

STUDY GUIDE

Alphabet Rockers: We make music that makes change.

Alphabet Rockers is the “modern day De La Soul for the 21st century (all-natural) juice box crowd (Cooper & Kid).” Their mission is to make learning come alive through the beats, rhymes, moves and community of hip hop. Since 2007, Alphabet Rockers have toured the country, earning its place as one of the premiere and nationally-renowned children’s music entertainers, playing on national stages and festivals, and serving the community through curating hip hop arts workshops and programs for well-respected venues such as Wolf Trap Center for the Performing Arts and the Asian Art Museum of San Francisco, as well as offering music and dance performances in libraries and schools.



Funded by the East Bay Community Foundation and the City of Oakland in 2015-16, Alphabet Rockers embarked on a new recording and performance project, set to address themes of diversity of skin color, family structures and culture. Along with the completion of a music entrepreneurship residency with Zoo Labs, run by founding employees from Google, they recorded songs for the album and built their business model, reflective of their artistic leadership vision for the future.

Alphabet Rockers provide engaging music and dance tied to curricular goals, getting audiences up and dancing with super-charged dance moves and beatboxing exercises, and offering joyful examples and explorations of social justice. A beloved Bay Area act for families, they work in partnership

with teaching artist organizations, educators, and changemakers. As culturally responsive educators, internationally renowned hip hop theater creators, and beloved family performers, Alphabet Rockers build community through their interactive shows, video series and recordings.

Described by presenters and press alike as “smart,” “imaginative,” “engaging,” and “fresh and contemporary,” this

inclusive band of educational music-makers performs at schools and community groups around the Bay Area and the nation. The San Francisco Chronicle deems Alphabet Rockers' impact as "Hip Hop spells Success," describing their ability to "tackle issues of race and kindness — all while inspiring a love of hip-hop." Songwriters/vocalists Kaitlin McGaw and Tommy Shepherd form the core of the band, formed in 2007 and now touring around 100 concerts each year. As Harvard-educated songster McGaw notes, "We aim to create a musical world for kids where imagination is king and queen. Everyone belongs and culture is celebrated. Music is magic, dancing is our language, and hip hop thrives as we encourage people to connect with themselves and one another through our music and performances."



They have received Parents' Choice Awards for all four of their recordings, as well as additional recognition by Sirius XM Radio, parenting blogs and partnerships with Too Small to Fail and National Educators for the Young Child. They are active artists on the rosters of: Intersection for the Arts, Young Audiences, Youth in Arts, LEAP and the Teaching Artists Guild.

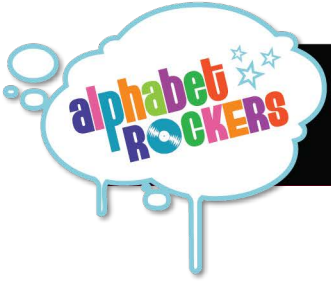
In 2017, Alphabet Rockers continues their mission, focusing their efforts to talk about racism and prevent it with our children. They are creating new hip hop music and media that will interrupt racial bias, music that will support a movement to empower our children of color to see themselves in beauty and power.

Alphabet Rockers is a fiscally sponsored project of Intersection for the Arts, a 501c3 dedicated to supporting artists working for positive change of and for the community.

Kaitlin McGaw, Artistic Director, a Harvard University Graduate in Afro-American Studies, is a leader in the Bay Area arts education community and an award-winning songwriter (John Lennon Songwriting Contest, Parents' Choice Awards). McGaw is a featured speaker and trainer at conferences on arts and integrated learning including California Kindergarten Association, Southern California Kindergarten Association, San Francisco Unified School District, and the Alameda County Office of Education.

Tommy Shepherd, Jr., Music Director, is a professional actor/writer/musician. Tommy (aka Emcee Soulati) has toured internationally in hip hop theater (Marc Bamuthi Joseph, Campo Santo, Intersection for the Arts). He is a co-founder of the live hip hop collective Felonious, who perform throughout the world and create original, theatrical productions. From the Kennedy Center with the Living Word Project to Wolf Trap Center with Alphabet Rockers, Tommy bridges communities and artforms through his work as a beatboxer, rapper, actor, playwright, and drummer.

Wonway Posibul (Juan Amador) is an emcee, deejay, actor, and culture cultivator. Juan composes for Bay Area theater, tours the country with Latin Soul Brothers as a deejay, and produces radio shows such as Thinkbeat radio. Since 2013, Wonway has brought the elements of hip hop to Alphabet Rockers as a DJ and emcee.



About Hip-Hop

Background and History

Hip-Hop: A Culture of Vision and Voice

Forged in the fires of the Bronx and Kingston, Jamaica, hip-hop became the Esperanto of youth rebellion and a generation-defining movement in the 1970s. In a post-civil rights era defined by deindustrialization and globalization, hip-hop crystallized a multiracial, polycultural generation's worldview, and transformed American politics and culture. It is a freedom culture.

The artists of hip hop include DJs, b-boys, and b-girls, rappers, graffiti writers, activists, fashion designers and poster makers. Some of its early founders and mavericks include DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa, Chuck D, and Ice Cube to name a mere few.

Hip-hop is global, lapping on every shore and landing at every airport. But what does Hip-Hop mean? Is it the music with a chest-thumping beat? The rapid-fire lyrics rapped into a handheld mic? Gravity-defying dance steps? Writers turning walls into canvases with larger-than-life letters and illustrations?

The answer is all of the above—and more. Hip-Hop embraces these artistic elements, most definitely. But it also has blended and transcended them to become a means for seeing, celebrating, experiencing, understanding, confronting, and commenting on life and the world. Hip-Hop, in other words, is a way of living—a culture. In Alphabet Rockers, we deem hip hop a freedom culture.

The elements of Hip-Hop came together in the Bronx borough of New York City. It was the early 1970s and times were tougher than usual for the poorer parts of urban America. From a whole lot of nothing—and a whole lot of imagination—Hip-Hop took form.

