

# HIP-HOP:

# Beyond Beats & Rhymes

ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM:  
EDUCATOR GUIDE

A FILM BY BYRON HURT

## “A hip-hop head weighs in on manhood in hip-hop culture”

HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes takes an in-depth look at representations of manhood, sexism and homophobia in hip-hop culture. This groundbreaking documentary is a “loving critique” of certain disturbing developments in rap music culture from the point of view of a fan who challenges the art form’s representations of masculinity. Leading rap and hip-hop artists including Mos Def, Busta Rhymes, Russell Simmons are interviewed—and pressed—to answer some difficult questions about the violent and sexually explicit content of many hip-hop songs and videos.



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ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is an educational resource providing new documentary video content and accompanying curricular materials, lesson plans, and homework assignments to high school and community college instructors and youth-serving community-based organizations. Video content includes approximately 15 minutes excerpted from an independently produced documentary film from the Emmy Award-winning PBS series *Independent Lens*. Content is grouped into subject specific segments that correspond to lesson plans and educational activities. All CLASSROOM materials are designed with key education standards in mind, and are available, along with the video content, on a DVD-ROM and online.

ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM is a product of the Independent Television Service and KQED Education Network, with support from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, and with guidance from PBS Teachers, the National Council of Churches, American Association of Community Colleges, 4-H, National Council for the Social Studies, National Council of Teachers of English and National Association of Multicultural Education.



## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE & FILM

Educators can use this guide to support viewing of HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes while engaging students in discussions about gender, race and community values. To support media literacy, teachers can also encourage young men and women to reflect on the impact of violent and sexual imagery on themselves, their relationships and their communities. The film and the education guide can also inspire conversations on an increasingly violent, materialistic and sexually explicit American culture using hip-hop as a point of reference. Each generation expresses itself in a new musical genre, and hip-hop is the voice of today's youth. With these resources, student can better listen, understand and respond.

### GRADE LEVEL

9–12, College

### SUBJECT AREAS

Social Studies, Language Arts, Ethnic Studies, U.S. History, Media Studies, Cultural Studies, Art/Music, Current Events

### ACTIVITIES

The activities in this Educator Guide are presented in the following order:

**Activity 1: Points of View** This lesson examines the many different voices in the film and allows students to reach their own conclusions about and evince their own responses to these points of view.

**Activity 2: Manhood and Gender Identity** This lesson delves deeper into understanding how gender roles, especially around manhood, are produced and projected in society as a whole and within hip-hop.

**Activity 3: Gender Violence** This lesson analyzes rap music lyrics and their impact on the listener, paying particular attention to misogynistic and homophobic content.

**Activity 4: Homophobia and Gay Rappers in Hip-Hop** This lesson asks the taboo questions and challenges the listener to consider the role homophobia in hip-hop plays in maintaining the one-dimensional definition of masculinity that boxes in both men and hip-hop.

**Activity 5: Media Literacy** This lesson provides students with an opportunity to do their own media research on and analysis of how media images are manufactured and marketed.

The activities target students at the high school level, but can be scaffolded to accommodate college settings as well as informal classrooms such as after-school programs, clubs and youth training programs through community-based organizations. All content aligns with national standards for social studies and English language arts. Each of the activities is designed to last two traditional class periods (90–120 minutes total); together, the five activities and modules constitute a unit that can last one to two weeks. All activities aim to incorporate educational content and themes that can be integrated into your existing content curriculum.

### **A Reminder to Teachers and Educators**

Please remember that the activities are guidelines only. The content of this film is difficult and will require heavy preparation and scaffolding. We hope that you will make the necessary adjustments to meet the needs of your academic and social environment, keeping in mind your own and your students' familiarity with the issues, the needs of your school and community, your students' grade level and social awareness, and the class size and duration. Though edited for the educational setting, some of the video content provided contains adult situations and deals with adult themes.

### **ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM VIDEO MODULES**

With this Educator Guide, you can build a unit around the entire film or you can focus on one or more of the CLASSROOM video modules. Each module contains several clips and runs approximately five to seven minutes. These short modules can easily be incorporated into your classroom curricula. The CLASSROOM video modules include the following chapters and suggested activity alignments:

**1. Overview and Images of Masculinity (7:40)** This clip summarizes the director's intent in making this film and begins by taking a look at violence and manhood in hip-hop culture. (Focus: Activity 1, Activity 2)

**2. Gender Violence (4:38)** This clip looks at the commodification of women in hip-hop and its ramifications in how women are treated in society. (Focus: Activity 3)

**3. Homophobia in Hip-Hop (5:27)** This clip looks at homophobia in hip-hop culture and explores undertones of homoeroticism. (Focus: Activity 4)

**4. Media Literacy (5:34)** This clip looks at the power structure of the hip-hop industry and how hip-hop is currently being packaged and consumed by artists, consumers and big business. (Focus: Activity 5)

### **Get the Classroom Video Modules:**

CLASSROOM video modules are available on streaming video format at [www.pbs.org/independentlens/classroom](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/classroom). A DVD with the CLASSROOM Video modules and Educator Guide is available to classroom and community educators by contacting ITVS COMMUNITY at [outreach@itvs.org](mailto:outreach@itvs.org). DVD quantities are limited.



**Get the Full Film on DVD**

In the event that you do not have the CLASSROOM Video Modules the activities can still be applied to the film in its entirety. As the teacher or educator, make the necessary adjustments to fit the needs of your learning community. Educational DVD copies of HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes can be purchased from: Media Education Foundation at <http://www.mediaed.org/videos>

**A Reminder to Teachers and Educators**

Both the full film and the CLASSROOM video modules contain adult situations and deals with adult themes.

