RAP IT UP!

CLASSROOM COMPANION

Hip Hop as literacy, voice, craft, culture and cross-curricular learning

Carole Boston Weatherford + Jeffery Boston Weatherford
Illustrated by Ernel Martinez



A flexible teacher guide for read-alouds, writing workshops and interdisciplinary units

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BOOK INFO

About RAP IT UP!

A picture book that turns the craft of rap into a joyful writing lesson.

THE BOOK

Written by Carole Boston Weatherford and Jeffery Boston Weatherford

Illustrated by Ernel Martinez

Henry Holt and Co. (BYR)
Published March 18, 2025
32 pages | Publisher age range: 4–8

Winner: 2026 NCTE Notable Poetry Book

WHAT READERS PRACTICE

Word choice • rhyme • figurative language • rhythm • structure • revision • performance • self-expression

WHY IT WORKS IN SCHOOL

The book makes the writing process visible. Students move from ideas on the page to language choices, sound, revision and performance...all inside a form many already recognize as culturally alive.

Book facts verified through Macmillan and NCTE.

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TEACHER NOTE

A Note to Educators, Librarians and Teaching Artists

Use this deck before, during or after reading RAP IT UP! Choose only the slides that fit your students and your time. Activities can be used with a live beat, a metronome, body percussion or no beat at all.

The goal is not to turn every student into a rapper. The goal is to use rap as a doorway into language, rhythm, research, identity, speaking and revision.

Keep participation invitational. Students may write about imagined characters, school topics or community observations instead of private experiences. Performance can be live, paired, recorded or read from the page.

TEACHER MOVE

Model the risk you ask students to take. Draft one awkward bar in front of them and revise it out loud.

3 PATHS

How to Use This Deck

Pick a lane...or build your own remix.

20–30 MINUTES

Read aloud + vocabulary + one writing prompt + share-out.

ONE WEEK

Read, analyze craft, draft verses, revise, perform and reflect.

2–3 WEEK UNIT

Connect rap to ELA, math, science, social studies, art and media literacy.

All three pathways can end with the same question: What did you learn because you had to make the idea rhyme, move or perform?

OBJECTIVES

Learning Goals

CRAFT

Identify and use rhyme, imagery, figurative language, repetition and sound devices.

WRITING

Generate ideas, draft, revise and strengthen original writing.

RHYTHM

Notice how syllables, stress and pacing shape meaning and flow.

VOICE

Use language to express perspective, identity, curiosity and imagination.

CONNECTION

Apply rap techniques to content in other subjects.

PRESENTATION

Build speaking confidence through rehearsal, delivery and reflection.

WHY HIP HOP?

Why Hip Hop Belongs in the Classroom

Not as decoration...as a working literacy system.

LANGUAGE

Rhyme, diction, syntax, figurative language and vocabulary become audible.

REVISION

Students can hear when a line is too crowded, weak or unclear.

MEMORY

Rhythm and repetition create powerful retrieval cues.

VOICE

Students practice saying something that sounds like them, not a worksheet.

COLLABORATION

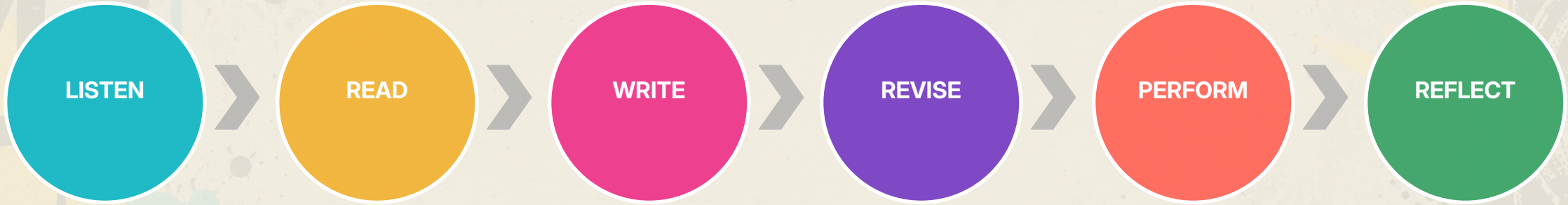
Cyphers and peer feedback make writing social without making it sloppy.