DJ Kool Herc is credited with throwing the switch at an August 1973 dance bash. He spun the same record on twin turntables, toggling between them to isolate and extend percussion breaks—the most danceable sections of a song. It was a technique that filled the floor with dancers who had spent days and weeks polishing their moves.

The effect that night was electric, and soon other DJs in the Bronx were trying to outdo Herc. It was a code that has flowed through Hip-Hop ever since: 1) Use skills and whatever resources are available to create something new and cool; 2) Emulate and imitate the genius of others but inject personal style until the freshness glows. Competition was, and remains, a prime motivator in the Hip-Hop realm.

Like a powerful star, this dance-party scene quickly drew other art forms into its orbit. A growing movement of hopeful poets, visual artists, and urban philosophers added their visions and voices by whatever means available. They got the word out about what was happening in their neighborhoods—neighborhoods much of mainstream, middle-class America was doing its best to ignore or run down. Hip-Hop kept coming, kept pushing, kept playing until that was no longer possible.

Today, some Hip-Hop scholars fold as many as six elements into Hip-Hop culture. We'll make it seven today. They include:

- **DJing**—the artistic handling of beats and music
- **MCing**, aka **rapping**—putting spoken-word poetry to a beat
- **Breaking**—Hip-Hop's dance form
- **Writing**—the painting of highly stylized graffiti
- **Theater and literature**—combining Hip-Hop elements and themes in drama, poetry, and stories
- **Knowledge of self**—the moral, social, and spiritual principles that inform and inspire Hip-Hop ways of being.
- **Beatboxing** - rhythmic vocal percussion that mimics drum machines

From its work-with-what-you-got epicenter in the Bronx, Hip-Hop has rolled outward to become a multibillion-dollar business. Its sounds, styles, and fashions are now in play around the world. DJs spin turntables in Sao Paulo, Brazil. MCs rap Arabic in the clubs of Qatar. B-boys and b-girls bust baby freezes in Finland. Graffiti rises on the Great Wall of China. Young poets slam poetry in D.C.

So what is Hip-Hop? All of the above and more—whatever we love enough to bring.

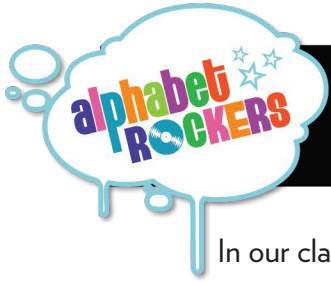
“Hip-hop is the voice of this generation. Even if you didn't grow up in the Bronx in the '70s, hip-hop is there for you. It has become a powerful force. Hip-hop binds all of these people, all of these nationalities, all over the world together.”
—DJ Kool Herc, from the Introduction to “Can't Stop, Won't Stop” A History of the Hip Hop Generation by Jeff Chang

“America seems to be on the verge of a great cultural upheaval. The old way of doing things when it comes to racist systems is being challenged by a growing group of young people. In this climate, much like musicians and artists during the civil rights and Black Power movements, hip-hop artists are in a unique position to help shape a new culture. Will they challenge the inner workings of the music industry? Will they change the content of their music? In this environment more than ever before, they have a chance to impact an entire generation.” - Talib Kweli, “Shifting Perceptions: Being Black in America” series commissioned by Perception Institute in partnership with Mic [<https://perception.org/featured/from-ferguson-to-freedom-hip-hops-role/>]

We need hip hop in our classrooms. We need it in our communities. Why? Because these artists (DJs, b-boys and b-girls, rappers, graffiti writers, activists, fashion designers and poster makers) are changemakers. Because the critical thinking and complex artistic presentations from the artists invites audiences in each case to think deeper about the fractures of society and deepen their own knowledge of self to become a changemaker. And because hip hop builds us up as an inclusive community.

In today's current climate, our perceived democracy has revealed the cracks in its foundation, and the veil has been lifted to see the many systems of racist oppression infused in the state and society fabrics. It is in this current climate that the culture of hip hop can be seen as an opportunity and invitation to be a part of radical social change. This freedom culture invites you to have true knowledge of self and change from within. From this place of self-understanding, one can see and understand others to work together to build vibrant community.

It is within this framework that we invite you as educators to embrace freedom culture in your classrooms, and to embrace knowledge of self for your classrooms above all efforts.



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In our classrooms, we've found that teachers "see" their students in a new light after an engagement with hip hop expres-sion, writing, dance and creativity. Through this guide, we will explore the elements of hip hop as outlined by the Ken-nedy Center (and in parallel with our framework as well), for deepened understanding of the art form and for activities to help explore each element in your classroom.

So with that, let's drop the beat and get started.

LEARN ABOUT DJ-ING

DJing—the artistic handling of beats and music



DJs are the soul behind the beat that pleases, surprises, and puts people on the dance floor. The best DJs have an almost mystical sense of mood at a party or club. They sense the right moment to cue the right song using the right technique to take the party where it's ready to go. It is that insight, a passionate knowledge of music, and technical know-how that make DJing one of the pillars of Hip-Hop culture.

A DJ's sound system is a laboratory for making music magic. Twin turntables are standard, allowing the DJ to switch easily between songs, or spin and manipulate records in tandem to create effects or unique musical combinations. The turntables are wired to a receiver, amplifier, and earthquake-causing speakers. The DJ may use headphones to cue up the next song or song segment as the current music plays. Then he or she uses a mixer, or fader, to make transitions from one turntable to the other—hopefully without missing a beat. Today's DJs often incorporate digitized and computerized components, as well. But most Hip-Hop purists frown on DJs who button-push preprogrammed playlists. Hip-Hop culture saves its greatest praise for inspired improvisation.

