

STATION 1

The images of hip hop

1) Describe the atmosphere of a hip hop video and its general effect on the viewer. You can choose from the list of adjectives below. Talk about your results in the group.

aggressive, offensive, pushy, menacing,
macho, sexist
funny, ironic, cheerful, amusing, entertaining
monotonous, boring
creative, unusual, surprising, playful
dynamic, lively, hectic
sexy, frivolous, provocative
harmonious
cool, relaxed
superficial, stupid, simple-minded
critical, meaningful
confusing, incomprehensible
other: _____



2) Describe the singer(s)/dancer(s) and how they perform:

outward appearance (clothes, hair, jewellery etc.):

voice:

action, movement:

gestures:

facial expression:

interaction with others:

3) Describe the background images.

4) What do you think does the video try to express? Does it tell a story?

STATION 3

The language of rap

Look at this passage from a rap ("Peter Piper") by Run-DMC.

Now Peter Piper picked peppers, but Run⁽¹⁾ rocked rhymes
 Humpty Dumpty fell down, that's his hard time ...
 Jay's⁽²⁾ like King Midas, as I was told
 Everything that he touched turned to gold
 He's the greatest of the greater, get it straight, he's great
 Claims fame 'cause his name is known in every state
 His name is Jay, to see him play will make you say:
 "Goddamn, that deejay made my day!"
 Tricks are for kids, he plays much gigs
 He's the Big Bad Wolf and you're the Three Pigs
 He's the Big Bad Wolf in your neighborhood
 Not "bad" meaning bad, but bad meaning good!


RUN-DMC GREATEST HITS


Examine the text by the help of the following questions:

1. Who is meant by Peter Piper, Humpty Dumpty, Midas, Big Bad Wolf? What kind of literature do they belong to?
2. Find out the meaning of the slang words "gig" and "bad". Try to think of reasons why so many rappers prefer slang to standard language.
3. Examine the rhythm and the rhyming technique.

These literary terms will help you:

- end-rhyme (masculine or feminine): syllables rhymed at the end of lines of verse
- half-rhyme: imperfect rhymes (e. g. hair – tear)
- internal rhyme: words rhyming within a line of verse, rather than at the end of lines
- rhyme cluster: a series of similar rhymes
- assonance: similarity in the stressed vowel sounds of words that are close together in a poem (e. g. "around one thousand pounds")
- alliteration: the use of words that begin with the same consonants (e. g. "Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness" (John Keats))

4. Like many rappers, Run-DMC show off in their texts. Read the following passage from "Hip Hop America" (George 1999: 50f) that tries to explain why rappers like to "show off". Sum up the content in your own words. Find other examples of raps where the MC shows off (for this you can use the internet lyrics collection: www.ohhla.com).

For certain African-American men, pride and arrogance are bound together like electrical wiring. Twisted tight and full of energy these two qualities become one supercharged current that burns away humility. In general this is perceived as a bad thing. Yet for generations of disenfranchised men this has been an invigorating source of self-empowerment. (...) For African-American males, this pride can be an aggressive manifestation of identity. (...) It is Sammy Davies Jr., writing an autobiography titled "Yes, I Can" despite working in an America that often says "No, nigga, you can't." (...) And it is the essential swagger that underpins hip hop. Black male pride is a weapon and an attitude. It is an attack on the negative and it is a way to spin the negative on its head.

(1) Run – Run-DMC, a very successful rap group from Queens
 (2) Jay – Jam Master Jay (Jayson Mizell), member of Run-DMC

STATION 4

Old-school rap – KRS-One: Poetry (extract)

Well now you're forced to listen to the teacher and
the lesson
Class is in session so you can stop guessin'
If this is a tape or a written down memo
See I am a professional, this is not a demo
5 fact call it a lecture, a visual picture
Sort of a poetic and rhythm-like mixture
Listen I'm not dissin' but there's somethin' that
you're missin'
Maybe you should touch reality, stop wishin'
For beats with plenty bass and lyrics said in haste
10 this meaning doesn't manifest, put it to rest
I am a poet, you try to show it, yet blow it
It takes concentration for fresh communication
Observation, that is to see without speaking
Take off your coat, take notes, I am teachin'
15 class, or rather school, cause you need schooling
I am not a king or queen, I'm not ruling
This is an introduction to poetry
A small dedication to those that might know of me
They might know of you and maybe your gang
20 But one thing's for sure, neither one of y'all can hang
Cause, yo, I'm like an arrow, and Scott is the crossbow
Say something now ... thought so
You seem to be the type that only understand
The annihilation and destruction of the next man
25 That's not poetry, that is insanity
It's simply fantasy far from reality
Poetry is the language of imagination
Poetry is a form of positive creation
Difficult, isn't it? The point? You're missin' it
30 Your face is in front of my hand, so I'm dissin' it (...)
See I come from the Bronx so just kiss this
Boogie Down Productions is somewhat an experiment
The antidote for suck MC's and they're fearin' it
It's self-explanatory, no-one's writin' for me
35 The poetry I'm rattlin' is really not for battlin' (...)
I'm teaching poetry
I'm teaching poetry
Scott LaRock
We're teaching po-e-try

