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7. HIP-HOP AND SOCIAL CHANGE

Critical Pedagogy in the Classroom

INTRODUCTION

Growing up in an urban environment as I did, my experiences have made me somewhat skeptical of teachers who assume a "missionary" role in the classroom, as some teachers, including myself, are apt to do. As a kid, my friends and I could easily determine which teachers were there for us and which were there in spite of us. There were several Kurtz's who lost their way, standing in front of my classes, seduced by ideological ivory or noble causes or just wanting to save us and our cursed dark bodies. Perhaps because of my childhood classroom experiences I have come to believe that teachers' goals should always be, first, to know their students, not to "fix" or "save" them. Fixing or saving students can be dangerous, even when we have the best of intentions. An important reality in the United States can be summarized by a statistical syllogism: The majority of teachers in the United States are white, 82% (Digest of Education Statistics, 2014). This fact is well known. However, most teachers teach curriculums based upon ideological perspectives of white privilege in the United States. Said curriculas no doubt play a role in the retention and graduation rates of students of color. Members of the unprivileged categories drop out or are pushed out of school (Holzman, 2012) and are frequent targets for discipline, remediation, and, upon leaving the educational system, incarceration (Green, 2008; Sabol et al., 2007).

So, how can our educational system be more receptive to these particular students who are in danger of dropping out or being pushed out of school? Students are multilingual and multicultural. They speak several languages that encompass various cultures. The goal of good teachers should be, in my opinion, to be able to identify and appreciate the value and importance of these languages and cultures. Hence, a teacher must realize that she or he is more of a partner than a missionary. Teachers work with students in a classroom to co-create knowledge. Teachers' jobs, first and foremost, are to teach students how to learn. Teachers do this by opening students' minds to possibilities. These possibilities help them to create questions and seek answers and make sense of their worlds. Theories provide teachers with the tools needed to communicate with students from different realities than their own. This chapter seeks to present a theoretically-informed approach to using music in

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the ELA classroom as a scaffold to teach critical approaches to reading and writing in the classroom, including literary analysis, use of literary devices, grammar, or vocabulary. This chapter focuses on the importance of student empowerment in classrooms and how music can be used with Critical Pedagogy and elements of Reader Response to facilitate learning, keeping at the forefront of instruction the students' needs.

Music is also an excellent tool that teachers can use to engage students, connect with students, and accrue social and cultural capital in the classroom. Many disconnects between learners and teachers stem from teacher ignorance and apathy. By using music, particularly rap lyrics, teachers can work with learners to choose lyrics that interest the learners and couple those lyrics with methods and strategies to engage students. The frameworks of remixing, multimodality, call and response, and signifying are firmly constructed upon a foundation of critical resistance that compels performers to critique the socio-political issues affecting them. Adding these critical elements and strategies to a lesson can help students develop skills to become critical readers and critical thinkers. As critical readers and thinkers, hopefully students, like some who I have taught, might be more motivated to read texts that they once found boring and even refused to read. The goal should be for students to challenge texts, not ignore them.

READING THE WORLD; READING THE WORD

In 1971 Paulo Freire published his seminal text, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* which became a very important work for teachers wanting to become social activists and challenge institutions, communities, and organizations to implement radical changes to help and to protect citizens at every level of society (Darder et al., 2009). Critical pedagogy is cultural politics and is fundamentally committed to the development and enactment of a culture of schooling that supports the empowerment of culturally marginalized and economically disenfranchised students (p. 9). This pedagogical perspective seeks to help transform classroom structures and practices that perpetuate undemocratic life. Freire believes teaching to be a vocation, and the goal of the teacher is to help liberate students. This is the only way students can become "truly humanized" (p. 10). The humanizing elements, however, need to be inserted individually by the teacher and the student, working together, so as to address student issues and interests. Freire's humanizing pedagogy stands in stark contrast to the banking model of education.

The banking model refers to when teachers choose to or are trained to *fill* students with the teacher's "narration," thus turning education into an "act of depositing" (Freire, 2011, pp. 72–73). This narration is detached from the student's reality; it is the teacher's reality. The teacher does not concern him or herself with the student's reality or needs but rather with the process of *filling* the student with the information that the curriculum makers deem appropriate. Hence, the students do not benefit

from this information. In actuality, the students are not learning but mimicking and regurgitating information their teachers are interested in or have been mandated to impart to their students. Subsequently, when students are introduced to literary terms and literary techniques, there are no attempts made by their teachers to draw correlations between their worlds and their schools or their local communities and their schools. Freire's solution to this dilemma is for the teacher to liberate students by sharing or disseminating teacher-power. Empowering students enables them to think *authentically*. "Authentic thinking," is developed and achieved through "problem-posing" education in which students use education for the purpose of *doing* something in their communities (p. 79). Students and teachers identify problems and work toward solutions. It is at this point that classroom lessons transcend their theoretical origins and transform into agents of praxis.

