



#BLACK MUSIC MATTERS

“POUPÉE RUSSE” / “PRIDE”

“POUPÉE RUSSE” - SARAHMÉE

“PRIDE” - TRANS TRENDERZ (FEAT. BLXCK CXSPER
AND LADY LONDON)

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S):

In this lesson, students will explore music from two Montreal-based LGBTQ2S+ rappers. Students will compare and contrast the expressions of each artist, explore imagery used by both artists to describe their identities, and reflect on personal applications of their lyrics.

Subject specific activities in Music, Business, English, French, Communications Technology, Design Technology, Visual Arts, Dance and Social Science will allow students to interact with two web resources to explore designing their own queer music festival or creatively respond to artist statements about LGBTQ2S+ representation.

Additional resources that allow students to research additional LGBTQ2S+ Hip Hop artists will also be provided.

GRADE LEVEL: 9 - 12



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LESSON CONTEXT

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

In 2016, [an article on Montreal born Hip Hop producer and internationally-known artist Kaytranada revealed that he was gay](#). This revived a discussion in mainstream Hip Hop circles about queer identities in a Hip Hop culture that had long seen homophobic lyrics, slang and song concepts. This continued a mainstream discussion from 2012 when singer, and member of the wildly popular Odd Future Hip Hop collective, Frank Ocean came out through a post on Tumblr. Ocean's revelation provided journalists an opportunity to [contextualize Ocean's place amongst a history of gay musicians](#).

Ocean's name would again be invoked, along with Odd Future standout Tyler the Creator, [as inspiration for the rapper Lil Nas X's coming out during Pride Month in 2019](#). The positive response to Lil Nas X demonstrated a cultural shift where LGBTQ2S+ identities were much more welcome. However, in the underground, queer rappers had long been present, most notably New Orleans bounce rapper Big Freedia. Freedia was inspired by a drag performer in 1998 and began performing the year after with the name Big Freedia Queen Diva. Freedia's work was given a mainstream spotlight when [Beyoncé sampled, then featured, Freedia's work for the powerful song Formation](#) (which included an iconic performance at the 2016 Super Bowl).

In Canada, the presence of rappers with LGBTQ2S+ identities was similar to the underground scene in the United States, with a small number of out artists that faced systemic difficulties, and almost no mainstream visibility. This raises the issue of [Intersectionality](#), and the disproportionate ways members of marginalized communities can be disadvantaged. Artists that were Black were less likely to receive industry support, even more so if they were women, and furthermore if they identified as LGBTQ2S+.

It is in this context of Frank Ocean that the Canadian National Broadcaster [begins to highlight regional efforts to create space for queer rappers](#), however many spotlighted leaders of this recent movement were female or gender non-conforming. The lack of out cis-gendered male rappers was apparent.



Lil Nas X. Photo: The Source



ABOUT SARAHMÉE

Sarahmée is a Senegalese-Canadian rapper based in Quebec. Through three full-length albums (*Légitime*, *Irréversible* and *Poupée Russe*) she has received significant attention from prestigious awards both in Quebec and nationally. She has received nominations from ADISQ (a nonprofit association in Quebec to support the recording arts), and has won the SOCAN Songwriting Prize and a JUNO Award. Sarahmée has mainstream success in Quebec, while raising issues of the African Diaspora, racial justice and gender equity. She is also an out lesbian. Her music has created space to discuss the intersection of her identities.



Sarahmée. Photo: Twitter

ABOUT BLXCK CXSPER

Blxck Cxsper is a trans-masculine rapper based in Montreal. Cxsper was raised in three different continents before moving to Canada, which helped shape his self-defined musical sound as “50 Shades of Trap.” Cxsper founded Trans Trenderz, the first record label dedicated to trans musicians. This label gained the attention of Billboard Magazine for the Ghostly Beats Project, which connected trans artists with free resources from music industry professionals. Cxsper’s music transparently discusses themes of mental health and sex positivity.



