



Lecture 6: The Art of MCing

MUS 17: Hip-Hop

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The Art of Emcee

Rap as Poetry

Rapping vs. MCing

Rapping, also known as “MCing”, refers to performing lyrics rhythmically to a beat as a type of vocal percussion, often with a heavy emphasis on rhyming and rhyme schemes.

- MC is sometimes used to imply a greater degree of live performance skill to “rock the crowd”.
- Another use of the term is to suggest that “rappers” are more commercially focused and less skillful, while “MCs” are more genuine, authentic, and proficient.



Emcee

- If someone is watching or not, if money is involved, or if the general public approves, are not the concerns of the emcee.
- They write and spit (recite) rhymes because it is part of who they are as human beings.
- Many of them save looseleaf notebooks full of rhymes, or keep them in their phones.
- A cypher, or rhyming session is where emcees form a circle trade bars with each other. Cyphers are used for training purposes, networking, and displaying your skills to other emcees (dance session/cypher is of the same kind).





Freestyle

- Many, but not all emcees pride themselves on the ability to not only write rhymes, but improvise them as well.
- The word "freestyle" has taken on several meanings in Hip-Hop vernacular throughout time.
- However, the skill of improvising rhymes is not taken lightly, because to do it well is universally recognized to be difficult.



SPILLAGE

THE ART OF RHYME

FULL MOVIE



Ghost Writing

- Ghostwriting is to write rhymes for artists who can't write for themselves, or to co-write with artists that prefer to write with a group.
- Some rappers fall into ghost writers because they don't have good voices, their looks don't really sell, or they're too introvert. Commercially successful rappers can also be ghostwriters for other rappers.
- A lot of members in Hip-Hop community consider the real and authentic part of Hip-Hop comes from the pens and the creative minds of MCs who write and own their rhymes.

Ghost Writing

- Even though ghost writing has been a part of Hip-Hop industry since its inception, some people feel like if you're not writing your own songs you are not a real rapper.
- Sometimes the Hip-Hop fans' feelings are hurt when they find out some of the records are ghost written, especially the songs involving personal feelings and sensitive, intimate moments. The fans feel they are lied to by the rapper/narrator.



Forbes

GHOSTWRITING:

INSIDE HIP-HOP'S SECRET BUSINESS

Alternative/Underground Hip-Hop ([0:00 - 12:20](#))

- By the mid-90s, Hip-Hop's most visible leaders had a new look for the culture – foreign clothes and cars, champagne and yachts, shiny suits and icy chains, the *Jiggy era*. But not everyone was feeling it, and in response, alternative underground Hip-Hop scene emerged across the US, trying to bring the culture back.
- East Coast: Washington Square Park cypher, shut down brutally by NYC mayor Rudy Giuliani. Later on the sessions/cyphers were transferred to an indoor venue, Lyricist Lounge.
- West Coast: an alternative scene to the gangsta rap. Venue: a health food store named the Good Life Cafe.

Hip-Hop Music Appreciation

Criticisms of Hip-Hop Music

- The music is *simple* and *repetitive*, only the stories told in the lyrics have social value.
- It sounds like a whole bunch of *noise* with a lot of loud-ass beats bang, bang, banging.
- It doesn't arouse me emotionally and it's difficult to resonate or sing along with.
- The lyrical contents are explicit and controversial. It's all about guns, sex, drugs, and money.
- It steals other people's music and patch them together. It's a lazy way of music making and not innovative.

Hip-Hop Music Appreciation

- Some of the most common criticisms of hip-hop music come from a lack of understanding of hip-hop's own value system for evaluating good from bad.
- Many of the things hip-hop fans look for in a hip-hop song are almost the opposite of what fans look for in other genres such as rock, jazz, and blues.
- Understanding hip-hop's aims and how they differ from other genres is key to understanding the appeal of the music and properly evaluating it. It can be looked at in the same way as film criticism – a horror movie can't be judged by the same criteria as a children's movie, as it would be heavily criticized for being too graphic and not lighthearted enough. To fully appreciate hip-hop, you have to know what to listen for, rather than judging the music on a different set of values.

Hip-Hop Music Appreciation

1. Rhythm and rhyme are more important than melody
2. Playing with language, not emotions
3. It can be flow and delivery, not meaning
4. It covers its own subjects
5. Sampling and sound collage

MC Rhythm Techniques

- 16ths
- 32nds
- Triplets
- One syllable on each beat
- Rests
- Punctuating the offbeat
- Flams
- Rolled Rs
- Sliding off the beat (lazy tails)
- Rhythm is perhaps the only element of MCing that is totally indispensable
- Free combination of different techniques
- Form unexpected patterns
- Create rhythmic variety
- Come up with impressive flows
- Eg. “*Inner City Boundaries*”

BEAT



HI-HAT



Versace **Versace** **Versace**

VOX POP

EARWORM

Freestyle Fellowship (12:20 - 20:40)

- Did Snoop Dogg miss the point? ([12:20 - 12:50](#))
- *Freestyle Fellowship* are virtuoso rappers based in Los Angeles, associated with legendary freestyle scene around the open mic night at the [Good Life Cafe](#).
- Draw explicitly on jazz traditions and techniques (esp. improvisation), but also from other forms of poetry and spoken word outside of Hip-Hop.
- *Inner City Boundaries* is their most commercially successful track and was produced by Daddy O from Stetsasonic.



Flow Diagram

1	2	3	4
Let me freak the	funk , obso-	lete is the	punk that talks
more junk than	Sanford sells.	I jet pro-	pel at a
rate that compli-	cate their mental	state as I	invade their
masquerade .	They couldn't	fade with a	clipper . . .

- Lyrics are aligned with the beat
- 4 beats in a bar
- Syllables fell directly under the downbeat are in **bold** type



Inner City Boundaries

||Once |we |have the |knowledge of self as a

||people then we could be |free and no devil |could ever enter the |boundaries

|| I |stand in the center |around all these |sounds I see

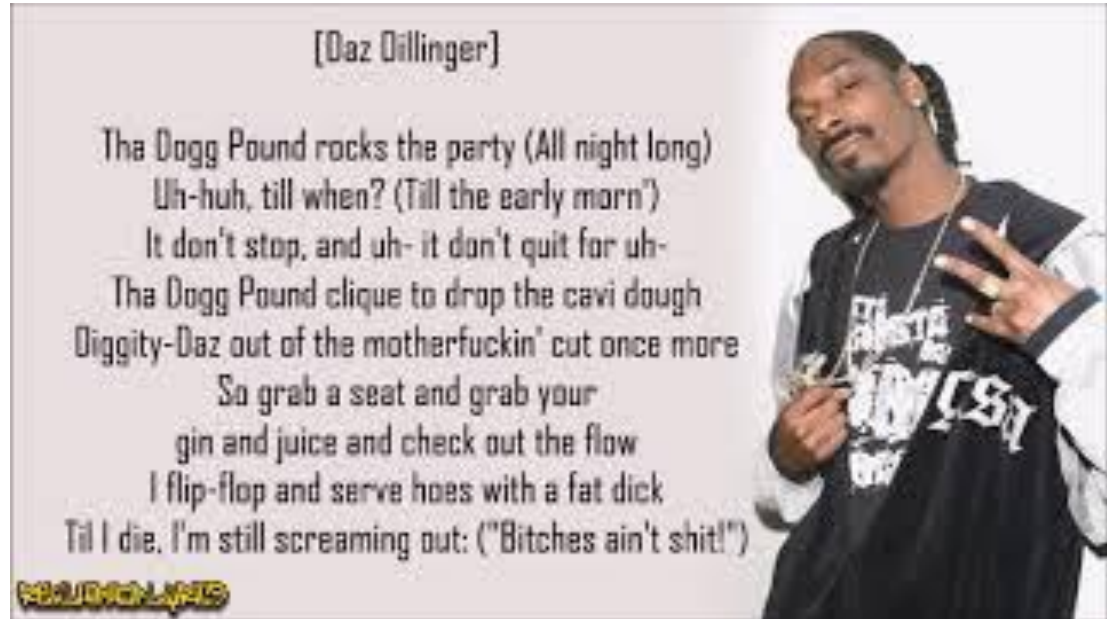
||Blessin' Allah that I |found the key |__That's how |we be

