

Grades  
6 - 12



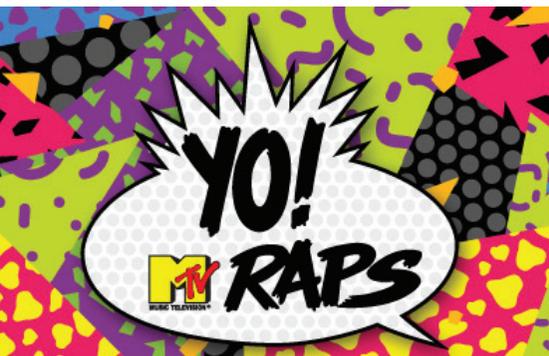
# HOW WE GOT ON STUDENT GUIDE



# TIME CAPSULE: 1988

“ Perhaps you are here to take a little trip through memory... maybe you ‘remember when...’ ”

— SELECTOR, *HOW WE GOT ON*



Travel back to a time when Jordan, not James, was the king. It's 1988 in the Midwest suburbs. Reagan is in his second term. Vice President George H.W. Bush is battling it out with Mike Dukakis. "His Airness" Michael Jordan is making slam dunks for the Chicago Bulls in his Air Jordans, the must-have sneaker. The Supreme Court rules that public schools can censor their students' "expressive activities." Bruce Springsteen tours the U.S., and Cher wins an Oscar. The suburbs have become more diverse; between 1970 and 1995, seven million African-Americans move out of cities to the 'burbs.

Meanwhile, in the world of hip-hop, 1988 is a watershed year. 1986 had seen hip-hop make the *Billboard* Top Ten with the Beastie Boys' "(You Gotta) Fight for your Right (to Party!)" and the cover of *Rolling Stone* with a feature on group Run-D.M.C. By 1988, hip-hop record sales have reached a high of \$100 million and *Source* magazine—the go-to hip-hop news source—is founded in a Harvard dorm room. 1988 is also the year that *Yo! MTV Raps* makes its premiere. A T.V. show devoted solely to hip-hop, it becomes so popular that it is aired six times a week and introduces whole new populations to hip-hop. The program features videos, live concerts and interviews. Hip-hop fans—whether in cities, suburbs or out in the country—hear directly from the artists about their inspirations and journey to stardom.

## TO DO:

What will define your generation? Think 20 years into the future—what will people remember about this year? Create a list of four time capsule memories:

1. What song defines 2014?
2. What TV show or film?
3. What happened in athletics?
4. What happened politically?

# IN THE MOMENT AND ON THE SPOT

“ *The basic motivation for hip-hop is self-expression. It doesn't cost anything. It's free.* ”

— GRANDMASTER CAZ

Hip-hop is an art form of innovation, improvisation and self-expression. Like Julian discovers in *How We Got On*, the body can be turned into a rhythm machine through beatboxing (making drum noises with your mouth). Technological innovation, too, has always been central to hip-hop. Early DJs experimented with the records and turntables they already owned and turned them into instruments to create new forms of music. Strong improvisation skills are the mark of a true hip-hop master, much like in jazz. In rap and dance battles, competitors make up their rhymes and moves on the fly, building on their opponent's tricks and adding their own signature twist. Such freestyling draws on the performer's emotions, the crowd's energy and even objects in the room. This constant innovation and improvisation keeps hip-hop personal, relevant and fresh.



▲ *DJs setup for a block party.*

## TO DO:

Hip-hop artists often use objects or people around them to inspire their performance. Find an object that is meaningful to you and create a short rap about it to share with your family and/or your class. Remember, it's ok to make mistakes!

# HIP-HOP IS POETRY (WITH A BEAT)

“*Simile over metaphor every time. If you say ‘I’m Mighty Mouse,’ then you’re saying I’m a mouse which is dumb, but ‘fly like Mighty Mouse’...*”

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are approximately 21 million teens in the United States each spending 2.25 hours per day listening to their favorite music. Those same teens spend about four minutes per day reading. However, just because they are not burying themselves in Robert Frost, doesn't mean they are not exposed to figurative language. In fact, hip-hop is often full of simile, metaphor, hyperbole and alliteration. Take these two lines from Nas's "Ghetto Prisoners":

— HANK, *HOW WE GOT ON*

*I'm like the farmer planting words,  
people are seeds*

*My truth is the soil. Help you grow  
like trees.*

In his recently published manifesto entitled *Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop*, University of Colorado English Professor Adam Bradley proclaimed that, "Thanks to the engines of global commerce, rap is now the most widely disseminated poetry in the history of the world." He further states that "the best MCs deserve consideration alongside the giants of American poetry. We ignore them at our own expense." Hip-hop artist Jay-Z would agree. In his book *Decoded*, Jay-Z categorizes himself as a poet and believes that "a poet's mission is to make words do more than they normally do, to make them work on more than one level." He also defines the literary term "meter" through his art form: "In poetry, the meter is abstract, but in rap, the meter is something you literally hear: it is the beat. But the beat is only half of the song's rhythm. The other is the flow. When a rapper jumps on a beat, he adds his own rhythm." So, perhaps it's time to expand our poetic knowledge, listen to a



