

# HIP-HOP LANGUAGE ARTS THEMATIC TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

Michael Cirelli and Alan Sitomer

## The Classics

Mark Twain  
Aristotle  
Frederick Douglass  
Jane Austen  
Oliver Wendell Holmes  
Martin Luther King Jr.  
Gandhi  
The U.S. Constitution  
Philip Vera Cruz  
Lao-tzu  
Alice Walker  
Ernest Hemingway  
Sonia Sotomayor  
Junot Díaz

## The Contemporaries

Jay-Z  
Lauryn Hill  
Nas  
Kendrick Lamar  
Tupac Shakur  
Drake  
Afrika Bambaataa  
Chuck D  
Queen Latifah  
Jeff Chang  
Lupe Fiasco  
Rakim  
J. Cole  
Eminem

## Delivering the 5th Element of Hip-Hop to Capable Young Minds

**1.** B-boying **2.** MC-ing **3.** Graffiti Art **4.** DJ-ing **5.** Knowledge

*Note:* All work contained herein begins with the smart and effective implementation of standards-based lesson plans that have been constructed around three principles:

**1.** no profanity **2.** no misogyny **3.** no homophobia

Great vocabulary words to discuss; inappropriate elements to validate in a classroom environment.



## HIP-HOP INTERPRETATION GUIDE

**Question: Is violence ever an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?**

Consider the following text:

**from “Murder to Excellence” by Kanye West (with Jay-Z)**

I’m from the murder capital, where they murder for capital  
 Heard about at least 3 killings this afternoon  
 Lookin’ at the news like dang I was just with him after school,  
 No shop class but half the school got a tool,  
 And *I could die any day* type attitude  
 Plus his little brother got shot reppin’ his avenue  
 It’s time for us to stop and re-define black power  
 41 souls murdered in 50 hours

1. What does Kanye state about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?
  - Kanye clearly states that he does not believe violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict.
2. What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?
  - Kanye directly says in regard to the violence, “It’s time for us to stop.”
  - Kanye cites the egregious number of deaths (i.e., 41 souls murdered in 50 hours, I’m from the murder capital).
3. What can you infer about Kanye’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?
  - We can reasonably infer that Kanye does not believe that violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict in his community.
  - We also can infer that Kanye is deeply disturbed by the large number of violent acts in Chicago and feels his community needs to rethink the meaning of materialism, power, and respect.
4. What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?
  - When Kanye mentions “at least 3 killings this afternoon,” he is showing the irrationality/inappropriateness of turning to violence to resolve conflict.
  - When Kanye mentions that half of his school has a tool (gun), he is pointing to the false logic of an eye-for-an-eye mentality.
  - When Kanye asks his community to “stop and re-define,” he’s inferring that he has already done so and come to the conclusion that violence is NOT the answer.

### Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases

*What does Kanye mean when he says...*

1. “I’m from the murder capital, where they murder for capital”
  - The first part is an allusion to Chicago, 2014, the murder capital of the United States. The second part, “where they murder for capital,” explains that in Chicago some people value money (i.e., capital) more highly than they value another human being’s life.
2. “No shop class but half the school got a tool”
  - The word “tool” is slang for a gun. The phrase “half the school got a tool” is therefore an illumination of how prevalent weapons are in the city of Chicago. Furthermore, the “No shop class” phrase is a reference to the lack of educational funding being provided to inner city schools.



## HIP-HOP STUDENT WORKSHEET

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**2.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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**3.** What can you infer about Kanye’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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**4.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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### Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases

What does Kanye mean when he says...

**1.** “I’m from the murder capital, where they murder for capital”

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**2.** “No shop class but half the school got a tool”

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## THE CLASSICS INTERPRETATION GUIDE

**Question: Is violence ever an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?**

***On August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke the following words in Washington, D.C.:***

“[T]here is something that I must say to my people, who stand on the warm threshold which leads into the palace of justice: In the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred. We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline. We must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence. Again and again, we must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.”

1. What does Martin Luther King Jr. state about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?
  - Martin Luther King Jr. states that violence is not an appropriate solution for resolving conflict.
2. What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?
  - Martin Luther King Jr. specifically says that “[w]e must not allow our creative protest to degenerate into physical violence.” He is very clear about this point.
3. What can you infer about Martin Luther King Jr.’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?
  - We can infer that Martin Luther King Jr. believed that there were paths—different, more appropriate paths—to conflict resolution other than violence, paths he held great faith in.
4. What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim about this inference?
  - Martin Luther King Jr.’s reference to “conducting this struggle on the high plane of dignity” and cautioning people to “not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred” support the idea of his belief in finding nonviolent solutions.

### Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases

1. What does Martin Luther King, Jr. mean when he says, “We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline”?
  - The “high plane of dignity and discipline” is a reference to Martin Luther King Jr.’s deeply held belief that nonviolence is the only acceptable path his people can take to achieve their quest for true “color blind” justice. The “high plane” also can be interpreted to mean that this is the path God would want his people to choose (Martin Luther King Jr. was also a preacher).
2. Martin Luther King Jr. says, “We must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.” Why does he use the word “majestic” to describe these heights?
  - Though his people have been beaten, abused, and oppressed, he believes that replying with a strength of spirit is the most dignified, noble, Godly reaction that can be offered. To him, using soul force is not only the proper response but it’s also an undefeatable tactic, because it follows both the path to heaven and the path to inevitable victory. The use of soul force is thus “majestic.”



