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## HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Whether you’re an educator, administrator, parent, student, or just someone who wants to learn more about hip hop, you can use this guide as a way to discuss the themes in the film *Beat Street*. **Discussion questions** are in blue, and **worksheets**—found at the end of the guide—are in green. Lessons are aligned with time-coded video modules, and ‘Resources for Students and Teachers’ offers further reading, further watching, and a list of local and national arts organizations. Above all, we understand that educators are multifaceted artists in their own right, so we encourage you to utilize your own artistic experiences to spark dialogue.

A PDF of this and other creative, incisive Tribeca Film Institute® Educator Guides and companion Student Guides can be found at [TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG](http://TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG)
As hip hop’s dance practitioners were entering public consciousness after appearances in *Flashdance* and *Breakin’*, in the summer of 1984 *Beat Street* became the first big-budget film to connect b-boying, djing, rap and graffiti together as hip hop culture. *Beat Street* is widely regarded as one of, if not the most, influential films in terms of bringing hip hop to the world stage. Produced by Harry Belafonte, it follows a young, innovative hip hop crew from the Bronx as they attempt to “make it big” downtown. Union laws prohibited graffiti artists from working on the film’s set, producing a poignant visual disparity between the existing graffiti and the murals created specifically for the film by professional artists. *Beat Street* features some of the best performers of the time, from DJ Kool Herc, Bambaataa, Melle Mel, Doug E Fresh and Sha Rock to the legendary breakers Rock Steady Crew and New York City Breakers.

**ABOUT THE FILMMAKERS**

**STAN LATHAN**

Stan Lathan directed *Beat Street*. Born in Philadelphia, he’s a director and producer with a wide range of credits: he directed *Sesame Street*, *Miami Vice*, and *Alvin Ailey: Memories and Visions*; plus dozens of others. He also executive-produced and directed *Killin’ Them Softly*, Dave Chappelle’s HBO Comedy Series.

**HARRY BELAFONTE**

Harry Belafonte produced *Beat Street*. Belafonte is a singer, songwriter, and activist. His album *Calypso* became the first LP to sell more than a million copies in the U.S. within a year, and the “Banana Boat Song” has been replayed and remixed in countless forms. Belafonte won a Tony award and was the first African American to win an Emmy in 1959.

**DAVID V. PICKER**

David V. Picker produced *Beat Street* with Harry Belafonte; he is a third generation motion picture executive and producer. In various capacities at United Artists Corporation, he brought to life seminal films including the James Bond series and Woody Allen’s movies. He also brought European filmmakers Federico Fellini, Ingmar Bergman, and Francois Truffaut to United Artists. As President of Paramount’s Motion Picture Division, he discovered Steve Martin and produced *The Jerk*. 

3
Beat Street’s story focuses on a hip hop crew from the Bronx in the early ‘80s. Visually, the film presents the urban decay that is well-documented of the time, from burnt-out and abandoned buildings to subway cars and tunnels covered with graffiti. The film explores the dynamics between the Bronx and Manhattan or uptown vs. downtown through clashes between b-boy crews and the politics of the crew trying to break into a more lucrative and popular scene. This includes the Roxy, an actual nightclub where the film’s producers cast many of the performers. By 1984, Run-DMC, the nation’s biggest hip hop act of the time had released a well-received record, thus cementing the MC’s position at the pivot. Beat Street, however, captured hip hop’s ascension to the mainstream at a critical and truthful stage in its development. It contextualizes the DJ as one of the premier conduits of the culture with equal footing among b-boys and MC’s. It reminded audiences that the not-so-distant roots of hip hop were collaborative in nature. In terms of local marketability, the presence of Rock Steady Crew and the Universal Zulu Nation in the film had a trickling impact on every borough. By the fall of 1984, b-boy crews and kids mimicking members of Afrika Bambaataa’s crew could be seen in just about every public school. Stylistically, Beat Street captured New York urban fashion at a time when disco, new wave, and punk had a genuine, non-commercial relationship to hip hop enthusiasts.

INGENUITY: CREATING SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

Hip hop is a youth force and medium, a tool and the very language of survival and resistance. It also has roots in immigrant communities in New York City. How did a culture of innovative art, language, and music—hip hop—originate with limited resources? How does the constant flux of immigrants to New York continue to shape and influence the city economically, politically and socially?

