

Literacy at Work

How to

Write a Rap



TEACHER GUIDE WITH CHRIS EMDIN, GRADES 6–12

"We don't teach young folks how to be able to exude confidence.... I think that this kind of lesson on how to rap gives you the opportunity to be able to teach them these skills that they need for navigating life." – Chris Emdin

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will

- Write rap verses using figurative language
- Practice self-reflection
- Build confidence and presentation skills

MATERIALS

- Paper, journal, or laptop

VOCABULARY

Persona

The character you embody when you rap—a combination of performance, presence, and personality.

Simile

A non-literal comparison using the words "like" or "as." Ex: She was as tall as a mountain.

Verse

Words in a metrical rhythm, usually incorporating rhyme.

Metaphor

A comparison that is not literally true but suggests that two things are alike, not using the words "like" or "as." Ex: My heart is a river.

Figurative language

Words and phrases that convey meaning beyond their everyday use. Examples include metaphors, analogies, hyperboles, and idioms.

WATCH AND RESPOND

20 minutes

Share the "How to Write a Rap" video.

Have students discuss what they learned about writing a rap. If students are using the student worksheet, they can write their answers in the corresponding section.

- How is writing a rap similar to writing a poem or story?
- What are some important elements of rap that Chris and Loaded Lux discuss?
- What does it mean for a rapper to have a persona?
- Chris Emdin asked students, "What's your word?" What were some students' words? Was there a word that caught your attention?



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DEFINING PERSONA

5 minutes

An important first step in writing a rap is developing a “persona” that speaks to the real, honest you. A persona in rap is a combination of **performance**, **presence**, and **personality**.

As a class, have students brainstorm different actions or qualities that fall under each element of persona. Write students’ answers publicly or have students take notes during the discussion.

Performance	Presence	Personality
Ex: How you walk into a room	Ex: The expression on your face	Ex: The way you speak

WHAT’S YOUR WORD?

10 minutes

Students develop their unique personas and choose one word to represent themselves.

Ask students to think about what makes them who they are. Encourage students to think not only about who they are right now, but also who they want to be.

Have students brainstorm ideas. Students can turn-and-talk with a partner to begin brainstorming and then take 5–10 minutes to free write ideas, in full sentences, phrases, or single words.

Remind students that there are no wrong answers.

Pause the free write after five minutes and ask students to begin thinking of one unique word that connects to each of their ideas. The word does not have to be in English and can even be made up, like Chris’s example, “Ratchedemic.”

Guide students with follow-up questions.

Check in as students brainstorm independently. If students choose a more common word like “loud” or “nice,” ask questions to help them dig deeper.

ASK TO INSPIRE

- How do your friends describe you?
- What aspect of your personality do you wish more people knew about?
- Are you passionate about a hobby, sport, or activity?
- Who’s your hero? What qualities do you have in common with them?
- What’s happening in current events that you are passionate about?

Examples

Idea	Word
“My personality is something no one would ever forget.”	Unforgettable
“I’m a leader. I show up.”	Bold
“I’m my own person, not a copy of somebody else.”	Official

After brainstorming and free writing, each student should have one word that represents their persona.

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SHARING YOUR WORD

10 minutes

Students share their words with the class and embrace the “performance” aspect of rap. When students share their word and the reasoning behind it, they should try to embody that word and their persona.

Ask students to share their words and why they chose them. Remind students to think about how their word relates to their personality today and the version of themselves that they aspire to be.

Respond to students by encouraging effort and creativity.

WRITING YOUR STORY

20 minutes

Students choose a story that they want to share and then shape those stories into raps.

Have students brainstorm and take notes about personal stories that they want to share. Remind students that their stories should connect to their personas and words.

Students revise their stories into verses.

To incorporate rhyme into their rap verses, have students think of ten words that are critical to their story. Then, for each of those ten words, students should list five words that rhyme with it. Encourage students to use rhyming dictionaries or ask their classmates for help. Encourage students to organize their words into a table so they can reference it as they write.

	Word	Rhyming Words
1	Example	
2		
3		

Once their list of rhyming words is complete, give students at least 15 minutes to write their raps.

Remind students that rhyming is important, but so are meaning and structure. The raps should include figurative language to bring depth to the story. Consider calling out the figurative language the Loaded Lux uses: “Virtue or vices grippin’ can screw up your life stream. Tombstones, diapers, everyone’s in a cipher.”

EXTEND

- Give students out-of-class time to work on developing their raps. Then allow every student to perform their rap and perfect their persona.
- Have students create an artistic representation of their word. They could write the word in graffiti, draw a visual representation or logo, or create a mood board or collage.
- Create a class music album. Have students record themselves performing their rap and then upload the files to a free website so students have an online collection of their work.