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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2011 Volume III: The Idea of America

The Hip-Hopcracy of America

Guide for Curriculum Unit 11.03.09, published September 2011

by Rodney Robinson

This unit will be an examination of American Ideas through the expression of the hip hop culture. Students will generate spoken word poetry, street art, and rap music samples based on the ideas of America at the turn of the eighteenth, nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty first centuries through the eyes of the various immigrant groups that were streaming into America during these time periods. The students will examine the motivations of these immigrants to come to America, and compare their expectations to the reality they faced when they arrived.

The unit will be taught at three separate points throughout the year with the same theme in US History, Immigration and the Idea of America. Each time period will be examined through primary sources available in books and at local libraries and newspapers. Once the students have a general understanding, they will create a hip hop interpretation of the immigrants' thoughts and experiences as they try to survive in America. Each unit will have the same rules and design; the only difference is that a different group and the challenges each faced will be examined each time the unit is taught. The three groups of immigrant experiences that will be examined are African-Americans during the 17th and 18th centuries, Italians during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and Mexican immigrants during the late 20th and early 21th century.

(Developed for Virginia/U. S. History, grade 11; recommended for U. S. History, grades 6-12)

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