## THE CLASSICS STUDENT WORKSHEET

**Question: Is violence ever an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?**

***On August 28, 1963, Dr. Martin Luther King spoke the following words in Washington, D.C.:***

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**1.** What does Martin Luther King Jr. state about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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**2.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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**3.** What can you infer about Martin Luther King Jr.’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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**4.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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### **Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases**

**1.** What does Martin Luther King Jr. mean when he says, “We must forever conduct our struggle on the high plane of dignity and discipline”?

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**2.** Martin Luther King Jr. says, “We must rise to the majestic heights of meeting physical force with soul force.” Why does he use the word “majestic” to describe these heights?

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## HIP-HOP STUDENT WORKSHEET

**Question: Is violence ever an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?**

Consider the following text:

**from “Violent” by Tupac Shakur**

They claim that I’m violent,  
 Just cause I refuse to be silent  
 These hypocrites are havin’ fits,  
 Cause I’m not buyin it, defyin it,  
 Envious because I will rebel against  
 Any oppressor—and this is known as self-defense

**1.** What does Tupac state about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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**2.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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**3.** What can you infer about Tupac’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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**4.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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### Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases

What does Tupac mean when he says...

**1.** “These hypocrites are havin’ fits”

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**2.** “This is known as self-defense”

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## THE CLASSICS STUDENT WORKSHEET

**Question: Is violence ever an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?**

***On April 20, 1964, Nelson Mandela spoke the following words at the Palace of Justice in Pretoria, South Africa:***

“I do not deny that I planned sabotage. I did not plan it in a spirit of recklessness nor because I have any love of violence. I planned it as a result of a calm and sober assessment of the political situation that had arisen after many years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression of my people by the whites.”

- 1.** What does Mandela state about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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- 2.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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- 3.** What can you infer about Mandela’s beliefs based on his claim about whether violence is an appropriate solution for resolving conflict?

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- 4.** What specific evidence from the text can you provide to support your claim?

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### **Vocabulary Interpretation: Deduce the Meaning of Key Words and Phrases**

- 1.** Mandela says, “I planned it [sabotage] as a result of calm and sober assessment.” Why does Mandela use the word “sober”?

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- 2.** Why does Mandela use the phrase “after many years of tyranny, exploitation and oppression” in the text?

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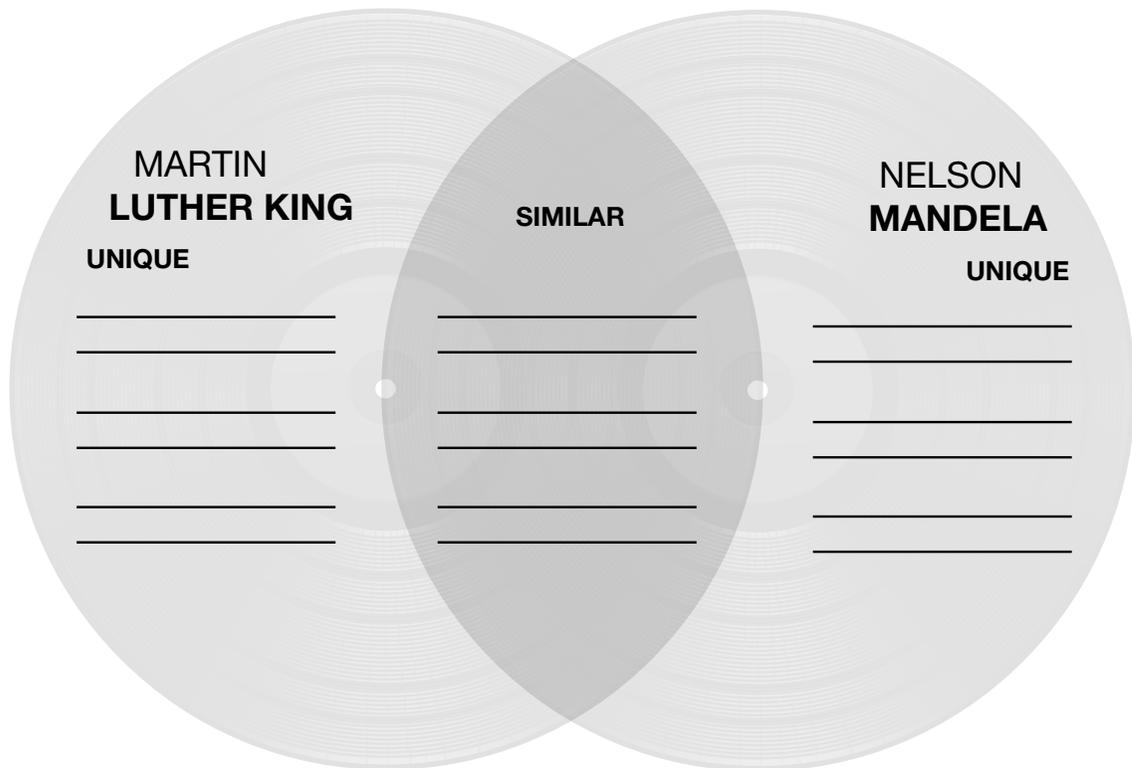


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### VENN DIAGRAM Student Worksheet



### VENN DIAGRAM Hip-Hop Student Worksheet

