

# **RAP AROUND THE MAP**

## **LESSON PLAN**

### **LESSON INFORMATION**

Grade Levels: 6-12

Subject Area: History/Language Arts/Music

Duration: 30-45 minutes

### **LEARNING**

Where you're from matters in hip-hop. It can help define a language, a style, a whole way of meaning and being. "Hip Hop America: The Mixtape Exhibit" testifies to the culture's geographic diversity, honoring the regions—and particular cities—that define hip hop's history. This exercise invites you to begin at the Shoutout Map, where several of the centers of rap music and hip-hop culture are featured: from LA to the Bay, Atlanta to New York City, and beyond. These cities are variously represented throughout the exhibit in artifacts and songs you can discover through close inspection.

### **Essential Questions:**

- How does regionality express itself in the objects found in the exhibit/the songs included for consideration?
- In what ways have hip-hop artists drawn from influences beyond their region of origin to create their distinctive styles?
- How important do you think that region remains today when we are all so connected by social media and other forms of digital connection?

### **Learning Objectives:**

- Associate rich geographic diversity and history of hip-hop culture and rap music.
- Build from specific observations to descriptive claims.
- Apply close reading and listening to make contextual connections.

### **Media and Materials Needed:**

- Scratch paper and a writing implement
- Region Descriptions
- Song snippets and lyric excerpts

### **Key Terms:**

- **Region:** A geographic area with distinct cultural, linguistic, and stylistic influences that shape the sound, themes, and production techniques of the music.
- **Local:** Of or belonging to a certain region, city, neighborhood, or block.
- **Style:** The distinctive character of music, dress style, and other cultural expressions that help define certain geographic areas; it can be as general as a region ("West Coast vs. East Coast") or as specific as an individual.
- **Vernacular:** The speech patterns, slang, and other aspects of everyday language that express themselves in lyrics from different regions.
- **Cultural Hybridity:** The process by which artists from a particular region may draw on the styles of artists from other regions to forge new modes of expression.

## STANDARD ALIGNMENT

### National Core Arts Standards:

Anchor Standard 7 (Perceive and analyze artistic work): Students will identify and analyze how hip-hop artifacts reflect the cultural and historical context of their regions.

Anchor Standard 8 (Interpret intent and meaning in artistic work): Students will interpret the significance of artifacts within the hip-hop culture of specific regions.

Anchor Standard 11 (Relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding): Students will relate hip-hop artifacts to their societal, cultural, and historical contexts to deepen understanding of regional influences.

### National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies:

Theme 1: Culture: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity.

Theme 3: People, Places, and Environments: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of people, places, and environments.

Theme 9: Global Connections: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of global connections and interdependence.

### National English Language Arts Standards:

Standard 1: Students read a wide range of texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world.

Standard 3: Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts.

Standard 7: Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems.

## INSTRUCTIONS

This exercise invites students (working either independently or in small groups) to engage in a scavenger hunt to identify specific items on display in the exhibit that originate from four (4) of the thirteen locations listed on the Shoutout Map. These locations are LA County, the Bay Area, Seattle, Houston, Chicago, New Orleans, Memphis, Detroit, Miami, Atlanta, Virginia Beach, the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia), and Boston.

1. **SELECT** four of the thirteen regions listed on the Shoutout Map and write them down on the paper provided.
2. **READ** the region descriptions provided to acquaint yourself with your chosen locations.
3. **SEARCH** the exhibit for artifacts that you can demonstrate originating from your chosen cities. Be sure to record the date and other identifying clues from the description tags to support your selections.
4. **CONSIDER** what each object tells you about its place of origin. Be prepared to discuss your findings with the group.

## ALTERNATE INSTRUCTIONS

This exercise invites students (working independently or in small groups) to explore how a region expresses itself in sound. Students will consider four (4) geographies—LA, New York, Chicago, and Atlanta—through the lens of lyrics celebrating particular cities.

