

LESSON

HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION

Objectives:

- Students will identify the contributions of the Sugarhill Gang, Kurtis Blow, and RUN-DMC to the history of hip-hop – Standard(s) 8, 9
- Students will respond to “Rapper’s Delight” from the point of view of an early MC – Standard(s) 8, 9
- Students will evaluate, compare, and contrast two early hip-hop songs – Standard(s) 6, 7, 9

Lesson Length: Approx. 90 min. (two class periods)

Materials:

Recordings of the following:

- “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugarhill Gang (optional)
- “The Breaks” by Kurtis Blow
- “Hard Times” by RUN-DMC

Pencils

Student Worksheets/Artist Summaries

Procedures:

1. Ask students to take five minutes to respond to the following using the “Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution” worksheet: “Have you ever felt like someone was pretending to be something that they were not? Describe that time and how it made you feel.”
2. Ask students to share their answers with a partner and then with the class.
3. Read the following to students:

“Today we are going to learn how hip-hop went from something done by young people in the Bronx to being part of the mainstream record industry. The first hip-hop song released to the public made many original MCs and DJs upset. There were several reasons for this, one of them being that the people who recorded it were not known for being MCs. Many people felt that they were pretending to be something that they were not.”

4. Divide students into three groups. Assign each group to read and complete summaries for one of the following artists: Sugarhill Gang, Kurtis Blow, and RUN-DMC

5. Ask each group to share their summary with the class. Provide corrections and clarification as needed.
 * You may choose to play "Rapper's Delight" for students and explain to them that it was the first hip-hop recording ever released to the public. ****However, the third verse contains lyrics that may not be appropriate for school.**
6. Have students form groups of three. Each group should have one representative from each of the previous groups.
7. Have students work collaboratively in their groups to complete the "Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution" worksheet.
8. Read the following to students:
"Take out the 'Hip-Hop - Breakthrough and Evolution Evaluation' worksheets. I am going to play 'The Breaks' by Kurtis Blow. This is one of his most famous songs."
9. Play "The Breaks" by Kurtis Blow and have students fill out the "Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution Evaluation" worksheet.
10. Have students share their answers with a partner and then the class.
11. Read the following to students:
"I am now going to play 'Hard Times' by RUN-DMC. This is from their first album. Notice the use of a beat machine in the backgrounds."
12. Play "Hard Times" by RUN-DMC and have students fill out the "Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution Evaluation" worksheet.
13. Have students share their answers with a partner and then the class.
14. Read the following to students:
"Now turn to the 'Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution Compare and Contrast' worksheet. I'm going to play 'The Breaks' and 'Hard Times' again. Remember that Kurtis Blow represented the 'original' hip-hop sound and that RUN-DMC used their backgrounds and their lyrics to change the sound of hip-hop. Please fill in the Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the two songs."
15. Have students share their Venn diagrams with each other and then with the class.
16. Create a class Venn diagram using the students' answers.

Assessment:

Hip-Hop – Breakthrough and Evolution Worksheet

Evaluation Sheets

Venn diagrams

artist profile

SUGARHILL GANG



By the end of the 1970s, hip-hop had spread to areas outside of the Bronx as it became more and more popular. Sylvia Robinson, a former singer and record executive, realized the potential for hip-hop to make money in the recording industry. In the summer of 1979, she met Henry "Big Bank Hank" Jackson, a local bouncer and manager of the *Mighty Force Emcees*. Robinson approached Jackson about starting a hip-hop act. Even though he had little experience as an MC, he agreed. Two others, Guy "Master Gee" O'Brien and Michael "Wonder Mike" Wright, joined Jackson and formed the *Sugarhill Gang*. In late 1979,

the *Sugarhill Gang* released "Rapper's Delight" under Sylvia Robinson's new record label, Sugarhill Records. "Rapper's Delight" was the first hip-hop recording to be released to the public.

