

ON BEAT: BUILDING BLOCKS OF BEAT MAKING AND RAP



TEACHING ARTIST: **SEE MORE PERSPECTIVE**

SEE MORE PERSPECTIVE has been described as a “Chicago Institution,” “walking creativity,” and “The hardest working, most unjustly slept-on artist in the Twin Cities” ... This award-winning hip-hopper is a Twin Cities Native, Chicago transplant, MC, poet, producer, engineer and educator. SEE has done years of youth work through hip hop and spoken word—dealing with social justice, identity and community engagement issues; has performed at countless venues and festivals; and has spoken at and facilitated workshops at various social justice conferences and retreats.

LESSON DESCRIPTION:

The group will learn to identify, count, and write to bars in the standard 4/4 time signature. This will translate to the foundations of beat making and Hip Hop music production, rap, and lay a universal foundation for a better understanding of music overall.

ARTISTS & PIECES OF ART INCLUDED:

Almost any popular music will do. It’s anything with bars that repeat on the 1 – 2 – 3 – 4.

LEARNING GOALS:

- Identify beats and bars, learn to count them, make a beat pattern and at least four bars of rap.
- **Why did you choose to share this lesson?**
It’s the first thing I do to establish the foundations for either music production or rap and it gets everyone moving and involved almost immediately.
- **What inspires you about this activity?**
Why is this activity, these artists, this art important?
Hip Hop is the most influential art form since the blues, or jazz, or rock ‘n’ roll. Music as a language is universal, so anyone can find a way in, even if they’re just getting in the shallow end of the pool. It’s accessible because you can learn the basics without it being intimidating.



Minnesota
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COMPAS PRISM PROGRAM

Lesson plans are created by COMPAS Artists. Each highlights artists and artworks from African, Latinx, Indigenous, and/or Asian communities.

LEARNING GOALS (CONTINUED):

- In addition, it's automatically inclusive, because drum sounds and beats can be expressed or connected to in so many ways for audiences of any ability. It's inclusive because participants can bring their own personality to it, their own manner of speaking, and their own thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a brief, low stakes crash course where you can be as serious or silly as you want. It also aligns the hearts, bodies, and brains of the participants, which is a healthy mindfulness practice. Even listening to music and identifying drum sounds, patterns, and bars connects us to our bodies and surroundings in subtle yet meaningful ways.
- The activity is easily adaptable for students of either music or rap, and beyond that can even be adapted to any number of contexts for a learning group.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON:

Bring Music or prepare to get suggestions from your class.

- You'll need to know how you can play it. Are you bringing a speaker? Will you have access to wifi? Sometimes you can't connect your phone because of a weak signal, or computers can't access YouTube or the like. So, if you plan on bringing music, or as I like to do when I have time, get suggestions from the participants, and listen to those as examples. Instrumental hip hop beats are ideal. A quick search of "instrumental hip hop beats" does the trick.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THIS LESSON (CONTINUED):

- Understand what you'll be illustrating for your students. Listen to a handful of songs, identify beats, bars, drum sounds, and their patterns.
- Identify how many beats per bar (likely, you'll be counting 1-4 on beat, and this is ideal when you're starting out because of how common the 4/4 time signature is).
- Once you've done that, you can identify what drum sounds are happening on which beat. Note what drum sounds and/or words are landing on your 1/4 note beats (any one of 1 - 2 - 3 - 4 -). The most likely combination is a kick on the 1 and 3 and a snare on the 2 and 4, though there can be a lot of subtle variations in popular music, and people are always doing something interesting with the standard. These are the basics, so no need to get too deep into how far patterns and rhythms go; participants find it if-and-when they're ready.
- Prepare a blueprint of the beats, bars, drums, and patterns you'll be listening for. For my purposes, it tends to look like this:

1	2	3	4
Kick	Closed High Hat	Snare	Open High Hat

- While I acknowledge there's a lot of other sounds and instruments happening in a song, these are the most basic building blocks, and these drum sounds are representative of the most common sounds heard in music, and hip hop specifically. Matching the number of drums to the number of beats in a bar creates an easy entry point, that's plenty to consider when you're starting out. It's deceptively simple, because so many patterns can be created with this basic format.

EQUIPMENT/SUPPLIES NEEDED:

- Music/internet
- Dry Erase Board (or anything like that)
- Writing materials

LESSON ACTIVITIES:

Music Making Process in pairs

- After I briefly introduce myself and what we'll be working on, I like to get the group thinking in the right direction by posing a series of questions they can talk about with their neighbors:
- What do we know about how music is made? Check in after a minute or so
- Did anyone hear anything they've never heard of before?
- What experience do you have with music? Making, listening, whatever.

