



## **UN SDG LESSON Hear Me, See Me - How Rap Teaches Peace and Justice**

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### **What's the goal?**

UN SDG #16 promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing equitable access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. In 1982, a rap called “The Message” addressed these same equity gaps in an attempt to be seen and heard. However, the inequities persist today and many are fighting against systemic racism. This is a renewable assignment that is designed to enable a student to become an agent of change to further the conversation to be and do better through the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). For this work, students will integrate the disciplines of reading, writing and hip-hop music to achieve SDG #16.

"Great teaching is about so much more than education; it is a daily fight for social justice."  
— Secretary Arne Duncan

### **What can we do to address this?**

Students will work together to suggest solutions or ideas to continue the conversation with bringing awareness that the same social injustices clearly addressed in the famous rap song, “The Message”, from 1982 are still currently happening in US cities today. After researching selected racial injustices spotlighted in “The Message”, student projects will emphasize the UN SDG #16 goals of delivering justice, combating corruption and ensuring inclusive participation in their local communities. The students will develop, share and implement their own anti-racist action plan in the form of

- writing and performing an original rap,
- protest art,
- poetry,
- or reporting on activism for racial equality on campus.

### **Materials**

- “The Message” (hip-hop rap), articles and a timeline used in a lesson on racial justice.

### **Objectives**

- Make connections between rap and the social and economic conditions from which they emerge
- Connect song lyrics to contemporary events

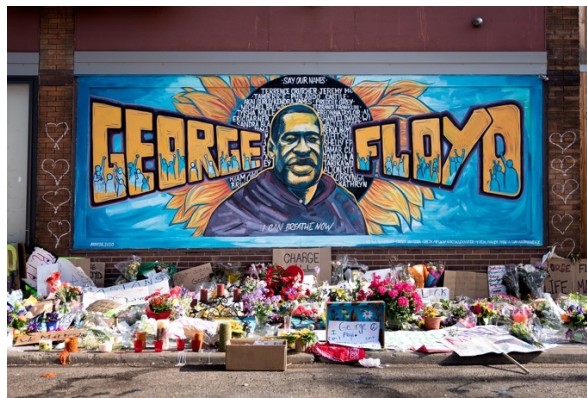
- Integrate information from data charts with texts and videos to make thematic connections and create deeper understanding of racial injustice

*"Not everything that is faced can be changed,  
but nothing can be changed until it is faced."*

*James Baldwin*

## **Part 1--Before Reading Activities**

In more than 580 cities and towns across the United States, hundreds of thousands of Americans have gathered together to protest the police killing of an African American man named George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Protestors' calls for justice, police accountability, and for an end to the systemic racism deeply embedded in the laws, practices, and institutions of the United States mark some of the most widespread protests the country has seen in half a century.



1. **Quick write** (write about a page answering the following questions):

What have you seen or heard about the protests against the police killing of George Floyd? Do you view these protests as connected to the Black Lives Matter movement? What have you seen on social media or in the news? How have different people of varying backgrounds responded to the movement? What impact do you believe that Black Lives Matter has had on American society? Do you think that street protests have been or will be effective? What makes protest effective?

2. Protests are one way to respond to social injustice, but music is another form that can be listened to many times. According to OWN, "Music is an essential tool for change, and hip-hop legend will.i.am contributed a powerful message to the 'Where Do We Go From Here?' conversation."

**Listen to the rap** by will.i.am, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xig0Z580U6o>, and write the key points that the rapper conveys to his audience.

*"Keep in mind when brothas start flexing the verbal skillz,  
it always reflects what's going on politically, socially,  
and economically." --Musician Davey D*

**3. Develop vocabulary** for the anti-racist movement and social injustice. The Racial Equity Tools website explains, “Words and their multiple uses reflect the tremendous diversity that characterizes our society. Indeed, universally agreed upon language on issues relating to racism is nonexistent. We discovered that even the most frequently used words in any discussion on race can easily cause confusion, which leads to controversy and hostility. It is essential to achieve some degree of shared understanding, particularly when using the most common terms. In this way, the quality of dialogue and discourse on race can be enhanced.”

