

STUDY GUIDE SHAKESPEARE: THE REMIX

BY AARON JAFFERIS
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2023-2024 | CAPITAL REPERTORY THEATRE STUDENT MATINEES

"What the Constitution Means to Me"

by Heidi Schreck

Student Matinee | Oct. 4, 2023

"Million Dollar Quartet Christmas"

Book by Colin Escott

Student Matinee | Dec. 13 and 20, 2023

"Sweat" by Lynn Nottage

Student Matinee | Mar. 27, 2024

WORLD PREMIERE

"Three Mothers" by Ajene D. Washington

Student Matinee | May 2 and 9, 2024

ON-THE-GO! IN-SCHOOL TOURS

"Shakespeare: The Remix"

by Aaron Jafferis & Gihieh Lee

Oct. 23-Nov. 18, 2023

"Henry Johnson: Ballad of a Forgotten Hero" by Rachel Lynett

Dramaturgy by Eunice Ferreria

Feb. 5-March 8, 2024

OTHER

NEW PLAY SUMMIT 13 | Spring 2024

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**This guide is an updated version of theREP's past study guide for "Shakespeare: The Remix," which was adapted from the Theatre Works study guide for the show. This study guide has been constructed for educational purposes only, theREP does not sell or make any money from the guide.*

Dear Educator:

Welcome to Capital Repertory Theatre at 251 North Pearl St.!

We are thrilled that you are attending a student matinee performance of “Shakespeare: The Remix,” one of theREP’s MainStage productions for the 2023-24 season, and hope that you will find this guide to be a useful tool in your classroom.

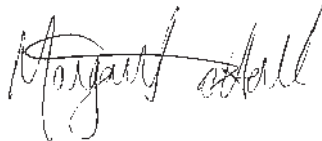
You have permission to reproduce materials within this guide for use in your classroom. It is designed to introduce the cultural and historical context of the play, as well as provide resources and ideas for incorporating the theatre experience into your curriculum. Productions by theREP are likely to generate questions, thoughts and opinions amongst your students.

The arts provide young imaginations with stimulation, points of reference and intellectual resources for the mind and spirit; it is theREP’s goal to make live theatre attendance possible for all students in the Capital Region. Tens of thousands of Capital Region students have attended student matinees and On-The-Go! performances throughout our history. We hope to continue to grow and serve the needs of the Capital Region education community for decades to come.

Your success stories help us to keep the program funded, so please let us know how you are using theatre in the classroom. We love to receive copies of lesson plans, student work related to our productions and your letters. These are important testimonials to the value of the arts in education.

We look forward to hearing from you!

With deepest gratitude,



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Associate Artistic Director
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ABOUT US

theREP★

Capital Repertory Theatre (theREP) is a non-profit professional-producing theatre. In its decades-long history, theREP has produced more than 8,000 performances for the people of the Capital Region.

A member of LORT (League of Resident Theatres), theREP strives to bring quality work that explores the essence of the human condition through the stories of people, events and phenomena that shape our contemporary lives. Theatre, at its best, entertains, cajoles and inspires by engaging the heart and mind through its most powerful ally—the imagination.

There are two basic types of theatre companies: producing and presenting. theREP is a producing theatre. The theatre hires a director and designers for the set, costumes, lights and sound. The theatre's artistic director and the director select appropriate actors for all the roles in the play. Then they all come to Albany, where the play is built and rehearsed. The resident staff of the theatre works with visiting artists to put the production together.

In addition to the main theatre space, theREP has a studio theatre that acts as a rehearsal hall and secondary venue for performances (such as several of Black Theatre Troupe of Upstate NY's recent productions), a costume shop where costumes are constructed and cared for, a prop shop where props are made, offices where the administrative staff works and housing facilities for out-of-town actors. theREP's sets are constructed in a scene shop that is also a part of the Proctors Collaborative and located in Rotterdam, NY.

In contrast to a producing theatre, presenting theatres (sometimes called “roadhouses”)—like Proctors in Schenectady (also a part of the Proctors Collaborative)—host shows that have been designed, built and rehearsed elsewhere. Touring productions are booked into presenting theatres. Shows that are booked into presenting houses will tour regionally, nationally or even internationally over an extended period. What you will see at theREP or with our On-The-Go! tours are unique to theREP where it was built. No one from anywhere else will see this production just as you see it!

Capital Repertory Theatre is a part of Proctors Collaborative, which also includes Proctors, Universal Preservation Hall, the Collaborative School of the Arts and the Collaborative Scene Shop.



STUDENT MATINEES | Performance at theREP @10:30am

PRICE | \$12 per student

CHAPERONES | For every 15 students, one complimentary adult ticket is provided

LOCATION | 251 North Pearl Street, Albany, NY 12207

RESERVATIONS | Contact Group Sales at 518.382.3884 x 139 | groupsales@proctors.org

SCHOLARSHIPS | Visit www.capitalrep.org for more information and applications

ON-THE-GO! | For more information and to book a tour contact onthego@proctors.org | school.proctors.org



Capital Repertory Theatre is one of the organizations within the Proctors Collaborative, which also includes: Proctors, Universal Preservation Hall (UPH), the Collaborative School of the Arts and the Collaborative Scene Shop.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

AARON JAFFERIS

Aaron Jafferis has been working as a teaching artist in urban high schools, middle schools and detention centers for over ten years. He teaches playwriting, poetry, and hip-hop theatre through the study and analysis of existing work, and through the creation, critique, performance and publication of new student work.



His students have published chapbooks, staged poetry slams and poetry cafes, opened for internationally-renown performers, and performed their own plays for sold-out houses. Jafferis' workshops emphasize the possibility of using writing as a form of social action. Students explore the history, social issues, and current events through the media of theatre and poetry; they then use their own writing and performance to link these issues to their own lives and to change the way they and their audiences think about these themes.

He has performed his hip-hop poetry at Madison Square Garden, the Kennedy Center and the National Poetry Slam Championships, where he was the 1997 Open Rap Slam Champion. His hip-hop musical "Kingdom" (music by Ian Williams) won the award for Most Promising New Musical at the 2006 NYMTF and has been developed by Bregamos Community Theatre. His solo hip-hop play "No Lie" has been seen at the Nuyorican Poets Café, H.E.R.E., Passage Theatre, the International Festival of Arts & Ideas and at high schools and colleges across the country. His hip-hop play "Shakespeare: The Remix" (music by Gihieh Lee) was commissioned by Theatre Works (PaloAlto) and performed by Theatre Works, St. Louis Black Rep, Collective Consciousness and Capital Repertory Theatre. He wrote the book and English lyrics for Ruben Flores' Latin American Songbook series at Joe's Pub. He was named one of "50 to Watch" in the July/August 2007 issues of The Dramatist. He has received artist residencies from Theatre Works and the MacDowell Colony. He has written poetry for the Urban Bush Women dance troupe and for The National and Northeast magazines.

He received his BA in Arts & Social Change from the University of California at Berkeley, studied at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and received his MFA in Musical Theatre Writing from NYU, where he was Alberto Vilar Global Fellow in the performing arts.

ABOUT THE PLAY

“SHAKESPEARE: THE REMIX”

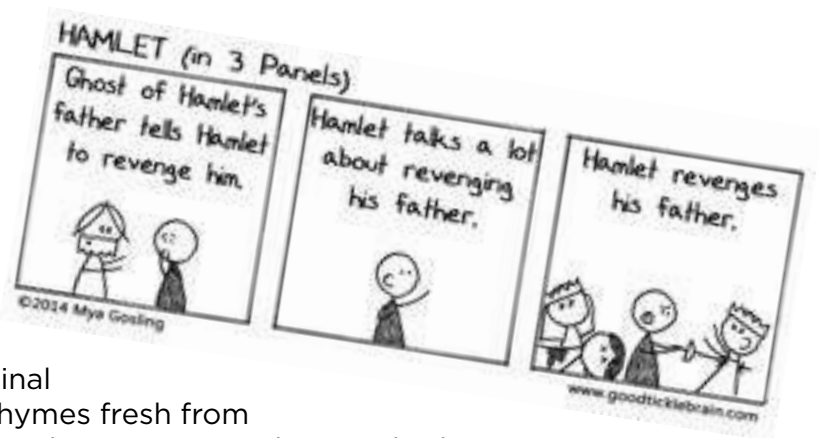
1. A NOTE FROM THE BOOK WRITER/LYRICIST TO TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:

Shayla, a high school student with a quick temper and a smart mind and mouth, is a tribute to various young women I've taught in high school and juvenile detention. Shayla is also like me: she doubts the value of school and Shakespeare until she discovers the real reason for writing – to move people. When conceiving the play, Gihieh and I looked for the most basic connection between hip-hop and Shakespeare – something more fundamental than their shared love for wordplay. We decided Shakespeare's job was to move the audience – move them to think, to feel, to applaud, to laugh, just like the goal of a hip-hop MC is to move crowds. That's why both hip-hop artists and the plays of Shakespeare are meant to be heard live, not read dead on the page. And that's why I, Gihieh, Shayla and Shakespeare became writers – to move people. We wanted to portray Shakespeare not as some perfect, untouchable intellect, but as someone to argue with, play with, use and ultimately, love. You can't truly love someone you worship. You have to really get to know him. That was the last key to the show for us: finding Shakespeare's own faults and unfulfilled wants. A ghost wouldn't be hanging around for hundreds of years if it didn't want something. We knew Shayla had to be the answer to Shakespeare's problems – the person who proves his continued relevance and the person to whom he passes the torch. Maybe Shayla is the next Shakespeare. Maybe you are. **Write.** – Aaron Jafferis

2. THE SCRIPT

SHAYLA

*What does Will Shakespeare
have in common with hip hop?
We're both so hot,
we'll make your bottom lip drop!*



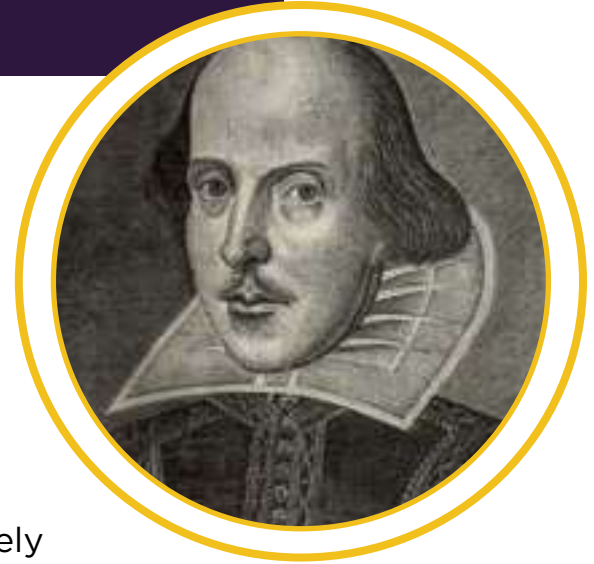
Shakespeare and Shayla are amid a wild and wonderful battle of words, colliding original text from Shakespeare's plays with original rhymes fresh from the mouth of a high school girl. "Shakespeare: The Remix" is a theatrical ode to all that is good, relevant, and irreverent in Shakespeare and in hip-hop.

