FYRE

FOUNDATION FOR YOUNG RAPPERS IN EDUCATION

ELA TEXTBOOK FOR HIGH SCHOOL

USING RAP AS ITS FOUNDATION

MEETING MO DESE EDUCATION STANDARDS

BY 8TEEZNRD

*This book is dedicated to the youth of MO DYS WRYC—
the kings who rise every day behind locked doors
and still choose to learn, create, and build.
Your courage forged this book.
Your futures will outshine your pasts.*

Prologue: Why Rap? Why Now?

For as long as schools have existed, teachers have searched for the language that reaches young people where they actually live, emotionally, culturally, and imaginatively. Today, that language is rap. Not because rap is a trend, and not because every student wants to be a rapper, but because rap is the modern vessel of **mythic identity**.

In every generation, young people choose larger-than-life figures to help them imagine who they could become. Ancient cultures had warriors and poets. Medieval cultures had knights and saints. The 20th century had rock stars and superheroes. And today? Our youth have rappers, artists who build entire worlds out of rhythm, story, struggle, and transformation.

Rap is more than music. It is myth-making in real time.

The kids we teach already speak this language fluently. They understand the metaphors, the cadence, the emotional gravity. They memorize verses the way previous generations memorized epic poetry. Rap is their shared mythos, their cultural shorthand, and their map of meaning. It is the arena where they see people rise from nothing, where failure becomes fuel, pain becomes poetry, and identity becomes something you **create** rather than something the world hands you.

Rap carries a message our students already believe:
 "You can rewrite who you are."
 And that message is the beating heart of education.

While lying in a hospital bed, wrestling with my own questions of identity, purpose, and survival, I realized something simple and profound: **Human beings transform when they adopt a mythic identity they can grow into.** When a student sees themselves not as a file number, not as a mistake, not as what the world expects them to be,but as a creator, a builder, a lyricist, a thinker, a person with a voice,something inside them shifts. They walk differently. They speak differently. They imagine differently.

That is what this textbook is built to do:
To guide students into language arts through the mythic identity they already admire—and to help them discover that those same powers belong to them.

Rap demands clarity of thought, precision of language, emotional honesty, rhythm, structure, creativity, and courage. These are not just academic skills; they are life skills. They teach resilience. They teach self-awareness. They teach the strength of having something to say,and saying it with intention.

Why rap?
 Because it is the mother tongue of modern youth culture.
Why now?
 Because our students need identities that lift them, not labels that shrink them.

If we can help young people build a healthy myth about who they are becoming, one rooted in resilience, self-respect, creativity, and the courage to speak their truth,
then this generation will not just learn English.
They will learn themselves.

And that is the real purpose of this book.

The Missouri DYS Philosophies & Beliefs

Throughout this book, in addition to citing MO DESE ELA educational standards, the Philosophies and Beliefs of the Missouri Division of Youth Services will be tied in whenever possible.
This entire pedagogical track was designed with each of these principles in mind. They apply across life, across age groups, across backgrounds, across schools, and across communities.

Please, dear reader, do not think for one moment that this book cannot be applied to your school environment or your kids. It absolutely can.

Below are the Missouri DYS Philosophies & Beliefs, presented in full for reference and clarity:

Safety and Structure Are the Foundation of Treatment

Meeting youths' basic needs and providing physical and emotional safety is the foundation of treatment. Youth need to know that staff care enough to expect them to succeed. Safety and structure are the first demonstration of that belief.

Each Person Is Special and Unique

Services and supports are individualized. Through this process, youth recognize the value and strengths of themselves and others, and are challenged and inspired to reach their full potential.

People Can Change

While change is often difficult and naturally leads to resistance and fear, people more readily embrace change when they are included in the process. Youth need guidance and support as they try new behaviors, practice them, succeed, and learn from mistakes as they internalize positive changes.

People Desire to Do Well and Succeed

All youth need approval, acceptance, and the opportunity to contribute. Programs and services must tap into and build upon these universal human needs.

Emotions Are Not to Be Judged

Feelings are not right or wrong. Personal disclosure and reconciliation of past experiences are important for healing and personal growth. Treatment invites youth to explore their behaviors, thoughts, and emotions without shame.

All Behavior Has a Purpose and Is Often a Symptom of Unmet Needs

Challenging behavior is frequently rooted in deeper issues or patterns. Services are designed to help youth address these needs, investigate their history, understand their behavior, explore healthy alternatives, and internalize lasting change.

People Do the Best They Can With the Resources Available to Them

Many youth arrive with limited resources, knowledge, and awareness of behavioral and emotional options. Within the situations they faced, their choices may have seemed logical or necessary. Treatment expands their options.

The Family Is Vital to the Treatment Process

Families want the best for their children. Services must take into account the values and behaviors established within the family system. Family expertise and participation are essential for true change, and help the youth's entire system move forward together.

True Understanding Is Built on Genuine Empathy and Care

Respect for the inherent worth and dignity of self and others forms the foundation of safety, trust, and openness. Demonstrating respect and appreciation for the intrinsic worth of youth and families is essential for healing and growth.

We Are More Alike Than Different

Everyone has fears, insecurities, and basic needs — including safety, attention, and belonging. Programs normalize these universal needs and help youth meet them in positive and productive ways.

Change Does Not Occur in Isolation — Youth Need Others

Treatment is structured to help youth experience success through helping others and being helped. This includes accessing community resources and building healthy, supportive relationships with peers, adults, family, and community members.

We Are a Combination of Our Past and Present

Youth learn from a wide variety of life experiences. Through linking past and present, they develop the knowledge, skills, and emotional capacity needed to succeed at home and in the community.

Respect and Embrace Opportunity for All

Services, supports, and interactions must show respect for — and build upon — the values, preferences, beliefs, cultures, and identities of youth, their families, and their communities. Differences in expression, opinion, and preference are welcomed and embraced.

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Prologue: Why Rap? Why Now?

MO DYS Philosophies and Beliefs

Chapter 1 — Foundations of This Course
Lesson 1: How to Rap Your Story Without Incriminating Yourself
Lesson 1 Feedback and Response: Johnny Cash Never Actually Shot a Man in Reno

Setup For "The FYRE Bell Game".

How to Conduct Freestyle Practice Sessions in the Classroom

Project 1: The Wall of Rap History

Lesson 2: The Basics of Bars and Structure

Vocabulary Days

Chapter 2 — History of Rap & Cultural Significance Early roots: spoken word, African griots, jazz poetry The Bronx origins Golden age rap Rap across decades—how the sound evolved Regional styles (East Coast, West Coast, South, Midwest) Cultural impact: fashion, activism, social commentary Rap as a global language

Chapter 3 — Understanding Rap as a Craft Rap as a skill set, not just "talent" Myth-busting stereotypes The discipline of writing, revising, and performing Understanding audience and purpose Rap as both art and communication

Unit II — Elements of Lyric Writing

Chapter 4 — Rhythm, Flow, and Cadence Understanding bars and measures Basic rhythm patterns How flow works Cadence variations Exercises: 4-beat, 8-beat, 16-beat drills

Chapter 5 — Rhyme Structure Single, double, triple rhymes Internal rhymes Slant rhymes Multisyllabics and compound rhyme techniques How rhyme supports meaning, not vice versa

Chapter One:
Foundations of This Course

Photo by Luis Quintero
From Pexels.com

✨ LESSON 1:

PART 1 — How to Rap Your Story Without Incriminating Yourself

Welcome to the first rap textbook for high school ELA. This book has a story about how it came to be, and to honor that story, we, at FYRE, want to make it the best possible resource for you.

To make this work for you, we need to start with something very basic–safety. There are techniques that you can use, and that professional rappers have been using for years, to tell their true to life stories without

- Snitching on themselves, or

- Adding charges to their records.

In this lesson, we're going to practice this, and get good at it, so you, too, can have the FREEDOM to tell your story, but to do so SAFELY.

Now, wait a minute! Don't professional rappers "tell on themselves" all the time? Hold on to that question! We'll address it in our first feedback section right after this lesson.

THE THREE HATS OF STORYTELLING

1. The Art Hat

You're writing *art*, not *testimony*.

- You can exaggerate

- You can fictionalize

- You can symbolize

- You can speak metaphorically

- You can use third-person characters

- You can move events around

- You can change details

- You can build myth

DYS Alignment: *Each person is special and unique; emotions are not judged.*

The Distance Hat

Distance keeps you safe.

Ways to create distance:

- Change the name

- Change the location

- Change the time

The Meaning Hat

This is the important one.
You're not describing the crime.
You're describing:

- Fear

- Anger

- Loneliness

- Change the details (car → bike; house → alley; gun → fists)

- Turn it into a fictional crew

- Make it about a cousin, a friend, a stranger

- Make it a metaphor instead of an event

- Make it a feeling instead of a fact

DYS Alignment: *We are more alike than different; people do the best they can with the resources they have.*

- Loyalty

- Pressure

- Rage

- Self-doubt

- Feeling abandoned

- Wanting respect

- Wanting to belong

- Wanting a second chance

- Wanting to change

- Wanting to heal

- Wanting to be seen

- Regret

You're talking about the **why**, not the **what**.

DYS Alignment: *All behavior has a purpose; youth desire to succeed; true understanding is built on empathy.*

Activity : "Take the Crime Out"

Take a neutral, fictional scenario:

"A kid stole a car."