Problem-posing education is centered in critical thinking. Through critical thought students can be liberated; this is why critical pedagogy is the teacher's main objective (Freire, 2011). In U.S. history, music has historically played a role in social activism. Problem-posing education works with music in the United States because historically music has provided inspiration and a soundtrack for social justice and change. Slave songs, chants, calls, and Negro Spirituals were used during slavery. The music was encoded with messages, narratives providing directions, settings, characters, and times. "Follow the Drinkin' Gourd," "Go Down Moses," "Swing Low Sweet Chariot," and "Wade in the Water" are examples of encoded slave songs. These songs were used again, or in hip-hop terms, remixed, during the Civil Rights Movement, and became rallying cries. The sixties and seventies also saw Marvin Gaye's music of social change and social justice (e.g., "What's Going On?," "Mercy, Mercy, Me," "Inner City Blues," 1971; "You're the Man," 1972) and James Brown's music of black identity ("Say It Loud, I'm Black and I'm Proud," 1968).

Conscientizacão is critical social consciousness, which is a by-product of authentic thinking. It encompasses dialogue and analysis and serves as the foundation for reflection and action (Freire, 2011, p. 13). It helps transform the classroom into a democratic learning zone in which knowledge is co-created: Students learn from teachers, and teachers learn from students (p. 13). What clearly separates critical pedagogy from other theoretical perspectives and praxes is that students are empowered to become co-creators. Working together with teachers and members of their communities, today's students can use hip-hop to develop critical narratives about problems in their communities by using models provided by critical, iconic Hip-Hop artists such as Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five ("The Message," 1982); KRS-One and Boogie Down Productions (BDP) (*Criminal Minded,* 1987, *By All Means Necessary,* 1988, *Ghetto Music: the Blueprint of Hip Hop,* 1989), Nas (*Illmatic,* 1994, *It Was Written,* 1996, *Nastradamus,* 1999, *Hip Hop Is Dead,* 2006); NWA (*Straight Outta Compton,* 1988), Public Enemy (*It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back,* 1988, *Fear of a Black Planet,* 1990); Dead Prez ("They Schools," 2000); Immortal Technique (*Revolutionary: Vol. 1,* 2001, *Revolutionary,*

Vol. 2, 2002); Kanye West (*The College Dropout,* 2004, *Late Registration,* 2005, *Graduation,* 2007), and Jay Z (*Reasonable Doubt,* 1996, *The Blueprint,* 2001, *The Black Album,* 2003).

Ideology, the societal lens, or framework of thought, used in society to create order and give meaning to the social and political world in which we live is used by critical pedagogy to "interrogate and unmask the contradictions that exist between the mainstream culture of the school and the lived experiences and knowledge that students use to mediate the reality of school life" (Freire, 2011, p. 11). Teachers must be aware and cognizant of how the culture of the dominant class becomes embedded in and hidden in curriculum. The curriculum, Freire explains, is informed by ideological views that structurally reproduce dominant cultural assumptions and practices that silence and thwart democratic participation (p. 12). Teachers and students through authentic thinking and problem-posing education can develop liberated, democratic students who not only graduate but who are also exposed to education that provides them with real experiences to prepare them for their careers instead of their having to do this on their own, outside of school.

MUSIC AS LIBERATORY PRAXIS

In reader-response theory, the reader or audience and his or her experiences are the driving force behind the theory. Using such a philosophy in the classroom, coupled with music that students can relate to and identify with, serves not only to engage students but also to make them more comfortable and available for scaffolding opportunities. Music is a liberatory praxis for students, as it relates to Hip-Hop because Hip-Hop by its very nature is a critical discipline. Hip-Hop regularly deals with race, deconstructs traditional paradigms, and demands social justice (Akom, 2009). Examples of Hip-Hop's critical nature, as I previously mentioned, can be seen in the works of Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, KRS-One and BDP, Nas, NWA, PE, and Dead Prez, to name just a few. What makes Hip-Hop, or any music for that matter, liberatory is first, that it be critical, second, that it adhere to "problem-posing" (Freire, 2011), and third, that it effectively conveys its message to its audience.

An important aspect of music has always been its ability to communicate or convey feelings and emotions. Music lyrics and music video images, like literature and film, contain narratives that tell stories that provide insight toward the history and culture of the period in which the lyrics and videos are created. Hence, music becomes an effective tool to study cultures from the past and in the present. Historically, music was an integral part of the daily resistance of slaves who rebelled. Slavery was brutal in nature. Africans were dehumanized, forced away from their homes in West Africa, separated from their African families, and from their families in the New World as well. Slaves were denied basic human rights: they were not permitted to speak their African languages after they had been kidnapped; they worked very long hours,

in poor conditions. Singing was one of the few acts that slaves were permitted to perform. Songs permitted slaves to express their sorrow, their rage, their hopes, and their dreams.