When Shayla, a hip-hop-loving schoolgirl on the verge of dropping out, meets Shakespeare, a 440 (plus)-year-old ghost having a mid-death crisis, a pitched battle of wits erupts that pits Shayla's sharp and questioning young mind against Shakespeare's hunger to prove himself relevant. Shayla and Shakespeare jump in and out of scenes from "Hamlet," "Macbeth," "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Merchant of Venice." Their debate ranges from the rhythm of beatboxing to the rhythm of iambic pentameter, from the violence of hip-hop to the violence of Shakespeare. In the end, Shayla is speaking fluent iambic pentameter and Shakespeare is rhyming over a hip-hop beat, but it is the third character – the "ghost" audience of school kids watching and often participating in the show – that is left most wowed and inspired by the words. "Shakespeare: The Remix" is an unparalleled way to re-introduce Shakespeare (as you've known him) to audiences of all ages.

ABOUT WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

A QUICK BIOGRAPHY

William Shakespeare, also known as The Bard, is the most written-about author in the history of Western civilization. His theatre company, Lord Chamberlain's Men, was the most successful in London in his day. He had plays published and sold in octavo editions, or penny-copies, to his literate audiences. He was the first playwright to experience his works published and sold as popular literature during his career. The Bard is often called the English national poet and is widely considered to be the greatest dramatist of all time. In fact, the works of William Shakespeare have been performed in countless hamlets, villages, cities and metropolises around the world for more than 400 years.



William Shakespeare's legacy is a body of work that may never again be equaled in Western civilization. His words have endured for 400 years, and still have the power to reach across the centuries as powerfully as ever.

Written records give little indication of the way in which Shakespeare's professional life molded his artistry. All that can be deduced is that over the course of 20 years, Shakespeare wrote plays that capture the complete range of human emotion and conflict.



For all his fame and celebration, Shakespeare's personal history remains mysterious. There are two primary sources that have provided historians with a basic outline of his life:

- **The First.** His work: his plays, poems and sonnets.
- **The Second.** The few official/legal documents, such as church and court records, that have survived.

A BRIEF TIMELINE

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

1564-1616



1564

- It is believed that William Shakespeare was born on April 23, 1564, to John Shakespeare and Mary Arden.
- William was baptized on April 26, 1564, at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford-upon-Avon.
 - He was the third of eight children: Joan (1558), Margaret (1562), Gilbert (1566), Joan (1569), Anne (1571), Richard (1574) and Edmund (1580)
- There are little to no records of his childhood, but it is believed that he attended King's New School in Stratford, England.

- On November 28, 1582, William Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in Worcester.

1582

1583

- On May 26, 1583, William and Anne's first child Susanna was born.

- February 2, 1585, Anne gave birth to a set of twins, whom the couple named Hamnet & Judith.
 - Hamnet died, of unknown causes, at the tender age of 11.

1585



1592

- By 1592, Shakespeare was earning a living as an actor and playwright in London.
- The early 1590s also show records stating that William was a managing partner in Lord Chamberlain's Men, an acting company in London. March 2, 1592: Shakespeare's first play, "Henry VI Part I," was produced. It was performed between 1592-93 and was first printed in 1594.

- Shakespeare's first piece of work, "Venus and Adonis," was published in 1593.

1593



1594

- William Shakespeare's most popular comedy, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," was written around 1594.

1597

- By 1597, William Shakespeare had published 15 of the 37 plays attributed to him.

- By 1599, William and his business partners helped Peter Smith to build the Globe Theatre; located on the Southbank of the River Thames.

1599

1613

- In 1613, the Globe Theatre burns down. In 1989, after work on the new Globe had already begun, archaeologists discovered about 10% of the remains of the theatre's original foundations beneath Anchor Terrace. The new Globe, which opened in 1997, stands only 200 yards from the original site.

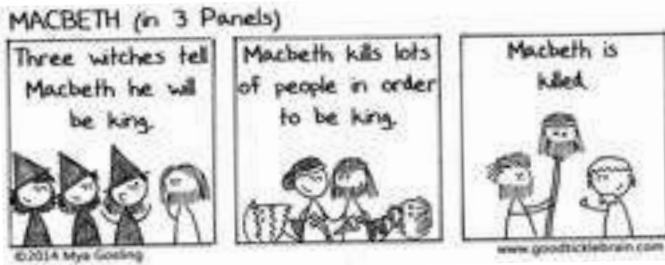
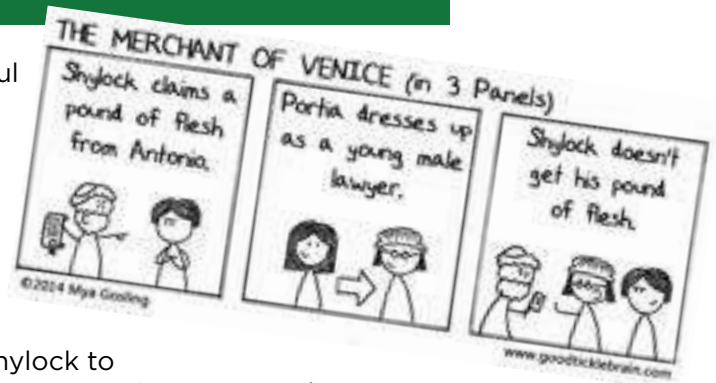
1616

- On April 23, 1616, William Shakespeare died of unknown causes in Stratford, England. It was his 52nd birthday.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS OF THE BARD'S PLAYS

USED IN "SHAKESPEARE: THE REMIX"

"The Merchant of Venice" | Portia, a wealthy and beautiful young woman of Belmont, is courted by several suitors, among them is Bassanio. He is short of cash, and he appeals to his friend Antonio (the title character) for help on this score during the courtship. Antonio agrees to lend his friend three thousand ducats for a period of three months, but to supply the funds; he himself must borrow a sum from a moneylender, Shylock. Shylock agrees to supply the loan with no interest—but only if Antonio agrees "in merry sport" to a clause that allows Shylock to cut off a pound of Antonio's flesh in the event of a forfeiture. Antonio can't pay the debt and must go to court to defend himself. Portia (in disguise) goes to court to help resolve the breach of contract. In the end, Shylock cannot extract a pound of flesh without shedding blood and loses the case. For every character, but not Shylock, mercy carries the day.



"Macbeth" | This play takes place in Scotland. It begins with three witches predicting that Macbeth will become king, among other political achievements. These predictions trouble him because he is not in line for the throne. But some of the witches' prophecies start to come true so he becomes very ambitious and begins to believe that he can become king and plots to murder him. When Macbeth hesitates, his wife (Lady Macbeth) insists that they go through with it. After an agony of deliberation,

he murders Duncan, the king. In the end, Lady Macbeth goes crazy from the guilt of the deed. Macbeth is murdered during battle and the slain king's son Malcolm inherits the throne. The play is a dark symphony of fear and miscalculation.

"A Midsummer Night's Dream" | Hermia is ordered to wed Demetrius; she refuses because she is in love with Lysander. So, they decide to elope and run off into the forest at night. They share their plan with Hermia's best friend Helena, who is in love with Demetrius. Meanwhile, in the realm of the fairies, King Oberon, who is having a fight with his queen, sends Puck, his aide, to find a flower that has magic powers. When the dust from this flower is sprinkled into the eyes of a person, they will fall in love with the first person they see. Puck messes up and sprinkles the dust in Lysander's eyes who sees Helena when he awakens and thinks that he loves her instead of Hermia. In the end, after many errors and love spells being cast, as well as further conflicts and confused characters, the world of the lovers is restored, including the world of the fairy king and queen. The play balances light romantic entanglements with brief but profound meditations on the illogical appeals of love and dreams.



"Richard III" | Richard is one of Shakespeare's most interesting characters. He is a deformed hunchback who is greedy for the throne and kills his whole family to obtain it. The play is about one man and the havoc he wreaks on England. The play is a pageant of ruthless ambition.



CONNECTIONS

Have students try their hand at making a three-panel cartoon for one of The Bard's plays, or a song, rap or poem.

BRIEF SYNOPSIS

ELIZABETHAN ENGLAND

In his plays, Shakespeare captured the realities and limitations of sixteenth-century England. Understanding this society will help students identify with the struggles and triumphs of Shakespeare's characters.

Elizabethan England was governed by the concept of **feudalism (class system)**, in which every citizen was answerable to another, more "worthy" citizen of an upper class. A person's class was a consequence of his or her birth, and this "natural" order was considered inflexible. People married within their class and lived as members of this class with rare exceptions. This class order also called for people further up the social scale to behave in a more "civilized," intellectual fashion.

