



#BLACK MUSIC MATTERS

HIP HOP & SOCIAL JUSTICE IN CANADA

RESOURCE CONTEXT

#BlackMusicMatters: Hip Hop & Social Justice in Canada is a listening- and inquiry-based resource designed for teachers with students in grades 7 - 12.

It is intended to be used by educators of various disciplines who wish to explore Black culture, history and creation, specifically through the lens of Hip Hop music.

The aim of *#BlackMusicMatters* is to introduce students to Canadian Hip Hop artists and their music, while engaging them in critical inquiry of a variety of social justice themes.



CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW

- Social Justice
- Critical Race Theory
- Gender, Intersectionality, and Hip Hop

2. A BRIEF HISTORY OF HIP HOP

- Canadian Hip Hop History

APPENDICES

1. Glossary of Terms and Definitions
2. Hip Hop at the JUNO Awards
3. Historical and Useful Resources
 - Notable Recordings in Canadian Hip Hop History
 - Interviews of Key Figures in Canadian Hip Hop History
 - Other Useful Resources

REFERENCES



MusiCounts gratefully acknowledges ADVANCE, Canada's Black Music Business Collective and the Saskatchewan Music Educators Association for helping to make this resource possible.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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

For more MusiCounts Learn Teaching Resources visit www.musiccounts.ca

Last Updated: February 1, 2023



OVERVIEW

Educators are encouraged to review the material in this resource context guide prior to exploring the provided lessons with students. This material serves as a foundation for the inquiry and analysis that will take place during discussions and activities with students. Social Justice, Critical Race Theory and Gender and Intersectionality are discussed to set the tone for the lessons that proceed. A brief history of Hip Hop is provided to aid educators in understanding its background and cultural roots. More specifically, this guide explores the roots of Canadian Hip Hop music and the Black artists who have been influential in the development of Canadian Hip Hop.

Educators will find the appendixes at the end of this guide helpful as they provide information on key terms and definitions, Hip Hop artists who have won JUNO Awards, and links to useful videos and websites.

WHY 'HIP HOP'?

There are several formats used to represent Hip Hop in academic writing and in printed or online resources (i.e., i.e., Hip-Hop, hip-hop, Hip-hop, hip hop). We have selected the format 'Hip Hop' for consistency throughout this resource, acknowledging that Hip Hop is the name of a culture and Hip Hop music (also referred to as Rap music) is an element of the larger culture.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is important that students understand the meaning of the term 'social justice' so they are able to identify and engage in conversations about the social justice issues being discussed in Hip Hop songs.

Social justice refers to the ways in which wealth and opportunities are fairly distributed within a society. Social injustice exists when an uneven distribution of wealth or opportunities result in some groups of people having an advantage over other groups of people in society. Since its inception, Hip Hop music has been serving as 'the voice of the oppressed'. The lyrical content and themes found in many Hip Hop songs often address and advocate against the political, social, economical, and racial injustices inflicted upon marginalized groups in society.



Photo: Nathan Dumlao



CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is a framework that positions race at the centre of social analysis (Delgado & Stefancic, 2013; Dumas, 2013). CRT was pioneered in the 1970's by legal scholar Derrick Bell and expanded by other legal scholars such as Kimberlé Crenshaw, Richard Delgado, Jean Stefancic, Cheryl Harris, Alan Freeman and Patricia J. Williams. Originally, CRT examined race inequality in the justice system. Over time it has developed into a tool that can be used to deconstruct oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruct human agency, and construct relations of power that are equitable and just in all areas of society, including the field of education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Yosso, 2005). CRT can be used to identify race-related silences and speak directly about structural and systemic racism (Hess, 2017).

Historically, Hip Hop music has been an artistic form of CRT, in advocating against social injustices faced by racialized and marginalized communities. Through Hip Hop lyrics, Black and racialized artists activate their human agency to uncover systemic racism, call out social inequality and demand social change. Each lesson in this resource includes discussion questions from a CRT lens. Teachers can use these questions and their understanding of CRT to create a safe space for candid conversations about the social justice themes that each song represents.

For further study of Critical Race Theory, consult these helpful resources:

YouTube Video: [Critical race theorist Derrick Bell on racism](#)

YouTube Video: [A Guide To Critical Race Theory](#)

YouTube Video: [The Legacy of Derrick Bell, Who Inspired Critical Race Theory](#)

You may also wish to refer to the reference list at the end of this document for additional reading resources.



Photo: Clay Banks



GENDER, INTERSECTIONALITY AND HIP HOP

In the music industry, Hip Hop performance, creation and production is dominated by male artists. A perusal of the first 30 years of JUNO Award winners in the Rap Recording of the Year (1991 - 2021) category confirms this. At the 2022 JUNO Awards, Haviah Mighty made history becoming the first Canadian female Hip Hop artist to win the Rap Album/EP of the Year (formerly Rap Recording of the Year) Award. In addition, a new category for Rap Single of the Year was introduced at the 2022 JUNO Awards and Charmaine, a female rapper, made history becoming the first Canadian Hip Hop artist to win this award. Both emcees were the only females to be nominated in either category. It is important to note the uneven distribution of opportunities that exist for female and non-binary Hip Hop artists. Furthermore, while many Hip Hop songs possess social justice themes, some songs and visual images contain damaging themes of consumerism, materialism, sexism, heterosexism, racism, and violence (Kruse, 2016).

