

TEXTURED TEACHING IS EXPERIENTIAL

“Experiential learning expands the limits of the classroom, and by incorporating sensorial experiences makes the learning physical and memorable.”

—Lorena Germán

How to Incorporate Hip-Hop into the ELA Classroom

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The five senses are a great way to approach experiential learning. Teaching a text by incorporating ways for students to see it, touch it, taste it, hear it, and smell it can be invigorating as well as inspiring. It also makes the text memorable and allows for critical and close reading in deep ways. If you know your students, you can design experiential lessons that appeal to their specific interests, allowing you to invite all students to engage with the material.

Sound includes music. I encourage you to expand your idea of music as more than simply background noise and consider it a full element of the classroom learning. Through Textured Teaching, you can use any type of music to explore lyrics and also create connections to a text for students: pop music or international music, older or newer, well known or underground. The use of hip-hop, in particular, can be a revolutionary act. Because of its origins in the Black community (in partnership with the Latinx community), anti-Black sentiment keeps it in a sphere where many consider it to be unacademic. Another hesitation for using hip-hop is due to its language and often sexual or misogynistic content. This is a real issue, but here is where I stand on that: students (in general) are already listening to it. Why not delete the foul language (as you print lyrics) and help them use their critical and academic lens to discuss popular culture? As a genre, hip-hop is a rich and genius opportunity to promote literacy and critical analysis. It's also a powerful tool for discussing culture and learning how to use the word to read the world.

There are many ways to incorporate hip-hop in English language arts classrooms. You can offer students hip-hop as texts weaved into units, analyzing lyrics to draw direct connections to a text you're studying. It can be used as a supplement. Figure 4-3 offers ways to incorporate music, including hip-hop, as supplements to texts studied in the classroom.

Figure 4-3

MAIN TEXT	SONGS	ANALYSIS
<p><i>The Poet X</i>, Elizabeth Acevedo (2018)</p> <p>A novel in verse about a young woman exploring her identity and the power of poetry (grades 9–12)</p>	<p>“Bachata Rosa” by Juan Luis Guerra (bachata)</p> <p>“Carta de Amor” by Juan Luis Guerra (bachata)</p> <p>“Girl on Fire” by Alicia Keys (pop music)</p>	<p>Consider the poetic elements present in these songs that mirror the ones present in <i>The Poet X</i>. The first two songs can be used to think about relationships, since they are such an important part of who Xiomara is becoming. The last song could be used to study her characterization and could be seen as an expression of herself.</p>
<p><i>The Hate U Give</i>, Angie Thomas (2017)</p> <p>A novel centering a young Black woman’s struggle between two worlds in the midst of police brutality (grades 9–12)</p>	<p>“Changes” by Tupac Shakur (hip-hop)</p> <p>“Brenda’s Got a Baby” by Tupac Shakur (hip-hop)</p> <p>“Keep Ya Head Up” by Tupac Shakur (hip-hop)</p>	<p>Since Tupac Shakur is present in the text, you can explore his music. The lyrics of these three songs lend themselves to a discussion of the issues and concerns present in the Black community and ones that come up for Starr and her family, friends, and community. Think about both content and form, analyzing not only for literary techniques, but also thinking critically about the theme. “Changes” could be a springboard into a study of American economics.</p>
<p><i>The House on Mango Street</i>, Sandra Cisneros (1991)</p> <p>A novel in vignettes about a young Mexican American girl exploring her identity, learning about her community, and dreaming through writing. (grades 6-9)</p>	<p>“I Can” by Nas (hip-hop)</p> <p>“Everything Is Everything” by Lauryn Hill (hip-hop)</p>	<p>Both of these songs are about youth experiences in challenging neighborhoods. Nas includes an uplifting message and attempts to inspire young people, and Lauryn Hill paints a picture of what it means to endure while considering one’s history. Both songs offer opportunities for close reading exercises where a thematic analysis can be connected to the main text.</p>
<p><i>Long Way Down</i>, Jason Reynolds (2017)</p> <p>A novel in prose about family, gun violence, and the complexity of that cycle (grades 8–10)</p>	<p>“Self-Destruction” by Stop the Violence Movement (hip-hop)</p> <p>“No Guns Allowed” by Snoop Lion (hip-hop)</p> <p>“I Gave You Power” by Nas (hip-hop)</p>	<p>Gun violence is an issue that continues to face U.S. society today, and it’s an especially relevant topic in schools. All three songs offer opportunities for analysis of the intersection of race and gun violence. The last song in particular, by Nas, can be used as a mentor text. It’s told from the point of view of the gun.</p>
<p><i>Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood</i>, Marjane Satrapi (2004)</p> <p>A graphic novel following the life of the author during the Iranian Revolution in the 1980s (grades 9–12)</p>	<p>“Fight the Power” by Public Enemy (hip-hop)</p> <p>“Bin Laden” by Immortal Technique (hip-hop)</p>	<p>Resisting government oppression and problematic policies are at the foundation of U.S. society. Both of these songs offer opportunities for analysis and a window into resistance. The first song can be a mentor text, and you can grant students opportunities to write their own song. The second song can be used for conversation about how artists use their platforms to share awareness and their political ideas.</p>