

## RAP REPORT CARD LESSON PLAN

### LESSON INFORMATION

**Grade Levels:** 8-12

**Subject Area:** Language Arts/Music

**Duration:** 30-40 minutes

### LEARNING

On the inner sleeve of his 1987 album, *How Ya Like Me Now*, the rapper Kool Moe Dee published the first-ever rap report card. He graded himself and two dozen of his peers on a handful of qualities that he believed defined excellence in rapping: voice, vocabulary, versatility, rhythm, and more. Not surprisingly, he gave himself (and two others) an A+. Otherwise, he was a pretty tough grader: the class average was a B. Looking at the report card now, it provides a way for us to talk about what makes great rap great.

### Essential Questions:

- How does Kool Moe Dee define excellence in rap? How do you define it?
- Hip hop music today sounds very different from how it sounded forty years ago. What categories (voice, rhythm, rhyme, etc.) do you think are most important to consider when evaluating today's music?
- How do you explain and support the grade you gave each artist's performance?

### Learning Objectives:

- Identify some elements of performance that matter most when evaluating rap music, both past and present.
- Apply student-defined parameters (as outlined below) to a musical performance.
- Synthesize oral comprehension and written analysis to make a verbal argument in support of a position.

### Media and Materials Needed:

- Writing implement
- A reproduction of Kool Moe Dee's Report Card
- A blank report card
- Song snippets

### Key Terms:

- Virtuosity: Great technical skill, as in the practice of a fine art.
- Flow: The distinctive rhythmic pattern of the rapper's voice.
- Rhythm: The patterned flow of sound through time, characterized by repetition and variation. In rap, the rhythmic relationship between the steady beat of the music and variable rhythm (or flow) of the voice.
- Rhyme: Two or more words that share the last stressed vowel sound and all the sounds following that vowel—such as in the words “demonstrate” and “exonerate.”
- Diction: The choice of words in speech and writing.

**STANDARD ALIGNMENT:**California Arts Standards Music (Grades 8–12):

Prof.MU:Re7.1: Apply criteria to select music for specified purposes, supporting choices by citing characteristics found in the music and connections to interest, purpose, and context.

Prof.MU:Re8.1: Describe how understanding context and the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

Prof.MU:Re9.1: Evaluate works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

National Core Arts Standards – Music:

MU:Re7.1.E.IIa: Apply criteria to select music for specified purposes, supporting choices by citing characteristics found in the music and connections to interest, purpose, and context.

MU:Re8.1.E.IIa: Describe how understanding context and the way the elements of music are manipulated inform the response to music.

MU:Re9.1.E.IIa: Evaluate works and performances based on analysis, interpretation, and established criteria.

National English Language Arts Standards:

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

Standard 6: Students apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions, media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts.

Standard 12: Students use spoken, written, and visual language to accomplish their own purposes.

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 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.

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

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

## INSTRUCTIONS

This exercise asks students, either independently or in small groups, to consider what qualities they value most in rap performance, making the case for why certain elements of rap (rhyme, rhythm, wordplay, storytelling, voice, etc.) are so important in producing a great performance. Students will review Kool Moe Dee's 1987 Report Card then fill in a simplified one of their own, evaluating three songs in three categories of their choosing.

1. **WATCH** the "Virtuosity" video in the Lyrical Adventures pod.
2. **REVIEW** Kool Moe Dee's Rap Report Card (included here), focusing on his chosen categories. Which categories do you think are most important when you listen to rap music? Settle on three (3), either independently or with your group (if applicable). You may select from Kool Moe Dee's categories or devise your own categories.
3. **FILL IN** the top of your report card (attached) with your chosen categories.
4. **LISTEN** to the three song snippets provided by your teacher [teachers may select songs on their own or draw from the provided list], settling on a letter grade for each of the three categories for each of the three songs. Calculate your average in the Final Grade column.
5. **COMPARE** your categories and ratings with your classmates. Be prepared to provide clear reasoning for why you awarded the grades you did.

