



#BLACK MUSIC MATTERS

“BROTHER (WATCHING)”

SHAD FT B & F KABANGO

LESSON OBJECTIVE(S):

In this lesson, students will explore notions of Blackness and the impact of anti-Black racism and stereotyping on ‘African’ youth.

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

GRADE LEVEL:

9 - 12



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APPENDIX 1: "BROTHER (WATCHING)" LYRICS



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

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Last Updated February 5, 2022



BACKGROUND

In “Brother (Watching),” Shad outlined the challenges for young Black people who immigrate to Canada where they face stereotyping, racism, lowered expectations in schools and limited job opportunities because of their ethnicity.

“Brother (Watching)” appears on the 2007 album, *The Old Prince*, a concept album where the eponymous character is observing the social challenges facing the young Black population, and battles his inner demons before rising up to be a leader. In the context of the album, this song is about the prelude to leadership. The main character is observing the issues and has some ideas of how to solve things, but has yet to take action.

The end of the song features the album’s narrators, and Shad’s parents, Bernadette and Francis Kabango. The two break character to share what their hopes are for their children as they grow older. The couple serve as a guide for the narrator and a symbol of the multigenerational interconnectedness found in many African communities (Shad is Kenyan-born and his parents are Rwandan).



Still, Official Video “Brother (Watching)”
Photo: YouTube



FOUNDATIONAL ACTIVITIES

PRE-ACTIVITY

1. REVIEW SHAD'S BIOGRAPHY (2:00)

[Shad Artist Biography](#)

2. REVIEW KEY VOCABULARY (10:00)

Review the Key Vocabulary List

Read through the lyrics to “Brother (Watching)” (Appendix 1)

Re-read the lyrics again if needed

3. WATCH THE MUSIC VIDEO (3:35)

[Official Video, “Brother \(Watching\)”](#)



Shad. Photo: Justin Broadbent

KEY VOCABULARY

Activist: a person who uses or supports strong actions (such as public protests) in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue

Affluent: having an abundance of goods or riches; being wealthy

African: a person and especially a Black person of African ancestry

Blackness: the social and cultural identity and experience of Black people

Blaxploitation: the exploitation of Black people by producers of Black-oriented films

Capitalist: a person who has capital especially invested in business

Exploitation: to make use of meanly or unfairly for one's own advantage

Infatuation: a feeling of foolish or obsessively strong love for, admiration for, or interest in someone or something

Saturated: full of moisture; made thoroughly wet

Stereotype: to believe unfairly that all people or things with a particular characteristic are the same

Swagger: an arrogantly self-confident way of walking

Definitions from Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary



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



Still, "Brother (Watching)" Official Music Video. Photo: YouTube

What is the purpose of the song?

(i.e., Shad is identifying the societal racism of lowered expectations for Black youth in North America; Shad identifies the 'limited range of possibilities' for Black youth and how that adversely impacts their psyche; Shad endorses the modern day activism of refuting those stereotypes by just 'being yourself')

What examples come to mind when you think about the phrase "infatuation with Blackness"?

(i.e., when non-Black people get their hair braided, get hair extensions or grow dreadlocks; when people from other cultures open businesses that offer Black goods and services; when non-Black people try to speak patois, etc.)

What are some ways that Black youth "souls [are] subtly attacked and abused"?

(i.e., societal expectations of having 'swagger' and being 'smooth'; the homogenous representation of Blacks on television; the limited amount of socially expected jobs for Black youth "making tracks or it's hoops")



What do you think Shad means in the hook, “I’ve been watching everything, oh brother, brother, brother?”

(i.e., “Watching” reflects Shad’s vision of the experiences of young Black people and their encounters with racism; “Oh brother” is both an exclamation of sadness as well as expressing solidarity with Black youth)

Why does Shad consider “just being yourself” and “doing what you’re passionate to” as Black activism?

(i.e., this is considered as Black activism because society often puts Black people into a box, dictating what they can and cannot do, what careers they can and cannot pursue - “doing what you’re passionate to” is activism because Black people are challenged to pursue any career they want, even if it is not common for them to be represented in a certain career)

Shad mentions the Black experience in school, representation of Blacks in the media, and limited job prospects. How does this song contribute to our current cultural discussion of systemic racism?