“...AND YA DON’T STOP”: CALL-AND-RESPONSE AND THE MC

Rappers are ubiquitous figures in popular culture and generally more prominent than practitioners of the other elements of hip hop. What makes an MC such a presence? What is the role of the MC? What tools and techniques do they use in their craft? What are skills that an MC uses that are applicable to other arenas and to our own lives?
HIP HOP VS. THE ESTABLISHMENT

Hip hop has long been a medium for spotlighting and documenting inequality and oppression. Chuck D’s most famous quote called rap music “The Black CNN.” What are some of the struggles and injustices faced by youth of color in New York, then and now? In what ways has/can hip hop provide a space for witness and resistance?

HIP HOP MEETS COMMERCE

While hip hop’s roots are in economically depressed yet exuberant and innovative youth communities, the culture has gone on to become part of multi-billion dollar media industries. As history has shown with other art forms, when art meets business there are significant impacts on both. Nas titled his 2006 album “Hip Hop Is Dead”. What percentage of the music you listen to frequently is hip hop? What other genres of music do you like? Do you have experience creating music yourself? How has hip hop morphed over the years? Has it run its course or is it still a viable youth medium of expression?

VIDEO MODULES

   (00:11:54–00:12:21)

   (00:06:12–00:09:33)

3. “Melle Mel: If You Believe That You’re the Future Scream it Out”
   (01:36:06–01:36:27)

4. “These Fools Busted Us for Dancing!”
   (01:15:03–01:20:30)

5. “You’re the Missionary and I’m the Native”
   (01:18:58–01:19:27)
LESSON 1: INGENUITY: CREATING SOMETHING FROM NOTHING

Time: 40 minutes
Tools: Chart paper, markers, copies from the book Can’t Stop Won’t Stop by Jeff Chang, Beat Street video module one, “Why Would Landlords Torch Buildings?” (00:11:54–00:12:21) and the Founders Worksheet.

PART A: The desert island
Describe this scenario and brainstorm solutions in a big web on the board/chart paper:
You live on a remote island where there are no traditional musical instruments. In addition, there are no formal classes for learning music and art and no centers where music is performed. You and your friends want to play and listen to music, dance and have fun. What do you do? Where do you go? Who do you access for help? How do you get resources?

Discuss:
• What factors might lead to a situation like the above scenario in a big city like New York?
• Why might youth be more creative in these situations than adults?
• How does your family history and where they originate from influence what you might turn to as a resource?

Explain that we are going to explore why and how hip hop emerged and how it has evolved and changed over time. Post and read this quote as a transition: “There was always a culture of borrow and take because there was a culture founded upon a lack of resources.”—Bobbito García (influential DJ/Rock Steady Crew member)

PART B: Origins

Discuss:
• Why would landlords torch buildings in the Bronx?
• Why would Kenny/DJ Double K say that where they live “ain’t New York”
• How do Kenny and his crew make do with what they have?
• Why do they want to create a space for music, art, dancing and fun?

Read excerpts from Jeff Chang’s Can’t Stop Won’t Stop: "Necropolis: The Bronx and the Politics of Abandonment” especially the sections “Bad Numbers” and “The Wasteland” on the downward spiral of economic conditions in the Bronx. Then “Making a Name: How DJ Kool Herc Lost His Accent and Started Hip-Hop,” especially the first pages on Kool Herc’s Jamaican origins. Discuss this quotation: “The blues had Mississippi, jazz had New Orleans. Hip hop has Jamaica. Pioneer DJ Kool Herc spent his earliest childhood years in the same Second Street yard that had produced Bob Marley.”

PART C: The founders
Break the class into small groups and provide each group with a basic timeline of hip hop history.

Assign each group a “founder” to research and present. Use the Founders Worksheet to brainstorm and then write the findings on chart paper. Turn the classroom walls, hallway or other prominent space into a large-scale hip hop timeline. End with a gallery walk and have everyone sign their names or tags on the timeline.
LESSON 2: “...AND YA DON’T STOP”: CALL-AND-RESPONSE AND THE MC

**Time:** 40 minutes  
**Tools:** Handouts or paper for note taking chart, speakers with songs queued up on an iPod or laptop, Beat Street video modules two, “DJ Kenny: Let Me Hear You Scream! + Us Girls” (00:06:12–00:09:33) and three, “Melle Mel: If You Believe That You’re the Future Scream it Out” (01:36:06–01:36:27) and the Call-and-Response worksheet.

