

## Handout

Atmosphere, 'The River', *Sad Clown Bad Dub 2* (Rhymesayers Entertainment, 2000)

### Verse 1: Slug

It was a purple-purple sky and an orange-orange moon  
And everyone was whistling the same damn tune  
Except Brian, Brian stared out across the field  
And watch the horizon blossom to cop a feel  
Over the edge of the world  
The one they're all afraid to walk  
The rationale for why they're so high on the small talk  
But Brian knows where the crows all go  
To find the ifs, and the ands and the butts and alsos

### Chorus

If I could run through the woods, and speed like the light  
I'd find the answers to why, and be back by tonight  
If I could fly through the fog and look at this rock  
I'd figure out how to keep Hell off of my block  
But as it stands, I stay content  
Tryin' to be the magic man, and pay my rent  
Wishing that Brian would turn me on to the secrets he sought  
While we keep burning the dawn, just to keep the day hot

### Verse 2: Slug

If I could ask you one question, I'd ask where you went  
You could teach me a lesson every time I got bent  
But the alcohol don't make me forget about it all  
Doesn't matter the season the leaves can still fall  
They slipped hidden messages within the cards that were dealt  
Trying to understand myself and all of the sorrow I felt  
For as simple as I am how'd it get so complex  
Got me studying the margins and disregarding the text  
I open the curtains and listen to the traffic go  
But I still get nervous each time my piece passes go  
The residue is thick and the memory fails  
I still laugh cuz the path feels a lot like a trail

### [Chorus]

### Verse 3: Slug

We used to be a couple of pimps walking the hallways with pride  
Drunk or sober, life was nothing short of rollercoaster rides  
Trip to the clubs, nod the skull to the rhythm  
All we wanted out of life was what was given  
And when you passed I wanted to take back the time we wasted  
I'd trade all the buzzes in for one more conversation  
We can sit in the shade and discuss the meaning of sacred  
Cause I can't see the garden no more, just the aphids  
But the wind still blows and the plains still grow  
And I wish your name was on the guest list at my shows  
I got to believe that you can see me when I find my freedom  
Cause you got to meet the sun before you got to meet my son

### Bridge x2

And when I see lightning, feels like my buzz is heightening  
Every time I feel the sun, I can smell the love  
And when I smell the air I can hear a child trying  
But every time I hear a river I think the mother is crying

Excerpt from *Hamlet* (Act I, Scene V, ll. 96-105)

Remember thee!

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
In this distracted globe. Remember thee!

Yea, from the table of my memory

I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,

All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,

That youth and observation copied there;

And thy commandment all alone shall live

Within the book and volume of my brain,

Unmix'd with baser matter: yes, by heaven! [...]

## Lesson plan

In this lesson I will be focussing almost entirely on Atmosphere's 'The River' as I believe there will be more than enough material to get through but have also included a small excerpt of Hamlet's second soliloquy. I chose 'The River' as it is not too complicated in terms of language but is rich and easily relatable in its content, and I have chosen this excerpt of Hamlet due to its similarity in form and content.

My main learning objectives for this lesson:

- To disrupt preconceived notions about what hip hop is or should be and open the students up to the vast array of forms it can take.
- To understand how soliloquy differs from monologue.
- To identify whether the primary text chosen is a soliloquy or a monologue and why.
- To make an interpretation of the text, identifying important themes within the overarching theme of mourning.
- To understand how the use of tense, imagery, and language relates to the themes of the text.
- To be able to relate 'The River' to the excerpt from *Hamlet* and therefore break down the dividing line between canonical prose and hip hop.

Listed below are the tasks for the lesson:

- We will begin by looking at the definition of soliloquies provided by Alison and Stephen Linstead: 'Soliloquies can be understood as internalized or imagined intersubjective encounters [...]'.<sup>1</sup> I will help pick apart this quote and ask them to identify how this differs from a monologue.
- We will then listen to the album version of 'The River' and I will ask the students as a group what they think it is about, replaying the second verse if they are not able to identify its meaning straight away.
- I will then split the class into six small groups of my choosing to reduce the likelihood of them making light of what is quite a serious topic. Each group will be assigned a verse so that we receive two interpretations of each verse. Each group will then say what they think their verse was about in relation to its major theme of loss and each member will be asked to point out any parts of their verse that they believed to be especially powerful in demonstrating this.
- Following this, we will discuss the chorus and bridge as a group so that we are able to unify what each group's verse means holistically, we will then list any themes that recur throughout the text within the overarching subject of loss: nature, regret, nostalgia, idealism, and any others they notice.
- After our discussion we will listen to the only occurrence of 'The River' being performed so that their interpretation is seen more vividly in Slug's emotion.
- Finally, we will analyse how the soliloquy excerpt from *Hamlet* relates to 'The River' thematically and in its form based on what we have discussed.

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<sup>1</sup> Alison Linstead, Stephen Linstead, *Organization and Identity*, (London: Routledge, 2009), p.48