

Hip Hop Culture and its Foundational Elements

Hip Hop's origin story begins in the 1970s in the South Bronx (Image 1) in New York with predominantly African American and Latino-American youth (around your students' ages!). Hip hop culture has four foundational elements: the DJ, the MC, graffiti, and breaking.

The DJ

The hip hop DJ didn't just put a record on the turntable and let it play. These DJs recognized that the dancers got really excited during certain parts of the songs, the breaks (a percussion section when the rest of the instruments drop out), so they devised ways to just repeat—or loop—the dancers' favorite sections of the music. DJ Kool Herc (Image 2) is perhaps the earliest pioneering figure in hip hop history, and he was known for having massive, incredibly loud speakers, the Herculoids. DJ Afrika Bambaataa is recognized as the Godfather of hip hop for his influential role, and DJ Grandmaster Flash is known for his scientific approach to deejaying and perfecting the loop.

The MC

Grandmaster Flash deejayed a party and the crowd wasn't into it, so he came up with the idea to have someone provide vocal accompaniment on a microphone to get the crowd excited. While DJs played the music, MCs began with simple phrases to get the crowd hype, some started rhyiming, and eventually this evolved into rapping as we know it today. (Image 3)

Graffiti

Although graffiti is obviously known for its rule-breaking, it is so important to acknowledge the incredibly innovative artistry graffiti artists developed. Though some might take issue with where this art was sometimes placed, an entirely new genre of visual art was created, and this genre of art can be anywhere—including art galleries. Many artists tagged their names or nicknames and this was a way for people, who society largely ignored, to be seen. (Image 4)

Breaking

Although there are now many different genres of hip hop dances, breaking or b-boying/b-girling (often referred to as "breakdance," though breakers do not use this term), was the original hip hop form that developed alongside the DJ, the MC, and graffiti. These dancers transition from standing moves to elaborate footwork, freezes, and spins on the floor. Yes, these are the dancers that spin on their heads! Rock Steady Crew appeared briefly in the 1983 movie *Flashdance*, and this clip of their breaking played an influential role in spreading hip hop around the world. (Image 5).

Image 1 – The Bronx

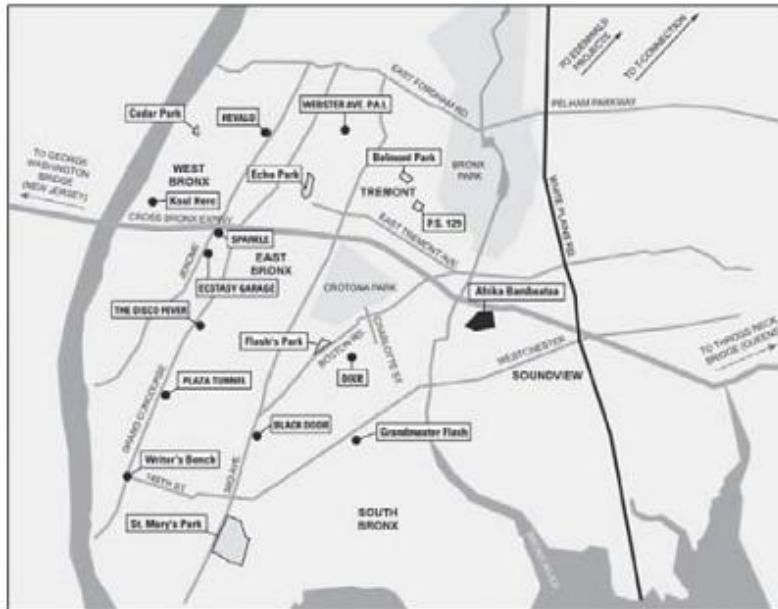


Image 2 – DJ Kool Herc



Image 3 – Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five



Image 6 – Graffiti by artist PINK



Image 5 – Crazy Legs, Co-Founder of Rock Steady Crew