FOUNDATIONAL ACTIVITIES

PRE-ACTIVITY

1. WATCH THE VIDEO (2:00)

[What does LGBTQ2+ mean?](#) (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat) (Take note of the transcript at the bottom of the website)

2. READ ARTICLE ON SARAHMÉE (5:00)

[SARAHMÉE: WELCOME TO HER LIFE](#) (Words & Music)

3. READ ARTICLE ON BLXCK CXSPER (5:00)

[This artist is creating a space for trans people to make music, together](#) (CBC)

- Note: this article carries a warning for mentions of suicide and suicidal thoughts
- An alternative article [Blxck Cxsper Aims For a ‘Trans Takeover’ of the Music Business with The Ghostly Beats Project](#) (Billboard) (10:00)

4. REVIEW THE KEY VOCABULARY FOR “POUPÉE RUSSE” AND “PRIDE.” (10:00)

Read through the lyrics to both songs. (Additional time may be needed to discuss the French to English translations)

5. LISTEN TO “POUPÉE RUSSE” AND “PRIDE”

Prepare to answer the discussion questions

(Note: The songs in this lesson are partially or completely in French. English translations have been provided alongside the French lyrics. French classes should note that there may be minor French to English translation differences given the slang in Hip Hop, as well as variations within French Canadian dialects. While the translations have been done with care, additional interpretation and discussion may be needed.)



Blxck Cxsper. Photo: CBC



KEY VOCABULARY

LGBTQ2S+ (LGBTQ2+ / LGBTQ2S) - an inclusive acronym that encompasses a variety of gender identities and sexual orientations. It stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, two-spirits, with the '+' representing other identities including non-binary, pansexual, asexual, and intersex

Queer - an umbrella term often used to categorize the entirety of the LGBTQ2S+ community

"Poupée Rousse"

Accomplice - a person who helps another to commit a crime or to do something wrong

Cégep - a general, technical, and vocational college exclusive to Quebec

Contempt - the feeling that somebody is without value and deserves no respect

Croesus - a 6th-century B.C. king of Lydia, an ancient kingdom in what is now Turkey; "rich as Croesus," has entered English as a generic term for someone extremely wealthy

Crocodile Tears - false tears

Friday - the typical day when new music is released

The Game - slang for the music industry

Materialists - people preoccupied with material goods instead of things intellectual or spiritual

Old One - slang for someone who has been around for a long time

Royalties - money that is paid to somebody who has written a piece of music each time it is sold or performed

Russian Doll - one of a set of hollow painted figures which fit inside each other

Solicitations - the act of trying to get something or persuading somebody to do something

Transcend - to rise above; to go beyond the limits of

Viola Davis - an African-American actor who has spoken out about the lack of opportunities available for Black Female actors, as well as common beauty standards that make dark-skinned women less desirable

Zenith - the highest point that the sun or moon reaches in the sky; the time when something is strongest and most successful

"Pride"

514 - area code for Montreal

The Bag - slang for a healthy amount of money

Beemer - slang for a BMW car

Bleu Gris Noir - could represent the colours of sadness (Blue, Grey, Black)

F.B.I. - acronym for slang "Female Body Inspector" (Blxck Cxsper is possibly asserting his male identity)

G.N.C. - abbreviation of "Gender Non-Conforming"

Kyng - not an ordinary king, someone with a special purpose

Knuck if you buck - Preparing to fight if someone says something offensive

Marco Marco - a fashion label from designer Marco Morante

Peepers - slang for eyes

Sabrina - reference to the 1990s teen sitcom "Sabrina the Teenage Witch"

Definitions from [Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary](#), [Oxford Learner's Dictionaries](#) and [Urban Dictionary](#)



DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

DISCUSSION ACTIVITY

As a class or in small groups, discuss the following questions and share responses. Refer back to the lyrics 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.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Consider the messages of both songs. What similarities do you notice?

