



# #BLACK MUSIC MATTERS

## HIP-HOP & SOCIAL JUSTICE IN CANADA

RESOURCE INTRODUCTION

#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.



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**ADVANCE**  
CANADA'S BLACK MUSIC BUSINESS COLLECTIVE



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# RESOURCE INTRODUCTION

In recent years, many organizations and institutions have been reflecting on and responding to systemic racism and the oppressive structures that exist in our society. Since 2013, the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement has been calling for social change to eradicate white supremacy and to intervene in violence and injustice inflicted on Black communities. Long before the BLM movement, Black artists have been protesting and advocating for social justice through hip-hop music.

Hip-hop music, like many other forms of Black music, has been historically underrepresented in school music classrooms. As a result, Black students are not seeing themselves reflected in music curricula and students in general are missing opportunities to learn about Black culture and creation in their music classes. Music educators across Canada have expressed their desire to engage Black and racialized students in music education. This is why MusiCounts brought together Black artists and educators to create a new resource that will empower educators to explore Black culture, history and creation across the curriculum.

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Photo: Nathan Dumlao



# USING THIS RESOURCE

Hip-hop is a ‘culture’, and as such, hip-hop music can be integrated with other areas of the arts such as dance and visual arts. Cross-curricular connections can also be made with many subject areas such as English, Geography, History, Business, Visual Arts and the Social Sciences. Educators of grades 7-12 students are encouraged to use this resource as an entry point for engaging students in the study of Canadian Black culture, history and creation through hip-hop music.

This resource is structured in two parts:

## 1) RESOURCE CONTEXT



Photo: Ben Weins

The authors of this resource have prepared a contextual document to support educators in bringing conversations about race, hip-hop and social justice into the classroom. Teachers are highly encouraged to start here; [this document](#) will help educators gain a clear understanding of the aims of this resource, and acquire the foundational background knowledge needed to begin introducing students to Canadian hip-hop music and artists. Links to useful additional resources are provided in these sections to aid educators in furthering their background knowledge. Topics addressed in this document include an overview of Critical Race Theory, gender and intersectionality in hip-hop and a brief history of hip-hop.



## 2) LESSON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES



Still, "Protest" Official Music Video  
Photo: YouTube

Throughout February 2022, four lessons will be released that explore different hip-hop songs by different Canadian hip-hop artists. These lessons will be released weekly, and can be downloaded via the MusiCounts website for free.

Lessons are structured in three sections: Lesson Context, Foundational Activities and Subject-Specific Activities.

The **Lesson Context** section is designed to provide educators with key background and contextual information related to the hip-hop songs being explored to aid them in facilitating discussions with students.

The **Foundational Activities** section is designed to provide students with an introduction to the featured Canadian hip-hop song(s) and related social justice issue(s). Students will engage in short activities to introduce the song to be explored. A main discussion activity follows, allowing students to 'dig deeper' and think more critically about the social justice issues that are being addressed in the song. Teachers of all subject areas are encouraged to facilitate these foundational activities with their students prior to engaging in subject-specific activities.

The **Subject-Specific Activities** section is designed to provide students with opportunities to further explore the presented social justice themes from a cross-curriculum lens and through the application of subject-specific skills. These activities should be explored after the foundational activities have been completed.

Links to the materials needed to facilitate each lesson are provided.



# BEFORE YOU DIVE IN

Although the intended grade level for each lesson is indicated in this resource, educators will need to consider the unique dynamics of their classroom(s) to determine the appropriateness of the lesson for their students. Teachers are encouraged to review song lyrics and the list of key terms to confirm their own understanding of the key social justice themes being presented in the lesson. Educators must also consider sensitivity of language when considering a lesson for their class. Some hip-hop songs contain profanity or use of the ‘N’ word. Teachers may modify lessons to censor language that they deem inappropriate for their classroom and instead, focus on sections of the music that do not contain profanity. Alternatively, educators might provide students with a disclaimer about sensitive language contained in a song and facilitate discussion about context and reasons for the use of certain words and phrases in a song.

The main purpose of this resource is to help educators and students explore Canadian hip-hop music and its role as a tool for promoting and advocating for social justice. The songs selected to support the lessons developed for this resource all have identifiable social justice themes. As such, social justice education must be at the center of a learning that takes place in the classroom through the use of this resource.



Photo: Clay Banks



# THE WRITERS

## DARREN HAMILTON

Darren Hamilton is a secondary music educator with the Peel District School Board. He has a broad and diverse background in music and education, spanning over two decades. He holds a Honours BFA in Music from York University, a BEd from the University of Toronto and a MMus in Music Education from the University of Western Ontario. Darren is currently a doctoral candidate in the Faculty of Music at the University of Toronto, having research interests in formal gospel music education and equity, diversity and social justice in music curriculum. In 2021, his articles, “#BlackMusicMatters: Dismantling Anti-Black Racism in Music Education” and “Hip-hop Music Education: Engaging Students in Black Culture Creation and Social Justice Advocacy” were published in the Canadian Music Educator journal.

Recently, Darren launched a new integrated arts course at his school called “The Sounds and Sights of Hip-Hop and R&B” that exposes students to the musical analysis, production and performance of these Black musical forms along with their visual arts elements. Darren is the founding director of the University of Toronto credit Gospel Choir course and has been presenting gospel music pedagogy workshops at the annual Ontario Music Educators’ Association conferences for the past five years. When not teaching, he is an active clinician, workshop presenter and conductor of the Waterloo Region Mass Choir.



Darren Hamilton

## JON CORBIN

Jon Corbin is a secondary English and Social Science educator with the Halton District School Board. He holds a Double Honours BA in English and Social Science from Wilfrid Laurier University and a BEd from York University. Jon has spent 15 years in the teaching profession integrating the study of hip-hop and spoken word into Ontario classrooms. When not teaching, Jon is a hip-hop artist who has released three full-length albums and a dozen musical projects. Jon is the host of “The Jon Corbin Podcast”, a conversational storytelling program on creativity and inspiration. Jon is also developing Spark Rap Coaching, an interactive program teaching students how to rap.



Jon Corbin