- One syllable on each beat
- Fast rapping with triplets over half beat
- Fast rapping with 16th and 32nd (alternative to triplets)
- Rests on the downbeat/ punctuating the offbeat/ syncopation



Flams

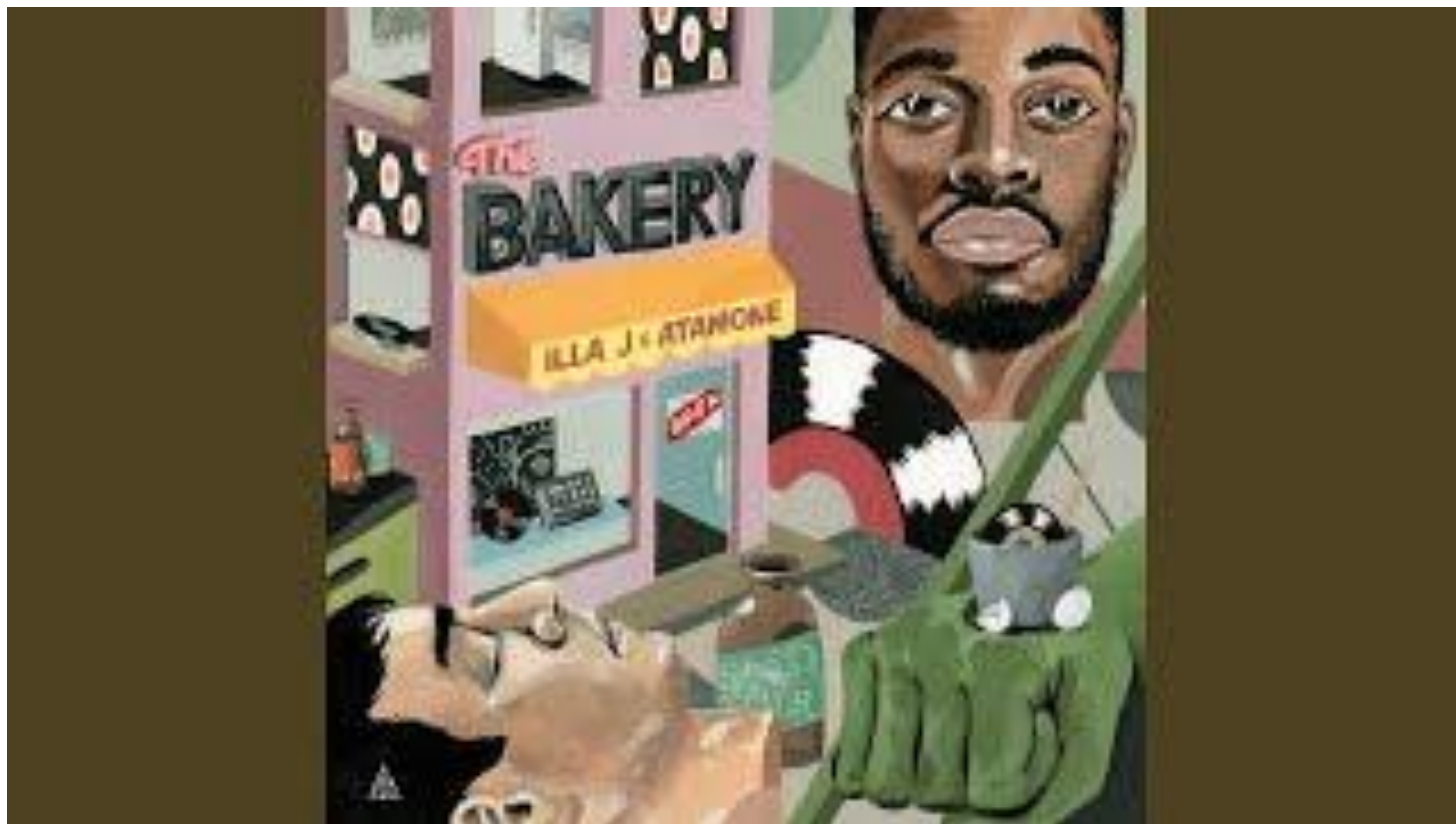
- A soft drum hit immediately followed by a louder hit, to make a “*ta-dum*” sound.
- Opposite combination, a “*dum-ta*” sound
- Variations such as “*ta-ta-dum*” and “*dum-ta-ta*”
- Eg. “**gun**-a-way”, “run-a-**way**”



Sliding Off the Beat (Lazy Tails)

- The rapping is squarely in time to the beat, apart from certain syllables or words that are said so that they slide off the beat.
- This adds variation to the flow and gives it a laid-back feel.
- Often the first letter is said slightly after the beat and the whole syllable or word is drawn out, for effect.
- This is also a type of syncopation used on particular syllables.

Layback



Rolled Rs



MC 光光 – 弹舌 (Flow Technique Derived From Rolled Rs)*



Rhythm and rhyme are more important than melody

A frequent criticism of Hip-Hop, especially in the earlier days when it first emerged, is that it doesn't use much melody and that rappers aren't able to sing.

- Hip-hop music normally revolves around the rapping and the musical backing and how these two elements interact.
- The musical backing is usually based on repetition, with the same or similar rhythms repeated constantly throughout a track.
- The rapping creates variation and continually changes – it is common for the rapped rhythm to change in every line of a verse.

Rhythm and rhyme are more important than melody

- With rhythm in hip-hop music, it's important to listen for the variations that the rapper uses, as well as the fixed rhythms of the musical backing. There will usually be drums doing one rhythm, bass doing a rhythm on top of that, and so on, stacked on top of each other to create the fixed musical backing that repeats. The rapper's varying rhythms sit on top of the rhythms of the musical backing, as another musical instrument.
- For many rappers the creative process begins with improvising rhythms before the lyrics are even written – the combination of the rhythm and rhymes of a rap are often referred to as the *flow*.

Rhyme

- A heavy emphasis on rhyming is a key feature of hip-hop. While you may get a few rhyming words at the end of each line of a regular rock song, for example, in Hip-Hop the most advanced rappers like to fill each line with a lot of rhyming words, often creating complex rhyme schemes that constantly change and evolve over a verse or song. A lot of rappers judge their peers on the work they put into their rhymes and rhyme schemes.
- So where a listener expects to hear a melody, there often isn't one – instead the emphasis of the artist is on complex rhythms and rhyme schemes. These are the elements to listen for in order to get the most out of the technical side of rapping.

A close-up photograph of a man with a beard and a red headband, singing into a microphone. He is shirtless and wearing a necklace. A yellow audio waveform is overlaid on the background. The word "Vox" is written in a stylized white font in the bottom left corner.