**PART A:** What does Old MacDonald have to do with Melle Mel?
Recite this nursery rhyme and ask the class to shout out the response.
Old MacDonald had a farm Response: “E-I-E-I-O!!” Ask students how they knew the response and where they learned it, then explain that rapping or MCing is rooted in this form of audience participation, called “call-and-response.” This form has a deep history going back to blues and gospel which is in turn rooted in spirituals and field hollers that slaves brought and innovated from African oral traditions.

Play a series of songs that contain call-and-response. In partners, have students transcribe the call-and-response portion on the Call-and-Response worksheet. Give them time between each song to agree on and write it out.

**Discuss:**
- What effect does call-and-response in a song have on the listener?  
- What effect do you think it would have when performed live with an audience?  
- What other places, events, shows, etc. have you seen call-and-response used? (ie. at church, at a rally, at a game, military chants, etc.)

**PART B:** “If you dig where we’re coming from say yeah!”

**Discuss:**
- What is the purpose of the MCs using call-and-response in their performance, and what is the response from the audience?  
- What are other examples of songs (past or present) that contain call-and-response?

Play “ATLiens” by OutKast, a song that interpolates Melle Mel’s “Throw your hands in the air.” Discuss how through the years MCs have referenced and “updated” these classic chants and put their own spin on them.

**PART C:** More call-and-response
Break out with the same partners. Have the pairs choose from the following: take a classic hip hop chant and put your own spin on it; create and write your own call-and-response chant; research other songs that contain call-and-response and transcribe them; research call-and-response traditions in other cultures. Have each pair lead the whole class in their chant.

End the class by leading everyone in several chants of

“When I say Hip, you say Hop...Hip...”
“Hop!”
“Hip!”
“Hop!”
LESSON 3: HIP HOP VS. THE ESTABLISHMENT

Time: 40 minutes
Tools: Speakers with songs queued up on an iPod or laptop and Beat Street video module four, “These Fools Busted Us for Dancing!” (01:15:03–01:20:30).

PART A: Stop-and-frisk
Ask if anyone has heard of an NYPD policy called “Stop-and-Frisk.” Call on several students to explain their understanding of it, and to share personal stories or instances they have heard of”.

Discuss:
• Why would New York City institute a policy like this?
• Who does the policy generally target?
• Do you think the policy is effective in addressing persistent public safety and other criminal activity?
• What could the city and the police do differently to address these issues?

Share the article and/or show the video “The Scars of Stop-and-Frisk” from the New York Times.

PART B: Arrested for dancing
Play Beat Street video module four, “These Fools Busted Us for Dancing!”

Discuss:
• Why would the police target Lee and the dance crews?
• What other activities might youth be involved in that adults and/or police could view as dangerous or criminal?


Discuss the Amadou Diallo case, what students remember about it, their views, and how it connects to this Beat Street film module and Stop-and-Frisk policy.

Play KRS-ONE’s “Sound Of Da Police” and/or 2PAC’s “Trapped” as examples of hip hop songs that address racial profiling and police harassment. Visit rapgenius.com for user-submitted lyric analysis, sometimes by the artists themselves.

PART C: The mixtape
Break into partners and have the pairs research a song in which the artists present lyrics and messages about injustice, politics, police, incidents in their community, etc. Have the students write up a description including: artist, song title, album title, year; short summary of the song; quotes of lines or lyrics that particularly address the above examples; why they chose it. Then compile all of the songs into a class playlist/mixtape entitled “Hip Hop Songs Against Brutality” or the like.
LESSON 4: HIP HOP MEETS COMMERCE

Time: 80 minutes
Tools: Graph paper, the Art & Business worksheet and Beat Street video module five, “You’re the Missionary and I’m the Native” (01:18:58–01:19:27).

PART A: Art and business
Have students do a quick-write response and share-out to this quote: “The Bronx in the late ’70s was the American poster-child for urban decay...[the youth] came from poverty and conquered the world [through hip hop]”—Bill Adler (former Director of Publicity, Def Jam) What do you think Adler means that hip hop “conquered the world?” Do you agree or disagree? Why or why not?

Draw or project the Art & Business worksheet and fill it in by brainstorming with the class as a whole.

