

Visual Music: Hip-Hop Style

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Abstract

This unit pulls together Black Visual Cultural for the modern music classroom with elements of Visual music defined as a form of intermedia. By using artists that are mainstream and pairing them with contemporary content from Fredrick Douglass, Jaffa, Beyonce, Kanye West and even Michael Jackson. A discussion of authentic audience vs. authentic music- digital everything, album covers – like cassettes and vinyls – seem to be part of nostalgic music paraphernalia can be powerful social statements that deserve discussing.

Key Words

Beyonce, Visual Music, Authentic Audience, Authentic Music, Digital Music, Intermedia, Kanye West, Jaffa, Frederick Douglass, Jay Z, Project Based Learning, Whole Music

Unit Content

This unit is designed for students in the High School General Music classrooms in a diverse Philadelphia public school. This is for learners that have no prior experience to All City Music students. The class is 90min- 45min of lecture/lesson and 45min of Project Based Learning.

Problem Statement

As I enter my 15th year of teaching students from Boston to Lubbock to Philadelphia all different grades, different subjects within music and from a vast array of socioeconomic, language and learning Though it is just my fourth year at South Philadelphia High School I see a shift in music that it is one with visuals and those visuals can all mean different things to each person.

Diving into an introspective look at each of the artists in the unit plan and students as their own artist. We can look at the portraits of Douglas *Pictures and Progress* and *Love is the message, and the Message is Death* coupled with *4:44* gives us a view of the ‘White gaze’ and ‘Black gaze’ that Jafa writes and articulates in film.

When I read the course description of the Spring 2022 TIP course *Black Visual Culture*, I knew I wanted to use this course to explore Visual Art and Music and how that can transcend an artist. Being able to dive deep into new text and a variety of types of media through different time periods is helping me pull together the idea of a *Whole Music Artist*. The blend of new media that the students are familiar with mixed with the old type of media (that their new technology is trying to imitate) and show them the more bare bones of the artist and how they flower. This class provides the environment for me to explore these different *Gazes* with new found knowledge and a new perspective.

Rational

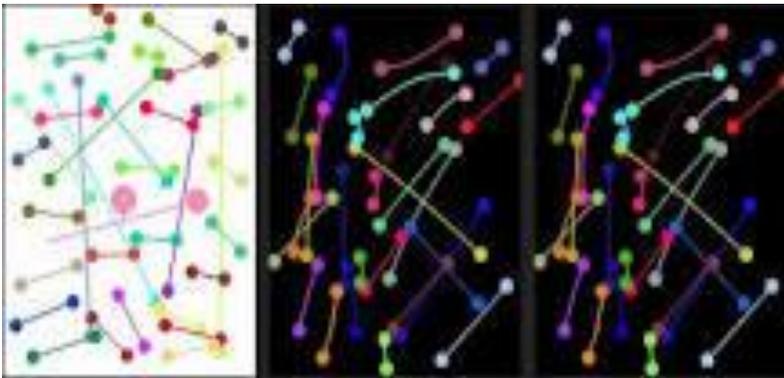
Visual music has also been defined as a form of intermedia. Visual music also refers to systems which convert music or sound directly into visual forms, such as film, video, computer graphics, installations or performances by means of a mechanical instrument, an artist's interpretation, or a computer.

Composing and representing music visually has traditionally been through music notation. Using a 5 lined “staff” or “stave” as a framework, black circles with lines are drawn to represent pitch and length of notes with other markings such as “slur” or “staccato” to represent phrasing and articulation.

It's the physical embodiment of your music. Design, photography, fashion, video—these are vehicles to express yourself on an additional plane, amplifying what you have to say and making it travel further and resonate more powerfully with your audience. Now, more than ever, musicians need a visual identity.

Whether you like it or hate it, the visual presentation is an incredibly powerful tool for making sense of your music. If you do everything right, honing your performance,

honing and style, then from a random band performing on Tuesdays at a local bar, you can turn into festival headliners.