"Rapper's Delight" was controversial among early DJs and MCs. There were several reasons for this. The members of the *Sugarhill Gang* were not widely respected or even known as MCs within the hip-hop community. Also, the fact that the *Sugarhill Gang* was from Englewood, New Jersey and not New York angered many original MCs and DJs. Further, Grandmaster Caz of *The Cold Crush Brothers* originally

wrote Henry Jackson's lyrics to "Rapper's Delight." Jackson, who once managed *The Cold Crush Brothers*, "borrowed" the lyrics but never gave credit or payment to Caz. Finally, "Rapper's Delight" used the backgrounds to Chic's "Good Times," a popular disco song at the time. Disco, however, was losing popularity among young people. Many criticized the choice to use a disco background for "Rapper's Delight" because most early DJs did not play disco. Though "Rapper's Delight" was not without critics, it opened the door for other MCs and DJs to enter the music industry.

artist profile

KURTIS BLOW

Kurt Walker, commonly known as Kurtis Blow, was born in 1959 in Harlem, NY. He took part in the early hip-hop scene as a b-boy and DJ. In 1976, he enrolled in the City College of New York and served as the program director for their radio station. In 1979, Blow recorded the single "Christmas Rappin'" a hip-hop take on "The Night Before Christmas." "Christmas Rappin'" was released through Mercury Records, making Blow the first hip-hop artist to sign with a major record label. In 1980, Kurtis Blow released his second single "The Breaks." "The Breaks" was a huge success and sold over 500,000 copies, becoming the first rap song to be certified gold. Kurtis Blow became the first "star" of hip-hop. Over his eleven-year career, he released ten albums. He is known for his eloquent rhymes and positive message. After his music career, he began work as a minister by founding The Hip-Hop Church.

By Ferhat Ataman aka Islam smoonie.com (Own work) [CC-BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)], via Wikimedia Commons



artist profile

RUN-DMC



In 1983, a group by the name of RUN-DMC introduced the first significant musical changes to hip-hop. Raised in the Hollis neighborhood of Queens, New York, RUN-DMC consisted of Joseph "Run" Simmons, Darryl "D.M.C." McDaniels, and Jason "Jam-Master Jay" Mizell. RUN-DMC represented a new kind of hip-hop. Their aggressive look created by black jackets, black pants, laceless Adidas, brimmed hats, and gold chains stood out from the sleek and sometimes eccentric look of

other artists. also brought a new sound to hip-hop. The invention of the drum machine allowed them to depart from the funk backgrounds that had been prevalent up to that point. With edgy, aggressive lyrics and sparse, heavy-hitting backgrounds, in 1983 RUN-DMC changed hip-hop forever with their single, "It's Like That/ Sucker MCs."

Between 1984 and 2001, they released seven albums. During this time they became immensely popular. During

the late 1990s and early 2000s, tensions within the group had begun pushing them apart. Tragedy hit in 2002 when Jam-Master Jay was shot and killed in his recording studio. Jam-Master Jay's death shook the hip-hop community. Joseph Simmons and Darryl McDaniels announced that RUN-DMC was officially disbanded shortly after. Both Simmons and McDaniels have gone on to record solo albums. Simmons has also starred in his own MTV reality show "Run's House."

ARTIST SUMMARY

Artist/Group Name:

Date and Place of Birth or Where and When This Group Was Formed:

Famous Recordings:

Reasons They Are Important to the history of Hip-Hop:

Interesting Facts:

HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION WORKSHEET

Using at least *three* sentences, describe why original MCs and DJs were upset by “Rapper’s Delight.” (3 points)

What is the name of the group who recorded the first hip-hop song ever released to the public? (1 point)

Why is Kurtis Blow important to the history of hip-hop? (1 point)

What is the name of Kurtis Blow’s first album? (1 point)

Using at least *three* sentences, describe how RUN-DMC’s music and image were different from earlier hip-hop artists. (3 points)

Put the following events in order by writing the numbers 1, 2, and 3 to the left. (3 points)

____ Kurtis Blow releases “Christmas Rappin’” and is signed by Mercury Records

____ *The Sugarhill Gang* is formed

____ RUN-DMC records “It’s Like That/Sucker MCs”

HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION WORKSHEET (CONTINUED)