Artists and entertainers were considered vagrants, lower class and not responsible to any particular lord. Perhaps dealing with his own frustrations as an artist in this class position, Shakespeare attempted to upset this "natural" order in his plays, such as having a member of a lower class aspire to a higher position or a woman dress as a man for some deviant purpose. This makes for good drama and begins to challenge such a rigid class system, but at the end of the play, Shakespeare always restored the hierarchy. This pleased the nobility and promoted good public relations between the theatre and the ruling class.

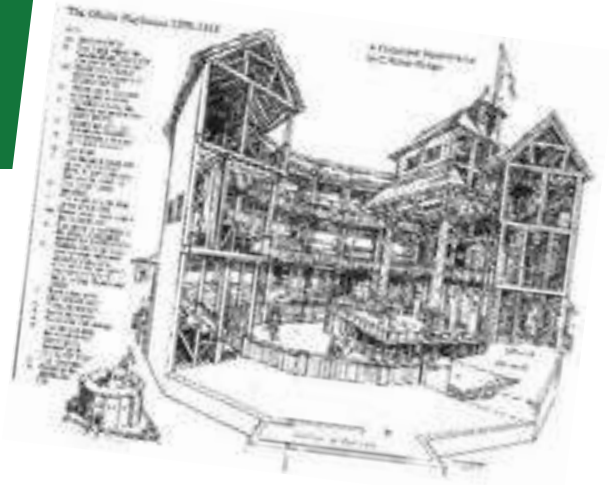
Sixteenth-century England's class system of natural order extended to religion, appearance and race. The noble Elizabethans thought of themselves in the highest possible terms. White, Christian, beautiful people were the Elizabethan ideal, and anyone who did not fit this mold was looked on with disdain. Shakespeare's plays are filled with characters expressing their contempt for those outside the norm. However, all his characters are complex, not mere stereotypes. As a member of a lower class himself, Shakespeare understood some of what it was like to be on the outside.



BRIEF SYNOPSIS

THEATRE IN SHAKESPEARE'S TIME

Without television, radio, films or computers, the people of Elizabethan London had a limited choice of entertainment. Those wealthy enough could pay to have musicians, dancers, actors, and fencers perform in their homes. The common people most often went to taverns, bearbaiting rings or theatres. For about the price of a bearbaiting match, commoners could stand in front or to the side of the theatre stage and watch a performance. The people who stood in this area were known as groundlings. For more money, one could purchase a seat in the galleries (the theatre walls) or a special box seat. Shakespeare wrote for each segment of this audience, incorporating base humor with sophisticated commentary.



But the groundlings are the audience members who make performances at the Globe Theatre so memorable: they mediate between the stage and the galleries, they have an immediate response to jokes, and they are made a part of the action—both imaginatively by the actors who see them as an army, a forest or a court, but also by their own verbal and physical participation—such as throwing back the apple a character has just thrown into the yard (the area where the groundlings stand).

LITERARY DEVICES WITHIN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

- **Imagery:** (n) the formation of mental images, figures, or likenesses of things or of such images collectively.
- **Soliloquy:** (n) the soliloquy is a device dramatists use to allow a character to communicate his or her thoughts directly to the audience. Other characters may surround a character during their soliloquy on the stage, however, the convention is such that the other characters can't hear what is being said. This is because the soliloquy is essentially a vocalization of what the character is thinking rather than actually speaking to anyone. Elizabethan audiences took the convention for granted.
- **Monologue:** (n) a monologue is a speech made by a character to other characters, sometimes even to a crowd. It is not dialogue.



CONNECTIONS

WRITE! A Monologue: Students are asked to write a short monologue (and or soliloquy) for the character of Puck in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" OR about a significant moment they recently experienced. Students should strive to use iambic pentameter and imagery in the same way that Shakespeare did.

LITERARY DEVICES

GETTING STUDENTS EXCITED ABOUT THE LANGUAGE

VERSE AND LYRICS

Shakespeare wrote many of his plays in alternating **PROSE**, which sounds like everyday speech, and **VERSE**, which has a particular structure or rhyme or rhythm, for two reasons:

1. Traditionally, beginning with the ancient Greeks, plays were written in verse because this elevated the storytelling aspect of theatre to a new register of language, separating it from the everyday.
2. Verse was easier than prose for an actor to memorize. This helped actors in Shakespeare's time who played many roles and performed often.

Most often, Shakespeare wrote in **BLANK VERSE**, which has rhythm but does not always rhyme. The rhythm is called **IAMBIC PENTAMETER**, meaning five sets of iambs, or pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables.

IAMBIC PENTAMETER IS MODELED ON THE RHYME OF THE HUMAN HEARTBEAT.

A line of iambic pentameter has 10 syllables and as mentioned it is **modeled on the rhythm of the human heartbeat**—da dum, da dum, da dum—where the first beat—or da—is a little weaker, and the second beat—or dum—is a little stronger.

The following line, from Richard III is a good one for demonstrating iambic pentameter: ***A horse! a horse! my kingdom for a horse!***



LISTEN! Hear British Actor, Kenneth Branagh, give the line a go: www.youtube.com/watch?v=g2gqtmLchGM

Sometimes a line does not have ten beats but more or less than that. This has great significance to the actor because **Shakespeare is actually guiding the way he wants the actor to pause**. If the lines have eleven beats, perhaps he's indicating that the character is excited and having one thought right after another. If the line has fewer than ten beats, Shakespeare might be suggesting a pause for thought. **The iambs are the actual road map for the actor.**



Pictured: Kenneth Branagh

LITERARY DEVICES

ELIZABETHAN ENGLISH

Today, we consider Shakespeare and his language to be rather lofty and highbrow. His writing is poetic, and often involves, to our modern ears, unusual sentence structures and words. Shakespeare delights, and nearly overwhelms, our modern ear with a myriad of images that can surprise, delight, inspire and even startle us.



Many consider Shakespeare's language to be 400 years older than the English we speak today; however, it might be more helpful to think of his language as being 400 years younger than what we speak today. In this way we can begin to appreciate it being presented as more vibrant, daring, outrageous and replete with images.

Because the language is primarily dramatic, it is engaging and alive when it is being performed.

SHAKESPEARE VOCABULARY

Words/phrases created by Shakespeare (heard for the first time in one of his plays):



It's Greek to me
Green-eyes jealousy
Tongue-tied
Fair play
Slept not one wink
Short shrift
Cold comfort
Too much of a good thing
Lived in a fool's paradise

High time
The long and the sort of it
The game is up
Teeth set on edge
Without rhyme or reason
Give the devil is due
Bid good riddance
Send someone packing
Dead as a door-nail
Laughing stock
Devil incarnate
Stony-heated villain
Bloody-minded
Blinking idiot
It is all one to me
For goodness' sake
Eyesore
Truth be known
Suspect foul play

It's not understandable
Deep jealousy from a girl
Unable to speak
Fair dealings
Now sleep
Short changed
Not much comfort
Something bad
Thought things were good,
but they were really bad
It's about time
A brief synopsis
The game is over
Bothered very much
Not understandable
Get revenge
Say goodbye
Send someone away
Dead
A fool
A bad person
Someone without remorse
Someone who wants to fight
A very stupid person
It's the same thing
Expressing annoyance
Something ugly to look at
Everyone knows the truth
Suspects someone caused
something bad to happen

CONNECTIONS:

Today, Shakespeare and his language are often considered as very lofty and highbrow. Do you think that was the case in his day?

- **Shakespearean Insults:** This activity, on page 32, of this study guide, is a great – and fun – way for young actors/students to begin to speak the language.

ABOUT HIP-HOP

Hip-hop is more than a term within the music industry for a specific genre of music. It's an artistic and cultural movement that has influenced everything from music to fashion to politics.

It's a culture that embraces a series of artistic elements, i.e.: music with a chest-thumping beat; music with rapid-fire lyrics rapped into a handheld mic; dance with gravity-defying steps; and it is visual art where walls are turned into canvases that showcase larger-than-life letters and illustrations! It's a means of seeing, celebrating, experiencing, understanding, confronting, and commenting on life and the world. It's a way of living.

HIP-HOP'S ORIGINS: A BRIEF HISTORY/TIMELINE

2023 is the 50th Anniversary of the musical genre known as hip-hop, as DJ Kool Herc is credited with starting it all at an August 1973 dance bash where he spun the same record on twin turntables-toggling between them to isolate and extend the percussion breaks-the most danceable sections of a song. Toggling quickly became a technique that filled the dance halls with folks who'd spent days perfecting their moves and doing their thing on the dance floor. What followed: every single DJ in the Bronx trying to outdo Herc's magic.

Competition is a prime motivator that fuels and flows through hip-hop.

1. Use your skills and whatever resources are available to create something new and cool.
2. Emulate and imitate the genius of others but do so while injecting your personal style into it.

The dance-party scene quickly drew in other forms of expression including poets, visual artists and urban philosophers.

From its work-with-what-you-got epicenter in the Bronx, hip-hop has become a multibillion-dollar business with its sounds, styles and fashions now in play globally. Since it began, hip-hop has birthed dozens of subgenres, including trap, grime, gangsta rap, rap rock (or nu metal), crunk, chillhop, bounce, mumble rap, Latin hip-hop and conscious hip-hop; along with notable hip-hop artists and acts including DJ Kool Herc, Tupac Shakur, The Notorious B.I.G., The Roots, Missy Elliott, Salt-n-Pepa, Nas, Jay-Z, Lil'Kim, N.W.A., Nicki Minaj, Big Daddy Kane, Rakim and Ice Cube.



DJ Tony Tone and DJ Kool Herc, 1979© Joe Conzo, Jr. photographs and ephemera, #8091. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library.



CONNECTIONS | CLASSROOM DISCUSSION:
Who are some of your favorite hip-hop artists?
Why do you like them?

