

= Flocabulary =

Flocabulary is a Brooklyn @-@ based company that creates educational hip hop songs , videos and additional materials for students in grades K @-@ 12 . Founded in 2004 by Blake Harrison and Alex Rappaport , the company takes a nontraditional approach to teaching vocabulary , United States history , math , science and other subjects by integrating content into recorded raps . Flocabulary 's website features videos , lesson plans , activities and assessments .

The company has emphasized outreach to underprivileged schools in its business decisions . As of 2015 , more than 35 @,@ 000 schools use Flocabulary products in the classroom . Flocabulary has been praised by rapper Snoop Dogg (AKA Snoop Lion) and historian Howard Zinn , and the company 's products have been generally well received by educators and the press . However , the project has been criticized for perceived cultural inauthenticity and politically charged material in some song lyrics .

= = History = =

Blake Harrison conceived of the idea that would become Flocabulary while in high school . Inspired by hip hop artists like Outkast and A Tribe Called Quest , Harrison wanted to combine the easy retainability of hip hop lyrics with educational content . Harrison graduated from the University of Pennsylvania with a degree in English . He then moved to San Francisco , where he met Alex Rappaport , a music graduate of Tufts University . Harrison shared his idea with Rappaport , and in 2004 the two made a demo recording of two songs with a combined total of 80 SAT words . Within two months Sparknotes made the songs available for free streaming , and soon afterward Harrison and Rappaport set up a Flocabulary website . Cider Mill Press published Flocabulary books and distributed them through Sterling Publishing to sell the book at Barnes & Noble and Borders stores . The Hip Hop Approach to SAT Vocabulary sold 10 @,@ 000 copies in its first year of publication and was reprinted five times . In 2005 , Flocabulary went on a promotional tour of concerts at schools .

By early 2006 , Flocabulary began self @-@ publishing its products . Harrison and Rappaport raised \$ 50 @,@ 000 from family and friends and began visiting schools and education conferences to sell their products . Flocabulary entered into a contest for startup businesses at Columbia Business School and won a social value award . After participating in a collaborative business advice program with Columbia students , Harrison and Rappaport decided to stop self @-@ publishing and returned to Cider Mill . Flocabulary raised \$ 110 @,@ 000 from investors and hired 30 sales representatives . In September 2007 , a line of Flocabulary products was released called " Word Up " for teaching standardized test vocabulary .

Word Up ! proved successful and helped to double their annual revenue in 2008 to \$ 600 @,@ 000 . Flocabulary 's 2007 release Shakespeare Is Hip @-@ Hop featured musical and lyrical contributions from a number of hip hop artists , including Grammy Award @-@ winner 9th Wonder . In 2008 , Harrison and Rappaport created The Week in Rap , a weekly series of songs that has covered current events including the 2008 presidential election and the results of California Proposition 8 . By 2009 , Flocabulary made \$ 900 @,@ 000 in annual revenue .

Rappaport says that Flocabulary has made access to its products a priority over profitability , saying , " We wanted to reach the kids who might never get to the SATs , whose families weren 't buying books at Barnes & Noble . " According to Rappaport , Flocabulary has made " social responsibility a core value [of the company] and never [let] it get overshadowed by our revenue goals , " and , " we 're trying to make this as affordable as possible , because unfortunately the schools with money aren 't necessarily the schools that need Flocabulary . So we 're trying to work with some government organizations and other charities to really get these into the schools that need them . " Flocabulary 's non @-@ profitable social projects have included charitable donations and outreach to underprivileged schools .

In September 2010 , the use of Flocabulary was postponed in Oklahoma City Public Schools after several teachers voiced concern over some of the lyrics in the program . The lyrics to the song " Old

Dead White Men " drew complaints for referring to the Founding Fathers of the United States as dead white males , a term used to criticize perceived disproportionate emphasis on the contributions of historical European males . The lyrics to " O.D.W.M. " also compare Andrew Jackson 's policy of Indian removal to Adolf Hitler 's Final Solution . Rappaport responded that the materials were meant to keep the students engaged and promote discussion , but the company has since replaced the song on its site . Tucker Carlson said Flocabulary was a " get @-@ educated @-@ quick [scheme] " that disregards historical " context or accuracy " , and said " there are still no independent studies that demonstrate rapping about social studies is any more educational than rapping about sex or gunfights . " Carlson particularly noted what he saw as over @-@ simplification of the African @-@ American Civil Rights Movement in the song " Let Freedom Ring " .

By June 2016 , when Flocabulary raised a \$ 1 @.@ 5 million convertible note from Rethink Education , the company had produced more than 725 educational rap videos . [1]

= = Reception = =

School Library Journal notes that , " [Flocabulary 's] catchy songs hook K @-@ 12 students in a way that textbooks can 't . " A reporter for The Wall Street Journal visited classrooms where Flocabulary was being used and remarked that , " When third @-@ grade teachers asked questions about the videos and vocabulary , the problem wasn 't getting children to raise their hands , but to put them down . " A reporter for FastCompany writes that " As a lesson supplement , it gets the job done ? not every memory tool inspires comments like " JAMMIN " on YouTube . " Academics Howard Zinn and Cornel West endorsed Hip @-@ Hop U.S. History . Menchville High reported that use of Flocabulary increased SAT scores from 420 to 477 , though the principle said the school can 't verify to what extent Flocabulary did or didn 't have an influence . A study conducted across six US states by former International Reading Association president Roger Farr demonstrated improvement in reading and writing skills among middle schools students who studied with Flocabulary . Proficiency increased by more than 20 percent . Snoop Dogg has expressed support for the company 's products . Jack Rosenthal of The New York Times says that Flocabulary is " one example of how Web sites have latched onto mnemonics as ways to teach SAT words to high @-@ school students . " In November 2014 , Entrepreneur.com reporter Laura Entis called a video about credit cards in Flocabulary 's financial literacy series " direct , clear and insanely catchy . " Common Sense Media notes that , " One of Flocabulary 's best qualities is that the songs sound like real rap songs , not an embarrassing facsimile that 's obviously for educational purposes . The backing beats and samples are catchy and memorable , and videos contain a fun combo of stock footage , original animation , and , for The Week in Rap , current news clips . " In the book Slam School : Learning Through Conflict in the Hip @-@ Hop and Spoken Word Classroom Bronwen Low , while praising Flocabulary and similar programs for incorporating hip hop into American schools , argues that Flocabulary is culturally inauthentic and refers to Flocabulary 's methods as a gimmick . Similarly , while the book The Anthology of Rap supports Shakespeare Is Hip Hop as an " effective and entertaining [tool] " , the author said Flocabulary failed to " illuminate rap 's distinct poetic tradition . "