**RESOURCES****ITVS COMMUNITY CLASSROOM HIP-HOP MATERIALS**

- Educator Guide
- Fact sheets and Issue Briefs
  - Hip-Hop 101
  - Masculinity: Men & Boys
  - Gender Violence & Homophobia
  - Media Literacy & Responsibility
- Community and Viewer Discussion Guide
- All resources are available at:  
[www.pbs.org/independentlens/classroom](http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/classroom)

**WEBSITES**

- ITVS Community Engagement Campaign for HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes: <http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hiphop/>
- PBS Companion Website <http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/hiphop/>
- The Original Hip-hop Lyrics Archive: <http://ohhla.com/>
- VIBE magazine: <http://www.vibe.com>
- Davey D's Hip-hop Corner: <http://www.daveyd.com/>
- Media Literacy MAP Frameworks, KQED Education Network: <http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/mapframework.jsp>
- Prefix online magazine: <http://www.prefixmag.com/features/S/saul-williams/146>
- San Francisco Bay Guardian newspaper: [http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover\\_dickcollective.html](http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover_dickcollective.html)
- Southern Voice newspaper: <http://www.sovo.com/2003/8-29/news/national/hip-hop.cfm>

**A Reminder to Teachers and Educators**

As always, be sure to check these URLs to see if they are still live, if the content is appropriate for your students and classroom, and if they can be accessed at your school. In the event that your school or workplace blocks any of these URLs, access the Web at home and make the necessary print copies for your classroom.

**BOOKS**

- Banjoko, Adisa, *Lyrical Swords: Hip-hop and Politics in the Mix*, YinSumi Press (2004).
- Chang, Jeff, *Can't Stop Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-hop Generation*, St. Martin's Press (2005).
- Chang, Jeff, *Total Chaos: The Art and Aesthetics of Hip-hop*, Basic Civitas Books (2007).
- Cross, Brian, *It's Not About a Salary: Rap, Race and Resistance in Los Angeles*, Verso Books (1993).
- Kitwana, Bakari, *The Hip-hop Generation: Young Blacks and the Crisis in African American Culture*, Basic Civitas Books (2003).
- Spady, James G., H. Samy Alim and Samir Meghelli, *Tha Global Cípha: Hip-hop Culture and Consciousness*, Black History Museum Press (2006).

## ABOUT THE FILM

Filmmaker Byron Hurt, a lifelong hip-hop fan, was watching rap music videos on BET when he realized that each video was nearly identical. Guys in fancy cars threw money at the camera while scantily clad women danced in the background. As he discovered how stereotypical rap videos had become, Hurt, a former college quarterback turned activist, decided to make a film about the gender politics of hip-hop, the music and the culture he grew up with. "The more I grew and the more I learned about sexism and violence and homophobia, the more those lyrics became unacceptable to me," he says. "And I began to become more conflicted about the music that I loved." The result is *HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes*, a riveting documentary that tackles issues of masculinity, sexism, violence and homophobia in today's hip-hop culture.

Sparking dialogue on hip-hop and its declarations on gender, *HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* provides thoughtful insight from intelligent, divergent voices, including rap artists, industry executives, rap fans and social critics from inside and outside the hip-hop generation. The film includes interviews with such famous rappers as Mos Def, Fat Joe, Chuck D and Jadakiss and hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, along with commentary from Michael Eric Dyson, Beverly Guy Sheftall, Kevin Powell and Sarah Jones and interviews with young women at Spelman College, a historically black school and one of the nation's leading liberal arts institutions.

The film also explores such pressing issues as women and violence in rap music, representations of manhood in hip-hop culture, what today's rap lyrics reveal to their listeners and homoeroticism in hip-hop. A "loving critique" from a self-proclaimed "hip-hop head," *HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* discloses the complex intersection of culture, commerce and gender through on-the-street interviews with aspiring rappers and fans at hip-hop events throughout the country.

The violent and hypersexual imagery in hip-hop has been a topic of heated debate on school campuses and in civic organizations, legislative sessions, women's magazines, churches and homes. These debates stir strong emotions, with particular resonance among African Americans, arguably the community most affected by the negative messages and stereotypes reinforced by the music. Some defend the right to self-expression or argue that hip-hop encourages entrepreneurship; others link it to an increasingly nihilistic youth culture that supports violence against women and homosexuals. Missing from the debate are tools to help communities lead and sustain productive conversations that engage all sides.

*HIP-HOP: Beyond Beats and Rhymes* examines representations of manhood, sexism, and homophobia in hip-hop culture through the eyes of an adult fan who is an African American male and anti-sexism trainer. Instead of offering simple conclusions about hip-hop's fans and creators, the candid voices in the film describe the cultural and political environment in which the music is created, commercialized and consumed.