Musical and Visual Art definitions are not finite. The definitions can be subjected to change along with the cultural representation of the time. Students have trouble understanding how BIG Mozart, Elvis or MJ were in the times that they were hit stars. We can look at the visual culture at the time and that gives us a window into how the artist was received during their time and that is something that students struggle to identify with.

Unit Outline

1. *Before Tidal, before Blue Ivy, before Yeezus, there was Roc-A-Fella Records*
 - a. Jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy Netflix docuseries
 - b. Watch: The College Dropout- Through the Wire
 - c. Discussion of lyrics and visuals- Quick thought, Deep thought, Visual thought :
 - d. *“Mr. H to the Izzo”*
“Somebody from the Chi that was ill”
*“I still won't grow up, I'm a grown a** kid”*
“Thought I was burnt up like Pepsi did Michael”
“I look like Tom Cruise on Vanilla Sky”
“Unbreakable- Called me Mr. Glass”
 - e. Chaka Khan's “Through The Fire”
 - i. *“Through the fire, to the limit, to the wall / For a chance to be with you, I'd gladly risk it all / Through the fire, through whatever come what may / For a chance at loving you, I'd take it all away / Right down to the wire, even through the fire.”*
 - ii. from "to the wire" to "through the wire"— described the way he was literally forced to talk following his surgery and also gave him the perfect metaphor to describe his own struggles: *“But I'm a champion, so I turned tragedy to triumph / Make music that's fire, spit my soul through the wire.”*
 - f. What is Kanye West's calling card? Is it his sample-heavy production techniques? The eclectic pop-cultural references in his rhymes? His emotional vulnerability? His outlandish fashion sense? His oversized ego?
 - g. The Wrap Up- Song thoughts and Introspection
2. “4:44”

- a. The title track to Jay-Z's album 4:44 where he seems to admit his disloyalty: "I apologize/Often wolmanized/Took for my child to be born to see through a woman's eyes." as a response to Beryonce's- Lemonade.
- b. Watch 4:44
- c. Why 4:44 as the name? Do you think of the visuals when listening to the song? What gaze do you see this video through?

3. *My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy*

- a. Art Cover Controversy
- b. Marketing campaign West dubbed "the G.O.O.D Friday," released free albums every week- thoughts?
- c. The five different album covers, all designed by George Condo:
"Yoooo they banned my album cover!!!! Banned in the USA!!! They don't want me chilling on the couch with my Phoenix!"
- d. Just a month before the album's release, he released his video 'The Runaway,' which included a beautiful color palette, views of ballerinas in black tutus... camera hovering over their heads, and Kanye West standing at the piano, styled in a white blazer.
- e. Short Film/Video?
 - i. Watch the whole 20 min film
 - ii. Compare: Thriller (watched in MJ unit), 4:44 and My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy as a concept album or digital album

4. *Photo Line up*

- a. How artist change throughout the years in photos-
 - a. Portraits of Douglass-
 - b. Prince, MJ, Kanye, Billie Holiday and Beyonce
- b. Assignment- Find an artist and find photos that represent the artist during their career- 4 photo minimum
- c. Authentic audience vs. authentic music

● **Prior Knowledge:**

- Beyonce- *Lemonade*
- Kanye West- *Jeen-yuhs* (netflix)
- Michael Jackson- *Thriller*
- Song Exploder- *Ty Dolla \$ign* (netflix)

- Douglas- *Pictures and Progress*
- Jafa- *Love is the message, and the Message is Death*
- concrete knowledge of the videos and songs of the artist that they picked for PBL
- **Project Based Learning:**
 - Student Long Term Project- time is allotted to students throughout the unit to follow the timeline for completion.
- **Redo a songs with a story video narrative:**
 - If you look at music videos simply, they represent short films in which imagery and a song are incorporated into a message so that it appeals to your audience artistically. promote an artist and their song, which usually results in increased sales.

In the world of digital everything, album covers – like cassettes and vinyls – seem to be part of nostalgic music paraphernalia, powerful social statements that deserve discussion.