TRANSFER

The same craft can explain history, science, math, literature and lived experience.

BIG IDEA

Hip Hop Is a Literacy Lab



THE TEACHING MOVE

Do not stop at “write a rap.” Make the process explicit. Students should collect language, test sound, revise for clarity, rehearse delivery and explain the choices they made. That turns a fun activity into durable learning.

SET THE STAGE

BEFORE YOU READ

RAP IT UP! Classroom Companion

BEFORE READING

Infer from the Title

Treat the title as the first piece of evidence.

RAP IT UP!

Prediction is not about being right. It gives students a reason to notice what the book confirms, complicates or surprises.

ASK STUDENTS

- What do you expect a book called RAP IT UP! to teach or celebrate?
- What does “rap” mean in this title…music, speaking, writing, storytelling, performance, or all of them?
- What would you expect to see in the illustrations?
- What might “up” suggest…finish it, level it up, wrap it up, turn it up?

CONTEXT

What Is Rap? What Is Hip Hop?

RAP / MCING

A form of rhythmic verbal expression that uses rhyme, rhythm, language, voice and performance. Rap can tell stories, boast, teach, joke, protest, reflect or imagine.

Important: “rap” is not historically an acronym for “rhythm and poetry.” That phrase can be a teaching memory trick, but it should not be taught as the word’s origin.

HIP HOP

A larger culture that grew from Black and Latino communities in the Bronx and includes interconnected practices such as MCing, DJing, breaking and graffiti art…along with fashion, language, knowledge, community and entrepreneurship.

Teach the culture as living, evolving and global…not as a frozen list of “four pillars.”

COMPANION BOOK

The Roots of Rap: Hip-Hop Has a History

MEET THE BOOK

THE ROOTS OF RAP
16 Bars on the 4 Pillars of Hip-Hop

By Carole Boston Weatherford
Illustrated by Frank Morrison

little bee books, 2019

Use this alongside RAP IT UP! to explore where hip-hop comes from.

CULTURAL ROOTS

Students trace influences including folktales, spirituals, poetry, jazz, soul and funk.

The book introduces DJing, MCing, breaking and graffiti as interconnected practices, and explores hip-hop's origins in the Bronx and its global reach.

TEACHER PROMPT
What traditions helped shape the music and culture we recognize today?

PAIRED READING

Two Books, One Hip-Hop Literacy Lab

THE ROOTS OF RAP

FOCUS: HISTORY + CULTURE

Read selected pages to identify influences that predate recorded hip-hop.

Ask: Which people, traditions and places helped develop hip-hop?

Students create a visual timeline with evidence from the book.

RAP IT UP!

FOCUS: WRITING + CRAFT

Study rhyme, rhythm, word choice and revision in RAP IT UP!

Ask: How does knowing hip-hop history change the way we approach our own lyrics?

EXIT TICKET
Name one historical root and one craft technique. Use both to draft four original lines.

HISTORY LAB 1

Before Hip-Hop: Trace the Roots

EARLIER TRADITIONS

Folktales and oral storytelling: stories, rhythms, and community knowledge passed through speech.

Spirituals, blues, jazz, soul, and funk: musical traditions that helped shape later hip-hop.

Poetry and spoken word: patterned language, voice, and social commentary.

RESEARCH THE CONNECTION

Explore Langston Hughes and James Brown as figures named in discussions of the book.

INVESTIGATE: What does each tradition or artist contribute to rhythm, storytelling, or performance?

EVIDENCE: Find one credible source; record what it actually says.

Avoid claiming one person invented all of hip-hop.

HISTORY LAB 2

The Bronx, 1973: A Community Creates

PLACE + DATE

August 11, 1973
1520 Sedgwick Avenue, Bronx, New York

Cindy Campbell organized a back-to-school party; her brother DJ Kool Herc played records. The event became a celebrated milestone in hip-hop history.

Hip-hop also grew through the contributions of many Black, Latino, Jamaican, and other Caribbean communities.

INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE

WHO: Cindy Campbell and DJ Kool Herc
WHERE: The Bronx
WHEN: August 11, 1973

RESEARCH: Why did communities organize parties and develop new creative forms?