Imagine that you are an MC in 1979. You and your friends turn on the radio and hear "Rapper's Delight" for the first time. You have not heard of the *Sugarhill Gang* and their music sounds different from the hip-hop that you and your friends have helped create. What is your first reaction? How do you feel? Do you think that what the *Sugarhill Gang* did is a good thing? Why or why not? (4 points)

[illegible]

Rubric:

4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
The response adequately answers all of the questions	The response adequately answers 3 of the questions	The response adequately answers 2 of the questions	The response adequately answers 1 of the questions	The response does not adequately answer any of the questions

Grading: 16-15 points = A, 14-13 points = B, 12 points = C, 11-10 points = D, 9-0 points = F

HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION EVALUATION

Use the table below to rate how well you like the song being played. Give each aspect of the music a score from 1–5 with 5 indicating that you liked it a lot and 1 indicating that you did not like it all. (1 point for each category completed)

Name of Song and Artist:

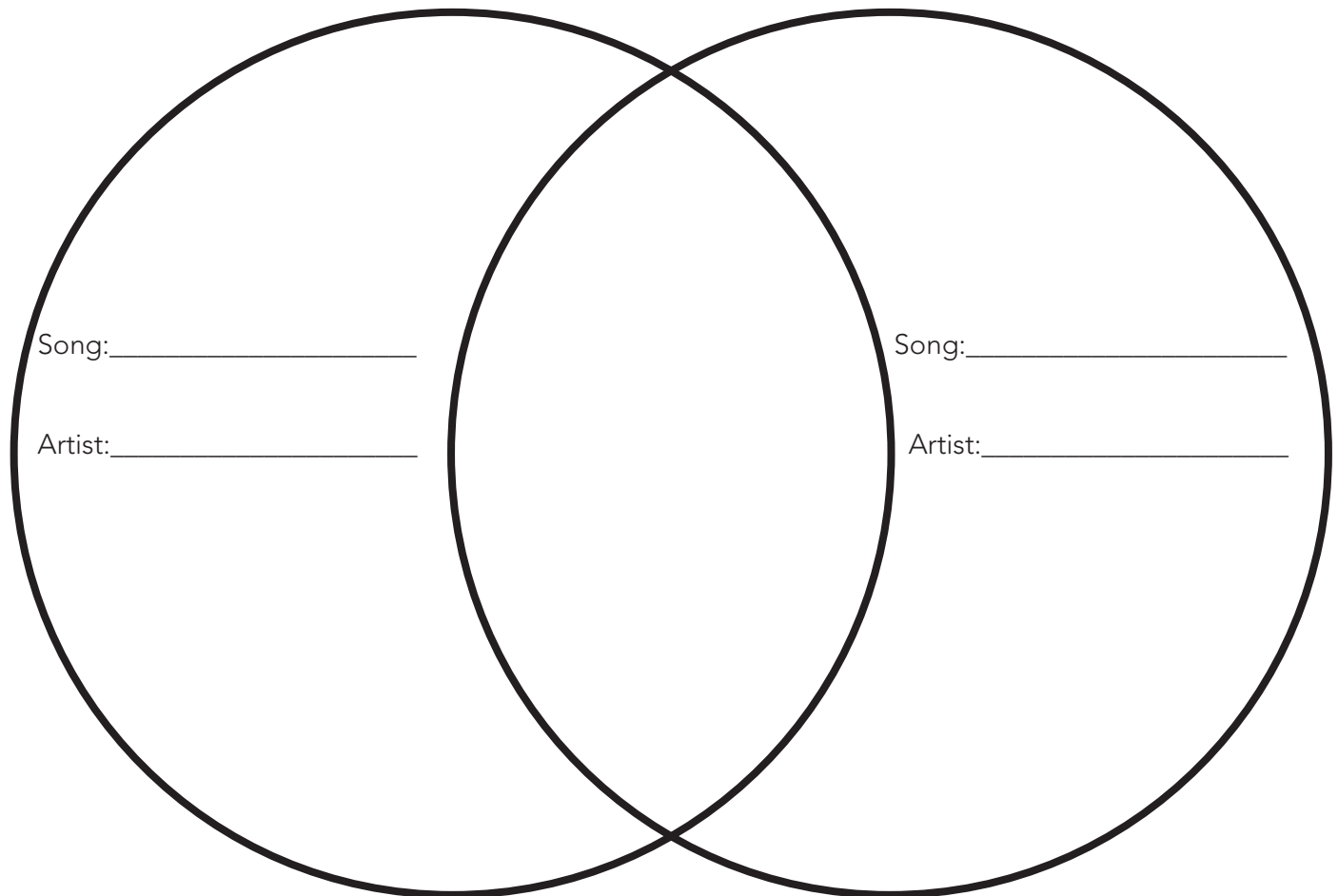
Speed (Tempo)	
Changes in Volume (Dynamics)	
Lyrics/Message	
Sounds that are Used (Timbre/Instrumentation)	
Flow (Vocal Rhythms)	
Instrumental Rhythms/Beat	
Other:	
Total	

