

Hip Hop Lesson Plan

Subject: History

Theme(s): Race and inequality

Texts: Akala, 'Knowledge is Power' (Engine-Earz Experiment, 2012), Lupe Fiasco, 'All Black Everything' (Atlantic Records, 2011)

Learning Objectives:

- To gain a significant understanding of black US history and the achievements of black historical figures.
- To analyse the use of history in hip hop track lyrics
- To understand the relevance of black history in modern American society, and to be able to identify contemporary aspects of racial inequality.

The lesson will begin with an introduction to the topic of black history, including finding out which, if any, key moments in black history the pupils can already identify. Following this, the pupils should be encouraged to think of any examples of historical references in lyrics of the music they like to listen to, particularly rap or hip hop. As David Stovall suggests in his ethnographic research of hip hop in education, 'the infusion of hip-hop culture can provide the context for students to develop a critical lens in approaching subject matter and its relevance to their daily lives.'¹ Combining these thoughts, the pupils should offer examples of racial inequality in modern society and their own experiences. The two texts will then be distributed one after the other, in the form of a print out, and the pupils will be asked to work in pairs to begin to analyse the lyrics.

¹ David Stovall, 'We Can Relate: Hip-Hop Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom' *Urban Education*, 2006, Vol.41(6), p.585-602 (p.589).

The first text, verse one of 'Knowledge is Power' by Akala, is intended to establish significant aspects of black history. Although independent interpretation should be encouraged, the main topics which pupils should be guided towards for discussion are the Harlem Renaissance ('jazz', 'Cab Calloway'), Slavery ('the whips the ships', 'slave music') and African History ('schools of Timbuktu', 'thousand oral epics'). In pairs, pupils should work to identify these moments in the lyrics, place them on a timeline and then research each topic, with the use of textbooks or computers, to answer simple questions provided by the teacher (for example, when the historical moment took place, who did it affect/involve?) After the responses to this task have been discussed, the second text should be distributed, the hook and verse one of 'All Black Everything' by Lupe Fiasco. While studying this source, pupils should continue to identify significant moments and figures in black history, such as W.E.B Du Bois, Martin Luther King, and Nelson Mandela, and attempt to make judgements on their chronology and context. Pupils should also be encouraged to infer from this source the way in which Lupe Fiasco rewrites US history to be 'all black everything', and discuss in groups why he may have chosen to approach the topic of history in this way.

Further Tasks:

- Produce a timeline of key events of black US history.
- Produce a Famous Figure profile of one black figure mentioned in the studied lyrics.
- Participate in a class discussion on why black history is a prominent theme of hip hop music, and what the intentions of artists might be by 'rewriting' it.

Bibliography

Akala, 'Knowledge is Power' (Engine-Earz Experiment, 2012)

Fiasco, Lupe, 'All Black Everything' (Atlantic Records, 2011)

Stovall, D., 'We Can Relate: Hip-Hop Culture, Critical Pedagogy, and the Secondary Classroom' *Urban Education*, Vol.41, No. 6 (2006), 585-602

Appendix

1. Verse 1 of 'Knowledge is Power', Akala

We claim we're lovin' this hip hop
Are we ready to understand it
In its fullest cultural state
Beyond its useless branding
Beyond the story that keeps us feeding us the common myth
Done with the talk
But let's not pretend there was no foundation to this art
Because KRS-ONE and Bam would be the first ones to say
Birth of hip hop runs far deeper within our veins
Before Kool Herc came to New York pumping 100 watts
Before the Watts Prophets, Last Poets and Gil Scott
Before there was Jazz
Before there was Blues
Before there was Cab Calloway
Before the whips the ships and all the tragedy
Before we were stripped of Knowledge of our cultural anatomy
You could be apart for generations you're still family
Before there were slaves, fuck the bullshit about slave music
You must have had a cultural base to even produce it
The schools of Timbuktu they already knew
The cycles of the planet and the motion of the moon
150 years before Galileo, check it
And medieval Benin's in the Guinness book of records
And all of them cultures there... they had a Griot speaker
A storytelling musician poet and history keeper
Who had to memorise a couple thousand oral epics
The tradition still exists today but it could get neglected
And hip hop? Needs to be understood
In its fullest context not just as a product of the hood
Cos Miles Davis was rich and still played with the same feeling
It's that cultural memory go and ask Steven
Ella Fitzgerald scatting's basically rapping
When we know we lost our language then you know what has happened
So when you hear somebody's rapping?
The base of it is African
It ain't about excluding no one; it's just accurate...

2. Hook and Verse 1 of 'All Black Everything', Lupe Fiasco

You would never know
If you could ever be
If you never try
You would never see
Stayed in Africa
We ain't never leave
So there wasn't no slaves in our history
Were no slave ships, were no misery, call me crazy, or isn't he
See I fell asleep and I had a dream, it was all black everything

Uh, and we ain't get exploited
White man ain't feared so he did not destroy it
We ain't work for free, see they had to employ it
Built it up together so we equally appointed
First four hundred years, see we actually enjoyed it
Constitution written by the W.E.B. Du Bois
Were no reconstructions, Civil War got avoided
Little black Sambo grows up to be a lawyer
Extra extra on the news stands
Black woman voted head of Ku Klux Klan
Malcolm little dies as an old man
Martin Luther King read the eulogy for him
Followed by Bill O'Reilly who read from the Quran
President Bush sends condolences from Iran
Where FOX News reports live
That Ahmadinejad wins Mandela peace prize