DISCUSS: What is the difference between a landmark event and saying a culture began in just one moment?

HISTORY LAB 3

Four Elements, Many Voices

THE FOUR PILLARS

DJing: selecting, mixing, and reshaping recorded sound.

MCing: rhythmic speech, storytelling, and engaging the crowd.

Breaking: expressive, competitive dance with its own techniques and community.

Graffiti writing: visual identity, lettering, and public art.

LOOK FOR EVIDENCE

In The Roots of Rap, look for visual or textual evidence of each element.

Make a chart: ELEMENT / WHAT IT DOES / EVIDENCE FROM THE BOOK.

CRITICAL QUESTION: What else belongs to hip-hop culture beyond the familiar four-pillars framework?

Use “four pillars” as a useful lens, not a complete history.

HISTORY LAB 4

People Who Shaped the Story

FIGURES TO INVESTIGATE

Langston Hughes: poet whose work models musical language and Black cultural expression.

James Brown: funk pioneer whose recordings became important to breakbeat culture.

DJ Kool Herc: early Bronx DJ associated with extending percussive breaks.

EXPAND THE TIMELINE

Cindy Campbell: organizer of the 1973 back-to-school party.

Grandmaster Flash: DJ known for developing turntable techniques.

Queen Latifah: MC and artist represented in the book’s portraits.

RESEARCH: What did each person actually do? Cite one source, and distinguish an achievement from a legend.

HISTORY LAB 5

Student Research: Prove the Connection

INVESTIGATION TASK

Choose ONE: a person, place, musical tradition, or hip-hop element.

1. Write a research question.
2. Use the book plus one reliable external source.
3. Record two confirmed facts, with source names.
4. Locate one illustration or passage that connects to the facts.
5. Write 4 original lines teaching what you found.

RESEARCH WORKSHEET

TOPIC / QUESTION: _____

FACT 1 + SOURCE: _____
FACT 2 + SOURCE: _____

BOOK EVIDENCE: _____
MY INTERPRETATION: _____

EXIT TICKET: What can a picture book teach about history, and what still needs verification?

VOCAB

Words to Know and Play With

Beat

The pulse or rhythmic foundation.

Bar

A unit of musical time; in rap, often one line or measure.

Flow

How words move across the beat.

Cadence

The pattern of stress, timing and delivery.

Hook

A repeated, memorable section.

Verse

A section that develops ideas or story.

Rhyme

Matching or echoing sounds.

Imagery

Language that helps us see, hear, taste, touch or feel.

Metaphor

A comparison that says one thing is another.

Hyperbole

Intentional exaggeration for effect.

Alliteration

Repeated beginning consonant sounds.

Onomatopoeia

Words that imitate sound.

LISTEN LIKE A WRITER

WHILE YOU READ

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DURING READING

Listen Like a Writer

- Circle or call out a word that sounds especially strong.
- Listen for places where sound helps the meaning.
- Notice when the narrator teaches a craft move instead of only telling a story.
- Track the movement from idea…to draft…to revision…to performance.
- Watch how the illustrations make language feel physical, loud or kinetic.
- Ask: What would change if this line were simply spoken instead of performed?

> Teacher move: pause only when the pause earns something. Protect the rhythm of the read-aloud.

DISCUSS

Voice + Identity

NOTICE

What does the narrator tell us about who they are...directly and indirectly?

Which details make the voice feel specific rather than generic?

CONNECT

What topics would make your own voice sound most natural?

What words or phrases belong to your family, neighborhood, hobbies or generation?

CREATE

Write two lines that could only come from your point of view. No rhyming required yet. Specificity first...rhyme second.

DISCUSS

Word Choice: Strong Words Do More Work

ASK

- Which verbs create motion?
- Which nouns create a clear picture?
- Where does the book choose a surprising word instead of an obvious one?
- Which words feel good in the mouth when read aloud?

QUICK REVISION TEST

Start with a flat line:

“I walked into school and felt nervous.”

Now swap in stronger details:

“I slid through first period, backpack tight to my chest.”

Ask what changed…not just what rhymed.

