

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

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

WHY EDUCATE YOURSELF ABOUT HIP HOP? (AKA NOBODY LOVES A TOURIST)

Hip Hop is now worldwide. The culture is seen, heard, felt and consumed by billions of people with tremendously different backgrounds and experiences than those few who originated it in New York and California only a few decades ago. This exposure has created multiple ways for new people to engage Hip Hop culture. Some will see a bit of dancing or hear a song from afar and pass on by, while others might observe the same sights and sounds and find themselves so irresistibly attracted to Hip Hop that they decide to become a part of it forever. Both of these groups, and all that fall in between, have different levels of responsibility to and reward from the culture. If you are reading these words, chances are that you are someone who has decided, or is at least considering, that you should learn more about the origins, history and customs of Hip Hop. Before you go any further on your quest, let us take some time to really understand why it is so important to educate yourself about Hip Hop.

If you have only seen a Rap video or graffiti on a wall somewhere, you may not understand that Hip Hop is more than music or spray paint. Hip Hop, as we mentioned above, is a complete culture. What is a culture? A culture is a shared experience by a group of people which includes behavioral customs and traditions, history with important and celebrated dates, the recognition of heroes and villains, styles of dress, language, art, beliefs, myths, debates and a variety of means for expressing all of these. Culture represents a whole world and way of life for a group of people. As such, it is deeply meaningful and personal to those people and therefore deserves to be treated with great care and respect by any who encounter the culture.

As our world becomes "smaller" through easier travel and technology like TV, radio and especially the internet, we have greater opportunity to experience new things than ever before. Culturally, this has turned us all into a society of tourists. While not good or bad in and of themselves, the behavior of tourists can make them either well received or despised by a particular culture. A proper tourist engages new cultures with open-mindedness while practicing a polite and reverent curiosity. This tourist seeks to understand without judgment based on his or her own experiences and shows appreciation for those passing on their cultural knowledge. A poor tourist is a blind consumer. This tourist does not seek to understand, but instead takes without concern for authenticity, accuracy or quality. Using the example of a couple on vacation, the proper tourist seeks out a knowledgeable local to show them the sights that are truly representative of the local experience while the poor tourist buys mass produced trinkets at the local airport from international chain stores that sell such inauthentic imitations in every city. Because, as with most things, the examples of poor tourists commonly overshadow the examples of good ones, a situation is created where people generally despise tourists. They are seen as self-indulgent, ignorant, arrogant, overbearing and rude. These are clearly ugly qualities. However, this negativity is made even worse when it is from an outsider who mindlessly tramples on the cultural values of an entire society. As we have all become tourists, we each need to make a decision about what type of tourists we will be. But how do we apply this to Hip Hop culture?

In the culture of Hip Hop, a tourist is anyone who goes beyond a casual encounter with the culture and seeks to experience more. A good Hip Hop tourist is someone who goes to a trusted and respected Hip Hop source and seeks, with an open mind, to learn more about particular aspect of the culture. For example, someone may see graffiti art and then seek to learn more by finding a competition to attend and then engaging with the artists and fans there. A poor Hip Hop tourist is someone who indiscriminately collects Hip Hop products because of their potential to increase social status without knowing whether their collection is actually legitimate Hip Hop. For example, someone may hear a Hip Hop sample in a commercial, go online, start illegally downloading any song listed under the genre of Hip Hop and then drive through their neighborhood blasting that music through their car stereo with the windows rolled down. The former person is appreciated and welcomed into the culture. The latter person is a nuisance who gives both tourists and the culture a bad name, which then only adds to the general distaste for tourists from both people inside and outside the culture. To avoid becoming a poor tourist, let us now consider some additional ways that we can show respect for Hip Hop while learning about the culture and also how to make the successful transition from being a casual visitor to a permanent resident.

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As a visitor to another culture, it is essential to understand that cultures are born out of an individual's relation to his or her environment. Because we are all different and each environment is different, cultures are vastly different. Therefore, you have to be ready to engage without being critical, remembering that just because something is different doesn't mean that it is wrong. For example, from the outside looking in, a closed mind says that graffiti artists are criminals, Rap isn't real music because they don't use traditional instruments or sing, and breakers are just throwing themselves around on the ground. Not only is this point of view disrespectful to those for whom these artforms are a way of life, but it is grossly inaccurate, as many of these SCHOOL'd lessons demonstrate. To show proper respect, it is far better to make these observations internally but then, from the point of view of those within the culture, seek to understand how they view these particular aspects of their culture and why they are so highly valued. By educating yourself about the culture, not only do you avoid erroneous judgments, but you open yourself up to the benefits of a whole new cultural experience. As a Hip Hop tourist, or as any tourist, be respectful, be observant, be gracious, ask questions, keep an open mind, listen and learn. Different is good. If you can embrace those differences while respecting your own values, you will have the best of both worlds.

Understanding other cultures and values helps you to more completely understand your own. Specifically, Hip Hop is full of beneficial lessons for the world, and not just fans. Knowledge of the creation and history of Hip Hop is helpful even to those who have no interest in it artistically or socially. The more you learn about how other people live, the easier it is to be more kind, tolerant and helpful to any other type of person you meet.

If you are someone who desires to move from a tourist to an actual representative of Hip Hop, you need to read through the SCHOOL'd lessons titled "I Am Hip Hop". Those lessons explain in detail how you may become a true ambassador of the culture. As a quick preview, the basis of the lesson is this ... in order to say "I Am Hip Hop", you must learn about Hip Hop, participate in its essential activities and contribute artistically to the culture.

Ignorance and consumer greed are responsible for nearly all of the problems Hip Hop has culturally. By educating yourself about Hip Hop culture with a spirit of gratitude, you can help to preserve its authenticity and promote its positive value in the world as an artform.

HIP HOP WORD OF THE WEEK

Fell off: Short for "fell off the map". Anyone that was prominent that has fallen from popularity. It can also refer to someone that was previously doing something and no longer does it as much or at all.

EX: "I remember when everyone said he was the best dancer in the school, but since he lost that one battle, he straight fell off."

Song reference: "He Fell Off" by Astro, "Peace of Paper/Cup of Jayzus" by Lupe Fiasco

BONUS: NAME ANOTHER SONG/ARTIST THAT HAS USED THIS HHWOTW

EXTRA LEARNING

- 1) What, besides these SCHOOL'd lessons, is a good source of Hip Hop knowledge? Be specific. (i.e. not "the internet")
- 2) What makes you want to learn about Hip Hop?
- 3) In your own words, how would you respond to a friend who likes to listen to Hip Hop music and asked you, "Why do I need to learn about Hip Hop? I just like the music."