A harmful theme sometimes found in Hip Hop music is that of misogyny. Misogyny refers to feelings of hate or dislike directed towards women, or the belief that women are inferior to men. Misogyny exists through Hip Hop lyrics that portray negative images of women or promote the objectification of women.

Over 30 years ago, Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term 'intersectionality' to express the various ways in which the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences are shared by the intersection of race and gender. She extends this understanding of 'intersectionality' by exploring how race and gender intersect to shape structural, political and representational aspects of violence against women of colour. The key principle of intersectionality is that discrimination or oppression is amplified when they are the direct result of separate identities that are possessed by the same individual (Crenshaw, 1991b).

Building on the concept of intersectionality and the term misogyny, Dr. Moya Bailey coined the term 'misogynoir', which refers to the dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against Black women. To better understand these terms, consider the challenges that a woman might experience applying for a job in a male-dominated field such as mechanical engineering. When a Black woman applies for that engineering position, the discrimination she faces is magnified, not only because of her gender, but also because of her racial identity.



Photo: June Heredia



As a marketed artform, Hip Hop has developed codes and conventions that shape social expectations. The role of rapper is expected to be played by a Black male, while women of all ethnicities are reduced to voiceless, sometimes faceless, dancers in music videos. This diminishes the roles that women and non-binary people are expected to play in Hip Hop. The Black male as rapper has a voice, and is able to project an image of power, while the artform used to protest oppressive social conditions against Black people severely limits the expression of Black women. With this in mind, this resource aims to represent and amplify the voices of Black women and non-binary Hip Hop artists by exploring their perspectives and songs throughout the developed lessons. For further study of Intersectionality and Misogyny, consult these helpful resources:



Kimberlé Crenshaw. Photo: YouTube

YouTube Video: [Kimberlé Crenshaw Discusses 'Intersectional Feminism'](#)

YouTube Video: [Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Race, Gender, Inequality and Intersectionality"](#)

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

You may also wish to refer to the reference list at the end of this document for additional reading resources.

LGBTQ2S+ AND HIP HOP

As a historically male dominated artform, Hip Hop music has been rightly criticized for its harmful portrayal of women. It is also criticized for excessive use of harmful language against people who identify as LGBTQ2S+. Anti-LGBTQ2S+ statements occur in high profile singles from Hip Hop's early emergence, including "Rapper's Delight" by the Sugarhill Gang (1979) and "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five (1981). There is a long history of cultural and academic criticism of Hip Hop music that aligns with false ideals of masculinity repeating a pattern of homophobia and sexism. This behaviour connects to the history of emcee battles, in which rappers would lyrically elevate themselves and put down their opponents. Common put downs ascribed someone with 'feminine' or 'effeminate' traits, implying they were unable to reach the ideal standard of 'a real man' and denigrating women and LGBTQ2S+ people in the process. Hip Hop music from the 1980s into the 2000s saw its brightest stars



continue this pattern of masculine bravado that had extremely negative consequences. Kanye West (in a 2004 radio interview) was notably one of the first mainstream artists to publicly condemn anti-LGBTQ2S+ language in Hip Hop. During the 2010s, many Hip Hop artists have publicly stated that their use of harmful language was wrong – including the Beastie Boys, Ice-T and Eminem.

This homophobia would spark underground artists to create Hip Hop music in response. By the late 1990s, several American groups of queer rappers had emerged, enough to cause a debate about whether there should be a subgenre called ‘Homo Hop.’ The 2010s saw artists heavily connected to Hip Hop music come out, such as Frank Ocean (a part of the Odd Future supergroup) and Kaytranada (a highly sought after Hip Hop producer). Additionally, straight artists began releasing LGBTQ2S+-positive music. The latter half of the decade saw more big name artists coming out including Kevin Abstract (from the UK group Brockhampton) and American Lil Nas X.

In Canada, the 2010s saw the growth of queer labels and artist collectives to create space for LGBTQ2S+ artists who could not find support in the Canadian music industry. The labels 88 Days of Fortune (co-founded by Toronto’s Ayo Leilani a.k.a. Witch Prophet) and Trans Trenderz (founded by Montreal’s Blxck Cxsper) are excellent examples of this. Even though there is still inequitable access to supports within the Canadian music industry, the music scene is seeing an emergence (and increasing acceptance) of queer artists. Music by Black LGBTQ2S+ artists and issues surrounding discrimination towards the LGBTQ2S+ community are explored throughout the lessons in this resource.

MENTAL HEALTH AND HIP HOP

There is a growing consensus among health care professionals that Black mental health has been an underserved field in Canada for generations. Within Black communities, mental health concerns are often dismissed, driving the solution towards faith and prayer - a historical response connected to, but also preceding, the slave trade. At the same time, the Government of Canada notes that decades of “colonialism, oppression and racism” created significant distrust between Black communities and health care professionals. (Mental health and the black narrative, 2022).