In your own words, describe what you think this song is about, who the intended audience is, and why, using at least *three* sentences. (3 points)

Grading: 9 = A, 8 = B, 7 = C, 6 = D, 5-0 = F

COMPARE AND CONTRAST**HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION**

Use the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast the songs played in class. Your Venn diagram must have a total of *ten* similarities and differences. Use the categories from your evaluation sheet (lyrics, speed, volume, sounds used, etc.) as a starting point. Only accurate descriptions will be counted. (10 points)



Grading: 10–9 points = A, 8 points = B, 7 points = C, 6 points = D, 5–0 points = F

ANSWER KEY

HIP-HOP —BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION WORKSHEET

Using at least *three* sentences, describe why original MCs and DJs were upset by “Rapper’s Delight.” (3 points)

The Sugarhill Gang were not known as MCs. Also, they were not from the Bronx. Henry

“Big Bank Hank” Johnson used lyrics written by Grandmaster Caz.

What is the name of the group who recorded the first hip-hop song ever released to the public? (1 point)

The Sugarhill Gang

Why is Kurtis Blow important to the history of hip-hop? (1 point)

He was the first star of hip-hop. or He was the first MC to sign with a major record label.

What is the name of Kurtis Blow’s first album? (1 point)

The Breaks

Using at least *three* sentences, describe how RUN-DMC’s music and image were different from earlier hip-hop artists. (3 points)

They used an electronic beat machine. Their lyrics were edgy and aggressive. They

wore all black, with laceless Adidas and brimmed hats.

Put the following events in order by writing the numbers 1, 2, and 3 to the left. (3 points)

 2 Kurtis Blow releases “Christmas Rappin’” and is signed by Mercury Records

 1 The Sugarhill Gang is formed

 3 RUN-DMC records “It’s Like That/Sucker MCs”

ANSWER KEY**HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION (CONTINUED)**

Imagine that you are an MC in 1979. You and your friends turn on the radio and hear “Rapper’s Delight” for the first time. You have not heard of the Sugarhill Gang and their music sounds different from the hip-hop that you and your friends have helped create. What is your first reaction? How do you feel? Do you think that what the Sugarhill Gang did is a good thing? Why or why not? (4 points)

I am shocked to hear hip-hop on the radio. Also, I am surprised that I have never heard

of the Sugarhill Gang. I feel excited that my favorite music has made it on the radio but

my music is better. I think that what they did is good because “Rapper’s

Delight” will allow other MCs to share their music with the world. I am not happy

that they used Grandmaster Caz’s lyrics without giving him credit.

Rubric:

4 points	3 points	2 points	1 point	0 points
The response adequately answers all of the questions	The response adequately answers 3 of the questions	The response adequately answers 2 of the questions	The response adequately answers 1 of the questions	The response does not adequately answer any of the questions

Grading: 16-15 points = A, 14-13 points = B, 12 points = C, 11-10 points = D, 9-0 points = F

COMPARE AND CONTRAST SAMPLE ANSWERS

HIP-HOP — BREAKTHROUGH AND EVOLUTION

Use the Venn diagram below to compare and contrast the songs played in class. Each song must have a total of ten similarities and differences. Use the categories from your evaluation sheet (lyrics, speed, volume, sounds used, etc.) as a starting point. Only accurate descriptions will be counted. (10 points)

