

Word Count: 569

Hip Hop Lesson Plan

Subject: English Literature

Texts: Jurassic 5, *Concrete Schoolyard* (1998) & Mos Def, *Mathematics* (1999).

Theme: “Protest” - Verbal and Physical Conflict

Using Hip Hop texts to teach literature will hopefully encourage an assessment of the author/artist’s use of language and literary techniques, as well as a close, critical analysis of the context.

Like Hill’s lesson, I opted for “non-mainstream” or contemporary chart hits so that students would not be overly familiar with the texts, hopefully promoting a reading of the lyrics which was not influenced by presuppositions (Hill, 2009). The song’s reflect the theme of the lesson and incorporate a key element of rap music: verbal battling and lyrical skill.

My hope is that because the text’s I have chosen provide an emphasis on the lyrical skill of the rapper, this will encourage students to think about how these artists have used literary techniques to reflect on wider contextual issues, as well as how “conflict” is embodied by the songs themselves. The first half of the lesson will focus on this through a close reading of *Concrete Schoolyard*; while the second half will look at *Mathematics*, in order to develop notions about “conflict” and look at some of the contextual issues influencing and reflected by, the artist’s work. The aim is to develop student’s analysis of language, form and structure, as well as contextual awareness. As a lesson theme, conflict and combat is an interesting parallel to the ideas brought up by H. Samy Alim, who suggests that confusions and tension exists in “the language education of linguistically profiled and marginalized youth”¹ (Alim, 2007: p. 162), and Hip Hop education may be a productive way to resolve this.

“Protest” – Verbal and Physical Conflict

Aims:

- Students engage in a close analysis of the texts and develop an awareness of the literary techniques employed.
 - Use Mos Def’s *Mathematics* to bridge a link between rap’s emphasis on lyrical technique and skill, the literary techniques used, and the wider contextual issues: protest, violence, police and prisons.
 - Verbal battles and expressing lyrical skill is common in rap dialogue: students are encouraged to extend analysis to draw parallels between this and the context.
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Lesson structure:

- Teacher informs about the weeks theme
- Pre-listening activity (creative thinking before engaging with text)
- Students are given the chance to read the lyrics before listening
- Listen to texts in turn
- Group discussions and questions:

Concrete Schoolyard:

- How does rhyme effect the meaning of the song?
- Give examples of the metaphor of death and pain in the song. How does Jurassic 5 use this to emphasise lyrical skill, battle and combat in Hip Hop?
- Discuss the shifts in perspective and voice as each rapper takes on a different verse.
- How does the song call on the past, as well as the present moment?

Mathematics:

- Discuss “Mighty Mos Def”’s use of alliteration.
- Mos Def emphasises his rhyming skill: what other language techniques are used the song?
- Numbers and statistics are repeated in a piece which emphasises lyrical and verbal skill. Do you think this is effective and why?
- Discuss the theme of police and prisons.
- What does Mos Def mean when he says, “You want to know how the rhyme you better learn how to add”, in relation to America’s prison industrial complex?

Task:

Using the same style or rhyme scheme as Mos Def or J5, describe a political issue which inspires or frustrates you.

Reference List

Mark Lamont Hill, *Beats, Rhymes, and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York: Teachers College Press/Columbia University Press, 2009).

H. Samy Alim, “Critical Hip-Hop Language Pedagogies: Combat, Consciousness, and the Cultural Politics of Communication” in *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, Vol 6, No. 2 (2007) pp. 161–176.

Appendix

Jurassic 5, *Concrete Schoolyard* (1998).

[Intro]

We were sitting out on a step, you know

[Verse 1]

Now I'm a say this one time boy and that's my word
We rockin shots and not fire through the Hindenburg
The contribution is clear
You add water to bone
And get the Jurassic 5 on the microphone
Now if you like the tone
And how the harmony's done
And the sucka mc's die before they've begun
Well I'd like to know if
You've got the notion
Cause we're number one
I'm not trying to say my style is better than yours
I'm just on some other shit
I'm all about the beats and the lyrics
So when you hear it you can feel it
The vibe is energized by the presence of my spirit
No interference we persevere
The purpose is clear
We're here to leave your ear hurtin severe
You're lurking in fear
Cause we take it back like Robin Loxley
Rockin from country sides to spots where hard rocks be
I often wonder if these MC's even know how it feels
To dedicate they whole life to this mic of steel
Its not about the bills
That's not keeping it real
A lot of tight rappers out here ain't got no deals
We appeal to the brothers with flow finesse
Cause it's the 100 watt blood shot game of death
Cause we're protected by the covenant of words and beats
Rewind and feel the heat
Recline and take a seat
So ah...

