

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION'S  
BLACK MEN AND BOYS INITIATIVE  
PRESENTS

# BRING YOUR "A" GAME

EDUCATOR GUIDE

[www.21cf.org/agame](http://www.21cf.org/agame)

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## FROM THE PRESIDENT OF TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION



**WE ARE PLEASED TO PROVIDE THIS GUIDE** to accompany your viewing of our film **BRING YOUR "A" GAME**. As you already know, our Black men and boys in the United States are in the fight of their lives. Every day, the news cites statistics that are astoundingly disconcerting on the high school dropout rate, probable incarceration, and unemployment of this segment of the population.

Twenty-First Century Foundation (21CF), an endowed national Black public foundation, is at the forefront of changing that dynamic by building a framework for coalitions, collaborative efforts, and durable partnerships across all sectors of society to work together on the issues collectively identified as critical to change the paradigm for this population. Our approach is centered on cultivating strong Black civic leadership and combining it with sound advocacy and organizing infrastructures to achieve positive, long-term social change for young Black males.

We launched the Black Men and Boys Initiative (BMB) in 2004 to identify, highlight, and support strategies that address the crisis confronting America's Black men and boys. The overall goal of the BMB Initiative is to mobilize the organizational, political, and financial resources required to move the collective response to the crisis facing America's Black men and boys from discussion to action and, ultimately, to positive impact. **BRING YOUR "A" GAME**, created as a tool in the work of the BMB Initiative, is geared to do just that. Please incorporate it in your teaching and outreach because this effort is going to take all of us.

In life, timing is everything, and with a role model like President Barack Obama setting the bar high... the time is now.

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Erica Hunt". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Erica Hunt  
*President*

## ABOUT BRING YOUR “A” GAME

**TO CATALYZE A NATIONAL** conversation on the plight of Black men and boys, 21CF has partnered with actor-director Mario Van Peebles and producer Karen Williams to create **BRING YOUR “A” GAME**—a documentary film that, in Van Peebles’ words, “sheds light on the resilience and influence of Black males.” Featuring Black male leaders in a variety of arenas, the film is the focus of a comprehensive community engagement effort.

**BRING YOUR “A” GAME** uses screenings and accompanying community discussions as a catalyst to transform the lives of urban youth. **BRING YOUR “A” GAME** offers a message of success, delivered by influential Black male cultural figures. Using a cinematic style influenced by popular culture and employing innovative technologies, the film details strategies that have improved the lives of Black men and boys. It underscores how essential educational achievement and high school graduation are to survival and success in today’s world.

In a recent interview, Van Peebles said, “I am honored to be partnering with the Twenty-First Century Foundation to make this film. It isn’t going to be nice, polite, or loved by everyone, but I hope it will be an honest, insider look at the culture of the community that needs it the most.”

**INTERVIEWEES INCLUDE** such Black male icons as Richard “Dick” Parsons, Chris Rock, Spike Lee, Dr. Cornel West, Ice Cube, Newark, New Jersey Mayor Cory Booker, Sean “Diddy” Combs, Kevin Liles, Lou Gossett Jr., Lupe Fiasco, Hill Harper, Damon Dash, Kevin Powell, Geoffrey Canada, Bruce Gordon and former NBA star Allan Houston, among others.

The film and accompanying activities target three principal audiences:



**ADOLESCENT BLACK MALES**—To enable them to recognize that a variety of life strategies and choices exist that can help them achieve their goals

**CARING ADULTS**—To increase their awareness of the challenges faced by a largely marginalized segment of our society facing an ongoing crisis, and share viable solutions and

**INFLUENTIAL PEOPLE OF COLOR**—To stimulate their involvement and investment in social action

**TO ATTRACT THE ATTENTION** of those who generally would pay little heed to traditional documentaries, we brought on board noted cinematographer and special effects expert Scott Billups (*Bend it like Beckham*, *Jurassic Park*) to employ innovative film technologies. The principals were filmed in color in front of a “green screen” and inserted into black-and-white animated backgrounds reflecting a variety of urban landscapes. The resulting look is designed to pique and sustain the interest of otherwise casual viewers and to engage them in productive discussion and work on the critical issues facing Black youth.

**BRING YOUR "A" GAME** is a media tool—a helpful instrument to bring to light myriad issues facing young Black males in America, and largely, throughout the world. Consider this from the Center for Social Media:

- Probably at no time in history has access to, and proficiency with, media and information technologies been more important in the public mind, nor more critical to policymaking.
- Nor at any time in the recent past have the nation's press, media, and information sectors been the object of as much intense public concern or scrutiny with a growing recognition of their unmatched importance in the conduct of our daily lives and democratic institutions.
- Never before have the once separate worlds of news, stored knowledge, and products of the mass media and entertainment industries converged locally, nationally, and globally, with even greater convergence certain to take place in the years ahead.

Twenty-First Century Foundation urges community groups, faith-based organizations, schools, policymakers, and funders to use **BRING YOUR "A" GAME** to discuss not only the challenges that affect Black America, but to use it as the basis for conversations about solutions. How can each of us and our institutions, be the change agent to increase outcomes related to educational attainment, alternatives to the criminal justice system, and developing a successful work ethic?

This educator guide, specifically for adults who work with urban male youth, is designed to explore these questions with high school-aged youth in and out of classroom settings. For more information about the film or to order a copy, please visit us at [www.21cf.org/agame](http://www.21cf.org/agame).



## WANT TO HAVE A BRING YOUR "A" GAME EVENT?

### CONSIDER A TOWN HALL MEETING FORMAT:

- Invocation (sensitive to all faiths)
- Stating the Occasion
- Screening of BRING YOUR "A" GAME
- Panel Discussion
- Panel can include adult and youth participants. Topics can include the three main messages in BRING YOUR "A" GAME: educational attainment, avoidance of the criminal justice system, and work ethic, or other issues of local importance
- Q&A
- Pledge
- Adjourn and Direct to Local Resource Organizations that are Present

# ABOUT THIS EDUCATOR GUIDE

## GUIDING VISIONS

- All youth must have the opportunities and resources to develop the socio-emotional skills, dispositions, and habits of mind needed to pursue life's goals and to participate fully as informed, productive members of society.
  - This educator guide assumes that Black male development must consider objectives that exist beyond the traditional school day as they experience and experiment with manhood—reading and writing, and associating spoken words with their graphic representations.
  - It encourages engagement around the abilities and socio-cultural resources that adolescent Black males bring to school.
  - It provides ample room for the innovation and creativity essential to teaching adolescent Black males.
  - It is interrelated with and should be considered as part of a larger “curriculum,” not as distinct and separable.
5. Young men will conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and non-print texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.
  6. Young men will use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information, and to create and communicate knowledge.
  7. Young men will develop an understanding of and respect for themselves and others across cultures, ethnic groups, geographic regions, and social roles.
  8. Young men will participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of communities.

## THE OBJECTIVES

1. Young men will read a wide range of print and non-print materials:
  - to build an understanding of themselves and of Black males in the United States and the world
  - to acquire new information
  - to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace
  - for personal fulfillment
  - to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
2. Young men will apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate the social and cultural history and political consequences of Black males. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other Black males, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features (e.g., sound–letter correspondence, sentence structure, context, graphics).
3. Young men will employ a wide range of strategies to rewrite themselves and appropriately use different elements for this rewrite to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.
4. Young men will apply knowledge of self and others to create, critique, and discuss Black males.

## CORE SKILLS, PRINCIPLES, AND CONCEPTS OF THIS EDUCATOR GUIDE

1. **SOCIAL AND CIVIC RESPONSIBILITY:** the quality of moral, civil, and mental accountability, reliability, and trustworthiness.
2. **SELF-ACTUALIZATION:** the full realization of one's potential based on the desire for self-fulfillment. This tendency might be phrased as the desire to become more and more what one is, to become everything that one is capable of becoming.
3. **ASPIRATION (AND EFFICACY):** a strong desire to achieve something high or great, realized in one's capacity to produce an effect.

## BEFORE VIEWING

- Determine what you want to learn from the material.
- Think about what you will view.
- Skim to find out about the film and about how the producer has chosen to present the material.
- Ask yourself what you already know about the topic(s) the film will cover.
- Jot some predictions on paper about what you expect to learn from the film.

4. **RESILIENCE:** an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change.
5. **REFLECTION:** contemplation on oneself and one's actions and possibilities for acting.
6. **CRITICAL LITERACY:** the ability to read the word and the world in an active, reflective manner in order to better understand power, inequality, and injustice in human relationships.
7. **HOPE:** a belief in a positive outcome related to events and circumstances in one's life, governed by the feeling that what is wanted can be had and that events will turn out for the best.

## GUIDE FOR SETTING GROUND RULES

**WHenever you hope to facilitate conversations** on critical issues, whether preparing for a one-hour workshop or weaving such discussions into a yearlong class, a vital first step is the development of guidelines for participation. These guidelines, often referred to as “ground rules,” should provide the community within a workshop or class a framework for ensuring open, respectful dialogue and maximum participation.

### GENERATING A LIST OF GROUND RULES

There are several effective ways to create ground rules. If time is an issue, as it tends to be in short workshops of one to two hours, it may be necessary for you to simply list the ground rules for the group. Be sure to inquire as to whether the ground rules are agreeable, and mention that if you had more time together, you would have preferred the group to generate the list.

A second way to create ground rules is to list those rules you commonly use, then ask for additional ground rules from the participants. When somebody proposes a ground rule, ask the other participants if they agree to it. If most do, add it to the list.

The best way to create ground rules, if you have the time, is to allow the participants to generate the entire list. Ask them to think about what they, as individuals, need to ensure a safe environment in which to discuss difficult and controversial issues. If the participants are having difficulty coming up with ground rules, or if they do not come up with a particular ground rule you feel is important to the success of your facilitation, try to prompt them toward it. If they still do not mention it, you can add it to the list yourself.

### EXAMPLES OF WIDELY USED GROUND RULES

Ground rules should be developed and adapted for every unique context. Appropriate ground rules may depend partially on age, region, social class, and other contextual factors. The following list of common ground rules from multicultural education classes and workshops should serve only as a starting point for your process of creating a similar list suitable to your own situation:

- Listen actively—respect others when they are talking.
- Speak from your own experience instead of generalizing (“I” instead of “they,” “we,” and “you”).

- Practice timely attendance.
- Do not be afraid to respectfully challenge one another by asking questions, but refrain from personal attacks—focus on ideas.
- Participate to the fullest of your ability—community growth depends on the inclusion of every individual voice.

Instead of invalidating somebody else's story with your own spin on their experience, share your own story and experience. The goal is not to agree—the goal is to hear and explore divergent perspectives. Be conscious of body language and nonverbal responses—they can be as disrespectful as words.

It is also important to set a ground rule for how participation will be managed. Do you prefer for participants to raise their hands and be called on, or for people to speak freely? Remember that some people—especially those who tend to be introverted—need more time to process thoughts and speak, so the latter option may exclude them from the discussion. Still, the formal process of raising hands to be recognized may detract from the collective atmosphere needed to discuss multicultural issues.

### STRATEGIES AND NOTES

It is very helpful to post the ground rules somewhere visible during the entire course of a class or workshop. Some teachers and facilitators who are with a certain group over an extended period will bring the list of ground rules (on newsprint or some other transportable medium) back to the group for every session or class period. They can then refer to the list when they sense that participants are failing to sufficiently follow one or more of the items.

Challenge the participants on the ground rules early and often. If you do not set a tone of strict adherence to the rules early in the process, it may become impossible to enforce them later.

