

#BLACK MUSIC MATTERS

“MADE IT”

MICHIE MEE FT TONYA P

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S):

In this lesson, students will explore anti-Black racism as it relates to oppression faced by Black female artists in the music industry and Black women in the larger society. Students will also explore themes of perseverance, resilience and Black Brilliance as they relate to overcoming systemic structures that disadvantage racialized youth.

English, Social Science, Geography, Visual Arts and Music-specific activities will enable students to identify and respond to the social issues of anti-Black racism and misogyny.

GRADE LEVEL:

11 - 12



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CANADA'S BLACK MUSIC BUSINESS COLLECTIVE



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AUTHORS

Darren Hamilton

Music Educator, Researcher and Choral Conductor

Jon Corbin

English and Social Science Educator, Hip Hop Artist

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Dr. Mark Campbell

Assistant Professor and Associate Chair, Music and Culture, University of Toronto

Adrian Khan

Teacher, Hip Hop DJ and Music Producer

Alicia Mighty

Music Teacher, Peel District School Board

Carlos Morgan

Recording Artist, Songwriter and Music Producer

Keziah Myers

Executive Director, ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective

Nick Godsoe

Senior Manager of Programs and Education, MusiCounts

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LESSON CONTEXT

BACKGROUND

MICHIE MEE

Michelle McCulloch, best known by her stage name ‘Michie Mee’, is credited as being the ‘godmother of Canadian Hip Hop music’ or Canada’s ‘Queen of Hip Hop’. Born in Kingston, Jamaica, she moved to Toronto at a very young age and grew up in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood. In the mid-1980s, she teamed up with DJ L.A. Luv (Phillip Gayle) to form the duo Michie Mee and DJ L.A. Luv. The duo made an impact in the United States with their first single, “Elements of Style”. This led to their signing to First Priority/Atlantic Records in 1998, making Michie Mee the first Canadian Hip Hop artist to sign a major record deal with an American label. She is also recognized as the first Canadian female Hip Hop artist. Michie Mee is known in the music industry for her unique style of rap, combining her Jamaican roots in reggae and dancehall with Hip Hop. Many successful artists have followed in Michie’s footsteps using this gifted technique. Having a career that spans over 35 years, she has released three full-length albums and has worked as an actress in television shows and movies. Besides being an entertainer, Michie is also a mother and she makes it one of her duties to keep involved with today’s youth.



Still, “Jamaican Funk” Official Music Video. Photo: YouTube

TONYA P

Tonya Pringle-Lovemore, who goes by the stage name ‘Tonya P’, is a Canadian born reggae singer and songwriter. As the daughter of popular promoter Clive Kubba Pringle, Tonya P got her start in the music industry at the age of 14 and performed her first major show in Jamaica at the age of 19 opening for Beenie Man, the King of Dancehall. She recorded and released her first original song “With Me” in 2005 with producer Radford Ettienne (Dr. Rad). Since then, the two have worked together to release numerous hits that have made Tonya P one of the most decorated and recognized female reggae artists in Toronto.



Still, “Made It” Official Music Video. Photo: YouTube



ABOUT THE SONG

“Made It” was first released as a single in 2018 and later on Michie Mee’s 2020 album, *Bahdgyal’s Revenge*, her first full-length album since *The First Cut Is The Deepest* in 2000. The song speaks about Michie’s struggles as a single mother and female rap artist in addition to the struggles of Black youth in society in general. Some of these struggles are identified directly, while others are referenced indirectly. In a recent interview, Mee shares that her intent is not to focus on the pessimistic side of life, but rather to encourage the next generation that they can make it through anything if they stand by their beliefs and by their community (Pride News, 2021). “Made It” contains themes of perseverance, resilience and Black Brilliance as they relate to overcoming systemic structures that disadvantage racialized youth.



Still, “Made It” Official Music Video.
Photo: YouTube

CONTENT WARNING

The music video of “Made It” contains visual profanity displayed on a pair of high heel shoes from 1:37 - 1:41. The second verse of the lyrics contains the word “hoes”.