1. **READ** the relevant region descriptions provided to acquaint yourself with the four locations.
2. **LISTEN** to the song selections for each region, reading along with lyrics as you do so.
3. **GATHER** observations about each song that might suggest a connection to the artist's place of origin. This might include references to place, specific slang or other distinctive language, speech accent, or other details. Be prepared to explain your connections to the group.

## SONG SELECTIONS FOR ALTERNATE MODEL

### LA County:

Murs & 9th Wonder, "LA" (2006) (0:00-0:49)

I'm from L dot A dot Californ-I-A hot  
 Days got shade let me take you 'round the way  
 Lot of out-of-towners can't handle this city  
 Where you wear the wrong color and it can get tricky  
 But that was eighty-six and, things done changed  
 We a lot mo' evolved with the way that we bang  
 Not the rips and the dawgs, man the smog might kill ya  
 But you ain't gotta worry if you stayin North of Wilshire  
 Don't be scared of Crenshaw, the Slausson super-mall  
 Or Earle's Hot Dogs—man, you gotta do it y'all, c'mon  
 Come to the hood where we do the most good  
 Magic Johnson be ownin everything like he should  
 Lynnwood, Long Beach, Hawthorne, Gardena  
 From the towers in Watts, to the hills of Altadena  
 The home of the traffic and that gangbang culture  
 And I hope the way we do the damn thang don't insult ya

### Chicago:

Common, "The People" (2007) (0:00-0:58)

This is street radio, for unsung hero  
 Riding in they regal, trying to stay legal  
 My daughter found Nemo, I found the new Preemo  
 'Ye, you know how we do, we do it for the people  
 And the struggle of the brothas and the folks  
 With lovers under dope, experiment to discover hopes  
 Scuffle for notes, the rougher I wrote, times was harder  
 Went from rocky starter to a voice of a martyr  
 Why white folk focus on dogs and yoga?  
 While people on the low end tryna ball and get over  
 Lyrics are like liquor for the fallen soldiers  
 From the bounce to the ounce, it's all our culture  
 Everyday we hustlin', tryna get them custom rims  
 Law, we ain't trusting them, thick broads, we lust in them  
 Sick and tired of punching it, I look on the bus at them  
 When I see 'em struggling, I think how I'm touching them  
 The people

### Atlanta:

OutKast, "Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik" (1994) (0:00-0:46)

Well, it's the M-I-crooked letter, comin' around the South  
 Rollin' straight Hammers and Vogues in that old Southern slouch  
 Please, ain't nothin' but incense in my atmosphere  
 I'm bendin' corners in my 'Lac, boy, 'cause that's how we be rollin' here

Deep, the slang is in effect because it's Georgia  
Kickin' the khakis and Adidas, packin' your heaters 'cause you supposed to, cousin  
Catfish and grits is how my flow flows  
Rollin' steady in that Caddy, but them fifty bottles got to go  
See, juice and gin used to be my friend from the beginnin'  
Now I'm just a player, sippin' sauce every now and then  
To catch a buzz like a bumble bee

#### **New York:**

Jay-Z and Alicia Keys, "Empire State of Mind" (2009) (00:00-0:48)

Yeah, I'm out that Brooklyn, now I'm down in Tribeca  
Right next to De Niro, but I'll be hood forever  
I'm the new Sinatra and since I made it here  
I can make it anywhere. Yeah, they love me everywhere  
I used to cop in Harlem: Hola, my Dominicanos (Dímelo!)  
Right there up on Broadway, brought me back to that McDonald's  
Took it to my stash spot, 560 State Street  
Catch me in the kitchen, like a Simmons whippin' pastry  
Cruisin' down 8th Street, off-white Lexus  
Drivin' so slow, but BK is from Texas  
Me? I'm out that Bed-Stuy, home of that boy Biggie  
Now I live on Billboard and I brought my boys with me  
Say "What up?" to Ty Ty, still sippin' Mai Tais  
Sittin' courtside, Knicks and Nets give me high fives

#### **REGION DESCRIPTIONS**

**LA County:** Los Angeles hip-hop is shaped by certain features of the region's people and geography: the warm, dry climate that allows for year-round outdoor activity; the glamor, glitz, and wealth of the movie industry; the surface streets and freeways that make for a car-centered culture; the racially- and ethnically-divided neighborhoods; and the history of gang culture and aggressive policing. All of these helped foster a hip-hop culture of bass-heavy beats (like the "G-Funk" sound pioneered by Dr. Dre), "gangsta rap" themes of crime and punishment; and party music that celebrates the good life. Defining artists include N.W.A, 2Pac (who was born in New York, raised partly in the Bay Area, and spent the last years of his life in LA), Kendrick Lamar, Ice Cube, and The Game.