If you are using more than two or three ground rules, try focusing on particular items during appropriate activities or discussions. For example, if you are facilitating a discussion in a large group, state before the discussion starts that you would like to focus on active listening. Challenge participants to refrain from any side discussions. The same can be done if you are facilitating an experiential activity, by introducing it as a “silent” activity.

You must **MODEL** these ground rules in your own participation. This is especially true for an item such as “Speak from your own experience.” Be sure that your own language reflects ownership and responsibility by using as many “I” and “me” statements as possible.

If a particular ground rule is routinely broken, bounce it back to the participants. A fruitful discussion can often arise from a close examination of why the participants are not adhering to particular items. Revisit the ground rules occasionally, and, if time allows, ask whether the participants would like to add any new items.

### **RETHINKING GROUND RULES**

If a goal of this curriculum is to challenge current structures and assumptions about Black males, we must look closely at

all guidelines we use in our classes and workshops, asking ourselves who they support and who, if anybody, they privilege. As such, many educators and facilitators have begun to rethink the idea of ground rules and the ways they are currently implemented.

Recent critical analysis of common ground rules have resulted in a collective reconsideration of their role. This is because ground rules that are put in place, whether by an educator/facilitator or by participants, too often privilege the already-privileged groups in a given dialogue. For example, in a dialogue about race, white participants will often support ground rules meant to keep anger out of the discussion—ground rules focused on a dominant idea of respect. When we consider who is protected by ground rules like “attack the idea, not the person,” it becomes apparent that, intentionally or not, they protect the participants representing privileged groups.

While we do not advocate dropping ground rules altogether, we do support the idea of seriously studying these issues and the possible ramifications of rules that might ultimately support the status quo by providing safety and comfort for those who, for the sake of their own learning experience, most desperately need to be made to feel uncomfortable. Consider opening this conversation within your class or workshop or among colleagues, and challenge yourself to make sure that the discussions and dialogues you are setting up do not further oppress historically oppressed people.

## **SECTION 1: WARM-UPS**

### **ACTIVITY ONE: “I AM” POEMS**

This activity begins the active reflection process while providing opportunities for students to make connections with each other. Participants write short poems, starting each line with “I am,” which encourages them to describe in their own words who they are and what they believe is salient to their identity.

#### **OBJECTIVES**

In any attempt to increase awareness and encourage self-development, it is crucial to engage participants in activities that call for introspection and active self-reflection. It is also important to provide opportunities for participants to make connections across, and even within, cultural lines. The “I Am” activity can provide a non-threatening starting point for encouraging self-reflective thought and introspection. It is a safe way for students to think about and share the influences that have shaped their identities. Also, it continues the connection-making process as participants find unexpected similarities and differences between themselves and others in the group.

#### **INSTRUCTIONS**

Ask participants to take 10 to 15 minutes to write a poem called I Am... . Instruct them that the only rule for the piece is that each line must start with the phrase “I am... .” Leave it open to their interpretation as much as possible, but suggest that they can, if they wish, include statements about where they’re from regionally, ethnically, religiously, and so on; memories from different points in their lives; interests and hobbies; mottos or credos; favorite phrases’ family traditions and customs’ and whatever else defines who they are. Be sure to let them know that they will be sharing their poems.

#### **FACILITATOR NOTES**

To ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share his or her story, you might consider breaking the group into diverse, smaller groups of 8–10 if necessary. Give participants the option to either read their poems or to share parts of their poems from memory.

## POINTS TO REMEMBER

Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read their poems, even in small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their poems first. Consider sharing your poem before asking students to write their own pieces. If you make yourself vulnerable, others will be more comfortable about doing the same.

Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their poems or sharing them from memory.

If you're using this as a final activity, not much processing is necessary. Encourage applause, and thank folks for sharing their poetry.

If you use this activity in the middle of a class or workshop, have

## SAMPLE "I AM..." POEM

I am basketball on a snowy driveway.

I am fish sticks, crinkle-cut frozen French fries and frozen mixed vegetables.

I am primarily white, upper-middle class neighborhoods and racially diverse schools.

I am Donkey Kong, Ms. Pac Man, Atari 2600 and sports video games.

I am football on Thanksgiving and New Year's Day.

I am "unity in diversity" and "speaking from your own experience."

I am triple-Wahoos, earning three degrees from the University of Virginia.

some process questions ready. Once everyone has spoken, ask them how it felt to share their poems.

Ask what, if any, connections people made with each other from this activity. What were some commonalities across poems? Did any of these surprise you?

You might also consider asking people to get up and talk to someone with whom they felt a connection through the poetry.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does it mean to know who you are?
- How does one get to this?
- How important is it for a person to know who they are?

## SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

- *Finding Fish* by Antoine Fisher
- *Song of the Smoke* by W.E.B. DuBois

I am diversity, multicultural education, identity, introspection, self-reflection, and social action.

I am Daffy Duck, Mr. Magoo, Hong Kong Phooey, Foghorn Leghorn, and other cartoons.

I am Tae Kwon Do, basketball, the batting cages, a soccer family, and the gym.

I am a wonderful family, close and loving and incredibly supportive.

I am films based on true stories and documentaries.

I am the History Channel, CNN, ESPN, BRAVO, and Home Team Sports.

I am a passion for educating and facilitating, personal development and making connections.

## ACTIVITY TWO: RESPECT

This activity begins the social and civic responsibility process while continuing to provide opportunities for students to make connections with each other. Participants understand what it means to respect themselves, others, and the communities in which they live.

### OBJECTIVES

In any attempt to build community, it is crucial to engage participants in activities that call for social and civic responsibility. This activity is designed to initiate that process and for creating a safe space where potentially controversial discussions can be aired freely.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Ask everyone to find someone in the room they've not met before. Instruct them to introduce themselves to that person, and spend 5–10 minutes talking about respect. What does it mean for you to show respect, and what does it mean for you to be shown respect? After the allotted time, ask the participants to return to their seats, then open the discussion. What ideas did people come up with?

Common responses include "following the Golden Rule," looking somebody in the eyes, being honest, and appreciating somebody's ideas even when you do not agree with them. It is important to mention that respect is a crucial ingredient in any discussion, but especially in a discussion of often-controversial

issues regarding Black males. The point is to learn from our differences—to understand each other’s understanding. The point is NOT to agree. Another important part of respect is knowing each other’s names, and how to pronounce them. Also, respect includes keeping the conversation in the group. This type of community building—and the safety people feel within it—can make or break an attempt to facilitate discussions on tough issues.

This activity touches many bases. First, it starts the crucial path toward building a community of respect. This is the first step in maintaining a constructive exchange regarding issues such as racism, sexism, and the like. At the most basic level, participants meet someone they did not know previously and exchange ideas with that person. Second, the community is built through an understanding of how the group perceives respect, and how they negotiate its meaning. Third, the similarities and differences in participants’ ideas about respect begin to show the first signs of similarities and differences within the group on a larger level.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What does respect mean to you?
- How does it look, sound, and feel?
- How important is it for a person to be respected?  
To give respect?

## WHILE VIEWING

- Take notes to help you construct meaning and recall important information (see “Tips for Note Taking” in appendix).
- Ask yourself while watching the film: “Do I understand what I am watching and do I see how it fits in my life?”
- Pay attention to new words, background scenery, and highlighted materials.
- Examine any tables, illustrations, statistics, and other aids the producers have provided.
- When possible, pause during your viewing to reflect upon and organize new information and link it to what you already know.
- When you don’t understand something, review your notes to see where you got off track, review the passage, talk to another person, or consult such resources as a dictionary.

## SECTION 2: BLACK MALE DEMOGRAPHICS

### ACTIVITY ONE: EXCHANGING STORIES

This activity works toward bringing the stories of individuals to the forefront in the Black male experience.

#### OBJECTIVES

The objective of this activity is to explore Black male demographics (as presented in the film) through the specific stories of young Black male participants. The guiding principles here deal with continuous reflection and self-actualization, two processes important for deconstructing Black male demographics and reconstructing new Black male lives.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Go over the “nameless” statistics mentioned in the film. What do they mean to the students? Ask the students to place the name of someone they know next to each statistic. Ask students, “How does it make you feel? How might those statistics be revised?”

Now ask students to write “new” statistics that they feel are positive and that reflect a place or situation in which they want to be. Ask them to write their name next to these new statistics. Discuss as a whole group some of the situations the students brought to mind.

Ask students the age-old question, “What’s in a name?” Then ask them to write short stories (1–2 pages) about their names. (You may have to assign this prior to the class in which you want

## AFTER VIEWING

- Summarize the film by restating main ideas and points from it.
- Evaluate your notes and understanding of the film.
- Review parts of the film that you did not understand.
- Apply new ideas from the film to broader situations to extend your thinking.
- Evaluate the ideas presented in the film.
- Jot down any questions you still have about the topics the film presents.
- Use strategies for note taking located in the appendix to identify and remember ideas from the film.

to use it.) Leave the assignment open to individual interpretation as much as possible, but if asked for more specific instructions, suggest some or all of the following possibilities for inclusion in their stories:

- Who gave you your name? Why?
- What is the ethnic origin of your name?
- What are your nicknames, if any?
- What do you prefer to be called?

Encourage students to be creative (e.g., write poetry, include humor, list adjectives that described them, and so on). Also, be sure to let students know that they will be sharing their stories with the rest of the class.

Students should end their stories, however, with the same final line: “My name is \_\_\_\_\_, which means \_\_\_\_\_, and I am more than a statistic.”

### FACILITATOR NOTES

To ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, break into diverse small groups of 4 to 6 people if necessary. Give participants the option to either read their stories or to share their stories from memory. Ask for volunteers to share their stories.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How does your name help you to make sense of who you are?

- How does your name link you to your family history? The history of other Black males?
- Is there anything about your name that makes you proud?

### SUPPLEMENTAL READINGS

- *Speak My Name* by Don Belton
- *Dreams from My Father* by Barack Obama

## IMPORTANT POINTS TO REMEMBER

- Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read their stories, even in the small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their stories first.

If you make yourself vulnerable, others will be more comfortable doing the same.

- Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their stories or sharing them from memory.
- Once everyone has shared, ask participants: (1) How did it feel to share your stories? (2) Why is this activity important? (3) What did you learn?

## ACTIVITY TWO: ROLE PLAYS

The demographics surrounding Black males are complicated by issues such as racism, sexism, classism, and heterosexism. These are not easy issues to discuss in classrooms. This activity provides participants an opportunity to discuss tough topics without causing division or undue conflict.

### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this activity to advance critical literacy on social and cultural issues that are hotly contested in the United States and around the world, particularly as they relate to Black males.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Discuss sections in the film on what it means to be a Black male. How do the students understand what the film is saying about being a Black male? Who are Black males according to the film? What kinds of challenges and possibilities exist for them? Discuss some of the particulars related to the situations presented around the criminal justice system and its ramifications, the high school dropout rate, and the quest for limited career choices.

List these possibilities and challenges on a T-chart. Ask the young men to identify some of their assumptions about Black males. Are any of their assumptions prejudices? Ask them to discuss how they feel other groups see Black males. Chart student responses on the board.

Next, divide participants into groups of four or five. Prepare enough space in the room for small groups to perform skits. This activity will be most effective if you have already engaged in a discussion about the importance of dealing with issues of social justice.

Ask participants to share a story about a time when they experienced racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, or another form of oppression that took an unexpected turn and caused conflict that was never resolved. The situation may have ended in shouting or hard feelings, or may have even deepened the tension being discussed.

## AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE TO ROLE PLAY

Encourage students to look deep into the juridical record — how do Dred Scott, Plessy v. Ferguson, and other cases up to the 1950s and 1960s, in which racism was enshrined in law, lend an invisible hand even today? Have students explore solutions for increasing racial equity.