Vox

TURTLE



STILLTURTLE

TURTLE
ISLAND
MUSIC



Breaks on a bus brakes on a **car**

Breaks to make you a **superstar**

Breaks to win and breaks to **lose**

But these here breaks will rock your **shoes**

End rhymes

Internal rhymes

t can you **detect** what's coming **next** from the **flex** of

indeed and I'll **proceed** 'cause my **man made a mix**

e **bleed** he won't **need** no **band-Aid to fix**

Multi-syllable rhymes

/ **man made a mix**

band-Aid to fix

A

A

B

B

Perfect Rhyme: **Assonance:** **Consonance:**

cat/hat

cat/back

sock/sack

mug/plug

hot/dog

cut/cot

hit/grit

fit/hip

bell/bill

Bending Words:

arms/mom's

three/dre

Make words rhyme that typically don't rhyme together

Alliteration:

Jimmy/joke

mama/might

light/ladder

Here's a Jimmy joke about your mama that you might not like

Multi-syllable Rhymes:

dropping these/mockeries

Compound rhymes: link with rhyme or rhythm

that rhyme with orange

60
MINUTES

● @ILKESV

Alliteration, Tongue-Twister, Call and Response

Run: Now Peter Piper picked peppers

DMC: But Run rocked rhymes

Run: Humpty Dumpty fell down

DMC: That's his hard times

Run: Jack B.

DMC: Nimble

Run: was

DMC: Nimble

Run: and he was quick

Together: Jam master's much faster, Jack's on Jay's dick



Couplets



1	2	3	4
Riddle me	this , my brother,	can you	handle it?
Your style to	my style, you	can't hold a	candle to it.

Internal rhymes

Can you **detect** what's coming **next** from the **flex** of

indeed and I'll **proceed** 'cause my **man** made a mix

bleed he won't **need** no **band-Aid** to **single-liner**

His **palms** are **sweaty**, **knees** weak, **arms** are **heavy**

There's **vomit** on his **sweater** already: **Mom's** spaghetti

He's **nervous**, but on the **surface** he looks **calm** and **ready**

To drop **bombs**, but he keeps on for**getting** **multi-liner**

Born inside the **winter** **wind**, day after **December** **10**

These **simpletons** they **mentionin'** the **synonym** for **feminine**

Sweeter than some **cinnamon** from Danish rings by **Entenmann's**

Rush up on **adrenaline**, they get they asses **sent to them**

(Gentlemen) you got a **tenement**, well then **assemble** it!

Leave your unit **tremblin** like herds of movin **elephant**

whole verse

Every **cutie** wit a **booty** bought a **Coogi**

Now who's the real **dookie** meaning who's really the **shit?**

Them n***as ride **dicks** Frank White push the **six**

Or the **Lexus**, LX, four and a **half**

Bulletproof **glass**, **tints** if I want some **ass**

Gonna **blast** **squeeze** first **ask** questions **last**

That's how most of **these** so-called gangsters **pass**

At last, a n***a rappin 'bout blunts and **broads**

Link with rhyme

Before one rhyme scheme ends, another one begins

Rhyme Motif

Born inside the winter wind, day after December 10

These simpletons they mentionin' the synonym for feminine

Sweeter than some cinnamon from Danish rings by Entenmann's

Rush up on adrenaline, they get they asses sent to them

(Gentlemen) you got a tenement, well then assemble it!

Leave your unit tremblin' like herds of movin' elephant

- Forming the pattern
- Forming expectations
- Establishing consistency

short short

Better partition,

long



Rhythm Motif

Better partition, better dot your T

And I gon' mention, how the far you see

Putting my dick in the rap industry

Everybody bitchin', getting mad at me

Recognize Kendrick, in the battery

Whistling to the melody
 couldn't think of a better D
 Better be on your P and Q, it's
 just me Jay Rock, Soul and Q
 So the system ain't barbeque,
 ain't nothing else you can do

Violation of expectations via rhyme

And I wish they **fixed** the door to the **matrix**,
there's mad **glitches**
Spit so many verses sometimes my jaw **twitches**
One thing this party could use is more **booze**
Put yourself in your own **shoes**

FIXED
MATRIX
GLITCHES
TWITCHES
BITCHES

BOOZE
SHOES

live from home of the brave with dirty **dollars**
beauty **parlors** baby **bottles** and bowling ball **Impalas**
& street **scholars** that's majoring in culinary **arts**

Accent rhyme within different places relative to beat and bar

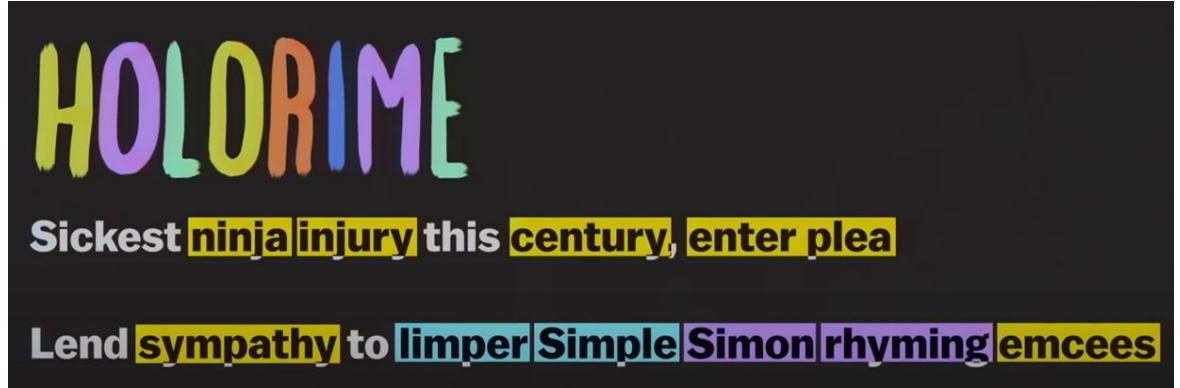
*Cross
the
bar
line*

Dead right | If the head right | Biggie there every night |
Poppa been smooth | since days of Underoos |
Never lose | Never choose to | bruise crews who | do something to us |
Talk go through us | Girls walk to us | wanna to do us | screw us |

The party is live, the rhyme can't be kept in **side**

Holorime

Holorime^[1] (or **holorhyme**^[2]) is a form of rhyme where two very similar sequences of sounds can form phrases composed of different words and with different meanings.



In some British English dialects:

In Ayrshire hill areas, a cruise, eh, lass?

In ertia, hilarious, accrues, hélas!

Holorime by 贝(bèi)贝(bèi)*

心(xīn)境(jìng)高(gāo)雅(yǎ)韵(yùn)如(rú)风(fēng)

英(yīng)俊(jùn)潇(xiāo)洒(sǎ)令(lìng)狐(hú)冲(chōng)



Rhyme Schemes in Other Languages (Japanese)*

- For Japanese rappers, the initial challenges included **the lack of stress accents**, patterns on which American rappers base their flow.
- The **multi-moraic nature** of the Japanese language also makes it difficult to fit a message into a sixteen-pulse line.
- The habit of constructing lines according to the seven-and-five morae of Japanese poetry and modern song lyrics tended to leave long, awkward silences at the end of lines.
- the Japanese literary tradition did not emphasize end rhymes, as most sentences end with auxiliary verbs like *-desu* and *-masu*.