Work Songs, Protest Song, and Critically Conscious Music

Slaves also used music as a form of communication and self-expression. Most slaves were illiterate; it was illegal for them to learn or to be taught to read or write. However, even though slaves could not write letters or make telephone calls, through the act of singing, they could relay messages for miles across cotton fields. Whether using the melodic cry of the field hollers or through individual or group songs, like work songs, slaves methodically moved messages from one field to another or from one plantation (community) to another.

Over time, the structures and themes of field hollers, slave songs, and sorrow songs evolved into Negro spirituals, ragtime, and the blues. Early African-American music relied primarily on the African-American oral tradition. Negro spirituals embody themes of the slaves' desire for freedom, justice, how the oppressor will be punished for his or her transgressions, criticism for the oppressive regime, and coded messages of escape (Fisher, 1953; Lovell, 1969). James Cone (1972) concludes that spirituals offer a religious expression of resistance. Spirituals made multiple contributions to Black communities. The music gave communities a true, valid, and useful song. They kept communities invigorated. They inspired uninspired individuals. Spirituals enabled the group to face its problems. The music also allowed the folk to comment on the slave situation. Each member was empowered to share personal solutions and this also created a sense of belonging in the midst of a confusing and terrifying world. Lastly, spirituals provided a coded language for emergency use (Lovell, 1972). The Black church has historically been the epicenter of African-American life and culture. African-American leaders such as Martin Luther King, Adam Clayton Powell, and Malcolm X were all prominent clergymen before making their way from the pulpit to lead movements of social change.

Work Songs

An example of a work song used in slave resistance is "Follow the Drinking Gourd." To unsuspecting ears, the song seemed like any other work song; in actuality, the song was used to transmit directions for slaves to escape from the Southern United States, where slavery was legal, to the Northern United States, where it was not. The drinking gourd in the song refers to the constellation Ursa Major, also known as the Big Dipper. The slaves followed stars in the constellation in order to maintain a northerly course. Other stanzas in the song according to various etymologists, folklorists, and music historians, gave more specific directions depending upon the

Southern region in which the song was being used. In the H. B. Park version of the song, the first verse tells the slaves when to start the journey. The lyrics, "when the sun comes back" and "when the firs [sic] quail calls," both denote the springtime, when the days are longer (Communicating English in Culture, 2012).

The blues were passed down as part of the African-American Oral Tradition. The blues were developed from African-American work songs and field hollers of Black workers (Jones, 1963; Walker, 1992) combined with the Anglo-American folk ballads which provided the regular, predictable pattern of chord changes that characterize the blues. The blues did for Post Reconstruction freedmen what spirituals, hollers, work songs, and shouts did for the slaves: provide a vehicle by which they could communicate with one another and reach out into the world to tell their stories, escape, and relieve their sorrows and feelings of pain and anger.

Protest Songs

Early resistance or protest songs from the blues and jazz traditions are sung by two famous jazz singers, Billie Holiday and Nina Simone. Holiday's classic, "Strange Fruit" (1939) was originally written as a poem and later set to music and published by Abel Meeropol, a white, Jewish high school teacher from the Bronx, New York as a protest against lynchings (Edwin, 2010; Magolick, 2000). Meeropol's poem was inspired by a 1930 Lawrence Beitler's photograph of the lynching of Thomas Shipp and Abram Smith in Marion, Indiana (Edwin, 2010). The poem takes a hard stand against lynching and generates social awareness about this barbaric ritual.

Jazz performer and social activist Nina Simone's song, "Mississippi Goddamn" (1964), rejects liberalism and pays tribute to Medgar Evers who was murdered in Mississippi and the four black children murdered when a church was bombed in Birmingham, Alabama, during the Civil Rights Movement. Simone chastises in the refrain, "Alabama's got me so upset, Tennessee's made me lose my rest, and everybody knows about Mississippi *goddam*." In the song she mocks liberalism: "Keep on sayin' 'go slow'…to do things gradually would bring more tragedy. Why don't you see it? Why don't you feel it? I don't know, I don't know. You don't have to live next to me, just give me my equality!" Simone and Holiday create texts that discuss problems that students who appreciate critical music can both relate to and appreciate. From their critiques, readers are introduced to vocabulary, such as "liberalism." In my experience teaching Simone and Holiday as poetry, these works can help to historicize Harlem Renaissance literature or Civil Rights literature. Dr. Martin Luther King's, *Why We Can't Wait* (1964), which includes his seminal text, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," in which he speaks out against liberalism, going "slow" and waiting. Malcolm X in "The Ballot or the Bullet" and "Message from the Grassroots" also makes allusions to King, Civil Rights literature, and liberalism. All of these texts create ample opportunities for students to compare and contrast texts and for teachers to scaffold lessons.