 Rewrite it without saying *anything* that would make a lawyer smile.

All lines must be about *feelings, meaning, and pressure*, not factual incrimination.

Examples you can give:

- "I was running from the ghost of my past."

- "I was trying to outrun a childhood I didn't choose."

- "I wanted horsepower because I didn't have power at home."

- "I was trying to get somewhere I didn't belong."

They turn a crime into a poem.

This shows the skill.

Assignment:

Directions: Write phrasing about the following situations that can be used SAFELY (without making a lawyer smile) in a song.

1. A kid got into a fight with someone who disrespected him.

2. A kid ran away from placement because he felt ignored.

3. A kid sold drugs to help pay for things at home.

4. A kid joined a gang because he needed protection.

5. A kid kept skipping school because he felt he didn't belong.

The Purpose

You're not writing documents for the courts.
You're writing **art for the soul**.

You're not your file.
You're not your worst day.
You're not who the world expects you to be.
You're building something new.

Student Feedback From Lesson 1: Part 1

In lesson one, we have our two bullet points early in the chapter of things to avoid, 1.) snitching on oneself, and 2.) adding new charges to one's record. One young man pointed out that "real" rappers snitch on themselves all the time in the real world rap industry. My knee-jerk, instant, reflexive response as a teacher was: "Well, more power to them. My concern is protecting YOU and keeping YOU safe."

🔥 **First: Let's address the student's question truthfully and sharply:**

Yes — "real" rappers incriminate themselves all the time.

This is factually true in the modern rap industry:

- drill rappers openly reference shootings

- mainstream rappers flaunt felonies

- lyrics get used in court

- the culture incentivizes risk and spectacle

- bravado is currency

So the student's claim is **accurate**.

But here is the deeper truth:

Professional rappers choose risk because it makes them money.

High school kids don't have that safety net.**

Teachers need to understand this so they know how to respond.

> **"Well, more power to them.**
> **My concern is protecting *you* and keeping *you* safe."**

That's exactly right.

Because professional rappers:

- have lawyers

- have money

- have labels

- have PR teams

- have producers

- have silence networks

- can weather investigations

- can pay bail

- can settle cases

High schoolers generally **cannot.**

Bottom Line: It's about safety. It comes back to not snitching on oneself and not adding new charges to one's record. Plus, it's **art**, not a **testimony**.

Let's continue this idea of art, not testimony with the second part of this student feedback.

MORE Student Feedback From Lesson 1: Part 1

It was expressed that if a rapper changed their story AT ALL, IN ANY WAY, in the student's opinion, that would be lying and just making stuff up and not telling the truth.

🔥 THE STUDENT'S OBJECTION (Reconstructed Clearly)

> **"If a rapper changes their story at all—**
> **in any way—**
> **then they're lying.**
> **They're making stuff up.**
> **They're not telling the truth."**

This is a genuine, *developmentally grounded* concern.

It was **an indicator of cognitive stage**, AND a trauma-defense reaction, AND a philosophical objection… all woven into one.

🔥 WHY THIS IS PIAGET'S THEORY OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT TO THE BONE

The student displayed:

- **Concrete Literalism**

- **Truth = literal factual accuracy**

- **Story = exact recounting of events**

- **Changing details = lying**

- **Imagination = falsehood**

- **Metaphor = deception**

- **Art = documentation, not expression**

In terms of Piaget's Theory of Cognitive Development: **Concrete Operational Thinking** - Rigid categories - Literal definitions - One-to-one correspondence between reality and representation - Difficulty with "symbol stands for something" - Limited comfort with dual meanings - Struggles with abstraction, metaphor, and hypothetical situations	
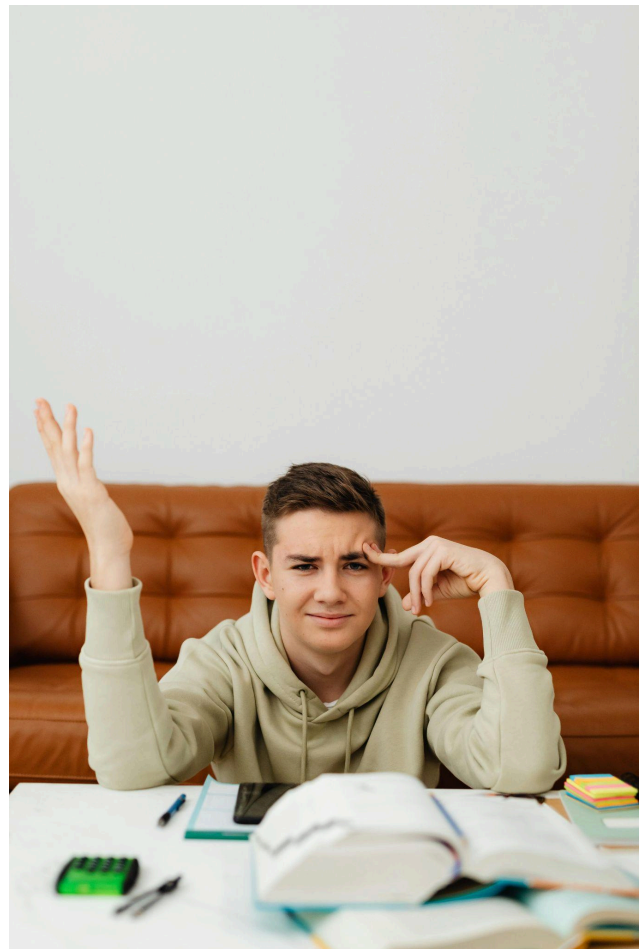
This is VERY common in youth with:

- trauma histories

- disrupted attachment

- restricted creative exposure

- hypervigilance (where "truth" feels like safety)

Students who feel this way are NOT not being defiant —
They are being being **developmentally consistent**.

FYRE curriculum can actually *move kids from concrete → abstract.*

🔥 WHY THIS IS ALSO A TRAUMA RESPONSE

Kids in DYS don't trust adults.
 They don't trust narrative flexibility.
 They don't trust imagination.

To them:

- Lies = danger

- Secrets = danger

- Discrepancies = danger

- Changing your story = danger

- Fiction = danger

- Creativity = suspicious

- Metaphor = manipulation

They've learned to survive by being hyperliteral.

So when you say:

"Don't incriminate yourself,
change the details."

To some youth, you're saying:

"Be dishonest."

To you, that means **protect yourself.**
To him, that means **be unsafe.**

That's why it can bother some students.

This wasn't about rap.
This was about **identity, survival, and truth.**

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*"Concrete vs. Abstract Rap:

Why Changing Details Isn't Lying — It's Storytelling."**

And in this chapter, you can:

- introduce Piaget

- show how art USES abstraction

- show how metaphors work

- explain "composite characters"

- teach the concept of "emotional truth"

- teach safety-based narrative alteration

- clarify that rap does NOT need to be literal

● expand capacity for symbolism ● reduce literalism that leads to legal danger This is a transformative chapter. This becomes a **pillar** of FYRE pedagogy.	

🔥 HERE'S WHAT FYRE TEACHERS NEED TO KNOW

1. **Many DYS kids think concretely.**

2. **They equate "changing details" with lying.**

3. **They have almost no framework for metaphor.**

4. **Art = truth for them. Fiction = falsehood.**

5. **You must teach abstraction explicitly.**

6. **You must explain safety vs. honesty.**

7. **You must frame "changing details" as art, not deceit.**

8. **You must reassure them that emotional truth IS truth.**

9. **You must show examples from real rappers, films, literature.**

10. **You must explain the legal stakes in cognitive terms they understand.**

When a student like says:

"Changing details means you're lying."

The FYRE textbook will train teachers to say:

**"No — changing details is what ARTISTS do.

Literal truth and emotional truth are not the same thing.

Emotional truth is the part that matters.

When you change details, you are expressing the REAL meaning safely."**

And then show examples:

- Eminem's exaggerations

- Tupac's composite stories

- NF's emotional storytelling

- Johnny Cash never actually shot a man in Reno

- Country musicians spin exaggerated tales

- Painters don't paint literal photographs

- Poets bend reality

- Movies compress time, combine characters, and invent moments

Reno, Nevada

You are teaching them the difference between:

Lying to deceive
 and
 Art to express.

 This is Piaget.
 This is trauma-informed.
 This is DYS-aligned.
 This is rap-literacy.
 This is emotional-literacy.
 This is legal safety.

Introduction: The Problem as Students Experience It

In every FYRE classroom, eventually a student raises a hand and says some version of:

> **"If you change anything in your rap, you're lying."**

For some young people—especially those in high-stress environments or those who have not yet fully transitioned into abstract thinking—this belief feels absolutely true. They see authenticity as literal accuracy, and anything symbolic or exaggerated feels dishonest.

This chapter exists to help students—and teachers—bridge the gap between **literal truth** and **artistic truth**, and to show why learning this distinction is essential both for **creative expression** and for **legal and emotional safety.**

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1. Piaget and the Two Ways of Thinking

Developmental psychologist **Jean Piaget** identified two major stages of thinking that matter for young artists:

A. Concrete Thinking (Literal Stage)

- Sees truth as factual accuracy

- Believes events must be described exactly as they happened

- Struggles with metaphor and symbolic meaning

- Interprets changes in a story as deception

- Tends to ask: *"But did it really happen that way?"*

Many young people in DYS fall into this stage longer than typical because trauma, instability, and survival stress can delay a natural shift toward abstraction.