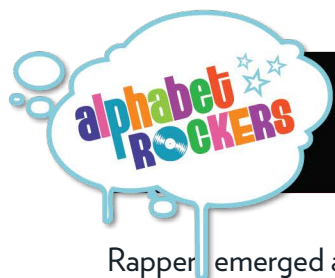
One technique DJs embraced is scratching. To scratch, the DJ physically manipulates the record beneath the needle. Grand Wizzard Theodore stumbled on the technique in the mid-70s. He was a young teen blasting his music when his mom scolded him to turn it down. He fumbled the needle, liked the effect, practiced it, and began using it in shows. Other DJs quickly added scratching to their repertoire as a way to inject more personal style into the music flow.

LEARN ABOUT MC-ING

MCing, aka **rapping**—putting spoken-word poetry to a beat



In Hip-Hop's early years, its music scene focused on the disc jockey and the dance floor. The MC—short for “master of ceremonies”—was often a kind of sidekick to the DJ. Before long, though, MCs wanted to showcase their own talents. More and more, MCs earned the right to grab the mic using freestyle skills to entertain and command a live audience. The job of an MC then and now is to guide everyone's good time with their energy, wit, and ability to interact with people on the floor. And good MCs don't just demand the mic—the audience honors their skills by demanding they take it.



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Rapper emerged as a somewhat distinct group as rap gained commercial success. They were the voices and characters that created and sold the records. In some ways, the talents and responsibilities of rappers overlap with MCs, and an MC might also rap. The interaction with the audience is the big difference.

In 1979, a trio of MCs rapped over the break from Chic's "Good Times." The result was The Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight," rap's first hit. Three years later, Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five released *The Message*, a funky but unblinking account of hard times in an inner-city neighborhood. As the 1980s unrolled, MCs and rappers rose rapidly from second fiddles to big dogs including Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Run DMC, and Public Enemy. They created personas, cooler-than-life characters that might be super-smooth or gangland tough. They boasted about their style and talents and made sure to honor the DJ. MCing and rapping went from sideshow to main event as one of Hip-Hop's essential elements.

Before Hip-Hop and rap took hold in the United States, spoken-word poetry occasionally worked its way into jazz performances. Many history-minded rappers also connect their art to The Last Poets, a Harlem-based group, and The Watts Prophets out of Los Angeles. Both emerged in the late-1960s and paired political poetry with improvisational jazz. Gil Scott-Heron's "The Revolution Will Not Be Televised" resembles rap before it got the name.

An MC or rapper's "flow" is crucial to his or her performance. The flow is the combination of rhyme and rhythm to create the rap's desired effect: fluid and soothing to communicate romance, for example; staccato and harsh to signal anger and conflict. A good MC surprises audiences with syncopation and other off-the-beat techniques. Hip-Hop aficionados reserve special respect for MCs with freestyle skills—the ability to improvise fresh rhymes while standing in the heat of the spotlight.

LEARN ABOUT BREAKDANCE

Breaking—Hip-Hop's dance form. The performers are called b-boys and b-girls, or breakers.



In keeping with Hip-Hop's ethic of improvisation, breaking is often a create-on-the-fly dance style. It mixes super-quick footwork with body-torquing twists. Robotic movements flow into smooth whole-body waves before dropping into acrobatic leg flares that suddenly halt in mid-spin freezes that seem to defy gravity. Breaking is the ultimate 3-D dance—flipping high, spinning low, and putting a premium on physical imagination and bravado.

Breaking has copied from many dance styles to generate this uniqueness. These styles include the Charleston from 100 years ago that loaned its characteristic leg kick and arm swing as a top-rocking move. The ad-libbing of the Lindy Hop, popular from

the 1920s on, also lives in breaking's style. For individual inspiration, though, no one can best soul singer James Brown. His high-energy dance moves in the 1960s and 70s have inspired b-boys and b-girls ever since, and his song "Get on the Good Foot" is one of breaking's early anthems. Tap, steppin', ballet, disco, and modern all continue to contribute.

Breaking has rummaged beyond the dance floor and stage to find many of its most dramatic moves. The whirling torsos and legs of gymnasts on the pommel horse are seen in leg flares, for example. The world of hand-to-hand combat has also provided inspiration for b-boys and b-girls. Hip-Hop scholars often link breaking with *capoeira*, a martial arts dance with roots in Angola and Brazil that displays acrobatics, grace, and power. A full-blown showdown makes it clear why breaking contests are referred to as "battles" as dancers mix dance moves with shadow kicks, leg sweeps, and fake attacks in the faces of the competition. Competition and innovation in breaking—as with all things Hip-Hop—is essential and inspired, and today its style inspires wherever people dance.

LEARN ABOUT GRAFFITI / "WRITING"

Writing—the painting of highly stylized graffiti

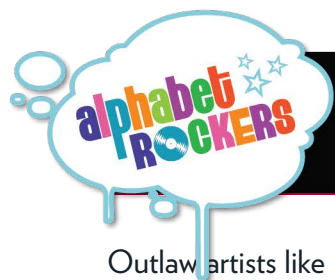
Mike "Dream" Francisco circa 1995.



One element of Hip-Hop predates the music and dance scene itself—graffiti writing, or simply *writing* as the artists themselves call it. But it blossomed at the same time the music and dance scenes were finding their feet, and its wild and color-outside-the-lines improvisational style were influenced and inspired by the desire to create something new and fresh.

Graffiti has been around since humans first painted, etched, or carved on rock walls. But urban youth began to put a new spin on it in the 1960s. The number and talents of writers spiked in the mid-1970s as Hip-Hop's competitive drive kicked in. They added illustrations and second colors to outline stylized bubble and block lettering. The writers—many if not most of them young teens—jumped the limits of size, complexity, and color. Their finest designs seemed to bring life to whatever they graced. They called it *wild style*—and it was.

Today, graffiti-influenced writing styles show up worldwide in graphic design, fashion, street art, and gallery exhibitions.



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Outlaw artists like Banksy are still out there painting trouble. But the vision, passion, and humor the best of these writers display—legit or not—give people the chance to see the work-a-day world in new ways. They seem to say if we pay attention, we can find beauty, meaning, and art most everywhere we look.