Blues music influenced many genres of American music, including Rock 'n' Roll, Rhythm and Blues, and hip-hop, to name a few. During the protest era, students participated and influenced many movements: the Civil Rights Movement, the Anti-War Movement, the Feminist Movement, and the Black Power Movement. Folk Rock was an urban music primarily performed by Jewish artists. Bob Dylan, Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel are three of the most notable folk rock artists. These artists created and performed songs frequently used as protest songs. Each of them strongly supported the labor movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the protests against the Vietnam War. Like many of the famous blues artists, Bob Dylan performed with guitar and harmonica and started the genre with the song, "Blowin' in the Wind" (1963), which poses a series of rhetorical and ambiguous questions like, "How many roads must a man walk down/Before you call him a man?" and "…how many times must the cannonballs fly/Before they're forever banned?" The answers he says are "blowin' in the wind."

Dylan's lyrics became symbolic of the student movement's challenge of the attitudes and values of the Greatest Generation's ideologies of social equality, war, and peace, which younger Americans were calling into question. Dylan's song, "Like a Rollin' Stone" (1965), expands his critical gaze from the topics war, peace, and social equality to the individual struggle for personal moral development and fulfillment.

Paul Simon, the creative force behind Simon and Garfunkel, started in Dylan's footsteps but quickly developed their own powerful voices in "The Sound of Silence" (1966) and "Bridge over Troubled Water" (1970). Folk Rock continued the American tradition of music as the window into the soul of the nation. As spirituals, blues, and folk rock provided a soundtrack for social change, that soundtrack continued from the sixties into the seventies with performers like John Lennon from the Beatles. "Imagine" (1971) was one of the most impactful songs ever written; Lennon, who is English, released the song as part of a solo album. Lennon's song sought to raise the moral consciousness in a post-industrial, post-modern world. Ironically, Lennon, who was influenced by non-violent social protests of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, two very religious leaders begins "Imagine" asking us to "Imagine there's no heaven" or hell. He also calls for humanity to create a world without borders and in essence for us to remove each of the distractions that cloud our judgment. "Imagine" calls for humanity to remove the distractions that we use as excuses to "kill or die for."

Critical and Socially Conscious Music

Continuing a social conscious theme affiliated with Dylan and folk rock, Marvin Gaye released "What's Going On?" (1971), a song inspired by the idea of Reginald Benson of the Motown group the Four Tops after he witnessed police brutality at an anti-war rally in Berkeley, California (Bowman, 2006). Berry Gordy, who ran

Motown, Gaye's record label, believed the song was too political and controversial for radio play and refused to release it. Gaye went on strike and refused to record until Gordy eventually released the song (Bowman, 2006). "What's Going On?" brings a soulful, rhythm and blues tone to social justice themed music of the era, which had been previously associated with Dylan, Lennon, Simon, and Garfunkel, in mainstream music. Gaye's urbanization of the genre gives it more of a street sensibility. "What's Going On?" opens with sounds of people—community members perhaps—talking in the background as Gaye sings of "mothers crying" and "brothers dying," reminiscent of the pain and anguish embodied by the blues. Gaye's song is a social critique, calling for social change; it transcends the traditional lamenting of blues songs that is often personal, focusing on the narrator's woes or hard times in general. Gaye's tone embodies a more confident, post-Civil Rights, post-Black Power, post-Anti-war edge that is not prevalent in earlier African-American music. "What's Going On?" is purposeful and calls for action. He critiques the escalation of weapons during the Cold War and explains that only "love" can "conquer hate." During this age of integration, Gaye is an advocate for communication. In each stanza he repeats "talk to me" or "we've got to find a way."

What's Going On? (1971) is one of the early concept albums in African-American music history, in which the album focuses on a particular theme or closely related plotlines. The album depicts a Vietnam War veteran returning home and experiencing disillusion with injustice, hate, poverty, and addiction. Structurally, Gaye's soulful, melodic voice insightfully critiques the urban experience. His precarious break from love songs to social activism transforms the previously folksy genre from an acoustic, reflective tone to a soulful, bluesy, jazz tradition. Gaye also adds gospel and orchestral elements to the album that are incredibly complex, yet so intrinsic, that the album is still musically, politically, and culturally relevant today. He also revives the religious traditions of call and response, melodic cries, moans and scats, and develops a social discourse in which he tries to layer many voices from the community into the album. In addition to "What's Going On?" the album also contains "Mercy, Mercy, Me (The Ecology)" which speaks out about pollution, the ozone layer, oil spills, mercury poisoning of fish, and radiation and "Inner City Blues (Makes Me Wanna Holler)" which critiques classism, oppression, the Vietnam War, and police brutality in the inner city. This ground breaking album influenced many artists of the era, including musicians and social activists Stevie Wonder and Curtis Mayfield, and possibly even Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five who will create "The Message" (1982) a decade later.

Curtis Mayfield is a very interesting historical figure because his music is socially conscious and even though his lyrics focus on the inner city, like Gaye's, Mayfield's music is even more critical and controversial than Gaye's. Mayfield wrote and produced the soundtrack for the Blaxploitation film *Super Fly* (1970), and his music addressed the adverse and unseemly effects of drugs on the inner-

city. Songs like "Freddie's Dead" and "Pusherman" are classic and authentic portrayals of the inner city that were later revisited and reinforced in the "The Message." "Freddie's Dead" is a tragic tale of the pervasive and destructive nature of drugs in urban communities during the era. Mayfield's high tenor voice and his funky, soulful beats and style made his music popular and a frequent choice for hip-hop DJs to sample. The innovative and often rebellious music of the seventies and eighties laid a firm foundation for hip-hop music.