FOUNDATIONAL ACTIVITIES

PRE-ACTIVITY

1. WATCH THE VIDEO (14:06)

[Misogyny in Hip Hop | Ellen Chamberlain | TEDxWayneStateU](#)

2. WATCH THE VIDEO (3:49)

[Michie Mee Interview for the CBC Hip Hop Summit](#)

3. READ THE ARTICLE (10:00)

[‘Don’t just close the doors’: Michie Mee on the Canadian music industry and her first album in 20 years | CBC](#)

4. REVIEW KEY VOCABULARY (10:00)

Review the Key Vocabulary List

Read through the lyrics to “Made It” (Appendix 1)

Re-read the lyrics again if needed

5. WATCH THE MUSIC VIDEO (3:07)

[“Made It”, Michie Mee Ft. Tonya P](#)



Ellen Chamberlain. Photo: YouTube



Still, “Made It” Official Music Video.
Photo: YouTube



KEY VOCABULARY

Bahdgyal: this term has a dual meaning. It can be slang for ‘bad girl’, the opposite of a ‘good girl’, a girl that does things deemed unacceptable by society. It can also refer to a woman who has a lot of confidence and determination, someone who does not let others bring them down.

Black Brilliance: a term that means Black Intelligence, Black Power, Black Unity and Black Excellence. The term counteracts negative stereotypes placed on Black people to show that they can be successful and positive contributors to society.

Biz: slang for ‘business’.

Colin Rickards: a journalist and author who took special interest in the Canadian-Caribbean community and contributed to local Caribbean newspapers in Toronto such as Share and Pride. In a recent interview, Michie Mee attributes Rickards as one of her sources of guidance and faith within the Black community (Pride News, 2021).

Exploit: to make full use of and derive benefit from (a resource).

Finch: reference to Jane (Street) & Finch (Avenue), a high density, multicultural, low-income neighbourhood located in the northwest end of Toronto, Ontario. This was one of the neighbourhoods that Michie Mee grew up in.

Flinch: to make a quick, nervous movement as an instinctive reaction to fear, pain, or surprise.

Itah Sadu: a prominent storyteller and children’s author. She is also the owner of the Toronto bookstore A Different Booklist. Sadu’s stories, workshops and presentations often address issues of racism and equity as well as demonstrating the wealth of knowledge, experience and wisdom gained from oral traditional cultures of the African Diaspora. In a recent interview, Michie Mee attributes Itah Sadu as one of her sources of guidance and faith within the Black community (Pride News, 2021).

Jones & Jones: reference to Jones & Jones Productions, a prominent entertainment agency with the Greater Toronto Area Black community. Founded in 1987 by Allan Jones and his wife, Denise Jones, who passed away in 2020, the couple’s agency was influential in advocating for and promoting reggae in Canada. In a recent interview, Michie Mee attributes Jones & Jones as one of her sources of guidance and faith within the Black community (Pride News, 2021).

Mary J: reference to Hip Hop soul and rhythm and blues (R&B) artist, Mary J. Blige.

Misogyny: refers to feelings of hate or dislike directed towards women, or the belief that women are inferior to men.

Pop: reference to youth engaging in gun violence and/or gang life as a means of making a living.

Posse: a large group often with a common interest.

Resilience: the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful again after something bad happens

Sanchez: reference to Jamaican reggae artist and producer, Kevin Anthony Jackson, who goes by the stage name ‘Sanchez’.

Spittin’: another word for ‘rapping’, ‘rhyming’ or ‘flowing’.

Swag: short for ‘swagger’. To possess a very confident and typically arrogant or aggressive manner.

Definitions from [Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary](#)



Still, “Made It” Official Music Video.
Photo: YouTube



Denise Jones. Photo: Kevin Jones



DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

ESTIMATED DURATION (20:00)

As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions and share responses. Refer back to the lyrics and reflect on the pre-activity videos as needed while generating responses.

Note: Educators can select specific questions from the list provided to engage students in discussion. Possible student responses are also provided.

QUESTIONS



Ellen Chamberlain. Photo: YouTube

In the first pre-activity video, Ellen Chamberlain discusses ‘misogyny’ in Hip Hop (see Key Vocabulary for ‘misogyny’) . She said, “When ownership [of Hip Hop music] shifted [from the underground Black community to non-Black major record labels and radio stations], so did imagery of [Black] women”. What does this statement reveal about the history of anti-Black racism and misogyny in the music industry? How can the music industry work to make these wrongs right?

(i.e., This statement reveals that record companies and radio stations used their platforms to produce and promote music that degraded Black women; The music industry can make things right by acknowledging and apologising for its role in promoting negative images of Black women; The music industry can take steps to promote music that uplifts Black women and women of all ethnic backgrounds in general)



In the first pre-activity video, Ellen Chamberlain said, “If the record company that’s getting rich has no ties to the community that is breaking down as a result, who cares?” This statement demonstrates how Black music is exploited by the music industry at the expense of the Black community. In addition to putting Black women down, what are other ways in which Hip Hop music has been used to break down the Black community?

