

English 2027 Introduction to Poetry: Poetic Foundations of Hip-hop

Instructor: Susan Weinstein *Time/Place:* T/Th 12 – 1:20 p.m., 27 Allen Hall
Email: sweinst@lsu.edu *Office:* Allen 43A *Office Hours:* T/Th 9-10:30, 1:30-3

Overview

This course will examine major movements in African American poetry, including slave songs, the blues, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Black Arts Movement, in order to develop an understanding of the poetic traditions from which the music of hip-hop developed its particular lyrical preoccupations. We will also examine the lyrics of artists considered to be exemplars of the form within hip-hop, for example Melle Mel, Rakim, and Nas, with an eye to mapping their styles and subject matter onto these earlier poetry movements. This course includes a required service learning component in which students will work with a local high school American Literature class to deepen both their own, and the high school students', understanding of the poetry they are reading and of how contemporary hip-hop artists hearken back to these earlier forms in their work.

Course Objectives

Students will:

- Recognize and analyze the connections between poetic form, content, and context.
- Understand the connection between individual poems, literary movements, and historical contexts.
- Become literate in the discourses of African American poetry and of hip-hop and be conversant with major figures in both discourses.

Learning Goals:

Students will:

- Learn how diverse poetry can be.
- Understand how poetry and popular/commercial culture intersect.
- Begin to find both pleasure and intellectual engagement in canonical and contemporary poetry and poetry-related forms.
- Interact with Baton Rouge-area teenagers, poets, and hip-hop artists, and become more familiar with the city they inhabit.

Required Texts

Vintage Book of African American Poetry

Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip-Hop (Adam Bradley)

Anthology of Rap (Adam Bradley)

Selected readings posted on course Moodle site

Service-Learning

This section of 2027 includes an optional service-learning component. Service-learning is defined as "a course-based, credit bearing educational experience in which students (1) participate in an organized service activity that meets identified community needs and (b) reflect on the service activity in such a way to gain further understanding of course content, a broader appreciation of the discipline, and an enhanced sense of civic responsibility" (Bringle & Hatcher, 1995).

You will work with Ms. Shelby Gamble and her 11th grade American Literature students at McKinley High School (just around the corner from LSU). Early in the semester, we will meet with Ms. Gamble and her students to identify their needs and interests; based on that information, we will work together to engage in a semester-long project that helps both the LSU and McKinley students connect their literary studies to contemporary poetic culture, and to deepen their understanding of the texts being discussed in each class. English 2027 students should expect to commit 10 hours to service learning activities outside of regular class time.

Ms. Gamble's email address is sgamble@ebschools.org. Please contact her ahead of time if you will not be able to make a scheduled class visit.

See this site for details about Service-Learning Student Trip Insurance:

<http://uiswcmsweb.prod.lsu.edu/ccell/Faculty%20Resources/CCELL%20Policies/item42068.html>

Assignments:

Class participation (10%). This includes full participation in all class discussion and activities.

Film response 1 (15%). Three-page written summary and discussion of a film selected from a list provided by Dr. Weinstein.

Film response 2 (15%). Three-page written summary and discussion of *The Black Power Mix Tape*.

Midterm Exam (30%). The midterm exam will require you to discuss three poems in detail, connecting them to material covered to this point in the semester through analysis of form, content, and context.

Service-learning project (30%). The service-learning component of this course requires at least 10 hours in the field. In order to receive credit for this course, you must sign in at site and fill in the attached field log form.

Reflective assignments for service-learning component. You will turn in a portfolio with a signed copy of your s-l contract, the following assessment pieces and a log sheet

signed by the McKinley teacher verifying the dates and times you worked at McKinley on the project. Sample reflections and expectations will be discussed in class.

1. Examination of the s-l site - Describe and evaluate the class in which you have been placed. Then, create enough questions for a twenty-minute interview with the classroom teacher and with a student in the class about their experiences, likes, and challenges in teaching/learning about literature. Write a summary of that experience including how this experience made you think about your service-learning project (750 word essay).
2. S-L Project Plan- Describe what your project will be and what you think the obstacles and benefits will be. Make an action plan which outlines the roles and responsibilities for each group member. Sample plans will be discussed in class.
3. Text selection - Select the texts/artists you will incorporate into your s-l project. Then, write a list of those titles with an explanation of why you chose them, how they helped you with your project, and what you thought about them.
4. Project Reflection - For this final assignment, reflect on what you have learned during this service-learning experience. Address the following questions—Has your idea of hip-hop, American literature, and how people engage with literature changed? Why or why not? What have you learned about what makes American literature, especially African American poetry, relevant to you and to other learners? What have you learned about using hip-hop as a teaching and learning tool? Describe and reflect on one particular experience during your SL project and how that experience helped you understand some aspect of this course’s content that might not have been possible without your placement.

DATE	TOPIC/ACTIVITY	ASSIGNMENT
T 8/27	Introductions	
Th 8/29	Defining Terms: Hip-hop & Poetry	
T 9/3	Reading lyrics as poetry	Bradley, “Rap Poetry 101,” pp. xi – xxiii
TH 9/5	<i>The MC</i> (video)	Bradley, “Rhythm,” pp3-47
T 9/10	West African/African American verbal and musical arts	“Tell My Story: Boast and Toast Traditions,” Brown
Th 9/12	African American Verbal play	Film Paper #1 due
T	African American Verbal play	“A Half-Dozen Definitions” and “A Trip Down Twelfth

9/17		Street," Wald
Th 9/19	Slave songs	"Slave Songs Preface" EXAMINATION OF S-L SITE DUE
T 9/24	Slave songs	"Slave Songs as American Poetry," Ramey
Th 9/26	The Blues	"African Slaves/American Slaves: Their Music," Jones
T 10/1	The Blues	"Introduction to Blues Legacies and Black Feminism," Davis S-L PROJECT PLAN DUE
Th 10/3	Harlem Renaissance (video)	"The New Negro," Locke
T 10/8	Harlem Renaissance poems	"The Negro Artist and the Racial Mountain," Baldwin
Th 10/10	Midterm Review	S-L TEXT SELECTION DUE
T 10/15	MIDTERM EXAM	
Th 10/17	Guest Poets	
T 10/22	1930s – '50s	"New Poets," Walker
TH 10/24	Civil Rights Movement – MLK speeches, spirituals, SNCC	"The Myth of a 'Negro' Literature," Jones/Baraka
T 10/29	Political influences on the arts – Malcolm X, MLK	Film paper #2 due
TH 10/31	Black Arts & Black Power	"The Black Arts Movement," Neal
T 11/5	Black Arts Poetry – Baraka, Giovanni, Knight, Sanchez, Last Poets, Gil Scott Heron	"The Black Arts Movement and its Critics," Smith
TH 11/7	FALL BREAK – NO CLASS	
T 11/12	Spoken word poetry	Weinstein – Aesthetic precursors to spoken word
TH 11/14	Spoken word poetry	
T 11/19	Hip-hop and gender/sexuality	
TH 11/21	Hip-hop and politics	
T 11/26	Hip-hop and class	
TH 11/28	THANKSGIVING – NO CLASS	
T	Global hip-hop	FINAL SERVICE LEARNING PORTFOLIO DUE,

12/3		INCLUDING REVISIONS OF PREVIOUSLY SUBMITTED COMPONENTS AND PROJECT REFLECTION
TH 12/5	Wrap up celebration with Service Learning partner, including guest poets! (Exact time/place TBA)	