HIP-HOP MUSIC

"The Message"

"The Message" (1982), one of Hip-Hop's first social critiques, is a pivotal text that facilitates Hip-Hop's transition from its strict affiliation with disco and fun to a more critical agenda. This agenda was most noticeably carried out by KRS-One and BDP with their LPs *Criminal Minded* (1987), *By All Means Necessary* (1988) *Ghetto Music: The Blueprint of Hip Hop* (1989), and *Edutainment* (1990). BDP was made up of KRS-One, D-Nice, and DJ Scott La Rock—who was murdered just months after the release of *Criminal Minded*—and they were among the first hip-hop activists who expressly used Hip-Hop as a vehicle for social change in their community in the Bronx, New York City. In the true spirit of "problem-posing" education, the group used the violent, gun-related death of DJ Scott La Rock and the death of a fan at a concert in which BDP and Public Enemy performed, as an opportunity to actively lobby to stop gun violence and other self-destructive behavior among inner city hip-hop fans. They started the Stop the Violence Movement and enlisted the help of many other famous East Coast hip- hop stars of the era to join the movement. Other artists included Public Enemy, Stetsasonic, MC Lyte, Doug E. Fresh, Just-Ice, Heavy D, and Biz Markie. The compilation of stars released the 12-inch single *Self Destruction* (1989).

BDP

BDP's KRS-One, the self-proclaimed "Teacha," was one of the first in Hip-Hop to introduce the concept of rapper as philosopher and to use rap as a tool of instruction. He developed a cultural and a philosophical connection to the African griot and later more African-centered rappers, like Brand Nubians and X Clan, and he would make more intensive connections to Africa that were based upon historical and religious beliefs. KRS-One also continued the shift started by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, transforming Hip-Hop from party music to a more aggressive, self-conscious, and critical artistic direction in both style and performance. These changes were not only reflected in their lyrics but in the images on their album covers. On *Criminal Minded* (1987), KRS-One and Scott La Rock appear on the

cover with Scott La Rock holding a handgun and KRS-One draped in a bandolier with shotgun shells, both sitting behind a desk full of weapons. Here begins a shift toward an edgier more critical tone in East Coast Hip-Hop. The *By All Means Necessary* (1988) album cover pays tribute to Malcolm X by mimicking a famous Malcolm X photograph and one of his most popular quotes. On this cover, KRS-One holds a tec-9, semi-automatic handgun, while peeking from behind a curtain. The cover pays tribute to Malcolm X's famous photograph in which he looks out a window from behind a curtain and brandishes a Kalashnikov (AK-47). These two album covers also introduce a few ironies that I have used for discussions when trying to get students to think more deeply about the complexities that can be discovered when analyzing and synthesizing meanings in texts. It is ironic that DJ Scott La Rock holds a handgun on the cover of BDP's *Criminal Minded* (1987) album and is murdered soon after, as a result of gun violence. As I stated previously, KRS-One sits next to him strapped with a bandolier full of shotgun shells. The irony presents itself again after La Rock's death, on the *By All Means Necessary* album cover. On this cover, KRS-One mimics the Malcolm X Kalashnikov photograph. KRS-One poses with a tech-9 instead, but the irony of Malcolm X's assassination and DJ Scott La Rock's murder, creates ambiguity in terms of the group's choice of images it wanted to convey and the messages that it wanted to send to their community. Developing essential questions to get students to think about the possibilities of these decisions and how these texts shape our world and the way that we think and interact with one another is very important classroom work. Problem-posing lessons centered around music and modern dilemmas such as these can generate the types of activities that have meaning and purpose that may be more tangible for students we have difficulty engaging.

For teachers considering International Baccalaureate programs or broader world views, she or he might examine the connection between not only KRS-One to Malcolm X, but also between Malcolm X and Jean Paul Sartre. Malcolm X's quote, "by any means necessary," is also used in one of Sartre's plays. Malcolm X uses it in one of his later speeches (Malcolm X, 1992). This interesting and relevant fact could provide an opening for a teacher who wanted to introduce Sartre and his drama into the her or his classroom.