(ie. both songs reflect pride in self-identity. Sarahmée: “J’suis bien la preuve que tout est possible [I’m proof that anything is possible],” Blxck Cxsper: “I’m a Black Trans Kyng, she a Black Trans Goddess / We gon’ take over the world yeah that’s a promise”; both songs discuss riches and wealth Sarahmée: “Objectif: être riche comme Crésus” [Goal: to be rich as Croesus], Lady London: “Got bad habits, pushing the beemer,” “Make sure you don’t get too close to my designer swag.”)

What differences do you notice?

(ie. Blxck Cxsper & Lady London are more overt about their sexuality while Sarahmée does not discuss it; Blxck Cxsper & Lady London declare they are going to take over the world, while Sarahmée takes a more “sober” approach, recognizing that “Si demain tout s’arrête, c’est la vie” [“If tomorrow everything stops, that’s life”])



Lady London. Photo: Steph Paul



Why is the Russian doll imagery significant for Sarahmée?

(ie. the Russian doll contains several smaller dolls inside of it which represent the layers of Sarahmée’s identity that is unfolding to the public, including gender, race, and sexual orientation)

Blxck Cxsper says: “Here to tell you Imma live long after I die.” What are some possible meanings of this line?

(ie. Blxck Cxsper & Lady London are more overt about their (ie. Earlier in the song, Blxck Cxsper self-references as a ghost or “fantôme,” which can also connect his stage name to the cartoon Casper the Friendly Ghost. A ghost lives on in some form after their body dies; In the pre-activity articles, Blxck Cxsper is shown to be developing systems of support for Black Trans artists. This will provide him a legacy in the music world)

Choose a line from each song that contains some discussion of pride. Which line is more impactful for you? Explain your answer.

(Answers will vary; suggestion: using a t-chart, write down the lines identified by the students to see if any specific phrases emerge as most impactful)



SUBJECT-RELATED ACTIVITIES

A notable discussion about the work of Sarahmée is that even though Sarahmée's music is not as overt in discussing her queer identity, [she has conducted interviews to discuss the importance of her presence as representation](#) for young LGBTQ2S+ folx. Sarahmée was also a high profile performer for [Montreal's 2022 FeminiX Day, a conference and concert for queer women](#) that occurred during Pride Month.

The activities in this section are related to the two web pages provided, an interview with Sarahmée and a press release from Montreal Pride about FeminiX Day. Students are to read the pieces and respond using the prompts.

(Note: The article from Fugues is in French. English speaking classes should use the Google Translate feature found in most web browsers to translate the webpage)

[Interview: Sarahmée pour enflammer la Fierté \(Sarahmée to ignite Pride\) \(Fugues, 2022\)](#)

[Press Release: Ariane Moffatt to Perform with Sarahmée, Laura Niquay, Calamine, DJ Kris Tin and DJ Sam at the Esplanade of the Olympic Park \(Festival Fierté Montreal, 2022\)](#)



Pride Parade. Photo: Mercedes Mehling



MUSIC

- Select one artist from the 2022 Montreal FeminiX Day, or research and select your own. Create an arrangement for one of their songs that could be performed at the festival. Present your arrangement and discuss the changes or additions that you made. (300:00)

BUSINESS

- Research and program your own one day FeminiX day music festival featuring Canadian queer artists (from any genre, or mixture of genres) set in a Canadian city of your choice. Develop a business plan for the city that outlines the cost of the festival including venue cost and artist fees. Present your findings in a report or presentation. (375:00)

ENGLISH & FRENCH

- Research and program your own one day FeminiX day music festival featuring Canadian queer artists (from any genre, or mixture of genres). Using the press from Festival Fierté Montreal, write your own press release to promote the festival.
- Research and choose two queer poets as potential hosts for your festival. Write a proposal to the city pitching these two poets and explain your choices using examples from their poetry. (225:00)

COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

- Research and program your own one day FeminiX day music festival featuring Canadian queer artists (from any genre, or mixture of genres) set in a Canadian city of your choice. Design a poster for festival. (225:00)