Some questions to guide the discussion related to role plays:

- What went wrong in the situation you shared?
- How did the facilitator or educator or participants try to address the issue?
- What about the tension felt unresolvable?
- How did the conversation end?
- How could the discussion have been more fruitful?

Ask each group to choose one story to role-play for the rest of the class. Some people are less comfortable “performing” in front of the class, so encourage them and mention that everybody will have an opportunity to participate in a role play. Role plays should last no longer than 3 minutes.

After providing time for small groups to plan their role-plays, ask for groups to volunteer to perform their role play for the class. Following each role play, use or adapt the following questions to tease out the issues and strategies for addressing them:

- What are the benefits/dangers of continuing a dialogue in response to the situation?
- What are the educational opportunities introduced by the situation?

## ACTIVITY THREE: CIRCLES OF SELF

The Circles activity engages participants in a process of identifying what they consider to be the most important dimensions of their own identity. Stereotypes are examined as participants share stories about when they were proud to be Black males and when it was especially hurtful to be associated with the group.

### OBJECTIVES

The objective of this activity is to inspire continued reflection and critical literacy, but to also stimulate hope and resilience.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Distribute copies of the Circles handout (see Appendix 2). Ask participants to pair up with somebody they do not know very well. Invite them to introduce each other, then follow these steps:

1. Ask participants to write their names in the center circle. They should then fill in each satellite circle with a dimension of their identity they consider to be among the most important in defining themselves. Give them several examples of dimensions that might fit into the satellite circles: male, athlete, Black, brother, middle class, and so on.
2. In their pairs, have participants share two stories with each other. First, they should share stories about when they felt especially proud to be associated with one of the identifiers they selected. Next, they should share a story about a time when it was particularly painful to be associated with one of the identity dimensions they chose.

- What are some strategies for managing the situation without immediately ending the conversation?

Following all of the role plays, process the activity by asking participants if they noticed any parallels in the stories.

### FACILITATOR NOTES

It is always important when activities call for participants to share their own stories and make themselves vulnerable to remind the group about active listening. Consider starting the activity by sharing a story from your own experience to ease the tension. You might also consider following this activity with one in which participants are encouraged to take turns facilitating conversations about issues of oppression for the other participants. Consider using “plants,” students you have prepared beforehand to introduce difficult topics into the class experience.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Do statistics around Black males reinforce stereotypes about them?
- What purposes might the statistics on Black males serve?
- What role do you play in continuing or challenging the statistics reported in the film?

### SUPPLEMENTAL READING

- *We Real Cool* by bell hooks

3. The third step will be for participants to share a stereotype they have heard about one dimension of their identity that fails to describe them accurately. Ask them to complete the sentence at the bottom of the handout by filling in the blanks:

## HALL OF FAME EXERCISE FOR STUDENTS

Have students pick a non-famous Black male “hero.” Ask the students to bring to class a picture and significant artifacts of this hero. Provide each student with poster paper and drawing and coloring material, and ask them to create an exhibit using the materials they brought to class. The exhibit should give their hero’s name, tell about their life accomplishments, explain why they are a hero, and creatively illustrate something exceptional about this person. After students have created the exhibit, create a gallery in your classroom, invite visitors to view, and from the exhibits discuss the attributes the students believe are heroic.

“I am (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_ but I am NOT (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_.” Provide your own example, such as, “I am a Christian, but I am NOT a radical right Republican.” Instructions for steps 1, 2, and 3 should be given at once. Allow 8–10 minutes for participants to complete all three steps, but remind them with 2 minutes remaining that they must fill in the stereotype sentence.

4. Probe the group for reactions to each other’s stories. Ask whether anyone heard a story he would like to share with the group. (Make sure the person who originally told the story has granted permission to share it with the entire group.)
5. Advise participants that the next step will involve individuals standing up and reading their stereotype statement. You can either simply go around the room in some chosen order or have people randomly stand up and read their statements. Make sure that participants are respectful and listening actively during this activity, as individuals are making themselves vulnerable by participating. Start by reading your own statement. This part of the activity can be extremely powerful if you introduce it energetically. It may take a few minutes to start the flow of sharing; so allow for some silent moments.

#### FACILITATOR NOTES

The key to this activity is the process of examining one’s own identity and the stereotypes associated with that identity, then having one’s own stereotypes challenged through others’ stories and stereotype challenges. Encourage participants to think about the stereotypes they apply to people and to make a conscious effort to think more deeply about them, eventually eliminating them.

As with most activities, it can be especially effective if you participate while you facilitate. If you are willing to share your own experiences, participants are more likely to feel open to share their own.

It is crucial, especially for the final part of the activity when participants are sharing their stereotypes, to allow for silences. People will be hesitant to share initially, but once the ball starts rolling, the activity carries a lot of energy. Allow time at the end for participants to talk more about whatever stereotype they shared. After everyone has shared their stereotype challenge, announce that anyone who would like to share another one can do so. Model by sharing another one about yourself.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do the dimensions of your identity that you chose as important differ from the dimensions other people use to make judgments about you? How did they differ from images of Black males presented in the film?
- Did anybody hear somebody challenge a stereotype that you once bought into? If so, what?
- How did it feel to be able to stand up and challenge your stereotype?
- Where do stereotypes (and the statistics that sometimes ground them as presented in the film) come from?
- How can we eliminate them?

## SECTION 3: THE “RAPPER, BALLA, HUSTLA” (RBH) MYTH

### ACTIVITY ONE: PROBLEM-POSING MYTHS

#### OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this activity are to help students become conscious of myths around being Black males and to help participants become aware of the myths.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

Facilitators should divide the class into small groups of no larger than 10 members each. Then, each participant is given the opportunity to relate a story in which he experienced the RBH myth. Be sure that everyone has an equal opportunity to tell his or her story.

#### FACILITATOR NOTES

It is vital to continually relate stories back to how they made the person feel. Participants will often not offer this information without being asked by the facilitator.

Remind participants about confidentiality. Also, mention that it is better not to refer to people who are not in the class by name. It is unfair to implicate someone who is not there to offer their perspective.

It is important to acknowledge that we can’t bust myths five minutes ago, let alone several years ago. The point is to figure out exactly what the myths are and then decide for ourselves if we want to continue doing the same things.

Participants are often reluctant to volunteer to begin this activity. A good strategy is to, as the facilitator, tell your own story first. This will help with the trust factor as well.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What do you want to do when you grow up and why?
- Identify responses in which students mentioned being athletes and entertainers. What are the chances of students fulfilling these dreams?

(Ask students to refer to the film when answering.)

- Ask students about alternative occupations that they might pursue instead of these.
- Ask why it might be important to consider such options.
- Discuss whether college or other formal and informal educational pursuits are important. Visit a website such as The Lumina Foundation's Know How 2 Go ([www.knowhow2go.org](http://www.knowhow2go.org)) for testimonials from young persons of color who are pursuing college.

## ACTIVITY TWO: INCLUSION/EXCLUSION

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Participants share their own experiences, exploring different ways people are made to feel “included” in some larger group.

### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this activity is to examine belonging and to critique the glorification of material and bling that hold up the RBH myth.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Divide participants into pairs, preferably two people who do not know one another well.

Ask participants to share two stories with their partner: (1) Recall a time from your own schooling when you felt especially included in the learning process in a particular class; and (2) recall a situation in which you felt especially excluded from the a game or activity. Allow 8–10 minutes.

Bring students back to the larger group and ask pairs to share each other's stories. Request a volunteer to record brief notes about both categories of stories. (What makes students feel included? What makes them feel excluded?)

Facilitate a discussion about examining consistencies and differences in individuals' stories and learning needs.

### FACILITATOR NOTES

When activities call for participants to share their own stories and make themselves vulnerable, it is always important to remind the group about active listening. Consider starting the activity by sharing your own set of stories to ease any tension.

This activity provides a perfect opportunity to challenge students to reexamine myths about RBH. Challenge them to think about their own opinions as they engage in this activity and hear each other's stories.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- What similarities do you see among the situations in which people felt especially included?
- What consistencies do you notice in the situations in which people felt excluded?
- What differences among the stories do you find interesting?
- What can you do as a young man to ensure that you meet your life's goals?

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## SECTION 4: PRISON INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

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### ACTIVITY ONE: TO KILL ANOTHER MOCKINGBIRD

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This activity examines the shrill imagery of Jena 6, which emits an episodic rerun too often cast in American literature. In classic works such as Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* and Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Black males are put on trial sadly if only to comment on the failure of human dignity that divides so many Americans. Thus, the common place for a Black man in this American tradition is the courtroom, which serves ironically as a site of heated social and political injustice.

### OBJECTIVE

The objective of this activity is to build students' critical literacy skills and empower them to rewrite the Black male prison narrative.

### INSTRUCTIONS

Read excerpts (facilitator selected) from the characters of *To Kill a Mockingbird's* Tom Robinson and *Native Son's* Bigger Thomas.

## TEXT AND ELECTRONIC RESOURCES

### LITERARY TEXTS DEALING WITH THE “TRIALS” OF BLACK MEN:

- o Ernest Gaines’s *A Lesson Before Dying*
- o Harper Lee’s *To Kill A Mockingbird*
- o William Shakespeare’s *Othello*
- o Richard Wright’s *Native Son*
- o Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*
- Songs dealing with the “trials” of Black men:
  - o Snoop Dogg’s “Murder Was The Case That They Gave Me”
  - o Tupac’s “Changes”
  - o Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power”
  - o N.W.A.’s “F—k the Police”

### REAL LIFE “TRIALS” OF BLACK MEN:

- o Scottsboro Boys case: <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/scottsboro/>
- o Michael Vick case: <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,290061,00.html>
- o Kobe Bryant case: <http://www.courttv.com/trials/bryant/>
- o Genarlow Wilson case: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/16862643/>
- o O.J. Simpson case: <http://www.courttv.com/casefiles/simpson/>

Ask students in what ways they have witnessed similar stories in popular culture and in real life. After linking the literature to their lives, use various “trial” scenarios endemic in American literature to comment on and challenge pervasive assumptions that characterize Black men, in literature and in life, as either guilty until proven innocent or by nature criminal unless made civil.

Draw on such comparisons between literature and life to help students reevaluate the social, judicial, and political violence that many Black men endure, and question the continuity of the repellent images of Black men in courtrooms, which reproduce themselves not only in literary texts but also in people’s imaginations.

Also, by linking the literature to their lives, help students talk back to institutions of power using critical textual analysis as a tool for reclaiming their lives.

## APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR NOTE TAKING

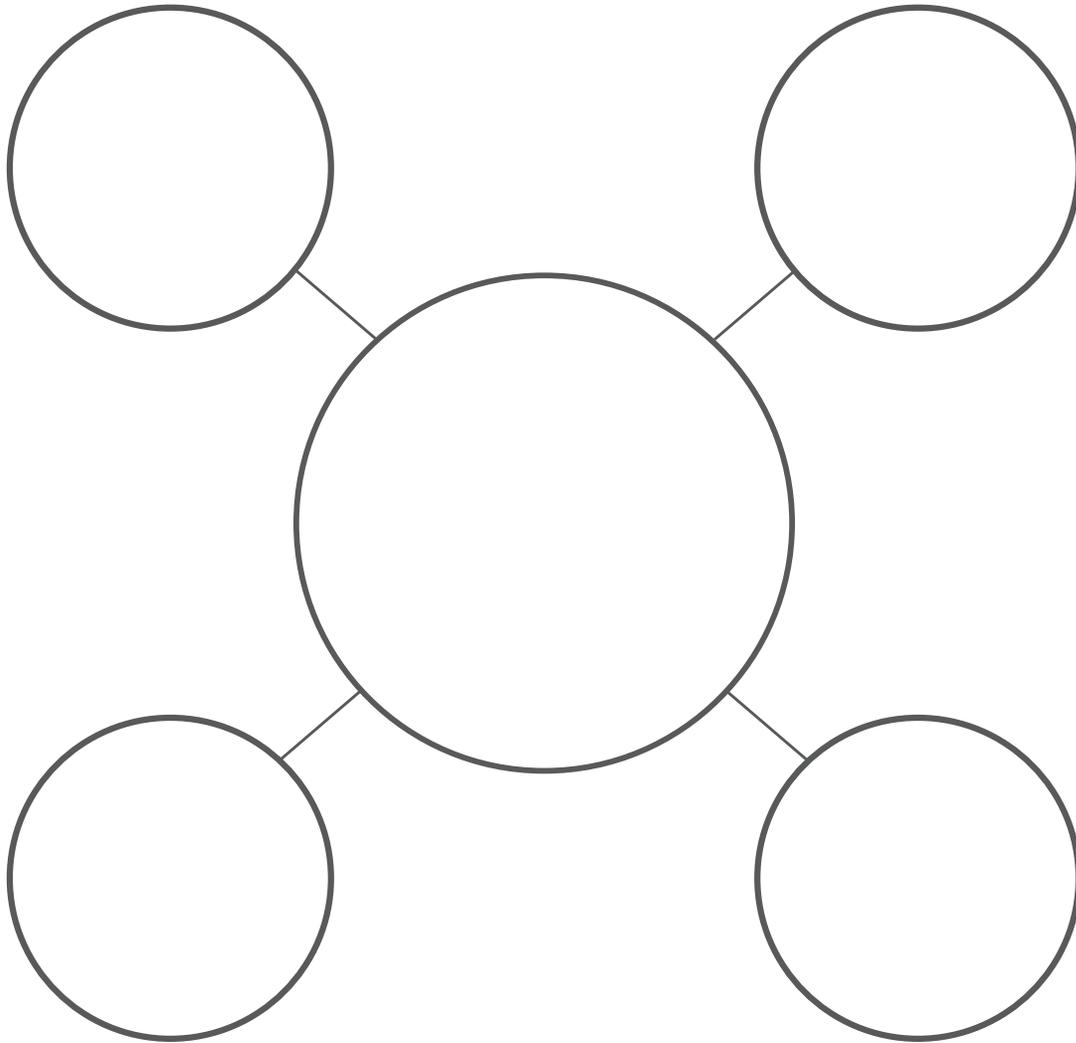
### APPENDIX A: TIPS FOR NOTE TAKING

The Note-Taking System has proven to be effective by countless middle and high school students. Start by using the main section of your notebook page to take down your notes while viewing the film. Be sure to leave space on the left side of the page and at the bottom.

### THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND:

- Get the film’s main points. Don’t write down every word you hear.
- Leave blank spaces in your notes to add explanations later.
- Organize as you write. Pay attention to cues such as repetition and emphasis.
- Indicate main points and supporting points as you go.
- Jot down key vocabulary, important facts, and statistics.
- Ask questions. If you’re confused, it’s better to ask while the material is fresh in your mind.

## APPENDIX B: CIRCLES OF MY MULTICULTURAL SELF



This activity highlights the multiple dimensions of Black male identities. It addresses the importance of individuals self-defining their identities and challenging stereotypes.

Place your name in the center circle of the structure below. Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the satellite circles—an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you. This can include anything: Black, male, son, athlete, Christian, smart, friend, or any descriptor with which you identify.

1. Share a story about a time when you were especially proud to identify yourself with one of the descriptors you used above.

2. Share a story about a time when it was especially painful to be identified with one of your identifiers or descriptors.

3. Name a stereotype associated with one of the groups with which you identify that is not consistent with who you are. Fill in the following sentence:

I am (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_  
but I am NOT (a/an) \_\_\_\_\_.

(So if one of my identifiers was “Christian,” and I thought a stereotype was that all Christians are radical right Republicans, my sentence would be: *I am a Christian, but I am **not** a radical right Republican.*)

## BONUS LESSON PLAN

### “HURT ME SOUL” — RITES OF PASSAGE, TRANSFORMATION, AND WORLDVIEW

Artist: LUPE FIASCO  
Album: *FOOD & LIQUOR*  
Song: “HURT ME SOUL”

#### [VERSE 1]

[1] Now I ain't tryna be the greatest  
I used to hate hip-hop... yup, because the women degraded  
But Too \$hort made me laugh, like a hypocrite I played it  
A hypocrite I stated, though I only recited half  
[5] Omittin the word “b\*\*\*\*,” cursin I wouldn't say it  
Me and dog couldn't relate, til a b\*\*\*\* I dated  
Forgive my favorite word for hers and hers alike  
But I learnt it from a song I heard and sorta liked  
Yeah, for the icin, glamorized drug dealin was appealin  
[10] But the block club kept it from in front of our building  
Gangsta rap-based filmings became the buildin blocks  
For children with leakin ceilings catchin drippins with pots  
Coupled with compositions from Pac, Nas' “It Was Written”  
In the mix with my realities and feelings  
[15] Living conditions, religion, ignorant wisdom and  
artistic vision  
I began to jot, tap the world and listen, it drop

#### [CHORUS 1]

My mom can't feed me, my boyfriend beats me  
I have sex for money, the hood don't love me  
The cops wanna kill me, this nonsense built me  
[20] And I got noooo place to gooo  
They bomb my village, they call us killers  
Took me off they welfare, can't afford they health care  
My teacher won't teach me, my master beats me  
And it huuurts meee sooooul

#### [VERSE 2]

[25] I had a ghetto boy bop, a Jay-Z boycott  
'Cause he said that he never prayed to God, he prayed to Gotti  
I'm thinkin godly, God guard me from the ungodly  
But by my 30th watchin of “Streets is Watchin”  
I was back to givin props again and that was botherin  
[30] By this uncomfortable as a untouchable touchin you  
The theme songs that n\*\*\*\* hustle to seem wrong but these  
songs was comin true  
And it was all becoming cool  
I found a condom on the ground that Johns would c\*\*  
into and thought  
What constitutes a prostitute is the pursuit of profit then  
they drop it

[35] The homie in a suit pat her on the butt, then rock it  
It seems I was seein the same scene adopted  
Prevalent in different things with the witnesses indifferent to  
stop it

They said don't knock it, mind ya business  
His business isn't mine and that n\*\*\*\* pimpin got it

#### [HOOK 2]

[40] They took my daughter, we ain't got no water  
I can't get hired, they cross on fire  
We all got suspended, I just got sentenced  
So I got noooo place to gooo  
They threw down my gang sign, I ain't got no hang time  
[45] They talk about my sneakers, poisoned our leader  
My father ain't seen me, turn off my tv  
'Cause it huuurts meee sooooul

#### [VERSE 3]

So through the Grim Reaper sickle sharpening  
Macintosh marketing  
[50] Oil field augering  
Brazilian adolescent disarmament  
Israeli occupation  
Islamic martyrdom, precise  
Yeah, laser guided targeting  
[55] Oil for food, water, and terrorist organization harborin  
Sand camouflage army men  
ccf sponsorin, world conquerin, telephone monitorin  
Louis Vuitton modelin, pornographic actress honorin  
String theory ponderin, bullimic vomitin  
[60] Catholic priest fondlin, pre-emptive bombin and Osama  
and no bombin them  
They breakin in my car again, deforestation and  
overloggin and  
Hennessy and Hypnotic swallowin, hydroponic coughin and  
All the world's ills, sittin on chrome 24-inch wheels, like that

#### [HOOK 4]

They say I'm infected, this is why I injected  
[65] I had it aborted, we got deported  
My laptop got spyware, they say that I can't lie here  
But I got noooo place to gooo  
I can't stop eatin, my best friend's leavin'  
My pastor touched me, I love this country  
[70] I lost my earpiece, I hope y'all hear me  
'Cause it huuurts meee sooooul

# LESSON PLAN

## “HURT ME SOUL” — RITES OF PASSAGE, TRANSFORMATION, AND WORLDVIEW

### OVERVIEW

In the song “Hurt Me Soul,” Lupe Fiasco uses autobiography and social commentary to illuminate the landscape that has shaped him. He highlights the forces that affect his community, and also uses allusion to comment on global problems. In almost every culture, young people have rites of passage that bring them to and through the many phases of their lives—this song reflects a certain type of rite of passage. For many oppressed communities, survival is a most basic rite of passage. Lupe’s song deals directly with the forces that shaped his worldview, and ultimate survival. Students will examine the multiple allusions that have shaped Lupe’s worldview and also have the opportunity to reflect upon their own. Through uncovering the multiple national and international references in the work, students will also get a better sense of some of the issues affecting our current global society.

These verses touch on literally hundreds of different topics and issues. Through research and examination of terms, topics, and devices, this unit can play into multiple subjects and areas of study. This lesson plan includes some of the major themes that are explored in the song, and encourages the exploration of all the topics/terms illuminated herein.

### OBJECTIVES

STUDENTS WILL:

- Identify autobiography, allusion, and rites of passage
- Identify systems of oppression
- Critically break down lyrics
- Learn literary devices and key terms
- Write critical responses
- Respond creatively (through prose and poetry) to the work

### DISCIPLINES/SUBJECTS COVERED

English Language Arts, Social Studies, Global Studies, History

### MATERIALS

- *Food & Liquor* CD (“Hurt Me Soul”)
- Lyrics of “Hurt Me Soul”
- Dictionary
- Critical readings/essays included
- Magazines and newspapers

### KEY TERMS\*

Autobiography	Hegemony/Hegemonic
Memoir	System
Coming of Age	Prison Industrial Complex
Etymology	Mass Media
Frederich Nietzsche	Patriot Act
Malcolm X	Internalize
Anne Frank	Commodity
Sarcasm	Class
Irony	Period
Hypocrisy	Perpetuate
Oppression	World View
Misogyny	Alias
Imagery	Nontraditional
Candid	End Rhyme
Untouchable	Transcriber
Caste	

# LESSON ONE: 8,000,000 Stories

## ACTIVITY ONE

Have students listen to and read “Hurt Me Soul,” paying close attention to verses 1 and 2. In these verses, Lupe uses elements of autobiography\* and verse to explain his coming of age\* in hip-hop. Define and study the definition of autobiography (below). This unit could also coincide with reading either of two well-known autobiographies, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* or *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

NOTE: *It is imperative that students read along with the lyrics as they listen to the song.*

### \*AUTOBIOGRAPHY *n.*

The American Heritage Dictionary defines autobiography\* as “the story of a person’s life written by that person” and continues to define autobiography as “memoirs.” Memoir\*, however, is defined as “an autobiography or biography” that takes it out of the realm of the purely autobiographical. The definition of autobiography is different from the definition of biography, and one can see the difference in the literal translation of the two words from their origin. The etymology\* of the word autobiography is *autos* meaning “self,” *bios* meaning “life,” and *graph* meaning “writing,” as biography maintains the same definition minus the reflexive self element (Olney 6).

The first and most important criterion for a work of literature to be considered autobiographical agrees with the dictionary

definition of “autobiography.” The author of the life story must be the subject of the story. This criterion is not controversial, as it is generally accepted and it can be easily identified that the author is the subject of the story. For instance, in the famous autobiography *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Anne Frank is easily identified as the author and the subject.