> I was not the one to invent lies: they were created in a society divided by class and each of us inherited lies when we were born. It is not by refusing to lie that we will abolish lies: it is by eradicating class by any means necessary. (Sartre, 1963, Act 5, Sc. 3)

> We declare our right on this earth to be a man, to be a human being, to be respected as a human being, to be given the rights of a human being in this society, on this earth, in this day, which we intend to bring into existence by any means necessary. (Malcolm X, 1992)

In "My Philosophy" KRS-One proclaims himself a teacher. He professes the importance of intelligence and Afrocentric education in "My Philosophy" and "You Must Learn" (1989). KRS-One, the Teacher, introduces Hip-Hop as a tool and calls for music to be used as a part of the education of young people in Hip-Hop communities. The rapper's teachings adhere to Freire's belief in the invaluable role that teachers play in the liberation of students (2011). KRS-One's message is Afrocentric and engaging. It attacks hegemony and invites students to invest in their learning. It also stresses the importance of teachers being invested in students and the students' needs within their communities. In "You Must Learn," KRS-One's message is also didactic. In the song, he raps about several African-American inventors and their contributions to American society. An important element of the song is his message explaining the importance of equity in the content disseminated by teachers to students, particularly teachers who instruct African-American learners.

Beyond BDP

There are a myriad of Hip-Hop artists who have created critically conscious work over the last four decades. This music has not only contributed greatly to Hip-Hop culture, it also has significant pedagogical value. As East Coast rap was becoming more hardcore, a West Coast version of critically conscious Hip-Hop emerged. Niggas with Attitudes (NWA), with their critically acclaimed diatribe of the Los Angeles police department, established a formative presence in the development of gangsta rap, which quickly became a popular subgenre of Hip-Hop. In the late eighties, NWA's *Straight Outta Compton* (1988) on the West Coast and Public Enemy's *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* (1988) and *Fear of a Black Planet* (1990) on the East Coast set the tone for critically conscious rap and paved the way for iconic artists, like Nas, and frequently Tupac Shakur, and sometimes Jay Z, and before him the Notorious BIG (Biggie Smalls).

PICKING SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS ARTISTS

Nas

A very important note to add here is that my list is specific to me and my tastes and the preferences of my students over the years. Earlier in my career, I was partial to Jay Z's work. I was not exposed to the work of his contemporary, Nas, until students challenged my preference of Jay Z over Nas without having studied Nas' work. Understanding that this was something that I frequently accused my students of–judging works without studying them–I relented and decided to give Nas a listen. My students burned CDs, brought in lyrics, challenged me, and taught me. Thus, long before I read Freire, I was teaching in a student-centered class,

where students felt free to not only challenge my views but to create their own curriculum. I learned from my students why Nas was considered one of the most prolific artists in the history of the genre, or as they would say, *the rap game*. He had things to say that were simultaneously critical, disrespectful, and profound. And he articulated it in a style that was so authentically and unapologetically Black that it was impossible to not be captivated by it. His flow and diction were mesmerizing and addictive. I immediately saw where my students were engaged by his lyrics, and of course, his message was positive, Afrocentric, and on point. Nas' critical discography includes *Illmatic* (1994), *It Was Written* (1996), *Nastradamus,* (1999), and *Hip Hop Is Dead* (2006).

Kanye West

Jay Z, Nas' contemporary, created *Reasonable Doubt* (1996) *The Blueprint* (2001) and *The Black Album* (2003). After Jay Z and Nas, Kanye West, who worked with Jay Z, created several very strong critical works, *The College Dropout,* (2004), *Late Registration* (2005), and *Graduation* (2007). When teaching, I consider these artists writers; they are philosophers and social critics. I teach them the way I would teach Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, W. E. B. Du Bois, or Ida B. Wells-Barnett. Hip-hop lyrics speak to the critical needs and concerns in many of the communities and classrooms that I have taught. An important part of the selection process is choosing artists that are relevant to the students. The artists that I have discussed are not as current as J. Cole, Wale, or Kendrick Lamar but millennials, given the opportunity, will introduce current artists into a problem-posing paradigm.

Of the modern artists, Kanye West does significant work in paying tribute to musical icons in his sampling (what I consider remixing) and in his lyrical content. In "Touch the Sky" (2006) West slows down and samples Curtis Mayfield's "Move on Up" (1970). West also samples funk, rhythm, and jazz of Steely Dan's song "Kid Charlemagne" (1976) in his song "Champion" (*Graduation,* 2007). "Kid Charlemagne" tells of the exploits of an LSD chemist and a tale of sixties drug culture. West's early albums, like Gaye's and Mayfield's, use the concept technique. *College Dropout* (2004), *Late Registration* (2005), and *Graduation* (2007) all focus on the illusion of education, The American Dream, and what it means to be successful in America.

