

RAP-LIBS LESSON PLAN

LESSON INFORMATION

Grade Levels: 6-12

Subject Area: Language Arts/Music

Duration: 20-30 minutes

LEARNING

Rapping is hard to do. Perhaps the best way to help students realize that is to invite them to try it for themselves. How do rappers keep to the rhythm, stay on theme, and devise compelling figurative language all while making sure to rhyme? It may be too much to ask students to begin with a blank page, so instead, this exercise gives them a template upon which they can invent rap language of their own in the context of a famous rap song.

Essential Questions:

- What tools do rappers use to write rhymes?
- What is the relationship between rules and creative freedom?
- What are the most challenging aspects of writing and performing a rap?

Learning Objectives:

- Evaluate how rap is the product of both imagination and rules, freedom and constraint.
- Demonstrate that learning the rules of grammar and usage isn't a punishment but a preparation for their creative expression.
- Practice presenting—and maybe even performing—a lyric in front of the group.

Media and Materials Needed:

- Scratch paper and a writing implement
- "RapLib" Pages

Key Terms:

- Craft: The skillful and practiced execution of an artistic or creative discipline, honed through experience, technique, and dedication to mastery.
- Imagination: The quality of mind that enables us to form mental images, concepts, or ideas that are not immediately present to the senses; reliant on rules as well as freedom.
- Syllable: Basic sound units of speech that help shape rhythm and language, consisting of one or more vowel sounds with or without consonants.
- Cypher: The collaborative and competitive space in which rappers exchange lyrics with one another.

STANDARD ALIGNMENT

California Arts Standards, Music (Grades 8–12):

Prof.MU:Cr1.1: Compose and improvise ideas for melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that reflect characteristics of music from a variety of historical periods or cultures.

Prof.MU:Cr2.1: Select and develop draft melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas or motives that demonstrate understanding of characteristic(s) of music or text(s) studied in rehearsal.

Prof.MU:Cr3.1: Evaluate and refine draft compositions and improvisations based on knowledge, skill, and teacher-provided criteria.

National Core Arts Standards – Music:



MU:Cr1.1.E.IIa: Compose and improvise ideas for melodies, rhythmic passages, and arrangements for specific purposes that reflect characteristics of music from a variety of historical periods or cultures.

MU:Cr2.1.E.IIa: Select and develop draft melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas or motives that demonstrate understanding of characteristic(s) of music or text(s) studied in rehearsal.

MU:Cr3.1.E.IIa: Evaluate and refine draft compositions and improvisations based on knowledge, skill, and teacher-provided criteria.

National English Language Arts Standards:

Standard 4: Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes.

Standard 5: Students employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

Standard 6: Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.

National Social Studies Standards:

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

Theme 4: Individual Development and Identity: Social studies programs should include experiences that provide for the study of individual development and identity.

CASEL Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Competencies:

Self-Awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior.

Self-Management: The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations.

Social Awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures.

Relationship Skills: The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups.

Responsible Decision-Making: The ability to make caring and constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions across diverse situations.

INSTRUCTIONS

In this group exercise, students will work together to fill in the missing words to a well-known rap song—the difference is they can't use the actual word or phrase from the song. Instead, they'll work to find a word that suits the line in terms of sound and sense. Students may replace the song's words with new words of their own creation, but they must be sure to keep the exact syllable count, part of speech, and rhyme scheme (if applicable). Think of it like Mad-Libs, but specifically, it aims to get students to appreciate the mutually supportive function of rules and imagination.

(Alternative Version/Expansion Pack: This activity asks students to write rap lyrics for themselves, inspired by some of the great opening lines in hip-hop history. In the Lyrical Adventures pod at the exhibit, the interior wall is covered with a couple dozen famous opening bars. This activity asks students to select one (or more) of those openings and then write at least two additional lines of their own to follow. They'll have to work within a few parameters: (1) they should NOT simply write down the lines that follow in the original song; (2) they must attend to rhythm and rhyme patterns that the opening lines dictate; (3) they can't write explicit language and content. The goal is to engage students in the craft of writing rhymes and to show the technical ability required.)

1. **CHOOSE** one of the lyrics and read it aloud with your group.
2. **WRITE IN** words and phrases that work to fill in each of the empty spaces. (If you know the song, be sure to avoid simply reproducing the actual song lyrics.)
3. **READ** the lyrics again with your added words. Do you need to revise anything?
4. **PRESENT—OR BETTER YET, PERFORM** your lyrics for the group in a cypher format.

“RAP-LIB” LYRICS

“Six in the morning, _____ at my door

[two-syllable noun]

Fresh _____ across the _____ floor”

[3-syllable noun]

[1-syllable verb]

[2-syllable adjective]

Ice-T’s “6 N Tha Mornin” (1985)

“ _____-raising, _____-chasing, new worldly possessions

[1-syllable noun]

[1-syllable noun]

_____ -making, _____ -breaking, which one would you lessen?

[1-syllable noun]

[2-syllable noun]

The better _____, the human _____, you love ‘em or dissect ‘em

[1 syllable noun]

[1-syllable noun]

Happiness or _____? How do you serve the question?”

[3-syllable noun]

Kendrick Lamar’s “PRIDE.” (2017)

“Look at how I _____ that, ate it up and gave it bac

[2-syllable past-tense verb]

Yeah, you look good, but they still wanna know where _____ at

[2-syllable proper noun]

Saucy like a _____ but you won’t get your baby back”

[3-syllable noun]

Megan Thee Stallion, “Body” (2020)

ASSESSMENT

- Students successfully meet the requirements of each blank space while also displaying creativity and invention.
- Students demonstrate the capacity to work together to devise creative solutions to the challenges they encounter.
- Students show the preparation and poise to present their finished product to the group.

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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