

## Sampling: The Foundation of Hip Hop | Lesson Plan | Soundbreaking

Students learn about the creative concepts and technological practices on which Hip Hop music was constructed, investigating what it means to “sample” from another style, and who has used sampling and how. Students will follow patterns of Caribbean immigration and the musical practices that came to New York City as a result. This lesson also explores how sampling might demonstrate a powerful creative expression of influence or even a social or political statement and encourages students to think about the conceptual hurdle Hip Hop asks listeners to make -- presenting new music made from old sounds.

### Lesson Summary

In many ways Hip Hop is quintessentially American music. It was first created in the Bronx, NY, a borough of New York City that at the time was economically depressed, dangerous and mostly forsaken by the local government. The pioneers of Hip Hop, young people of color living in struggling communities and limited in their opportunities, embraced modern music technologies (first turntables, then drum machines and later samplers) but used them creatively, often in ways their manufacturers never intended. Indeed, the origin story of Hip Hop is one of opening doors that seemed tightly shut.



To many listeners, the first commercial rap releases were surprising, something that seemed new, even unexpected. Many of the early rappers who performed at the block parties that spawned the genre had not themselves conceived of Hip Hop as something one could record and sell. For instance, in Soundbreaking Episode 6 Public Enemy’s Chuck D

recalls that before the Sugar Hill Gang's breakthrough release, "we couldn't even imagine a rap record." However, as radical as it sounded to the average American listener in 1980, Hip Hop had deep connections to African-American and Afro-Caribbean music traditions in its performance style and in its use of turntables and prerecorded material as the primary instrument in the band.

In this lesson students explore the creative concepts and technological practices on which Hip Hop music was constructed, investigating what it means to sample from another style, who has used sampling and how. Then, students experience the technology first hand using the Soundbreaking Sampler TechTool. Students will follow patterns of Caribbean immigration and the musical practices that came to New York City as a result of those patterns, finally considering the ways in which Hip Hop reflects them. Moving forward to the late 1980s and early 90s, what some consider Hip Hop's Golden Age, this lesson explores how sampling might demonstrate a powerful creative expression of influence or even a social or political statement. Finally, this lesson encourages students to consider the conceptual hurdle Hip Hop asked listeners to make by presenting new music made from old sounds.

## Learning Objectives

### Essential Question:

How is the re-use and re-purposing of existing music at the heart of the Hip Hop recording experience?

Upon completion of this lesson, students will:

Know (knowledge):

- That as a concept, sampling can take different forms and has a long history
- How early Hip Hop reflected the cultural influence of Caribbean immigration to the Bronx in New York City
- How the recording "Rapper's Delight" took a musical movement associated with live events and parties and turned it into a recorded form of music
- How changes in technology expanded the range and use of sampled music
- How during the so-called Golden Age of Hip Hop sampling evolved from the practice of isolating beats for a rhythm track to the layering of sounds to create sonic collage
- How the evolution of Hip Hop has been integrally connected to the evolution of sampling

Be able to (skills):

- Make connections between artistic movements and the social and economic conditions from which they emerge
- Evaluate the cultural influence of immigrant communities on the dominant culture
- Integrate information from texts and videos to make thematic connections and create deeper understandings
- Make connections between popular music and historical events
- Evaluate the effects of technology on history and culture

- Make connections between the history of sampling and their own musical experiences

### Media Resources:

The Santana Drum Break - [Video](#)

Public Enemy - "Fight the Power" - [Video](#)

Sampling as a Natural Human Practice - [Video](#)

The Bronx in the 1970s - [Video](#)

Chuck D on Imagining a Rap Record - [Video](#)

"Rapper's Delight" - [Video](#)

The Sampler and its Uses - [Video](#)

Public Enemy and Sampling as a Cultural Concept - [Video](#)

For additional lesson plan materials, please visit the [Lesson Resources at TeachRock](#).