Japanese Rhyme Scheme Development*

- In Ito Seiko's album *Mess/age* (1989), he included a rhyming dictionary, in which many of the rhymes were English phrases in Japanese pronunciation.
- Japanese rhyming technique took a step forward when K Dub Shine, one of King Giddra's rappers, developed a technique akin to newspaper headlines.
- K Dub Shine broke normal Japanese syntax, forming sentence fragments ending with the keyword, as this word could be a noun, verb, or adjective. This rhyming scheme was widely adopted among Japanese rappers.
- Meanwhile, various flow techniques were developed by exaggerating [pitch](#) [accents](#) or playing with the duration or characteristics of morae.

Japanese phonology*

- 撥音 (hatsuon "moraic nasal", /N/, written in kana as ん or ン)
- 促音 (sokuon "moraic obstruent", /Q/, written in kana as っ or ッ): consonant germination
- 長音 (chouon, /R/, written in kana as あ/ア, い/イ, う/ウ, え/エ, お/オ or ー): the lengthening half of a long vowel
- Pitch accent language: the position or absence of a pitch drop may determine the meaning of a word: /ha[↓]shiga/ (箸が[↓], 'chopsticks'), /hashi[↓]ga/ (橋が[↓], 'bridge'), /hashiga/ (端が[↓], 'edge')
- A language with its own rhythms



KEN THE 390,
GADORO, NORIKIYO

RHYME
SCHEME

Chinese Phonology*

- Language based on single syllable characters (not multi-syllable words)
- Four tones
- Not only rhyme with syllables, but also rhyme with the tones of Chinese characters
- Sometimes can rhyme with tones only (regardless of vowels) in rhythmically well structured phrases
- Rhyme schemes developed under a **tonal language system**

Chinese Rhyme Scheme Development*

- 宋岳庭 (Shawn) pioneered **double rhyme** in Chinese. His rhyme scheme was widely adopted among Chinese rappers, and his record [Life's a Struggle](#) (2003) was cited as important by many Chinese MCs.
- One of the earliest Chinese Hip-Hop crew [竹游人](#) (Bamboo Crew), established in Shanghai 2002, was the first Hip-Hop group that studied rhyme schemes and flow techniques.
- Battle MC [贝贝](#) (Bei Bei), known as Battle King, Rhyme Maniac (押韵狂魔), revolutionized the MC battle scene in China since 2012, largely developed and refined Chinese rhyme schemes, and elevated Chinese rap to an level of art form. 贝贝 influenced almost all Chinese MCs afterwards especially MCs rapping in Mandarin.

Chinese Rhyme Scheme Development*

- There are a lot of dialects in China. **Dialect rap** is an important feature to Chinese rap, which not only adds diversity to the Chinese rap repertoire, but also highlights the regional characteristics of Chinese rap map.
- Representatives of dialect rap includes:
 - Sichuanese [谢帝 \(Boss X/ Fat Shady\)](#)
 - Chongqing dialect [\[GO\\$H\] L4WUDU](#)
 - Cantonese [陈冠希 \(Edison Chen\)/ 陈奂仁 \(Hanjin Tan\)](#)
 - Tibetan [西藏镜团体 \(Tibet Mirror Crew\)](#)
 - Changshanese [C-Block](#)
 - Fuzhou Dialect [万妮达 \(Vinida Weng\)](#)
 - Uyghur [新疆 Yiltiz](#)
 - Shanghainese [寿君超\(Keyso\)](#)



僧MONK

紅花會 貝貝

"Talking Shit Freestyle"

韵脚
检查

A woman with long dark hair is looking down in a dimly lit room. The lighting is dramatic, with strong highlights and deep shadows. The background is dark and indistinct.

**vem
curtir**

vem curtir nao digas que nao


Quotes from the Video

- Hypnotize is one of the **smoothest** rap songs ever; it's not predictable and it's always changing (long-short interleaving sentences; delivering sentences across the barline; Before one rhyme scheme ends, another one begins).
- When I see the line I'll separate it into not just words but into **syllables**.
- When you group all of these rhymes together, this incredibly complex rhyme scheme emerges. It's unpredictable, it's complex rhythmically and lyrically.
- Use the musicality of rhymes to create memorable songs (using motive). It's one of few songs that physically you can rap along to it.
- His (MF Doom) following bar will be referencing the punchline, but not in a way that he'll set up another one, he just starts to go in another direction but acknowledges where the last bar was [continuation, movement].
- I love rappers with that syncopated uneven phrasing where the sentences don't line up with the bars, because you can't predict what's going to happen. *The point of appreciating it is to see what the very most clever human beings are capable of doing that you didn't think possible.*

2. Playing with language, not emotions

- Another popular criticism of Hip-Hop music is that it doesn't engage listeners' emotions as often as other forms of music.
- Many of the most acclaimed rappers aim to impress the listener with clever **wordplay** and **flow**, rather than trying to get a “deeper” emotional response.
- It can be equated with hearing an impressive solo on a percussion instrument, where the focus is on showcasing the technical proficiency of the musician. In hip-hop, this is sometimes done with the inventiveness of the content and other times it's done with impressive rhyme schemes and rhythms. It can also be done with rapid-fire, fast rapping styles, or styles that continually vary throughout a song.

Uh, sama lamaa duma lamaa you assuming I'm a human
What I gotta do to get it through to you I'm superhuman
Innovative and I'm made of rubber
So that anything you say is ricocheting off of me and it'll glue to you
I'm devastating, more than ever demonstrating
How to give a motherfuckin' audience a feeling like it's levitating
Never fading, and I know that the haters are forever waiting
For the day that they can say I fell off, they'd be celebrating
Cause I know the way to get 'em motivated
I make elevating music, you make elevator music



Young Twista

runnin' off at da mouth

Jay Z “Jigga What, Jigga Who?”

- A rhythmically complex rap
- Beat shifts between regular and double time: some elements of the song are in a slow tempo, others move twice as fast
- Jay Z’s flow shifts between the two layers



Wordplay: Entendre

- When Jay “*runs base*” – sells drugs like freebase cocaine – he aims to dodge jail time in the penitentiary. Meanwhile in baseball Jackie Robinson is running bases, dodging so as to not to get tagged out and sent back to the pen scoreless.
- A homophone of base/bass: When Jay raps along to the bass of the beat, he freestyles rather than writing raps beforehand. Therefore he is “*dodging the pen.*”
- The pen Robinson isn’t dodging likely is the one that was used to sign his Brooklyn Dodgers contracts. Because Jay runs base (sells drugs), he doesn’t have to sign any paperwork, as his work is illegal.



I father, I Brooklyn-Dodger them

I jack, I rob, I sin

Aw, man—I'm Jackie Robinson

'Cept when I run base, I dodge the pen

Slang: the verb to "jack" a person means to steal something from them

Wordplay: Punchline

- Common “yo mama” joke in Hip-Hop
- “Yo mama” joke can be hit or miss, but the clever way Rabbit presented this paid off and drove the crowd crazy.
- Rabbit knows the area code to Lotto’s house (313), now he just has to ask her for the rest of the number.
- The seven digits also refer to the seven numbers in the lottery (a play on Lotto’s stage name). He’s also saying that Lotto’s mom would be easy and cheap, since Rabbit says it would only cost him a measly dollar.



*My motto: "F*ck Lotto!"*

I'll get the seven digits from your mother for a dollar tomorrow

2. Playing with language, not emotions

Myka 9, Freestyle Fellowship

The average dope MC that's really tight, they'll tell you [that] in your mind you are constantly thinking of metaphors. Everytime you see a street sign or a billboard, you're thinking, how can I tie that into a rhyme? So [you] constantly think of metaphors, analogies, things of that nature.