LEARN ABOUT THEATER AND LITERATURE

Theater and literature—combining Hip-Hop elements and themes in drama, poetry, and stories



More and more, the stage has been welcoming Hip-Hop's elements, energy, and world view. Graffiti writing may splash across the scenery. DJing, rapping, and breaking are likely to take turns in the spotlight. Some shows, like *Into the Hoods*, tell their tales mainly through dance and music, while others lay Hip-Hop style over more traditional scripts. Hip-Hop artists are tackling drama, comedy, and tragedy, and some

classic material is getting the Hip-Hop makeover. Will Power's *The Seven*, for example, retells the ancient Greek tragedy *Seven Against Thebes* by Aeschylus using a DJ and rapping cast. Lin-Manuel Miranda's *Hamilton* has become a cultural phenomenon with its incorporation of Hip-Hop into a new retelling of American history.

Producers, directors, and playwrights stress input and participation by stakeholders—the very people the play is intended to speak to and entertain. Long-time Hip-Hop theater writer/actor/director Danny Hoch says it this way: “Hip-hop theatre... must be *by*, *about* and *for* the hip-hop generation, participants in hip-hop culture, or both.” Plots often tackle current social issues, especially as they relate to urban communities. Questions of identity are often front and center, including race, class, gender, sexuality, and anything regarded as “different.”

Rapped aloud or published on paper, Hip-Hop-influenced literary forms have roots in the Black Arts Movement of the 1960s. BAM inspired a generation of African American, Latino, and feminist writers, including Amiri Baraka, Maya Angelou, Nikki Giovanni, Sonia Sanchez, the Last Poets, and many others, to share stories and views often overlooked or outright rejected by mainstream America. Along the way, spoken word—a forerunner of rap—injected energy into performance. Through poetry slams, it has developed its own fans with its forceful, fun wordplay.

LEARN ABOUT KNOWLEDGE OF SELF

Knowledge of self—the moral, social, and spiritual principles that inform and inspire Hip-Hop ways of being.

Hip-Hop's fifth element of "knowledge" teaches the Hip-Hop community about its identity and ways to express that identity. It places great importance on claiming a stake in one's own education. "Knowing where YOU come from helps to show YOU where YOU are going," writes legendary MC KRS-One. "Once you know where you come from you then know what to learn."

Hip-Hop believes that people can take control of their lives through self-knowledge and self-expression. Knowledge influences style and technique and connects its artists under a collective Hip-Hop umbrella. It engages the world through Hip-Hop's history, values, and ideas, and adds intellectual muscle to support and inform its music and moves and its poetry and art. Most importantly, it allows for a shared experience against an uncertain world.

LEARN ABOUT BEATBOXING

Beatboxing - rhythmic vocal percussion that mimics drum machines

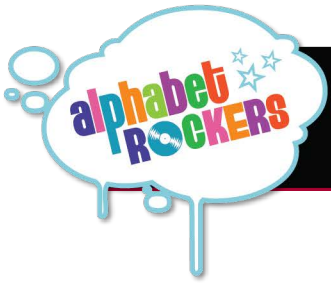
Doug E Fresh



Beatboxing (also **beat boxing** or **b-boxing**) is a form of vocal percussion primarily involving the art of mimicking drum machines using one's mouth, lips, tongue, and voice. It may also involve vocal imitation of turntablism, and other musical instruments. Beatboxing today is often referred to as "the fifth element" of hip-hop, although it is not limited to hip-hop music. The term "beatboxing" is sometimes used to refer to vocal percussion in general.

Its techniques have history in early American musical genres since the 19th century, such as early rural music (Appalachian technique of eefing), religious songs, blues, ragtime, vaudeville, and hokum. Additional influences may include forms of African traditional music, in which performers utilize their bodies (e.g., by clapping or stomping) as percussion instruments and produce sounds with their mouths by breathing loudly in and out, a technique used in beatboxing today.

The term "beatboxing" is derived from the mimicry of the first generation of drum machines, then known as beatboxes. "Human beatboxing" in hip-hop originated in the 1980s. Its early pioneers include Doug E. Fresh, the self-proclaimed first "human beatbox," Swifty, Buffy, and Wise. Other pioneers of beatboxing include Rahzel well known for his realistic robotic sounds and for his ability to sing and beatbox simultaneously, Scratch, a beatboxer and musician well known for further revolutionizing the use of vocal scratching in beatboxing, and Kenny Muhammad "the human orchestra" a beatboxer known for his technical ability and rhythmic precision.



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Resources

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ONLINE

- <http://artsedge.kennedy-center.org/students/features/series/hip-hop>
- <http://hiphopeducation.com>
- http://www.ithaca.edu/wise/hip_hop/
- <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2007/04/hip-hop-planet/mcbride-text>
- http://mobile.nytimes.com/2016/01/20/nyregion/bronx-school-embraces-a-new-tool-in-counseling-hip-hop.html?_r=0
- <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=iL82x-diQAY>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9Bp1Z-7P8xc>

BAY AREA ORGANIZATIONS:

- Alphabet Rockers
alphabetrockers.com
- Future Arts Now!
<https://www.facebook.com/FutureArtsNow/>
- Hip Hop For Change:
<http://www.hiphopforchange.org>
- Beats Rhymes and Life
<http://brl-inc.org>

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Glossary

B-boys & B-girls

A dance style stemming from the early 1970s hip-hop scene, evolving from such diverse sources as jazz, martial arts, capoeira and tap dancing. Break boys and girls, who later became known as b-boys and b-girls, first started dancing during DJ breaks at Bronx hip-hop parties. This soon became a skilled and competitive art form. The term “breakdancing” was later created by mainstream media in the 1980s.

Battling

A competition, often between DJs or rappers, judged often on originality and skill

Beats

The basis of hip-hop—the instrumental music itself

Beatboxing (also beat boxing or b-boxing)

A form of vocal percussion where one creates sounds that mimic drum machines and replicate rhythmic patterns and percussion. Beatboxers use one’s mouth, lips, tongue, and voice. It may also involve vocal imitation of turntablism, and other musical instruments. Noted beatboxers include Doug E. Fresh, Darren Robinson (a.k.a. The Human Beatbox) of the Fat Boys and Rhazel of the Roots.