DESIGN TECHNOLOGY

- Research and program your own one day FeminiX day music festival featuring Canadian queer artists (from any genre, or mixture of genres) set in a Canadian city of your choice. Design a model of an outdoor stage suitable for an all day music festival. Be sure to include room for storing and transporting band equipment (this will depend on the artists you select). (300:00)



City of Montreal. Photo: Jackie Hutchinson



VISUAL ARTS

- Choose a quote from the Sarahmée interview. Create a visual arts piece that includes the quote and artistically represents the meaning of her statement. (225:00)

DANCE

- Select one of Sarahmée’s songs and develop a choreographed dance routine that reflects the song’s theme. Present your dance and explain how your choices connect to the song. (265:00)

SOCIAL SCIENCE

- Read the Sarahmée interview. Identify Sarahmée’s statements on the importance of visible LGBTQ2S+ representation. Develop a set of qualitative research questions to ask FeminiX Day attendees. Explain how the Sarahmée interview informed your questions. (150:00)



LGBTQ2S+ Street Art. Photo: Yoav Hornung



LESSON RESOURCES AND LINKS

[Kaytranada Is Reaching 100%](#) (Fader, 2016)

[A Close Look At Frank Ocean’s Coming Out Letter](#) (NPR, 2012)

[LIL NAS X SAYS ARTISTS LIKE FRANK OCEAN AND TYLER, THE CREATOR ‘MADE IT EASIER’ TO COME OUT](#) (TheSource, 2019)

[Meet Big Freedia: The New Orleans Bounce Star Who Came to Slay in Beyoncé’s “Formation”](#) (Vogue, 2016)

[Intersectionality](#) (ThoughtCo.)

[Queering the Canadian music industry](#) (CBC, 2019)

[Sarahmée pour enflammer la Fierté \(Sarahmée to ignite Pride\)](#) (Fugues, 2022)

[Ariane Moffatt to Perform with Sarahmée, Laura Niquay, Calamine, DJ Kris Tin and DJ Sam at the Esplanade of the Olympic Park](#) (Festival Fierté Montreal, 2022)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

[10 BLACK QUEER TORONTO ARTISTS TO FOLLOW](#) - opportunities for students to research more LGBTQ2S+ artists

[88 Days of Fortune collectively changed Toronto hip-hop. Has its luck run out?](#) - article on the 2010s artist collective that created space for queer artists

[Kaytranada Wants to Be Just a Little Bit of a Superstar](#) (GQ, 2020) - additional reading on Kaytranada that reflect on his coming out four years prior

[Sarahmée- Elle est partie feat. Nissa Seych](#) - music video from Sarahmée with great visuals that represent the theme of misogyny



APPENDIX 1: "POUPÉE RUSSE" (RUSSIAN DOLL) LYRICS

FRENCH

REFRAIN

Ils n'y croyaient pas, dès le début
On t'l'avait bien dit, mais t'as pas cru
Ils découvrent qui j'suis comme poupée russe
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus
Ils n'y croyaient pas, dès le début
On t'l'avait bien dit, mais t'as pas cru
Ils découvrent qui j'suis comme poupée russe
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus

COUPLET 1

J'suis bien la preuve que tout est possible (Tout est possible)
Bébé, tu peux monter dans mon bolide (Dans mon bolide)
J'suis la compétition, j'le mérite (J'le mérite)
Meilleur chrono après un tour de piste
Au moindre faux pas j'les vois applaudir, y'a pas d'succès sans échec
J'saute sur l'occas' comme une trampoline, t'as toujours pas fini le Cégep
Prochain movie, j'suis au black-office, come thru, Viola Davis
Si demain tout s'arrête, c'est la vie, ils verseront des larmes de crocodile
J'ai changé de classe économique
Jeune femme et noire, j'ai peur d'la police
Pas de paix tant qu'il y aura pas de justice
Sois t'es un allié, sois t'es leur complice (Ah, ouais)
J'compte plus les DMs, les déclarations
Les appels manqués et sollicitations
Les tapis rouges et félicitations
Normal, on est toujours dans l'action