In the modern era, where a stronger examination of systemic injustice is occurring, equitable access to healthcare and mental health supports is still lacking for many Black Canadians. Additionally, there is often a gap in culturally relevant healthcare support, which creates further barriers to access.

Over the decades of Hip Hop history, several prominent artists have declared that Hip Hop music is their ‘therapy.’ While Hip Hop has created space for expression of emotions, it has often been one of a limited number of contexts in which it is okay for men to share their feelings. A post-pandemic analysis of Black men’s mental health further demonstrates exponential risk as lockdowns removed other ‘acceptable’ contexts for emotional expression like the gym, sports and social events.

Hip Hop, then, bears the burden of being one of the few outlets of Black emotional expression while suffering under misogynist and homophobic limitations that require rappers not to be overly emotional, for fear of being labelled ‘soft.’ In this context, Hip Hop music becomes a window into the world of Black mental health (particularly, but not exclusively to, men), where racism creates additional layers of anxiety, and it is socially unsafe to fully express emotion without being considered threatening.

SYSTEMIC BARRIERS IN THE MUSIC INDUSTRY

Historically, musical genres derived from Black culture and Black artists have been underrepresented in the Canadian Music Industry. There are several systemic barriers that have contributed to this underrepresentation such as access to grant funding for recording and marketing singles, EPs and albums; adequate promotion on media platforms such as national radio, television and social media; and exposure to Black music in educational institutions.

Black Hip Hop music and artists have experienced the negative impact of these systemic barriers. Oftentimes, Hip Hop artists have to go to the United States to get signed and widen their audience as the infrastructure of the Canadian music industry does not support them in the same ways that it supports other forms of music not associated with Black culture. The same is true for R&B music and artists. For example, Canadian artist, Deborah Cox, had a difficult time breaking into the Canadian music industry as



an R&B artist in the early 1990s. She ended up relocating to the United States where she was signed to Arista Records by Clive Davis and her career took off. Almost 30 years later, Deborah Cox was recognized for her contributions to the music industry as a Canadian R&B at the 2022 JUNO Awards, becoming the first Black woman to be inducted into the Canadian Music Hall of Fame.

Hip Hop culture has been historically male-dominated. Negative perceptions towards the LGBTQ2S+ community and the degradation of Black women have been themes found in Hip Hop music historically. As such, homophobia, misogyny, transmisogyny, misogynoir and transmisgynoir have created additional systemic barriers for women, non-binary and LGBTQ2S+ artists in the industry.

YOUTUBE VIDEO: KARDINAL OFFISHALL – THE CANADIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY WASN'T READY FOR HIM IN 2001

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

YOUTUBE VIDEO: THE CANADIAN MUSIC INDUSTRY REJECTED DEBORAH COX. NOW, SHE'S BEING HONOURED AT THE JUNOS

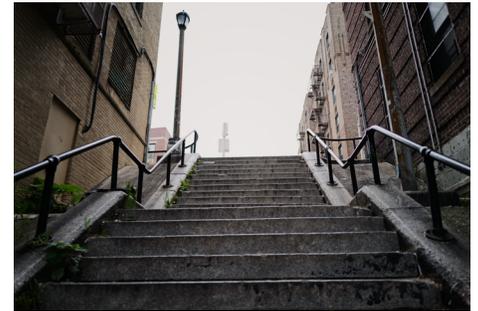
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f3BNTwj_Stk



A BRIEF HISTORY OF HIP HOP

The roots of Hip Hop can be traced to the Bronx, New York, surrounding boroughs and low-income neighbourhoods in New York in the late 1970s. As an artistic and cultural expression, Hip Hop was used to bring struggling communities together under the tenets of ‘Peace, Love, Unity and Having Fun’. Early Hip Hop music was greatly influenced by the Disco music of the 1970s. The musical elements of Disco can be heard on many early Hip Hop recordings. Hip Hop, however, started as a direct rebellion against underground disco clubs in New York. Blacks and other racialized groups were restricted from having access to some disco clubs. This resulted in Blacks creating their own ‘clubs’ in the form of street parties.

It was at these parties that the ‘culture’ of Hip Hop was born. DJs would perform sets of music from various genres such as Disco, Soul, Funk, R&B and Rock, while attendees danced and had a great time. DJs also began sampling and looping music so that individuals could perform rhythmic, lyrical phrases overtop of the loops—this was the birth of Rap! Rappers, also known as ‘Emcees’, would use this platform to speak out against the social injustices and oppression of the time. In addition, they would form ‘battles’, competing with each other to see who had the best lyrics (or ‘bars’) and who had the skills to perform the most intricate combination of beats and rhymes. The ‘battle culture’ prompted rappers and DJs to create ‘stage names’ for themselves that they used while performing. During their sets, DJs had moments in which they would ‘drop the beat’, introducing a new loop known as the ‘breakdown’. This was the cue for the dancers to ‘hit the floor’ and show off their best moves, resulting in the emergence of ‘breakdancing’. Practitioners continue to use Hip Hop to respond to the oppressive social, political and economic conditions that have led to racism, poverty, homelessness, substance abuse and criminal activity for African-American, Caribbean-American, Caribbean-Latina/o, and other marginalized people (Bridges, 2011; Kruse, 2016, Pulido, 2009; Wang, 2010).