Teaching Strategies and Classroom Activities

Before Tidal, before Blue Ivy, before Yeezus, there was Roc-A-Fella Records

The New York City rap powerhouse, founded by Shawn 'Jay-Z,' Kareem 'Biggs,' Burke, and Damon 'Dame,' Dash, ascended to dominate post-Bad Boy East Coast rap, propelled not only by its celebrity founder but also by a cutting-edge production staff, a roster of street level emcees, and rap's greatest A&Rs. Even more amazing, they achieved it at one of rap's most competitive periods: Ruff Ryders and Murder Inc. were both on the rise, but no one could match The Roc in terms of quality music, commercial success, and street cred track for track.

Personal conflicts between Jay-Z and his associates eventually brought the company down, but their vision of a self-owned rap empire built by hustling remains one of hip-ultimate hop's creation myths, inspiring a generation of rap moguls to dream of dead presidents. More crucially, while purists of the era were quick to point fingers at what

they saw as commercial compromise, the label's albums and songs have outlasted most – whether backpaker-approved or MTV-ready.

Jeen-yuhs: A Kanye Trilogy Netflix docuseries

That's a rather good average for a big project: *Jeen-yuhs* covers more than four hours and is separated into 90-minute chunks by old pals who have been following the erratic rap sensation with a camera for more than two decades.

The first two episodes focus on Kanye's struggle to persuade the rap world that he was more than just a skilled producer from the late 1990s to the mid 2000s. Despite what it may appear now, rap labels and executives weren't convinced that this skinny kid who had created compelling beats for Jay-Z, Jermaine Dupri, and Foxy Brown could really sell records on his own as a rapper – especially after Kanye was involved in a car accident that raised serious doubts about his ability to spit rhymes again.



The last portion spans the years 2000 to 2020, when Kanye's buddies, filmmakers Clarence "Coodie" Simmons and Chike Ozah, grew apart from him and were no longer able to provide the fly-on-the-wall perspective that made the first two parts so valuable. The most valuable moments here are when Simmons lets the camera follow Kanye as he hops from topic to issue as if his mind is running faster than his voice can keep up.

You can't help but wonder why Kanye's label doesn't understand how massive this record is going to be as he plays an early version of *Through the Wire* for super-producer Pharrell Williams, who freaks out when he hears it. Kanye eventually spends \$30,000 of his own money on the song's video, the video's popularity persuades Roc-A-Fella to finally step up and fund production for his debut album.

Watch: The College Dropout- Through the Wire

"*Through The Wire*" key elements:

- use of classic soul samples (in this case a pitched-up version of Chaka Khan, who called the effect "Chaka on helium")
- respecting a nostalgia for dusty old records and transforming them into something fresh and new



- Creative and original wordplay, as in turning a story about not being able to eat solid foods into a hilarious rhyme of "Ensure," "dessert," and "sizzurp" (syrup)
- pop-cultural and historical references, ranging from MTV reality shows to M. Night Shyamalan movies to Dickens novels to old commercials for Pepsi and Toys R Us.
- A certain emotional vulnerability, moments when Kanye's reflects on his focus on money or done too much "stupid s---" in his life
- Ample ego, describing himself in the third person while declaring that his raps are "ill", that he's "really putting it down," that he's making "music that's fire" ("Kanye West - through the Wire")

Discussion of lyrics and visuals- Quick thought, Deep thought, Visual thought

"Mr. H to the Izzo"

Quick Thought

"H to the Izzo" was half of the iconic chorus (along with "V to the Izzay") of Jay-Z's 2001 hit "H.O.V.A.," the Kanye-produced song that marked West's emergence as a major hip-hop producer; at the time West recorded "Through the Wire," being "Mr. H to the Izzo" was still his biggest claim to fame.

Deep Thought

"H.O.V.A." isn't actually an acronym; it's simply short for Jehovah—Jay Z's typically modest nickname for himself, derived from his self-proclaimed status as "the God of rap."

Visual Thought

Diamond sign? How does the audience react to the lyrics during concerts?

"Somebody from the Chi that was ill"

Quick Thought

= Kanye, of course.