**SONG BANK (Note: Time-stamped sections from songs listed below do not contain curse words. Lyrics are listed at the end of this document in Appendix A.)**

Kendrick Lamar feat. SZA, "Luther"

Lupe Fiasco, "Kick Push"

Kendrick Lamar, "good kid"

N.W.A., "Express Yourself"

Travis Scott, "BUTTERFLY EFFECT"

Lauryn Hill, "Final Hour"

Tierra Whack, "Fruit Salad"

DOOM, "Cellz"

Lupe Fiasco, "Mural"

Eric B. & Rakim, "You Know I Got Soul"

Dave, "Six Paths"

DOOM, "Benzi Box"

Vince Staples, "Big Fish"

Nas, "It Ain't Hard to Tell"

NF, "The Search"

Kid Cudi, "Day N Night (Nightmare)"

## ASSESSMENT

- Students make a reasoned case for their criteria selection and evaluation of each individual performance.
- Students demonstrate the capacity to analyze musical compositions with attention to detail.
- Students apply their chosen evaluative criteria with consistency and specificity.

REPORT CARD	VOCABULARY	ARTICULATION	CREATIVITY	ORIGINALITY	VERSATILITY	VOICE	RECORDS	STAGE PRESENCE	STICKING TO THEMES	INNOVATING RHYTHMS	
Kool Moe Dee	10	10	10	10	9	10	8	8	10	10	95 A+
Melle Mel	10	9	10	10	9	10	8	10	10	9	95 A+
Grand Master Caz	9	10	10	10	10	9	7	10	10	9	94 A+
L.L. Cool J	10	10	9	6	10	9	9	10	9	8	90 A
T. La Rock	10	10	10	9	8	9	8	7	10	9	90 A
Rakim	8	10	10	9	8	10	10	7	9	10	91 A
KRS One	7	9	9	9	10	9	9	9	10	9	90 A
Spoonie G	7	8	9	9	8	9	9	7	9	7	82 B
M.C. Shan	7	9	9	9	9	7	9	8	9	7	83 B
Doug E. Fresh	7	9	10	10	9	8	9	10	9	9	86 B+
Bizmark	7	7	9	8	8	8	9	9	9	9	83 B
Kurtis Blow	7	7	7	8	9	9	9	9	9	7	81 B
Just Ice	9	8	8	9	8	8	8	7	8	9	82 B
Run DMC	6	9	8	8	7	8	10	10	9	7	82 B
Fat Boys	6	8	8	9	8	8	8	9	10	7	81 B
Whodini	7	8	9	9	9	8	9	9	10	8	86 B+
Beastie Boys	6	7	7	6	6	6	8	8	10	6	70 C
UTFO	7	9	9	9	9	9	8	10	9	10	89 B+
Heavy D & the Boyz	7	9	8	8	8	8	8	10	9	8	83 B
Boogie Boys	7	8	8	8	8	7	8	7	8	8	77 C+
Ultra Magnetic	10	7	8	8	8	7	8	7	8	9	80 B
Public Enemy	7	9	8	9	8	9	8	7	8	7	80 B
Stetsasonic	9	7	9	9	8	7	8	9	8	8	82 B
Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five	9	8	7	10	7	8	7	9	9	7	81 B
Jazzy Jeff and the Fresh Prince	8	9	10	10	9	8	8	10	9	7	88 B+

ARTIST/SONG	CATEGORY 1:	CATEGORY 2:	CATEGORY 3:	FINAL GRADE
SONG 1:				
SONG 2:				
SONG 3:				

### 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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## **Appendix A - SONG BANK LYRICS & TIME STAMPS**

### **1. KENDRICK LAMAR, “LUTHER” (song section: 0:00 - 0:32)**

[Verse 1: Kendrick Lamar]

Hey, Roman numeral seven, bae, drop it like it's hot  
If this world was mine, I'd take your dreams and make 'em multiply  
If this world was mine, I'd take your enemies in front of God  
Introduce 'em to that light, hit them strictly with that fire  
Fah-fah, fah-fah-fah, fah-fah, fah

