

## **Hip Hop Education Lesson Plan**

Subject: English Lit.

Theme: Incarceration

### **Lesson Overview**

This lesson is primarily focused on the theme of incarceration in two hip hop texts (both appendicized): One verse from ‘One Love’ by Nas, and another plus a chorus from ‘Up North Trip’ by Mobb Deep. The lesson is designed to have students critically analyse literary techniques and concepts from each text, and then go on to identify, analyse and ultimately compare and contrast the key themes and ideas present. Fear of incarceration amongst urban youth, the effect of prison on the psyche, violence in and outside of prison, are all ideas to be looked at concerning the lesson’s main theme, but outside of that I would also expect students to identify secondary themes present in the text (with teacher guidance if necessary), namely crime in general and representations of ‘the hood’. Ultimately this lesson aims to allow students to partake in ‘literary interpretation and criticism through the lens of hip-hop culture.’<sup>1</sup> This plan is designed for a class of sixteen but numbers can vary depending on size of class.

### **Learning Aims/Objectives**

- Students will apply traditional literary interpretive skills
- Students will be able to critically read literary texts in general and hip hop texts in particular
- Students will be able to identify social themes from a literary text and explore them
- Students will have a greater understanding of New York slang

### **Lesson Plan**

#### **First Task: Close Literary Reading**

The class will be split into eight pairs, with four reading ‘One Love’, and four ‘Up North Trip’. This initial task will be focused on literary techniques, so students will be asked to pick out, highlight and name as many examples of literary/poetic techniques as possible, and think about how they add significance or enhance meaning. No terms will be named prior to the reading, in order to encourage students to identify what techniques are present independently, but some I would expect students to identify are: Internal Rhyme; Rhyme Schemes; Imagery; Enjambement; Persona; Metaphor. After fifteen minutes, each pair will be asked to give and explain one example each.

#### **Second Task: Wider Group Discussion**

The class will then come together for a wider discussion based on themes of the text. The guiding statement for the discussion will be: Compare and contrast how each artist represents

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<sup>1</sup> Marc Lamont Hill, *Beats, Rhymes and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2009), p.19.

the issue of incarceration in their texts, but more specific questions to stimulate conversation are:

- What do Nas and Prodigy have to say about the psychological effect of incarceration?
- What do you make about the last three lines of Nas' verse? Is there a wider point here about why people might turn to crime?
- Why do you think Nas and Prodigy chose to write their verses in the second person?
- Do you think there is a sense of fear conveyed in one or both of the verses?
- Why does the threat of incarceration not seem to be enough to deter Nas or Prodigy from a life of crime?
- Can you tell from these verses that Nas and Mobb Deep are both from Queensbridge Housing Projects?
- How do Nas and Prodigy contrast life in and outside of prison? What are the similarities/differences?
- How do the persona's of Nas and Prodigy contrast?

### Final Task

Each student will pick one or two lines from each text and write a short paragraph analysing both the literary/poetic techniques present in each, as well as their contribution to the wider themes of the text. Students should use notes/ideas from the previous two tasks to do this. The paragraph should be comparative in nature, and make some kind of judgement/critique of each text.

## **Bibliography**

Hill, Marc Lamont, *Beats, Rhymes and Classroom Life: Hip-Hop Pedagogy and the Politics of Identity* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 2009)

## **Appendix**

(Italicised/underlined words explained at verse's end)

Nas, 'One Love' in *Illmatic* (1994)

[Verse 2]

Dear Born, you'll be out soon, stay strong  
Out in New York the same shit is goin' on  
The crackheads stalkin', loudmouths is talkin'  
Hold, check out the story yesterday when I was walkin'  
That nigga you shot last year tried to appear  
Like he hurtin' somethin'  
Word to mother, heard him frontin'  
And he be pumpin' on your block  
Your man gave him your Glock  
And now they run together — what up, son? Whatever  
Since I'm on the streets I'ma put it to a cease  
But I heard you blew a nigga with a ox for the phone piece  
Wildin' on the Island, but now in Elmira  
Better chill, 'cause them niggas will put that ass on fire  
Last time you wrote you said they tried you in the showers  
But maintain, when you come home the corner's ours  
On the reals, all these crab niggas know the deal  
When we start the revolution all they probably do is squeal  
But chill, see you on the next V-I  
I gave your mom dukes loot for kicks, plus sent you flicks  
Your brother's buckwildin' in 4-Main, he wrote me  
He might beat his case, 'til he come home he'll play it lowkey  
So stay civilized, time flies  
Though incarcerated your mind dies  
I hate it when your moms cries  
It kinda makes me want to murder, for reala  
I even got a mask and gloves to bust slugs, but one love

(*Ox* - Razor; *Island* - Rikers Island; *Elmira* - Elmira Correctional Facility, a maximum security prison; *V-I* - Prison Visitation; *Buckwildin'* - To act crazy or unrestrained; *4-Main* - Main cell block of a prison; *Slugs* - bullets)

Mobb Deep, 'Up North Trip' in *The Infamous...* (1995)

[Verse 1: Prodigy]

It all began on the street, to the back of a blue police vehicle  
Next come the bookings, the way things is lookin  
It's Friday, you in for a long stay  
Gettin' shackled on the bus first thing come Monday  
Hopin in your mind you'll be released one day  
But knowin, home is a place you're not goin' for a long while  
Now you're up on the isle  
And the position that you in got you refusin' to smile  
But keep in mind there's a brighter day, after your time spent  
Used to be wild, but locked up, you can't get bent  
Thought you could hack it, now you're requestin' PC  
You're fragile, it ain't hard to see  
Niggas like that don't associate with me  
I'd rather, get busy to the third degree  
Cause the war in population's on infinitely  
If this was the street, my razor would be a mac demon  
Hit you up, leave your whole face screamin'  
What you in for kid - bustin nuts?  
Cats heard of me in street stories told inside this trap  
Who are you to look at me with your eyes like that?  
Wisen up youngblood, before you make things escalate  
And I would hate to set your crooked ass straight...

[Hook x2: Havoc and Prodigy]

Livin' the high life, make your moves at night  
Pack your heat in this war zone, niggas is trife  
Runnin' from one time, ain't no time to slip  
Make one false move and it's a up north trip

(*Isle* - Rikers Island; *Bent* - Drunk; *PC* - Protective Custody; *Mac Demon* - MAC-10 machine pistol; *One Time* - Police)