B. Abstract Thinking (Symbolic Stage)

- Understands metaphor, symbolism, and exaggeration

- Can express emotional truth instead of literal event lists

- Can combine multiple experiences into one story

- Can invent fictional details to make meaning clearer

- Tends to ask: *"What does this story represent?"*

Rap—like all art—lives in the **abstract** stage.
 It is symbolic, emotional, metaphorical, and expressive.

Understanding this shift is a key milestone in creative maturity.

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2. All Art Is Abstract (Including Rap)

Think about painting:

- Picasso never painted a person exactly as they looked.

- Van Gogh's skies did not swirl in real life.

- Jackson Pollock was not documenting anything except emotion.

Dance, sculpture, poetry, photography, video games—every art form bends, reshapes, exaggerates, or rearranges reality.

Rap is no different.

Rap uses:

- metaphor

- symbolism

- exaggeration

- composite characters

- stylized tension

- compressed timelines

- heightened emotion

- fictionalized scenes

This isn't "lying."
 This is **craft.**

Johnny Cash famously sang:

> "I shot a man in Reno just to watch him die."

He absolutely did not.
 But the *feeling* of the line—the anger, despair, and darkness—was emotionally true to his life.

That's the power of art.

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3. Why Rap Needs Abstraction to Stay Safe

FYRE follows two safety principles:

1. Do not incriminate yourself.

2. Do not add new charges to your record.

These rules exist for a reason:

- Lyrics **can** be used in court.

- Investigators **do** read social media.

- Prosecutors **do** use art against youth.

- Bravado can become evidence.

- Literal storytelling can get you hurt.

**Changing details is not only allowed—
 it is necessary.**

Abstract storytelling protects:

- *your legal freedom*

- *your physical safety*

- *your future opportunities*

- *your ability to express yourself without fear*

When you change details in your rap, you're not being deceptive.
 You're using the **same artistic tools** professional rappers use.

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4. Literal Truth vs. Emotional Truth

To a concrete thinker:

> **Truth = Exactly what happened.**

To an abstract thinker:

Truth = What the experience meant.
Truth = What it felt like.
Truth = The message behind the story.

Rap is about meaning, not minutes.
Feeling, not forensic detail.
Message, not police reports.

Changing facts to express meaning is what every great rapper does:

- Eminem exaggerates emotions for intensity.

- J. Cole compresses timelines and people into composite characters.

- Kendrick Lamar layers metaphor over lived experience.

- Tupac wrote from a place of myth, social symbol, and cinematic language.

This is not dishonesty.
This is **artistic accuracy**.

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5. This Is Aligned With DYS Philosophy

"Emotions are not to be judged."

Rap is an emotional art form.

Changing details in a rap often allows a young person to express difficult emotions *without* exposing themselves to legal danger or retraumatizing themselves.

"People do the best they can with the resources available to them."

Concrete thinking is not a flaw—it is a stage.
FYRE teaches students how to safely expand their cognitive toolkit.

"True understanding is built on genuine empathy and care."

By allowing students to express emotional truth safely, we honor their dignity and humanity while protecting their future.

"We are a combination of our past and present."

Art requires synthesizing experiences into meaning—exactly what abstract storytelling teaches.

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6. How To Explain This To Students (Scripts)

Teacher Script #1: Emotional Truth

> "Changing details in your rap isn't lying.
> It's choosing emotional truth over literal truth.
> The goal isn't to document your life.
> The goal is to express what it *felt like*."

Teacher Script #2: Safety

> "Real artists protect themselves.
> Nobody gives prosecutors a free mixtape of evidence.
> Change names. Change locations. Change details.
> Keep the emotion. Keep the meaning. Keep the power."

Teacher Script #3: Professional Examples

> "Johnny Cash never shot anyone in Reno.
> And he's one of the most respected storytellers in music history.
> Art is about *meaning,* not transcripts."

Teacher Script #4: Piaget Made Simple

> "Little kids think literally.
> Grown artists think symbolically.
> This class is where you learn to upgrade from concrete to abstract thinking."

Teacher Script #5: DYS Philosophy

> "Your feelings are valid.
> Your emotions matter.
> You do NOT have to reveal details that can hurt you.
> You can tell the truth through metaphor."

7. How To Explain This To Students (Student-Friendly Version)

**What you felt = truth.

What literally happened = detail.**

Rap is art.
 Art uses metaphor.
 Metaphor keeps you safe.

It's not lying to change details in a rap.

It's leveling up.

You're not a detective writing a report.
 You're an artist expressing meaning.

If the emotion is real, the rap is real.

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8. Simple Exercise: Concrete → Abstract

Concrete version:
 "I got locked up for fighting at the gas station."

Abstract version:
 "I was a storm looking for a spark."

Concrete version:
 "My uncle used to yell at me every night."

Abstract version:
 "I grew up in a house where thunder never stopped."

Concrete version:
 "I ran from the cops on Wednesday."

Abstract version:
 "I've been running from shadows for years."

The meaning becomes bigger,
 safer,
 and more powerful.

Conclusion: The Artist's Upgrade

Becoming a rapper is not just learning rhyme schemes and bars.
 It's learning how to turn **real emotion** into **safe expression**.

Concrete thinking creates *reports.*
 Abstract thinking creates *art.*

And for our students—for your students—abstract thinking also creates something else:

A safe future.

This chapter gives them the tools to transform their lived experiences into meaningful, powerful storytelling without exposing themselves to danger.

This is not just a writing skill.
 This is a **life skill.**

🔔 The FYRE Bell Game

A Rite of Fire, Focus, and Flow

The **FYRE Bell Game** is a live, high-energy classroom challenge designed to build **verbal agility, focus, emotional regulation, and creative courage**. It turns writing into a **public performance** and frames literacy as a **mythic trial**—not busywork.

At its highest level, the Bell Game crowns a **FYRE King or FYRE Queen**, the first student in a class to conquer **100 words in a single uninterrupted session**.

This is not luck.
 This is endurance, discipline, and command of language.

🔥 The Objective

A contestant must speak or write responses to **randomly generated words**, creating a meaningful phrase, sentence, or lyrical line for each word **without stalling, skipping excessively, or breaking the rules**.

The ultimate goal is to complete **100 words in one session**, earning the title:

> 👑 **FYRE King** or **FYRE Queen**
> 🎤 Bearer of the **Excalibur Mic**

> **NOTE:** 100 words used correctly and successfully from the random word generator is a lot and it's supposed to be. Doing this is not supposed to be easy. When this was first tried in a real classroom, a couple of students actually believed they could do it immediately, right off the bat. Neither of them got even ten words. As of this writing, there is no FYRE King or Queen….yet.

> **ADDITIONAL NOTE:** Different schools and teachers may want to do things differently, to modify the program to fit their own styles, needs, and budgets. I, the author, actually invested out-of-pocket for a mic from Amazon that awaits the day that one of my boys will earn it. If you choose to have a champion level (FYRE King, FYRE Queen) mythic-level reward for the game, but you've got a tight budget or other constraints, feel free to use something that world for you.

> "He who correctly commands 100 words or more in the FYRE Bell Game. He shall be FYRE King."

🛎️ Required Materials

- A **random word generator** (digital or printed). We recommend www.randomwordgenerator.com.

- An **old-fashioned desk bell** (hotel-style preferred)

- A visible **skip counter** (whiteboard, paper, or tally)

- One **student referee**

- Optional but legendary: a **microphone trophy** ("The Excalibur Mic")

💁 Classroom Roles

🔔 The Referee

One student is assigned as **Referee** for each session. Their responsibilities:

- Track skips

- Enforce rules fairly

- Ring the bell when:

    - A skip is used

    - A rule is violated

    - The session ends

This role reinforces **peer accountability** and **procedural justice**.

📜 How to Play

1. The contestant stands or sits in the **FYRE Circle** (front of room or designated space).

2. The word generator produces one word at a time.

3. For **each word**, the contestant must:

    - Immediately incorporate it into the VERY NEXT couplet. Failure to use the target word in the VERY NEXT couplet uses a skip.