Discuss:
- What are the purposes and motivations behind art? Behind business? What does an artist want? What does a business want?
- Are the two mutually exclusive or can compromises be made?
- What examples can you think of in which art and business go hand in hand?

PART B: “Making it” and making the hit
Play Beat Street video module five, “You’re the Missionary and I’m the Native.”

Discuss:
- What do Lee, Kenny, and Chollie want from the opportunity?
- Why doesn’t the show want to screen Lee’s performance on TV?
- What does Kenny mean with the “missionary” comment?

Play “Hip Hop Saved My Life” by Lupe Fiasco, a song that tells the story of an up-and-coming MC who is forced to change his sound and lyrics to make a “hit” record.

PART C: What’s your motivation?
Have student volunteers represent a character in a fictional meeting of the up-and-coming hip hop group “Sick Communication” in the boardroom of award-winning record label Imperial Media. Provide each panel member with a role that is posted in front of them for the whole class to see, along with a Background/Motivation worksheet that only they can see; give them a few minutes to prepare. The class facilitator will serve as the moderator of the meeting. Make sure everyone speaks and stays “in character,” and take questions from the audience. Have the panel reveal their backgrounds/motivations and debrief the role-play.

Discuss:
- What was surprising about the discussion?
- How did each side strategize to get what they want?
- Was a compromise achieved? What did each side gain/lose in the compromise?
- If there was no compromise, what are some possible solutions?
RESOURCES FOR STUDENTS & TEACHERS

FURTHER READING  IF YOU'RE INTERESTED IN LEARNING MORE ABOUT SOME OF THE ISSUES PRESENTED IN THE FILM, CHECK OUT THESE BOOKS.

**Born in the Bronx: A Visual Record of the Early Days of Hip Hop**  By Johan Kugelberg, Joe Conzo & Afrika Bambaataa  
A historical record of the hip hop movement with a focus on the progressive musical culture that grew out of tough Bronx neighborhoods in the 1970s, this book pulls together previously unpublished street flyers, polaroids, and testimonials from Tony Lone, LA Sunshine, and Charlie Chase. Published in 2007.

**Hip Hop America**  By Nelson George  
Nelson George, veteran journalist and Brooklyn native, portrays rap as an art form and cultural and economic force in this 2005 book. His writing is both scholarly and engaging, shedding light on major locations, people, and events he witnessed personally. An effectively entertaining history of hip hop.

**New York Ricans from the Hip Hop Zone**  By Raquel Rivera  
Rivera’s book focuses on Puerto Rican contributions to hip hop music over the past 30 years. She points out that while Puerto Ricans and African-Americans collaborated to create hip hop in the early 1970s South Bronx and shared a ghetto-based entitlement, Puerto Ricans had to “step lightly through the identity minefield.”

**That’s the Joint: The Hip Hop Studies Reader**  Edited by Mark Anthony Neal & Murray Forman  
That’s the Joint! brings together the most important and up-to-date hip hop scholarship in one comprehensive volume. Presented thematically, the selections address the history of hip hop, identity politics of the “hip hop nation,” debates of “street authenticity,” social movements and activism, aesthetics, technologies of production, hip hop as a cultural industry, and much more.

FURTHER WATCHING  IF YOU LIKED THIS FILM, YOU MIGHT ALSO LIKE SOME OF THESE OTHER FILMS.

**Estilo Hip Hop**  
Filmmakers Loira Limbal and Vee Bravo chronicle three hip hop enthusiasts from Brazil, Chile and Cuba who mobilize young people to become politically active. They firmly believe that hip hop can change the world and the decisions they make ultimately will.

**Inventos: Hip Hop Cubano**  
Also by Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi, Inventos: Hip Hop Cubano provides a unique insight into the realities and politics of contemporary Cuba. The film follows some of the pioneers of this musical movement to their homes, the stage and as they travel abroad for the first time.

**Home Grown: HipLife In Ghana**  
Eli Jacobs-Fantauzzi’s film is a feature-length documentary about V.I.P. (Vision In Progress). The film documents ten years of their journey from the ghetto in Accra to their first international tour—they grow from being teenagers with a shared dream to musicians with fans around the world.

**Something from Nothing: The Art of Rap**  
Ice-T takes us on an intimate journey into the heart and soul of hip hop with the legends of rap music. This performance documentary goes beyond the stardom and the bling to explore what goes on inside the minds, and erupts from the lips, of the grandmasters of rap.