DISCUSS

Rhyme + Sound

Rhyme is one tool...not the whole toolbox.

END RHYME

Words rhyme at line endings.

INTERNAL RHYME

Rhyming sounds land inside the line.

SLANT RHYME

Sounds are close, not identical.

ALLITERATION

Beginning sounds repeat.

ASSONANCE

Vowel sounds echo.

REPETITION

Words or phrases return for rhythm or emphasis.

Challenge: Find a place where sound supports meaning. Explain the effect instead of only naming the device.

DISCUSS

Figurative Language: Make the Idea Bigger Than the Sentence

SIMILE

Compare using like/as.
Example: My thoughts race like sneakers on concrete.

METAPHOR

Say one thing is another.
Example: My notebook is a launchpad.

HYPERBOLE

Exaggerate on purpose.
Example: I revised that line a million times.

ONOMATOPOEIA

Let the word imitate sound.
Example: Boom. Click. Scratch.

OXYMORON

Pair seeming opposites.
Example: A loud silence filled the room.

IMAGERY

Write for the senses.
Example: Marker fumes, bass hum, chalk dust.

DISCUSS

Revision: Creativity Is a Practice

FIRST DRAFT → BETTER CHOICES → OWN YOUR VOICE

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. Is the idea clear?
2. Is there a stronger verb or more specific image?
3. Did rhyme force me into a weaker sentence?
4. Where does the rhythm drag or rush?
5. What line deserves to be cut, moved or rewritten?
6. What do I want the listener to remember?

A rhyme that weakens meaning is not a win. Teach students to protect the idea first.

TURN READING INTO MAKING

AFTER YOU READ

RAP IT UP! Classroom Companion

TEXT TO SELF

What Do You Have to Say?

PROMPT

Choose something you know, notice, wonder about or care about. Write four honest lines before you worry about rhyme.

I notice...

I remember...

I wish...

I know...

I wonder...

Around here...

Nobody tells you...

One thing about me...

Build a Rhyme Bank

1. PICK A WORD

Choose a word tied to your topic.

Example: light

2. BUILD FAMILIES

Exact: night, bright, sight

Slant: life, rise, time

Phrase rhyme: “write tonight”

3. WRITE FOR MEANING

Use the bank as options, not handcuffs.

Write the idea first...then choose the rhyme that keeps the idea strong.

ELA LAB 2

Metaphor Mixtape

TOPIC **SCHOOL** → **COMPARE IT TO...** **A MAZE**

NOW PUSH IT

School is a maze.
Hallways are the turns.
The bell is a timer.
Friends leave clues.
Tests feel like locked doors.

Which details extend the metaphor? Which become forced?

Extension: Ask students to build a six-line extended metaphor for a science, history or math concept.

ELA LAB 3

Vocabulary Remix

Turn content words into usable language...not memorized wallpaper.

SCIENCE

evaporation
condensation
precipitation

MATH

numerator
denominator
equivalent

SOCIAL STUDIES

migration
primary source
civic action

ELA

theme
point of view
figurative language

THE RULE

A vocabulary rap only counts if the words are used accurately. Rhythm cannot rescue a wrong definition.

SAME CRAFT...NEW CONTENT

HIP HOP ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

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MATH

Count the Beat

CONCEPTS

- 4/4 time
- Equal subdivisions
- Fractions of a measure
- Repeating patterns
- Tempo / rate
- Counting syllables
- Data from class performances

TRY THIS

Clap four steady beats. Speak one vocabulary word on each beat. Then divide a beat into two equal parts. What changes when students must fit more syllables into the same amount of time?

MATH QUESTION

A 16-bar verse is a common convention, not a law. Use it to explore multiplication, grouping and structure:

4 bars × 4 sections = 16 bars

Then ask: What other structures could we build?

SCIENCE

Sound You Can See

FREQUENCY

How fast a sound wave repeats.

AMPLITUDE

How large the vibration is.

PITCH

How high or low a sound seems.

VOLUME

How loud or soft we perceive sound.

MINI LAB

Record a clap, hum and spoken line in a classroom audio tool. Compare the waveforms. Which sound has the biggest peaks? Which appears more regular? How do distance from the microphone and speaking volume change what you see?

