

## Hip Hop as History and Community Activism

**Anthony K. Amos** believes art plays a major role in helping people and communities reach their highest potential. Mr. Amos' love of music (and especially hip hop) led him to the art of disc jockeying in 1984 while in college at the University of Virginia. With over 25 years of experience as a DJ, Mr. Amos has been a major contributor to the inspirational and urban gospel market in DC. He has lent his DJ skills in venues all across the country, working with artists such as Da Truth and sharing the stage with people like Kanye West and Kirk Franklin. Mr. Amos created an inspirational music video show called *Exodus Videos* which aired on Charlottesville's cable access channel for 9 years and has done videography work for various organizations in the Charlottesville area. Mr. Amos founded *Skies the Limit Entertainment* in 1999 as a way to use his love of music and other art forms to provoke positive change in communities. *Skies the Limit* sponsors the "Verbs and Vibes Open Mic" show (formerly "Just Lyricz Open Mic and Poetry Jam") every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday at Random Row Books from 7pm until 10pm. Verbs and Vibes is a platform for artists of all kinds to be heard. Its aim is to inspire people, build community and allow space for creativity to soar.

**Objective:** To share the history of hip hop, the catalysts for its development, its significance; the 5 elements that define it as a genre and culture; and its relevance as a historic movement as a way to explore the capacity of art as a catalyst for cultural change.

**Presentation Format:** Ideal class size is 35 students. Larger classes can be accommodated with consultation between the teacher and workshop leader prior to the class. Presentations can be 1 hour or longer, one class period or spanning multiple classes.

**Workshop Overview:** Integrating music, videos, writing and various discussion formats, this workshop will explore hip hop as an example of young people using art to address community issues. Students will compare the music of hip hop founders and present day hip hop artists (both underground and mainstream). They will also consider how the elements of hip hop can be used to address issues of concern to today's youth. Depending on the amount of time allocated for the workshop and the subject of the class, the workshop may include various interactive components such as:

- a debate on the topic "Has Hip Hop Made Important Contributions to American Society?";
- student presentations in which they express themselves in small groups about a community issue they would like to see improved using the 5 elements of hip hop (music, spoken word/rap, dance, art, and knowledge);
- writing or speaking on their analysis of how the elements of hip hop are expressed within a current hip hop song; or
- an exploration of a theme relevant to the subject of the class the workshop is being integrated within or a theme present within hip hop culture (empowerment, violence, sexuality, male/female identity, etc.) using one of the aforementioned formats.

**Standards of Learning:** While the subjects that this workshop most clearly aligns with are music and history, Mr. Amos is open to crafting his presentation to fit any and all subjects. Some of the standards of learning that this presentation can support include:

## **English**

### **Oral Language K -12**

1.1 The student will continue to demonstrate growth in the use of oral and written language

- a) Listen and respond to a variety of media, including books, and other age-appropriate materials.

7.1 The student will give and seek information in conversations, in group discussions, and in oral presentations.

- a) Use oral vocabulary and style appropriate for listeners.
- c) Ask probing questions to seek elaboration and clarification of ideas.
- d) Make supportive statements to communicate agreement with or acceptance of others ideas.

## **Grade Eleven – English**

### **Oral Language**

11.1 The student will make informative and persuasive presentations.

- a) Gather and organize evidence to support a position.
- b) Present evidence clearly and convincingly.
- c) Support and defend ideas in public forums.
- d) Use grammatically correct language, including vocabulary appropriate to the topic, audience, and purpose.

### **Reading Analysis**

11.3 The student will read and analyze relationships among American literature, history, and culture.

- b) Compare and contrast the development of American literature in its historical context.
- c) Discuss American literature as it reflects traditional and contemporary themes, motifs, universal characters, and genres.

11.5 The student will read and critique a variety of poetry.

- a) Analyze the poetic elements of contemporary and traditional poems.
- b) Identify the poetic elements and techniques that are most appealing and that make poetry enjoyable.
- c) Compare and contrast the works of contemporary and past American poets.

### **Writing**

11.7 The student will write in a variety of forms, with an emphasis on persuasion.

- d) Organize ideas in a logical manner.
- e) Elaborate ideas clearly and accurately.