Autobiography is generally assumed to be nonfiction, which means that the work of literature is not filled with blatant fabrications. The second criterion for the definition of autobiography requires that the work convey some significant message or moral that the person derived from his or her life. Friedrich Nietzsche argued that this criterion appears in works of philosophy not necessarily autobiographical when he said, “Little by little it has become clear to me that every great philosophy has been the confession of its maker, as it were his involuntary and unconscious autobiography.” (Olney 46)

Olney, James, ed. *Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980.

Pilling, John. *Autobiography and Imagination*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd. 1980.

### \*COMING OF AGE *n.*

Reaching maturity, respectability, or prominence

## ACTIVITY TWO

1. For five minutes, have students FREE WRITE experiences in their lives that made them feel that they had *come of age*.

FREE WRITE: pen to page; write off the top of your head without thinking about grammar, spelling, or punctuation; follow your train of thought.

2. For five minutes, have students FREE WRITE experiences in the lives related to their father, mother, or guardian that made that person come of age.
3. For five minutes, have students FREE WRITE experiences in the life of an elder of the person described in step # 2. This could be a grandfather, grandmother or influential person in that person’s life. PLEASE NOTE to students: This can be made up. This is an opportunity for students to imagine the coming of age moments in the life of their elder.
4. Examine refrain\* in Audre Lorde’s poem “Hanging Fire.” For five minutes, think of one phrase that the person in step #2 says. For example, My father always said, to be successful, you need to juggle.

5. Finally, for the next 20 minutes, create a poem that uses each coming of age story. Place the line from step #4 between each section and again at the end. Your phrase from step #4 will serve as the refrain.

### \*REFRAIN *n.*

A phrase, verse, or group of verses repeated at intervals throughout a song or poem, especially at the end of each stanza.

Music for the refrain of a poem.

A song or melody.

A repeated utterance or theme.

## HANGING FIRE

by Audre Lorde

I am fourteen  
and my skin has betrayed me  
the boy I cannot live without  
still sucks his thumb  
in secret  
how come my knees are  
always so ashy  
what if I die  
before the morning comes  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance  
in time for the next party  
my room is too small for me  
suppose I die before graduation  
they will sing sad melodies  
but finally  
tell the truth about me  
There is nothing I want to do  
and too much  
that has to be done  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think  
about my side of it  
I should have been on Math Team  
my marks were better than his  
why do I have to be  
the one  
wearing braces  
I have nothing to wear tomorrow  
will I live long enough  
to grow up  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

## ACTIVITY THREE

After students have a firm grasp of the terms for this unit (autobiography, memoir, coming of age), have them **read and compare** the excerpts from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X* to the autobiographical elements of “Hurt Me Soul”'s verses 1 and 2. Identify how Malcolm X changed or had “come of age” in the different periods of his life.

**MALCOLM LITTLE** (1925–1941)

*Malcolm Little was an average youngster who wanted a good life but was confronted by racism.*

## CRITICAL BREAKDOWN [LUPE VERSES 1 AND 2]

LINES 1–5: The first line is meant to be sarcasm,\* as it is poking fun at stereotypical rappers who claim to be the “greatest” emcees. Lupe is also challenging the typical misogyny in rap lyrics, and then his own hypocrisy\* for laughing at them. Too \$hort is an Oakland rapper known for his overly sexist and misogynistic lyrics.

LINES 6–16: These lines highlight the innate power of rap lyrics, and their ability to glamorize negative life choices. He illuminates gangsta rap as a building block for the youth in his community, and uses beautiful imagery\* to describe the leaking ceilings. He makes allusions to emcees Tupac and Nas “in the mix” with his coming of age, and concludes in line 16 with a line that manifests his manifestation as a writer, a journalist of the world.

To further illuminate the imagery of tapping the world, or being a journalist of your own experiences and surroundings, use Rakim's Follow the Leader song or Talib Kweli's Eternalists, which both boast (Talib sampling Rakim), “In this journey you're the journal/ I'm the journalist/ Am I eternal/ Or an eternalist.” Both verses have intense imagery, similes, and multiple other literary devices used to exemplify their work.

LINES 25–32: These lines again point to Lupe's struggle with being bothered by the negative images in hip-hop, the gangsta lifestyle as portrayed in Jay-Z's *The Streets is Watchin*, and the hustler mentality. He illuminates his discomfort through the simile of “as uncomfortable as an untouchable touchin you.” He struggles with the how these songs are inherently wrong but have become cool.

The allusion to an “untouchable”\* can be an opportunity to discuss caste systems\* in India, and also how that can relate to our own social and economic classes\* in the United States. Many rites of passage are also very class-specific.

Somehow, I happened to be alone in the classroom with Mr. Ostrowski, my English teacher (in 8th grade). I had gotten some of my best marks under him, and he had always made me feel that he liked me... He told me, “Malcolm, you ought to be thinking about a career. Have you been giving it thought?” The truth is, I hadn't. I never have figured out why I told him, “Well, yes, sir, I've been thinking I'd like to be a lawyer.” He kind of half smiled and said, “Malcolm, one of life's first needs is for us to be realistic. Don't misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you've got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that's no realistic goal for a nigger. You

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## HANGING FIRE

*by Audre Lorde*

I am fourteen  
and my skin has betrayed me  
the boy I cannot live without  
still sucks his thumb  
in secret  
how come my knees are  
always so ashy  
what if I die  
before the morning comes  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance  
in time for the next party  
my room is too small for me  
suppose I die before graduation  
they will sing sad melodies  
but finally  
tell the truth about me  
There is nothing I want to do  
and too much  
that has to be done  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think  
about my side of it  
I should have been on Math Team  
my marks were better than his  
why do I have to be  
the one  
wearing braces  
I have nothing to wear tomorrow  
will I live long enough  
to grow up  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

need to think about something you can be. You're good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don't you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you'd get all kinds of work. The more I thought afterwards about what he said, the more uneasy it made me... It was then that I began to change—inside. (*Autobiography* pp. 36–37)

**DETROIT RED** (1941–1952)

*Detroit Red was a drug-dealing criminal who was a danger to himself and to his community.*

I was a true hustler—uneducated, unskilled at anything honorable, and I considered myself nifty and cunning enough to live by my wits, exploiting any prey that presented itself. I would risk just about anything. Right now, in every big city ghetto, tens of thousands of yesterday's and today's school drop outs are keeping body and soul together by some form of hustling in the same way I did and they inevitably move into more and more, worse and worse, illegality and immorality. Full time hustlers never can relax to appraise what they are doing and where they are bound. As is the case in any jungle, the hustler's every waking hour is lived with both the practical and the subconscious knowledge that if he ever relaxes, if he ever slows down, the other hungry, restless foxes, ferrets, wolves, and vultures out there with him won't hesitate to make him their prey. (*Autobiography*, pp. 109–110)

**MALCOLM X** (1952–1963)

*Malcolm X was a Black Nationalist Muslim minister who exposed the racist barbarism of American life.*

Elijah Muhammad spoke of how in this wilderness of North America, for centuries the “blue-eyed devil white man” had brainwashed the ‘so-called Negro.’ He told us how, as one result, the Black man in America was mentally, morally and

spiritually dead.” Elijah Muhammad spoke of how the Black man was the Original Man, who had been kidnapped from his homeland and stripped of his language, his culture, his family structure, his family name, until the Black man in America did not even realize who he was. He told us, and showed us, how his teachings of the true knowledge of ourselves would lift up the Black man from the bottom of the white man's society and place the Black man back where he had begun, at the top of civilization. (*Autobiography*, p. 199)

**OMAWOLE** (1964–1965)

*Omaole (a name Malcolm received in Nigeria) was an anti-imperialist, Pan-Africanist who expanded his religion and nationalism toward world brotherhood.*

It was a big order—the organization that I was creating in my mind, one which would help to challenge the American Black man to gain his human rights, and to cure his mental, spiritual, economic, and political sicknesses. But if you ever intend to do anything worthwhile, you have to start with a worthwhile plan. Substantially, as I saw it, the organization I hoped to build would differ from the Nation of Islam in that it would embrace all faiths of Black men, and it would carry into practice what the Nation of Islam had only preached... One of the major troubles that I was having in building the organization that I wanted—an all-Black organization whose ultimate objective was to help create a society in which there could exist honest white-Black brotherhood—was that my earlier public image, my so-called “Black Muslim” image, kept blocking me. I was trying to gradually reshape that image. I was trying to turn a corner, into a new regard by the public, especially Negroes; I was no less angry than I had been, but at the same time the true brotherhood I had seen in the Holy World had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision. (*Autobiography*, pp. 320, 381)

## ACTIVITY FOUR

### SECTION 1

The Alias\* Poem or AKA Poems or Name that Poet Poem

In this exercise, student poets will create poems based on nicknames, or aliases.

1. Have students list real or imaginary nicknames on a sheet of paper. OR, to make this a group exercise, have each student write their nickname on a sheet of paper. Next, have the students pass their paper to the next student, who will write a new nickname

(made up), based on the written nickname, on the line below it. Students will pass papers around the room until their original paper comes back to them.

2. Next, students will write reasons for why they resemble or reflect each specific nickname on the line next to the list of names. For example: Slick Rick—because I'm smooth as olive oil.

3. Using the format below, have students create an alias poem.

I'm (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Real name \_\_\_\_\_

AKA (2) \_\_\_\_\_ because I'm \_\_\_\_\_

(Encourage students to use metaphors and similes in these blanks.)

They call me (2) \_\_\_\_\_ AKA (3) \_\_\_\_\_

because I like to \_\_\_\_\_.

You should call me (3) \_\_\_\_\_ AKA (4) \_\_\_\_\_

because I'm \_\_\_\_\_, etc.

## SECTION 2

1. Create a word bank using various words from Lupe's verses 1 and 2, and the four excerpts from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*, and write them on the board. Have students choose the words (20+ words), e.g., Leakin' ceiling, wits, Nas, wolves, props, preached). [5–10 minutes]
2. Have students separate their lives into four major periods\*. Next, they are to create a title for each period of their lives, using nicknames or an alias, as seen in Section 1, and the excerpts from the *Autobiography of Malcolm X*.
3. Have students write mini-autobiographies that correspond with each period of their lives. Challenge students to use as many of the words from the word bank as possible. [5–10 minutes per period]
4. Present autobiographies with titles for each section of their lives, as shown in the Malcolm X excerpts.

# LESSON TWO: FLIP THE SCRIPT/FIGHT THE POWER

## ACTIVITY ONE

Define and examine sarcasm, irony, and hypocrisy and how they relate to the song.

### SARCASM *n.*

- A cutting, often ironic remark intended to wound.
- A form of wit that is marked by the use of sarcastic language and is intended to make its victim the butt of contempt or ridicule.

### IRONY *n.*

- The use of words to express something different from, and often opposite to, their literal meaning.
- An expression or utterance marked by a deliberate contrast between apparent and intended meaning.
- A literary style employing such contrasts for humorous or rhetorical effect.
- Incongruity between what might be expected and what actually occurs: *Hyde noted the irony of Ireland's copying the nation she most hated.* (Richard Kain)

### HYPOCRISY *n.*

- The practice of professing beliefs, feelings, or virtues that one does not hold or possess; falseness.
- An act or instance of such falseness.

**ANSWER:** Lupe is candid\* about his hypocrisy in supporting aspects of the hip-hop music/lifestyle that he doesn't condone. He is sarcastic in insinuating other rappers by claiming, "I ain't tryna be the greatest." The irony lies in the fact that he has also bought into the same things that he claims to condemn: misogyny, gangsta lifestyle, drug dealing. He further elaborates on the gangsta lifestyle in verse 2. He talks about wanting to boycott Jay-Z because of his allegiance to John Gotti (reputed mob boss), but after watching Jay-Z's film *The Streets is Watchin'* 30 times, he was brainwashed again. These qualities were becoming "cool" (line 32), "adopted" (line 36), and folks have become "indifferent to stop it" (line 37). Even though these things "seemed wrong" (line 31), Lupe still supported them hypocritically.