Blues- a musical form created primarily within the African-American communities in the Deep South of the United States at the end of the 19th century from spirituals, work songs, field hollers, narrative ballads, shouts, and chants. The genre is characterized by specific chord progressions- most commonly a 12 bar progression.

Break (or breakbeat)

An instrumental or percussion section during a song derived from or related to stop-time – being a “break”

from the main parts of the song or piece that focuses on percussion. DJs used the break for breakdancers and MCs to improvise. A short break is also known as a “cut”, and the reintroduction of the full bass line and drums is known as a “drop”, which is sometimes accentuated by cutting off everything, even the percussion.

Classical Music

Music, usually European and from the 18th or 19th centuries, following Western music traditions such as fugue and counterpoint.

Cypher

Group of b-boys/b-girls taking turns in the center of the dance floor

Dap

The knocking of fists together as a greeting, or form of respect.

DJ

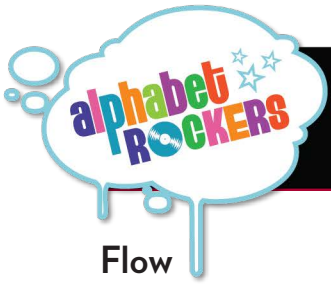
In hip-hop, DJing originally encompassed the art of mixing and scratching music to create new music.

Dub

Hip-hop’s roots emerged from dub, a form of ska and reggae music out of 1960s Jamaica characterized by an MC singing or rapping over a mostly instrumental “dub” version of an existing song.

Elements of Hip Hop

There is much discussion within the hip hop community as to the number of elements, but the basic four include: MCing, DJing, graffiti, and break dancing. Alphabet Rockers includes beatboxing as our 5th element. In other renderings, it includes knowledge, fashion and more.



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Flow

A lyricist's rhythm or cadence, his or her ability to combine words with the music

Freestyle

Freestyle initially referred to style of improvisation with or without instrumental beats, in which lyrics are recited with no particular subject or structure. In hip hop, it is commonly used to refer to rap lyrics which are improvised on the spot

Freeze

Sudden halt of a dance step to hold a pose, often while balanced on a hand, shoulder, or head

Jazz

A musical art form characterized by blue notes, syncopation, swing, call and response, polyrhythms, and improvisation. Originating in African-American communities in the early 20th century, jazz has been called "the first original art form" to develop in the United States of America.

Locking

Snapping arms or legs into held positions, often at sharp angles, to accent a musical rhythm

MC

A hip-hop performer or rhymer. Also stands for "mic controller" or "master of ceremonies."

Old school

Early hip-hop style, usually spanning the 1970s to the mid-to-late 1980s

Popping

Fluid movements of the limbs, such as moving arms like an ocean wave, that emphasize contractions of isolated muscles

Rap

Rapping, also known as Emceeing, MCing, Rhyme spitting, Spitting, or just Rhyming, is the rhythmic delivery of rhymes, one of the central elements of hip hop music and culture. Although the word rap has sometimes been claimed to be a backronym of the phrase "Rhythmic American Poetry", "Rhythm and Poetry", "Rhythmically Applied Poetry", or "Rhythmically Associated Poetry", use of the word to describe quick and slangy speech or repartee long predates the musical form. Rapping can be delivered over a beat or without accompaniment. Stylistically, rap occupies a grey area among speech, prose, poetry, and song. Rap is derived from the griots (folk poets) of West Africa, Caribbean-style toasting, and American Blues and Jazz roots.

Sampling

The process of using sound segments from one musical piece to form sounds in another musical piece

Scratching

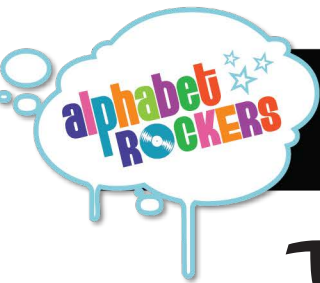
Moving a record manually under a needle to create new musical sounds

Turntablism

Playing the record turntable as if it were an instrument. Techniques might include scratching or mixing in order to create rhythms and manipulate sounds.

Writer

Graffiti artist who has a distinct way they design their letters



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THE PLAYGROUND ZONE SHOW

GIMME SOME SKIN

Activity 1: Replay the “Ultimate High 5” in pairs.

What colors do you notice in your skin tones? What about your partner’s? What things in the world and in nature have the same color as the colors in your skin? What do you like about it? What do you not like about it? How is your skin color different from your other family members? Or your friends?

Activity 2: Refer to the handout on shades of brown. Shade in all places your ancestry comes from in shades of brown.

Name the countries and the languages that you color in on the map. Explore how we are connected, and how more people in the school and neighborhood might fill in more of the map.

Activity 3: Read “The Colors of Us” by Karen Katz

Activity 4: Create unique skin tones through watercolor. Create self-portraits.

THAT’S YOUR NAME, WEAR IT OUT!

Activity: Pick a word or words that begin with the same letter as your name. Make up a dance move to go with it.

Activity 2: Use the Alphabet Rockers handout to write about what your names mean.

Do you know where your name comes from or what it means? What do you like about your name? What do you not like? How many different ways have people said your name? Who else has the same name as you? Does your name always get pronounced correctly?

CHANGE THE WORLD

Activity: Make a class pact to each help another person with something in the week ahead, and next week report back on how it went. What did you do, and how did it feel? Did it make a difference to you, and to the other person?

Imagine the Playground Zone (perhaps even draw a picture of The Playground Zone!). What do you want to see in this world? Can you think of a time you helped a friend or made a difference? What did you do? How did it make you feel?