The Bronx. Photo: Mike Von



Hip Hop is a 'culture' comprised of nine elements: breakin' (breakdancing), emceeing (rapping), graffiti art (aerosol spray painting), deejaying (disc jockey or DJ), beatboxin', street fashion, street language, street knowledge, and street entrepreneurship. Afrika Bambaata (born Lance Taylor), a disc jockey, rapper, songwriter and producer from the South Bronx, New York has been influential in the development of Hip Hop culture. Although Hip Hop has its roots in New York, other notable places that contributed greatly to the development of Hip Hop culture and music include Compton, California and Detroit, Michigan.

Hip Hop music uses elements from any and every musical genre imaginable such as disco, funk, R&B, rock and soul music. Beat producing, emceeing, beatboxin' and DJing are the musical practices associated with Hip Hop music. Beat producing is the process of composing backing tracks for singers and rappers to perform with. These tracks are usually created using digital instruments such as drum machines and synthesizers. Audio samples are often edited and reassembled into new backing tracks during beat production. Emceeing, commonly referred to as rapping, involves combining rhythmic spoken word and singing. Beatboxin' refers to using the voice to create drum-like sounds during performances. DJing entails mixing and playing back prerecorded music for live audiences.

CANADIAN HIP HOP HISTORY

Due to their proximity to New York, Toronto and Montreal became hotspots for the development of Canadian Hip Hop music. As musicians caught wind of the new sound that was being developed in New York, they began to explore and expand Hip Hop in Canada. Montreal-born Anthony Scharschmidt, known by his DJ name 'Butcher T', is credited for bringing the New York style of Hip Hop DJing to Montreal. He provided musical accompaniment on Canada's first urban music radio show on CKGM's Club 980 in Montreal. Butcher T recounts his frequent trips to New York in the early 1980s as being influential in inspiring his work as a DJ. Toronto-based DJ and music promoter, Ron Nelson, is best known for popularizing Hip Hop music and later dancehall and reggae music in Canada. He is known as the 'godfather of Toronto Hip Hop' for his role in creating Canada's first Hip Hop radio show, *Fantastic Voyage*, in 1983 on CKLN-FM. He is also a concert promoter and was instrumental in creating platforms for local Hip Hop arts through his 'Monster Jams' and 'rap battles' between Toronto and New York performers. Through his radio show, Nelson



Breakdancing is one of the nine elements of Hip Hop culture.
Photo: Colin Lloyd



Photo: Manny Fortin



promoted and developed many early Canadian Hip Hop artists such as Maestro Fresh Wes, Michee Mee and the Dream Warriors. As an educator, he brought the study of Hip Hop and other Black music genres to the postsecondary arena, teaching the course “Contemporary Black Urban Music” at York University from 2005 to 2017.

Jay W. McGee, known by his rap stage name ‘Mr. Q’, is credited for performing on some of Canada’s earliest Hip Hop recordings. He was born in Fayetteville, North Carolina, and after spending six years in Flint, Michigan, he relocated to Toronto in 1974. He lived in Toronto for 25 years before returning to Flint permanently in 1999. In 1979, Mr. Q. released the first Canadian Hip Hop singles “Ladies Delight” and “D.J. Style” which contains a sample of Michael Jackson’s disco-influenced, “Don’t Stop ‘Til You Get Enough”, released in the same year. Not long after, Canadian duo Bobby Boyer and Demetrius (Demo) Cates, known as Bobby / Demo, released a series of Hip Hop singles in 1980 followed by what may be the first Canadian full album, on the Toronto-based record label, Scorpio Records (rereleased on the Buffalo, New York label Amherst Records). Mr. Q. also had ties to Scorpio Records, having some of his singles in the early 1980s on the label. Boyer, a white musician born in Windsor, Ontario moved to Detroit, Michigan where he met Cates. Later, they both moved to Toronto to pursue a career in Hip Hop music. Bobby / Demo’s album, *Rap The Night Away*, was released in 1981 and is influenced by Mr. Q’s work, being recorded in a similar manner, having many of the same players and featuring some of his samples. “Party Rap” is said to be Bobby / Demo’s historical masterpiece. Collectively, Mr. Q and Bobby / Demo can be viewed as the ‘forefathers of Canadian Hip Hop’, setting the stage for the well known Canadian Hip Hop pioneers, Maestro Fresh Wes and Michie Mee.

Wesley Williams, best known by his stage name ‘Maestro Fresh Wes’ or most recently as simply ‘Maestro’, is credited as being the ‘godfather of Canadian Hip Hop music’. In 1989, his hit single “Let Your Backbone Slide” from his debut album *Symphony in Effect* was certified gold and was the first Canadian rap track to crack the top 40 charts in America. Today, it is still recognized as the best-selling Canadian Hip Hop recording of all time. Wes helped to put Canadian Hip Hop on the map globally. The attention garnered from his single and debut album, along with the work of other emerging Canadian Hip Hop artists, resulted in the creation of the ‘Rap Recording of the Year’ category at the JUNO Awards, which Wes won in 1991 for *Symphony in Effect*. The album was also the first by a Black Canadian artist to be certified platinum for record



Photo: Cassidy Dickens



Still, “Let Your Backbone Slide”
Official Music Video.
Photo: YouTube



sales. Thirty-plus years later, Wes continues to produce Hip Hop music, in addition to being a radio show host and motivational speaker. Throughout his career, he has released nine full-length albums and three EPs.