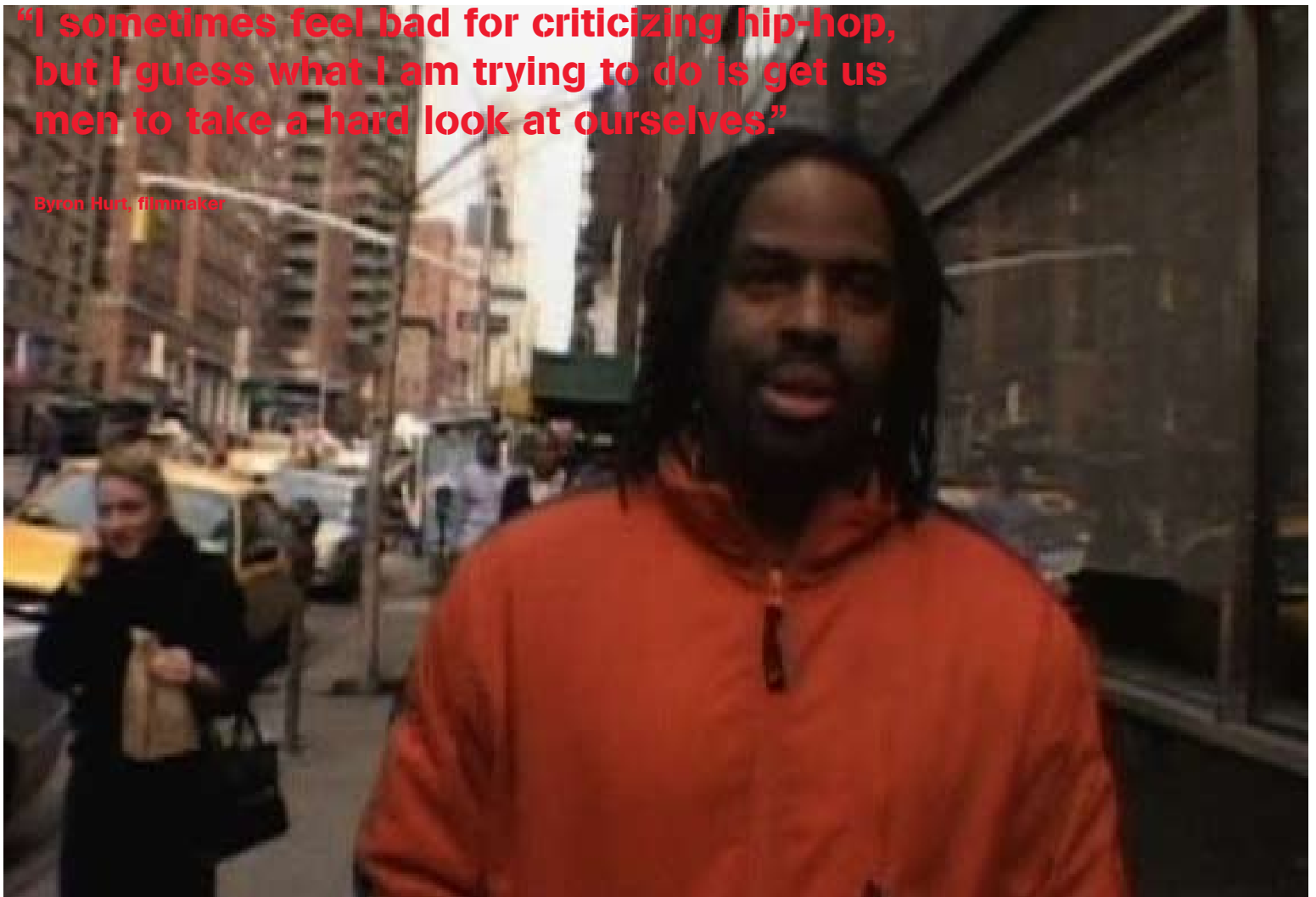


# Activity 1

Points of View  
(90 min + assignments)

**“I sometimes feel bad for criticizing hip-hop,  
but I guess what I am trying to do is get us  
men to take a hard look at ourselves.”**

Byron Hurt, filmmaker



# Activity 1

## Points of View

(90 min + assignments)

Good documentary work presents myriad points of view. Although Byron Hurt takes a strong stance against the violence, misogyny and homophobia in hip hop, in his film he presents many voices who speak for themselves on the subject. This lesson examines those voices and allows the students to reach their own conclusions about and evince their own responses to these points of view.

1. Write this quote:

***“Hip hop is the voice of this generation. ... It has become a powerful force.”***

—DJ Kool Herc, one of the “founding fathers” of hip hop

Have students write a response using the sentence stems:

- I think Kool Herc is saying that ...
- I agree/disagree with Kool Herc because ...

Have the class show their point of view with a “thumbs up/thumbs down,” then call on a few students from each perspective to read their sentences.

2. In small groups, have students brainstorm what they know about hip-hop from their own experience and from various forms of media. They can use a chart like this one to organize the information they come up with, which can be in the form of related words, phrases, examples and so on. They can use any or all of these categories or come up with their own. Refer to **Student Handout B: Hip-Hop Matrix** as a worksheet for your students.

<b>Music/Sound</b>	<b>Visual</b>	<b>Language/Slang</b>
<b>History/Origins</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Message(s)</b>
<b>Artistry/Creativity</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Influence/Impact</b>

3. Have students read “Issue Brief: Hip Hop” (PDF) from the ITVS website to inform their “History/Origins” square: [http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief\\_hiphop.pdf](http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief_hiphop.pdf)

4. Each group picks two or three squares to brainstorm. After the brainstorming session, have each group tell the rest of the class where their information comes from, then have the class as a whole discuss how the groups have similar or different ideas.

5. Show **Video Module 1**, “Overview and Images of Masculinity” (7:40). While they are watching, have the students record speakers and quotations for further reference and discussion after viewing the video module, for example:

<b>Name</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Quotation</b>
Toni Blackman	Rapper, actress, writer	“I jokingly say that I’m in recovery from hip hop. It’s like being in a domestic violence situation. You’re home is hip hop and your man beats you.”

Refer to **Student Handout C: Speaker and Quotes** as a worksheet for your students. Refer to **Teacher Handout A** for a list of recommended speakers and quotations.

6. Think: Pair-Share

- Think – Have each student choose one of the speakers and quotations from his or her chart and journal responses to these questions: What is the speaker's relationship to or role in hip hop? What is the speaker's view on violence and/or misogyny in hip hop? If you could respond to the speaker's statement, what would you say to him or her?
- Pair – Divide students into pairs, then have them compare with each other what they wrote about their respective speakers. They can use the following questions to guide their discussion: Would the two speakers agree with each other? What would they say in response to each other's statements? Which of the speakers most represents your view?
- Share – The pairs share with the class, using these speaking stems: We agree with \_\_\_\_\_, who says ... / We disagree with \_\_\_\_\_, who says ...

7. Activity: Crossing the Line

In this activity, students will think about their own views on hip hop and express those views in a nonverbal activity. Make a line on the floor through the middle of the classroom with masking tape. Standing on one side of the line will indicate agreement with the statement the facilitator reads. Standing on the other side will indicate disagreement. One at a time, read each of the following statements aloud to the class and allow the students to go to the side that indicates their view:

- Hip hop is a creative art form and a form of expression.
- I enjoy listening to rap music.
- When I hear a rap song, I pay more attention to the beat than to the lyrics.
- Rap lyrics contain too many references to violence and gunplay.
- Many rappers are just reinforcing negative stereotypes about urban youth and young people of color.
- Rappers who talk about violence and the streets are just reflecting the violent American culture that we live in.
- Musicians have a responsibility to provide positive messages and images because children are listening.
- Consumers of music don't want to hear music with conscientious, righteous or positive messages.
- Record labels would rather promote stereotypical "gangster" rap music because it sells more units.
- Hip hop has become commodified and exploited by corporate America.
- Rap music as a whole is disrespectful toward women.
- Rap music as a whole is hateful toward gays.
- Rap music, like movies, is ultimately entertainment and should not be taken so seriously.
- Hip hop is a culture that has the power to unify people across linguistic, racial and geographic lines.
- Hip hop has the power to be a voice of resistance and social change.
- Hip hop has become a caricature and a modern-day minstrel show.

Discussion – Reflect on the activity with the following guide questions:

- Which statements were easy/difficult for you?
- Which responses from the class surprised you?
- Which statements did you feel very strongly about?

8. Assignment: Persuasive Essay

Have each student pick one statement from the Crossing the Line activity about which to write a persuasive essay. In their essay, students should take a clear stance on whether they agree or disagree with the statement and support their claims with evidence from the film. They should use as examples the quotations they selected in Step 3 of this activity.