**The Bay Area:** The Bay Area's hip-hop is defined by its eclecticism; the region boasts extremes of wealth and poverty, natural beauty and urban congestion. Out of this context emerged a musical culture that's equally divergent, including playful and experimental artists like Digital Underground and Souls of Mischief alongside more hardcore artists like Too \$hort and Andre Nickatina. One of the defining styles of the region is hyphy—slang for "hyperactive"—a music marked by playful, high-energy delivery and booming beats. The lyrics of the Bay Area center on hustle culture, community-based movements, and innovative slang (e.g., "yee" and "ghost riding the whip"), best epitomized by the linguistic creativity of E-40. Other notable artists include Mac Dre, Mac Mall, Lil B, The Coup, and Kamaiyah.

**Seattle:** Seattle's rap scene is dominated by independent artists and an alternative sound, in keeping with the underground alternative rock scene for which the city is most famous. At the same time, Seattle boasts a handful of chart-topping artists who have crossed over to the pop charts, including Sir Mix-a-Lot in the 1990s and Macklemore in the 2000s. These artists are the exception, however; Seattle is historically outside the mainstream of hip hop, helping it foster independent and experimental voices. Among the best of these are the groups Blu & Exile and Shabazz Palaces. Additional artists include Blue Scholars, Lil Mosey, and Jay Park.

**Houston:** Houston's sound is famous for its slowed-down, bass-heavy production known as chopped and screwed, pioneered by DJ Screw, as well as its trunk-rattling anthems and storytelling tradition. The city's sprawling geography, car culture, rural and urban spaces, and deeply rooted Southern pride have influenced its laid-back but powerful approach to hip-hop. Iconic artists include UGK, Scarface, Bun B, and Megan Thee Stallion.

**Chicago:** Chicago's midwest scene may have emerged later than that of either coast is diverse, but it quickly caught up. Stylistically, it is centrally located as well, drawing from southern storytelling traditions, East Coast hard rhyming, and West Coast experimentation. Like the West Coast, too, Chicago hip hop took shape against the backdrop of gang culture and gun violence. As a consequence, the music boasts both the raw energy of drill—the Chicago-born style characterized by dark, often violent lyrics, and menacing beats—as well as by conscious and political rap. The city's history of segregation, economic disparity, and deep jazz and blues influences have shaped its rap storytelling. Notable artists include Common, Kanye West, Chief Keef, Chance the Rapper, and Noname.

**New Orleans:** New Orleans, the cradle of jazz, is also a rich geography for hip hop as well. Among its most distinctive contributions is bounce music, a rapid-fire, call-and-response style of rap that often centers on dance and live performance. Among its most visible artists is Big Freedia. The city also birthed some of the defining crossover artists of the last thirty years, including Juvenile, Master P, and the incomparable Lil Wayne. Other significant artists include Birdman, Mia X, B.G., and Mystikal.

**Memphis:** Memphis hip-hop is marked by dark, eerie beats, raw street storytelling, and the signature lo-fi sound of early underground rap tapes. The city's deep blues history and urban environment have influenced the rise of both crunk and modern trap. Key artists include Three 6 Mafia, Yo Gotti, and Glorilla.

**Detroit:** Though Detroit hip-hop is perhaps best known for its most famous native son, the "Rap God" Eminem, its history is both wide and deep. Emerging from the same soil that gave birth to Motown in the late-1950s and 1960s, Detroit fostered talents in both rapping (Danny Brown and Big Sean) and production (J Dilla). The city's economic struggles and DIY ethos have fueled a generation of independent artists making music with an urgent, relentless energy. Other figures include Royce da 5'9", Tee Grizzley, DeJ Loaf, and Kash Doll.