### **2. KENDRICK LAMAR, “good kid” (song section: 1:26 - 2:05)**

All I see is strobe lights, blindin' me in my hindsight  
Findin' me by myself, promise me you can help  
In all honesty I got time to be copacetic until  
You had finally made decision to hold me against my will  
It was like a head-on collision that folded me standing still  
I can never pick out the difference and grade a cop on the bill  
Every time you clock in the morning, I feel you just want to kill  
All my innocence while ignorin' my purpose to persevere  
As a better person; I know you heard this and probably in fear  
But what am I 'posed to do when the blinkin' of red and blue  
Flash from the top of your roof and your dog has to say woof  
And you ask: "Lift up your shirt," because you wonder if a tattoo  
Of affiliation can make it a pleasure to put me through  
Gang files, but that don't matter because the matter is racial profile  
I heard 'em chatter: "He's prob'ly young, but I know that he's down

### **3. TRAVIS SCOTT, “BUTTERFLY EFFECT” (song section: 0:56 - 1:21)**

Bend laws, bend lanes (Skrrt, skrrt)  
Been bustin' bills, but still, ain't nothin' change (Skrrt, skrrt, skrrt, skrrt)  
You in the mob soon as you rock the chain (Skrrt, skrrt, mob)  
She caught the waves, just thumbin' through my braids (Alright)  
Heatin' up, baby, I'm just heatin' up (It's lit)  
Need your love, not a need, it is a must (Yeah)  
Feelin' stuck, you know how to keep me up (Yeah, yeah)  
Icy love, icy like a hockey puck (Alright)

### **4. TIERRA WHACK, “FRUIT SALAD” \* (Song section: 0:00 - 0:27)**

[Verse]

Worry 'bout yourself and don't worry about nobody  
Drinking' water, eatin' fruits, takin' care of my body  
When you doin' good, they want kick it just like Karate  
Stealin' swag, I know they mad, they tried to rob me

[Chorus]

They tried to rob me, they can't deny me  
You can't define me, don't need no ID  
They want to rob me, they can't deny me  
You can't define me, I don't need no ID

*\*boss... i don't know bout this one*

**5. LUPE FIASCO, "MURAL" (song section: 1:08 - 1:54)**

[Verse 1]

We're all chemicals, vitamins, and minerals  
And vicodin with inner tubes wrapped around the arm  
To see the vein like a chicken on the barn  
Top Cat chat, let's begin another yarn  
That's flying saucer cheese, or is it chicken parm'?  
But roosters don't fly like boosters don't buy  
So what powers cowards to get them to the top  
Just to fall asleep listening to Bach?  
The ribbon in the sky is the riddim that I drop  
Dribbling the eye across the prism of a clock  
That lacks meaning, but racks up stacks of fat reading  
They catch Chief and wrapped up plants from trap dealings  
Now what's a coffin with a scratched ceiling?  
And what's the talking without the match feeling  
That's buried living  
And cherry-picking every lemon from your berry system  
Then proceed with the pack feeding

**6. DAVE, "SIX PATHS" (song section: 1:21 - 1:49)**

[Verse 2]

Look, man just talk like I never took risks  
In the field like I never took risks with squares  
When I put the dare in Santan and the Santan in Santander  
Wait, look, man get aired  
I've done everything that you did  
I was 16 with a grand in my jeans and all the same clothes that you wear in your vid  
Walk in a party see a barbie looking nice I just give her a smile and a wink  
Her boyfriend's holding his hand in a fist like he can't get more than a bang to the ribs  
Them man there are just angry and pissed  
I took the right path, got cash in legit  
Why so bitter, indirects on Twitter them man they're just chatting for chicks

**7. VINCE STAPLES, "BIG FISH" (song section: 1:45 - 2:24)**

[Verse 2: Vince Staples]

It's funny, I was going crazy not too long ago  
Women problems every morning like the Maury show  
Swimming upstream while I'm tryna keep my bread from the sharks