ABOUT HIP-HOP

ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

Early hip-hop is rooted in the 1970s in the NYC borough of the Bronx. It began as a collaboration among youth at block parties and other community gatherings and featured DJs playing soul and funk music. NYC DJs such as DJ Kool Herc, Grand Wizzard Theodore, Grandmaster Flash and Afrika Bambaataa began experimenting with different techniques during these gatherings and are often credited as the pioneers of modern hip-hop and rap music. The new techniques they were using included longer percussive breaks (called “breakbeats” or “the breaks”), turntable techniques, scratching, freestyle, and improvised vocals based on Jamaican “toasting.”



EXPANSION THROUGH THE U.S.

In 1979, hip-hop trio Sugarhill Gang released “Rapper’s Delight,” a record now widely considered to be the first hip-hop record, which reached the top 40 on the US Billboard charts and thrust hip-hop into the spotlight. Hip-hop was now a fully-fledged musical genre.



LISTEN! To Sugarhill Gang’s “Rapper’s Delight”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mcCK99wHrk0>

DIVERSIFICATION

Hip-hop was in full force in the 1980s, with many different artists bringing new ideas to the table, such as drum kits, complex sampling, metaphorical rap lyrics and broader collaboration with genres like electro music. It was also in the ‘80s that hip-hop gained an international audience, notably across the UK, Japan and Australia, with songs such as “The Message” by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five.



LISTEN! To “The Message”

by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PobrSpMwKk4>



NEW SCHOOL HIP-HOP

By 1984, several newly released albums, by Run DMC, LL Cool J and the Beastie Boys, introduced a new style that would become known as “new school hip-hop.” It emphasized drum machine beats, minimalism, shorter songs (more radio-friendly) and socio-political commentary. These artists were moving away from the party rhymes and funk influences of “old-school hip-hop.”



Note: There is some strong language and content within the song, teachers should screen and determine if the song is appropriate for their classroom before showing.

Pictured Top to Bottom: Grand Wizzard Theodore, Grandmaster Flash, Afrika Bambaataa | LL Cool J, Beastie Boys and Run DMC

ABOUT HIP-HOP

ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

THE GOLDEN ERA

From the late '80s into the early '90s, hip-hop was in its golden age. Many performers were enjoying mainstream success while propelling major innovations in the genre with each new record they released. Artists such as Public Enemy, Tupac Shakur, The

Notorious B.I.G., MC Hammer, Boogie Down Productions,

Snoop Dogg, Nas, A Tribe Called Quest and Big Daddy Kane. It is also at this time that gangsta rap was on the rise, a subgenre of hip-hop that emphasized inner-city life and was characterized by artists like Schoolly D, Ice-T and N.W.A.

COMMERCIALIZATION

By the late '90s, hip-hop was a major mainstream genre that had created many high-profile artists, such as Timbaland, Nelly, Puff Daddy, Jay-Z, Ja Rule, Eminem and 50 Cent. In 1995, the Grammys added a new award category for Best Rap Album – and was won by Naughty by Nature.

ALTERNATIVE HIP-HOP

By the 2000s, artists were incorporating influences from genres like punk, jazz, indie rock and electronic. Rising artists at the time were Outkast, MF Doom, 2 Chainz, Gucci Mane, Juicy J, The Roots, Kid Cudi, Mos Def, Drake, Aesop Rock and Gnarls Barkley (to name a few).

CONTEMPORARY HIP-HOP

Streaming services created an explosion of artists, mixtapes, and experimentation. Artists that have risen up in recent years include Waka Flocka Flame, Cardi B, Future, Migos, Travis Scott, Megan Thee Stallion, 21 Savage and Lil Uzi Vert.

Note: There is some strong language and content within the song, teachers should screen and determine if the song is appropriate for their classroom before showing.

Pictured Top to Bottom: BIG, MC Hammer, Snoop Dogg / Timbaland, Puff Daddy, Jay-Z, Eminem / The Roots, Outkast/ Waka, Cardi, Megan Thee Stallion

ABOUT HIP-HOP

ORIGINS OF HIP-HOP

Hip-hop as a genre of music is most often characterized by a strong, rhythmic beat and a rapping vocal track. The genre originated in NYC in the 1970s as a cultural exchange among Black, Latino and Caribbean youth and has grown into one of the most consumed genres of music in the U.S.

As a culture, hip-hop is built on four main forms of expression:

- **DJing** – The use of turntables to manipulate records and create new music is known as DJing.
- **MCing (aka rapping)** – which is the art of writing and performing rhymes, usually over rhythm-heavy music.
- **Break dancing (aka breaking or b-boying)** – is a specific style of dance that is often very athletic, and almost always done to music created by hip-hop DJs or MCs.
- **Graffiti** – Urban forms of art where words and pictures are drawn with spray paint on walls, trains and other urban canvases is known as graffiti.

Beatboxing is a fifth form of expression that is often present – or vocal percussion – and is the art of creating beats or rhythms using the human mouth.



WATCH!

Check out these videos of an incredible ‘Father vs. Daughter Beat Box Challenge’

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggghiM2gwRE>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_weUICZwuSO

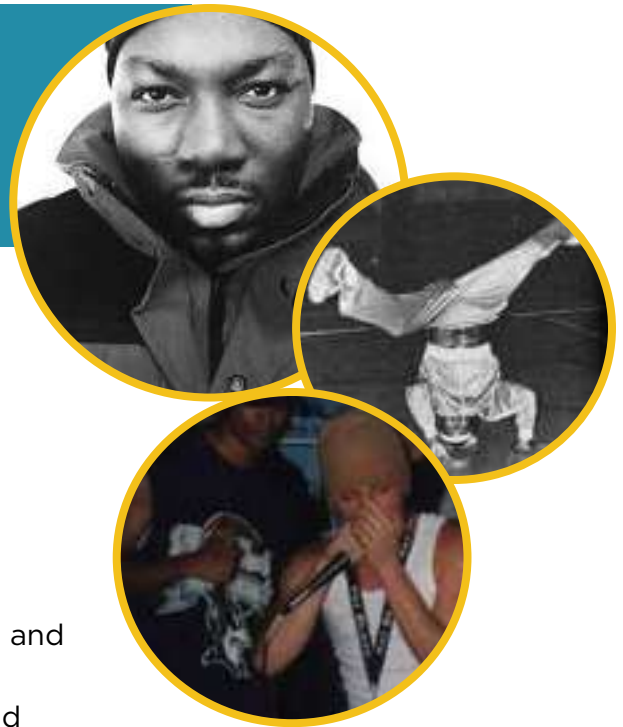
Try your hand at Beatboxing by watching these one-minute tutorials by Spencer X:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EAHExoZlgjM>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZrXueCbrD3o>
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q3Bnc_fpEf4
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ILHasXPYDQ>
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyF0K9XMvhk>

Or Butterscotch’s “13 Levels of Complexity and Beatboxing:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Efk_z9kg2MU

In addition to these five forms of expression, the culture also contains numerous other characteristics, such as a specific style of fashion, political messages, and a loose set of philosophies.



THE LANGUAGE

HIP-HOP MUSIC

The lyrics are the words in songs and the pattern they follow and are typically broken into verses and choruses.

- Verses give specific information while the choruses are more general and thematic.

The rhythm, or beats, are almost always in a **4/4-time signature (or four beats per meter/bar)**.

The rhythm can be created by sampling and/or sequencing portions of other songs; and can also incorporate synthesizers, drum machines and live bands.

Artists may write and memorize, or improvise their lyrics, performing their works a capella or to a percussive beat.

- Traditionally, the song will have a snare or clap on the 2nd and 4th beat of the bar, with the bars ending with a rhyme.
 - Take the Fresh Prince of Bel Air's Theme Song (here's the first stanza)
*Now this is a story all about **how**
My life got flipped-turned upside **down**
And I'd like to take a minute Just sit right **there**
I'll tell you I became the prince of a town called **Bel-Air***
 - Or this section of Run-DMC's song 'Sucker MCs'
*Two years ago, a friend of **mine**
Asked me to say some MC **rhymes**
So I said this rhyme I'm about to **say**
The rhyme was Def and-then it went this **way***

The **tempo** is distinct and varies within the different subgenres of hip-hop music.

- When you're "In the Pocket" you're following the tempo and the groove of the instrumentation with which you're performing.
- Old-school, East Coast hip-hop tempos were in the 100-120 BPM range.
- Early West Coast hip-hop initially slowed it down to 90-100 BPM, then expanded the range to 90-120 BPM.
- Southern hip-hop often uses a polyrhythmic/double-timing effect that is interpretable as 80 or 160 BPM.

CONNECTIONS:



Beatboxing and rhythm in the script.

In pairs, students should try the scene below—as well as finish out The Bard's last line.

Brief setup: Shayla and Shakespeare are discussing the different rhythms used in each of their forms of writing (and speaking). While Shakespeare uses iambic Pentameter (10 beats per line), Shayla explains that hip-hop's four beats per line don't have to follow a specific rhythm.

SHAYLA

Iambic pentameter has five heavy beats per line, hip-hop has four.

As Shayla tries to inform the Bard about hip-hop's rhythm, she starts beatboxing and Shakespeare tries to join in (he may or may not be successful at it), they swap off beatboxing while the other is saying their line.

SHAYLA

One, two, three, four.

Shakespeare might have rhythm, but hip-hop has more.

SHAKESPEARE

One, two, three, four.

Your rhythm is so simple it's a bit of a bore.

SHAYLA

Five, six, seven, eight.

My rhythm can hiccup, switch up, and syncopate.

SHAKESPEARE

Five, six, seven, eight.

THE LANGUAGE

LYRICAL THEMES... SOCIAL COMMENTARY

Like Shakespeare's texts, hip-hop is meant to be heard rather than read.

It is a continuation of the African heritage of oral traditions like storytelling. Performers “spin poetry” to music, showcasing their verbal dexterity and storytelling abilities. Songs use complex and expressive/meaningful lyrics, often with multiple layers of meaning that can be interpreted in different ways by different people, to tell a story—often focusing on social or personal themes.