    - Keep moving—no long pauses

4. Words are counted aloud or tracked visibly.

5. The session continues until:

  ○ The contestant reaches 100 words **OR**

  ○ The contestant uses a **fourth skip**

⏭️ Skip Rules (Critical)

- Each contestant is allowed **3 skips**

- On the **4th skip**, the session **immediately ends**

- A skip may be used for:

  ○ A word the contestant truly cannot work with

  ○ A momentary mental block

🚫 Automatic Skips

The referee must immediately ring the bell and count a skip if the contestant:

- Uses **profanity**

- Introduces **school-inappropriate topics**

- Deliberately stalls or refuses to engage the word

These rules matter because **self-control is part of mastery**.
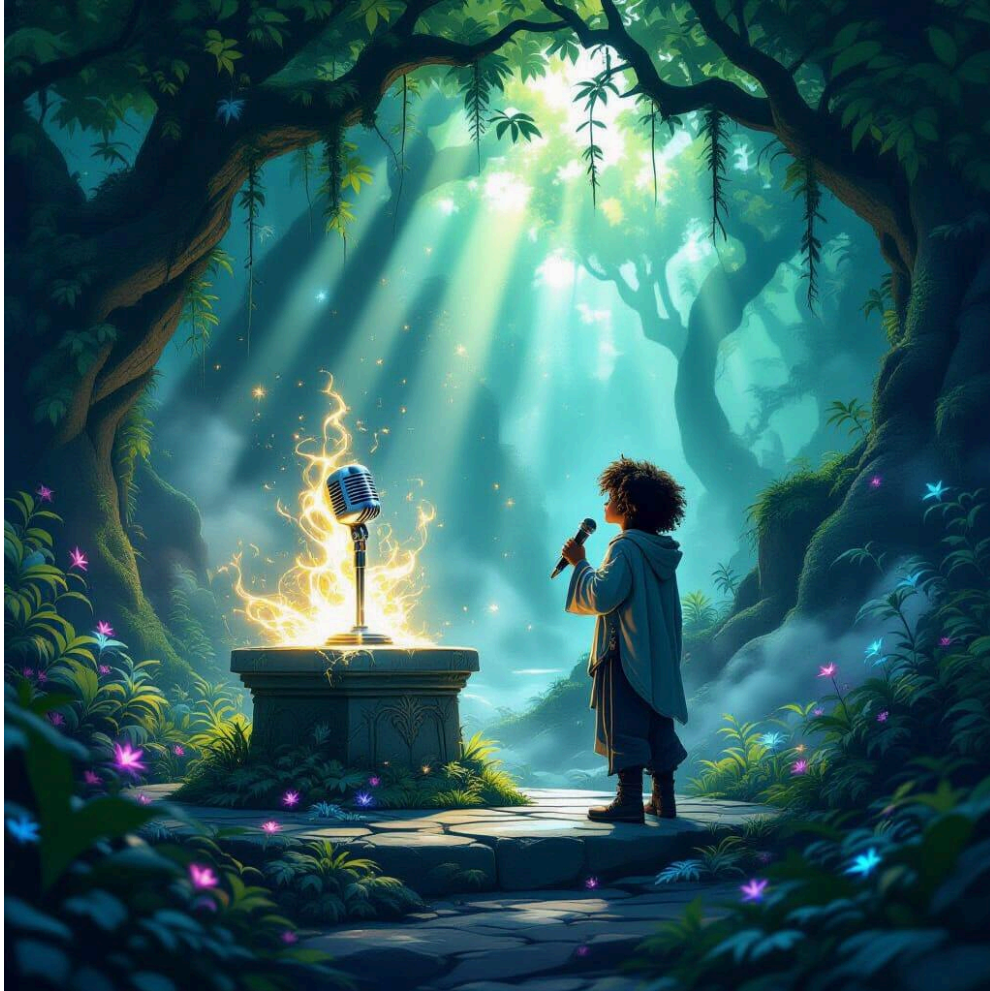
👑 The Excalibur Mic & Mythic Identity

The **Excalibur Mic** is not "just a prize."

It is a **symbol**.

Just as King Arthur proved himself by drawing the sword from the stone, a FYRE student proves mastery by pulling **100 coherent, controlled, creative responses** from the chaos of randomness.

Earning the title **FYRE King or FYRE Queen** marks a student as someone who:

- Commands words under pressure

- Maintains discipline in public

- Converts raw impulse into structured expression

This taps into **mythic identity**, a powerful psychological framework where students see themselves as heroes in a meaningful story—not just kids completing assignments.

🏆 About Rewards (Important Note for Schools)

In some classrooms, the teacher or school may choose to purchase a **microphone trophy** out-of-pocket as a permanent class artifact.

However:

🎓 **This is NOT required.**

Schools and teachers are encouraged to adapt rewards in ways that fit their environment, including:

- Certificates

- Wall of Champions

- Privilege passes

- Leadership roles

- Verbal recognition only

The **real reward** is the status earned through effort—not the object itself.

🔥 Why the Bell Game Works

- Builds **verbal fluency** and **cognitive flexibility**

- Trains students to perform under pressure

- Reinforces **code-switching** and topic control

- Converts classroom energy into **structured fire**

- Creates unforgettable milestone moments

Students don't forget the day someone hit **100 words**.

They'll remember who they were becoming.

Freestyle Practice Sessions in the FYRE Classroom

The "Random Words + Beat + Couplets" Method (inspired by Harry Mack)

One of the fastest ways to build real freestyle skill—without turning class into chaos—is to practice inside **clear constraints**. The method below is adapted directly from a practice approach demonstrated by freestyle rapper and educator **Harry Mack** in his video *"How To Get Better At Freestyle Rapping – Setup, Punchline"*. [YouTube](#)

Harry Mack's key idea is simple:

- **Practice is not performance.**

- Practice is where you work on one specific skill, make mistakes, and improve on purpose. [YouTube](#)

This section shows how to run a Harry Mack–style practice session in a classroom using:

- **randomwordgenerator.com**

- a **background beat**

- a strict rule: **two lines per word (a rhyming couplet)**

Credit where it's due: FYRE strongly recommends Harry Mack as a model of "school-safe" excellence, positivity, discipline, and true improvisational craft. Teachers should watch his practice philosophy directly and share it with students. [YouTube](#)

Video we use in FYRE classes (watch first):

`https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KP5kZreliBI`

The Core Drill

The Loop

1. Turn on a beat (instrumental).

2. Generate **one random word**.

3. The student must rap **a couplet** (two lines) where:

   - **Line 1 = setup**

   - **Line 2 = punchline**

4. The random word should land in a **strong "power position"**—typically at the end of **line 2**. [YouTube](#)

5. Immediately move to the next random word and repeat.

This creates a training environment where the brain learns to:

- think fast,

- stay on beat,

- build meaning quickly,

- and control the mouth under pressure.

Vocabulary You Need (In Plain English)

Rhyming Couplet

A **rhyming couplet** is **two lines** that end with the same rhyming sound.

Setup → Punchline

- **Setup (Line 1):** sets the idea up and points the listener toward the ending.

- **Punchline (Line 2):** lands the rhyme **and** reveals the random word in a satisfying way.

Harry Mack explains that **line 2 is where people react** because it's where the rhyme resolves and the proof of improvisation hits hardest. [YouTube](#)

Practice vs. Performance (The FYRE Rule)

In performance, a rapper can "escape" into whatever they're already good at.
In practice, you **don't escape**—you stay on the specific skill until it improves.

Harry Mack emphasizes that practice means:

- setting **parameters**,

- working a **specific weakness**,

- and being willing to sound rough while leveling up. YouTube

FYRE translation:

If students always do what's easy, they won't improve.
If they stay inside the drill, they'll level up fast.

Classroom Setup That Works

Materials

- A projected screen (or teacher laptop) showing **randomwordgenerator.com**

- A speaker for clean instrumentals

- A timer (optional)

- A bell (optional, for "reset" moments)

Student Roles

- **Performer:** the student freestyling

- **DJ/Word Master:** runs the word generator and advances words

- **Referee (optional):** tracks resets/skips and enforces school-appropriate standards

- **Audience:** silent support (no heckling; reactions are earned)

Time Structure

- 5 minutes: teacher models the drill (even imperfectly—this helps students feel safe)

- 10–15 minutes: student rounds (short turns)

- 2 minutes: reflection (what improved? what broke down?)

The Non-Negotiables (School-Safe Rules)

This method can be intense. Rules keep it educational.

1) Clean Content Only

Profanity or school-inappropriate topics count as a **reset** (or a skip, if you're using FYRE Bell Game rules).

2) No Heckling

The room must be emotionally safe. Students can react to great punchlines—but not sabotage.

3) Stay in the Drill

No switching to "random storytelling" or "flow tricks" to escape a hard moment.
 The whole point is practicing **one isolated skill**, like Harry Mack demonstrates. [YouTube](#)

The "No Filler" Challenge

A major Harry Mack focus in the video is reducing **filler phrases**—those default phrases people use when they're buying time. [YouTube](#)

In FYRE terms:

- **Filler isn't evil.** It can help keep rhythm.

- But **practice sessions** are where you try to *reduce it*, so your bars have more meaning per second.

Classroom-friendly rule:

Try to make Line 1 contain *real meaning*, not just "sound."

Students will struggle at first. That's normal. That's practice.

Difficulty Levels (Teacher Options)

Level 1: "Just Make It Work"

- Any two lines

- Word must be used somewhere

- Main goal: stay on beat

Level 2: "Power Position"

- Random word must land at the **end of line 2** (or very close)

Level 3: "Meaning on Both Lines"

- Line 1 must contain actual setup content

- Line 2 must land the rhyme + word cleanly

Level 4: "No-Filler Round"

- Student attempts the drill with minimal filler

- If they blank: they reset and try the next word

Why FYRE Endorses This Method

Because it trains the exact traits FYRE is built to awaken:

- **Focus under pressure**

- **Self-control**

- **Verbal agility**

- **Fast thinking without panic**

- **Discipline inside constraints**

And it gives students a rare experience:

> "I can do something hard in real time… and I'm getting better."

That's not just rap skill. That's life skill.

Teacher Tip: Choosing the Right Beat

A Note on BPM (Tempo) in the FYRE Classroom

When using background beats for freestyling activities such as the FYRE Bell Game or structured freestyle practice, **tempo matters**.