The albums signify on the American educational system and the paradoxical value system that blasts kids for not getting an education but then does not provide a means to pay for the education through jobs and livable wages. As Gaye's music pushed the parameters of jazz and blues through social critique, West's music extends the criticism even farther with Hip-Hop. West does not depict the "dope man" with scorn; he instructs that the community has glorified the "dope man" because he is the only person in the community with any money. Through this social figure, resistance and survival are possible. Using the trope of signifying, the chorus

sardonically sings, "we wasn't supposed to make it past twenty-five but the joke's on you we're still alive…Drug dealing just to get by, stack your money 'til it gets high." The chorus acknowledges the reality of having a job but only making "$6.55" an hour, as a means of survival it is necessary to "hustle" (sell drugs) "to get by" ("We Don't Care," 2004). West continues that, "as a shorty" he looked up to the dope man because he was the only adult male he knew that wasn't "broke man." People in his neighborhood didn't care what people outside said about drug dealers. Dope money, explains West, can become "scholarship" money. In using West's work as a tool of liberatory praxis (Freire, 2011) the teacher and the students can critically analyze West's texts contextualizing and problematizing his version of reality and what are considered appropriate and inappropriate actions. What is moral and immoral is often determined based upon a society's ideology. Reality is a complex undertaking. This rhetorical analysis involves a much deeper conversation than whether drugs are immoral or whether they are destroying urban neighborhoods. Assignments can take more interdisciplinary approaches and explore the social, historical, political, and economic ramifications behind West's critique. In that sense, from an ELA perspective, today's learner may find Hamlet, Ishmael, or Nick Carraway more accessible, or possibly more engaging, if he or she can explore the complexities of each character's conflicts beyond the world of the text. Characters are tools writers construct to interpret the world and assign meaning to experience. Writing music, poems, and stories are a healthy, creative, and productive way to express displeasure and disappointment about one's life.

It is important that any teacher of Hip-Hop music understand that Hip-Hop has a long critical tradition. The genre is more critical of the urban experience and American culture than any academic discipline that an American student studies. Critically, what separates West's music is his ability to infuse various African-American musical traditions into his work. Call and response is used throughout *College Dropout*. The second song on *College Dropout*, "I'll Fly Away," is a spiritual. He makes connections to the lingering effects of slavery on psyches of people in the inner city. The song, "All Fall Down" and the skits on the album provide critiques of the educational system. West depicts college as more symbolic than substantive, leaving graduates in debt and no better off than before they went.

"All Fall Down" is complex. The video is slick and entertaining. Sonically, West remixes and recreates Lauryn Hill's "Mystery of Iniquity" (2002). In his version Syleena Johnson sings the Hill's hooks. Lyrically, West attacks consumerism and chastises a young female college student that he describes as "addicted to retail" and having "no idea what she's doing in college." For my students, when discussing this text, I introduce my students to the concept of "vulgar careerism" (Karenga, 2010) and alternative views on education and college as merely opportunities to make money, not as an opportunity to grow and learn. West raps, that his protagonist won't drop out of college because "her parents will look at her funny." It appears that this disillusionment is a result of the illusion of the American Dream and the paradox of capitalism in the quest for social justice.

An interesting literary companion to West's music can be can found in Harlem Renaissance texts like chapters one and two of Du Bois' *Souls of Black Folk*, Langston Hughes's "The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," or works in which artists seek to explore individual identity that is distinct and separate from material objects. Kanye West's song is critical because Hip-Hop, by its nature is critical, very critical, but its parallel nature is paradoxically commercial and deeply compacted in consumerism. This is a discussion that needs to take place in the class as well.

Man in the Mirror

Another critical emphasis of modern music lyrics focuses on the individual's role in society. Some critical music lyrics focus on how society can be improved through the individual growth of its members. An example of this is the Michael Jackson song, "Man in the Mirror" (1998). In the song, Jackson states that he's starting with the man in the mirror and asking him to "him to change his ways." The protagonist is going to a look at himself and then "make a change." On an ideological level, Jackson's approach to social change in his song presents a contrast to the songs I have discussed. His philosophy of personal responsibility contrasts the works that are critical of social and environmental forces and their influences. Some students may consider "Man in the Mirror" naïve or accommodating, compared to the rap songs I have discussed. In the past, I have applied Bloom's Taxonomy in developing activities. Music like Jackson's and others provide opportunities for students to synthesize and analyze texts by discussing conceptual relationships between them and historical events that span hundreds of years.

To follow a thread of accommodation in Jackson's song, there may arguably be some affiliation with Booker T. Washington's accommodationist philosophy. Washington, the self-made man, who espoused the mantra: "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" (Washington, 1901) also believed in personal social responsibility. Viewing Michael Jackson's "Man in the Mirror" as a call for the social critique of the self is very much in touch with the Washington's self-reliance. While the individual cannot control outside forces, he or she can control him or herself. This notion is also Freirean (2011). Freire states, "It is only the oppressed who, by freeing themselves, can free their oppressors" (p. 56).

India Aire

Continuing the theme of self-reliance, India Arie presents another element of change addressed in American music. She focuses on personal change and growth. Like Jackson, she approaches social change as an individual's personal responsibility. Instead of changing, however, Arie might implore the individual *not* to change. Aire's mantra is "Love Yourself." In her video, "Video," she plays the starring role. She sets the video's tone with a shot of the back right pocket of her blue jeans which sport a yellow patch with a red border that says "LOVE * YOURSELF" in

black capital letters. Aire's character is a non-conformist. She resists the social and cultural pressure to shave her legs and comb her hair. Her beauty comes from within. As an independent, confident woman, she defines herself repetitively in the chorus as a queen.