## KEYBANK CPH COLLEGE



few more hours of hip-hop and place Tupac Shakur's collection of poetry, *The Rose That Grew From Concrete*, alongside our volumes containing Phyllis Wheatley, Langston Hughes, Maya Angelou and Robert Hayden. Here's a selection from Shakur to begin:

*Did you hear about the rose that grew  
from a crack in the concrete?*

*Proving nature's law is wrong it learned  
to walk without having feet.*

*Funny it seems, but by keeping it's  
dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air.*

*Long live the rose that grew from  
concrete when no one else ever cared.*

### TO DO:

Poetry and word choice are both major elements of hip-hop and important to Luann, Julian and Hank. Search online or go to the library and find a poem (of any kind) that you find meaningful and connect with. Type out the poem so that each line is distinct. Print out the poem and cut out the entire line or each word, whichever you prefer. Now play around and recombine the words or line in any order you like. What new meaning emerges? What idea or image now sticks out?

### THE PROGRAM:

*Saturday master classes, performances  
throughout the school year*

KeyBank CPH College introduces you to the circle of artists creating professional theatre at CPH. By participating in a variety of arts education experiences, peer-to-peer learning opportunities and the invitation to view professional theatre, you will discover the powerful impact theatre plays in your community and your life.

### DETAILS:

**WHO:** High School Students, grades 9-12

**WHEN:** One Saturday per month

**TIME:** 10:00 AM - 5:00 PM if attending classes and show, 10:00 AM - 1:30 PM if only attending classes

**WHERE:** Cleveland Play House  
Administration and Education Center  
1901 E. 13th Street, 5th Floor

**COST:** Free (Includes lunch and a ticket to a CPH show)

To register, contact, or for more information:  
**opportunity@clevelandplayhouse.com**  
**216-400-7061**

# INTERVIEW

## WITH CYNDII JOHNSON

“ First thing you gotta do is accept that there will be mistakes. ”

– LUANN, *HOW WE GOT ON*



▲ Cyndii Johnson (Luann)

Cleveland Play House staff member Nathan Lilly sat down with Cyndii Johnson, the actress playing Luann in Cleveland Play House's production of *How We Got On*, to discuss the play, Cyndii's journey as an actress and her connection with her character.

**Talk to me about how you got connected with CPH's production of *How We Got On*.**

This is so full circle! We were in Humana [Festival at Actor's Theatre of Louisville] and Idris [Goodwin] came in for our opening night and I told him, "Your show is going to be in my hometown. I'm going to get that!" He was like, "Do it! Do it!" I saw that [the audition notice] went up and I talked to my agent and said, "I want to be in that show!"

**You graduated from The Cleveland School of the Arts high school and studied drama. Were the goals you had as a “starry-eyed” 16 or 17-year-old the same as they are now, or have they changed?**

Definitely similar, but I was scared [then]. I [decided] I was going to school for broadcasting, but then my Dad said, “Why?” I was like, “Because theatre jobs aren’t guaranteed.” He said, “Didn’t hundreds of Cleveland [CMSD] teachers get laid off? Nothing is guaranteed.” So [after that] I really had no choice, and I said, “Okay, I am going to school for acting.” I didn’t have that many options. I couldn’t go too far from home, and Wright State [University’s School of Drama] was just perfect. They have one of the best programs! I didn’t even know! I actually skipped a class to go to a “College Talk” and learned about the drama program.

**If you could go back in time and tell 16-year-old Cyndii something, what would you tell her?**

“You have to listen,” and “you have to do things...that [will help you become] who you want to be.” You have to take steps towards [your goal.] I would definitely tell her to “create your own art,” because that’s what I’ve learned over these past years...the rules aren’t out there...and if it’s what you want to do, [sometimes] you have to do it yourself. That’s very important!

**In the play, Luann says, “The first thing you gotta do is accept that there will be mistakes.” How does that resonate with you?**

That’s my whole life! No, literally! If you don’t accept the fact that there will be mistakes, you’re going to judge everything that you do, and you’re going to think everything is a mistake! That was one of the things that I learned in sixth grade. You have to be willing to take risks. In acting its about taking a risk...and that really resonates in my real life...if you don’t accept it, you’re going to be scared and part of you won’t want to do anything. But once you get over that fear, that’s when things can come to fruition. And it’s funny that she says, “...you have to accept it...” You have to know, accept and embrace it. And that’s not the second thing, it’s the first thing! Even when it’s devastating...you have to accept it.

## TO DO:

Cyndii’s journey was not always as straightforward as she thought it would be. Yet, because she had a strong idea of what she wanted to do and where she wanted to go, she was able to persevere and follow her dream. Take some time to think about what you would like to be when you grow up. Choose two of the following years and write a letter to your future self: 5 years (2020), 10 years (2025), 20 years (2035) or 50 years (2055).



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## SPONSORED BY

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