# Activity 2

Manhood and Gender Identity  
(60-90 min + assignments)



**“The reason why braggadocio and boast is so central to the history of hip-hop is because you’re dealing with the history of black men in America.”**

*Jelani Cobb, Assistant Professor of History at Spelman College*

# Activity 2

## Manhood and Gender Identity (60-90 min + assignments)

HIP-HOP is concerned with how prevailing attitudes about masculinity are reinforced in popular representations of hip hop. This lesson delves deeper into understanding how gender roles are produced and projected in society as a whole and in hip-hop. For this activity, show **Video Module 1**, “Overview and Images of Masculinity” (7:40).

1. Divide a chart paper into two sides: “Should” and “Should Not.” Have students brainstorm what boys/men “should” like to do, what they “should” be like and how they “should” act. Do the same for the “Should Not” side.
2. Discuss using the following guide questions:
  - How do you, your friends and adults you know fit these stereotypes? How are they different from these stereotypes?
  - How do these stereotypes of how boys/men “should” and “should not” be influence some people your age?
3. Have students read “Issue Brief: Men and Boys” (PDF) from the ITVS website: [http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief\\_menandboys.pdf](http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief_menandboys.pdf)
  - How does the “Man Box” oppress women? How does it oppress men?
  - How do the images and lyrics in hip hop contribute to the “Man Box”?
  - What can boys and men do to challenge or break out of that box?
4. Present the following quotes to the class and have each student copy down the one that most strikes him/her:
 

“Hip hop is a man’s game.”  
—Suge Knight, CEO, Death Row Records

“The notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity.”  
—Michael Eric Dyson

“BET is the cancer of black manhood in the world.”  
—Chuck D

“From a young age, [boys] are taught that real men are tough, violent, control women and cannot under any circumstances show weakness.”  
—Byron Hurt

Have students compare the quote they chose with the brainstorm list the class developed in Step 2. Use these questions as a basis for comparison: Would the speakers agree with what you generated in Step 2? Do you agree or disagree with the speakers?
5. Break the class into pairs. In each pair, one student will research a representation that depicts men as violently masculine, tough, sexist and so on while the other student will research a representation that depicts men as sensitive and more multifaceted. The representation each student chooses to research can be a rapper, a character in a film, show or book, a politician, a role model, or even someone the student knows.
6. Each student pair will create a poster that places their two representations side by side. The poster should include photos or illustrations, background information, and a reflective paragraph about what the image means and what influence it has.
7. Gallery Walk: Exhibit the posters and have students read and examine them. They should record notes about both types of representations.
8. Press Release and Press Conference: Have students nominate and develop a list of awards they would give to people in hip hop, for example, “Most Pro-Female Empowerment Lyrics” and “Most Positive Portrayal in a Television Series.” Have students write and contribute descriptions to a press release for print and online circulation. Also have the class present and record a press conference at which they publicly recognize their awardees.

# Activity 3

Gender Violence  
(60 min + assignments)



**“I jokingly say I’m in recovery from hip hop. It’s like being in a domestic violence situation. Your home is hip hop and your man beats you.”**

**Toni Blackman, Rapper, Poet, Actress**

# Activity 3

## Gender Violence

(60 min + assignments)

Hip-hop is notorious for images that commodify women as sex objects. Even a casual survey of a channel like BET will show video after video with scantily clad, sexualized women. At the same time, male power and aggression in hip-hop often comes from feminizing opponents, and therefore homophobia is very present in imagery and in lyrics. This lesson analyzes rap music lyrics and their impact on the listener. For this activity, show **Video Module 2**, “Gender Violence” (6:18).

- The chorus of a rap song is often (and accurately) referred to in slang as “the hook.” Group the students into pairs and have each pair write down “hooks” that they know from current or past rap songs. Have them share with the class the hooks they came up with, then have a class discussion using the following guide questions:
  - How did you remember the hook? What makes a hook easy to remember?
  - What is the overall message of the hook? If people are singing along with it, what are they saying?
  - Do you think people think about what the lyrics mean when they sing along with them?
- Present the students with the lyrics of two songs, one that is very misogynistic and one that is very feminist:
  - “Bitches Ain’t Shit,” by Dr. Dre (from *The Chronic*, 1992)  
Link to lyrics is available at The Original Hip Hop Lyrics Archive: [http://ohhla.com/anonymous/dr\\_dre/chronic/bitches.dre.txt](http://ohhla.com/anonymous/dr_dre/chronic/bitches.dre.txt)
  - “U.N.I.T.Y.,” by Queen Latifah (from *Black Reign*, 1993)  
Link to lyrics is available at The Original Hip Hop Lyrics Archive: <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/qlatifah/blkreign/unity.lah.txt>
- Give the students some background information: Dr. Dre’s *The Chronic* was wildly popular, considered by many to be a hip-hop classic and often referred to as the album responsible for ushering in the era of gangsta rap. Queen Latifah has been one of the few and most prominent women in hip-hop, and “U.N.I.T.Y.,” one of her biggest songs, could be considered a direct response to the misogyny of Dr. Dre’s hit song.
- Analyze the Dr. Dre track using the following guide questions:
  - What is the hook? Is it catchy? What is the message of the hook?
  - In the first verse, Dr. Dre refers to his former partner, Eazy E, as a woman. What is his point?
  - In the second verse, Snoop Dogg describes an episode that ends in him exacting violence against a woman. What is his justification for that act of violence?
  - Jewell, a female rapper, raps the last verse. How does she position herself toward other women and toward men?
  - How does this song relate to Michael Eric Dyson’s analysis in the film that men bond with each other by using sex and their domination of women “at the expense of their heterosexual alliances with women”?
- Introduce the analysis by Saul Williams, poet and actor, from this interview from the online magazine Prefix: <http://www.prefixmag.com/features/S/saul-williams/146>  
*“Beats are extremely, extremely powerful. When the beat drops, you nod your head. Like yes. The affirmative. Dr. Dre puts out *The Chronic*. All of a sudden the beats are so hypnotic and the lyrics are like ‘Bitches ain’t shit,’ and we start making excuses. ‘Oh, I just like the beat. I just like to dance to this. I really don’t care about what he’s saying.’ And so over time we built up a tolerance for bullshit lyrics.”*
  - Do you agree or disagree? How does the force of the music deliver the lyrics more powerfully?
  - In the film, rapper Jadakiss argues that these kinds of lyrics are “what people want to hear” and that even women are some of the main people dancing and singing along. Do you agree? Why?