**QUESTION/DISCUSSION:** Why is the gangsta lifestyle seen as cool? Why is the idea of "pimping" cool? [These questions will complement the next exercises dealing with systems of oppression, sexism, and misogyny.]

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## MALCOLM LITTLE (1925–1941)

*Malcolm Little was an average youngster who wanted a good life but was confronted by racism.*

Somehow, I happened to be alone in the classroom with Mr. Ostrowski, my English teacher (in 8th grade). I had gotten some of my best marks under him, and he had always made me feel that he liked me... He told me, “Malcolm, you ought to be thinking about a career. Have you been giving it thought?” The truth is, I hadn’t. I never have figured out why I told him, “Well, yes, sir, I’ve been thinking I’d like to be a lawyer.” He kind of half smiled and said, “Malcolm, one of life’s first needs is for us to be realistic. Don’t misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you’ve got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that’s no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You’re good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don’t you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you’d get all kinds of work. The more I thought afterwards about what he said, the more uneasy it made me... It was then that I began to change—inside. (*Autobiography* pp. 36–37)

## DETROIT RED (1941–1952)

*Detroit Red was a drug-dealing criminal who was a danger to himself and to his community.*

I was a true hustler—uneducated, unskilled at anything honorable, and I considered myself nifty and cunning enough to live by my wits, exploiting any prey that presented itself. I would risk just about anything. Right now, in every big city ghetto, tens of thousands of yesterday’s and today’s school drop outs are keeping body and soul together by some form of hustling in the same way I did and they inevitably move into more and more, worse and worse, illegality and immorality. Full time hustlers never can relax to appraise what they are doing and where they are bound. As is the case in any jungle, the hustler’s every waking hour is lived with both the practical and the subconscious knowledge that if he ever relaxes, if he ever slows down, the other hungry, restless foxes, ferrets, wolves, and vultures out there with him won’t hesitate to make him their prey. (*Autobiography*, pp. 109–110)

## MALCOLM X (1952–1963)

*Malcolm X was a Black Nationalist Muslim minister who exposed the racist barbarism of American life.*

Elijah Muhammad spoke of how in this wilderness of North America, for centuries the “blue-eyed devil white man” had brainwashed the ‘so-called Negro.’ He told us how, as one result, the Black man in America was mentally, morally and spiritually dead.” Elijah Muhammad spoke of how the Black man was the Original Man, who had been kidnapped from his homeland and stripped of his language, his culture, his family structure, his family name, until the Black man in America did not even realize who he was. He told us, and showed us, how his teachings of the true knowledge of ourselves would lift up the Black man from the bottom of the white man’s society and place the Black man back where he had begun, at the top of civilization. (*Autobiography*, p. 199)

## OMAWOLE (1964–1965)

*Omaole (a name Malcolm received in Nigeria) was an anti-imperialist, Pan-Africanist who expanded his religion and nationalism toward world brotherhood.*

It was a big order—the organization that I was creating in my mind, one which would help to challenge the American Black man to gain his human rights, and to cure his mental, spiritual, economic, and political sicknesses. But if you ever intend to do anything worthwhile, you have to start with a worthwhile plan. Substantially, as I saw it, the organization I hoped to build would differ from the Nation of Islam in that it would embrace all faiths of Black men, and it would carry into practice what the Nation of Islam had only preached... One of the major troubles that I was having in building the organization that I wanted—an all-Black organization whose ultimate objective was to help create a society in which there could exist honest white-Black brotherhood—was that my earlier public image, my so-called “Black Muslim” image, kept blocking me. I was trying to gradually reshape that image. I was trying to turn a corner, into a new regard by the public, especially Negroes; I was no less angry than I had been, but at the same time the true brotherhood I had seen in the Holy World had influenced me to recognize that anger can blind human vision. (*Autobiography*, pp. 320, 381)

## ACTIVITY TWO

Critically analyze the Hooks/Refrain\* 1, 2, and 3. Have students write down what they think each line is referring to. Are there systems\* that Lupe is talking about in his hooks? Who is the “they” Lupe is referring to?

**CRITICAL BREAKDOWN / POSSIBLE ANSWERS** [HOOK 1, 2, AND 3]

LINES 17–19: These lines illuminate cycles of poverty and violence. It also references the treatment of oppressed communities by the police state. The “they” is often referring to hegemonic\* systems of power. There are countless examples of the abuse of power by the police.

LINES 20–24: Line 21 can refer to wars and global conflicts. In recent years, Islamic communities (Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran) are the target of aggression and are, ironically\*, perceived as killers, while being the victims of attack. Lines 22 and 23 refer to systems of oppression that enable the ruling class\* to oppress, by denying access to money, health care, and education.

LINES 40–43: Line 40 is again referring to global issues (warfare and access related). Lines 42 and 43 are also talking about being moved (in different ways) from either being

suspended (either school, job) or being sentenced (prison industrial complex\*), and the repercussions of that displacement by having nowhere to go.

LINES 44–47: In these lines, Lupe brings the verse back to the local/personal conflict and struggles. Lupe has an impressive knack for coupling the global with the national and then looping back to the personal. Lines 44 and 45 refer to individual insecurities, which could be mass-media\* induced (e.g., Sneakers, and sneaker culture in youth). He even goes as far as saying he needs to turn off his TV, which may be the source that perpetuates many of the cycles that Lupe is referring to.

LINES 64–70: Lines 64–67 refer to disease, abortion, immigration, and spyware as further factors in displacing people. The characters in these verses are adversely affected by these conditions. With the onset of the PATRIOT Act\*, people’s basic civil liberties are being threatened, and oppressed people are bearing the bulk of the burden. In the following lines, Lupe touches on food (media-driven), as well as the scandals in the churches. However, despite it all, the speaker has internalized\* a love for his country.

## ACTIVITY THREE

1. Have students read Advertising: System of Sexist Oppression, below, and compare to systems of oppression\* that are discussed in “Hurt Me Soul.”
2. Explore sexism and misogyny as seen in the media. Have students create collages from images in magazines, advertisements, and commercials that perpetuate a system of oppression. Students will give examples (of racism, sexism, homophobia, and so on) through their collages and present them to the class.

### \*OPPRESSION n.

The systematic, institutionalized, and socially condoned (elite sanctioned) mistreatment of a group in society by another group or by people acting as agents of the society as a whole.

### ADVERTISING: SYSTEM OF SEXIST OPPRESSION

by Trisha Grover/Duluth YSA

As we all know, capitalism operates in a cycle: the production of commodities, the distribution of those commodities, and the consumption of them which produces more capital so that the wealthy can then in turn take it and produce even more commodities. Each of these elements is equally important, and if any of them are taken away, the cycle is halted and the rich will cease to get wealthy.

That is where advertising enters the picture. Before 1925 advertisements focused on the actual properties of the products

being sold, but at about that time corporations realized that method did not generate enough capital so they tried a different approach: relating products to real human desires and emotions. This is the system we see to this day.

One of these basic human desires is sex. Advertising frequently uses the image of sex or sexual pleasure to sell a product that has nothing to do with sex. With this portrayal of sex in advertisements, women are almost always the ones to provide the sexual pleasure. They are shown to be willing and ready; in almost any circumstance life has to offer. More often than not, the body position of women becomes one of a passive and vulnerable person, rather than one who takes an active participation in her sexual affairs. She is shown with her finger in her mouth, looking coyly to the side or down, with the passivity of a little girl. This is not an image of power.

On the contrary, the way men are portrayed in advertising is quite the opposite. They are most often shown in an active stance: legs apart, firmly on the ground, with arms crossed. If they are not standing, they are portrayed doing something active, like sports, or taking hold of a passive woman.

Women are also “pieced up” in advertisements a lot of the time. In those instances, it is not just a woman on display, but rather her legs, waist, butt, or breasts. By doing this, women become literally an object rather than a full person. This is sometimes done to men as well, but not as often and with fewer consequences.

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## THE ALIAS POEM

I'm (1) \_\_\_\_\_ Real name \_\_\_\_\_

AKA (2) \_\_\_\_\_ because I'm \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

They call me (2) \_\_\_\_\_ AKA (3) \_\_\_\_\_

because I like to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

You should call me (3) \_\_\_\_\_ AKA (4) \_\_\_\_\_

because I'm \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_, etc.

With women so frequently displayed as passive sexual objects, this has consequences for women in real life. According to the U. S. Department of Justice women get raped approximately 13 times the rate of men and 18.2% of American women will be victims of sexual assault during their life times. We have to keep in mind that statistics are based on reported cases, so the number could very well be much higher. I am not proposing that advertising directly causes women to be victimized, but it contributes to the overall system in which women are viewed as objects that can be bought and sold, taken and used.

The fact is, while advertisements on the surface sell products, through their secondary discourse they sell normalcy, values, and ideas. The way we know that advertisements create culture rather than just reflect it, is by examining different cultures and time periods. Our concepts of gender are constructed and advertisements help construct it.

So why does advertising create gender stereotypes? To sell products of course, but that answer is too obvious. As I mentioned earlier, advertising sells normalcy, so not only does it tell society what a woman/man is, it creates an image of the perfect woman or man. The women in advertising are representative of less than 5% of the whole population. They are incredibly thin, with big breasts, and flawless skin. Almost always a person with a thin body is not born with big breasts, so most of the images we see with this body type have had plastic surgery. Not only this, but people in advertisements are air brushed and doctored to appear “perfect.” With this in mind, women are given an unobtainable ideal. The average woman can never look like this, so how is she able to? By buying the products of course. Advertising needs women to feel insecure about themselves or they will not generate more capital, and that is what the system is about.

It does not end there. Women exposed to this system of advertising are not merely shown an ideal image that they cannot achieve, but they internalize it and there are real consequences. Eating disorders are a huge problem, with an estimated 5–10 million girls/women in the United States and 1 million boys/

men affected. Not only does the unobtainable beauty stereotype create physical consequences, but perverse mental ones as well. According to the National Eating Disorder Association, 80% of American women are dissatisfied with their appearance. Not only are they dissatisfied, women are obsessed with how they look and this prevents them from participating in other areas of life. In my opinion, this serves as a great tool to keep women out of the political sphere and public areas of life.

As socialists, we are aware of the corruptions within the capitalist system, and the institution of advertising is just another example of how people are harmed by motives for profit. If we as consumers are aware that advertising needs women to be insecure, perhaps we can internalize that instead.

### STATISTICS\*

- 42% of 1st–3rd grade girls want to be thinner.
- 81% of 10-year-olds are afraid of being fat.
- The average American woman is 5’4” tall and weighs 140 pounds.
- The average American model is 5’11” tall and weighs 117 pounds.
- Most fashion models are thinner than 98% of American women.
- 46% of 9–11-year-olds are “sometimes” or “very often” on diets, and 82% of their families are “sometimes” or “very often” on diets.
- 91% of women recently surveyed on a college campus had attempted to control their weight through dieting; 22% dieted “often” or “always.”
- Americans spend over \$40 billion on dieting and diet-related products each year.

*\*Provided by the National Eating Disorders Association  
<http://www.geocities.com/youth4sa/advertising.html>*

## ACTIVITY FOUR

1. Read and discuss “Hanging Fire.” What does this poem say about being a young girl? Does the article on sexism relate to this poem? Based on “Hanging Fire,” have students brainstorm about some of the issues they face as young people. What are their insecurities? Their injustices? Create a list on the board.
2. Based on “Hanging Fire,” have students write their own poems using the first lines as a starting point:

I am \_\_\_\_\_ and my skin has betrayed me...



