

SCHOOL'D BY FUNKMODE

You want to become a Hip Hop expert? Learn the info below and you're on your way, yo!

THE GOOD AND BAD OF HIP HOP

For those who love and support Hip Hop culture, it can be difficult to see how often it is painted in a negative light by people in the public and the media. The truth is, there are many people and organizations that represent or claim to represent Hip Hop who don't really care about the culture. As an unfortunate result, there has been a long list of horrible things done in the name of Hip Hop. Therefore, it's hard to fault those who think that Hip Hop is all bad. However, as with most news, the good side of Hip Hop is rarely publicized as much as the bad. It sells more magazines and gets more TV ratings to report about violence and scandal than philanthropy and success. In today's lesson, we will acknowledge the sometimes negative aspects of Hip Hop but we will also show how much positivity the culture has produced since it began in the 1970s.

DJing was true beginning of Hip Hop culture. DJs like Kool Herc, Grandmaster Flash, and Afrika Bambaataa laid the foundation for breakbeat DJing, a style that had never been seen before. These DJs, and others like them, spent hours, days and months in record stores searching out the best and hardest-to-find albums to play at their parties. They wanted their crowds to hear music they couldn't find anywhere else. Even more so, they wanted to put together sets that kept the people on the dance floor all night long. When these early Hip Hop DJs created techniques like cutting, mixing and scratching, it was the result of putting in hours of practice to be known as the best DJ in town. They had a real passion for their work and cared about the audiences that came to see them. Along the way, there were also DJs who didn't care as much about the music and only played what was popular at the time. If that was Hip Hop, that's what they played; but as soon as something else was trendy, they moved on to that. These DJs didn't care if the music they played had good lyrics or was performed by solid artists. They really only cared about getting paid. These DJs also poorly copied the techniques of earlier DJs because of they gave little time to practicing. Instead of learning to scratch, they used fake digital scratching sounds because it was trendy. Some of these fake DJs became really successful in popular music but those who know better saw them as poor representatives of the culture. Instead, they looked to DJs who focused on playing the best music and putting on the best shows for the crowds.

Soon after the DJs took to the turntables, they turned over their microphones to their friends who became known as the MCs. As you know from previous lessons, MCing, or rapping, became the most popular aspect of Hip Hop culture. The music is what most of the general public thinks about when the word Hip Hop is mentioned, and unfortunately this is the aspect of the culture that gives Hip Hop the biggest black eye. Since the early days of rap, rappers have used profane and negative lyrics. They rhyme about criminal activity and even write songs that are racist, sexist and degrading. It is so bad that most people would never let Hip Hop music be heard by children. This is a long way from what Kurtis Blow, the first MC to have a record deal, had in mind. Kurtis never used any profanity in his lyrics as he wanted it to be enjoyed by all. Many followed in his footsteps. Today, the artist Chamillionaire does not use profanity and, not surprisingly, there are many Christian rappers that do not swear or use degrading lyrics of any kind. But besides just not including negative content in their lyrics, there are many rappers who actively speak against the negativity in Hip Hop music. Artists like Chuck D of Public Enemy, Krs-ONE, Common, Mos Def, Talib Kweli, De La Soul, Queen Latifah, Will Smith, Arrested Development, Digable Planets, Guru, Lauryn Hill, Wyclef Jean and The Roots have all written songs about saving Hip Hop and moving in a more positive direction.

Most people think of graffiti as illegal and in many cases, they are right. However, many excellent artists have moved from defacing buildings and trains to doing something positive with their art. Street artists like Shepard Fairey, Banksy, TATS CRU and Klark Kent have become muralists, held art shows and allowed their pieces to be included in collections around the world.

Most of the people coming to FUNKMODE are lovers of Hip Hop dance. It is one of the most awesome expressions of movement our generation has ever seen. Still, there are many who are just in Hip Hop because they think it's a cool trend. Many dance studios have classes they call "Hip Hop" but are being taught by teachers who

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know nothing about Hip Hop culture and have spent no time learning real street dance in the streets. They copy moves they see on TV or the internet or even entire routines and then teach them to students. Others try to promote themselves as Hip Hop choreographers without ever studying b-boying or Funk Styles or any of the newer styles coming out of the urban areas of the US. The result is people being exposed to fake Hip Hop dancing from people who are just looking to cash in on the popularity of urban dance. These people then can't even tell real Hip Hop dancing from any other style. Fortunately, many of the pioneers of Hip Hop dance are still active in the community. Don Campbell (creator of Locking), Boogaloo Sam Solomon, his little brother Poppin Pete, Crazy Legs, Mr. Wiggles, Popmaster Fable, Frosty Freeze and many others were all there at the beginning and still travel the world lecturing people about real Hip Hop dancing while also judging international competitions, holding classes and even dancing themselves. All of these people have trained other dancers to carry on the true Hip Hop styles so that there will always be people who can continue to promote real Hip Hop dance culture to the world.

In the end, it is up to everyone who cares about Hip Hop culture to take it in the right direction. Hip Hop can be a force for good or bad, but it is in our hands. Hip Hop is about freedom of expression. Freedom, however, requires responsibility. Knowing the true power of Hip Hop, a responsible person will use it in a way that maximizes its potential and keeps it strong. Negativity tears down while positivity builds up. For those who want to see Hip Hop continue to be alive and thriving, the choice is clear.

HIP HOP WORDS OF THE WEEK

Dipped: To be covered in really fashionable clothes.

EX: "That dude's got the latest fits from Adidas from head to toe. I ain't never seen anybody dipped like that!"

(All) Gravy: All good.

EX: "Don't trip about that argument earlier. It's all gravy, baby."

Wacksauce: Something horribly lame and uncool. Just awful.

EX: "I got detention for passing a note in class and I didn't even touch it. That's totally wacksauce!"

BONUS: Create a sentence using all words of the week

EXTRA LEARNING

1) Russell Simmons is one of the most successful people in Hip Hop and one of its biggest sources of good.

Name one positive social or political cause he has organized or fought for.

2) Name one philanthropic thing that Jay-Z has done.

3) What is one thing you would do to help Hip Hop be seen as positive?