No recording software? Use rubber bands, tuning forks, cups or a phone’s built-in voice memo as observation tools.

SOCIAL STUDIES

Rap as a Voice from a Time and Place

SOURCE QUESTIONS

- Who is speaking?
- What community or event is being described?
- What details reveal perspective?
- What information can we verify elsewhere?
- What is emotion, opinion, memory or interpretation?
- Whose voice is missing?

CLASSROOM PROJECT

Choose a historical event or local history topic. Students research first, then write 8–12 bars from a clearly identified perspective. They must attach a source note showing which facts came from which source.

Creative writing stays creative...facts stay accountable.

VISUAL ARTS

Graffiti, Lettering + Visual Voice

The page can perform too.

LOOK

Analyze line, scale, color, contrast, repetition, layering, texture and typography in graffiti-inspired design.

MAKE

Turn one key word from a student’s verse into a legal classroom mural panel or paper “wall.”

DISCUSS

What changes when writing becomes public art? Who owns a wall? Who gets to decide what belongs in shared space?

SEL

Identity, Emotion + Belonging

PROMPT

Write about a feeling without naming the feeling. Use images, movement, sound and metaphor to let the listener infer it.

CHOICE

Students can fictionalize or choose a neutral topic.

BOUNDARIES

No student owes the class personal disclosure.

LISTENING

Respond to the writing before judging the life behind it.

BELONGING

Make room for dialect, home language and code-meshing as intentional choices.

SPEAKING

From Page to Mic

BREATH

Mark where you need air.

PACE

Slow down where meaning needs space.

ARTICULATION

Hit important consonants and key words.

EYE LINE

Look up at moments you want the audience to catch.

VOLUME

Project...do not shout.

REHEARSAL

Practice until delivery supports the writing.

Offer multiple performance modes: solo • duo • group • recorded audio • teacher read-aloud • silent gallery walk

MEDIA LITERACY

Sampling, Sources + Remix Ethics

SAMPLE

Study how artists can build something new from existing sounds, phrases or traditions.

CREDIT

Teach students to name sources, authors and inspirations. “I found it online” is not attribution.

CREATE SAFELY

For classroom recordings, favor teacher-made, student-made, public-domain or clearly licensed audio. Discuss copyright and fair use as questions...not assumptions.

COLLABORATION

The Classroom Cypher

A circle for ideas, feedback and courage.

ONE MIC / ONE VOICE

BUILD...DON'T BELITTLE

CRITIQUE THE LINE...NOT THE PERSON

PASS IS ALWAYS ALLOWED

APPLAUSE FOR RISK + REVISION

BORROW ENERGY...NOT SOMEONE ELSE'S WORDS

PROJECT MENU

Choose Your Classroom Remix

BOOK TALK BARS

Summarize a character or theme in 8 bars.

VOCAB VERSE

Teach five content words accurately.

HISTORY VOICE

Write from a researched historical perspective.

SCIENCE FLOW

Explain a process from cause to effect.

MATH HOOK

Create a memorable hook for a rule or pattern.

GRAFFITI PANEL

Design one word or phrase as visual language.

PODCAST CYPHER

Record discussion + short original verses.

COMMUNITY PORTRAIT

Interview, write and perform a local story with permission.

CAPSTONE

RAP IT UP! Studio Day

1. **CHOOSE**
   Pick a topic or content target.
2. **DRAFT**
   Write 8–16 bars.
3. **CRAFT**
   Use at least two intentional literary devices.
4. **REVISE**
   Strengthen meaning, rhythm and word choice.
5. **REHEARSE**
   Choose pacing, emphasis and breath.
6. **SHARE**
   Perform, record or gallery-walk.
7. **REFLECT**
   Explain one choice you changed and why.

NONNEGOTIABLE

Students should be able to explain what they learned beyond “it was fun.” Ask for a reflection that names a craft choice, a content idea and a revision decision.