The lyrics of hip-hop songs, whether they were from the 1970s when it all started, or “today,” have always been a form of social commentary. As it emerged in parks, clubs and parties in and around NYC in the 70s, the musical genre brought forth the voice of inner-city youth who were living in a post-civil rights era, an era that included voting for all people regardless of race, the integration of schools, and the expansion of the African American into the middle and upper classes.

As time progressed, lyrics in hip-hop remained a creative outlet for American Black youth. Artists continued using themes that linked to the political and racial injustices faced by African Americans. Along with such discrimination, themes also included drug abuse, poverty, and criminal activity. References to alcohol use and brands became an ongoing theme in the music as well.

To put it simply, the lyrics are a form of expression central to creating social and political awareness for the audience. Early artists, like Afrika Bambaataa, created themes of unity, peace and respect in their songs. Grandmaster Flash uses his song “The Message” to describe the emotions of people living in poverty-stricken cities.

i.e.: “It’s like a jungle sometimes, it makes me wonder/ How I keep from going under.”

Jay Z’s hit song “99 Problems” is an example that highlights the discrimination and constant threat of law enforcement faced by (specifically but not exclusively) young Black men, with officers suspecting them of dealing drugs and carrying armed weapons merely because of the color of their skin.

i.e.: “Well you was doing fifty-five in the fifty-four...License and registration step out of the car, Are you carrying a weapon on you, I know a lot of you are.”

THREE INTEGRAL CHARACTERISTICS OF HIP-HOP MUSIC

Although hip-hop is a varied musical genre, most songs within said genre incorporate these three common elements:

- **Strong, Rhythmic Beat** - a rhythmic beat is the strongest unifying factor of hip-hop music. It can be fast and aggressive or slow and relaxed, but it carries the song steadily forward and serves as a backdrop for vocal performance. Most beats in hip-hop aren’t simple drum lines – beat-making is a complex and varied art form.
- **Vocals** - most hip-hop songs incorporate rapping as their main vocal style—a rhythmic, usually rhymed type of chant that interplays with the beat. Other vocal styles include singing, spoken word, autotune and ad-libs.
- **Breaks** - “break” is a term for long percussive periods in a hip-hop song. Modern hip-hop songs often include breaks to hearken back to the genre’s roots or encourage dancing.

THE LANGUAGE

POETS OF THE MICROPHONE: THE MC (RAPPER)

Today, MCs like Jay-Z have huge profiles in the world of hip-hop, but that wasn't always the case. In the early years of hip-hop, these poets of the microphone were often seen as a sidekick to the DJ. There to make any necessary announcements during the party. But it wouldn't be long before the MCs wanted to show off their talents like the DJs and Breakers and soon MCs were not just announcers but rappers.

Students of hip-hop culture recognize the best MCs as accomplished formal poets, rapping complex rhyme schemes, built on a rock-solid four-beat rhythm. But a great MC will surprise their audience with syncopation and other off-the-beat techniques.

MC TERMS TO KNOW

- **End Rhyme** – rhyming words at the end of lines
- **Flow** – a rapper's vocal style

- **Freestyle** – improvised rapping
- **Griot (GREE-oh)** – oral storytellers and historians of West Africa
- **Internal rhyme** – rhyming words within the same line
- **MC** – short for “master of ceremonies,” a performer using rap techniques to interact with an audience
- **Meter** – the rhythm of a poem
- **Persona** – a character assumed by a performer
- **Rap** – spoken-word lyrics performed to a beat
- **Rapper** – performer that rhymes lyrics to a rhythm
- **Spitting** – speaking, performing a rap
- **Syncopation** – shifting a rhythm away from the normal beat

THE ARTIST AND THE TURNTABLE: THE DJ

DJs are the soul behind the beat that pleases, surprises and gets people on the dance floor. The best DJs have an uncanny ability to sense the mood at a party or club. They can feel the right moment to cue up the right song, to take the party where it's ready to go.

The sound system used by DJs is like the lab equipment a scientist uses, providing the DJ with their way of making magic.

- **Twin turntables** allow the DJ to switch easily between songs, or spin and manipulate records in tandem to create effects/unique musical combinations.
- **A receiver, amplifier and speakers** are wired to the turntables.
- **Headphones** are used to cue up the next song or segment while another piece of music is played for the crowd.
- **Mixers (or faders)** are used to make transitions from one turntable to the other-without missing a beat.
 - Today's DJs also often utilize digitized/computerized pieces of equipment.
- **Beat matching** – following a song with another that uses an identical or similar rhythm
- **Break (or breakbeat)** – an instrumental section of a song that emphasizes percussion and rhythm
- **Cue** – positioning a recording to play at a specific point
- **DJ** – short for “disc jockey,” the person who plays recorded music for an audience
- **Drum machine (or beatbox)** – an electronic device used by DJs to synthesize drum beats
- **Looping** – replaying a section of a song to extend it
- **Sampling** – lifting a section of a recording and using it in a different number or recording
- **Scratching** – technique of physically manipulating a recording to create a unique effect
- **Turntablism** – live and extensive manipulation of recordings to create a unique song

Grand Wizzard Theodore stumbled onto the technique of scratching as a teen. When his mom told him to turn down the music, he fumbled with the needle, liked the effect, practiced it and then began using it in his shows

▶ **Check out this video about DJ Herc – manipulating twin turntables and creating Break Beats.** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qwml-F7zKQ&t=66s>

DJ TERMS TO KNOW

- **Back spinning** – turntable technique that quickly “rewinds” a section of a recording
- **Beat juggling** – manipulating two or more recordings to create a unique musical arrangement

▶ **Check out a “recreation” of that first scratching here:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXz2vdx4IJY>

THE LANGUAGE



BREAKDANCING: HIP-HOP'S DANCE FORM

As the hip-hop culture rose from the streets of the Bronx, so did its dance form-breaking. Early b(reaker)-girls and b-boys, like Crazy Legs and his Rock Steady Crew, earned their skills on that concrete –admiring one another's cuts and bruises as battle scars as they pushed the art form with ever more audacious displays of style and guts.

- Like most elements of the culture, breaking was also improvisational, many breakers created their dances “on-the-fly.”
- Breaking mixes super-quick footwork with body-torquing twists, robotic movements that flow into smooth body waves, and acrobatics with leg flares that might suddenly halt mid-spin, where the breaker seems to be defying gravity.

- **Down-rocking** - dance moves performed on or close to the ground
- **Up-rocking** - martial arts strikes, kicks and sweeps built into the dance steps often with the intent of “burning” an opponent
- **Power moves** - acrobatic spins and flares requiring speed, strength, and agility
- **Freeze** - sudden halt of a dance step to hold a pose, often while balanced on a hand, shoulder, or head
- **Cypher** - group of b-boys/b-girls taking turns in the center of the dance floor.

WATCH!

Breakdancing Compilation Video (there may be strong language/content in the songs, teachers should prescreen before showing their class)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gVr4J2Cm12k>

This compilation video of Stephen ‘Twitch Boss from his time on ‘So You Think you Can Dance’

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3KICG9OpWNM&t=1s>

TERMS TO KNOW ABOUT BREAKING

- **Popping** - fluid movements of the limbs that emphasize contractions of isolated muscles
- **Locking** - snapping arms or legs into held positions, often at sharp angles, to accent a musical rhythm
- **Top-rocking** - fancy footwork performed upright

WRITING: GRAFFITI AND HIP-HOP CULTURE



Another element of the culture is graffiti writing, or “writings” as the artists themselves call it. Its wild and color-outside-the-lines style was influenced and inspired by the desire to create something new and fresh. Of course, graffiti is not new, humans have been painting/etching on walls since early man, but urban youth put a new spin on it all in the 1960s.

WRITING TERMS TO KNOW

- **All city** - being known for one's graffiti throughout a city
- **Bite** - to steal another writer's design or style
- **Black book** - sketchbook used by graffiti writers
- **Bombing** - to paint many surfaces in an area
- **Burner** - elaborate, large designs
- **Crew** - a team of writers that often work together

- **Getting up** - developing one's reputation or “rep” through writing graffiti
- **Graffiti** - writing, or drawing on surfaces in public places, usually without permission
- **Kings or Queens** - highly respected, experienced writers with most tags
- **Piece** - short for “masterpiece,” a large, complex graffiti design
- **Stencil graffiti** - premade designs of paper or cardboard that allow quicker, more exact transmission of images or lettering
- **Tag (or scribble)** - stylized, but basic graffiti writer's signature
- **Throw up** - quick execution writing; generally, one color outline and one color filled in
- **Toy** - inexperienced writer
- **Wild style** - style of writing that usually involves bold, interlocked letters
- **Writer** - graffiti artist who has a distinct way they design their letters

THE LANGUAGE

KNOWLEDGE: A PHILOSOPHY OF HIP-HOP

This element of the culture teaches the community about its identity and ways to express that identity. Hip-hop believes that folks 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 allows for a shared experience in an uncertain world.

KNOWLEDGE TERMS TO KNOW

- **Culture** – the behaviors and beliefs of a particular group of people
- **Didactic** – intended to teach a lesson, especially a moral lesson
- **Empowerment** – increasing economic, political, social, educational, gender, or spiritual strength of individuals or communities
- **Praxis** – process when a theory, custom, or lesson is practiced
- **Society** – social, economic, and cultural system
- **Strategy** – plan to reach a desired result
- **Worldview** – ideas about how the world works

THEATRE AND LITERARY TERMS TO KNOW

- **Choreography** – arrangement of dance moves
- **Collaboration** – working together
- **Content** – subject of information
- **Genre** – category of literature, such as fairy tales or historic fiction
- **Lyricism** – poetic or musical style
- **Metaphor** – symbolic figure of speech
- **Scenery** – backdrop for a theatre production
- **Stakeholder** – someone who shares interest or responsibility

MCs, Rappers, Theatre Makers, Griots, all tell complex stories. They all love words.