From: *Criminal Minded* (1987)

Slang expressions

- 7 **diss** – to scorn, snub, belittle (from: dismiss, disrespect, disapprove)
- 11 **blow** – not manage, waste
- 20 **hang** – maybe: be or stay cool, understand, compete
- 33 **suck** – idiot

Annotations

Boogie Down Productions: name of the hip hop duo formed by KRS-One and Scott LaRock in the Bronx in 1986.
KRS-One: an acronym for "Knowledge Reigns Supreme Over Nearly Everyone". Born as Lawrence "Kris" Parker, KRS-One is one of the most respected figures in hip hop. He was the central creative force on the Stop the Violence Movement's "Self Destruction", a record and video of several famous rappers that condemned black-on-black violence, one of the great problems of America's black communities today. KRS-One has written articles about racism at schools for *The New York Times* and has lectured at several famous universities like Columbia and Harvard. He once said: "I speak to the human intelligence. I want to show kids another way to deal with things. We can deal with things by being intelligent and dealing with our problems head on."
Scott LaRock: Scott Sterling, DJ, former partner of KRS-One. They'd met at a men's shelter in the Bronx, where LaRock, a college grad, was a counselor and the homeless KRS a client. Together they released *Criminal Minded*. Not long afterward, on August 27, 1987, Scott was shot dead in the Bronx, trying to intercede on behalf of a friend in an argument. He was twenty-five years old.

Questions on the text

1. Who does KRS-One address?
2. What does he think of his "target group"?
3. What "profession" does he claim for himself?
4. How does he define the term "poetry"?
5. Find the passages where the speaker shows off and where he threatens someone.
6. Give examples of KRS-One's rhyming technique.
7. What other stylistic devices does the text contain?
8. Compare the text with this passage from Eminem's song "Words Are Weapons". Find parallels and differences.

Eminem: Words Are Weapons (extract)

Chorus:

My words are weapons
I use 'em to crush my opponents
My words are weapons
I never show no emotion
My words are weapons
I use 'em to kill whoever's steppin' to me
My words are like weaponry on a record.

Yo, the rage I release on a page
Is like a demon unleashed in a cage
Lunatic, soon as I hit the stage
My mind is like a f***in' stick of dynamite (...)

STATION 5

**Contemporary white rap –
Eminem: White America**

America!! Hahaha! We love you!

How many people are proud to be citizens of this beautiful country of ours?

The stripes and the stars for the rights that men have died for to protect

The women and men who have broken their necks for the freedom of speech the

- 5 United States government has sworn to uphold... (Yo, I want everybody to listen to the words of this song) ... or so we are told!

I never woulda dreamed in a million years I'd see So many motherf***in' people who feel like me Who share the same views and the same exact beliefs

- 10 It's like a f***in' ARMY marchin' in back of me. So many lives I touched, so many anger aimed In no particular direction, just sprays and sprays And straight through your radio waves it plays and plays 'til it stays stuck in your head for days and days.

- 15 Who woulda thought – standin' in this mirror bleachin' my hair With some peroxide, reachin' for a t-shirt to wear That I would catapult to the forefront of rap like this? I must've struck a chord with somebody up in the office 'Cause Congress keep tellin' me I ain't causin' nuthin but problems.

- 20 And now they're sayin' I'm in trouble with the government – I'm lovin' it! I shovelled s*** all my life and now I'm dumpin' it on... (Chorus)

White America! I could be one of your kids
White America! Little Eric looks just like this
White America! Erica loves my s***

- 25 I go to TRL – look how many hugs I get!

Look at these eyes, baby blue, baby just like yourself If they were brown Shady would lose, Shady sits on the shelf But Shady's cute, Shady knew Shady's dimples would help Make ladies swoon baby (ooh baby) – look at my sales!