## HANGING FIRE

by Audre Lorde

I am fourteen  
and my skin has betrayed me  
the boy I cannot live without  
still sucks his thumb  
in secret  
how come my knees are  
always so ashy  
what if I die  
before the morning comes  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance  
in time for the next party  
my room is too small for me  
suppose I die before graduation  
they will sing sad melodies  
but finally

tell the truth about me  
There is nothing I want to do  
and too much  
that has to be done  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think  
about my side of it  
I should have been on Math Team  
my marks were better than his  
why do I have to be  
the one  
wearing braces  
I have nothing to wear tomorrow  
will I live long enough  
to grow up  
and momma's in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

# LESSON THREE: RITES OF PASSAGE

## ACTIVITY ONE

Students will explore rites of passage. Have students explore the excerpt about rites of passage and identify realities or struggles that could be considered rites of passage in Lupe's verses. What "stressful changes" or adversity did the speaker in "Hurt Me Soul" have to go through? Do these represent rites of passage?

### RITES OF PASSAGE

People throughout the world have heightened emotions during times of major life changes. These stressful changes may be physiological or social in nature. They are usually connected with personal transitions between important stages that occur during our lives. These transitions are generally emotionally charged—they are life crises. Most cultures consider the important transitions to be birth, the onset of puberty, marriage, life-threatening illness or injury, and finally death. Graduation from school, divorce, and retirement at the end of a work life are also major transitions in modern, large-scale societies.

During the early 20th century, Belgian anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep observed that all cultures have prescribed ways for an individual and a society to deal with these emotion charged situations. They have ritual ceremonies intended to mark the transition from one phase of life to another. Van Gennep called these ceremonies rites of passage.

In North America today, typical rites of passage are baptisms, bar mitzvahs and confirmations, school graduation ceremonies, weddings, retirement parties, and funerals. These intentionally

ritualized ceremonies help the individuals making the transition, as well their relatives and friends, pass through an emotionally charged, tense time. Most rites of passage are religious ceremonies. They not only mark the transition between an individual's life stages but they reinforce the dominant religious views and values of a culture. In other words, they reinforce the world-view\*.

### ANSWER/POSSIBLE RITES OF PASSAGE

Lines 11–12: Living conditions that were endured can signify a rite of passage.

Line 15: Direct reference to the realities that construct a world-view\*.

Hooks 1–3: Directly reference adversities that oppressed people have endured in disadvantaged communities.

### EXERCISE/HOMEWORK/RESEARCH PAPER

Research skills: Have students study effective research skills—ways of using the school library, the internet, and magazines and journals.

Students must research and create a book report or presentation on a rite of passage from an indigenous culture. Encourage students to create visual cues, as well as to compare the rite of passage presented with a rite of passage that they have experience as a young person (see page 31).

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## CRITICAL BREAKDOWN, "HURT ME SOUL"

### CRITICAL BREAKDOWN/POSSIBLE ANSWERS [HOOK 1, 2, AND 3]

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# STUDENT HANDOUT

## ADVERTISING: SYSTEM OF SEXIST OPPRESSION

by Trisha Grover/Duluth ysa

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## STUDENT HANDOUT (part 2)

so most of the images we see with this body type have had plastic surgery. Not only this, but people in advertisements are air brushed and doctored to appear “perfect.” With this in mind, women are given an unobtainable ideal. The average woman can never look like this, so how is she able to? By buying the products of course. Advertising needs women to feel insecure about themselves or they will not generate more capital, and that is what the system is about.

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## ACTIVITY TWO

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Students will explore rites of passage. Have students

### SECTION 1

1. Read and discuss “Hanging Fire,” being sure to identify what could be considered a nontraditional\* rite of passage (handout available on page—).
2. Have students circle lines in “Hanging Fire” that are associated, in traditional or nontraditional ways, to rites of passage. For example, students may circle “suppose I die before graduation” or “my marks were better than his.”
3. Next, students will take the lines they circled, and either finish the line or write an answer. These will be either statements, or questions and answers. Have students write their favorite statements on strips of paper, or over magazine or newspaper images (see below). These statement-pictures will become part of the collages created in Section 2.

### SECTION 2

1. Have students discuss nontraditional rites of passage, circumstances, or occasions that they have gone through that they consider to be a modern-day rite of passage. Why are these considered to be rites of passage?
2. For five minutes, have students list rites of passage that they have been through.
3. Have students go through magazines and newspapers and cut out images that can be associated with their rites of passage.
4. Students will pick out one rite of passage and create poems from that rite of passage.

These poems should address: What costume is worn during rite of passage? What people are involved? In what place does the rite of passage take place? Are there any smells, tastes, feeling(s) associated with this rite of passage?

5. Finally, students will create collages, with their poems as the centerpiece, using the images collected from the magazines and newspapers.

### HANGING FIRE

*by Audre Lorde*

I am fourteen  
and my skin has betrayed me  
the boy I cannot live without  
still sucks his thumb  
in secret  
how come my knees are  
always so ashy  
what if I die  
before the morning comes  
and momma’s in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

I have to learn how to dance  
in time for the next party  
my room is too small for me  
suppose I die before graduation  
they will sing sad melodies  
but finally  
tell the truth about me  
There is nothing I want to do  
and too much  
that has to be done  
and momma’s in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

Nobody even stops to think  
about my side of it  
I should have been on Math Team  
my marks were better than his  
why do I have to be  
the one  
wearing braces  
I have nothing to wear tomorrow  
will I live long enough  
to grow up  
and momma’s in the bedroom  
with the door closed.

# LESSON FOUR: ALLUSION AND RESEARCH PAPER

## ACTIVITY ONE

1. Have students explore the literary device of allusion\*.

### \*ALLUSION n.

Allusion is a reference to a person, event, or place, real or fictitious, or to a work of art, such as a casual reference to a famous historical or literary figure or event.

An allusion may be drawn from history, geography, literature, religion, culture, politics, sports, science, or popular culture.

2. Have students identify the allusions in Theme for English B by Langston Hughes. Also have students identify any instances of sarcasm or irony in his poem.

### THEME FOR ENGLISH B

by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

*Go home and write  
a page tonight.*

*And let that page come out of you—  
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?  
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?  
Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white—  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me—  
although you're older—and white—  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

### ANSWERS

This poem has multiple geographic allusions [Winston-Salem, NYC, Harlem, etc.] as well as allusion to Christmas, music [Bessie, bop, Bach] and discrimination (which is a socio-cultural allusion). This poem is sarcastic and ironic because Hughes is poking fun at the instructor's lines, and drawing upon the social conditions of people of color in light of his instructions. (It may also be interesting to investigate String Theory in Lupe's verse 3, with the ideas Hughes comments on in his poem, i.e., "yet a part of me, as I am a part of you," with the sarcastic line "That's American.")

3. Have students investigate allusion in verse 3 of "Hurt Me Soul." Students will write research papers expounding upon each of "the world's ills" (Line 63) that Lupe alludes to.

# STUDENT HANDOUT

## THEME FOR ENGLISH B

by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

*Go home and write  
a page tonight.*

*And let that page come out of you—  
Then, it will be true.*

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.  
I went to school there, then Durham, then here  
to this college on the hill above Harlem.  
I am the only colored student in my class.  
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,  
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,  
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,  
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator  
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me  
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what  
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you:  
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.  
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?  
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.  
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.  
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,  
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.  
I guess being colored doesn't make me not like  
the same things other folks like who are other races.  
So will my page be colored that I write?

Being me, it will not be white.  
But it will be  
a part of you, instructor.  
You are white—  
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.  
That's American.  
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.  
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.  
But we are, that's true!  
As I learn from you,  
I guess you learn from me—  
although you're older—and white—  
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

# RESEARCH PAPER TEMPLATE

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## COVER PAGE(S)

First page with name, date, title of ARTIST, SONG & ALBUM.

The following pages should be the song or verse in its entirety.

The songs arrangement is totally up to you. However, take your time to really think about it. Do you want to present it in end rhymes\*, or do you want to be more creative? You are the transcriber\* and because most songs are oral, and not written down, you get to make the decision as to how it looks on the page.

## OPENING PARAGRAPH

Introduce the artist.

Provide a brief biography of the artist.

## SECOND PARAGRAPH

Introduce and give a description of the song. Assess its message, literary devices, and techniques.

Also explain how you decided to illuminate the “story” of the song, as well as the “devices” that the artist uses.

Describe the “arc” that the song takes. How do you feel about it? Is it successful or not? (This can also be further evaluated in the final paragraph.)

## THIRD PARAGRAPH

Describe any other albums the artist had after the highlighted work.

Describe any other personal information about the artist.

## FOURTH PARAGRAPH

Briefly re-introduce the song and why it is viable as a lead-in to the critical analysis of its lyrics.

## NEXT STEPS

In as many breakdowns as you choose, take small clips (in 10-point type, indented) of the lyrics and then break them down in paragraph form. Here you will cite any references that the lyrics are alluding to, any poetic devices used, and also the meaning behind the narrative or verse of the song.

Be sure to re-state what the artist is saying in understandable terms and also try to connect that to as many outside references (poems, other songs, other artists, newspaper articles, magazine articles, and so on) as possible.

For example (taken from Common’s Book of Life):

The song, Book of Life, is a great example of Common’s poetic dexterity all while synthesizing the artist’s thoughts and feelings about his current situation. His expansive use of language and allusion puts this song as a great example of the validity of rap as a legitimate form of poetry.

I got so much trouble on my mind, so I take time  
out my day to pray and I say, *now lay me down to sleep*  
hopin’ that I keep my soul—

Peep, I’m gettin’ old and it’s a cold cold world  
and I ain’t even got a bomber, livin’ with my mama  
it’s the same routine: keep my room clean

In the opening of the song, the poet acknowledges that his mind is riddled with trouble and he therefore takes time out of his day to pray. He cleverly infuses an 18th-century children’s bedtime prayer that goes “Now I lay me down to sleep;/ I pray the Lord my soul to keep./ If I should die before I wake,/ I pray the Lord my soul to take.” However, Common flips this common prayer by wanting to keep his soul despite his circumstances. He further explains that it’s a cold world, which is also a common phrase, and further suggests that he has no coat, or “bomber.” And finally he still lives at home with his mother and keeps the same monotonous routine of common chores.

## FINAL PARAGRAPH

This will be the conclusion. Be sure to state how the poet resolves any conflict, or how the poet travels the length of his/her verses.

Be sure to reiterate the main literary devices used, as well as the common theme explored.

Feel free to state your own opinion of the song, and how it is effective as a piece of literature that demands academic study.