Deep Thought

The size of Kanye West's ego has taken on nearly legendary status; the word arrogant almost always appears in descriptions of him. Whether or not that's entirely fair, Kanye's penchant for speaking of himself in the third person and lavishing praise on his own talents and this lyric certainly feeds the fire.

Visual Thought

Where is Chicago and what does it sound like? Is there found sound or visuals that Kanye uses?

*"I still won't grow up, I'm a grown a** kid"*

Quick Thought

Here Kanye borrows the melody from a long-running Toys R Us TV ad from the 1980s and '90s.

Deep Thought

Original lyrics:

I don't wanna grow up; I'm a Toys R Us kid; There's a million toys at Toys R Us that I can play with; More bikes, more trains, more video games; It's the biggest toy store there is; I don't wanna grow up; Because if I did; Then I wouldn't be a Toys R Us kid

Visual Thought

What gaze or lens are you viewing his lyrics through? Are there visual representations within the song that help your claim?

"Thought I was burnt up like Pepsi did Michael"

Quick Thought

In 1984, Michael Jackson received second-degree burns over much of his head after his hair caught on fire while he was filming a commercial for Pepsi.

Deep Thought

Something went horribly awry during the filming for Pepsi's ad starring Michael Jackson. While Jackson sang his hit "*Billie Jean*," a shower of sparks from the pyrotechnic show taking place behind him somehow lit his hair on fire. Jackson sued and Pepsi settled out of court; the pop star later did appear in a more successful (and less fiery) Pepsi ad in 1988.

Visual Thought

After Jackson's death in 2009 they released never-before-seen video footage of the burning incident.

"I look like Tom Cruise on Vanilla Sky"

Quick Thought

Vanilla Sky was a 2001 sci-fi psychological thriller directed by Cameron Crowe; the movie begins with Tom Cruise's character surviving (maybe?) a gruesome automobile accident that leaves his face a mangled mess.

Deep Thought

Following his accident, Cruise's character is never sure whether he is alive or dead, whether his experiences are reality, a dream, or a nightmare.

Visual Thought

That lyric really sparks in the video, Jamie Foxx goes nuts.

“Unbreakable- Called me Mr. Glass”

Quick Thought

Unbreakable is a movie filmed in Philadelphia in 2000 directed by M. Night Shyamalan. In Unbreakable, Mr. Glass is the cruel nickname given to the character played by Samuel L. Jackson, who has a rare disease that causes his bones to break incredibly easily.

Deep Thought

In Unbreakable, the lead character played by Bruce Willis discovers that he has superpowers after he survives a devastating train wreck without suffering a scratch. Kanye West's accident caused his jaw to break in three places; was he really more like Bruce Willis' "unbreakable" character or Sam Jackson's Mr. Glass?

Visual Thought

In the video he shows his broken jaw- in a raw since at the doctors to his x-rays.

The Wrap Up- Song Thoughts and Introspection

- What is Kanye West's calling card?
- Is it his sample-heavy production techniques?
- The eclectic pop-cultural references in his rhymes?
- His emotional vulnerability?
- His outlandish fashion sense?
- His oversized ego?
- *"smarta-- narcissism?"*

Kanye West is a genius, and he wants you to know it as well. He's the class smartie, an irritating know-it-all, but he's also the class clown. Because he's entertaining, he typically gets away with it. And he's well aware of it. Except that he generally provides us plenty of reasons to justify his own enormous self-image, his ego is absurd, and his self-absorption legendary. This is a guy who quotes his own lyrics and then compares himself, in all seriousness, to Gandhi.

“Everything I'm not made me everything I am” Kanye says in an interview:

“In my humble opinion, that's a prophetic statement I made. Gandhi would have said something like that” Picture somebody going up to Gandhi saying, ‘*This is bad about me, blah, blah, blah*’ And Gandhi would say ‘*Everything you're not made you everything you are. Leave, my son.*’” What kind of person compares his rap lyrics to the wisdom of Gandhi? How arrogant can a person be? But then, you do have to admit that that lyric

actually is pretty good. Think about it for a second. Maybe Gandhi actually would have said something like that.