VOICES OF HIP-HOP

Talk's Q and A with Public Enemy's Chuck D

To understand the diverse perspectives embodied in the hip-hop movement, we must listen to the voices of the artists themselves.

Chuck D: Hip-hop is basically a term for Black creativity. There should be a more permanent museum context for it in New York and there are plans to do that. It being a cultural thing – musical history – I wonder why it isn't taught in schools.

I would always laugh when somebody would come up to me and say, "man, I'm 21; I definitely don't wanna be rapping when I'm 30." I'd say, "What're you gonna do? Open up a cleaners? You're still gonna rap, 'cause it's an art. Would a painter stop painting when he hits 50?"



”

THE LANGUAGE

VOICES OF HIP-HOP

“Sunshine” by Coolio



If love was a flower I'd spread the petals about the planet
And plant seeds throughout every city and country
Even in those who do not want me
I try to make some sense of the situation we call life
Some, verbal illustration to help ease this strife
Some, lyrical penetration to try to make things right
In hopes that what I'm saying can saturate your mindframe
And help you with the pain and the strain of the everyday struggle
I don't need it all, I wanna see all y'all bubble
And rise to the top then prove to be hard like a rock
Cos you know it don't stop unless we let it all stop
So when you face to face with adversity, just curse him, C
And look him in the eye, and let him know, that he can't hurt a G
And you willin' ta risk it all
For the things of people that you believe in
So educate yourself in order to assess your achievements
And if I had to explain this realer so you could see it in your mind -
I guess it's kinda like sunshine.

TUPAC SHAKUR, FROM TUPAC:

Resurrection (1971-1996)

"When I auditioned for the Baltimore school for the arts that was one of my good luck times. I spent three years in Baltimore. But at my homeboy's high school, it's not like that. They don't have trips to go see Broadway plays, they don't read the things we were reading, and they didn't know what I was talking about when I was like, 'Yo, Shakespeare's dope.' They don't have the same experiences that we had. Then I started thinking, like, damn why is that? Cuz our school that I went to is mostly for the white and rich minorities. And I started going. 'Damn, man, I would have been a totally different person had I not been exposed to these things.' Hell no, I was living in the ghetto. We didn't have any lights, no electricity. We was about to get evicted."



CONNECTIONS:

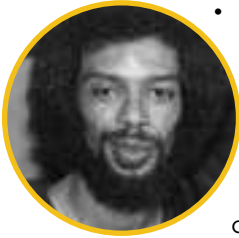
- What is the Coolio saying in the song? How is language important and/or useful to him?
- “Sunshine” was featured prominently on American radio. How do you think the public responded?
- Compare what you know about hip-hop with the following statements: “Hip-hop crosses cultural boundaries” and “Anyone can do it.” Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- What is Tupac saying in the quote about cultural awareness? How can hip-hop teach people about different cultures or experiences?

THE LANGUAGE | POETRY

JAZZ POETRY, SPOKEN WORD POETRY, SLAM POETRY



- In the 1960s, Langston Hughes created “**Jazz Poetry**,” poetry that has a jazz-like rhythm or an improvisational feel.
- Langston Hughes was a poet, novelist, fiction writer and playwright. He’s known for his insightful, colorful portrayals of Black life in America from the 1920s-1960s. He was also known for his engagement with the world of jazz and the influence it had on his writing.
- In the 1970s, Gil Scott-Heron as well as the Last Poets, set their poetry to music and spoke about the Black American experience, and would become known as some of the “godfathers of hip-hop.”



- Gil Scott-Heron was a poet, novelist, musician, and songwriter. He’d written his first collection of poems by age 13; published his first novel in 1968; and released more than 15-albums over the course of his career/life. He was known for his spoken word performances, and conviction that art should be functional – therefore, as an artist and communal leader, he embraced his role as a political voice committed to the liberation of Black people.

- The Last Poets were a group of musicians and poet performers that came out of the Civil Rights Movement; their works had an emphasis on the Black re-awakening. The original members of the Last Poets were Felipe Luciano, Gylan Kain and David Nelson.



- Spoken word** is a genre of poetry that was developed in the United States in the early 1900s and gained traction in the second half of the 20th century.
- Referred to as both spoken word and spoken word poetry, the form is that of poetry meant to be performed; it incorporates the wordplay, alliteration and intonation of ancient oral traditions.
- It contains several features of rap, hip-hop, jazz, rock, blues, spirituals and folk songs.
- It is one of the most important modern art forms.



- Many artists across the globe have chosen the spoken word as the creative form from which to share their views takes, and stands on crucial social issues, cultural values and prejudices in the world.

- According to scholars, the poetry of the Harlem Renaissance, Beat Generation and The Last Poets played an important role in the development of the spoken word; the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s-60s also influenced this performative poetry form.

- In 1973, the Nuyorican Poets Café was founded in NYC and is one of the oldest venues of the spoken word. *Nuyorican poets café pic

- A poetry slam is a form of performance poetry that combines competition into a performance called a ‘slam.’ Poets perform their poems at a slam, often to a beat, where an MC engages with the audience to determine who wins the slam (as well as those who come in second and third). Winners often receive monetary prizes along with the title of “champion” etc. of a particular slam contest.

ELEMENTS OF SPOKEN WORD POETRY

- Subject** - what the poem is about
- Gateway line** - a combination of the first line, or first few lines, of the poem and is meant to introduce the audience to the subject of the poem; often includes a “hook” to entice the audience
- Motif** - a recurring idea in the poem; often the repetition of one word, line or idea, incorporated in the poem
- Wordplay** - the use of a particular word in different contexts throughout the poem – to create a punning effect; and or an amalgamation of different images, emotions, and sounds in the poem used to make the performance more lively
- Sound devices** - to create euphony – musical, pleasing qualities of the words within the poem – to enhance the message, motif, and subject; important poetic devices in spoken word include: alliteration, assonance, consonance, rhyme, repetition and onomatopoeia
- Power line** - typically the last line of the poem, and contains a hard-hitting message; it emphasizes the main idea/ message of the poem

WATCH! SLAM POETS IN ACTION

Book Riots list of “12 of the Best Slam Poetry Performances to Leave You in Awe” by Yashvi Peeti (Aug. 9, 2021)
<https://bookriot.com/best-slam-poetry/>

Note: There is strong language and content within these poems, teachers should screen before showing and select poems they feel appropriate for their classroom.

Pictured Top to Bottom: Langston Hughes, Gil Scott-Heron, The Last Poets, Nuyorican Poets Café

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

1. After reading the brief plot synopsis on page 9 of this guide, ask students to think of contemporary characters/people that are like the ones described in Shakespeare's plays or that they could see playing these roles. Discuss why these real-life people are like the characters mentioned in these plays.
2. **Make a List on the Board.** Some Examples that may fit: Hillary Clinton; Barack Obama; George W. Bush; Saddam Hussein; Britney Spears; Prince William; A friend who is liked by someone but doesn't like them back; One of their best friends who likes someone who doesn't like them back, etc.

UNDERSTANDING SHAKESPEARE'S TEXT

In groups, have students read a scene from one of The Bard's texts. Students should decipher the language and who the characters are, as well as the relationships between the characters in the scene. Then have students answer questions like what is going on between the characters? What is happening in the world that affects how these characters interact? Who likes – or doesn't like – who and why? Finally, ask if students have seen the play their scene is from. If yes, how did they feel about the production? Did the characters act differently than they would have thought? Was the script easier to understand by hearing it out loud while actors embodied the characters rather than reading it in one's own head?



ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE/POETRY

Teachers should pass out the following page to students: The language of poetry is attached to “being.” It expresses inner states and emotional responses to outer events.

To speak poetry, words must be plugged into the inner condition, generating energy on a vertical path running between mind and heart. The language energies of spoken poetry run simultaneously on vertical and horizontal pathways, or, if you like, on electrical circuits that are at once introverted and extroverted. A consciousness of how words are spoken is necessary in cultivating the ability to speak poetically.

When words are seen, tasted, touched, or felt, they penetrate and break up patterns of thought. They reach into emotions, memories and associations, and they spark the imagination. They bring life. The way you speak Shakespeare’s words will determine the depth at which you plumb their meaning.

Spanish poet Pablo Neruda has a passionate desire for something rough and tactile in words and that passion is indivisible from the passion of his creative process. He says that the words must be the senses, must be the emotions because only then will they plumb the depths of the human condition and tell the truth. The Shakespeare speaker does well to listen to him.

Excerpt from Mos Def’s song Love From the album Black on Both Sides



Love
*I start to think, and then I sink
Into the paper, like I was ink
When I’m writing I’m trapped in
Between the line
I escape when I finish the rhyme
I spent my early years in Roosevelt
Project
It was a bright valley wit some dark
Prospects
This is far before the days of high
glamour and pose
Aiyyo power from the streetlight made
The place dark
I know a few understand what I’m talking
About
It was love for the thing that made me
Stay in the house
Spendin time, writin rhymes
Tryin to find words dat describe the vibe
That’s inside the space
When you close yo’ eyes and screw yo’
face
Is this the pain of too much tenderness
To make me nod my head in reverence
Should I visit this place and remember it?
To build landmarks ere as evidence
Nighttime, spirit shook my temperament
To write rhymes that portray this
Sentiment.*

Shakespeare’s Sonnet XVII



*Shall I compare thee to a summer’s day?
Thou art mor lovely and more temperate:
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of
May,
And summer’s lease hath all to short a date:
Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,
And often is his gold complexion dimmed,
And every fair from fair sometime declines,
By chance, or nature’s changing course
Untrimmed:
But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow’st,
Nor shall death brag thou wander’st in his
Shade,
When in eternal lines to time though
grow’st,
So long as men can breathe, or eyes can
see,
So long lives this, and this give life to
Thee.*

Step One: Students are asked to reach the lyrics and the sonnet to themselves. Once completed, they are to write down what senses were engaged as they read each piece.