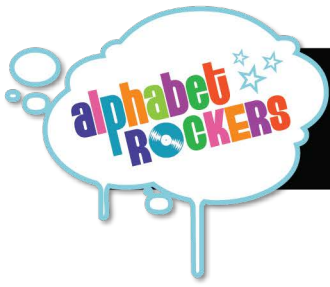
WIGGLE JIGGLE

Activity: Watch and learn the dance moves from [YouTube.com/alphabetrockers](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCqWwUgR3Ug3Ug3Ug3Ug3Ug3U). Have a dance battle in the classroom!

Activity: Make your own music video! Share it with us at [#alphabetrockers](https://twitter.com/alphabetrockers), [@alphabetrockers](https://www.instagram.com/alphabetrockers) or by email below.

RISE

Activity: Read through the lyrics of the song as a class. Learn more about each of the freedom fighters and poets hinted at in the lyrics. Create new poems based on children’s favorite lines of inspiration. What makes you RISE up for justice?



Alphabet Rockers Activities

Hip-Hop's range of artistic expression offers many connections to California Visual and Performing Arts Standards. Several classroom activities suggested below marked with an asterick [*] are listed with examples of links to VAPA Standards. Beneath each activity the applicable Standards Component Strand is listed, followed by a sampling of standards for the applicable grades.

HIP HOP CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES K-12

Kindergarten:

Reading

Book: *When the Beat was Born: Dj Kool Herc and the creation of hip hop*, by Laban Carrick Hill

Explore questions

1. What is a DJ?
2. Where were some of the places that hip hop music was created in the story?
3. Where do you create music in your life?

***KINDERGARTEN, STANDARD 3.0 HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT**

Understanding the Historical Contributions and Cultural Dimensions of Music

Students analyze the role of music in past and present cultures throughout the world, noting cultural diversity as it relates to music, musicians, and composers.

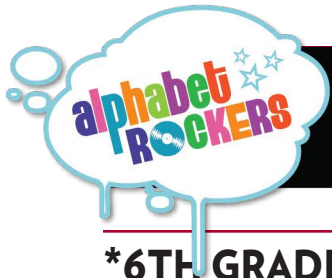
K-12 Reflection: What is hip hop?

Round 1: Flash Words

1. Brainstorm with the class one word that comes to mind when hearing the words "hip hop." Write the words on the board.
2. Share with the class the five elements of hip hop – DJ, Emcee, Breakdance, Graffiti and Beatboxing
3. Explore again, what words come to your mind when knowing this is what hip hop is?
4. What do we notice about our words – how much of the initial words reflect artistry? Culture? Challenges?

Round 2: Theater Snapshots (From Sarah Crowell, Destiny Arts)

1. Define the elements of hip hop with the class.
2. Divide into 5 groups and assign each group one of the elements.
3. Instruction: create a silent image as a group, using your bodies, where we can guess what element of hip hop you represent. Perform for class.
4. Instruction: add sound to your image
5. Now, in your group, assign ABCDE to each person (if more than 5 people, share a letter). Each person gets a turn to be the sculptor. Go through each element and have the sculptor create a "snap shot" image of the element of hip hop. Then switch sculptors.
6. Finally, transition between each image created, on a beat. Let the elements of hip hop become the story and movement.



STUDY GUIDE

*6TH GRADE, STANDARD 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Dance

2.5 Use the elements of dance to create short studies that demonstrate the development of ideas and thematic material.

2.6 Demonstrate an awareness of the body as an instrument of expression when rehearsing and performing.

Grades 2-8

What is a What?

Rhyming Game using opposites

Reference: <https://youtu.be/zZupMHXkmqQ>

Alphabet Rockers use this fun game to improve our freestyle and writing skills as emcees.

What is a what is a what is a what?!

What is a what is a what is a what.

What is ____ if you don't have ____?

What is ____ if you don't have ____?

What is a what is a what is a what?!

What is a what is a what is a what.

Round 1:

1. Watch the Alphabet Rockers video 'What is a What!?' <https://youtu.be/zZupMHXkmqQ>.
2. In the lyrics printed above, you'll know that each of the questions has two blanks. Those words should be opposites. The second of the blanks should rhyme with each other.
3. Have each student write down ten pairs of opposites.
4. Look through the list and see what words rhyme, or if there are additional words that rhyme. Of the additional words that rhyme, are their opposites you can add?
5. Pair up, and test out the game
6. Now, do it to a beat.

Round 2:

1. Complete steps 1-2.
2. Skip writing and create your pairs on the fly.
3. Keep the beat going by tapping on your laps, or by picking an instrumental beat to accompany the game.

GRADES K-12

Beatboxing 101

Alphabet Rockers uses several ways to teach beatboxing. We find the skill of vocal percussion is loved by kids of all ages and cultures, and is a great tool for teaching patterns and letter sounds for early English language learners. Try these few ways of teaching beatboxing, and explore how you can play with it in vocabulary and games to come.

Version 1: Boots and Caps

1. The words boots and caps can instantly become the sounds of beatboxing when said on beat in repetition: "boots caps, boots caps." If you remove the vowel sounds, it is even more precise.

2. For K-2, try marching in a circle, pulling on your boots and caps. Pause and play with learning your letters with this by drawing the letters you hear in the air.
3. Turn the pattern into another rhythm by repeating words “boots boots caps” etc. Have the students make their own patterns up and share them with the class.

Version 2: B T K S & P

1. Simply using the letters above can create patterns and rhythms of beatboxing. Practice by saying only the letter sound (not the letter name).
2. Have the students choose a pattern out of the 5 letters and write it on the board. Have another student share what it sounds like as a pattern. Repeat.
3. Break into small groups. Within each group, create a pattern using these letters. Practice the beat as a group.
4. Return to the full class and share your beats.
5. See what it sounds like when groups go at the same time. Conduct the class and see if beats can remain intact when soloed and overdubbed.

Version 3: Buttercup and baby ketchup

1. For older classes, go through versions 1 and 2.
2. Brainstorm additional words that have the letters from Version 2, such as “buttercup” “baby ketchup” “books” etc.
3. To create the beat, remove the vowels as you say the letter sounds of the word. Repeat.
4. Break into groups and come up with unique beatboxes based on additional words with the sounds.