If there does not seem to be an obvious attempt to connect with the listener in a deep, emotional way in a particular song, it's usually because the focus is on other areas. There may be a lot of **rhyming** words being used, the rapper might be employing a series of complex **rhythms**, or there could be a lot of **wordplay** or witty **metaphors**.

Content Tools

- **Imagery:** the use of vivid language and description to create a picture and movie in the listener's mind. Rap is a multisensory figurative language.
- **Simile:** a way of directly comparing one thing to another thing, usually using the words “as” or “like”.
- **Metaphor:** one thing is used to represent another thing
- **Analogy:** an analogy is basically an extended metaphor – the metaphor lasts longer and can cover a whole verse, song or album
- **Slang:** It always helps to connect the song to a particular time, place and movement, since different groups of people follow different trends in slang and the language is always changing.
- **Vocabulary:** e.g. the words rhyming with “orange” ([6:05](#))
- **Wordplay:** [executing] a pun or pop culture reference through word alterations and the flipping of meanings.
- **Punchline:** a particularly strong phrase in the lyrics that “punches”, or hits, the listener

Rap as Poetry

An Analysis of New York State of Mind

Nas - New York State of Mind (1994)

- I will present a detailed analysis to one of the most classic, everlasting Hip-Hop songs -- *New York State of Mind*.
- Nas was from the Queensbridge projects.
- This song, produced by DJ Premier, is from Nas's first album *Illmatic*.
- *Illmatic* established Nas as probably the pre-eminent lyricist in Hip-Hop and was also a more general showcase of state-of-the-art of NY Hip-Hop at the time (productions by Pete Rock, Large Professor, Q-Tip).
- His style, like Rakim's, is dense and highly complex rhythmically, but is directed more toward observation of the world around him.



vevo

New York State of Mind ([Poetry In America](#))

- In this film, you will encounter some lyrical analysis of the song "New York State of Mind", from a wide range of people--music executives, scholars, emcees, music journalists, and from Nas himself.
- In 2002, Harvard University opened the doors of the world's first academic Hip-Hop archive. The archive's mission to provide an institutional home for an art form and cultural movement that had, over the last 20 years, achieved global importance.
- In the fall of 2013, when the archive's first research fellowship was established, it was named for Nasir Jones whose pioneering album, *illmatic*, whose just then been reissued in a 20 year anniversary edition.

Rap as an Art Form

- In 2022, UCLA's Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies launched its wide-ranging Hip Hop Initiative, which will establish [UCLA as a leading center for hip-hop studies globally](#).
- [Rap Lyrics as Literature](#): UCLA scholars teach hip-hop as the most popular form of American contemporary poetry.
- UCLA becomes the first major *West Coast destination* for scholarly explorations of Hip-Hop culture

Content Tools

- **Imagery:** ...one ran, I made him back-flip. Heard a few chicks scream, my arm shook, couldn't look. Gave another squeeze, heard it click, "Yo, my shit is stuck!"
- **Simile:** Each block is *like* a maze / My rhymin' is a vitamin held without a capsule
- **Metaphor:** Full of black rats trapped
- **Analogy:** I'm like Scarface sniffin' cocaine, holdin' an M16...
- **Slang:** basehead/ crackhead/ coke/ rock/ basin'— drugs of freebase cocaine/crack
- **Vocabulary:** I'm jettin' to the buildin' lobby
- **Wordplay:** And it was full of children, prob'ly couldn't see as high as I be
 - Getting high smoking weed, the children couldn't see because of their innocence
 - Nas is taller so the children couldn't see what taller people can see
 - Nas is older and this violence is going off from young children who can't understand it.
- **Punchline:** I never sleep, 'cause sleep is the cousin of death

N.Y. State of Mind Production

The 100 Greatest Hip-Hop Beats of All Time

Producer: DJ Premier

"*NY State of Mind*" was one of DJ Premier's most powerful and evocative productions. A menacing piano riff from Joe Chambers' "Mind Rain," claustrophobic guitar, and booming drums of death take the listener deep into the heart of a New York subway tunnel at 3 a.m. aka "*the dungeons of rap*."

Off The **RECORD**

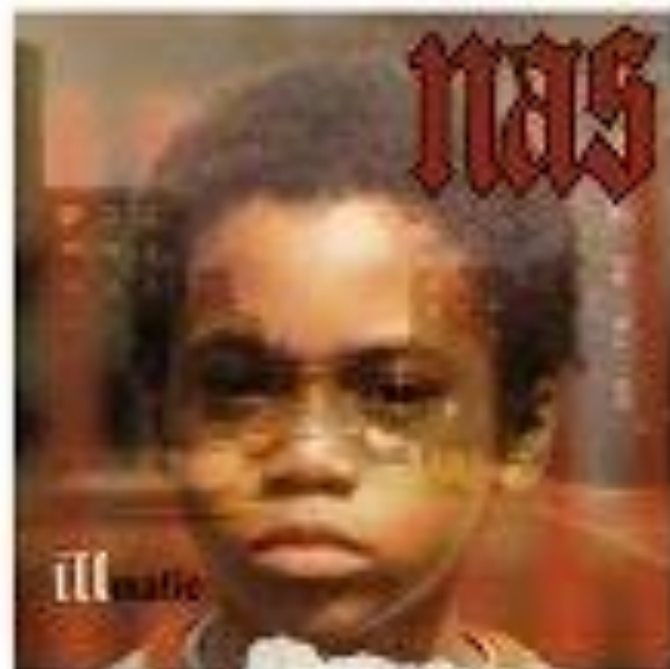
SIDE
A



Nas
"NY State of Mind"

**mass
appeal**

with **DJ Premier**



EPISODE 5

N.Y. STATE OF MIND
Nas



NAS

though you was nothing over the
We had a covenant, who
Like Ice Cold's album, a
Never thought we sing the
Thought it was all wood-gr
We wouldn't bicker like the
Never imagine all the disaster
Should blame, the game, and
It's kill or be killed, how could I
And forever be in debt, and that
So the pressure for success can
On a friend you call
Out the worst is
Although

N.Y. State of Mind Analysis

|| Rappers; I | monkey flip 'em | with the funky | rhythm,
I be || kickin', mu | sician inf | lictin' compo | sition,
Of || pain, I'm like | Scarface | sniffin' co | caine,
Holdin' an || M six | teen, see with the | pen I'm ex | treme



Flow

- Multi-syllable rhymes
- Accent rhyme within different places relative to beat and bar
- Link with rhythm (2nd line)
- Bending words: M sixteen/I'm extreme

Content

- Wordplay: *monkey flip* is a wrestling and breakdancing move
- Simile, analogy: I'm *like* Scarface
- Imagery: Scarface

N.Y. State of Mind Analysis

Now, || bullet holes | left in my | peepholes

I'm | suited up with || street clothes, | hand me a | 9 and I'll de | feat foes

|| Y'all know my | steelo, | with or without the | airplay

|| I keep some E | &J, sittin' | bent up in the | stairway



Flow

- Multi-syllable rhymes
- Cross the bar line
- Before one rhyme scheme ends, another one begins

Content

- Entendre: *peephole*
 - Homophone for people
 - Peephole on the door
 - The surveilling eyes of the community
- Slang: *bent up* means after getting drunk