Michelle McCulloch, best known by her stage name ‘Michie Mee’, is credited as being the ‘godmother of Canadian Hip Hop music’. 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. She is also recognized as the first Canadian female Hip Hop artist. In 1991, the duo released the album *Jamaican Funk–Canadian Style*, featuring the popular single “Jamaican Funk”. The album earned her a JUNO nomination in 1992. When DJ L.A. Luv left the duo to join the group Dream Warriors, Mee continued to record as a solo Hip Hop artist while collaborating on numerous recordings with other artists. 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.

Throughout the 1990s, several artists emerged on the Canadian Hip Hop music scene, such as Ghetto Concept, Choclair, Dream Warriors and Kardinal Offishall, to name a few. One of the most notable artists of the decade was a group from Vancouver, British Columbia called Rascalz. In 1998, the group’s album, *Cash Crop*, won the JUNO award for Best Rap Recording. On the evening of the award show, the group declined to accept the award as a protest against the Canadian music industry for marginalizing Black artists and their music. Since the introduction of the JUNO for Rap Recording of the Year/Best Rap Recording in 1991, the award had always been presented at the JUNO pre-show and never for the live television broadcast ceremony. This was also true of many other categories representing Black music at the JUNOs. In 1998, Rascalz wrote and recorded a single called “Northern Touch” that featured guest Canadian rappers, Checkmate, Kardinal Offishall, Thrust and Choclair. The song was adopted as an anthem for the resilience and determination of Canadian Hip Hop artists and became the first Canadian Hip Hop hit since Michie Mee’s “Jamaican Funk” in 1991. As a result of their advocacy, the JUNO Awards moved the presentation of the Best Rap Recording to the televised ceremony in 1999. During the 1999 JUNOs, not only did Rascalz perform their hit “Northern Touch” for the live



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



Still, “Northern Touch” Official Music Video. Photo: YouTube



television broadcast, but they also won the award for Best Rap Recording that year. “Northern Touch” helped to define a new era of Canadian Hip Hop music from 1999 to 2009, in which artists such as Swollen Members, k-os and K’naan emerged and were also recognized with Rap JUNO awards.

Since 2009, the Canadian Hip Hop industry has continued to gain traction through the work of artists such as Kardinal Offishall, Shad, Haviah Mighty and Cadence Weapon, to name a few. Kardinal Offishall (Jason Drew Harrow), who won the 2009 JUNO Award for Rap Recording of the Year, has been recognized as Canada’s ‘Hip Hop ambassador’ in the recording industry, now serving as Senior Vice President of Artist and Repertoire (A&R) for Universal Music Canada. Shad (Shadrach Kabango), who won the 2011 Rap JUNO Award, is also the host of the Emmy & Peabody award winning documentary series Hip Hop Evolution on Netflix. In 2013, Shad was named the second-greatest Canadian rapper of all time by CBC Music. Representing modern Canadian female rappers, Haviah Mighty’s debut album, 13th Floor, earned her the 2019 Polaris Music Prize. Haviah also made history with her sophomore album, Stock Exchange, becoming the first Canadian female rapper to win the JUNO for Rap Album/EP of the Year at the 2022 JUNO Awards. In 2009, Cadence Weapon (Roland “Rollie” Pemberton) won the 2021 Polaris Music Prize for his first studio album, Parallel World. The most notable and globally recognized name in modern Canadian Hip Hop is Drake (Aubrey Drake Graham). Drake got his start in the entertainment industry as an actor. He played the role of Jimmy Brooks in the Canadian teen drama series, Degrassi: The Next Generation, from 2001 - 2008. In 2006, he launched his music career by releasing his first mixtape, Room for Improvement. By 2009, he released his third mixtape, So Far Gone, which was re-released as an EP that earned him the 2010 JUNO Award for Rap Recording of the Year and led to his signing with American rapper Lil’ Wayne’s label, Young Money Entertainment. Over time, Drake’s career skyrocketed, having recorded several albums, landed numerous endorsements and embarking on a plethora of business ventures, including his own label, October’s Very Own (also known as OVO). In 2013, he was named the ‘global ambassador’ of the Toronto Raptors basketball franchise. To date, Drake has released six studio albums and several mixtapes and EPs. He is regarded as one of the world’s best-selling music artists and his recordings have earned him multiple Grammy, American Music, Billboard and JUNO awards.



Cadence Weapon



Haviah Mighty



Drake



It is important to note that while there are a number of ‘household names’ in Canadian Hip Hop, there are also several ‘underground’ artists who have been marginalized and impacted by the history of systemic racism and oppression in the Canadian music industry. It is very difficult to locate music by underground Canadian Hip Hop artists through mainstream media channels. One useful resource for investigating both underground and mainstream Canadian Hip Hop artists is the Northside Hip Hop Archive (www.nshharchive.ca). Curated by University of Toronto Hip Hop professor and DJ, Dr. Mark Campbell, the mission of the Northside Hip Hop Archive is to maintain a digital collection of Canadian Hip Hop culture and history.

