

Name _____ Date _____

50 Years of Hip-Hop (1973-2023)

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

On August 11, 1973, DJ Kool Herc threw a party at 1520 Sedgwick Ave. in the Bronx. He used two copies of the same record to loop instrumental breaks, giving break boys and break girls more time to dance. It also gave him a rhythmic canvas for his announcements on the mic a style that opened the door to rapping. Hip-hop was born. These techniques spread to house parties and outdoor gatherings across NYC. Young Black and Latinx people began shaping the five pillars of hip-hop: DJing, MCing, breakdancing, graffiti, and knowledge of self, one's surroundings, and history of the movement.

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DJs like Grandmaster Flash and Grand Wizzard Theodore expanded upon Herc's style. MCs like Coke La Rock and members of groups like the Furious Five and Cold Crush Brothers rocked the mic at parties, parks, and in battles. Breakbeats dubbed onto cassettes helped hip-hop spread, allowing MCs and breakdancers to show their skills in school yards and on neighborhood streets. By the late 1970s, hip-hop was growing. But at the time, MCing was strictly a live, in-person experience that was about to change.

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The growing genre caught the attention of the music industry. In 1979, the first commercially released hip-hop record came out:

\xe2\x80\x9cRapper\xe2\x80\x99s Delight\xe2\x80\x9d by Sugarhill Gang. The song reached number 36 on Billboard\xe2\x80\x99s Hot 100 chart, pushing the genre into the spotlight and MCs into the recording studio. Early \xe2\x80\x9980s dance tracks like Kurtis Blow\xe2\x80\x99s \xe2\x80\x9cThe Breaks\xe2\x80\x9d were complemented by songs full of social commentary like \xe2\x80\x9cThe Message\xe2\x80\x9d by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five. Movies like Wild Style, Style Wars, and Beat Street showcased hip-hop culture to a widening audience.

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As production technology advanced, the sound of hip-hop evolved. Breaks from funk and rock records were replaced by drum machines and synthesizers as hip-hop spread to dance clubs in downtown Manhattan. These advances opened the door for a new crop of artists in the mid-\xe2\x80\x9980s: the new school. Run DMC combined rock and rap, LL Cool J was hip-hop\xe2\x80\x99s first romantic lead, the Beastie Boys appealed to a White audience, and Public Enemy continued the legacy of political, socially conscious lyricism. Producers like the Bomb Squad and Rick Rubin embraced sampling like never before, creating musical collages from a wide range of existing sources of audio.

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3. b'

Notes

By the late 1980s, hip-hop had spread globally. Women MCs like Salt-N-Pepa, Queen Latifah, and MC Lyte stepped into the spotlight. Rap acts from outside New York also gained traction, from Will Smith and DJ Jazzy Jeff to MC Hammer to Digital Underground. But a major shift toward the West Coast came with N.W.A. Their aggressive style spawned gangsta rap and a new set of influential artists, including Ice Cube, Dr. Dre, and later Snoop Dogg and Tupac Shakur.

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Back east, rappers like Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, and KRS-One were pushing lyrical boundaries. By the early 1990s, production techniques were changing again, introducing new sounds from NYC: the grit and grime of Wu-Tang Clan, Nas, and The Notorious B.I.G. and a more playful, Afrocentric approach from A Tribe Called Quest and De La Soul. Mid-1990s groups like The Fugees melded socially conscious hip-hop with R&B, while more mainstream artists became A-list celebrities: Diddy and Jay-Z on the East Coast and Dr. Dre on the West. Music video budgets were growing, and displays of wealth were becoming a norm as a rivalry between coasts developed one that led to the deaths of both Tupac and Biggie.

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4. b'

Notes

By the late 1990s, hip-hop was the best-selling genre in the US, with an increasingly White and suburban audience. The genre's musical and visual style was everywhere. As the 1990s ended, a new region rose to prominence. The South added bounce and new cadences to the genre, featuring artists like OutKast, Master P, Three 6 Mafia, Lil Wayne, T.I., and Ludacris. The early-mid 2000s proved to be the era of the super producer: Dr. Dre signed Eminem and 50 Cent; Timbaland worked with Missy Elliot and Jay-Z; Swizz Beatz with the Ruff Ryders, LOX, and Jay-Z; Kanye West with himself and Jay-Z; and the Neptunes with Clipse, Snoop Dogg, and, of course, Jay-Z. By the mid-2000s, hip-hop was a fully commercial product. LL Cool J, Ice Cube, and Queen Latifah were movie stars, and Jay-Z was as much a business mogul as he was an MC. Underground and alternative hip-hop acts like MF DOOM, Mos Def, J Dilla, and the Roots garnered acclaim, but hip-hop was already big business.

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Over time, hip-hop sales slipped. Commercial hip-hop was falling out of favor as the internet became part of daily life. Consumer production technology rivaled professional studios, and the internet allowed anyone to release music on their own. Artists from around the world like M.I.A. from the UK created and released music independently, building a fanbase online. Late-2000s social media and file sharing brought artists like Kid Cudi, Drake, Lupe Fiasco, Nicki Minaj, J. Cole, and Kendrick Lamar to the forefront.

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Throughout the 2010s, hip-hop regained commercial prominence in the streaming era. Migos and Future modernized the Southern sound. Women MCs like Cardi B and Megan Thee Stallion rose to fame. SoundCloud rappers like Lil Uzi Vert pushed rap in a moodier direction. In recent years, hip-hop's global appeal has become clearer than ever with massive acts like Bad Bunny and ever-present rap verses in K-pop songs. 50 years in, hip-hop has changed the world. From DJ Kool Herc in a Bronx basement to Jay-Z selling out Madison Square Garden to Kendrick Lamar winning a Pulitzer Prize, hip-hop has evolved and changed. 50 years may sound like a lot, but hip-hop remains a relatively young genre.

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