N.Y. State of Mind Analysis

Or || **either** on the | **corner** bettin' | Grants with the | **cee-lo** **champs**

|| Laughin' at | **base-heads**, | tryna sell some | **broken** **amps**

|| G-packs get | **off** **quick**, for | ever niggas | **talk** **shit**



Re || miniscin' a| bout the last | time the task | **force** **flipped**

Flow

- Bending words:
base-heads/broken
amps
- Triplet flow: last
phrase syncopation

Content

- Slang:
 - *Grants* refers to \$50. The image of Ulysses S. Grant (18th US president) on the US \$50 note
 - *Basehead* is slang for crack addict
- Wordplay: homophone *bass* ties to *amps*

LUPE FIASCO \times LLMs



3. It can be flow and delivery, not meaning

- **Flow and delivery** are two of the most important elements of MCing, yet the least studied and understood.
- Although there is often a focus on content in Hip-Hop — analyzing it, reviewing it, and criticizing it — for many listeners, fans, and MCs, content is actually **secondary** to the flow and delivery, which give MCing its immediate musical interest.
- Hip-hop content can often confuse first-time listeners who are expecting the lyrics to have a clear meaning. For example, Das EFX's "They Want EFX" begins with lyrics which are essentially a collection of nonsensical sounds.



3. It can be flow and delivery, not meaning

- Das EFX's rap is like a drummer doing a fast drum roll. It is an opening vocal drum roll of sounds, launching into the first verse.
- Often the actual meaning of the words is secondary to the way the rap is being said, and to the rhythm and rhyme schemes – the flow of the rap. A string of rhyming words doesn't always have to “mean” anything in particular, it can just be an impressive run of words, about how the syllables and the consonants ring.
- A lot of hip-hop lyrics do have an obvious meaning, especially if they are story raps, or raps filled with interesting metaphors and similes. In certain songs, hip-hop lyrics sound like they don't make sense until you understand the *slang*, such as a lot of Wu-Tang Clan songs, which use very dense slang.

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E-40 LINGO EXPLAINED

3. It can be flow and delivery, not meaning

- Often the topic is just a theme to riff on while coming up with creative flows and vocal styles. But when a run of rhyming words does make sense, it is always particularly impressive.
- There isn't always a hidden meaning to untangle from every line of lyrics in Hip-Hop – sometimes the lyrics are meant to impress through how they sound, rather than through what they mean.



Vox



Thank You!

4. It covers its own subjects

- Hip-hop's frequent focus on guns, sex, drugs, money, and bragging is easily one of the most common criticism of hip-hop.
- This complaint can come from too shallow a knowledge of Hip-Hop. There are numerous songs with messages, positivity, and substance to their lyrics.
- Hip-hop often deals with life in inner cities and describes situations where violence and drugs are commonplace, as well as using extravagant imagery and metaphors.
- Braggadocio content and creating new ways of saying you're the best are integral to hip-hop and its history.
- Criticizing hip-hop for covering these topics is like criticizing the blues for focusing on "having the blues", or heavy metal for being too loud, or classical music for not having a strong enough drum beat.

Content Topics

- **Real-life content** (realism: descriptive realism/ argumentative realism/ naturalism/ magic realism)
- **Fictional content** (keep it real; poetry, imagination, creativity)
 - Dramatic contrast between life as it exists and life as it might be (e.g. Special Ed “*I Got It Made*”)
- **Conscious content**: e.g. social political issues
- **Club/party content**: highlighting flow; creating a fun vibe
- **Controversial content**: attention-grabbing subjects such as violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, power and money



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Realism

- It does not disallow fiction, imaginative constructions, or hip hop's traditional journey into myth. Rather, it is an explicitly ideological stand against selling one's soul to the devils of capitalism or assimilation as one sells the art form and lives life.
- Being "real" is a call to authenticity that becomes a political act. It constitutes a political rather than purely sociological stance that gives testimony to the emotional state resulting from the experience of poverty, blackness, and the crises of urbanity.

Yeah kid, its Big Time boy.
12th street representin' it
Big shout out to my man,
Tear Gas, think, Lake whole crew kid
You knowhatl'msayin' couso?
Richie Fraud known to leave ya scarred,
give a big shoot out to my man Heavy L
Big Palms representing from the Goodfellas





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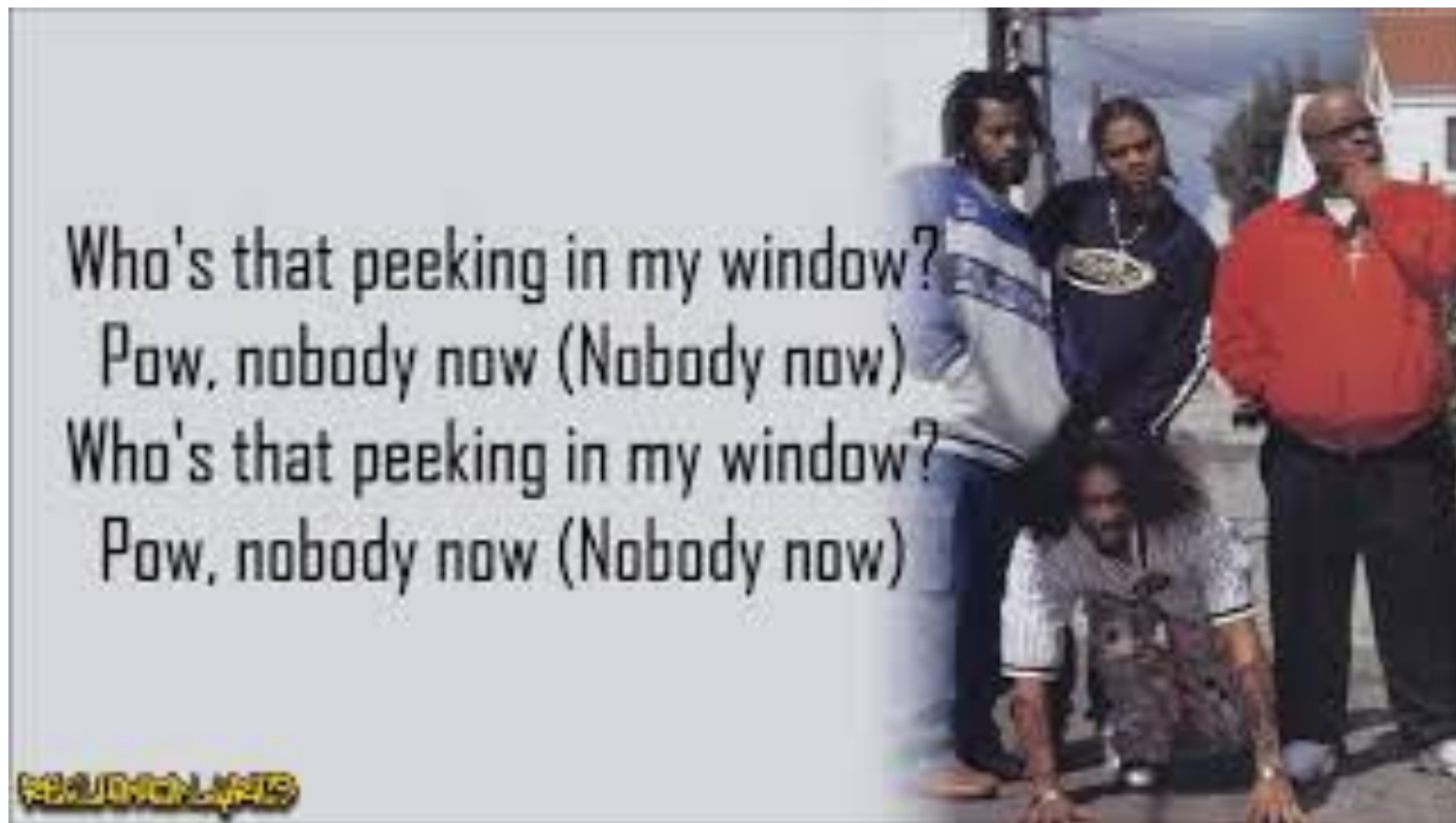
Realism