Although an outline of the eras in Canadian Hip Hop music has not been officially established, this brief history can be summarized as follows:

The Foundation Era: 1979 - 1989

The Pioneer Era: 1989 - 1999

The “Northern Touch” Era: 1999 - 2009

The Drake Era: 2009 - Present

This brief history is intended to provide a broad overview of Canadian Hip Hop music and artists. Many of the artists mentioned are represented in the lessons that have been developed for this resource. Educators and students are encouraged to investigate and explore the music of other Canadian Hip Hop artists who may not have been highlighted. The ‘Hip Hop at the JUNO Awards’ list in Appendix 2 is a great place to start when desiring to learn more about mainstream Canadian Hip Hop artists. As noted earlier, this list is dominated by male rappers and so other resources will need to be explored to learn more about female or non-binary rappers.

Educators seeking to include Canadian Hip Hop music and its history into their music classroom will find additional resources in Appendix 3.



APPENDIX 1: GLOSSARY OF TERMS AND DEFINITIONS



Photo: Karsten Winegear

Bars - a common term used to refer to rap lyrics. Can also be used to compliment an emcee (MC) for having great rhythm and improvisation talent by means of the phrase “you got bars!”.

Battle - also known as a Hip Hop contest which can take many forms. A ‘rap battle’ occurs when two or more MCs compete by means of performing lyrical content that either insults other rappers or boasts about one’s own rapping skills. A ‘dance battle’ occurs when two or more break dancers compete to prove who has the best dance moves. A ‘DJ battle’ occurs when two or more DJs compete to prove who has the best turntable skills.

Beat - refers to the rhythmic element of rap songs. It can also be the percussive element such as drum beat or it may incorporate broader musical elements such as melody lines, bass lines and pad chords.

Beatboxin’ - is an element of Hip Hop culture. It occurs when individuals use their voice to create sounds that imitate a drum kit or drum machine.

Black - a racial group of individuals possessing identities in African history and culture. Some examples include, but are not limited to African-Canadian, African-American, African-Caribbean.

Black music - music that originates from Black culture including, but not limited to, Rap, Hip Hop, Jazz, Rhythm and Blues, Soul and Gospel.

Break - an instrumental element, usually sampled from another recording, that repeats or “loop” throughout a Hip Hop song.



Breakin' - also known as breakdancing. Breakin' is an element of Hip Hop culture and refers to dancing that takes place when the DJ sets up the 'break' or 'drops the beat' during a musical performance. Dancers take this opportunity to hit the dance floor and show off their best dance moves.

Code switching - alternating between two or more languages or varieties of language in conversation. In Hip Hop music, code switching occurs when lyrics switch from commonly known language (i.e., English) to street language or slang.

Critical Race Theory - a framework that positions race at the centre of social analysis. It is a tool that can be used to deconstruct oppressive structures and discourses, reconstruct human agency, and construct relations of power that are equitable and just in all areas of society, including the field of education.



Photo: Yuvraj Singh

Deejay - also known as 'DJ' or 'disc jockey'. DJing is an element of Hip Hop culture. A DJ is the individual who mixes recordings using a turntable, to entertain people at the club, during a street party or at other social events. During mixes, they apply a number of techniques to make their performance interesting such as looping sections of the music, scratching the record, or superimposing samples of other recordings. Their role is to provide musical accompaniment that individuals can rap or dance to.

Emcee - also known as a 'MC' or 'rapper'. Emceeing is an element of Hip Hop culture and refers to the individual who performs rhythmic lyrical lines overtop of a beat or loop.

End rhymes - also known as a 'couplet'. Refers to two or more lines that end with words that rhyme. This is known to be one of the basic rhyme schemes or patterns commonly used in rap music.

Flow - the way in which rhymes and rhythms interact in a hip-vocal performance. A rapper's skill at delivering the verses of a song within its rhythmic structure.

Freestyling - a style of rapping in which lyrics are created 'on the spot', with no particular subject or structure or prior memorization.

Graffiti art - also known as aerosol spray painting. Graffiti is an element of Hip Hop culture and may be viewed as 'artistic advocacy'. Graffiti artists usually create murals on walls in alleyways, under bridges or on trains to 'paint a picture' of a social justice issue or to express themselves as individuals.



Intersectionality - The ways in which race and gender intersect to shape structural, political and representational aspects of violence against women of colour. The key principle of intersectionality is that discrimination or oppression is amplified when they are the direct result of separate identities (not only race and gender) that are possessed by the same individual (not only women).

Lyrics - the words of a song. Lyrics are often used to share information or tell a story. Rhyming is an important element of rap lyrics.

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

Misogynoir - refers to the dislike of, contempt for, or ingrained prejudice against Black women.

Rhymes - Lyrics that feature similar vocal or vowel sounds, usually at the end of a line or phrase. Rappers usually write lyrics that rhyme and then perform them rhythmically over a beat.