In FYRE classrooms—particularly in high-structure or therapeutic educational settings—we have consistently observed that **slower, "mellow" beats** (lower BPM) support better outcomes than fast, high-energy instrumentals.

What We Mean by "Mellow" Beats

"Mellow" beats are typically:

- Moderate to slower in tempo

- Steady and predictable in rhythm

- Minimal in aggressive percussion

- Designed to support focus rather than adrenaline

These beats tend to help students:

- Relax physically

- Stay emotionally regulated

- Maintain impulse control

- Access creativity without tipping into chaos

Why Faster Beats Can Be Counterproductive

In contrast, fast or highly aggressive beats often increase arousal levels very quickly. In some student populations, this heightened stimulation can:

- Reduce impulse control

- Increase disruptive behavior

- Shift focus from word choice and structure to pure energy output

- Undermine the learning goal of controlled expression

This is not a moral judgment about fast music, nor a statement about hip-hop as an art form. It is a **classroom management and learning observation**, based on repeated real-world experience.

The Educational Principle at Work

FYRE is built on the idea that **expression is strongest when it is regulated, not suppressed**.

For many students—especially those with histories of trauma, impulsivity, or difficulty with self-regulation—slower tempos create a neurological "sweet spot" where:

- the mind stays engaged,

- the body stays calm,

- and language can flow without losing control.

This aligns with broader educational and therapeutic principles around **optimal arousal** for learning.

A Practical Recommendation for Educators

For FYRE activities involving freestyling:

- Start with **mellow, mid-to-low BPM instrumentals**

- Observe student responses before increasing tempo

- Treat tempo as a **tool**, not a default

- Adjust based on your specific students and setting

Different classrooms may respond differently. Educators are encouraged to experiment thoughtfully and do what best supports **focus, safety, and growth** in their environment.

The Wall of Rap History

Rap Is Bigger Than Any One Generation

For many students, rap feels like something that "belongs" to their generation—music that exists only in the present moment, disconnected from anything that came before it. One of the goals of FYRE is to gently—but powerfully—challenge that assumption.

Rap is not a trend.
 Rap is a **culture**, with a history, a lineage, and a set of

evolving traditions that stretch back decades—long before today's students were born.

The **Wall of Rap History** project exists to make that lineage visible.

When students see rap laid out across time—era by era—they begin to understand that:

- the music they love didn't appear out of nowhere,

- the techniques they admire were built slowly, layer by layer,

- and every generation of artists was responding to the world they lived in.

This realization often changes how students listen, write, and perform.

Why a "Wall"?

A wall does something a worksheet can't.

A wall:

- stays up,

- stays visible,

- and quietly teaches every day.

Instead of treating rap history as a one-time lesson, the Wall of Rap History turns it into a **living backdrop** for everything else the class does—freestyling, writing bars, vocabulary work, and discussion.

Students begin to place themselves inside a larger story:

> *"I'm not just rapping today. I'm standing on something that already exists."*

That shift—from isolation to lineage—is powerful.

Culture, Not Just Content

This project is not about memorizing dates or artist lists.

It's about helping students see rap as:

- a response to social conditions,

- a creative outlet born from community,

- and a form of storytelling that evolves as technology, politics, and culture change.

By walking through different eras, students encounter:

- different production styles,

- different lyrical priorities,

- and different ideas about what it means to "be dope."

That comparison naturally opens the door to deeper questions:

- Why did this sound emerge *then*?

- What was happening in the world at the time?

- What problems were artists responding to?

- How is today's rap similar—and how is it different?

This Is a Framework, Not a Rulebook

The timeline and layout that follow represent **one well-tested approach** to building a Wall of Rap History.

It is intentionally presented as a **suggestion**, not a prescription.

Teachers and students are encouraged to:

- swap in artists they care about,

- expand eras that resonate more deeply,

- compress or remix sections,

- add local, regional, or personal influences,

- or redesign the wall entirely to fit their space and style.

FYRE does not believe there is only one "correct" version of rap history.

The goal is **engagement, ownership, and connection**—not uniformity.

A Project That Grows With the Class

One of the strengths of this project is that it doesn't have to be finished all at once.

Many classes choose to:

- start with the basic timeline,

- then add notes, lyrics, or artist spotlights over time,

- allowing the wall to evolve alongside the students' skills and tastes.

In this way, the wall becomes a shared artifact:

- part history lesson,

- part cultural map,

- part record of the class itself.

What Comes Next

The following handout provides:

- a **visual-friendly timeline**,

- key eras and turning points,

- and one concrete way to translate rap history into a physical wall mural.

Use it as-is, remix it, or let it inspire something entirely your own.

The only requirement is this:

Treat rap as a culture with a past—and give students a place to see themselves inside its future.

Below is a **visual-friendly timeline** you can translate straight onto a wall mural.Each block includes a **time span**, a **quick tagline**, **key musical traits**, and a **few flagship artists/albums** that will help students recognize the era at a glance. Feel free to swap in local or personal favorites, but the skeleton below covers the milestones most historians and fans agree on.

–
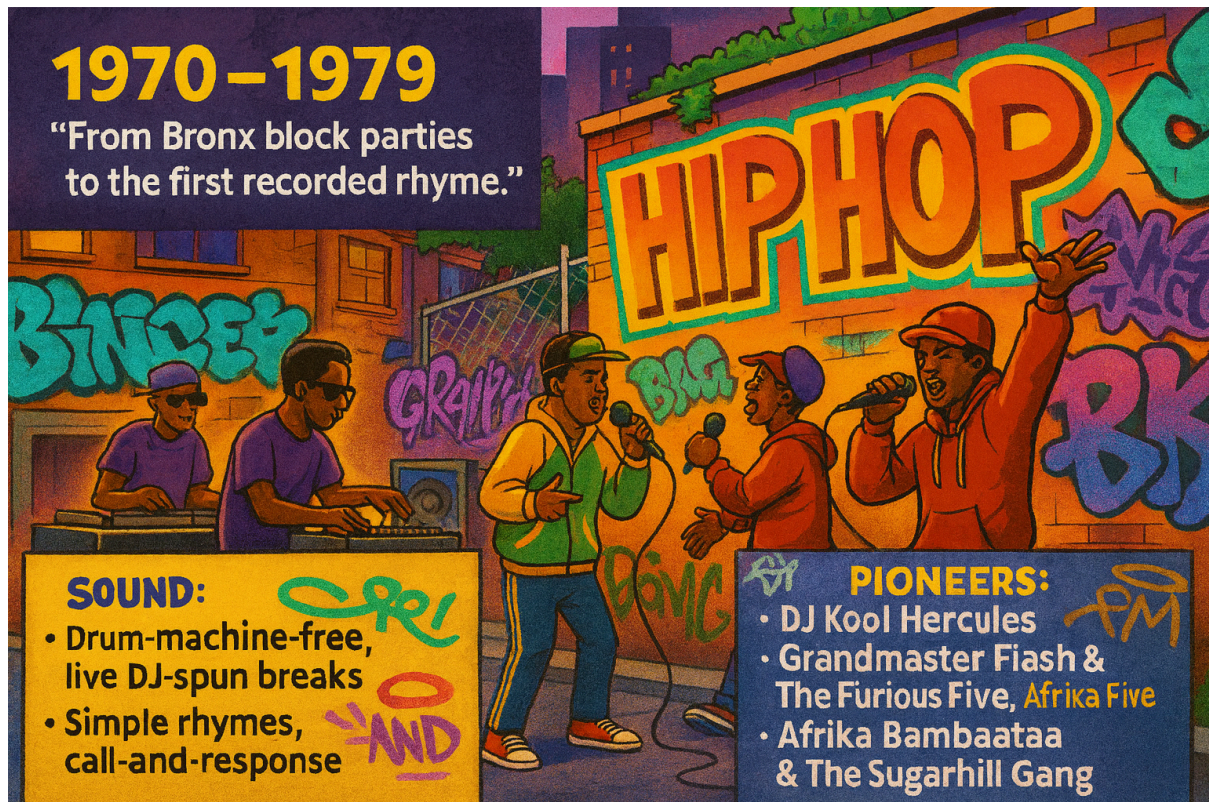
①1970-1979 – **The Birth of Hip-Hop**

Tagline: "From Bronx block parties to the first recorded rhyme."

- **What it looks like:** Turntables, break-beats, graffiti tags, boomboxes, MCs battling on the street.
- **Sound:** Drum-machine-free, live DJ-spun breaks (James Brown, The Soul Searchers). Simple rhymes, call-and-response.
- **Pioneers:** DJ Kool Hercules, Grandmaster Flash & The Furious Five, Afrika Bambaataa, The Sugarhill Gang ("Rapper's Delight").

–

1980–1984 OLD-SCHOOL FOUNDATIONS

Party anthems, simple flows,
the first rap-record contracts.

Sound:
- 4-to-the-floor beats
- Synth-bass lines
- "Party-rap" lyrics

Run-D.M.C. (early singles)
LL Cool J
The Fat Boys
Whodini
The Treacherous Three

"Sucker MCs"
– Run-D.M.C.

2 1980-1984 – **Old-School Foundations**

Tagline: "Party anthems, simple flows, the first rap-record contracts."