- **Witnessing** proves incredibly important in Hip-Hop. Hip-Hop at once witnesses and then testifies to certain events, whether or not the speaker participates in them, and acts as a witness to realism in the religious sense, as someone or something bears witness to life's hardship and difficult.
- Hip hop music concerns itself with both the self and the we. The **community** as an identifying and authenticating force holds huge significance, especially as artists validate themselves against claims of artifice.
- References to the projects (dwelling place of the underclass) in part give testament to a certain hardness or edge, and they also assert a **class-based proud identification** with poor black people.

Realism

- Nas ([7:00](#)): *The street is my world. It's everything. I'm from it. I'm of it, I love it.*
- The Real, or realism in hip hop as a movement, takes on two perspectives, **“telling” narratives** and **“being” narratives**, which, in terms of understanding hip hop as the production of a community and of individual artists, are mutually dependent.
- The difference between a being and a telling narrative is that between personification and third-person didactics. Songs about the lives of gangsters come in two varieties, the first-person story of a gangster, and the third-person story about gangsterism.

Telling Narrative



Being Narrative



Fake Gangsterism

- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, artists began appearing who personified gangsters without ever having experienced that lifestyle: record companies manufactured gangsters for their sensational appeal.
- The co-optation of Hip-Hop by the mainstream therefore became associated with “fake gangsterism”.
- Hip hop heads made efforts to weed out the commercial gangsters from the “real” ones, and so rumors of the suburban birthplaces and respectable middle-class childhoods of certain MCs surfaced as evidence of their inauthenticity, even though Hip-Hop had been a cross-class art form for years.



Jazz Cartier

88 Rising

- 88Rising is an innovative new entertainment company for the social-media age, combining a record label with a creative agency, a house for web-video production, and an artist-management agency.
- The company, which features hip-hop stars such as Rich Brian, Joji, and the Higher Brothers, was founded by Sean Miyashiro to “celebrate Asian talent and Asian stories and Asian culture.”
- The company built its name early on with viral hits, but Miyashiro wants to turn his company into a "Vice or Disney for Asians."
- The company's greatest asset might be Miyashiro's ability to work out savvy partnerships with brands including Guess and Sprite.

Fake Gangsterism

- In order to retain a sense of authenticity and connectedness to black communities, and also for the glamour provided by celebrity, various artists began to live out the narratives of gangster lives. The list of hip hop artists arrested or imprisoned since becoming celebrities is extremely long and includes Snoop Doggy Dogg, Marion “Suge” Knight, Slick Rick, Biggie Smalls, Tupac Shakur, Queen Latifah, Mystikal, Busta Rhymes, Shyne, and numerous others.
- In the 1990s, when realism became self-conscious enough as to support the phrase *keeping it real*, the practice of ghetto realism or thug realism facilitated the scapegoating of rap by both conservative and liberal voices.

“Keep It Real” Interpretations

- Rejection of sanitized Hollywood depictions of life and of conscious efforts to cross over and become accepted by white audiences.
- The retention of the artistry, craft, and sense of community that hip hop has at its best, and the rejection of the production of simplistic pop rhymes.
- Telling a story of how life in the hood is, in any number of ways, for good and bad.
- Sometimes a glorification of gunplay and the ills of the ghetto.

And it ain't like I'm trying to be a tough guy
Or trying to make people think I'm crazy
By sayin' all this shit
But what it is, dat:
I know how niggas gets down, alright?
I used to be in the clubs:
The Muse, The Tunnel, whatever the fuck



Conscious Content

- Conscious content is generally positive and calls for change or advancement.
- It often deals with political or social issues, or explores subjects such as relationships in ways that are insightful rather than exploitative.
- Hip-Hop's popularity and global reach make it a powerful medium with which to spread messages and influence people. Many Hip-Hop artists know they can have a major impact on the world, and they don't want to squander the platform they've been given.
- Conscious content often has what is described as substance – meaning the content is long-lasting, important, and profound, with more relevance and “real meaning” than other content.

[Flavor Flav]

I call a cab cause a cab will come quicker
The doctors huddle up and call a flea flicker
Reason why I say that cause they flick you off like fleas
They be laughing at you while you're crawling on your knees
And to the strength so go the length
Thinkin' you are first when you really are tenth
You better wake up and smell the real flavor
Cause 911 is a fake life saver



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Club/Party Content







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Controversial content

- Hip-Hop lyrics focus on topics that can be controversial, such as violence, sex, drugs, alcohol, power, and money.
- These forces are sometimes said to have a negative impact on society, but artistically speaking they are inherently **attention-grabbing subjects** – which is why numerous classic Hip-Hop albums have revolved around them and will continue to do so.
- Controversial content
 - Put a high level of craft and attention into details
 - Reflect the harsh realities of life
 - Encourage listeners to fantasize about doing things they can't do in real life.

A man in a grey hoodie and beanie is leaning forward, looking towards the camera with a slight smile. In the background, three other people are visible, all wearing caps. The scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor setting like a tunnel or a basement.

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Ice Cube - [Endangered Species](#) (Tales From The Darkside)





Content Forms

- Content forms are the basic ways of structuring the content of a song.
- A song's form is not its topic but the overall method it uses to present that topic.
- Content Forms include
 - Braggadocio form (exhortation/ proclamation)
 - Battle form (battle)
 - Conceptual form
 - Story form (narrative: being narrative(gangster)/ telling narrative(gangsterism))
 - Abstract form
 - Humorous form

Braggadocio form (exhortation/ proclamation)

- Hip hop has been characterized as bragging music because it is common for entire songs to be dedicated to proclamations about the MC's greatness.
- *Every MC feels like he's the best, and I guess you have to have the arrogance and the bravado to feel like that, to be able to be in this game, because the competition is real hot out there.* – Guerilla Black
- *A lot of my stuff stems from old school Hip-Hop, braggadocio ethic, where my shit is better than yours and that's the bottom line.* – Esoteric



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Battle Form

- Knowing a variety of ways to rhyme is a big part of battle raps. Your goal is to outdo the person you are battling.
- Battle rhymes can be aimed at a specific person or be written with general insults. The writing process can be different depending on which option you choose.
- “Battle songs” in the post-battle era that have maintained an attention to artistic or stylistic weaknesses are usually songs aimed at a prospective or imagined competitor, rather than a specific one.

MC Lyte - [10% Diss](#)



LIFE IS...