Step Two: Students should read the lyrics aloud (this can happen all at once as they are reading them for themselves); after reading each piece aloud, students are asked to write down what senses were engaged as they read the piece aloud; did anything change from when they read it in their head?

Step Three: Teachers should read each aloud for their students. Once again students are asked to write down what senses were engaged while listening to the lyrics/sonnet; did anything change as they heard the pieces versus reading it themselves (in their head or out loud)?

Finally: Hold a classroom discussion about what they felt during steps one, two and three. Then, as a class, compare the language in the sonnet with Mos Def’s lyrics from “Love.”

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

READ! Shakespeare wrote many plays, many sonnets, and even a few poems. Encourage students to read other works by The Bard.

- “Twelfth Night”
- “Macbeth”
- “Much Ado About Nothing”
- “The Tempest”
- “Hamlet”

READ! Read plays, poems and/or novels, etc. – that utilize different styles of the spoken word.

- “Hamilton” Book, Music and Lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda
- “In The Heights” Concept, Music and Lyrics by Lin-Manuel Miranda, Book by Quiara Alegria
- “The Hill We Climb” and/or “Call Us What We Carry” by Amanda Gorman
- “I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings” or “And Still I Rise” by Maya Angelou

CLASSROOM DISCUSSION: HIP-HOP & SHAKESPEARE

Side-by-Side | At the heart of “Shakespeare: The Remix” is the idea that two art forms separated by hundreds of years have a lot in common. Consider the language and lyrics, audience, content, performance style, culture, impact, etc. Make a Venn diagram on the board and have students write their thoughts/ideas in one of the three areas – hip-hop; Elizabethan Theatre; or both.

WRITE! A REVIEW.

Ask students to write a review of the REP’s production of “Shakespeare: The Remix.” Things to consider when writing the review:

- What was the most compelling or intriguing aspect of the production?
- How did the set, costumes and props add (or take away) from the production?
- What did you think of the sound/music and stage movement?
- What did you think of the direction of the piece?
- What questions arose for you about the production? Was anything unclear or confusing?
- Can you make any connections between this play and other plays that you have seen? Can you make any connections from the play to your own life?

WRITE & PERFORM!

Spoken Word Poetry | Students are asked to write a poem where the subject matter relates to how they see/feel about the world – i.e.: like the notable slam/spoken word poets do. To let their poem be a place where they can share their views on social issues, cultural values, and or prejudices still faced by our society. Teachers could then choose to hold a classroom slam – with some sort of prizes for the first, second and third place poets (i.e.: candy bars)!

WRITE! A SONG.

As a class, students are asked: ‘If you were going to write about the issues facing you in your neighborhood or your school, what would those issues be?’ Have them make a list on the board. Then, using that list, come up with some titles for a song your class could write. Finally, have each student create the first two lines of one of the ideas.

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

WRITE! A SONNET.*

Because of their structure and brevity, sonnets are a good way to introduce Shakespeare, his language, and iambic pentameter. (Sonnets 27, 57 and 116 are easy for students to understand.)

STEP 1 – READING A SONNET

Distribute copies of sonnets of your choice. Explain that Shakespearean sonnets are highly structured poems of 14 lines with the ABAB CDCD EFEF GG rhyme scheme. Each line is written in iambic pentameter – 10 beats or syllables per line. Explain that the rhythm resembles a heartbeat (da dum, da dum), with the first beat being a little weaker, and the second beat a little stronger.

Read through the sonnets and discuss the possible meanings for each line.

Try having each student read one line aloud exaggerating the rhythm verbally or tapping their palm against their chest to reveal the iambic pentameter.

STEP 2 – SPEAKING IN IAMBES

Once they explore the meter a bit, students should push desks to the corners of the room and sit in a circle on the floor. Explain that everyone will pound out an original iambic pentameter sentence, one at a time. Give an example, such as: “Hello, my name is Mary and I teach this class!” Ask for volunteers and remind students that the lesson is a learning process, and no one is expected to be an expert. If someone gets stuck, encourage the class to help.

STEP 3 – BECOMING A BARD

Ask the students to return to their desks and take out a blank sheet of paper. Have them number line from 1 to 14. Ask a volunteer to give you a word, and have students write that word on line 1. Ask for another word line 2. Then, for line 3, solicit a word, and have students write that word on line 1. Line 4 must likewise rhyme with line 2. Continue this way, rhyming lines 5 and 7, 6 and, 9 and 11, 10 and 12. Lines 13 and 14 must rhyme with each other.

Students can work on this individually or in pairs, depending on the ability level of your class. They now have an outline for their own sonnet. Encourage them to write their sonnet to a particular person for a particular reason. Perhaps they are writing to a beloved or to tell a secret or to express a problem.

VISUAL ART

Start with a classroom discussion using these two questions: In what ways does the hip-hop culture use different kinds of creative talent? How do these talents work together? **Next:** Students are asked to discuss the hip-hop art form of graffiti. After the discussion, students are asked to create a piece of graffiti-styled art.

DRAW/ILLUSTRATE/WRITE

Pick a moment from within one of Shakespeare’s plays or a hip-hop song and ask students to illustrate that moment.

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

VISUAL ART: DESIGNING A SHOW.

Congratulations! You’ve been hired as one of the designers for the next production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” After reading the script, the director gives you the following information:

- a. The production will take place in the 1600s (Elizabethan Era); on a three-quarter thrust stage (audience on three sides, just like the MainStage at the REP) or;
- b. The production will take place in the 1950s and the fairies will all be puppets; on a proscenium stage (just like Proctors) or;
- c. The production will take place today; the director’s concept also dictates that the company of actors must first embody a troupe of traveling Steampunk-style circus performers and that it is this circus troupe who will perform a Steampunk version of “Midsummer.”

SET DESIGNER

It is your job to create a set that will transform the theatre into the appropriate period and will represent all the locations within the script. How will the design highlight the director’s concept?

SOUND DESIGNER

It is your job to create the soundscape that supports the period and locations in which the play takes place. What sound effects will you use? What music will you select – or will you compose new music specifically for this production? How will your soundscape help to highlight the concept for the show?

COSTUME DESIGNER

It is your job to costume the actors. What period is the play being set in? What events have taken place just before you see a character for the first time etc.? How will the different groups of characters’ costumes differ: the Duke and others from Athens, including the lovers; the fairies – recognizing that there is a King and Queen among them; and the mechanicals – who have both their “everyday wear” as well as the costumes they will don for the play within the play, “Pyramus and Thisbe.”

LIGHTING DESIGNER

It is your job to create the lighting that supports the production, keeping with the period and location(s) the play takes place, as well as the different times of day each scene takes place in. Think castle to forest, daytime to nighttime, magical moments, etc.

Students are tasked with taking on one of the design roles for a production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” They are to create a PowerPoint presentation with their design choices. Images and drawings should support the period, location, and specific needs of the production.

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

THE LANGUAGE: RHYTHM IN SHAKESPEARE VS HIP-HOP

Comparing Verse & Lyrics: Read the examples below. Feel their rhythms and hear the rhyme if there is any. Choose a word or phrase to describe the way the verse sounded to you. What topics or themes are the speakers dealing with in each example? What emotions are conveyed through the images? Find more examples from authors, songs, poems or plays. How do the rhyme and rhythm patterns change in their works?

EXCERPT FROM ROMEO & JULIET

*O Romeo, Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?
Deny thy father and refuse thy name;
Or if thou wilt not, be but sworn my love,
And I'll no longer be a Capulet.
'Tis but thy name that is my enemy;
Thou art thyself, though not a Montague.
What's Montague? that which we call a rose by any
other name would smell as sweet;
So Romeo would, were he not Romeo call'd,
Retain that dear perfection which he owes
Without that title. Romeo, doff thy name,
And for that name which is no part of thee
Take all myself.*

EXCERPT FROM LOVE RAIN WITH MOS DEF AND JILL SCOTT

*And then she arrived
Like day break inside a railway tunnel
Like the new moon, like a diamond in the mines
Like high noon to a drunkard, sudden
She made my heart beat in a now-now time signature
Her skin a canvas for ultraviolet brushstrokes
She was the sun's painting
She was a deep cognac color
Her eyes sparkled like lights along the new city
Her lips pursed as if her breath was too sweet
And full for her mouth to hold
I said, "You are the beautiful, distress of mathematics."
I said, "For you, I would peel open the clouds like new fruit
And give you lightning and thunder as a dowry
I would make the sky shed all of its stars like rain
And I would clasp the constellations across your waist
And I would make the heavens your cape
And they would be pleased to cover you*

FROM PAGE TO STAGE (OR MOVIE OR SONG)

Shakespeare's plays were meant to be performed (heard) rather than read. Likewise, Hip-Hop is meant to be heard rather than read. *Shakespeare is daunting! We suggest students read one scene, break down that scene and then view the scene from a filmed version. Make sure to preview the filmed versions and check ratings for age appropriateness.*

EXAMPLES:

- **Richard III:** the 1955 film starring and directed by Laurence Olivier; 1995 film starring Ian McKellan; or the 1996 film, "Looking for Richard" with Al Pacino.
- **Hamlet:** the 1948 film with Laurence Olivier; 1990 film with Mel Gibson; the 1996 film "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are Dead" by Tom Stoppard; the 1996 film with Kenneth Branagh.
- **Macbeth:** the 1957 film "Throne of Blood" by Akira Kurosawa; the 1973 film by Roman Polanski.
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream:** the 1968 film by Peter Hall; the 1999 film by Michael Hoffman with Kevin Kline and Michelle Pfeiffer.

Most Hip-Hop songs tell a story. Ask students to bring in their favorite hip-hop songs with accompanying lyrics. Distribute the lyrics to the class and talk about the story. Then listen to the selection with music and discuss how the music contributes to the artistry of the piece.

Note: Teachers may want to specify that students bring radio versions of songs and pre-screen for content and language

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

THE LANGUAGE: INVESTING WORDS.