(i.e., The music industry has promoted Hip Hop music that presents negative images of Black people such as being thugs, gang members, thieves, etc.; The music industry, through Hip Hop music and music videos, promote the ‘get rich quick’ lifestyle and gun violence that is associated with gangs and these are things that have negatively impacted the Black community)

Consider the CBC article from the pre-activity. From Michie Mee’s perspective in the article, how was anti-Black racism present in the Canadian music industry? What challenges did female Hip Hop artists experience in the music industry?

(i.e., Michie Mee highlights that there was a lack of support and resources for Canadian Hip Hop music and there is a lack of recognition for individuals who have made significant impacts in Black music genres such as Hip Hop or reggae in comparison to those who have made impacts in non-Black music genres (or what is perceived as non-Black music genres) such as rock and roll; Michie Mee highlights that women were not taken seriously in Hip Hop and this made it more challenging for them to obtain opportunities)

Reflect on the lyrics, “If you could only see just where I’m comin’ from, then you would know in every single sense I’ve won”. What are some of the struggles that Michie Mee hints about going through when you review the song lyrics or during her interview? In what ways has she ‘won’?

(i.e., She suggests that she has experienced financial struggles - “I bought it, I couldn’t afford it”; She makes references to being a single mother; She has won because she had a successful career (“Internationally known, I call Canada home”), she is able to contribute back to her community, and she has done well raising her son as a single mother)



Still, “Made It” Official Music Video.
Photo: YouTube



Refer to the lyrics in Verse 1, “There’s a lot going on ‘round here, every year you gon’ hear a little somethin’ to fear with ideas these youths ain’t lookin’ for jobs, they lookin’ careers”. What underlying stereotypes about youth, specifically Black youth, is Michie Mee drawing attention to in these lyrics? What connections can you make between “gon hear a little somethin’ to fear” and anti-Black racism?

(i.e., The underlying stereotype is that Black youth are criminals and that society ought to fear them; The underlying stereotype is that Black youth are lazy and do not want to work, as such they get involved in gangs and criminal activity to obtain quick money; The lyrics connect to anti-Black racism because Black youth are already viewed by society as criminals making it difficult for them to obtain jobs and careers)

Given the references to Colin Rickards, Jones & Jones and Itah Sadu, how important is the sense of community to Michie Mee’s success? Review the Key Vocabulary for more information about these references. Consider the lyrics, “And every opportunity I’m back in my community, spreading love and unity, sound, no more lettin’ us down”.

(i.e., Michie Mee makes these references to acknowledge that she did not achieve success on her own, but rather, there were times in which she needed the support and guidance from her community in order to survive and thrive; Michie Mee recognizes that it is important to give back to her community to help the next generation be successful)

How significant is the message of “Made It” to: a) Black female rappers/artists; b) Black women in society; and c) Women in society in general?

(i.e., The message of “Made It” is significant to Black female rappers and artists because they have had to work harder to achieve success in the music industry than their male counterparts and Michie Mee’s experience provides proof that success is possible; The message of “Made It” is significant to Black women and women in society in general because they often face discrimination and inequality, yet, through perseverance, they can still be successful)



Itah Sadu in A Different Booklist.
Photo: Now Magazine.



Referring to her son, Michie Mee says in the song, “And you the boss of your biz, it’s not your loss, it’s his, I’m glad you had uncle to see how not to be a deadbeat”. How do these lyrics highlight Black Brilliance and resilience despite the reality of absentee fathers?

(i.e., These lyrics highlight that it is still possible to be successful even if you don’t have a ‘perfect’ home environment; These lyrics reinforce the importance of having a supportive community and positive role models to encourage one’s pursuit of success; Being the ‘boss of your biz’ shows that Black youth can be successful as business owners)

What do you think the phrase, “Nobody do it better, we kill a sound together, Sanchez to Mary J, look what the love made” means? How do the references to Sanchez and Mary J connect with Michie Mee’s style of Hip Hop?

(i.e., The phrase suggests that forms of Black music become better when they are merged together. Sanchez represents reggae music and Mary J represents R&B and Hip Hop soul music. Reggae artists are known to often take popular R&B songs and apply them to a reggae beat and musical feel; Hip Hop artists are also known to feature artists who perform other musical genres on their tracks. These references connect with Michie Mee’s style of Hip Hop because she is known for her unique style of mixing American Hip Hop with her Jamaican roots in reggae and dancehall music.