Make me wanna put the hammer to my head  
At the park politickin' with the kids  
Tryna get 'em on a straight path, got the lames mad  
Know they hate to see me make cash, got the space dash  
In the foreign with the GPS addressed to your mama house  
Compensation, conversations, what I'm all about  
Took the smart route, never been marked out  
Shoulda been dead broke, shoulda been chalked out  
But it didn't happen, now it's time to get it cracking  
Quarterbackin' like I'm 40 Water  
Mix the holy water with the Voss  
Wanna be the boss? Then you gotta pay the cost  
Learned it from the Dogg, I'm from Long Beach  
That's the city where the skinny carry strong heat

**8. NF, "THE SEARCH" (song section: 1:56 - 2:30)**

Where'd the beat go?  
Oh, ain't that somethin'?  
Drums came in, you ain't see that comin'  
Hands on my head, can't tell me nothin'  
Got a taste of the fame, had to pump my stomach  
Throw it back up like I don't want it  
Wipe my face, clean off my vomit  
OCD, tryna push my buttons  
I said don't touch it, now y'all done it  
I can be critical, never typical  
Intricate with every syllable, I'm a criminal  
Intimate, but never political, pretty visual  
Even if you hate it, I'll make it feel like you're in it, though  
You call me what you wanna, but never call me forgettable  
Leave you deep in thought, I could never swim in the kiddie pool  
Way that I been thinkin' is cinematic, it's beautiful  
Man, I don't know if I'm makin' movies or music videos (Videos, videos, videos)

**9. LUPE FIASCO, "KICK, PUSH" (song section: 0:35 - 1:15)**

[Verse 1]  
First got it when he was six, didn't know any tricks  
Matter of fact, first time he got on it, he slipped  
Landed on his hip and busted his lip  
For a week he had to talk with a lisp, like thisss... (Ugh)  
Now we can end the story right here  
But shorty didn't quit, it was something in the air (Ugh)  
Yeah, he said it was something so appealing  
He couldn't fight the feeling, something about it  
He knew he couldn't doubt it, couldn't understand it  
Branded, since the first kickflip he landed, ugh (Woo)  
Labeled a misfit, a bandit



Ka-kunk, ka-kunk, ka-kunk  
His neighbors couldn't stand it, so—  
He was banished to the park  
Started in the morning, wouldn't stop 'til after dark, yeah  
When they said "It's getting late in here  
So I'm sorry, young man, there's no skating here"

**10. N.W.A., “EXPRESS YOURSELF”** (song section: 1:21 - 2:01)

[Verse 2: Dr. Dre]  
Now, gettin' back to the PG  
That's program, and it's easy  
Dre is back, new jacks are made hollow  
Expressin' ain't their subject because they like to follow  
The words, the style, the trend, the records I spin  
Again and again and again — yo, you on the other end  
Watch a brother blend dope rhymes with no help  
There's no fessin' and guessin' while I'm expressin' myself  
It's crazy to see people be  
What society wants 'em to be, but not me  
Ruthless is the way to go, they know  
Others say rhymes that fail to be original  
Or they kill where the hip-hop starts  
Forget about the ghetto and rap for the pop charts  
Though some musicians cuss at home  
But scared to use profanity when up on the microphone

**11. LAURYN HILL, “FINAL HOUR”** (song section: 1:12 - 1:50)

I'm about to change the focus from the richest to the brokest  
I wrote this opus, to reverse the hypnosis  
Whoever's closest to the line's gonna win it  
You gonna fall trying to ball while my team win the pennant  
I'm about to begin it, for a minute, then run for senate  
Make a slum lord be repentant, give his money to kids to spend it  
And then amend it, every law that ever prevented  
Our survival since our arrival documented in The Bible  
Like Moses and Aaron, things gon' change, it's apparent  
And all the transparent gonna be seen through  
Let God redeem you, keep your deen true, you can get the green too  
Watch out what you cling to, observe how a queen do  
And I remain calm reading the 73rd Psalm  
'Cause with all that's going on I got the world in my palm

**12. ERIC B. & RAKIM, “I KNOW YOU GOT SOUL”** (song section: 0:09 - 1:08)

[Verse 1]  
It's been a long time, I shouldn't have left you  
Without a strong rhyme to step to