Kanye easys thematic jumps from the tragedy of Emmett Till to Michael Jackson's fiery mishap in a Pepsi commercial to the plot of a relatively obscure M. Night Shyamalan film. There's the utter lack of humility, the unapologetic declaration that *"this right here is history in the making, man."* He is seemling casting his recovery from a simple car wreck as some kind of heroic triumph of good over evil: *"I'll gladly risk it all right now / It's a life or death situation man" "I'm a champion, so I turned tragedy to triumph / Make music that's fire, spit my soul through the wire."*

Okay, it's actually pretty cool for someone to drop a killer vocal track despite having his broken jaw surgically wired shut.

"4:44"

Jay-Z explained the origins of 4:44's title

"I woke up, literally, at 4:44 in the morning, 4:44 a.m., to write this song, So it became the title of the album and everything. It's the title track because it's such a powerful song, and I just believe it's one of the best songs I've ever written." ("JAY-Z - 4:44")

A small boy singing along to Nina Simone's "Feeling Good," couples arguing in the street via Worldstar film, and Al Green singing the love song "Judy," among other bits of found footage, are all included in the video. ("Jay-Z's 4:44 Lyrics: All about Beyoncé, Blue Ivy, Cheating...And Becky")

Two dancing moments frame the footage, which continue throughout the 8-minute video. Customary acrobatics are minimized in favor of more gentle and seductive gestures. The

second scene features Beyoncé and Jay on stage, dancing and smiling but rarely looking at one other. In both dance stories, neither dancer touches the other.

What is the story about?

Love Lost?

Love Found?

Ture Love?

or is it about Love
at all?

My Beautiful Dark

Twisted Fantasy

(MBDTF)- Art

Cover Controversy



Kanye started the

hype for MBDTF with a cleverly crafted marketing campaign he called "*the G.O.O.D Friday*" (this was 2010- think where he is today with God). He released free albums every week and this earned its place in memorable musical moments, before Tik-Tok- Kanye knew bite sized information was a new way people perceive music.

MBDTF has five different album covers, all designed by George Condo, an American modern artist. Condo's characteristic style resembles Pablo Picasso's work and the cubist movement, including characters with bulging eyes and hideous jaws.(Kois)

Condo said in 2010 that "*Kanye West's music was 'new to him' and that he preferred 'old school rap,'*" but the two artists eventually collaborated.

Head with a Sword

Kanye's decapitated head is placed on its side wearing a gold crown, a sword plunged into his face, and lovely blue and white clouds in the background in the head with the sword artwork

Ballerina

features a turquoise green background and a white ballerina in a black tutu clutching what appears to be a wine



glass, similar to the ballerinas in the Runaway music video

Kanye West and the Sphinx Naked

a large red border framing the artist, who is holding a green bottle of beer while the naked sphinx mounts him on a blue couch wearing thigh-high mustard boots. "She's a kind of fragment, between a sphinx, a phoenix, a haunting ghost, a harpy," Condo says

Priest

predominantly black, grey, and brown for West's face

A Cubist style photo of Kanye

The graphic cover sparked a commotion and was even prohibited by some sites, prompting West to respond in a now-deleted tweet: "Yoooo they banned my album cover!!!! Banned in the USA!!! They don't want me chilling on the couch with my Phoenix!" (Dazed)

Finally, the album covers were regarded as "atypical," and the main album art on Apple Music was blurred.

"The superimposition of people's perceptions on a cartoon is frightening," Condo famously commented

when asked about the banning of the artwork. "What is going on in their heads should be prohibited. 'Not the artwork.'" ("Kanye West - Runaway (Full-Length Film)")



Compare: Thriller, 4:44 and My Beautiful Dark Twisted Fantasy as a concept album or digital album.

Photo line up- How artist change throughout the years in photos-



Authentic audience vs. authentic music.
 In the world of digital everything, album covers – like cassettes – are part of nostalgic music paraphernalia. And yet, they can be part of the state that deserve discussing.