Mary J. Blige
Photo: YouTube

In your opinion, when Michie Mee refers to herself as a ‘Bahdgyal’, is she being a bad influence for young women? Explain your viewpoint.

(i.e., On the surface, being a ‘Bahdgyal’ might appear as Michie Mee being a bad influence for young women, but in fact, it represents her strength and resilience to overcome the many challenges that life has thrown her way so that she can still be successful. When viewed from this perspective, Michie Mee can be viewed as a role model for young women, demonstrating that you can be successful and you can give back to your community to help others be successful)



SUBJECT-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

MUSIC

- Think about a challenge you have had to overcome in life. What was the challenge? How did you overcome it? Write a Hip Hop verse and/or chorus that would represent your version of “Made It”. (60:00 - 120:00)

- *Extending:* Using YouTube, find a free Hip Hop loop or beat that you can practice performing your created verse and/or chorus over.

- Consider the struggle female Hip Hop artists have had in the music industry and the negative images of women Hip Hop music sometimes portrays. Research and identify successful Black women in society or consider the ways in which Black women have demonstrated strength and perseverance in society. Write a Hip Hop verse and/or chorus that promotes positive images of women. (60:00 - 120:00)

- *Extending:* Using YouTube, find a free Hip Hop loop or beat that you can practice performing your created verse and/or chorus over.



Photo: Matt Moloney



ENGLISH

- In groups of 2 or 3, examine the chorus or one verse from the song, “Made It”. Write a 250-word response analysing the meaning of the chorus or the selected verse and discuss its effectiveness. (45:00)
 - Write a 250-word response journal. Write your thoughts about any aspect of the song, “Made It”. Consider questions like: What lines stood out to you? What lines did not make sense? What does this song tell us about social justice issues? (60:00)
 - Brainstorm a list of words related to the theme of perseverance. Using as many words as you can, write a poem on this theme. (60:00)
 - The song concludes with this line: “My definition of success ain’t about me being the best, but about me feeling blessed.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Write a formal paragraph defending your position. (30:00)
- *Extending:* Write a formal two paragraph response arguing either side of this statement.



Photo: Brad Neathery

GEOGRAPHY

- Review the [Glenfield-Jane Height 2016 Neighbourhood Profile](#) (Jane and Finch community that is located *south* of Finch Avenue) **OR** the [Black Creek 2016 Neighbourhood Profile](#) (Jane and Finch community that is located north of Finch Avenue) (Information is based on 2016 census data). This activity may be done individually or in groups. Each individual or group should focus on one of the following activities.
- Review the ‘Neighbourhood at-a-glance’ data (Page 3). Refer to definitions (Page 4) if needed. What data stands out to you? Why? How does looking at this data impact your view of Michie Mee and her song “Made It”? How does looking at this data highlight the existence of social injustice? Create a short slideshow presentation that outlines your analysis. (60:00 - 180:00)



- Review the ‘Families, households & marital status’ data (Page 7). Refer to definitions (Page 8) if needed. What data stands out to you? Why? How does looking at this data impact your view of Michie Mee and her song “Made It”? How does looking at this data highlight the existence of social injustice? Create a short slideshow presentation that outlines your analysis. (60:00 - 180:00)
- Review the ‘Ethnocultural diversity’ data (Page 17). Refer to definitions (Page 18) if needed. What data stands out to you? Why? How does looking at this data impact your view of Michie Mee and her song “Made It”? How does looking at this data highlight the existence of social injustice? Create a short slideshow presentation that outlines your analysis. (60:00 - 180:00)
- Review the ‘Education & labour’ data (Page 21). Refer to definitions (Page 22) if needed. What data stands out to you? Why? How does looking at this data impact your view of Michie Mee and her song “Made It”? How does looking at this data highlight the existence of social injustice? Create a short slideshow presentation that outlines your analysis. (60:00 - 180:00)
- Explore the [Jane and Finch AreaVibes website](#).
 - What key findings on the “Overview” tab surprised you? What key findings on the “Overview” tab confirm your previous knowledge about this community? Consider what the song “Made It” might mean for someone growing up in the Jane and Finch community. Write a 250-word journal response highlighting your findings and reflections. (60:00)
 - Pick one of the criteria on the “Livability” tab (i.e., Cost of Living, Employment, Schools, etc.). Interpret the provided data for your selected criteria. Compare the data for the Jane and Finch community against the data for Toronto, Ontario and Canada (if ‘National’ data is provided). Consider what perseverance might look like for someone growing up in the Jane and Finch community in relation to the data for your selected criteria. Create a slideshow presentation that outlines your analysis. (60:00 - 180:00)