30 Let's do the math – if I was black I woulda sold half I ain't have to graduate from Lincoln High School to know that.

But I could rap, so f*** school, I'm too cool to go back Gimme the mic, show me where the f***in' studio's at.

When I was underground, no one gave a f*** I was white,

- 35 No labels wanted to sign me, almost gave up, I was like

F*** it – until I met Dre the only one to look past Gave me a chance and I lit a fire under his ass Helped him get back to the top, every fan black that I got

Was probably his in exchange for every white fan that he's got

- 40 Like damn – we just swapped! Sittin' back lookin' at s***, wow,

I'm like my skin – is it startin' to work to my benefit now? It's ...

(Chorus)

See, the problem is I speak to suburban kids Who otherwise woulda never knew these words exist Whose moms probably woulda never gave two squirts of p**s

- 45 'til I created so much motherf***in' turbulence! Straight out the tube, right into your living rooms I came

And kids flipped, when they knew I was produced by Dre That's all it took, and they were instantly hooked right in And they connected with me too, because I looked like them.

- 50 That's why they put my lyrics up under this microscope

Searchin' with a fine-tooth comb, it's like this rope Waitin' to choke, tightenin' around my throat Watchin' me while I write this, like I don't like this (Nope!)

All I hear is: lyrics, lyrics, constant controversy, sponsors working

- 55 Round the clock to try to stop my concerts early, surely

Hip Hop was never a problem in Harlem only in Boston

After it bothered the fathers of daughters startin' to blossom.

So now I'm catchin' the flak from these activists when they raggin'

Actin' like I'm the first rapper to smack a bitch or say faggot s***!

60 Just look at me like I'm your closest pal
The posterchild, the motherf***ed spokesman now for...
(Chorus)
So to the parents of America
I am the derringer aimed at little Erica to attack her character
The ringleader of this circus of worthless pawns

65 Sent to lead the march right up to the steps of Congress
And p***s on the lawns of the White House
To burn the flag and replace it with a Parental Advisory sticker
To spit liquor in the faces of this democracy of hypocrisy.
F*** you Ms Cheney! F*** you Tipper Gore!

70 F*** you with the free-est of speech
This Divided States of Embarassment will allow me to have!
F*** you!
-- I'm just playin' America – you know I love you!

From: *The Eminem Show* (2002)

Annotations

- 25 **TRL** – famous show on MTV
- 27 **Shady** (also Slim Shady) – Marshall Mathers' pseudonym before he called himself Eminem
- 36 **Dre** (also Dr Dre) – pseudonym of Andre Young, one of the most important black hip hop producers
- 46 **tube** – television
- 58 **flak** – aggression, trouble, criticism (from German "Flugabwehrkanone")
- 59 **faggot** – pejorative for homosexual man
- 63 **derringer** – a pocket pistol of large calibre (after Henry Derringer, U.S. gunsmith, who invented it)
- 67 **Parental Advisory sticker** – sticker on many hip hop CDs warning of "explicit language"
- 69 **Ms Cheney** – wife of the Vice President of the United States (2002)
- 70 **Tipper Gore** – wife of Bill Clinton's Vice President Al Gore. She is the most prominent critic of gangsta rap and violence in rap songs.

Questions on the text

1. Sum up the contents of each verse in not more than two sentences.
2. What do we learn about Eminem's biography?
3. How does Eminem try to explain the criticism he gets for his songs? Do you agree?
4. Try to explain the images in lines 63 and 64.
5. What does he mean by "this democracy of hypo-

crisy" and "This Divided States of Embarassment"?

6. Discuss how you understand the first and the last line of this song.
7. Discuss the reasons for Eminem's success and the limits of "freedom of speech".
8. Inform yourself about other texts by Eminem (see www.ohhla.com). Do you think this is "poetry"? Give reasons for your answer!
9. Write either
 - a letter to Eminem in which a parent explains why he does not want his teenage child to listen to violent and insulting hip hop texts or
 - a letter to Tipper Gore in which you explain the quality of Eminem's texts.

The following passage from "Hip Hop America" may give you some arguments:

Rap lyrics that describe violence are a natural consequence of a world where a sixteen-year-old is shot at close range over (= because of) his jacket by classmates, where a fifteen-year-old boy is fatally stabbed by another teen over his glasses, where a seventeen-year-old is stabbed to death after hitting another teen with an errant basketball pass. In a world where crack-empowered gangs run on a philosophy of old-fashioned, excessive, insatiable, and unending revenge – one that is supported by the plots of American classics from "The Searchers" to "Star Wars" – gangsta rap is just further exploration of this theme. (George 1999: 49)