[Hook:]

Let's take it back to the concrete streets
Original beats from real live mc's
Playground tactics
No rabbit in a hat tricks
Just that classic

Rap shit from Jurassic
 Let's take it back to the concrete streets
 Original beats from real live mc's
 Playground tactics
 No rabbit in a hat tricks
 Just that classic
 Rap shit from Jurassic

[Verse 2]

Now I walk from Tranzania
 Earthquake Transalvania
 And on my way I kicked a whole through the wall of China
 Just to get the right blend
 Cause its schizophrenic of the pathway to livin
 I fell into the deep end
 You shouldn't have told me
 The pyramids can hold me
 So now a contest is what you owe me
 Pull out your beats pull out your cuts
 Give us a mic, whatup
 And we goin tear shit up
 I'm on some old and forgotten
 Sun up to sun down
 Like picking cotton
 The nutty professor science droppin
 Rockin Robbin's hood
 From New York to Compton
 Me and my three sons
 Jabari, Shakir, and Kahsum

[Hook:]

Let's take it back to the concrete streets
 Original beats from real live mc's
 Playground tactics
 No rabbit in a hat tricks
 Just that classic
 Rap shit from Jurassic
 Let's take it back to the concrete streets
 Original beats from real live mc's
 Playground tactics
 No rabbit in a hat tricks
 Just that classic
 Rap shit from Jurassic

[Verse 3]

Hey, I'm 2na-Fish from U-N-I-T-Y
 Do or die
 Anti-illuminati, why
 Do the liquid from my vocals

Make the ghetto start swimming
 Forever winning I'm in it
 Like Medolark Lemon
 I get goose bumps
 When the baseline thumps
 A sucka MC freestyle
 He had mine for lunch
 Marc 7even get you open like an attach'
 Briefcase in this case
 The victor is no way
 Ah, ah the tool spinners
 Cooking the full dinner
 Killing the first born of lyrical Yul Brenner's
 When is it the academy
 Rattling your anatomy
 That'll be J 5 so kill all of your fake flattery
 That'll be the day
 When labels pay our way
 2na what you say
 When MC's come to play
 Man fe dead
 Cause we take it back like Spinal Tap
 Preparing your intellect before your final nap
 So ah...

[Hook:]

Let's take it back to the concrete streets
 Original beats from real live mc's
 Playground tactics
 No rabbit in a hat tricks
 Just that classic
 Rap shit from Jurassic
 Let's take it back to the concrete streets
 Original beats from real live mc's
 Playground tactics
 No rabbit in a hat tricks
 Just that classic
 Rap shit from Jurassic

[Verse 4]

You got beef now watch how I settle it
 I'll fuck around and arrest your whole development
 I'm eloquent
 When it comes to digital display
 I'm ready for the world while you earl off the Tanqueray
 Tactics, my shits Jurassic 5
 Fingers of death while you exhale and inhale
 With a deep breath with my Chop-Sui style
 Cause I'm a lyrical chef
 I gets mines to the death
 Cause I be cookin

From here to Brooklyn
Your shits annoying like fat-ass Bookman
On Good Times
When I rhyme
I hit the designated area
I hope you got your shots cause this is lyrical malaria
Spreading, beheading fools with the punishment
I live in America but fuck this government
A hundred and fifty times over silk with lead
While y'all drink the Similac
My rhymes are breast-fed
No artificial nipples
I flip the real skills
I thought I told you once
I kick the lyrical windmills
And backspin Benedict
Strictly for my benefit
I step on toes when I flow don't get offended
Come and get with it
Comprehended when I kick it
I represent the real
From the beginning to the end of it

Mos Def, *Mathematics*, (1999).