GET INVOLVED  CRAVING MORE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE? CHECK OUT THESE ORGANIZATIONS.

**Nomadic Wax**  nomadic-media.com  
Nomadic Wax is a U.S. based social enterprise that produces music, film and educational events aimed at creating cross-cultural exchange and increasing awareness of global issues. Have a great video idea to promote your community work? Pitch it to Nomadic Media!

**Rock Steady Crew**  crazylegsworkshop.com  
Rock Steady Crew organizes the annual Rock Steady Anniversary, a community event that honors deceased members of the crew and celebrates hip hop culture both past and present; it also unites DJs, b-boys and b-girls, MCs, graffiti artists, and hip hop supporters like you and your friends.

**Scratch Academy**  scratch.com  
In 2002, Scratch Music Group’s CEO Rob Principe partnered with Jam Master Jay of Run-DMC to establish the Scratch DJ Academy. They offer classes in New York, Los Angeles, and Miami for young people interested in learning DJing and music production.

**FOKUS**  fokus.org  
FOKUS nurtures success in under-resourced communities by exposing their members to unexpected art experiences. Our arts education, events, and Insight magazine helps communities discover their own creativity. Attend an event or take a class in New York and Ann Arbor, Michigan.

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<th>FAMILY ORIGINS</th>
<th>HIP HOP</th>
<th>IMPACT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Where were they born? Where did they grow up?</td>
<td>What element do they practice?</td>
<td>What innovations did they bring? How did they impact hip hop?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DRAW!
Draw pictures or symbols to represent the people/groups.
## CALL-AND-RESPONSE WORKSHEET

<table>
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<tr>
<th>SONG</th>
<th>CALL</th>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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| Blind Willie Johnson  
“Keep your Lamp Trimmed and Burning” (1928)  
Traditional spiritual in gospel/blues | (Brother don’t...) | (Get Worried) |
| James Brown  
“Say It Loud, I’m Black and I’m Proud” (1968) | (Say it loud...) | (I’m black and I’m proud!) |
| Afrika Bambaata & the Soul Sonic Force  
“Planet Rock” (1982) | (Everybody say rock it don’t stop it...) | (Rock it don’t stop!) |
| Doug E Fresh  
“I-Ight” (1993) | (Aayyy-ohhh...) | (I-ight!) |
| Slim Thug  
“Like A Boss (Radio edit)” (2005) | (On top...) | (Like a boss!) |
| Beyonce  
“Run the World (Girls)” (2011) | (Who run the world?) | (Girls!) |
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<th>ROLE</th>
<th>BACKGROUND/MOTIVATIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>MC1 of Sick Communication</td>
<td>Had a brother hospitalized from police brutality. Wants to use his music to express his views to the community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MC2 of Sick Communication</td>
<td>Never had a lot of money. Wants to be a star on TV, wealthy and popular.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DJ/Producer of Sick Communication</td>
<td>Loved music ever since a little kid. Wants to create songs that are innovative, artistic, and sound different from everything else on the radio.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manager of Sick Communication</td>
<td>Childhood friend of MC1. Believes in the group, but wants them to “blow up” so everyone can be rich and famous.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Executive, Imperial Media</td>
<td>Has worked at the label for many years, but is faced with the drastic change in the industry due to music downloading. Discovered 50 Cent and is looking for the next big thing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Label Lawyer, Imperial Media</td>
<td>Same background as above but dislikes rap music for its “profanity and violent themes.” Does not want the label to promote an overtly political music group.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Radio Station Program Director</td>
<td>Has been a behind-the-scenes program director at popular station Bomb97 for years. Is not very open to spinning new groups but can sometimes be convinced with payola.</td>
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TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES® STAFF

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ABOUT TRIBECA YOUTH SCREENING SERIES®
The Youth Screening Series® is a media literacy program begun in 2006 by the Tribeca Film Institute®. The academic year is divided into two series, screened from September through June in partnership with national and neighborhood partners. These screenings are augmented by in-class sessions led by a Tribeca Teaching Artist, who works with a film-specific curriculum written and edited by a team formed through Tribeca Film Institute®. Schools are selected based on relationship, location, and need; in 2012 we will be working in eight schools in New York and New Jersey. Connect and download free curricula at TRIBECAFILMINSTITUTE.ORG

Additional program support provided by:

Honorable Margaret S. Chin, New York City Council

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