# RESOURCES

## BOOKS

### **BOYS INTO MEN: RAISING OUR AFRICAN AMERICAN TEENAGE SONS**

by Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Ph.D., and A. J. Franklin, Ph.D.,  
with Pamela Toussaint  
Publisher: Dutton/Plume

### **BREAKING THE CHAINS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SLAVERY**

by Na'im Akbar  
Publisher: Mind Productions & Associates

### **THE FAITH FACTOR: THE KEY TO BLACK EMPOWERMENT**

by Keith Augustus Burton  
Publisher: Life Heritage Ministries

### **FORTY MILLION DOLLAR SLAVES**

by William C. Rhoden  
Publisher: Random House

### **I WILL WEAR NO CHAIN!: A SOCIAL HISTORY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES**

by Christopher B. Booker  
Publisher: Praeger Publishers

### **KILL THEM BEFORE THEY GROW: MISDIAGNOSIS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN BOYS IN AMERICAN CLASSROOMS**

by Michael Porter  
Publisher: African American Images

### **LEARNING WHILE BLACK: CREATING EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN CHILDREN**

by Janice E. Hale  
Publisher: The Johns Hopkins University Press

### **LETTERS TO A YOUNG BROTHER: MANIFEST YOUR DESTINY**

by Hill Harper  
Publisher: Gotham

### **LETTERS TO YOUNG BLACK MEN: ADVICE AND ENCOURAGEMENT FOR A DIFFICULT JOURNEY**

by Daniel Whyte III  
Publisher: Torch Legacy Publications

### **LOCKSTEP AND DANCE: IMAGES OF BLACK MEN IN POPULAR CULTURE** (Margaret Walker Alexander Series in African American Studies)

by Linda G. Tucker  
Publisher: University Press of Mississippi

### **MAKES ME WANNA HOLLER**

by Nathan McCall  
Publisher: Vintage Press

### **MOTIVATING AND PREPARING BLACK YOUTH FOR SUCCESS**

by Jawanza Kunjufu  
Publisher: African American Images

### **THE SHAME OF THE NATION: THE RESTORATION OF APARTHEID SCHOOLING IN AMERICA**

by Jonathan Kozol  
Publisher: Three Rivers Press

### **SOUND THE TRUMPET! MESSAGES TO EMPOWER AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN**

by Darryl D. Sims  
Publisher: Judson Press

### **WHAT BLACK MEN SHOULD DO NOW: 100 SIMPLE TRUTHS, IDEAS, AND CONCEPTS**

by K. Thomas Oglesby (Author), Tavis Smiley (Foreword)  
Publisher: Kensington

### **WHY ARE SO MANY BLACK MEN IN PRISON?**

by Demico Boothe  
Publisher: Full Surface Publishing

### **“YO, LITTLE BROTHER...” : BASIC RULES OF SURVIVAL FOR YOUNG AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES**

by Anthony Davis  
Publisher: African American Images

### **YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK: PROMOTING HIGH ACHIEVEMENT AMONG AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDENTS**

by Theresa Perry (Contributor), Asa Hilliard III (Contributor),  
Claude Steele  
Publisher: Beacon Press

## REPORTS AND ARTICLES

### **BLACK MALE: WHY THE MID SOUTH CANNOT AFFORD TO IGNORE THE DISPARITIES FACING ITS BLACK MEN AND BOYS**

Foundation for the Mid-South  
[www.fndmidsouth.org/Documents/Black\\_Male\\_web.pdf](http://www.fndmidsouth.org/Documents/Black_Male_web.pdf)

### **BREAKING BARRIERS: PLOTTING THE PATH TO ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR SCHOOL-AGE AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES**

Congressional Black Caucus Foundation  
[www.cbccfinc.org/pdf/breaking\\_barriers.pdf](http://www.cbccfinc.org/pdf/breaking_barriers.pdf)

### **COMMUNITY RETURNS: INVESTING IN BLACK MEN AND BOYS**

Twenty-First Century Foundation  
[www.21cf.org/pdf/ExecutiveSummary.pdf](http://www.21cf.org/pdf/ExecutiveSummary.pdf)

### **GIVEN HALF A CHANCE: THE SCHOTT 50 STATE REPORT ON PUBLIC EDUCATION AND BLACK MALES**

Schott Foundation  
[www.blackboysreport.org](http://www.blackboysreport.org)

### **GREATNESS IS AN ENDLESS JOURNEY: A SYSTEMATIC RESPONSE TO SAVING AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALE AND REBUILDING THE VILLAGE**

Changemakers.net  
[www.changemakers.net/en-us/node/3572](http://www.changemakers.net/en-us/node/3572)

### **MOMENTUM: SUSTAINING EFFORTS TO IMPROVE LIFE OUTCOMES AMONG AFRICAN-AMERICAN MALES**

Ford Foundation  
[21cf.sslpowered.com/downloads/Momentum\\_Report.pdf](http://21cf.sslpowered.com/downloads/Momentum_Report.pdf)

### **NATIONAL OPPORTUNITY TO LEARN CAMPAIGN**

Schott Foundation  
[www.schottfoundation.org/otl/schott-otl-deck.pdf](http://www.schottfoundation.org/otl/schott-otl-deck.pdf)

### **WHY WE CAN'T WAIT: A CASE FOR PHILANTHROPIC ACTION: OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPROVING LIFE OUTCOMES FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES**

Ford Foundation  
[www.21cf.org/downloads/wwcw/wwcw-FinalReport.067.pdf](http://www.21cf.org/downloads/wwcw/wwcw-FinalReport.067.pdf)

### **YOUNG MEN OF COLOR IN THE MEDIA: IMAGES AND IMPACTS**

The Dellums Commission  
Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies  
Health Policy Institute  
[2025bmb.org/pdf/justice/menofcolor\\_media.pdf](http://2025bmb.org/pdf/justice/menofcolor_media.pdf)

## **websites**

### **TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION**

[www.21cf.org](http://www.21cf.org)

### **BLACK MALE COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT FORUM**

<http://bmcef.com>

### **BLACK MALE INITIATIVE**

City University of New York  
<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/oa/initiatives/bmi.html>

### **BLACK MAN'S THINK TANK**

[www.bmtt.org](http://www.bmtt.org)

### **BLACK MEN IN AMERICA: PROVIDING ROLE MODELS FOR YOUNG AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

NPR with Ellis Cose  
[www.npr.org/programs/wesun/features/2002/cose/index.html](http://www.npr.org/programs/wesun/features/2002/cose/index.html)

### **FLORIDA COUNCIL ON THE SOCIAL STATUS OF BLACK MEN AND BOYS**

[www.cssbmb.com](http://www.cssbmb.com)

### **THE MOREHOUSE MALE INITIATIVE**

<http://www.morehouse.edu/facstaff/bmarks/bmi.html#>

### **THE STATE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE**

<http://www.iamsaam.org/about/nationalsaam.php>

## **ABOUT THE DEVELOPERS OF THIS GUIDE**

**MICHAEL CIRELLI** is the Executive Director of Urban Word NYC, a grassroots nonprofit organization that provides free, safe, uncensored, and ongoing writing and performance opportunities for New York City teens. He is also the director of the Annual Spoken Word & Hip-Hop Teacher & Community Leader Training Institute at the University of Wisconsin that won the 2007 North American Association of Summer Sessions "Creative and Innovative Program Award." Cirelli is the author of the award-winning teaching guide, *Hip-Hop Poetry & the Classics* (Milk Mug, 2004), a standards-based curriculum that explores the relationship between hip-hop lyrics and "classic" poems. He is currently working on two other curricula utilizing hip-hop to engage students. His collection of poetry, *Lobster with Ol' Dirty Bastard* (Hanging Loose, 2008) was a New York Times Book Review independent press best seller, and his next book, *Vacations on the Black Star Line* (Hanging Loose, 2009) is forthcoming. Along with teaching writing workshops and performing across the country, he was previously the director of PEN Center West's Poet in the Classroom Program, and was featured on season five of Russell Simmons' *Def Poetry*. Cirelli has his MFA in poetry from the New School, and certificate from the Columbia School of Business, Institute for Nonprofit Management.

**DAVID E. KIRKLAND, PHD**, is Assistant Professor of English Education at New York University. His work focuses on youth popular culture, African American language and literacy, and urban teacher education. For five years, Dr. Kirkland taught secondary reading and English language arts in Detroit and Lansing, Michigan. He has written numerous articles and book chapters, and has received several prestigious awards, including the AERA Division G Dissertation Award. He is currently writing his third book, *A Search Past Silence: Exploring Literacy in the Lives of Young Black Men*.



# ABOUT TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FOUNDATION

**SINCE ITS FOUNDING** by economist Robert S. Browne in 1971 as a small public foundation, 21CF has worked with donors to invest in institutions and leaders committed to addressing the persistence of poverty and inequity in America's Black community. Black people confront injustice in every major area, including education, engaged parenting, health, workforce/employment, and criminal justice. The theory of change 21CF has developed to guide its programming rests on the premise that correcting these socioeconomic disparities requires a long-term commitment to building the organized power of people, money, and media to address the root causes of current problems. We work in partnership with other funders to develop the capacity of the nonprofit sector to have more than a short-term or individualized impact and to build a larger strategic force for change. We provide community based organizations with grants and technical assistance to build capacity, power and resilience. We seed local, regional, and national coalitions that link efforts across issues and connect place-based initiatives with larger campaigns. Finally, we identify and invest in new tools for communication and cooperation that enable diverse activists and supporters to combine their strengths to create a movement that can be sustained for the many years that may be required for true change to take hold.

As one of the few endowed African American foundations in the United States, 21CF has developed a range of giving vehicles through which donors can support leaders and institutions that are working to solve problems locally and nationally. We are particularly committed to expanding support and leadership by Black donors. We seek to represent, and to build in others, responsible stewardship, responsive grantmaking, and results-oriented partnerships.

Twenty-First Century Foundation identifies Black communities and populations where the needs are particularly acute and encourages focused, strategic giving to address these needs. Our programs aim for national scope and local impact. We are currently focusing on building Black leadership and nonprofit capacity in Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, Oakland, and the Louisiana/Mississippi Gulf Coast through two strategic initiatives: the Black Men and Boys Initiative, which identifies, highlights, and supports strategies that build leadership, educational opportunity, health, and economic stability for America's Black men and boys; and the Gulf Coast Organizing, Advocacy, and Leadership (GOAL) Initiative (formerly Hurricane Katrina Initiative), which supports work that helps the Gulf Coast's Black and other low-income communities of color recover from the devastation of the storms, particularly the hurricanes of 2005, and make their voices heard in equitable plans for rebuilding the region.

## ORGANIZATIONAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

From its inception, 21CF has become a nationally recognized expert on the needs of the Black community and has served as a vehicle for individual and institutional giving that has had a powerful impact nationally and in targeted cities and regions. Our growth in revenue, grantmaking, programming, donor engagement, and internal capacity has been especially pronounced since 2004, as the following highlights illustrate:

- From 2006 through 2008, 21CF's grantmaking totaled \$5,529,349, which represents 338 grants.
- 21CF has awarded grants to more than 600 Black community-based organizations, including 81 in 2008.
- 21CF grew from 80 individual donors and foundation partners in 2004 to 881 in 2007, and from nine donor-advised funds to 19.

- Major foundations and donor collaboratives have made substantial, sustained commitments to 21CF's work in the post-Katrina Gulf Coast. The Kellogg Foundation in 2008 made a \$1 million, three-year commitment to our Gulf Coast work. Gulf South Allied Funders, a collaboration among networks of progressive individual donors, has raised \$3.8 million since 2006 for our post-Katrina work and in 2008 began planning to launch a new campaign to raise \$10 million over the next five years for this cause.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT 21CF:

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Edited by: CAROL PICKERINE, DENISE BLAKE, and DAPHNE C. MACK

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## ABOUT THE PRODUCTION

Twenty-First Century Foundation presents  
**BRING YOUR "A" GAME**

An MVP Films Production of a film by Mario Van Peebles

Producers: MARIO VAN PEEBLES and KAREN WILLIAMS

Co-Producer: SCOTT BILLUPS

Associate Producer: JACKIE STOLFI

Director of Photography: SCOTT BILLUPS

Editor: LILLIAN BENSON, A.E.C.

Music: SAM RETZER AND TIM BOLAND

Director: MARIO VAN PEEBLES

## PRODUCTION AND OUTREACH FUNDING

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