Rhyme scheme - The way in which patterns of rhymes are constructed in a rap song. A common rhyme scheme is a four-line pattern where the first and second line end with rhyming words to form a couplet and so do the third and fourth lines (AABB). There are also alternating rhyme patterns (ABAB), in which every other line rhymes and monorhyme patterns (AAAA), in which all lines rhyme.

Sample - a short segment of recorded music performed by a DJ as a loop or superimposed over another song.

Social justice - refers to the ways in which wealth and opportunities are fairly distributed within a society.



Photo: Lefteris Kallergis

Street fashion - is an element of Hip Hop culture. It refers to 'street clothing' and accessories that Hip Hop artists would perform in such as tracksuits, chains, rings, kangol hats and laceless shell-toed sneakers.

Street knowledge - Possessing the awareness, experience and resourcefulness needed to survive in a difficult, often dangerous urban environment. Street knowledge is an element of Hip Hop culture.



Street language - also called Black English, Urban Slang or Ebonic. Street language is Hip Hop's urban language and linguistic codes. It refers to the language generally exclusive to members of particular in-groups in order to establish group identity, exclude outsiders, or both. Street language is an element of Hip Hop culture.



Photo: Lawless Capture

Underground (Hip Hop) artist - an artist who has an established local fanbase but is yet to achieve mainstream success. This may be by choice or as a result of systemic structures that limit their ability to reach a wider audience.

Verse - the section of a rap song where the 'story' is told. The verse typically has sixteen bars. A typical rap song will feature two or three verses. It is the primary part of a rap song with rhythmic vocals.



APPENDIX 2: HIP HOP AT THE JUNO AWARDS

RAP RECORDING OF THE YEAR (1991–1992)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
1991	Maestro Fresh-Wes	<i>Symphony in Effect</i>
1992	Dream Warriors	<i>My Definition of a Bombastic Jazz Style</i>

BEST RAP RECORDING (1993–2002)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
1993	Devon	<i>Keep It Slammin'</i>
1994	TBTBT	<i>One Track Mind</i>
1995	The Ghetto Concept	<i>"Certified"</i>
1996	The Ghetto Concept	<i>"E-Z On tha Motion"</i>
1997	Choclair	<i>What it Takes</i>
1998	Rascalz	<i>Cash Crop</i> Award refused by artist
1999	Rascalz featuring Choclair, Kardinal Offishall, Thrust and Checkmate	<i>"Northern Touch"</i>



BEST RAP RECORDING (1993–2002) (CONT'D)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
2000	Chocclair	<i>Ice Cold</i>
2001	Swollen Members	<i>Balance</i>
2002	Swollen Members	<i>Bad Dreams</i>

RAP RECORDING OF THE YEAR (2003–PRESENT)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
2003	Swollen Members	<i>Monsters in the Closet</i>
2004	Chocclair	<i>Flagrant</i>
2005	k-os	<i>Joyful Rebellion</i>
2006	K'naan	<i>The Dusty Foot Philosopher</i>
2007	Swollen Members	<i>Black Magic</i>
2008	Belly	<i>The Revolution</i>
2009	Kardinall Offishall	<i>Not 4 Sale</i>
2010	Drake	<i>So Far Gone</i>
2011	Shad	<i>TSOL</i>
2012	Drake	<i>Take Care</i>
2013	Classified ft David Myles	<i>"Inner Ninja"</i>



RAP RECORDING OF THE YEAR (2003–PRESENT) (CONT'D)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
2014	Drake	<i>Nothing Was the Same</i>
2015	Naturally Born Strangers	<i>The Legends League Presents: Naturally Born Strangers</i>
2016	Drake	<i>If You're Reading This It's Too Late</i>
2017	Jazz Cartier	<i>Hotel Paranoia</i>
2018	Tory Lanez	<i>Shooters</i>
2019	Tory Lanez	<i>Love Me Now?</i>
2020	Tory Lanez	<i>Freaky</i>
2021	TOBi	<i>ELEMENTS Vol. 1</i>

Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juno_Award_for_Rap_Recording_of_the_Year

RAP ALBUM/EP OF THE YEAR (2022 – PRESENT)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
2022	Haviah Mighty	<i>Stock Exchange</i>

RAP SINGLE OF THE YEAR (2022 – PRESENT)

YEAR	WINNING ARTIST(S)	ALBUM
2022	Charmaine	<i>BOLD</i>

Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juno_Award_for_Rap_Recording_of_the_Year



APPENDIX 3: HISTORICAL AND USEFUL RESOURCES

NOTABLE RECORDINGS IN CANADIAN HIP HOP HISTORY

YouTube Video: Mr. Q. - "[Ladies Delight](#)"

YouTube Video: Mr. Q. - "[D. J. Style](#)"

YouTube Video: Michael Jackson - "[Don't Stop 'Til You Get Enough](#)" (Official Video) - sampled in Mr. Q's "D. J. Style"

YouTube Video: Bobby / Demo - "[Party Rap](#)"

YouTube Video: Maestro Fresh Wes - "[Let Your Backbone Slide](#)" (Official Video)

YouTube Video: Michie Mee & L.A. Luv - "[Elements of Style](#)"