### Introductory Activity

Play the following two clips from PBS Soundbreaking:

- [Clip 1, Soundbreaking - The Santana Drum Break](#)
- [Clip 2, Soundbreaking - Public Enemy - "Fight the Power"](#)

Ask students:

- What is the source of the music in these two examples? *(Students might observe that Santana is playing instruments on stage, while Public Enemy is rapping over pre-recorded music provided by the DJ without instruments.)*
- How do you think Santana composes their music? How do you think they record it in the studio? *(Students might answer that Santana composes with instruments such as guitar and piano, and uses these instruments to record in the studio.)*
- How do you think Public Enemy composes music? What do you think they do in the recording studio? *(Students may not be equipped to articulate what Public Enemy does yet. Inform your students that Public Enemy's music is created by layering "samples" from other recordings in a form of sonic collage. Overall, help students recognize that after years of musicians with instruments on stage, some groups are performing with only various forms of technology on stage.)*

### Learning Activities

Distribute [Handout 1: Glossary of Terms](#) and direct your students to the glossary. Have them read the various definitions of sampling as a musical practice out loud to the class.

Now play [Clip 3, Soundbreaking - Sampling as a Natural Human Practice](#). Ask your students:

- In what sense do the people interviewed here suggest that all music draws on a form of sampling? *(Encourage students to interpret the artists' statements in the clip; they*

*suggest that musicians have created their own music from pre-existing music since the beginning of time.)*

- Do you think it is possible to make music that has no influences and sounds like nothing that has ever existed before? *(Encourage students to articulate their response in detail, whether they say "no" or "yes." This should encourage a lively class discussion about ideas of originality and tradition.)*
- Can you think of any other professions in which one must learn a trade and then develop it? How do these professions use a form of sampling to transfer knowledge? *(Students might suggest a variety of careers in which learning and to some extent mastering what is already known is required before they can expand upon previous knowledge.)*
- In what ways is it suggested that Led Zeppelin sampled from blues music? *(Students should recall that they borrow guitar riffs and lyrics.)*

Tell your students that just as Led Zeppelin interpreted American blues music in a manner common to their time and place, early Hip Hop musicians also reconfigured the music around them for their needs. Inform your students that the earliest Hip Hop dates to the late 1970s and ask:

- Where do you think Hip Hop music came from? *(Students may suggest major urban areas, but if they're not sure, tell them it came from New York City and, unlike most forms of music, Hip Hop's origins are pinpointed to a specific address, 1520 Sedgwick Avenue in the Borough of The Bronx.)*
- The Bronx is part of New York City and is located north of Manhattan, above Washington Heights and Harlem. What do you think the racial demographic of its population was in the 1970s? *(Students might suggest that The Bronx was populated primarily by African-Americans and Hispanics during this period.)*

Return the class's attention to [Handout 2: Map on Jamaican Immigration to New York City in the 1970's](#). Inform your students that New York City was a destination hundreds of thousands of Jamaican immigrants in the 1960s and 1970s. Have your students read the definitions of soundsystem, toasting, dub and break in the [glossary](#) and then show the [Clip 4, Soundbreaking - The Bronx in the 1970s](#). Ask your students:

- How did DJ Kool Herc's block parties demonstrate a connection to his Jamaican heritage? *(Students might connect the outdoor soundsystem and the use of prerecorded music rather than a band. They might also connect the idea of a person who chooses and plays records, in this case, Kool Herc as the featured personality of an event.)*

Distribute [Handout 3: Sound Systems: From Jamaica to the Bronx](#). Have your students compare the photos of a Jamaican sound system and Kool Herc's sound system. Now have them compare both to the photo of Diana Ross in the DJ booth at Studio 54, a popular disco venue that operated during the same time period 9 miles south in Midtown Manhattan.

- Which photos are most alike?
- How is the Studio 54 booth different from both the Jamaican and Kool Herc DJ rigs? *(Students might mention that Studio 54 is a permanent structure, and that the DJ booth is inside, while Herc and the Jamaican setup are mobile and improvised, using folding tables, etc.)*

Returning to discussion of the previous clip, ask your students:

- How do you think the breaks pioneered by DJ Kool Herc relate to the dub reggae we see being remixed in this clip? Even if it does not sound the same, do you notice any conceptual similarities? *(Students might observe that both use preexisting recordings to create new live music. A more sophisticated discussion might lead to the idea that both take music that would typically be conceived of as finished, and reconfigure it as a blank canvas on which someone creates something new.)*

Play Clip 5, [Soundbreaking - Chuck D on Imagining a Rap Record](#). Inform your students that though Chuck D became one of the most celebrated rappers in Hip Hop history, he states here that at one point he could not conceive of anyone recording a rap record. Ask your students:

- Why do you think the idea of a rap record was inconceivable to Chuck D and others in the late 1970s?
- How do you think people like Chuck D did conceive of Hip Hop at this time? *(Students might suggest that Chuck D thought of Hip Hop as a live event, a party at which DJs played records and MCs rapped.)*