6. Analyze the Queen Latifah song using the following guide questions:
- What is the hook? Is it catchy? What is the message of the hook?
  - In the first verse, whom is Queen Latifah addressing? What is her message to them?
  - In the second verse she calls out men who domestically abuse their partners. What is her message to them? Have students read "Issue Brief: Gender Violence and Homophobia" (PDF) from the ITVS website: [http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief\\_gender.pdf](http://www.itvs.org/outreach/hip-hop/resources/brief_gender.pdf)  
If Queen Latifah were to include statistics or factual information to back up what she is saying to men who abuse their partners, what would she say?
  - In the last verse, Queen Latifah speaks directly to women. What is her message to them?
  - This song was very popular when it came out. Would a song like this be equally appealing and commercially viable now? Why or why not?

7. Assignment: Compare and Contrast Essay

Have students write an essay comparing the lyrics and messages of the Dr. Dre and Queen Latifah songs or two songs of their choice that represent perspectives on women similar to the Dr. Dre and Queen Latifah songs. They should include specific lines as examples and present an opinion on how the songs impact listeners and consumers.

**A Reminder to Teachers and Educators**

This activity involves having the students examine the lyrics to a song that could be deemed offensive or inappropriate for classroom use. It is included for the following reasons: (1) The lyrics are a rich document in which each verse really captures all of the forms of hatred against women commonly found in rap lyrics, including a verse demonstrating the complicity of a female rapper (Jewell)! (2) Saul Williams argues that that particular track was "the most hypnotic beat on the record [The Chronic album]." (3) Queen Latifah's song clearly is a direct response. If, however, you would like to use an alternative song, consider "Pimp Juice" by Nelly (which is referenced in the film). [http://ohhla.com/anonymous/nelly/ville/p\\_juice.nel.txt](http://ohhla.com/anonymous/nelly/ville/p_juice.nel.txt)

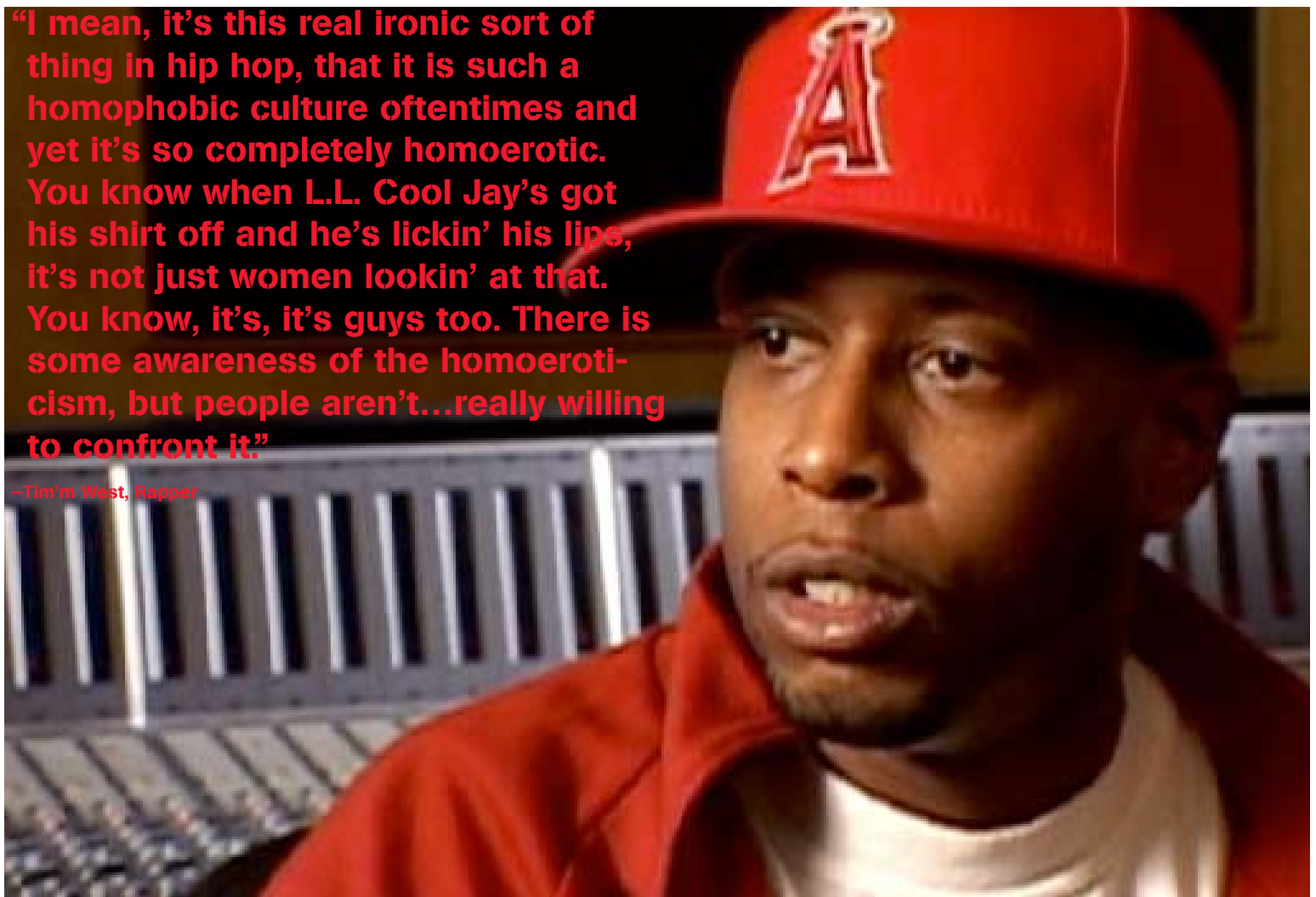


# Activity 4

Stalling the Cipher: Homophobia  
and Gay Rappers in Hip-Hop  
(90 min + assignments)

**“I mean, it’s this real ironic sort of thing in hip hop, that it is such a homophobic culture oftentimes and yet it’s so completely homoerotic. You know when L.L. Cool Jay’s got his shirt off and he’s lickin’ his lips, it’s not just women lookin’ at that. You know, it’s, it’s guys too. There is some awareness of the homoeroticism, but people aren’t...really willing to confront it.”**

—Tim'm West, Rapper



# Activity 4

## Stalling the Cipher: Homophobia and Gay Rappers in Hip-Hop

(90 min + assignments)

As such a visibly and audibly homophobic venue, rap music is a taboo topic that should be examined. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that there are hip-hop artists that have been challenging and redefining hip-hop with their presence. This lesson asks the taboo questions and challenges the listener to consider the role homophobia in hip-hop plays in maintaining the one-dimensional definition of masculinity that boxes in both men and hip-hop. For this activity show **Video Module 3**, “Homophobia in Hip-Hop” (5:27).