(i.e., this song reaffirms the lack of representation of Blacks in high profile jobs and positions of authority in our society; this song speaks about how Black people are often passed over for opportunities just because of the color of their skin)



Shad. Photo: Canadian Encyclopedia



SUBJECT-SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES

MUSIC

- Re-read the lyrics with a focus on the rhyme scheme. Describe any patterns you notice.
- Examine one stanza from the song. Identify how many syllables are in each line of the stanza. What patterns, if any, do you notice between the lines of the stanza?
- Consider a social justice issue that you are passionate about. Write a 4-line stanza expressing your opinion on the subject. (Each line should be between 7-12 syllables)

ENGLISH

- In groups of 2 or 3, examine one stanza from the song. Analyze the meaning of the stanza and discuss its effectiveness.
- Write a 250-word response journal. Write your thoughts about any aspect of the song. Consider questions like: What lines stood out to you? What lines did not make sense? What does this song tell us about the author?



Photo: Brad Neathery

SOCIAL SCIENCE

- Conduct research on a 21st century Canadian Black activist. What work are they involved in? Describe their impact on the modern social justice movement.
- Research project:
 - Research the historical stereotypes of Black people in 20th century television and film,
 - Then, research a modern film or television show that effectively challenges “the narrow conception of what’s Black”.



GEOGRAPHY

- Research the percentage of Canadian immigrants coming from African countries. Represent your findings on a map of Africa.
- Research where in Canada immigrants from Africa are settling. Represent your findings on a map of Canada.

VISUAL ARTS

- Consider Shad’s line, “So young blacks don’t see themselves in scholastic pursuits or the more practical routes...”
 - Create a visual arts piece that celebrates a positive image of Blackness.
 - Identify a scene from a TV show or movie in which Black culture is exploited. If you were the director or producer of this TV show or movie, how would you reimagine this scene to present a more positive image of Blackness?



Photo: Pinho



LESSON RESOURCES AND LINKS

[Shad's Biography](#)

["Brother \(Watching\)" Official Music Video](#)



APPENDIX 1

BROTHER (WATCHING)

LYRICS

[HOOK]

(I've been watching everything
Oh, brother, brother, brother)
[x2]

[VERSE 1]

I try to hold some hope in my heart for these African youths
Coming up where I'm from, many traps to elude
Surrounded by mostly white and affluent dudes
And somehow, you expected to have mastered this smooth
Swagger and move with the right walk, the right talk
Fashion and crews, souls subtly attacked and abused
And what's funny's being Black wasn't cool
Where I'm from till suddenly you started hearing rap in the school
Hallways, amidst this madness I grew
With a knack for amusing through this little skill for rapping at dudes
And we all like to laugh at the truth
But when you young and the same facts pertain to who you rapping 'em to
Well, I opted not to bring that to the booth
But after a while, it sort of starts nagging at you
The crazed infatuation with Blackness, the trash that gets viewed
And the fact that the tube only showed blacks acting the fool
And I was watching

[HOOK]

(I've been watching everything
Oh, brother, brother, brother)



[VERSE 2]

(Saturated with negative images and a limited range
Of possibilities is strange)
And it's sad cause that naturally do
Sort of condition your mind and over time that's what's attractive to you
So young blacks don't see themselves in scholastic pursuits
Or the more practical routes, it's making tracks or it's hoops
Or God-forbid moving packs for the loot
Shoot, even with this music we so limited, it's rap or produce
And that narrow conception of what's Black isn't true
Of course, still we feel forced to adapt to this view
Like there's something that we're having to prove
Now add that to the slew of justifications the capitalists use
For the new blaxploitation, many actions excused
In the name of getting cash that's adversely impacting our youth
With mental slavery, the shackles is loose
And it's hard to cut chains when they attached at the roots
So what the new Black activists do
For our freedom is just being them, do what you're passionate to
Not confined by a sense that you have to disprove
Any stereotypes, so-called facts to refute
Or match any image of Blackness they've established as true
Perhaps we'll break through the glass ceiling, shatter the roof
And emerge, from these boxes that they have us in-cooped
And grow to smash the mould that they casted of you
I'll keep watching

[HOOK]

(I've been watching everything
Oh, brother, brother, brother)
[x2]