Play Clip 6, [Soundbreaking - "Rapper's Delight"](#), ask your students:

- In what sense is the musical backing to “Rapper’s Delight” a sample of Chic’s “Good Times”? *(Students should recall that the bass line and drum beat from "Good Times" are the same, but replayed by different musicians in "Rapper's Delight".)*
- Why do you think Sylvia Robinson had the Sugar Hill Records house band play “Good Times” as a background for these three rappers? *(Students might suggest that it was good choice because the song was already popular and familiar to audiences, so it would serve as an easy transition for listeners.)*
- Why do you think Chuck D refers to “Rapper’s Delight” as “The Big Bang moment” for Hip Hop? How does this contrast with his earlier statement that he could not conceive of a rap album? *(Students should recall that “Rapper’s Delight” was the first successful rap recording and the first heard by audiences outside of the world of Hip Hop block parties. Encourage your students to consider also that through this recording, Hip Hop transitions from being a place and activity to a type of music that can be recorded, bought and sold, like other genres of music.)*

Play Clip 7, [Soundbreaking - The Sampler and its Uses](#). Ask your students:

- What did producers like the Wu-Tang Clan’s RZA and Marley Marl use samplers to do? *(Students might offer a variety of answers, such as using them to create samples of whole drum beats, individual drum sounds, e.g. snare drum or bass drum hits, voices and anything else interesting, sequencing them into longer musical pieces.)*
- Samplers and drum machines replaced live bands on Hip Hop recordings almost completely. What do you think made samplers so appealing to Hip Hop producers? *(Students might mention that samplers allowed producers to make new music using small sections of preexisting recordings. Encourage students to connect the use of samplers as a means to achieve the feeling of the original Hip Hop block party and the use of breaks. )*

Distribute [Handout 4: Public Enemy Listening Chart](#) and go over the prompts for note taking with your students. Play Clip 8, [Soundbreaking - Public Enemy and Sampling as a Cultural Concept](#). Ask your students:

- How did you describe the sound and mood of Public Enemy?
- In what ways would you differentiate Hank Shocklee and Public Enemy’s use of samples from the sound of “Rapper’s Delight” we heard in a previous clip? *(Students might answer that Chuck D said P.E. wanted to “destroy predictability” by creating a sonic collage that combined the expected drum beat with layers of musical and nonmusical sounds as well as spoken word, excerpts of speeches, etc. In contrast, they might recall that “Rapper’s Delight” is a sample of song still played by a band.)*
- How would you describe the message of the Public Enemy music you just heard?
- Do you think that the sound, in particular the way samples are used, reinforces the message in Public Enemy’s music? If so, how?

Break students into small groups (the number of groups should be based on access to the devices necessary to use this TechTool). Have each group open the [Soundbreaking Sampler TechTool](#). Distribute [Handout 5 - Soundbreaking Sampling TechTool](#) and have the groups read the instructions and follow the prompts. Once the groups have finished, each group should share its loop with the class.

## Culminating Activity

### Summary Activity:

Having now learned about sampling in several forms, ask your students to consider Jason King’s statement in the [Clip 8](#) that “sampling connects the past with the present and the future.” Ask your students:

- What do you think King means with this statement? How can a recorded clip of music connect the past with the present and the future?
- Do you think that as a practice “sampling” sounds from others, whether on an instrument or with a machine, has always been a part of music?
- Having now experimented with sampling yourself, do you think you could make new music using pre-recorded music?

### Writing Prompts:

Conduct a literal study of the idea of past-present-future connection by researching the specific use of samples in music. Have your students research the making of Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power.” Find out what samples they used in the track, and then research the albums from which those samples were taken. *(Note to teacher: all of this information is a Google search away, the website “whosampled” is a good resource. If the teacher chooses, the student could do this prompt with any song that uses sampling.)*

- Does this collection of samples support King’s assertion?
- Do you think the samples were chosen with any sense of cultural connectivity in mind, or were they picked on the basis of sound alone?

Sampling allows an artist to use bits and pieces of existing songs or other sounds to create a new piece of music. In this way, like the “melting pot,” sampling is a metaphor for American culture. Describe another example of this phenomenon, whether in terms of food, music, language, etc. In what ways is your example similar to or divergent from sampling?

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