Aire provides an excellent opportunity to critique how female images are viewed socially. For more mature students, "Video" would provide a compelling comparison and contrast with a song like Nicki Minaj's "Anaconda" (2014). Minaj's song samples Sir Mix-a-Lot's "Baby Got Back" (1986), which is an anthem to women's rear ends. Minaj's song is a modern, raunchier version of Sir Mix-a-Lot's song and permits a platform for a discussion on what students consider to be appropriate images and behavior for women in their communities.

Music provides an excellent soundtrack for an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis. The framework of remixing, multimodality, call and response, and signifying are firmly constructed upon a foundation of critical resistance that compels performers to engage the issues constraining them. ELA teachers can engage students using artists' attempts to communicate their perceptions of reality. This form of meaningful education is centered on lifelong learning that engages the learner and encourages him or her to be an active part of his or her community. Introducing music into the classroom provides a conduit by which teachers can empower students by permitting them a voice in course, content, and direction.

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LESSON PLAN

Target Audience: 6th grade ELA students.

Background

We were reading the book, *Crossing the Wire,* by Will Hobbs. This is a story about a young man forced to leave his family and home in Mexico to immigrate to the United States in order to work and earn money to help feed his family. Early in the story, during his migration, the protagonist hears a familiar style of Mexican music called "Ranchera" music, which is a traditional music in Mexico; it usually features mariachi bands. The protagonist becomes very emotional and gets homesick when he hears the music.

Scope

This is a two to three day assignment. First, the students closely read the chapter. They define Ranchera music and then they research it. Seeking out definitions and finding examples of the music on line. Our students have laptops, so this was an easy assignment for us, but it could also be assigned as group work and the research could be completed at the school library. If students do not have laptops or computers in the classroom, the teacher can provide sources for students to use in class.

Introductory Hook

To preface their research, I played three versions of Ranchera music. Depending upon your students you can have students translate the lyrics from Spanish to English. I translated the lyrics and provided the lyrics in English and Spanish. About a third of my students are Latin@, so I sometimes offer extra credit if a student wants to translate a text for our use in class. I make sure to double check the translation and proofread it before submitting it to all of the students.

In the three examples I give the students of Ranchera music, I offer two very traditional versions of songs and then a hip-hop version. The hip-hop version focuses on "mojados" a term used in the story which means wet, but is used for the English term, "wetbacks." We discuss this term and compare it to other derogatory or affectionate terms, depending upon the user. Other cultures have words that speakers use, which are similar, like the N-word for African-Americans. We discuss the way the word is used by other cultures and we discuss how we can compare and contrast the way the song is used in the video verses by the protagonist in the book. We use this as an opportunity to journal. We focus on citing sources and finding textual evidence to support claims.

Activity One

For a more formal writing assignment, I have the students practice finding direct quotes from the text in which they focus on how the music makes the characters in the book feel. Then, I have the students find their own personal versions of Ranchera music that adheres to the criteria that we have developed for the music in class before asking them to give an oral presentation on what they learned. This assignment can be set up on a Bloom's taxonomy chart or on a tic-tac-toe board.

Here are some initial directions that I gave on our Google Classroom assignment:

1. Open up a word document in Google Docs and upload it here.
2. Write a paragraph that gives me an example of music that you listen to that is dramatic and emotional and tells stories.
   - What is the name of the artist?
   - What is the name of the song?
   - Tell me two or three exciting things that happen in the songs.
   - Summarize the story that the artist tells.

Activity Two

The objective of this lesson is to analyze hip-hop songs and compare rap music to poetry by using Bloom's Taxonomy as a guide.

Knowing

Students will be given a list of ten rappers and ten songs. Students will select one of the rappers and songs and memorize the song (Required activity).
Students will create a chart and include each artist or group and their songs. In the chart or the map the students will include the 6 w's: who wrote the song, when, why did they write the song, where, what are the lyrics, and why is the song famous or important? The students will also find out who directed the videos for the songs, the record labels involved and any other information that they think is relevant (optional).

Understanding

Students will recite/perform the song lyrics they memorized in front of the class (required).
Students will be given a list of ten rappers and ten songs. Students will select one of the rappers and make a video performing the lyrics. For this activity students may work in pairs (optional).

Applying

Students will be given a list of ten literary devices. They will be asked to create a project that allows them to identify the ten literary devices used in rap music from our class list (required).
Students may choose from the entire list of artists, songs, and literary terms, students will make a puzzle with twenty entries: ten up and ten down (optional).

Analyzing

Students will create a graph or chart that represents what literary terms occur most frequently in the songs (required).

Evaluating

Students will create a rap song that mimics the themes and literary devices used in several of the songs in which they have studied and analyzed throughout these assignments (required).

Creating

Write a position paper explaining why rap should replace poetry in your curriculum (required).
Choose your favorite rapper and write a comparison and contrast paper comparing him or her to your favorite poet (optional).