ASSESSMENT

Simple 4-Point Rubric

CRITERIA	4	3	2	1
Meaning / Content	Clear, accurate, specific	Mostly clear / accurate	Some gaps or vagueness	Unclear or inaccurate
Craft / Language	Intentional devices + strong word choice	Effective choices in most lines	Some effective choices	Few intentional craft choices
Structure / Rhythm	Flow supports meaning	Mostly controlled	Uneven but understandable	Structure blocks meaning
Revision / Delivery	Evidence of revision + purposeful delivery	Some revision + preparation	Limited revision or rehearsal	Little evidence of revision

Assessment can score the writing, the content accuracy, the performance...or only the strand you are actually teaching.

1-WEEK UNIT

Five Days from Read-Aloud to Mic

DAY 1

READ + NOTICE

Read RAP IT UP! and collect craft moves.

DAY 2

PLAY WITH LANGUAGE

Rhyme bank, imagery and figurative language.

DAY 3

DRAFT

Choose a topic. Write 8–16 bars.

DAY 4

REVISE + REHEARSE

Peer feedback, stronger words, rhythm and delivery.

DAY 5

SHARE + REFLECT

Cypher, gallery walk or recording + reflection.

STANDARDS

Standards Connections

Use the anchor standards below and map them to your grade-level code.

CCRA.R.4

Interpret words and phrases, including figurative and technical meanings.

CCRA.W.3

Write narratives using effective technique, details and structure.

CCRA.W.5

Develop and strengthen writing through planning, revising, editing and rewriting.

CCRA.SL.4

Present information, findings and evidence clearly for an audience.

CCRA.L.3

Apply knowledge of language and style in different contexts.

CCRA.L.5

Understand figurative language, word relationships and nuance.

Also connects naturally to arts standards in creating, performing/presenting, responding and connecting. Teachers should align activities to local/state requirements and developmental level.

DISCUSSION

10 Questions to Keep the Conversation Moving

1. What makes a line memorable even before it rhymes?

2. When does rhyme strengthen meaning...when can it weaken it?

3. How does performance change the way we understand written words?

4. What is the difference between sounding confident and saying something meaningful?

5. How can a writer sound like themselves while still learning from artists they admire?

6. How can rap preserve a memory, history or community voice?

7. Which matters more: the beat, the words or the relationship between them?

8. How do visual art and typography change the mood of language?

9. What responsibilities come with writing about real people or events?

10. What did you revise because you heard your writing out loud?

EXTEND

Family + Community Connections

MUSIC MEMORY INTERVIEW

Ask a family member about a song that mattered to them and why.

LOCAL WORD WALL

Collect neighborhood words, place names and phrases...then research their stories.

MURAL WALK

Study legal public art. Photograph, sketch or describe composition and message.

FAMILY PLAYLIST ANALYSIS

Choose one school-appropriate song excerpt. Identify rhyme, imagery or storytelling moves.

COMMUNITY SHOWCASE

Invite families to a poetry/rap night where performance is optional and student choice leads.

AUTHOR / ARTIST CONNECTION

Invite a local MC, DJ, poet, muralist or producer to discuss craft and process.

EVERY STUDENT HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

Our job is to give them more tools for saying it clearly, powerfully and on purpose.

READ IT. WRITE IT. REVISE IT. RAP IT UP!

Sources + Design Notes

BOOK INFORMATION
Macmillan Publishers. RAP IT UP! Book page. Book details, creator credits, publication data, reviews and award listing.

AWARD
National Council of Teachers of English. Notable Children's Poetry Books and Verse Novels list.

STANDARDS
Common Core State Standards. College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening, and Language.

STYLE REFERENCE
A POEM FOR DUDLEY RANDALL: Poet and Publisher of the Black Arts Movement...A Book Links Classroom Companion. Used only as a structural/style reference for educator notes, objectives, before/during/after reading prompts and extension activities.

VISUAL DESIGN
Original graffiti-wall backgrounds created for this classroom companion. No interior book art is reproduced in this draft.
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ADDITIONAL HISTORY SOURCES: littlebeebooks.com/books/the-roots-of-rap-16-bars-on-the-4-pillars-of-hip-hop/ • smithsonianmag.com (How Hip-Hop Was Born 50 Years Ago at a Block Party in the Bronx) • archives.gov (50th Anniversary of Hip Hop, 2023)