1. Ask the class this question, which Byron Hurt poses to rapper Busta Rhymes in the film:

“*Would a gay rapper ever be accepted in hip-hop?*” Have students write a response using the following sentence stems:

- A gay rapper would/would not be accepted because ...
- A major record label would/would not promote a gay hip-hop artist because ...
- If a gay rapper were the best rapper, ...
- Busta Rhymes refuses to address the question because ...
- The lack of a gay presence in hip-hop is/is not surprising because ...

Have students show their point of view regarding each statement with a “thumbs up/thumbs down,” then call on a few students from each perspective to read their sentences.

2. Introduce the article “Stick This Into Your Mind,” by Amanda Nowinski. This article, which is a spotlight on Oakland rap crew The Deep Dickollective (D/DC), was the cover story of the *San Francisco Bay Guardian’s* Aug. 21, 2002, issue. One of the members of D/DC, Tim’m West, is featured in the film. [http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover\\_dickollective.html](http://www.sfbg.com/36/47/cover_dickollective.html)

3. Have the students read the article together in small groups, then discuss these questions within their group:

- West recounts a time he and Ampu walked up to a cipher and everyone stopped; no one wanted them to join and no one wanted to battle them. Why would the presence of a gay rapper cause that response? Why is it that for many rappers their “skill is bound up in the fact that [they are] hetero[sexual]?” What would happen if a gay rapper out-rhymed a heterosexual opponent in a cipher?
- West also argues that society expects black men to be homophobic, and he gives the example of journalists excusing “conscious” rappers for their homophobia. In fact, Common and Mos Def, arguably the most prominent and mainstream-visible conscious hip hop artists, have homophobic lines in their discography. (See Common’s “Doinit”: “*Niggas hate you, they ain’t payin’ you no attention / In a circle of faggots your name is mentioned*” <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/common/water/doinit.cms.txt> and Mos Def’s, from Black Star’s “RE:DEFinition”: “*Cats who claimin’ they hard be mad fag / so I run through them like floodwater through sandbags*” <http://ohhla.com/anonymous/blackstr/blackstr/redef.blk.txt>.) Are these artists just reflecting the masculine culture in society that “denotes gay terminology as negative” (refer to the article “Is Hip Hop Homophobia Softening?” from *Southern Voice*, Aug. 29, 2003 [http://www.sovo.com/2003/8-29/news/national/hip\\_hop.cfm](http://www.sovo.com/2003/8-29/news/national/hip_hop.cfm)) or are they presenting themselves as anti-gay? Do conscious artists have an even greater responsibility than unabashedly derogatory rappers to present an anti-homophobic stance?
- West states that as an artistic entity, “D/DC occupies this space that isn’t exactly comfortable for anybody.” How do they embrace that role? Why is it important to have artists visible in that role? Do they risk alienating any audiences? How might they contribute to reinforcing or breaking stereotypes? Could D/DC be a commercially successful music group?

4. Present this final quote from West from the San Francisco Bay Guardian article: “*What the D/DC is doing is not about homohop, and it’s not really about gay people in hip hop. What it’s really about is, we are rappers who believe, struggle and fight for freedom inside of hip hop to the utmost degree.*”

Have students discuss what “freedom inside of hip hop” might mean and might look like.

5. Assignment: Opinion Editorial

Have students write an OpEd to a media outlet of their choice presenting their views on homophobia in hip-hop, the presence of gays in hip-hop, and the impact of the language and messages that artists choose to communicate.

# Activity 5

Media Literacy (90 min + assignments)



**“...at the end of the day, it’s only entertainment.”**

*~Jadakiss, Rapper*



# Activity 5

## Media Literacy (90 min + assignments)

The film takes a critical look at how hip-hop's image is portrayed, especially in popular media. This lesson provides students with an opportunity to do their own media research on and analysis of how images are manufactured and marketed. For this activity show **Video Module 4**, "Media Literacy" (5:34)

- In small groups, have students brainstorm as many places and spaces as they can think of (television, films, commercials, billboards, video games, magazines, news, characters in books, etc.) where images of hip-hop can be seen and hip-hop music can be heard.
- From that list, each student should pick a different media outlet that he or she will research, view and bring in examples to report on (refer to the Media Literacy MAP framework at <http://www.kqed.org/topics/education/medialiteracy/mapframework.jsp>). Have the students use the following guide questions:
  - What type of media is being used?
  - Who or what aspect of hip-hop is being presented?
  - What stereotypes are being reinforced (or invalidated)?
  - Is the image positive or negative? In what ways?
  - What are the lyrics and images communicating to the viewer/listener?
  - Who is the target audience? How might they receive the images?
  - Who produced and funded the image? How much input do you think the hip-hop subject had in producing the representation?
  - Who would benefit from this image? What product or service is being sold with the help of this image?
- Have groups present their findings. They should share the media examples they found and explain and discuss their analysis of them.
- Filmmaker Byron Hurt came up with the vision and the critique that drives this film. Have students read this VIBE magazine interview with Hurt: [http://www.vibe.com/news/online\\_exclusives/2006/06/byron\\_hurt\\_on\\_manhood\\_in\\_hip\\_hop/](http://www.vibe.com/news/online_exclusives/2006/06/byron_hurt_on_manhood_in_hip_hop/). Hurt explains that in approaching the subjects he interviews and in presenting his critique "it was important that people know me as somebody who really loves hip hop and not someone trying to dis hip hop." He also begins the film with a disclaimer to emphasize that he is critiquing hip hop from the point of view of a participant, hip-hop community member and insider. Use these guide questions to discuss Hurt's statements:
  - Why does Hurt feel it is important that he make this disclaimer to the viewer?
  - How do his disclaimer and his explanation for his critique of hip-hop affect how you, as a viewer, receive the points he is making?
  - How do you think his insider position affected the responses he received from his interviewees?
  - Who else do you think he should have interviewed or included as a voice in the film? What other questions would you have asked the interviewees if you were behind the camera?
- Back in small groups, have students design and present a media representation of hip-hop in the way they would like to portray it. It could be a treatment for a music video, a television show, a film, a print, radio or television advertisement, a news report, and so on. Have them consider why they choose the images they do and what impact their representation would have on viewers/listeners and consumers. After each group presents its representation, have the class give the group feedback using the same guide questions from Step 2 of this activity.