This activity is based on a longer exercise developed by Kristin Linklater. It is designed to give actors the experience of speaking while connecting words to personal images, experiences, and emotions.

FIRST STEP | RELAXATION

Invite students to sit in a relaxed but supported posture, so they can breathe deeply into their diaphragms. Encourage them to take several deep breaths at their own pace, breathing in through the nose, and then exhaling completely through the mouth. Tell them to really push all the air out until there is no air left in the body before they take the next breath. Next, invite them to breathe in and sigh out with an “aaahhh” sound. Students may be self-conscious about making sounds in the classroom, but you can encourage them to think about releasing the tensions of the day. “Breathe in and sigh out all the homework you have to do tonight.” “Breathe in and sigh out all the sit-ups you will do at practice later.”

SECOND STEP | GIVING VOICE

Tell them to keep breathing in a normal relaxed way and to keep their eyes closed. In a moment you will write a word on the blackboard. When you tell them, they will open their eyes and say the word in a normal voice. Then you will give them instructions and ask them to say the word again. Give them clear cues about when to open and close their eyes, and when to speak. Remind them to stay focused on the word and to let go of all other thoughts and distractions. This exercise should move quickly enough to keep students’ interest, but slowly enough that they have a chance to visualize each instruction before they speak.

1. **LOVE – open your eyes – speak – “LOVE” – close your eyes**
 - *Who do you love most? – speak – “LOVE”*
 - *Who do you wish loved you? – speak – “LOVE”*
 - *Who would you love you go out with – speak – “LOVE”*
 - *What’s the best thing anyone has ever done for you? – speak – “LOVE”*

2. **SEA – open your eyes – speak – “SEA” – close your eyes**
 - *What color is it? – speak – “SEA”*
 - *How does it feel on a hot day? -- speak – “SEA”*
 - *Is it calm or stormy? – speak – “SEA”*
 - *When were you last by the sea? – speak – “SEA”*
3. **POWER – open your eyes – speak – “POWER” – close your eyes**
 - *Where do you feel it in your body? – speak – “POWER”*
 - *What makes you feel powerful? – speak – “POWER”*
 - *Who is more powerful than you? – speak – “POWER”*
 - *What would you do to get power? – speak – “POWER”*
4. **EARTH – open your eyes – speak – “EARTH” -- close your eyes**
 - *What does it smell like? – speak – “EARTH”*
 - *What’s it like to put your hands in? – speak – “EARTH”*
 - *What does it look like from a spaceship? – speak – “EARTH”*
 - *What does it feel like to lie on? – speak – “EARTH”*
5. **PLAY – open your eyes – speak – “PLAY” – close your eyes**
 - *Who do you play with? – speak – “PLAY”*
 - *What do children look like when they are playing? – speak – “PLAY”*
 - *What sounds do you make when you play? – speak – “PLAY”*
 - *What is your favorite game? -- speak – “PLAY”*

STEP 3 | OBSERVATION

Tell students to take a few more breaths to release the last word, slowly open their eyes and look around the room. Invite them to share their experiences of the exercise. Did the way they said each word change depending on what they were thinking about? Was there any image that they felt or saw particularly clearly? What physical sensations did they experience? Was there ever a moment where the sound of their own voice surprised them? Were they aware of others speaking? What did each word sound like? Did the words sound different from one another? Did the whole group say each word in similar or different ways?

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

LANGUAGE & PERFORMANCE: SHAKESPEAREAN INSULTS

Modern language is rather uninventive when it comes to expletives, connecting itself with a paucity of four-letter equivalents for the range of human distress. But Elizabethans took delight with language, weaving together terms to form stinging phrases of wit. Use this exercise to introduce the idea of language and conflict together. As a class go over the three below, all created by Shakespeare:

- **Would thou wert clean enough to spit on.** (*Timon of Athens* 4.3. 361)
- **What a disgrace is it to me to remember thy name.** (*Henry IV, part 2* 2.2.2 12-13)
- **You have a blasting and scandalous breath.** (*Measure for Measure* 5.1. 125)
-

Students are then asked to create their own Elizabethan insults. Combine one word from each column, prefaced with “Thou.” Choosing the final word from column C first will help you know what the focus or subject of your insult will be. Then, in pairs, students are to try and “one up” each other simply with the delivery of the one insult they created. How will intonation, demeanor, movement, etc., affect how it is said each time; and how will the student react to what was said to them?

A	B	C
artless	base-court	apple-john
bawdy	bat-fowling	baggage
beslubbering	beef-witted	barnacle
bootless	beetle-headed	bladder
churlish	boil-brained	bug-bear
cockered	clapper-clawed	bum-bailey
clouted	clay-brained	canker-blossom
craven	common-kissing	clack-dish
currish	crook-pated	clodpole
dank	dismal-dreamin	codpiece
droning	doghearted	death-token
errant	dread-bolted	dewberry
fawing	earth-vexing	flap-dragon
fobbing	elf-skinned	flax-wench
frothy	fat-kidneyed	flirt-gill
gleeking	fen-sucked	foot-licker
goatish	flap-mouthed	giglet
gorbellied	fly-bitten	harpy
infectious	full-gorged	hugger-mugger
jarring	guts-gripping	maggot-pie
lumpish	hell-hated	malt-worm
mammering	ill-breeding	miscreant
mewling	milk-livered	moldwarp
puking	onion-eyed	pig-nut
rank	plume-plucked	

ADDITIONAL CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

POLITICS

Can you think of a political message that is championed or challenged in a song? Bring in lyrics to share with your classmates. Deconstruct, or “break down” the political message. Do the same with a scene from one of the Bard’s plays, such as “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” “Macbeth,” or “Hamlet.”

SOCIAL STUDIES

Consider the idea of feudalism in Shakespeare’s time. Do we still have a class system in place today? What does our societal hierarchy look like? Review the quote by Tupac on page XX and consider the idea of access to the arts and literature. Tupac asserts that students from school in his home and neighborhood did not have the same access to theatre and Shakespeare as those students at the more privileged school. Do you agree? Was that the case in Shakespeare’s time?

JOURNALISM

Students are asked to write a report, as if it were a journalism article – newspaper, magazine, online publication, etc., on the musical genre of hip-hop. Things to consider when researching and writing: why do you think hip-hop developed when it did? What makes hip-hop different than other musical styles such as disco or funk – which were both popular when hip-hop started? What art forms influenced hip-hop – and what art forms have been influenced by hip-hop? Why do you think hip-hop isn’t taught in schools like other musical genres are? How has hip-hop changed since its beginnings in the 1970s?

MUSIC/HISTORY

Students are asked to write a report on a notable hip-hop artist; or research and report on the topic of women in hip-hop – be it female presenting hip-hop artists or how women are represented in hip-hop through the years.

RESOURCES CONSULTED

WEBSITES

- www.wikipedia.com
- www.goodtickbrain.com
- <https://www.theculturecrypt.com/posts/rap-the-art-of-storytelling>
- <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/hip-hop-guide>
- <https://www.kennedy-center.org/education/resources-for-educators/classroom-resources/media-and-interactives/media/hip-hop/hip-hop-a-culture-of-vision-and-voice/>
- <https://www.npr.org/2023/08/24/1195579648/missy-elliott-supadupa-fly>
- <https://www.npr.org/2023/08/23/1195414007/hip-hop-biggie-smalls-notorious-ready-to-die-justin-tinsley>
- <https://college.berklee.edu/bt/news/essential-features-of-hip-hop-production-tempo-instrumentation-rhythmic-feel-and-sonic-density#:~:text=Old%2Dschoo%2C%20East%20Coast%20hip,either%2080%20or%20160%20BPM>

- <https://www.hiphopmusichistory.com/art-of-rap-rhythm-cadence/>
- <https://medium.com/@geneduterte/hip-hop-the-evolution-of-lyricism-c7b01aff29b2>

OTHER:

Theatre Works Study Guide – Theatre Works originally produced Shakespeare: The Remix and shares a common vision with Capital Repertory Theatre, to educate children through the theatre arts and encourage students to express themselves onstage! Theatre Works is located in Palo Alto, CA. www.theatreworks.org

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH are key components of theREP's mission, "to create an authentic link to the community we serve." Through a wide range of programs, theREP strives "to provide the Capital Region with theatre programming which inspires a greater understanding of the human condition" and helps "to develop future audiences by instilling the notion that theatre is a vital part of the cultural life of all vibrant cities."

PROGRAMS FOR STUDENTS

Student Matinees (Classics on Stage): Performances of most of the theatre's professional productions are scheduled during the school day with dramatically discounted prices for area students to allow for greater accessibility.

On-The-Go! In-School Tour: Specially adapted professional productions designed to play to students on-site in schools. theREP's On-The-Go! program reaches close to 10,000+ students every year.

Young Playwright Contest: Providing students ages 13-19 with the opportunity to submit their work to be produced on theREP's stage. In addition, the winning playwrights are given a mentorship-prior to the production of the play-with a theatre professional playwright (and/or director).

Summer Stage Young Acting Company: Providing young actors the opportunity to work together, with leading professionals in the field, on a production that will take place at theREP. Company members hone their acting skills while rehearsing and then performing the Young Playwright Contest-winning plays.

CAST (Cultivating Arts & Students Together): Providing students with the opportunity to volunteer at the theatre and earn community service credits at the same time. Teens get an in-depth learning experience that satisfies their passion to be a part of the arts while fulfilling their community service needs.

Artists-in-Residency Programs: theREP works in conjunction with school educators to bring highly trained teaching artists to work in extended residency within the classroom. Opportunities to embed the theatrical experience into the curriculum are available.

Career Development: theREP is dedicated to helping build the next generation of theatre professionals with programs like the Professional Apprenticeship Program which provides year-long or summer-long paid apprenticeships (as an assistant stage manager and or crew member) and Internship Program that provides college students internships in many disciplines of theatre. These programs are specifically for young people beginning a career in the performing arts.



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