GRADES 3-12

Beatboxing Name Game

Use rhythm and music to build anticipation and celebration of learning your class’s names, or just to build community.

Round 1. Roll Call

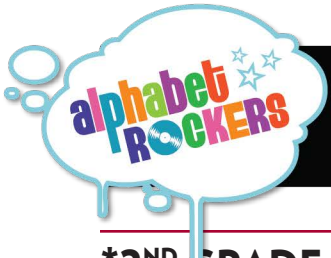
Circle up. When you point at a student, they will say their name. Try to do this on a beat or flow while pointing at the student who will say their name. You can speed up, slow down, and use the element of surprise (as in repeatedly pointing at one student as if a record is scratching). Be sure to have every student get a chance.

Round 2. Roll Call to a Beat

Same rules except this time the teacher beatboxes or plays music that can be stopped and started multiple times. One can also just tap out a pulse on their leg or snap or clap. When the music stops, the teacher will point at a student simultaneously so that the student has to say their name in the open space of the music break, in rhythm with the song or beat. It is up to the teacher to keep the pulse constant. This game helps build skills with rhythm and playful patterns.

Round 3. Roll Call - Students take the lead

Same rules as Round 2, but the students lead the rhythm and call outs.



STUDY GUIDE

*2ND GRADE STANDARD 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION

Creating, Performing, and Participating in Music

Compose, Arrange, and Improvise

2.4 Improvise simple rhythmic and melodic accompaniments, using voice and a variety of classroom instruments.

ACTIVITY: BREAKDANCE

GRADES K-6

Each dance move can reflect a different shape - from sharp edges to smooth curves. Much like letters!

First set up the rules of your cypher -

- How do we show appreciation for each other's dance moves?
- How do we take turns each week?
- What music you choose each week - consider letting students be the DJ of the week.

Use freestyle dance as a way to explore new vocabulary, sight words or letters, adapted to your class's age and learning goals by making letters with your bodies.

Round 1: Letter Freestyle

Choose the letter the class will make with their bodies. They can make a letter individually or in small groups. See how many different ways it can be represented and created, both upper and lower case, but also in expression.

- Can you make the letter shape in the air like a giant paintbrush?
- Can you shape the letter with each move to the beat?
- How can you make the letter using both your arms and legs?

One by one go into the center of the circle to flex your letter creation, adding your own personal style and flare to the shape.

Round 2: Letter Dance Game (for K-2)

Building off the earlier model, each student can cypher using the first letter of their name. In the next freestyle cypher, have each student choose a word that starts with their first letter and make a dance out of that action. Example: Tommy makes a T for his first dance move, and then the students suggest TRAIN and TACO for his dance. He makes dance moves like a train that gives out tacos, then returns to the circle to cheer on the next student.

Round 2: Vocabulary

Divide the class into groups of 2-4 people. Assign each group a word to create. Using similar stylings to the letter dance, create unique moves for each letter of the word, then transition the dance moves between letters to the beat. Finally, create a unique dance that reflects the meaning of the word, and present your creation to the class. For reference, review Alphabet Rockers videos on Vimeo.

***3RD GRADE STANDARD 2.0 CREATIVE EXPRESSION**

Application of Choreographic Principles and Processes to Creating Dance

2.3 Create a sequence that has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Name and refine the parts of the sequence.

2.4 Create a wide variety of shapes and movements, using different levels in space.

Communication of Meaning in Dance

2.5 Perform dances to communicate personal meaning, using focus and expression.

ACTIVITY: GRAFFITI

Grades K-5

In exploring graffiti - aka writing - with our students, we create highly stylized letters, and celebrate the unique expression of each Writer.

- How would you make your own letter?
- Start with drawing a block version of your letter.
- Do you see any possible creations you can make out of your letter shape?
- If you're stuck, turn the letter on its side, and upside down, and then back again, pausing for a few seconds with each - see if the shifting will create new ways to see shapes and creations.
- Draw, color or paint the creation onto the letter.

HANDSHAKES + GIMME SOME SKIN

Alphabet Rockers celebrates our diversity of skin color with the song, "Gimme Some Skin." "We stick together - thick or thin -- so gimme some skin." This song celebrates skin color diversity, and collaboration: "Everyone's skin is a different shade of brown." It asks listeners to lend a hand to a friend, and be "down" to celebrate everyone's differences.

In hip hop culture, the exchange of dap, or handshakes is another form of communication of understanding and connection. In our time in the classroom, we can use handshakes to build classroom community, expression of self, and understanding of one another.

Video: <https://vimeo.com/166852609>

Song: <https://soundcloud.com/alphabetrockers/gimme-some-skin>

Generative Topic: Sense of Self, Sense of Together (Power and Pride)

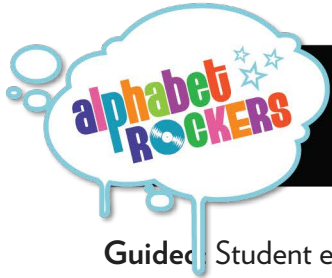
UNDERSTANDING GOAL:

Question: How can we see the color of our skin as a unification and affirmation of humanity?

Statement: Students will understand that our bodies come in beautiful colors.

Associated Performances of Understanding:

Initial: Students begin exploring skin tone colors and matching tones in the natural environment.



STUDY GUIDE

Guided: Student explore self portraiture through the study of Faith Ringgold.

Culminating: Students complete a portrait of a classmate juxtaposing colors of the natural world found in their earlier research.

Anticipatory set: Bring the class together in a circle. Invite them to give each person standing next to them a “hi-five, elbow tag or friendly fist bump.” Ask the class to name the largest organ of their bodies. Reveal that the largest organ of their bodies is their skin. Explain that they will begin to learn more about how their skin color is made and begin to explore the different types of skin colors that humans have.