- **Visual cues:** Early cassette tapes, colorful Adidas sneakers, break-dance silhouettes.
- **Sound:** 4-to-the-floor beats, synth-bass lines, "party-rap" lyrics.
- **Key acts:** Run-D.M.C. (early singles), LL Cool J, The Fat Boys, Whodini, The Treacherous Three.
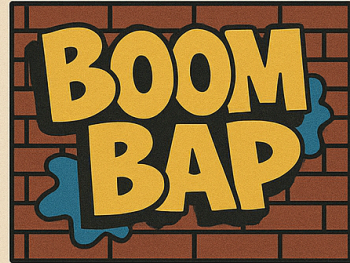
1985-1989 – The Golden Era Begins

Tagline: "Sampling becomes an art; lyricism takes center stage."

- **Iconography:** Vinyl crates, boom-box with "sample" stickers, graffiti murals of "boom-bap".
- **Sound:** Heavy use of the **Akai S950 / SP-1200** samplers, crisp boom-bap drums, multi-syllabic rhyme schemes.
- **Legends:** Rakim (Eric B. & Rakim), Public Enemy, Boogie Down Productions (KRS-One, Boogie Down Productions), Eric B. & Rakim, N.W.A (West-Coast), De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest.
-

1990–1994 THE CLASSIC 'GOLDEN ERA'
(PEAK)

'East-vs-West, storytelling, and the rise of the album as art.'

NYC   LA

Sound:
- Tight boom-bap
- G-Funk street narratives
- DJ scratches as hooks

Sound:
- Tight-boom-bap
- G-Funk synths
- Wu-Tang Clan
- Dr. Dre
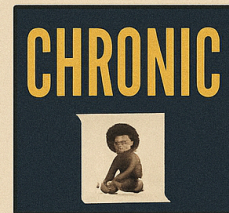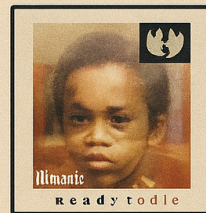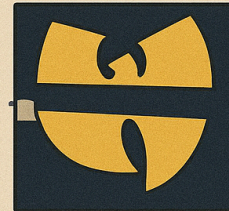
Must-Know:
- Nas – *Illmatic* (1994)
- The Notorious B.I.G. –

The Classic "Golden Era" (Peak)

Tagline: "East-vs-West, storytelling, and the rise of the album as art."

- **Visuals:** Dual-city maps (NYC ↔ LA), gold-plated microphones, "album cover" collages.
- **Sound:** Tight bom-bap, G-Funk synths, gritty street narratives, DJ scratches as hooks.
- **Must-Know:** Nas – *Illmatic* (1994), The Notorious B.I.G. – *Ready to Die* (1994), Wu-Tang Clan, Dr. Dre – *The Chronic* (1992), Ice Cube, Snoop Dogg, OutKast (early Southern).

1995–1999 THE 'SHINY-ERA' / MAINSTREAM EXPLOSION

'Hip-hop goes platinum, bling, and cross-genre collabs.
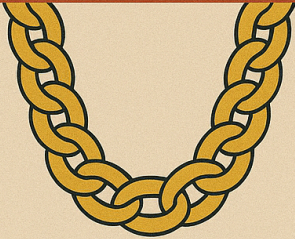
BLING

Sound:
- Polished production
- Heavy bass
- 'shiny" hooks
- More pop-oriented choruses

Stars: Jay-Z, Puff Daddy
Missy Elliott
Lauryn Hill – *The Miseducation* (1998)
DMX, Busta Rhymes, Juvenile (Cash Money)

⑤ 1995-1999 – **The "Shiny-Era" / Mainstream Explosion**

Tagline: "Hip-hop goes platinum, bling, and cross-genre collabs."

- **Graphics:** Gold chains, oversized "bling" fonts, glossy magazine covers.
- **Sound:** Polished production, heavy bass, "shiny" hooks, more pop-oriented choruses.
- **Stars:** Jay-Z, Puff Daddy, Missy Elliott, Lauryn Hill – *The Miseducation* (1998), Eminem's *The Slim Shady LP* (1999), DMX, Busta Rhymes, Juvenile (Cash Money).

2000–2005 – The 'Digital-Shift' & Southern Dominance

Crank the 808, mixtape culture, internet-age hype.

CRANK THAT

808-heavy trap beats (early T.I., Young Jeezy), crunk (Lil Jon), "chipmunk" vocal pitch-ups, auto-tuned choruses

50 Cent, Lil Wayne (Tha Carter series), OutKast–*Speakerboxxx*/*The Love Below* (2003), Kanye West (early production), Nelly, Ludacris

6 2000-2005 – The "Digital-Shift" & Southern Dominance
Tagline: "Crank the 808, mixtape culture, internet-age hype."
- **Imagery:** iPods, early smartphones, mixtape CDs, "crank that" dance moves.
- **Sound:** 808-heavy **trap** beats (early T.I., Young Jeezy), crunk (Lil Jon), "chipmunk" vocal pitch-ups, auto-tuned choruses.
- **Key players:** 50 Cent, Lil Wayne (Tha Carter series), OutKast – *Speakerboxxx/The Love Below* (2003), Kanye West (early production), Nelly, Ludacris.

7 2006-2012 – The "Internet-Mixtape" Era
Tagline: "Free downloads, DIY hustle, lyrical resurgence."

- **Visuals:** Laptop screens, SoundCloud icons, "download free" flyers.
- **Sound:** Mix of polished club bangers and raw, lyric-heavy mixtapes; rise of **auto-tune** as artistic tool.
- **Influencers:** Drake (mixtape *So Far Gone*), Kendrick Lamar (*Section.80*), J. Cole (*The Warm Up*), Kid Cudi, Nicki Minaj, ASAP Rocky, Tyler, the Creator.

'13–'18
The 'Streaming & Trap' Boom

Billion-play streams, 808s everywhere global crossover

Sound: Minimalist, hard-hitting trap drums, melodic synths, heavy use of auto-tune and vocal layering.

FUTURE   MIGOS   TRAVIS SCOTT
CARDI B   POST MALONE
LIL UZI VERT   XXXTENTACION

🔲 2013-2018 – **The "Streaming & Trap" Boom**
Tagline: "Billion-play streams, 808s everywhere, global crossover."

- **Graphics:** Streaming logos (Spotify, Apple Music), TikTok-style dancing silhouettes.

- **Sound:** Minimalist, hard-hitting **trap** drums, melodic synths, heavy use of **auto-tune** and **vocal layering**.
- **Heavyweights:** Future, Migos, Travis Scot, Cardi B, Post Malone, Lil Uzi Vert, XXXTentacion, 21 Savage, Rae Sremmurd.

'19–Present
The 'Genre-Fluid & Global' Wave

Borders blur, AI tools activism meets entertainment.

US'GI

Sound: Fusion of drill, afro-beat, Latin reggaetón, hyper-pop, lo-fi, and experimental electronic textures; lyrical focus on mental

9 2019-Present – **The "Genre-Fluid & Global" Wave**

Tagline: "Borders blur, AI tools, activism meets entertainment."

- **Visual cues:** World map with city pins, AI-generated art, protest signs, VR headsets.
- **Sound:** Fusion of drill, afro-beat, Latin reggaetón, hyper-pop, lo-fi, and experimental electronic textures; lyrical focus on mental health, social justice, and self-identity.

- **Current faces:** *Kendrick Lamar** (*Mr. Morale & the Big Steppers*), **Megan Thee Stallion**, **Lil Baby**, **Pop Smoke** (drill),
  *Burna Boy, **Bad Bunny**, **Doja Cat**, **Lil Nas X**, **Jack Harlow**, **Cordae**, **SZA**, **Tyler, the Creator** (still evolving).

'25-Future –
The 'AI-Assisted & Immersive' Frontier (Speculative)

AI-co-writing, VR concerts, decentralized royalties.
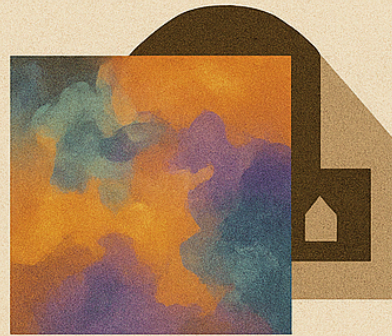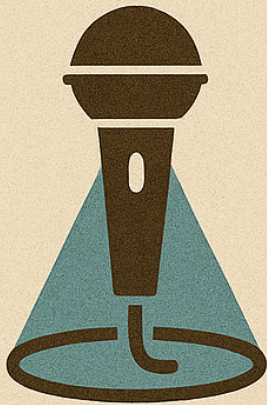
Emerging trends:
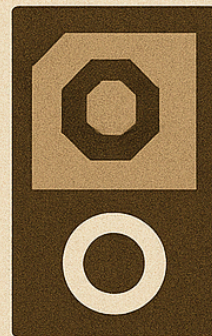
AI-generated beats, virtual-reality rap battles, NFT-backed releases, deeper cross-cultural collaborations (e.g., Afro-Asian rap hybrids)

🔟 2025-Future – **The "AI-Assisted & Immersive" Frontier** *(Speculative)*

Tagline: "AI-co-writing, VR concerts, decentralized royalties."

- **Potential visuals:** Holographic microphones, blockchain symbols, AI-generated album art.
- **Emerging trends:** AI-generated beats, virtual-reality rap battles, NFT-backed releases, deeper cross-cultural collaborations (e.g., Afro-Asian rap hybrids).