## Grades Nine–Twelve General Music

### Performance and Production

- HS.1 The student will participate in a variety of music experiences.
1. Listen and respond to music.
- HS.5 The student will investigate the role of music in the human experience.
1. Explore the development and function of music in diverse cultures throughout history through oral and written traditions.
  2. Explore various opportunities to experience music in the community.
  3. Identify the various uses of music.
  4. Discuss the role of technology in the development of music.

### Judgment and Criticism

- HS.6 The student will develop evaluative criteria to make aesthetic judgments.
1. Develop skills in evaluating music individually and in groups.
  2. Defend individual judgments regarding the function of the elements of music.

### Aesthetics

- HS.7 The student will explore music styles and genres through listening, performing, writing, and discussing.
- HS.8 The student will demonstrate appropriate performance behavior as a participant and/or listener.
1. Exhibit respect for the contributions of self and others within a musical setting.
  2. Demonstrate appropriate audience behavior for the context and style of music performed.

## Virginia and United States History

- VUS.1 The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis and responsible citizenship, including the ability to
- a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art, to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
  - b) evaluate the authenticity, authority, and credibility of sources;
  - c) formulate historical questions and defend findings, based on inquiry and interpretation;
  - f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;
  - i) identify the costs and benefits of specific choices made, including the consequences, both intended and unintended, of the decisions and how people and nations responded to positive and negative incentives.

VUS.15 The student will demonstrate knowledge of economic, social, cultural, and political developments in recent decades and today by

- c) explaining the media influence on contemporary American culture and how scientific and technological advances affect the workplace, health care, and education;

### **Virginia and United States Government**

GOVT.1 The student will demonstrate mastery of the social studies skills responsible citizenship requires, including the ability to

- f) identify a problem, weigh the expected costs and benefits and possible consequences of proposed solutions, and recommend solutions, using a decision-making model;
- g) select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.

GOVT.3 The student will demonstrate knowledge of the concepts of democracy by

- a) recognizing the fundamental worth and dignity of the individual;
- b) recognizing the equality of all citizens under the law;
- c) recognizing majority rule and minority rights;
- d) recognizing the necessity of compromise;
- e) recognizing the freedom of the individual.

GOVT.18 The student will understand that thoughtful and effective participation in civic life is characterized by

- e) keeping informed about current issues;
- f) respecting differing opinions in a diverse society;

## Sample Lesson Plan for a 90 Minute Class For 10-12 Students

- I. Introductions
  - a. Workshop leader introduces self and topic of presentation
  - b. Each student shares their name, which hip hop artist is their favorite and one line from a song by that artist. (Students who don't have a favorite hip hop artist may share their favorite singer of any genre.)
- II. Brief History of Hip Hop
  - a. Its founders and their hopes
  - b. Overview of what was happening in American culture when hip hop was born and, more specifically, the community problems that led to the creation of hip hop
  - c. What hip hop is today as an industry
- III. Who's allowed to be custodians of knowledge?
  - a. Sharing of video clip that states the 5 element of hip hop and introduces the concept of "custodian of knowledge"
  - b. Review of the following topics in the video:
    - i. What does it mean to be a custodian of knowledge?
    - ii. What made Shakespeare an unlikely custodian of knowledge?
    - iii. What makes hip hop artists unlike custodians of knowledge?
    - iv. What do the words "hip hop" mean?
    - v. What are the 5 Elements of Hip Hop (DJing, Mcing, Breakdancing, Graffiti art, Knowledge)?
- IV. Identify ways that hip hop embodies the 5 elements of hip hop
  - a. Sharing 2-3 clips from music videos both from the time frame when hip hop was founded and present day followed by students identifying the elements they noticed
  - b. Explore concept of "conscious" hip hop
  - c. Discuss differences between "conscious" hip hop and what's played usually on the radio
- V. What is it hip hop today isn't saying that you wish it would?
  - a. Divide students in 3-4 groups. Ideally, each group should have at least one writer or rapper, one dancer and one person who can draw. Each group decides on a community issue they want to "drop some knowledge" about. Then they are to come up with a 2-3 minute presentation on that issue incorporating as many of the remaining 4 elements of hip hop as feasible. The remaining 4 elements are 1) music (supplied by Anthony Amos, also known as DJ Double A1K), 2) rap/emceeing or spoken word, 3) dance and 4) art.