

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

I AM HIP HOP (A 5-PART SERIES) - PART 3: MUSIC

When the general public thinks about "Hip Hop", the first aspect of the culture that usually comes to mind is the music. Hip Hop music is popular worldwide and its fans cross racial, economic, gender and social barriers. At the same time, there are many who see Hip Hop music in a negative light. If one is to represent Hip Hop culture, it is important to understand the origins and history, as well as the positive and negative aspects of its music. In this lesson, we will help you learn how to gain the knowledge necessary to participate and contribute to the culture in a way that promotes your personal values and desires for the future Hip Hop.

While at its essence it is the same, Hip Hop music has changed in many significant ways since the 1970s. Though it started as easy going party and dance music, Hip Hop soon came to more seriously represent the hopes and struggles of people across the nation. As the music became recognized as economically viable, the scope of what people wanted to hear increased as did the desires of artists for expression. Quickly, subgenres of Hip Hop music developed. For example, we saw politically active artists emerge like Public Enemy and Rage Against the Machine. Run DMC started a rock trend in Hip Hop. Rakim moved the culture forward for highly creative lyricists. Around the same time, 2 Live Crew challenged free speech laws with sexually explicit lyrics while NWA struck a nerve with inner city minorities through music that explicitly described the harshness of life in urban ghettos. Many people look to artists like Rakim and Public Enemy as heroes in Hip Hop culture while groups like 2 Live Crew and NWA are often painted as villains. Whether or not either of these labels are true is a matter of historical context and personal opinion. However, it should be noted that the Hip Hop song noted by most historians as the most influential of all time, "The Message", by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, was seen as highly controversial in its time and it was opposed by many. This is not said to endorse or condone any particular song or artist, but to illustrate the fact that things are not always what they seem at first glance. Furthermore, especially in art, there is a time and place for everything, even explicit lyrics and negative expressions. We have to choose what is appropriate to represent ourselves while taking into consideration the merits of individual artistic expression.

We also point these facts out to express that Hip Hop music is an aspect of the culture which takes considerable time to know well. Listening to a few songs is a great start but, due to its vast stylistic diversity, it does not allow one to properly craft an informed opinion on Hip Hop music. Many of our SCHOOL'd lessons have focused on the topic of Hip Hop music and, as usual, we recommend you start your search to learn more there. Beyond that, to gain knowledge of Hip Hop music, you need to study many artists and their lyrics within the context of their personal history and social environment. To help you get started, here are a list of types of Hip Hop music that you can investigate: Freestyle (Battle) rap, story telling rap, party rap, old school rap, conscious rap, Christian rap, rap from foreign countries, novelty rap, fast rap, New Jack Swing, reggaeton, crunk, hyphy. There are tons of artists and tons of songs in each of these categories. Find the music that calls to you. Find the artists that inspire you or make you think. Find the lyrics that rouse your mind, spirit and body. There is something out there for almost everyone who is interested. A representative of Hip Hop culture can speak about these choices with accuracy and insight.

Once you start listening to the music, you have already begun to actively participate. However, as mentioned above, go beyond listening and learn about the artists making the music. Study lyrics and seek to understand the true meaning behind the songs you hear. Many artists make chart-topping hits that have little to no substance, originality or heart whatsoever. Conversely, there are quite a few artists who are incredibly talented and write lyrics that rival the most famous poets of history but are not yet well known by the general public. Search for more than what is being played on the radio or in videos. Dig deep into what is out there and you will find music that speaks directly to you. By doing so, you will definitely be participating in Hip Hop music culture.

Contributing to the culture of Hip Hop music requires even more effort than participation and is not for everyone. One of the most obvious ways to contribute is to start writing your own rhymes. But there are many other ways, as well. Maybe your rhymes come together better, not when they are written but, when they come directly out of your head in the moment. The battle rap scene is strong in America right now and there are many contests held all over where people can test their freestyle skills against one another. Most rappers tell stories of their first experience with

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

rapping coming on their school yards, battling against class mates or just showing off their skills to friends. Perhaps you don't have lyrics in your head but you have a talent for playing an instrument or composing music. Today's technology has put many in the role of music producer who would never have had such an opportunity when Hip Hop music began. Besides composing, you have the power to influence Hip Hop music as a DJ. But you don't have to throw a giant party to be a DJ. DJ Kool Herc's first gig was his sister's party at the local recreation center. When you play music for you and your friends, or even while just riding in the car, you are channeling the power of the DJ. You decide what music plays. You decide what people hear. That is what being a DJ is all about and doing this is a contribution to the culture. If you're good at beatboxing, there is yet another way to contribute to the musical culture of Hip Hop. YouTube showcases many excellent beatboxers all around the world who have nothing more than a webcam and a computer. If you have skills to show off, why not make your own videos and show the world?

The world of Hip Hop is a big place and the culture therefore has its good sides and bad sides. This is true with any group of people, nation, culture or society. Approaching the negative with understanding and studying the positive with interest will give you the opportunity to see things for yourself, from your own perspective, allowing you to make judgments based your personal thoughts and feelings. Being able to say, "I am Hip Hop" is a real responsibility. If you want to represent the culture, be ready to take the time to invest yourself in learning, participating and contributing so that you give the best representation possible.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Flow: (noun) An MC's vocal delivery. (verb) To deliver rhymes as an MC.

EX: "I've been reading Mos Def's lyrics online, but until the other day, I'd never heard him actually flow."

Bust Out: To start big or to go big; to pull something out for presentation or use.

EX: "I could tell they were ready to bust out in a battle, so I busted out my phone to record it."

Tight: Generally meaning cool. Specifically used when something is well put together, organized or composed to near perfection.

EX: "His rhymes were so crispy tight that every word fit together perfectly like some mad lyrical jigsaw puzzle."

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) Name two Hip Hop songs that you love and explain why.
- 2) Do you participate in the musical aspect of Hip Hop culture? If so, how?
- 3) Do you contribute to the musical aspect of Hip Hop culture? If so, how?