Jane and Finch Towers
Photo: BlogTO



SOCIAL SCIENCE

- How would an Anthropologist, Sociologist or Psychologist interpret the social issue of single motherhood? Use any of the major theories connected to your chosen discipline. Share your answers with the class. (30:00)
- Research and compare the North American concept of success with a definition from another part of the world. Present your findings in a slideshow, Prezi or short oral presentation. (60:00 - 120:00)



Photo: Eye for Ebony

VISUAL ARTS

- Review the lyrics for one of the verses in the song, “Made It”. (60:00 - 120:00)
 - Consider the themes of perseverance, resilience and Black Brilliance discussed throughout the lesson.
 - Consider a positive image of Black women or youth that comes to mind when you read the verse.
 - Using a technique of your choice (i.e., sketch, drawing, painting) create a visual art piece to represent the image that comes to mind from the verse.



Photo: June Heredia



RESOURCES, LINKS AND REFERENCES

PRE-ACTIVITY

[Misogyny in Hip Hop | Ellen Chamberlain | TEDxWayneStateU](#) (Video)

[Michie Mee Interview for the CBC Hip Hop Summit](#) (Video)

[‘Don’t just close the doors’: Michie Mee on the Canadian music industry and her first album in 20 years](#) (Article)

[“Made It” Michie Mee ft. Tonya P](#) (Video)

GEOGRAPHY ACTIVITY

[Glenfield-Jane Height 2016 Neighbourhood Profile](#)

[Black Creek 2016 Neighbourhood Profile](#)

[Jane and Finch AreaVibes website](#)

REFERENCES

‘Don’t just close the doors’: Michie Mee on the Canadian music industry and her first album in 20 years | CBC Radio. (2021, January 11). Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/q/thursday-jan-7-2021-michie-mee-lang-lang-and-more-1.5863366/don-t-just-close-the-doors-michie-mee-on-the-canadian-music-industry-and-her-first-album-in-20-years-1.5863378>

Pride News. (2021, April 23). Michie Mee: Canada’s queen of hip hop, back - and in charge. Retrieved from <http://pridenews.ca/2021/04/23/michie-mee-canadas-queen-Hip-Hop-back-charge/>



APPENDIX 1

“MADE IT” LYRICS

VERSE 1 – MICHIE MEE

Recording, feeling deported, I bought it, I couldn't afford it
Everything is distorted, ideas aborted
I'm tired of watchin' TV, cryin' for no reason
I'm still here and every year I'm leavin'
It's like I'm comin' from my Colin Rickards' crew
Jones & Jones at home, I'm on my Itah Sadu
Bahdgyal, attitude, and tell our posse don't flinch
Swag news, Toronto rappin' like I'm back on Finch
Internationally known, I call Canada home
There's a lot going on 'round here,
Every year you gon hear a little somethin' to fear with ideas
These youths ain't lookin' for jobs, they lookin' careers and they
Pop when that hungry in them, stars, but they can't get 'em
Diary of a good girl gone bad don't forget 'em
And every opportunity I'm back in my community
Spreading love and unity, sound, no more lettin' us down

CHORUS – TONYA P

If you could only see just where I'm comin' from
Then you would know
In every single sense I've won
Been through the battles
Been through the storm
And I'm still standin' right here
No matter how hard the disappointments been
I'm standin' right here
I made it



VERSE 2 – MICHIE MEE

I planned and worked hard for it
The first cut is the deepest, the love and the sweetness, the music, the weakness
Nobody do it better, we kill a sound together, Sanchez to Mary J, look what the love made
You know how friends get at me, they talked about dude
And all the nice things their husbands and baby daddies do
I didn't expect it, I've gotta respect it, my life shows,
And every single mother knows how this story goes
Bitter no babysitter while I'm takin' my time
I don't trust these hoes, I trust these rhymes, my son shine
He's the only reason I know how to act, all these lunches I've packed
I've taught him so much, he taught me back
And you the boss of your biz, it's not your loss, it's his
I'm glad you had uncle to see how not to be a deadbeat
Single mother, solo rapper, so when you say you love me it's the only thing that matters

CHORUS – TONYA P

If you could only see just where I'm comin' from
Then you would know
In every single sense I've won
Been through the battles
Been through the storm
And I'm still standin' right here
No matter how hard the disappointments been
I'm standin' right here
I made it

Yeah, I made it
Oh yes I did
My definition of success ain't about me being the best
But about me feeling blessed
Nothing more, nothing less
And I made it
Oh I made it