How to Lay It Out on the Wall

1. **Horizontal Timeline** – Each era gets a colored band (e.g., 70s-purple, 80s-orange, 90s-gold, 00s-red, 10s-blue, 20s-green).
2. **Icons & Snapshots** – Place a tiny illustration (boombox, turntable, iPod, streaming logo) inside each band.
3. **Mini-Quote Bar** – Add a famous lyric or tagline (e.g., "It's bigger than rap, it's a movement" – KRS-One).
4. **Artist "Spotlight" Circles** – Small circles with a portrait or silhouette of 2-3 hallmark artists per era.
5. **Timeline Axis** – Year markers every 5 years; larger markers at the start of each era.

Quick Reference Table (for the mural legend)

Era	Years	Core Sound	Visual Symbol	Representative Artists
Birth	1970-79	DJ-spun breaks, party MCs	Boombox on a street corner	DJ Kool Hercules, Grandmaster Flash
Old-School	1980-84	Simple synth beats, party anthems	Cassette tape & Adidas	Run-D.M.C., LL Cool J
Early Golden	1985-89	Sample-heavy boom-bap, lyric focus	Vinyl crate & spray-paint tag	Rakim, Public Enemy

Classic Golden	1990-94	East-vs-West rivalry, storytelling	Gold-plated mic	Nas, Notorious B.I.G., Dr. Dre
Shiny	1995-99	Polished, pop-hook heavy	Bling chains	Jay-Z, Missy Elliott, Eminem
Digital-Shift	2000-05	808 trap, mixtape hustle	iPod & CD-mix	50 Cent, Lil Wayne, OutKast
Internet-Mixtape	2006-12	DIY releases, lyrical resurgence	Laptop & download icon	Drake, Kendrick Lamar, J. Cole
Streaming & Trap	2013-18	Minimalist trap, global hits	Streaming logo	Future, Migos, Cardi B
Genre-Fluid	2019-Now	Fusion, activism, AI tools	VR headset & protest sign	Bad Bunny, Pop Smoke, Megan Thee Stallion
AI-Assisted (future)	2025+	AI-co-written beats, immersive shows	Hologram mic & blockchain	(Emerging artists)

Tip for the classroom: Invite students to **ad a "post-it"** with their favorite current rap lyric or a new artist they discover. Over time the mural becomes a living timeline that reflects both history *and* the class's own evolving taste.
Enjoy building the wall—and may it inspire the next generation of lyricists! 🎨 🎤 🚀

Mini-Lesson: "The Message" and the Power of Rap to Tell the Truth

In discussions about rap history, one song is often singled out as a turning point—not because it was the first rap song, but because it proved what rap *could do*.

In 1982, **The Message** was released by Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five. Decades later, *Rolling Stone* magazine ranked it the **#1 rap song of all time**, citing its groundbreaking role in showing that rap could examine serious social realities—not just party, brag, or dance themes.

This marked a major shift in hip-hop culture.

NOTE: This song uses occasional bits of profanity, so if that's not something your class is prepared for, feel free to skip this lesson, or to try to find a different song that can make the same point.

Why "The Message" Matters

Before *The Message*, most recorded rap focused on:

- party energy,

- crowd interaction,

- boasting skill or style.

The Message did something different.

It told a story about:

- poverty,

- urban decay,

- frustration,

- pressure,

- and the feeling of being trapped inside social systems that don't work.

Lines like *"It's like a jungle sometimes…"* weren't abstract poetry—they were lived experience.

For the first time, rap was widely recognized as:

> **a form of social commentary**,
> not just entertainment.

That recognition opened the door for everything that followed—from political rap to storytelling, from protest to introspection.

Rap as Literature (Not Just Music)

In FYRE, rap is treated as **a form of written and spoken text**, worthy of the same analysis applied to:

- poems,

- short stories,

- speeches,

- and songs studied in traditional English classes.

The Message is a powerful example because:

- the lyrics are concrete and descriptive,

- the voice is observational, not fictional,

- and the meaning depends heavily on **historical context**.

Understanding the song requires understanding the world it came from.

Student Analysis Activity

Step 1: Read the Lyrics (No Beat at First)
 Students read the lyrics on paper or screen, without music playing.
 This reinforces that rap stands on words, not just sound.

Step 2: Context Check
 Discuss:

- When was this written?

- What was happening in American cities in the early 1980s?

- Who is speaking in the song—and why?

Step 3: Close Reading Questions
 Students respond (in writing or discussion) to prompts such as:

- What problems does the speaker describe?

- What emotions come through most strongly?

- Which lines feel observational vs. emotional?

- Does the song offer solutions, or mainly describe reality? Why might that matter?

Step 4: Then Listen
 Play the song after analysis and ask:

- Does hearing the delivery change how the lyrics feel?

- Why might the tone matter as much as the words?

Connecting Past to Present

Students are often surprised to discover that:

- many of the issues described in *The Message* still exist,

- rap has been engaging with serious topics for over 40 years,

- and today's artists are part of a much longer conversation.

This realization helps students see themselves not as isolated voices, but as participants in a tradition.

ELA Standards Alignment (Teacher Reference)

This lesson supports common English Language Arts standards, including:

- **Analyzing literary texts** (theme, tone, perspective)

- **Interpreting a work within its historical and cultural context**

- **Evaluating how an author's background and environment shape meaning**

- **Comparing texts across time periods**

- **Supporting interpretations with textual evidence**

Because the lyrics function as a written text, this lesson fits naturally within ELA curricula while remaining culturally relevant and engaging.

Why FYRE Includes This Lesson

FYRE is not about convincing students that "old music is better."

It's about helping them understand that:

- rap has always been capable of depth,

- lyricism didn't start with their generation,

- and their voices matter more when they understand the voices that came before them.

The Message is one of the clearest entry points into that understanding.

Writing in Bars: Structure, Rhythm, and the Power of the Hook

When students first begin writing rap lyrics, they often write the same way they speak: long blocks of words, poured out all at once, with no clear rhythm, structure, or repeated sections. This is completely understandable. Writing is familiar. Music structure is not.

But here's a crucial truth that often surprises beginners:

> **Except for spontaneous freestyling, finished rap songs are highly structured.**
> They follow the same basic musical principles as pop, rock, country, and R&B.

Rap is poetry **inside** music—not outside of it.

This lesson introduces students to the idea of **bars**, **sections**, and **hooks**, and shows how professional rappers intentionally shape their words to fit the beat.

Rap Songs Have Structure (Just Like Other Songs)

Before writing, we listen.

Ask students to think of rap songs they already know well—songs they could recognize within the first few seconds. Then point out what those songs almost always include:

- **Verses** – where the story, message, or details are delivered

- **A Chorus or Hook** – a repeated section that anchors the song

- **Clear Line Lengths** – lines that fit the beat instead of spilling over it

Even artists famous for freestyling and improvisation switch to **structured writing** when they create recorded songs.

Freestyle is about speed and reaction.
 Songs are about **design**.

What Is a "Bar"?

A **bar** is a unit of musical time. In most rap beats:

- Each bar has **4 beats**

- The **snare drum** usually hits on beats **2 and 4**

- Rappers often place their **end rhyme near beat 4**

This is not a rule—but it is a powerful guideline.

When too many syllables are forced into a bar, words get rushed and slurred.
 When too few are used, words get stretched unnaturally.

The goal is **balance**.

Syllables Per Bar (A Practical Range)

Drawing from instructional material by **Cole Mize**, here is a helpful working range for beginners:

- **Low end:** 6–8 syllables per bar
   (leaves room for pauses and breathing)

- **High end:** 10–13 syllables per bar
   (keeps words clear and rhythmic)

There is **no single "correct" number**.
 There are only techniques—and choices.

Professional rappers usually do this **by ear**, not by counting.
 But counting syllables is a powerful tool **when something isn't working**.

Here are the exact Cole Mize videos we used in class:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhTp35DEEzQ

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KCdV7ApE7G4

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1ltyaFgMIT4&t=36s

Hooks Matter (And They're Not Optional)

Many beginners write entire songs with **no chorus at all**.
 This makes the song feel endless and unfocused—even if the lyrics are emotional or honest.

A **hook** (also called a chorus):

- Repeats

- Uses simpler language

- Gives the listener something to hold onto

- Provides structure and breathing room

Hooks are not "selling out."
 They are **how music communicates**.

Class Activity: Writing a Song Together

Instead of asking students to immediately write full songs on their own, this lesson works best as a **group composition**.

Step 1: Choose a Beat

Use a **mellow, mid-tempo instrumental** (not fast).

Step 2: Define the Structure on the Board

Write something like:

- Verse 1 – 8 bars
- Hook – 4 bars
- Verse 2 – 8 bars
- Hook – 4 bars

Step 3: Write One Bar at a Time

As a class:

- Agree on the **last word** of the bar
- Keep syllables within the suggested range
- Place the rhyme near the end of the bar

This slows everyone down—in a good way.

Step 4: Create a Simple Hook

The hook should:

- Repeat the same words
- Use fewer syllables than the verses
- Be easy to remember

This is where structure becomes obvious.

The Big Idea

Rap is not just emotion.
 Rap is not just speed.
 Rap is **craft**.

Learning structure doesn't limit expression—it **frees it**.