YouTube Video: Michie Mee & L.A. Luv - "[Jamaican Funk Canadian Style](#)" Video)

YouTube Video: Rascalz - "[Northern Touch](#)" (Official Music Video)



Still, "Jamaican Funk Canadian Style", Official Music Video. Photo: YouTube

INTERVIEWS OF KEY FIGURES IN CANADIAN HIP HOP HISTORY

YouTube Video: [Butcher T - In The Beginning](#) (courtesy of the Northside Hip Hop Archive)

YouTube Video: [Interview with Ron Nelson on Flow 93.5 FM's 'OTA Live' radio show](#)

YouTube Video: [Maestro Fresh Wes on making Canadian Hip Hop history](#)

YouTube Video: [Michie Mee interview for the CBC Hip Hop Summit](#)



OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES

Website: [Northside Hip Hop Archive](#) - Contains information on Canadian Hip Hop history, mainstream and underground Canadian Hip Hop artists and cross-curricular Hip Hop lesson plans based on the Ontario curriculum

YouTube Video: [Canadian Hip Hop Tribute ft. Kardinal Offishall, Michie Mee, Jully Black & more](#) | JUNO Awards 2021

Website: [WhoSampled](#) - Resource for identifying samples contained in recorded music



Jully Black performing in the Canadian Hip Hop Tribute ft. Kardinal Offishall, Michie Mee, & more. Photo: YouTube



REFERENCES

- 12 common Hip Hop terms: Significance of Hip Hop terms - 2022. (n.d.). Retrieved January 25, 2022, from <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/Hip-Hop-terms#12-common-hiphop-terms>
- Bailey, M.. (2021). *Misogynoir Transformed: Black Women's Digital Resistance*. New York University Press.
- Bobby / Demo. (n.d.). Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://www.discogs.com/artist/268155-Bobby-Demo>
- Bridges, T. (2011). Towards A Pedagogy of Hip Hop in Urban Teacher Education. *The Journal of Negro Education*, 80(3), 325–338.
- Butcher T was there - you should be too. (n.d.). Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://ckut.ca/en/content/butcher-t-was-there-you-should-be-too>
- Crenshaw, K. (1991a). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics [1989]. In *Feminist Legal Theory* (1st ed., pp. 57–80). Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1991b). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43(6), 1241–1299.
- Delgado, R. & Stefancic, J. (2013). *Critical race theory: The cutting edge*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press.
- Dumas, M. J. (2013). Doing class in critical race analysis in education. In M. Lynn & A.D. Dixson (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical Race Theory in Education* (pp. 113-125). New York & London: Routledge.
- Hamilton, D. (2021). #Blackmusicmatters: Dismantling anti-black racism in music education. *The Canadian Music Educator*, 62(2), 16-28.
- Hamilton, D. (2021). Hip Hop music education: Engaging students in black culture creation and social justice advocacy. *The Canadian Music Educator*, 63(1), 20-28.
- He's one of Toronto's first Hip Hop Radio Stars - and also one of its last | CBC Arts. (2017, March 31). Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://www.cbc.ca/arts/he-s-one-of-toronto-s-first-great-Hip-Hop-radio-stars-and-also-one-of-its-last-1.4050218>
- Hess, J. (2017). Equity and music education: Euphemisms, terminal naivety, and whiteness. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education*, 16(3), 15-47.
- Kruse, A. J. (2016). Toward Hip Hop pedagogies for music education. *International Journal of Music Education*, 34(2), 247-260.
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7–24.



- Mental health and the black narrative – breaking down barriers. (2022, February 24). Government of Canada. Retrieved December 16, 2022, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/government/system/digital-government/living-digital/mental-health-black-narrative-breaking-down-barriers.html>
- Misogyny. (n.d.). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/misogyny?q=misogyny>
- Northside Hip Hop Archive. (2019, February 01). Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://www.nshharchive.ca/>
- Porco, A. (2010, March 18). The evolution of Canadian Hip Hop. Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://maisonneuve.org/article/2010/03/18/evolution-canadian-Hip-Hop/>
- Pulido, I. (2009). “Music fit for us minorities”: Latinas/os’ Use of Hip Hop as Pedagogy and Interpretive Framework to Negotiate and Challenge Racism. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 42(1), 67–85.
- Rancic, M. (2021, March 17). Finding mr. Q. Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://hazlitt.net/longreads/finding-mr-q>
- Scobie, N. (2021, May 02). Jay W. McGee, a groundbreaking vocalist, songwriter and Juno nominee, always went back to the music of his father. Retrieved January 22, 2022, from <https://web.archive.org/web/20211021051720/https://www.thestar.com/life/together/remembrance/2021/05/02/jay-w-mcgee-a-groundbreaking-vocalist-songwriter-and-juno-nominee-always-went-back-to-the-music-of-his-father.html>
- Social justice. (n.d.). Retrieved January 21, 2022, from <https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/social-justice?q=social%2Bjustice>
- Wang, E. L. (2010). The beat of Boyle street: Empowering Aboriginal youth through music making. *New Directions for Youth Development*, 2010(125), 61-70.
- Yosso, T. J. (2005). Whose culture has capital? A critical race theory discussion of community cultural wealth. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 69-91.