**Miami:** Miami hip-hop is synonymous with bass: club-ready percussion, trunk-busting booms, and Latin rhythms that reflect the city's multicultural demographics and vibrant nightlife. The region's party culture and beachside setting have shaped its dance-driven sound and flashy, energetic aesthetics. In the 1990s, the group 2 Live Crew faced an obscenity trial for the explicit nature of the language in their lyrics. They prevailed, setting a precedent for free speech—and a Parental Advisory warning label on albums with explicit content until the present day. Key artists include Pitbull, DJ Khaled, Flo Rida, Trick Daddy, Trina, Rick Ross, and City Girls.

**Atlanta:** For the better part of the 21st century, Atlanta has dominated the sound of hip hop. If New York defined the first decades of rap music with sample-based instrumentals and rhyme-heavy storytelling raps, then Atlanta has dominated the present era with its turn toward more melodic flows and party-centered lyrics. Atlanta also boasts perhaps the greatest duo in hip-hop history, OutKast, who helped put the South on the map in the 1990s with a series of artistically-ambitious albums. Other defining artists include T.I., Young Thug, Future, Migos, Lotto, and Lil Baby.

**Virginia Beach:** Virginia Beach's hip-hop is distinguished by genre-blurring sounds shaped by its biggest producers, some of whom also rap: Timbaland, Pharrell Williams (and, along with Chad Hugo, the Neptunes), and Missy Elliott. The lyrics from this region range from the abstract experiments of Missy to the street stories of the Clipse. As some from the area like to boast, there's "something in the water" that makes Virginia Beach artists stand out. Key artists also include Big Pooh, Shaboozey, and Lil Ugly Mane.

**The Tri-State Area (New York, New Jersey, Philadelphia):** New York City is the cradle of hip hop; hip hop was born in the Bronx and quickly spread across the other boroughs and, before long, to neighboring cities in the region. Though the Tri-State Area boasts a range of sounds, the dominant style is characterized by gritty boom-bap beats, sharp lyricism, and an emphasis on storytelling and wordplay. Legendary artists are too numerous to mention in full, but include Jay-Z, The Notorious B.I.G., Nas, Lauryn Hill, Naughty by Nature, and The Roots.

**Boston:** Boston hip-hop hasn't always received the credit it deserves, perhaps because of its position as a northern neighbor to the city that gave birth to hip hop. A handful of artists have broken through to the mainstream, however, most significantly Guru who, along with the producer DJ Premier, made up the 1990s group GangStarr. Other important artists include House of Pain, Ed O.G., Mr. Lif, BIA, and Joyner Lucas.

### ASSESSMENT

- Students curate a set of artifacts and then use them to tell a bigger story about a region in the United States.
- Students demonstrate the capacity to work from both direct evidence and inference to identify the regional origins of their selected artifacts.
- Students reflect upon the degree to which place of origin defines style during a present moment in which access to styles from around the country—and the globe—is readily available.



## ATTRIBUTIONS

This lesson plan was written by Adam Bradley.

Adam Bradley is bestselling author, a professor of English and African American Studies at UCLA, and founding director of the Laboratory for Race & Popular Culture (aka, the RAP Lab). Adam pioneered the study of rap lyrics as poetry and has worked with some of the leading artists in popular music. As a curator, he has collaborated with museums across the country and the globe to launch exhibitions of art and culture. Most recently, he co-curated “Hip Hop America: The Mixtape Exhibit” (2023-2025) at the GRAMMY Museum. As a writer at large for the New York Times’s T Magazine, Adam tells impactful stories in long-form essays. He is the author of six books, including *Book of Rhymes*, *The Anthology of Rap*, and the national bestseller *One Day It’ll All Make Sense*, a memoir he wrote with the rapper and actor Common. Adam lives in Los Angeles.

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