LESSON

Part I: Initial Learning (Using student journals or blank sheets of paper have students record their observations using a set of skin tone colored crayons or colored pencils, followed by handshake creation)

1. Play the song: Gimme Some Skin (Alphabet Rockers). Allow students to move and dance to the music.
2. Invite students to look closely at their arm.
3. Have them find the crayon or pencil color that matches. Invite students to mix colors if they cannot find a good match.
4. Invite students to share how they describe their skin color. Record the descriptions they use to describe their skin. (I notice that my skin is the color black, brown, white, peach, mocha, almond, beige, chocolate)
5. Take a walk in your surroundings (can be inside the classroom, on the playground, around the block). Have students identify as many things as they can that match their skin tone and record.
6. Return to the skin tone descriptions and add on new words they may have come up with to describe their skin color. (I noticed that my skin was the same color as my shoe, the tree, the desk, the floor, the book cover, etc)
7. Invite students to appreciate each other's skin color by saying “You're skin color is beautiful!” to each student next to them.
8. Invite the class to affirm that their skin color is beautiful in unison. “My skin color is beautiful!”
9. Play the song Gimme Some Skin allow students to dance and give each other hi-fives!
10. Create new handshakes based on the color words students came up with in #6. E.g. “tree” – how can you make a handshake that looks like a tree? With your neighbor, combine the two words for a unique handshake: tree + book cover, for example, would have elements of the tree handshake and a book.

Part II: (Guided Learning) Today's exploration is the science of skin color. Melanin.

1. Read the story: *All the Colors we are: the story of how we get our skin color* By Katie Kissinger, Wernher Krutein (Photographer) Redleaf Press, 2002
2. Additional story option: *The Color of Us* by Karen Katz
3. Invite students to share their understandings of how they got their skin colors.

Part II (Guided Learning)

Materials: watercolor paper, watercolors, paintbrushes, cups, water, Faith Ringgold images

1. Show the self portrait images of Faith Ringgold. Use the protocol See, Think, Wonder to help students investigate the imagery (focus in on the colors and shapes Faith uses in her portraits).
2. Model how Faith Ringgold blended colors together to find the right shade of brown for her skin tone.

3. Model how to do a self portrait. <https://youtu.be/3ouiumHlnmA>
4. Model filling in the self portrait with the mixed color you made to find the right color for your skin.
5. Have students begin the process of making their self portraits.

Part III: (Guided to Culminating Performance of Understanding)

Materials: watercolor paper, watercolors, paintbrushes, cups, water, Faith Ringgold images

1. Tell the class that today they will get to paint the portrait of someone in the class.
2. Show the American portraits by Faith Ringgold. Use the protocol See, Think, Wonder to help students investigate the imagery.
3. Review with students how to draw a face.
4. Pair students up, having them sit directly across from one another. Students can take turns “sitting” for each other. Give about 10 min for each artist to draw the face of their friend. Once students have outlined the face they can begin to explore color mixing to mix the shade that represents their friend’s skin tone.

Extension:

1. Invite students to tell the story of their families and the colors that are represented in their family.
2. Print a blank map of the world; have students shade in all places their ancestry comes from.
3. Name the countries and the languages that you color in on the map. Explore how we are connected, and how more people in the school and neighborhood might fill in more of the map.

SEE, THINK, WONDER

See, Think, Wonder, developed by Harvard educators, is “a routine for exploring works of art and other interesting things.” Although the technique was developed to use with K-12 students. This approach empowers students to exercise *critical thinking skills* to make sense of an image. It is always useful and interesting to discover the background information about a work, but some of the potential meaning of a work lies within our grasp. The Harvard approach encourages people to trust their own eyes, their personal knowledge and life experience, and their curiosity when pondering an “interesting thing.”

Seeing is the first step. Take time to pay attention to what is visible to the eye and make an inventory of what you see. This step sounds obvious, perhaps, but in our fast-paced, over-stimulated environments, it is very easy to miss something obvious. This step reminds us that we have to make time to look before we can expect to understand and make meaning of what we see.

- I see a red star.

Thinking is the next step. Thinking means making sense of what we see based on reason, analysis, and inferences.

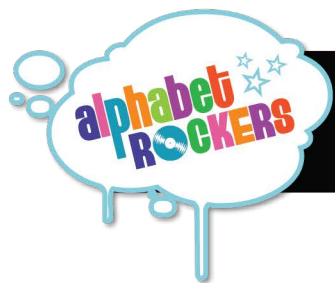
- The colors used here, make me think that it’s a polluted place.

Wondering taps into the imaginative aspect of thinking. Great art work generally stirs the imagination and further questioning.

- I wonder what’s behind the machinery.

<https://nmwa.org/blog/2013/11/06/dominating-with-depth-faith-ringgold/>

<https://nmwa.org/exhibitions/american-people-black-light>



STUDY GUIDE

RESOURCES

- <http://artedmethods.blogspot.com/2009/10/lesson-plan-1-life-sized-self-portraits.html>
- For ideas on life sized student portraits, search through the Pinterest database for inspiration.
- <http://kehindewiley.com>

Connections to Common Core

These and other Hip-Hop activities offer many connections to Common Core State Standards. Some examples include:

Grade: 03 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.3.2

Determine the main ideas and supporting details of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Grade: 03 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.3

Describe the relationship between a series of historical events, scientific ideas or concepts, or steps in technical procedures in a text, using language that pertains to time, sequence, and cause/effect.

Grade: 03 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.3.7

Use information gained from illustrations (e.g., maps, photographs) and the words in a text to demonstrate understanding of the text (e.g., where, when, why, and how key events occur).

Grade: 04 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.2

Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Grade: 04 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.3

Explain events, procedures, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text, including what happened and why, based on specific information in the text.

Grade: 04 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.7

Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

Grade: 05 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.5.2

Summarize a written text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.

Grade: 05 CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.5.3

Explain the relationships or interactions between two or more individuals, events, ideas, or concepts in a historical, scientific, or technical text based on specific information in the text.

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