## STUDENT HANDOUT A: DEFINITION OF RELATED TERMS

**hip-hop:** a type of popular culture among young people in big cities, especially African Americans, that includes rap music, dancing and graffiti art

**misogyny:** hatred of women

**braggadocio:** proud talk about something that you claim to own, to have done and so on

**homophobia:** irrational fear of, aversion to or discrimination against homosexuality or homosexuals

**gender:** the fact of being male or female; the behavioral, cultural or psychological traits typically associated with one sex

**manhood:** qualities, such as strength, courage and sexual power, that people think a man should have; manliness

**materialism:** the belief that money and possessions are more important than art, religion, moral beliefs and so on

**mainstream:** accepted by or involving most people in a society

**stereotype:** a generalized image of a person or group that does not acknowledge individual differences and that is often prejudicial to that person or group

Source: Longman Dictionary and Merriam Webster's Dictionary

## STUDENT HANDOUT B: HIP-HOP MATRIX

### ACTIVITY 1: *POINTS OF VIEW*

<b>Music/Sound</b>	<b>Visual</b>	<b>Language/Slang</b>
<b>History/Origins</b>	<b>Style</b>	<b>Message(s)</b>
<b>Artistry/Creativity</b>	<b>People</b>	<b>Influence/Impact</b>





## TEACHER HANDOUT A: LIST OF SPEAKERS AND QUOTES

"We're like in this box, and in order to be in that box, you have to be strong, you have to be tough, you have to have a lot of girls, you gotta have money, you gotta be a player or a pimp, you know, you gotta be in control. You have to dominate other men, other people, you know. If you are not any of those things, then, you know, people call you soft or weak or a pussy or a chump or a faggot, and nobody wants to be any of those things. So everybody stays inside the box."

—Byron Hurt, Producer and Director

"Every black man that goes into the studio, he's always got two people in his head: a pimp, in terms of who he really is, and the thug that he feels he has to project. It's a prison for us ... it's a prison we're in."

—Conrad Tillard, Hip-Hop Minister

"I jokingly say I'm in recovery from hip hop. It's like being in a domestic violence situation. Your home is hip hop and your man beats you."

—Toni Blackman, Rapper, Poet, Actress

"When you think about American society, the notion of violent masculinity is at the heart of American identity. So that the preoccupation with Jesse James and the outlaw, the rebel—much of that is associated in the American mindset, the collective imagination of the nation, with the expansion of the frontier. In the history of America ... the social imagination, the violent man using the gun to defend his family, his kin, becomes the suitable metaphor for the notion of manhood."

—Michael Dyson, Cultural Critic

"The political economy of the ghetto is so rife with arguments through the barrel of a gun—their homeboys getting shot, their homeboys getting shot at, their homeboys trying to shoot somebody, their homeboys wanting to shoot somebody. So the gun becomes the outlet for the aggression and the rage that young black and brown men feel."

—Michael Dyson, Cultural Critic

"Just draw up the image of Public Enemy's logo, where you have a black male figure in a scope, in the sights of a gun. And there's a way in which that is what we are navigating as black men in the inner city."

—Dr. James Peterson, Hip Hop Scholar

"The culture or the energy that came from that was a very improvisational energy, a very sort of reclaiming energy that young folks, through dance, through rapping and deejayin' and so on and so forth, that is how the culture took hold. It was a willed response to systematic violence in the community. And when I say "violence," I mean like destroying homes ... imagine someone puttin' a highway through your neighborhood—then you can understand hip hop."

—Dr. James Peterson, Hip Hop Scholar

"The dominant image of black masculinity in hip hop is the fact that somebody can be confrontational, but confrontational with the wrong cat. It's like they're not ever confrontational with the cats that will claim like, you know, "I'll wipe your whole neighborhood out." Because ... they're almost like they're trained not to even see them ... it's, my beef is wit' this cat right here that looks just like me."

—Chuck D, Rapper

“The national story is Black death. And Black death—whether it’s through film, whether it’s through recordings, whether it’s just through news— is the bottom line, in the black—no pun intended—a moneymaker. Black death has been pimped by corporations, and young people think that the street credibility is, you know, is a thing that will ride them to some kind of profitability in life.”

—Chuck D, Rapper

“One of the disappointing things about Tip Drill and that whole genre of music videos is that they have taken a view of women of color that’s not radically different from the views of 19th century white slave holders.”

—Dr. Jelani Cobb, Spelman College

“I’m torn, you know, to be honest, because I have to be real with the way that I’ve been socialized as a man and what my reaction, initial reaction, is to Tip Drill or to any other video, to look at these images, be excited by these images, um, be turned on by these images, et cetera.”

—Mikael Moore, Moorhouse College Student

“Generally speaking, black people do not believe that misogyny and sexism and violence against women are urgent issues ... we still think that racism, police brutality, black male incarceration are the issues that we should be concerned about.”

—Dr. Beverly Guy-Sheftall, Spelman College

“In the rest of our culture, when men want to call other men, you know, something that’s really going to degrade them, they call ‘em a ‘sissy,’ they call ‘em a ‘punk,’ they call them all these kinds of names. That’s outside of hip hop. That’s everywhere.”

—Sarah Jones, Singer, Actor, Writer

“I’ve never even seen straight black men in large numbers even try to have conversations with gay brothers, you know what I mean? I know of folks who’ve done it one on one. I’ve done it one on one, you know what I mean? But I don’t really see that happening, man, because I think part of the problem, part of the onus falls on straight men to really... begin to process how we define manhood.”

—Kevin Powell, Hip Hop Scholar

“I mean, it’s this real ironic sort of thing in hip hop, that it is such a homophobic culture oftentimes and yet it’s so completely homoerotic. You know when L.L. Cool Jay’s got his shirt off and he’s lickin’ his lips, it’s not just women lookin’ at that. You know, it’s, it’s guys too. There is some awareness of the homoeroticism, but people aren’t...really willing to confront it.”