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CHORUS

They didn't believe it from the start
We told you so, but you didn't believe
They'll find out who I am like a Russian doll
Goal: to be rich as Croesus
They didn't believe it from the start
We told you so, but you didn't believe
They'll find out who I am like a Russian doll
Objective: to be rich as Croesus

VERSE 1

I'm proof that anything is possible (Anything is possible)
Baby, you can ride in my car (In my car)
I'm the competition, I deserve it (I deserve it)
Best time after a lap
At the slightest misstep I see them applauding,
there's no success without failure
I jump on the opportunity like a trampoline, you still haven't finished college
Next movie, I'm at the Black office, come thru, Viola Davis
If tomorrow everything stops, that's life, they'll shed crocodile tears
I've changed economy class
Young woman and Black, I'm afraid of the police
No peace until there's justice
You're either an ally or an accomplice (Oh yeah)
I can't count the DMs, the statements
The missed calls and solicitations
Red carpets and congratulations
Normal, we're always in action



FRENCH

REFRAIN

Ils n'y croyaient pas dès le début (Non!)
On t'l'avait bien dit, mais t'as pas cru (Non!)
Ils découvrent qui j'suis comme poupée russe
(Non!)
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus (Wooh)
Ils n'y croyaient pas dès le début (Début, non!)
On t'l'avait bien dit, mais t'as pas cru (Non!)
Ils découvrent qui j'suis comme poupée russe
(Non!)
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus

COUPLET 2

J'verse deux-trois gouttes d'eau bénite
Prie pour que j'atteigne le zénith (Amen)
Le racisme est systémique
L'élite nous prend pour des débiles (Wooh)
Le respect se mérite, j'suis ton ancienne, pas ta
p'tite (Bâtard)
Métal sur les chevilles, achat d'humains par
devises (Par devises)
C'est la revanche, on va tout tout rapatrier
(Okay, okay)
Mes redevances me f'ront pas tout tout oublier
Le mépris et les propos déplacés
Comme après tsunami, t'es dévasté
Trop de lâcheté, t'aimes pas les matérialistes,
mais le dernier sac tu l'as acheté
Un loup n'engendre pas de brebis (De brebis)
J'transcende le game à chaque vendredi
Plus souvent qu'autrement, vous faites les cho-
ses médiocrement
Beaucoup se vantent, sont arrogants (Annh)
On fait les choses sobrement

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CHORUS

They didn't believe it from the start (No!)
We told you so, but you didn't believe (No!)
They find out who I am like a Russian doll (No!)
Goal: to be rich as Croesus (Wooh)
They didn't believe it from the start (Start, no!)
We told you so, but you didn't believe (No!)
They'll find out who I am like a Russian doll
(No!)
Goal: to be rich as Croesus

VERSE 2

I pour two-three drops of holy water
Pray that I reach the zenith (Amen)
Racism is systemic
The elite take us for fools (Wooh)
Respect is earned, I'm your old one, not your little
one (Bastard)
Metal on the ankles, buying humans by currency
(By currency)
It's payback, we're gonna take it all back (Okay,
okay)
My royalties won't make me forget it all
The contempt and the inappropriate words
Like a tsunami, you're devastated
Too much cowardice, you don't like materialists,
but the last bag you bought
A wolf does not give birth to sheep (Of sheep)
I transcend the game every Friday
More often than not, you do things poorly
Many boast, arrogant (Annh)
We do things sober



FRENCH

REFRAIN

Ils n’y croyaient pas dès le début (Non!)
On t’l’avait bien dit, mais t’as pas cru (Non!)
Ils découvrent qui j’suis comme poupée russe
(Non!)
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus (Wooh)
Ils n’y croyaient pas dès le début (Début, non!)
On t’l’avait bien dit, mais t’as pas cru (Non!)
Ils découvrent qui j’suis comme poupée russe
(Non!)
Objectif: être riche comme Crésus (Crésus, Cré-
sus, Crésus)