What do we know about music - group QnA

- I also like to ask a couple brief questions to the group to invoke a bit of curiosity and bring those paired mini-conversations to a larger group brainstorm.
- Be prepared to fill in the blanks for them and encourage them as they consider the possibilities.
- What do we need to make a beat?
 - Looking for drums as a basis, as is common in hip hop

What drum sounds are we familiar with?

- They might need a little help getting there, but many groups will often have this knowledge in one form or another. For instance, can they describe the sound, even if they don't know the name of it?

- Can anyone in the room beatbox? Pencil drum on the desk? Invite them to share!
- I like to describe the drum sounds as well as spell out the sounds for them on the board. As always, do what works best for you and your students.

- Kick: Thump/BMPH

- Closed High Hat: a short metallic hiss/Ts

- Snare: a loud crack (I also point out that snaps and claps are often used in place of an actual snare) KHH

- Open High Hat (or a crash cymbal if they come up with that first): a lingering metallic hiss (or metallic crashing)/

TSSSSsss (or KSHHHHH for the cymbal)

Now that we've identified the drum sounds, we need to make a beat, what do we need to do with those sounds? Is that all we need? Why or why not?

- Talk through it with the group, leading them to the idea that bars give us the scaffolding to make a pattern. Highlight that the pattern is made consistent by landing on the 1, 2, 3, and 4 structure of the bars.

Listening exercise and "notation"

- Play something you've prepared or take suggestions from the group. I like to find the instrumental versions of any songs I use to take away a layer of what might otherwise be distracting.
- Ask the group to nod their heads as they are able, pointing out that when their head is nodding down, this is the downbeat, and is where we count the individual beats (1,2,3,4)

LESSON ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED):

- Guess where the upbeat is! You guessed it, where your head is nodding up.
 - I may mention that lots of magic happens between the beats, but often hold off on getting too into that with most groups
- Nod to the beat as a group, and ask anyone to start counting, someone will always start! Ask the group to practice counting along with whomever takes the lead. Ask the group to practice counting along with whomever takes the lead.
- While listening, ask the group to note the pattern by what sounds they hear on the downbeats of the bars; matching the basic drum sounds we identified earlier with the 4 beats of the bar we identified.
 - Songs will usually have some variety from bar to bar, so let them know they're listening for the basic pattern, the one they hear the most, or even just choosing one bar if that's helpful.
 - Bonus points for folks that identify what's on the downbeat and upbeat, as well as any other sounds they identify and where they land in the bar.
 - Find consensus on what that basic pattern was and note it on the board.

1	2	3	4
Kick	Closed High Hat	Snare	Open High Hat

Group Beat

- Let's bring it all together!
- Create a pattern with the group on board.
 - With input from the group, match the previously identified drum sounds to each *downbeat* of a *bar* to create a *pattern*.
- Once you've noted the pattern on the board for everyone to see, and in their seating arrangement, assign the following sounds to groups of students (typically 3-5 participants per drum sound from left to right for to make it clear who and what goes where and when. desk or table to achieve the sound we're aiming for.
 - Open High Hats: Students can make a "TS" sound.
 - Snare: "KHH" sounds with claps and snaps.
 - Closed High Hat or cymbal: "TSSSSS" or "KSSSSSHHHH", respectively.
 - I like to practice with each individual group (the 1's, 2's, 3's, and 4's) by counting and letting each group practice finding the very bottom of that downbeat (at the point where our heads are lowest while nodding).
- Explain that you'll be counting them in to give them time to find the beat (one or two bars is usually enough). Anyone can also feel free to count along with you.
- Count them in and cue each group with a physical gesture. Practice as many times as it takes to get in a good rhythm. Feel free to create new patterns, go faster/slower/etc. It's also something you can come back to at any time to bring folks together, get engaged, etc.

COMMUNITY THIS ACTIVITY IS DESIGNED FOR:

Anyone interested in Hip Hop, beat making, rap, and/or music production (if a student gets into it, this can be a foundation for producing any style of electronic music). Can be modified for any group. For groups with disabilities, simplify, make room for experience, especially when you have nonverbal students or students with limited motor function. Letting them feel it and tap on their knees, clap, or vocalize in any way to the bars can open things up for them in beautiful and unexpected ways.

INDICATORS OF REACHING THE LEARNING GOALS:

- Nodding of heads on beat
- Ability to identify drums, up beats and down beats, and count bars
- Ability to create and perform a pattern as a group

EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ADDRESSED:

- Engage in cultural art forms
- Identify and create patterns in language and music
- Learn musical patterns as mathematics and connect those patterns to a physical experience
- Identify and follow a framework to write creatively
- Value and practice community communication and collaboration

**WHAT COULD A COMPAS TEACHING ARTIST HELP YOU
ACHIEVE IN YOUR CLASSROOM?**

Learn more at COMPAS.org