—Tim’m West, Rapper

“We have trusted the media and the corporations to define what hip hop is. It’s like now HOT 97 is “the station where hip hop lives,” so we hear that and we don’t understand that it’s some corporation owned by people with nothing to do with hip hop, who’re just trying to cash in. It’s like, ‘Oh, hip hop lives there. All right, so, you know, they must know. That must be what rap is.’ No, we, we have never let the media ... define us, so why are we doing that now?”

—Talib Kwali, Rapper

“After 700,000, it’s all white people. After, after your scan passes 700,000, it’s all white people, and he’s [50 Cent] well past 700,000. So the white people want to hear that killin’ every day. They wanna hear about that.”

—Jadakiss, Rapper

"If the KKK was smart enough, they would've created gangsta rap because it's such a caricature of black masculinity. Yet young people of color are being presented with this idea that somehow these people represent us, and they're cool and they're gonna, they're gonna stand in for 'us' against the white power structure while they're completely subservient to that white power structure. It's really an ironic, uh, uh, sad reality."

—Jackson Katz, Anti-Sexist Educator

"BET is the cancer of black manhood in the world because they one-, they have one-dimensionalized us and commodified us into being a one-, one-trick image. We throwin' money at the camera. We're flashin', you know, jewelry that can, can actually give a town in Africa water. We got \$160 million con-, in contracts. Cuz we got happy niggas."

—Chuck D, Rapper

"It's only—at the end of the day, it's only entertainment."

—Jadakiss, Rapper

"Who's making the decisions about what people see? Who's making the decisions about what gets the multimillion-dollar contracts? And overwhelmingly, it's not—this is no great secret—overwhelmingly, it's white men in suits who are makin' those decisions, and they're deciding, you know, 'This makes money, I'm gonna sell it. I don't care if it's hurting people.' Who, who—it's a business decision, right?"

—Jackson Katz, Anti-Sexist Educator

"The only thing that can turn the tide is black men. Before anybody says, 'I'm a rapper,' I tell 'em, first of all, you know, 'I'm a man.' A man tells his business situation like, 'We can't do that. We won't go there. We can't. It's a slap in the face to me and my constituency, my family where I come from and all.' That's a man. And that's what has been lacking in the music business and the film business, that we haven't had men represent black people."

—Chuck D, Rapper

## RECOMMENDED NATIONAL STANDARDS

### Curriculum Standards for the English Language Arts National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association

1. Students read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and non-fiction, classic and contemporary works.
2. Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
3. Students apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound-letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
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.
7. Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
8. Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

### Curriculum Standards for Social Studies Expectations of Excellence, National Council for the Social Studies

#### Performance Expectation 1: Culture

- Predict how data and experiences may be interpreted by people from diverse cultural perspectives and frames of reference.
- Demonstrate the value of cultural diversity as well as cohesion within and across groups.
- Interpret patterns of behavior reflecting values and attitudes that contribute or pose obstacles to cross-cultural understanding.

#### Performance Expectation 9: Individual Development and Identity

- Examine the interactions of ethnic, national or cultural influences in specific situations or events.
- Compare and evaluate the impact of stereotyping, conformity... and other behaviors on individuals and groups.
- Explain and analyze examples of tensions between expressions of individuality and efforts to promote social conformity by groups and individuals.
- Evaluate the role of institutions in furthering both continuity and change.

#### Performance Expectation 12: Production, Distribution and Consumption

- Apply economic concepts and reasoning when evaluating historical and contemporary social developments and issues.

For specific content standards on subjects such as ethnic studies, U.S. history, media literacy and art, please refer to your respective State Standards.

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**About ITVS:**

The Independent Television Service (ITVS) funds and presents award-winning documentaries and dramas on public television, innovative new media projects on the Web and the Emmy Award-winning weekly series *Independent Lens* on Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. ITVS is a miracle of public policy created by media activists, citizens and politicians seeking to foster plurality and diversity in public television. ITVS was established by a historic mandate of Congress to champion independently produced programs that take creative risks, spark public dialogue and serve underserved audiences. Since its inception in 1991, ITVS programs have revitalized the relationship between the public and public television, bringing TV audiences face-to-face with the lives and concerns of their fellow Americans. More information about ITVS can be obtained by visiting [itvs.org](http://itvs.org). ITVS is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, a private corporation funded by the American people.

**About *Independent Lens*:**

*Independent Lens* is an Emmy® Award-winning weekly series airing Tuesday nights at 10 PM on PBS. Hosted this season by Terrence Howard, the acclaimed anthology series features documentaries and a limited number of fiction films united by the creative freedom, artistic achievement and unflinching visions of their independent producers. *Independent Lens* features unforgettable stories about a unique individual, community or moment in history. Presented by ITVS, the series is supported by interactive companion websites, and national publicity and community engagement campaigns. Further information about the series is available at [pbs.org/independentlens](http://pbs.org/independentlens). *Independent Lens* is jointly curated by ITVS and PBS, and is funded by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting (CPB), a private corporation funded by the American people, with additional funding provided by PBS and the National Endowment for the Arts. The series producer is Lois Vossen.

**About KQED Education Network:**

KQED Education Network engages with community and educational organizations to broaden and deepen the impact of KQED media to effect positive change. Through parent education and professional development workshops, public screenings, multimedia resources, and special events, Education Network reaches more than 200,000 Bay Area residents a year and serves people of all ages, with a particular emphasis on reaching underserved communities. Learn more about its three unique services, Early Learning, Educational Services, and Community Engagement, at [kqed.org/ednet](http://kqed.org/ednet).

**About PBS:**

PBS is a media enterprise that serves 354 public noncommercial television stations and reaches almost 90 million people each week through on-air and online content. Bringing diverse viewpoints to television and the Internet, PBS provides high-quality documentary and dramatic entertainment, and consistently dominates the most prestigious award competitions. PBS is a leading provider of educational materials for K-12 teachers, and offers a broad array of other educational services. PBS' premier kids' TV programming and Web site, PBS KIDS Online ([pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)), continue to be parents' and teachers' most trusted learning environments for children. More information about PBS is available at [pbs.org](http://pbs.org), one of the leading dot-org Web sites on the Internet.