Who would you have included and why?