

This article is shared through IDEALS under the CIC Authors Addendum<sup>1</sup>

APA Citation:

Thibeault, M. D. (2010). [Review of the book *Hip hop speaks to children: A celebration of poetry with a beat*, by Nikki Giovanni]. *The Orff Echo*, 17(2), 35.

Many thanks to the *Echo* for permission to share this online.

More on my work, including links to other publications, is available on my website: [www.matthewthibeault.com](http://www.matthewthibeault.com)

Twitter: @mdthib

---

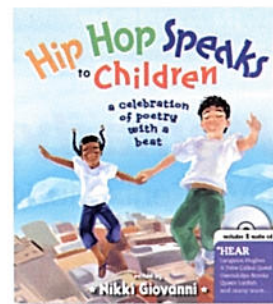
<sup>1</sup> More information available here:

<http://www.cic.net/projects/library/scholarly-communication/introduction>

## *Hip-Hop Speaks to Children: A Celebration of Poetry with a Beat*

By Nikki Giovanni

Sourcebooks, 2008 (CD included)



Most music teachers are ill-equipped to educate others in the intricacies of hip-hop, which has been the dominant popular music in the world for nearly a decade. Like jazz, hip-hop is an American invention, but has received perhaps less respect and appreciation close to home. Luckily for our profession, Nikki Giovanni has edited a rich, beautifully illustrated resource that has the potential to educate students and teachers, and elevate the status of hip-hop music.

This book outshines many similar offerings through the inclusion of an audio CD filled with high quality material. The CD contains poetry readings, excerpts from hip-hop recordings, and explanatory tracks where authors talk about works or larger contexts within which certain works were created. Each track is referenced clearly within the book, and the recording quality throughout is high. Songs range from the Sugarhill Gang's classic "Rapper's Delight" to the feminist anthem "Ladies First" by Queen Latifah and Oscar Brown Jr.'s recording of "Dat Dere." Most of the songs are presented as excerpts (likely for copyright reasons). However, poems are read in their entirety, and the forty-one total tracks are a deeply satisfying listening experience.

Even teachers who are open to presenting hip-hop in their classrooms inevitably wonder how best to approach the subject. *Hip-Hop Speaks to Children* offers one possibility, making comparisons and putting hip-hop within a larger African American context. The opening essay draws a corollary between hip-hop and opera, each a dominant musical style in the everyday lives of their respective audiences. The

author also presents hip-hop as part of the glorious tradition of twentieth-century African American poetry. The book convincingly presents and effectively pairs Young MC's "The Principal" with Pedro Pietri's "Love Poem for My People." This pairing helps encourage students to think deeply and critically about text in the songs they enjoy. This could also encourage more attention to the musical cadence and rhetorical style of writers such as Langston Hughes, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Maya Angelou. In conceiving of hip-hop as a descendent of the Harlem Renaissance, the book presents hip-hop as a music to which teachers not only can relate, but should feel a responsibility to understand and promote.

In addition to great music and poetry, a positive vision of children exists throughout the book. Children are depicted as music makers, creators, and activists in several poems, particularly in the opening selections. This volume also captures the multimedia nature of hip-hop, which is best described as a culture involving visual, textual, musical, and dance styles. In addition to the poetic texts and included CD, the book brims with vivid, powerful illustrations from five illustrators.

If one area is neglected in *Hip-Hop Speaks to Children*, it is better attention to the music that accompanies the rhymes. Here, interested teachers could benefit from reading outside sources such as Jeff Chang's *Can't Stop, Won't Stop: A History of the Hip-Hop Generation*, or Susan McClary's wonderful essay, "Rap, Minimalism, and Structures of Time in Twentieth Century Music." They might also benefit from showing students excerpts from

the 2002 movie *Scratch*, or by listening to the wonderful series of interviews with hip-hop stars by Terry Gross on NPR's *Fresh Air*.

*Hip-Hop Speaks to Children* is a wonderful book for any classroom library, and many music teachers will find wonderful examples to present within their classrooms. ■

*Matthew D. Thibault is an assistant professor of music education at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. He can be reached at [mdthib@illinois.edu](mailto:mdthib@illinois.edu).*

### Focus on Research Series

*The Orff Echo* will publish research reports that expand and enhance our knowledge of music teaching and learning. Articles can report on an original research study or synthesize an area of the research literature in ways that are relevant and meaningful to music educators. These articles must be research-based and include a discussion of the ways the knowledge can be applied in the classroom. Papers should be double-spaced using type no smaller than a 12-point font and should be between 2,000-3,000 words. Submissions should be sent electronically as a MS Word or PDF document to Carlos Abril, Ph.D., at [c-abril@northwestern.edu](mailto:c-abril@northwestern.edu).