Once students understand bars, hooks, and rhythm, their writing becomes:

- clearer

- more musical

- more confident

- and easier to perform

And that's the point of FYRE:
 expression with control, power with discipline, and creativity with structure.

Vocabulary Days

Building Word Power That Transfers Immediately Into Writing

Vocabulary is one of the fastest ways to level up a student's writing—but only if the words are learned **in context** and **used right away**.

In FYRE, vocabulary is not treated as a memorization task.
 It is treated as **ammunition for expression**.

That is the purpose of **Vocabulary Days**.

Why FYRE Uses Themed Vocabulary Lists

On Vocabulary Days, the teacher introduces a **themed list of words**, rather than a random or disconnected set.

This is done for two important reasons:

1 Connected Concepts Stick Better

The human brain learns more effectively when new information is **related**, not scattered.

When vocabulary words share a theme:

- students recognize patterns,

- meanings reinforce each other,

- and recall improves naturally.

This mirrors how real language is learned outside of school—through clusters of meaning, not isolated definitions.

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2 The Words Can Be Used Immediately in Writing

Because the words are related, they can be **applied right away** in a short songwriting or writing activity.

Instead of:

- learning words one day

- and *maybe* using them weeks later

Vocabulary Days are designed so students:

- learn the words,

- hear them,

- say them,

- and **use them creatively within the same class period**.

This immediate transfer is critical.

How a Vocabulary Day Works

Step 1: Introduce the Theme

The teacher briefly explains the theme of the vocabulary list.
 Examples might include:

- emotions

- conflict

- movement

- power

- identity

- change

- struggle

- success

The explanation should be short and concrete.

Step 2: Define the Words Together

For each word:

- read it aloud,

- clarify its meaning,

- give a simple example sentence,

- and invite students to restate it in their own words.

The goal is **functional understanding**, not dictionary perfection.

Step 3: Oral Practice

Before writing, students practice **saying** the words:

- in short phrases,

- in call-and-response,

- or inside a single bar or sentence.

This reduces anxiety and warms up the language center of the brain.

Step 4: Immediate Writing Application

Students then use the themed vocabulary in a **short songwriting or writing task**, such as:

- a 4-bar verse,

- a short chorus,

- or a brief paragraph written in rhythmic lines.

Because the words are thematically connected, students don't struggle to force them in—they **belong together naturally**.

What Vocabulary Days Are *Not*

Vocabulary Days are not:

- spelling tests,

- memorization drills,

- or isolated worksheets disconnected from expression.

The goal is not to "know" the word once.

The goal is to **own** the word.

Why Vocabulary Days Matter in FYRE

Vocabulary expands:

- what students can say,

- how precisely they can say it,

- and how much control they have over their expression.

For many students, limited vocabulary leads to:

- repetition,

- frustration,

- or emotional dumping without clarity.

Vocabulary Days give students **new tools**, not new rules.

Words become resources—not obstacles.

Teacher Flexibility Encouraged

The vocabulary themes, list length, and writing format are intentionally flexible.

Teachers are encouraged to:

- adapt themes to current lessons,

- adjust difficulty based on student readiness,

- and modify writing length to fit time constraints.

FYRE provides a structure—not a script.

The Big Idea

Vocabulary matters most when it is:

- connected,

- practiced,

- and immediately expressed.

Vocabulary Days ensure that new words don't stay trapped on a list—they **move directly into the student's voice**.

That's how language becomes power.

Sample Vocabulary List A

Theme: Power, Control, & Resistance

These words work well for songs about authority, pressure, survival, and standing ground.

- **Dominance** – control or power over others

- **Oppression** – prolonged unfair control or cruelty

- **Authority** – the right to command or enforce rules

- **Defiance** – open resistance or bold disobedience

- **Autonomy** – independence; self-governance

- **Leverage** – advantage or power used to influence

- **Constraint** – a limitation or restriction

- **Rebellion** – open resistance to control

- **Suppression** – forced restraint or silencing

- **Agency** – the ability to act independently and make choices

Suggested writing prompt:

Write 4 bars about a time someone tried to control you—and how you responded.

Sample Vocabulary List B

Theme: Identity, Growth, & Self-Reflection

These words are excellent for emotional maturity, introspection, and narrative writing.

- **Identity** – how a person sees themselves

- **Perception** – how something is understood or interpreted

- **Authentic** – genuine; true to oneself

- **Conflict** – a struggle between opposing forces

- **Transformation** – a major change in form or character

- **Introspection** – examining one's own thoughts and feelings

- **Integrity** – adherence to moral principles

- **Contradiction** – inconsistency between ideas or actions

- **Vulnerability** – openness to emotional exposure

- **Resolve** – firm determination

Suggested writing prompt:

Write a hook using two of these words that captures who you are *right now*.

Sample Vocabulary List C

Theme: Struggle, Survival, & Progress

These words connect well to real-world challenges, resilience, and forward motion.

- **Adversity** – hardship or difficulty

- **Resilience** – the ability to recover from setbacks

- **Perseverance** – continued effort despite obstacles

- **Momentum** – forward movement or progress

- **Stagnation** – lack of movement or growth

- **Sacrifice** – giving up something for a greater goal

- **Endurance** – the ability to withstand hardship

- **Instability** – lack of steadiness or security

- **Breakthrough** – sudden progress after difficulty

- **Trajectory** – the path or direction of movement

Suggested writing prompt:

Write a verse that starts in struggle and ends in forward motion.

Teaching Tip for Vocabulary Days

You do **not** need students to master every word perfectly.

Success looks like:

- recognizing the word,

- understanding it well enough to use it,

- and attempting it in writing or bars.

Precision improves over time through repetition and use.

Why These Lists Work in FYRE

- The words **connect naturally**

- They **sound right in lyrics**

- They push students beyond basic language

- They transfer immediately into writing

Vocabulary is not just academic—it's **expressive capacity**.

FYRE Teacher Tracking Sheet

Documenting Behavioral, Emotional, and Academic Impact

FYRE is designed to improve student expression **without sacrificing regulation, safety, or academic accountability**. In structured or therapeutic educational environments, it is often necessary—not just helpful—to **document outcomes**.

This tracking sheet exists for that reason.

It allows educators to collect **simple, observable data** that demonstrates whether FYRE is having a positive impact on students over time.

Why Tracking Matters

Many innovative instructional approaches fail not because they don't work—but because there is no clear way to **prove** that they work.

FYRE encourages educators to document changes in four key areas:

1. **Behavioral incidents**

2. **Emotional regulation**

3. **Class engagement**

4. **Academic performance**

These categories align closely with what most schools, districts, and oversight bodies already care about.

How to Use This Sheet

- This sheet is intended to be completed **once per week**, not daily.

- It works best when used **before FYRE begins** (baseline) and **during implementation**.

- Scores should reflect **observable trends**, not isolated moments.

This is not meant to be punitive or judgmental—it is meant to be **informational**.

FYRE Weekly Impact Tracking Sheet (Teacher Use)

Teacher Name: _____

Program / School: _____

Class / Group: _____

Week of: _____

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1 Behavioral Incidents

Compared to this student's typical baseline:

☐ Significant decrease
☐ Moderate decrease
☐ No noticeable change
☐ Moderate increase
☐ Significant increase

Notes (optional):

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2 Emotional Regulation

Student's ability to manage frustration, stay within boundaries, and recover from setbacks:

☐ Strong improvement
☐ Some improvement
☐ No noticeable change
☐ Some regression
☐ Significant regression

Observed indicators (check any that apply):
☐ Less impulsive behavior
☐ Faster recovery after redirection

☐ Improved frustration tolerance
☐ More appropriate emotional expression

Notes (optional):

_____

_____

_____

3 Class Engagement

Student participation during FYRE-related activities and general class time:

☐ Much more engaged
☐ More engaged
☐ No noticeable change
☐ Less engaged
☐ Much less engaged

Engagement examples (optional):
☐ Willing participation
☐ Sustained focus
☐ Voluntary contributions
☐ Peer collaboration

4 Academic Impact

Changes observed in school-related performance (assignments, effort, or grades):

☐ Clear improvement
☐ Some improvement
☐ No noticeable change
☐ Some decline
☐ Significant decline

Evidence (optional):
☐ Improved written output
☐ Better task completion
☐ Increased effort
☐ Improved grades or scores

Overall FYRE Impact (Teacher Judgment)

Based on observation, FYRE's impact on this student has been:

☐ Very positive
☐ Positive
☐ Neutral
☐ Negative

Additional Comments:

_____

_____

_____

Important Notes for Educators

- This sheet is **not** designed to replace official data systems.

- It is a **supplemental tool** to help educators communicate trends clearly.

- Individual results will vary, but **patterns over time matter**.

When used consistently, this kind of tracking helps:

- justify continued use of FYRE,

- support program expansion,

- and provide administrators with concrete evidence of impact.

Why FYRE Includes This Tool

FYRE is not just creative—it is **accountable**.

Expression without regulation is chaos.
 Regulation without expression is suppression.

FYRE aims for the middle ground—and this tracking sheet helps educators demonstrate when that balance is being achieved.

Optional Add-Ons (Not Required)

Educators may choose to:

- pair this with existing behavior logs,

- aggregate weekly sheets monthly,

- or use the form selectively for high-need students.

Use what fits your environment.