[Intro]

Bucka-bucka-bucka-bucka-bucka-bucka, haha!
 You know the deal: it's just me, yo
 Beats by Su-Primo for all of my people, negroes and latinos
 And even the gringos

[Verse 1]

Yo, check it
 One for Charlie Hustle, 2 for Steady Rock
 3 for the forthcoming live future shock
 It's 5 dimensions, 6 senses
 7 firmaments of heaven and hell, 8 Million Stories to tell
 9 planets faithfully keep in orbit with the probable tenth
 The universe expands length
 The body of my text possess extra strength
 Power-lift the powerless up out of this towering inferno
 My ink so hot it burn through the journal
 I'm blacker than midnight on Broadway and Myrtle
 Hip-Hop passed all your tall social hurdles
 Like the nationwide project-prison-industry complex
 Working-class poor: better keep your alarm set
 Streets too loud to ever hear freedom ring
 Say evacuate your sleep, it's dangerous to dream
 For ch-ching, cats get the "cha-pow!" You dead now
 Killing fields need blood to graze the cash cow
 It's a numbers game, but shit don't add up somehow
 Like I got, 16 to 32 bars to rock it
 But only 15% of profits ever see my pockets like
 69 billion in the last 20 years
 Spent on national defense but folks still live in fear like
 Nearly half of America's largest cities is one-quarter black
 That's why they gave Ricky Ross all the crack
 16 ounces to a pound, 20 more to a ki
 A 5-minute sentence hearing and you're no longer free
 40% of Americans own a cell phone
 So they can hear everything that you say when you ain't home
 I guess Michael Jackson was right: "You Are Not Alone"
 Rock your hardhat, black, cause you in the Terrordome
 Full of hard niggas, large niggas, dice-tumblers
 Young teens and prison greens facing life numbers
 Crack mothers, crack babies and AIDS patients
 Young bloods can't spell but they could rock you in PlayStation
 This new math is whipping motherfuckers' ass
 You want to know how to rhyme you better learn how to add
 It's mathematics

[Hook]

"The Mighty Mos Def"

"It's simple mathematics"
 "Check it out"
 "I revolve around science.."
 "What are we talking about here?"
 "The Mighty Mos Def"
 "It's simple mathematics"
 "Check it out"
 "I revolve around science.."
 "What are we talking about here?"
 "Do your math, do your math"
 "1, 2, 3, 4"
 "What are we talking about here?"

[Verse 2]

Yo

It's one universal law but 2 sides to every story
 3 strikes and you be in for life, mandatory
 4 MC's murdered in the last 4 years
 I ain't trying to be the fifth one, the millennium is here
 Yo it's 6 Million Ways to Die, from the 7 deadly thrills
 8-year olds getting found with 9mils
 It's 10 P.M., where your seeds at? What's the deal?
 He on the hill pumping krill to keep they belly filled
 Light in the ass with heavy steel, sights on the pretty shit in life
 Young soldiers trying to earn their next stripe
 When the average minimum wage is \$5.15
 You best believe you've got to find a new grind to get C.R.E.A.M
 The white unemployment rate? It's nearly more than triple for black
 Some front-liners got their gun in your back
 Bubbling crack, jewel theft and robbery to combat poverty
 And end up in the global jail economy
 Stiffer stipulations attached to each sentence
 Budget cutbacks but increased police presence
 And even if you get out of prison still living
 Join the other 5 million under state supervision
 This is business: no faces, just lines and statistics
 From your phone, your zip code to S-S-I digits
 The system break man, child, and women into figures
 2 columns for "who is" and "who ain't niggas"
 Numbers is hard and real and they never have feelings
 But you push too hard, even numbers got limits
 Why did one straw break the camel's back?
 Here's the secret
 The million other straws underneath it: it's all mathematics(math)

[Hook]

"The Mighty Mos Def"
 "It's simple mathematics"
 "Check it out"
 "I revolve around science.."
 "What are we talking about here?"

"The Mighty Mos Def"

"It's simple mathematics"

"Check it out"

"I revolve around science.."

"What are we talking about here?"

"Do your math, do your math"

"1, 2, 3, 4"

"What are we talking about here?"

[Outro]

(Mathematics, mathematics, mathematics...)

Lyrics from genius.com