



Yale-New Haven
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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2003 Volume III: Teaching Poetry in the Primary and Secondary Schools

Rap as a Modern Poetic Form

Guide for Curriculum Unit 03.03.07
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This unit is designed to make poetry relevant, accessible, and fun for today's high school students. The unit exploits student enthusiasm for rap music and teaches how rap is indeed a modern poetic form. Young people naturally respond to the rhythms and rhymes in rap. They learn, sing, and dance to poetic structures without even knowing it! Lesson plans are designed to help students analyze and write rap songs. In order to do this, students will engage in the understanding of poetic elements (allusions, similes, metaphors, repetition, rhyme, rhythm, meter, etc.). They will learn to write in a variety of poetic forms (skeltonic, narrative poem, elegy, lyric poem, cento, and free verse), all of which have characteristics in common with rap.

But this unit takes students beyond form. Lesson plans show students how common themes in rap are indicative of the problems, as well as the vehicles for empowerment, visible in our urban cultures today. Students will develop critical thinking, reading, and writing skills as they study famous political speeches, poetry, and rap, from such notables as Martin Luther King, Jr., Gil Scott Heron, and Nasir Jones. Students will play numerous learning "games" and will read, write and perform poetic works in order to develop confidence and a voice with which to be active and empowered leaders in their communities and in their lives.

(Recommended for English, Creative Writing, Poetry and Literature, grades 9-12)

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