TOO \$HORT



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DRAKE

PUSH UPS



They not like us, they not like us,
they not like us
They not like us, they not like us,
they not like us



Conceptual form

- Come up with a concept and write lyrics around it.
- There is one idea or theme that joins all of the lyrics together.
- E.g. Lil Wayne's "Dr. Carter" has the concept of Wayne playing the role of a doctor who has to save "patients" who have no style, confidence, or respect for the game, and this concept directs all three verses and links them together.
- E.g. concept songs where the concept is to go through the alphabet one letter at a time, using words that start with that letter before moving on to the next one.
- E.g. Nas's "Rewind" used the concept to tell a story backwards.
- Concept album. E.g. Eminem - *The Slim Shady LP*; Kool Keith - *Dr. Octagonecologist*

Dr. Carter



Kindly I'm kindling all kinds of ink on
Karate kick type brits in my kingdom
Let me live a long life, lyrically lessons is
Learned lame louses just lose to my livery
My mind makes marvelous moves, masses
Marvel and move, many mock what I've mastered
Niggas nap knowing I'm nice naturally
Knack, never lack, make noise nationally
Operation, opposition, off not optional
Out of sight, out of mind, wide beaming opticals

So with my mouth wide, holdin' my heat
Bullets I had plenty to squeeze, plenty for you
'Cause Jungle said, "block your on enemy's the"
Hung up the phone, then the phone rang
I'm laid in the bed, thinkin' about this pretty young thing
Who left, she came back, her clothes just fell to the rug
She fell to my bed and gave me a hug
I told her, "no hell," she talkin' about, "me kiss"
Bobbed her head then spit a nut back in my dick
Started suckin' with no hands, a whole lot of spit
Then got up and put her bra back on her tits



Story Form (Narrative)

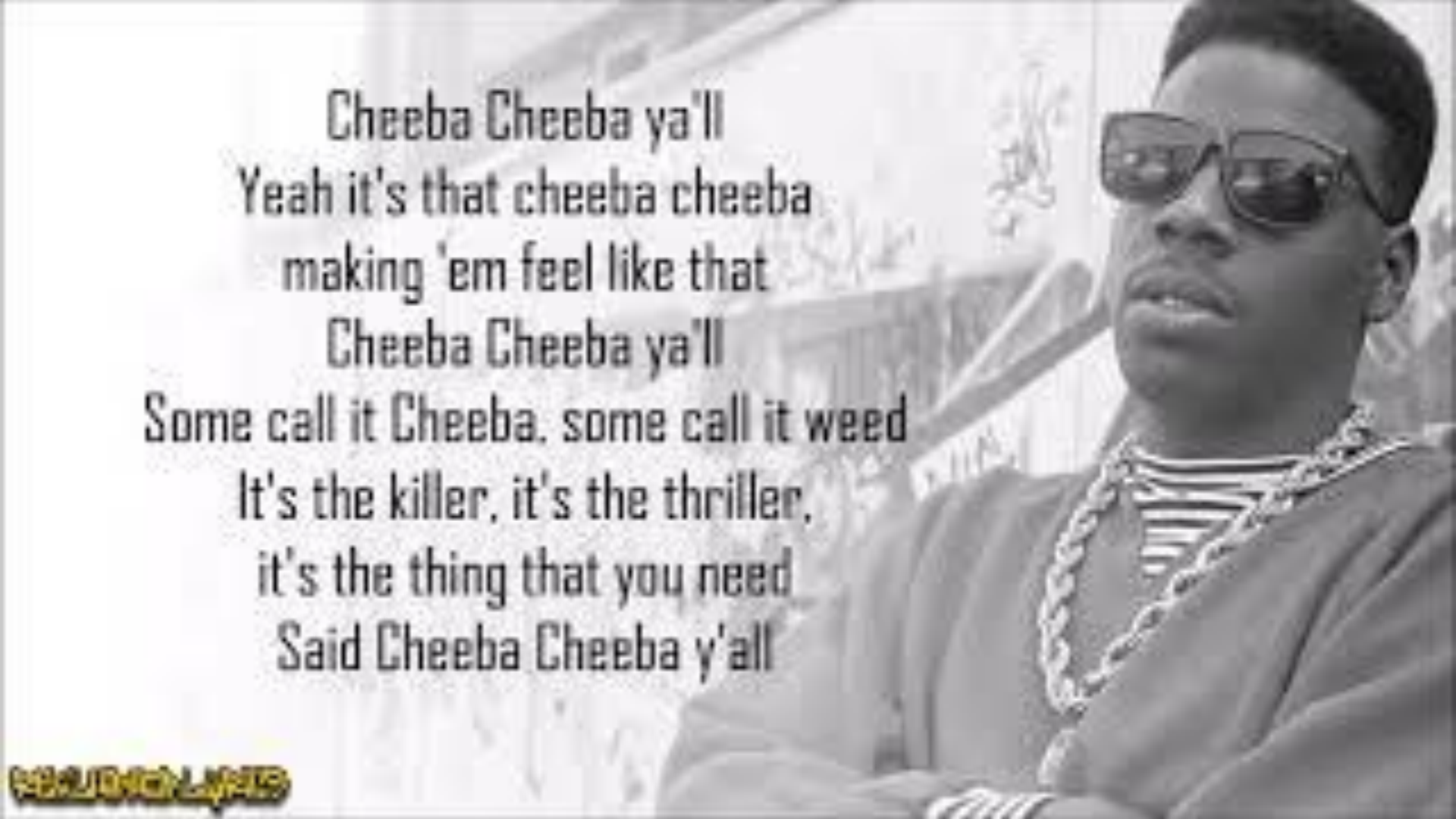
- Storytelling has always been an important technique for Hip-Hop MCs. Being able to structure content in the form of a story is important to being a well-rounded Hip-Hop artist.
- The narrative in hip hop is a kind of **storytelling**, a late-twentieth century and early-twenty-first-century extension of traditional African American folktales, the MC replacing Dolemite or Brer Rabbit.
- Within the story, time is traversed, and the topic might be mundane, dramatic, or comic. Oftentimes it contains elements of a morality play.
- Narratives are used to entertain and educate, but also to explicate the personality and lifestyle the MC projects.



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Cheeba Cheeba ya'll
Yeah it's that cheeba cheeba
making 'em feel like that
Cheeba Cheeba ya'll
Some call it Cheeba, some call it weed
It's the killer, it's the thriller,
it's the thing that you need
Said Cheeba Cheeba y'all

Abstract Form

- Abstract lyrics are those written in a way that's not straightforward or obvious.
- Terms and descriptions may not apply to concrete things.
- The language may be figurative, cryptic, and hard to decipher.
- Even though a song is about a simple subject, it's not described in a simple way.
- Kool Keith, MF Doom, and Rammellzee are known for using abstract lyrics.
- Aesop Rock is also often commended for his intricate, abstract lyrics, though he says, "That's not really a label I'd put on myself, but people kind of consider me [abstract]."



EARL SWEATSHIRT

SHATTERED DREAMS





HOW
AESOP
ROCK
WRITES A RAP



Humorous Form





5. Sampling and sound collage

- Hip-hop's technique of sampling segments of other records is often misinterpreted as simply “stealing” other people's music or done because the artist didn't want to learn to play an instrument (many hip-hop artists do play instruments, but still sample records). However, it is almost always done for aesthetic reasons – sampling records creates a certain sound and feel that can't be acquired in any other way.
- Sampling without clearance infringes the music copyright law. The questions are: Who owns music? How do they own it? How much of it do they own?
- In some senses, this is not so different from music as usual which is, and has always been, full of borrowing, licit and illicit

A man wearing a grey baseball cap and a grey t-shirt is gesturing with both hands in front of him. He is positioned in front of a wooden bookshelf filled with numerous books. The lighting is somewhat dim, and the overall tone is casual. The text "[I]NDEPENDENT LENS" is overlaid in the bottom left corner.

[I]NDEPENDENT LENS