- **Project Based Learning:**
 - Student Long Term Project- time is allotted to students throughout the unit to follow the timeline for completion.
- **Redo a songs with a story video narrative:**
 - If you look at music videos simply, they represent short films in which imagery and a song are incorporated into a message so that it appeals to

your audience artistically. promote an artist and their song, which usually results in increased sales.

- Take a moment to visualize the concept you want in your music video. When you're designing the music video, take a step back to visualize what that video will look like.
- What is your message? Is it the same concept that the original video or does it tell a story? What are you promoting? What is your visual influence?
 - Make arrangements for your video release well ahead of time.
 - Plan your budget You need to secure your team
 - You need to practice
 - A wardrobe style that flatters everyone
 - Your props will be secured when you do this
 - Your locations should be secure
 - 1:00 min minimum 5:00 min maximum
 - Use your choice of media production (Imovie, TikTok ect.)
- What is the story that you are going to tell in your music video? Does it flow?
- We will present these to the class then the student body for supplemental visuals to the Spring Concert.

Resources

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Appendix

Music Theory Composition/Creating MU:Cr1.1.C- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and work. Enduring Understanding: The creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence musicians’ work emerge from a variety of sources.

Essential Question: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

MU:Cr1.1.C.HSI- Describe how sounds and short musical ideas can be used to represent personal experiences, moods, visual images, and/or storylines. Music Theory Composition/Creating MU:Cr2.1.C- Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Enduring Understanding: Musicians’ creative choices are influenced by their expertise, context, and expressive intent.

Essential Question: How do musicians make creative decisions?

MU:Cr2.1.C.HSI- a. Assemble and organize sounds or short musical ideas to create initial expressions of selected experiences, moods, images, or storylines. b. Identify and describe the development of sounds or short musical ideas in drafts of music within simple forms (such as one-part, cyclical, or binary). Music Theory Composition/Creating- MU:Cr3.1.C Refine and complete artistic work. Enduring

Understanding: Musicians evaluate and refine their work through openness to new ideas, persistence, and the application of appropriate criteria.

Essential Question: How do musicians improve the quality of their creative work?

MU:Cr3.1.C.HSI- Identify, describe, and apply teacher-provided criteria to assess and refine the technical and expressive aspects of evolving drafts leading to final versions. Music Theory Composition/Creating-MU:Cr3.2.C- Refine and complete artistic work. Enduring Understanding: Musicians' presentation of creative work is the culmination of a process of creation and communication.

Essential Question: When is creative work ready to share?

MU:Cr3.2.C.HS1- Share music through the use of notation, performance, or technology, and demonstrate how the elements of music have been employed to realize expressive intent. Music Technology/Creating MU:Cr1.1.T- Generate and conceptualize artistic ideas and works. Enduring Understanding: The creative ideas, concepts, and feelings that influence musicians' work emerge from a variety of sources.

Essential Question: How do musicians generate creative ideas?

MU:Cr1.1.T.HSI- Generate melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas for compositions or improvisations using digital tools. Music Technology/Creating- MU:Cr2.1.T Anchor Standard: Organize and develop artistic ideas and work. Enduring Understanding: Musicians' creative choices are influenced by their expertise, context, and expressive intent.

Essential Question: How do musicians make creative decisions?

MU:Cr2.1.T.HSI- Select melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic ideas to develop into a larger work using digital tools and resources. Music Technology/Creating- MU:Cr3.1.T- Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work. Enduring Understanding: Musicians evaluate and refine their work through openness to new ideas, persistence, and the application of appropriate criteria.

Essential Question: How do musicians improve the quality of their creative work?

MU:Cr3.1.T.HSI- Drawing on feedback from teachers and peers, develop and implement strategies to improve and refine the technical and expressive aspects of draft compositions and improvisations. Music Technology/Creating- MU:Cr3.2.T Anchor Standard: Refine and complete artistic work. Enduring Understanding: Musicians' presentation of creative work is the culmination of a process of creation and communication. MU:Cr3.2.T.HSI- Share compositions or improvisations that

demonstrate a proficient level of musical and technological craftsmanship as well as the use of digital tools and resources in developing and organizing musical ideas.

Essential Question: When is creative work ready to share?