Think of how many weak shows you slept through  
Time's up, I'm sorry I kept you  
Thinking of this, you keep repeating, you miss  
The rhyme from the microphone soloist  
So you sit by the radio, hand on the dial, soon  
As you hear it, pump up the volume  
Dance with the speaker 'til you hear it blow  
Then plug in the headphone 'cause here it go  
It's a four letter word when it's heard, it control  
Your body to dance (You got it), soul  
Di-tects the tempo like a red alert  
Reaches your reflex, and let it work  
When this is playing, you can't get stuck with  
The steps, so get set and I'm a still come up with  
A gift to be swift, follow the leader, the rhyme will go  
Def with the record that was mixed a long time ago  
It can be done, but only I can do it  
For those that can't dance, then clap your hands to it  
I start to think and then I sink  
Into the paper like I was ink  
When I'm writing, I'm trapped in between the lines  
I escape when I finish the rhyme, I got soul (Soul)

**13. DOOM, “BENZI BOX”** (song section: 0:34 - 1:13)

(MF Doom)

Jump 'em in like jump rope, double dutch  
Then turn on the mic with a thumb stroke, subtle touch  
Cuddle clutch, is this thing on?  
Like the fling with Mrs. King Kong, this spring gone?  
Sing a song of slaphappy crappiness  
He came to blow like it was strapped to his nappy chest  
Surely I jest, the best on a wireless mic  
Not an eye test, yet I di-gress  
But why stress? Try and remember when  
Maybe bit the tender skin-ned babysitter Gwendolyn  
The type to hit and run and go tell a friend  
Word to El Muerto cucaracha exoskeleton  
He know, flow like interstellar wind  
Tow a rap djinn by his toe into hell again  
{\*ahem\*} One two, check me too  
Loose wreck see through your gooseneck EQ

**14. NAS, “IT AIN’T HARD TO TELL”** (song section: 1:18 - 1:50)

[Verse 2]

The buddha monk's in your trunk, turn the bass up  
Not stories by Aesop  
Place your loot up, parties I shoot up

Nas, I analyze, drop a jew-el, inhale from the L  
School a fool well, you feel it like Braille  
It ain't hard to tell, I kick a skill, like Shaquille holds a pill  
Vocabulary spills, I'm Ill plus Matic  
I freak beats, slam it, like Iron Sheik  
Jam like a TEC with correct techniques  
So analyze me, surprise me, but can't magmatize me  
Scannin' while you're plannin' ways to sabotage me  
I leave 'em froze, like heroin in your nose  
Nas will rock well; it ain't hard to tell

**15. KID CUDI, "DAY 'N' NIGHT"** (song section: 0:14 - 0:400)

[Verse 1]

Day and night  
I toss and turn, I keep stress in my mind, mind  
I look for peace, but see, I don't attain  
What I need for keeps, this silly game we play, play  
Now look at this  
Madness, the magnet keeps attracting me, me  
I try to run, but see, I'm not that fast  
I think I'm first but surely finish last, last

\*\*This is by far not the most interesting verse, but its the only one that doesn't reference smoking weed.

**16. MF DOOM, "CELLZ"** (song section: 2:16 - 3:04)

A bad samaritan averagin' above average men  
Rancid rants havin' ramblin' savages scavengin'  
For scraps, perhaps roadkill, if that  
Gift of gab, and he flow ill, chrome stiff hat  
Known for writin' lightnin' tight lines, chiefin', beefin'  
Bein' off deep ends, divine bright shines even  
Dimes quiet as mimes by design mighty fine  
Slight rewind, tightly bind, blind lead blind  
Need mines now, that was this is then, listenin'  
To sizzlin' officialtons whisperin' "Him again"  
Metal Face Finster playin' with the dirty money  
Sinister, don't know what he sayin' but the words be funny  
Major vet spaded through the vest with a bayonet  
Save your breath, gave a F, pay your debt, they forget  
Make her sweat bullets, crime pays no benefits  
Then it gets wilder with more childisher degenerates