OUTRO

(Non, non, non, non)
(Non, non, non, non)

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

CHORUS

They didn’t believe it from the start (No!)
We told you so, but you didn’t believe (No!)
They’ll find out who I am like a Russian doll
(No!)
Goal: to be rich as Croesus (Wooh)
They didn’t believe it from the start (Start, no!)
We told you so, but you didn’t believe (No!)
They’ll find out who I am like a Russian doll
(No!)
Goal: to be rich as Croesus (Croesus, Croesus,
Croesus)

OUTRO

(No, no, no, no)
(No, no, no, no)



APPENDIX 2: "PRIDE" LYRICS

HOOK

[Lady Londyn]

They know my girls we sparkle
We keep it hot like charcoal
They know my boys be proper
Wearing that Marco Marco
We got that G.N.C
Out in the N.Y.C
L.A. to M.T.L.,
Live til I D.I.E

[Lady Londyn & Blxck Cxsper]

You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride

VERSE 1

[Lady Londyn]

They might laugh like hyenas
But I show them why I'm the queen
This my jungle, you feel the fever
Black Girl Magic, no no Sabrina
Got bad habits, pushing the beemer
I rep the woke and you rep the sleepers
I am the spot where he lands his peepers
Turning them haters into believers
Ain't no messing around
They know if the Lady on it then it's finna go down
I'm the baddest in the game and the baddest in town
Make him wanna wear my chain when he walking around
Okay
Back to the story 'bout Pride
I can see it in your eyes that they all despise
When they girls walk by



Turn men to boys
Make 'em all ooey ooey ooey inside
Just another page in the book
Make the boys all look
We can knuck if you buck
Make sure he pay with the buck
Or my girls ain't giving it up
Sup? Yeah
Put that on us:
My girls we stick to the rules and we get to the bag yeah
When we level up
Make sure you don't get too close to my designer swag yeah!

HOOK

[Lady Londyn & Blxck Cxsper]
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride

VERSE 2

[Blxck Cxsper]

FRENCH

C'est ma Pride, c'est ma fierté
J'suis en mode F.B.I.: Fier de mon Bercaïl Inef-
frayé
En mode petit village gaulois:
On résiste aux colons car on est magique et ils
savent ça
C'est automatix, je pull up sur le mic en mode
acrobatix
Je calcule pas ceux qui me fight j'aime pas les
mathématiques
J'suis en Bleu Gris Noir, respectons la théma-
tique
Je suis le fantôme what's up?

ENGLISH TRANSLATION

It's my Pride, it's my pride
I'm in F.B.I. mode: Proud of my Failed Fold
In the mode of a small Gallic village:
We're resisting the colonists because we're magic
and they know it
It's automatix, I pull up on the mic in acrobatix
mode
I don't calculate those who fight me I don't like
math
I'm in Blue Grey Black, let's respect the theme
I'm the ghost, what's up?



Lemme switch it up
I'm proud of who I am I'm proud of who I love
I'm a Black Trans Kyng, she a Black Trans Goddess
We gon' take over the world yeah that's a promise
From the 514 to the 75
No border out there can contain my heart
I'm a threat yeah
You know because I'm proud
Here to tell you Imma live long after I die

HOOK

[Lady Londyn]
They know my girls we sparkle
We keep it hot like charcoal
They know my boys be proper
Wearing that Marco Marco
We got that G.N.C
Out in the N.Y.C
L.A. to M.T.L.,
Live til I D.I.E

[Lady Londyn & Blxck Cxsper]
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride
No, no, no, no, no
You won't take my Pride

OUTRO

[Blxck Cxsper]
Cause this Pride is all I have yeah
(you won't take it, you won't take it)
I worked hard to be alive yeah
(you won't take it, you won't take it)
For my rights yeah I will fight yeah
(you won't take it, you won't take it)
Cause my people should be thriving
(you won't take it, you won't take it)