Take for example, the term “white privilege”. These two words triggered violent reactions and create significant misunderstanding among many who are not familiar with the term “white privilege” as it has come to be used in the current discussion of race relations in this country.

The concept of white privilege does not say or claim anything about your own income level, the size of your bank account, how many jobs you have had, or how hard you have worked in your life; it does not say or claim anything about whether or not you as an individual are prejudiced against people of color.

I would like you to add one more layer to your thinking on the concept of "privilege." **Please read one of the articles I've found on the topic:**

**Gina Crossley-Corcoran, "Explaining White Privilege to a Broke White Person"**  
([https://www.huffpost.com/entry/explaining-white-privilege-to-a-broke-white-person\\_b\\_5269255?guccounter=1](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/explaining-white-privilege-to-a-broke-white-person_b_5269255?guccounter=1)).

**Peggy McIntosh, "Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"**  
(<https://www.racialequitytools.org/resourcefiles/mcintosh.pdf>)."

**“What is White Privilege, Really?” by Cory Collins**  
<https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/fall-2018/what-is-white-privilege-really>

**“The Evolution of Racism” by Ben Zimmer in The Atlantic 2020**  
[https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/09/how-racism-made-its-way-into-dictionary-merriam-webster/615334/?campaign\\_id=37&emc=edit\\_rr\\_20200905&instance\\_id=21944&nl=race%2Frelated&regi\\_id=109773973&segment\\_id=37510&te=1&user\\_id=2221bf8034f7eab8250aab8f639e9d3d](https://www.theatlantic.com/culture/archive/2020/09/how-racism-made-its-way-into-dictionary-merriam-webster/615334/?campaign_id=37&emc=edit_rr_20200905&instance_id=21944&nl=race%2Frelated&regi_id=109773973&segment_id=37510&te=1&user_id=2221bf8034f7eab8250aab8f639e9d3d)

Once you've had time to consider these articles, respond to the following questions:

1. How does the concept of Privilege - or lack of it - connect to Place and Personal Identity?
2. Is white privilege racism?
3. What can you infer about the author’s interests and values based on this text?
4. What is this text “saying”? Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support your analysis

**Please watch Cracking the Codes: Joy**

**DeGruy** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wf9QBnPK6Yg>

Please answer these questions:

1. Explain how DeGruy's sister-in-law uses her white privilege to stand up to systemic inequity.
2. What can you do once you recognize your own privilege?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wa-1KmQgyV8> Javier Avila

A humor-filled one-man show by Javier Avila that embraces the autobiographical journey of a man who moves between cultures to provide a fascinating perspective of American Latinos who struggle to dispel misconceptions about their identity and place in the world. It examines the issues of language, race, and social justice in an eye-opening performance that breaks barriers and embraces the diversity of a nation whose history is rich and colorful.

In the video [performance](#), listen to Avila read his poems about being the future of America and one about his four great grandmothers, "Blood Line". Listen to the Q&A after Avila talks to answer these questions:

1. How does Avila define "racist"?
2. What does he mean by "privilege"?
3. Why does he believe we are all racists?
4. What does he mean by being "color blind"? What does he not mean when it comes to being color blind?
5. What does he believe to be the solution to inequality in America?

Can you add to the list below of examples of privilege?

Examples of Privilege: Being able to...

- assume that most of the people you or your children study in history classes and textbooks will be of the same race, gender, or sexual orientation as you are
- assume that your failures will not be attributed to your race, or your gender
- assume that if you work hard and follow the rules, you will get what you deserve
- succeed without other people being surprised; and without being held to a higher standard
- go out in public without fear of being harassed or constantly worried about physical safety
- not have to think about your race, or your gender, or your sexual orientation, or disabilities, on a daily basis...

**Select the 18 terms and definition** from the Georgetown University Anti-Racism Toolkit, [anti-racism glossary](#), and then **use Quizlet**, a free program at [quizlet.com](#), to **make flash cards** of each of the 18 terms. Finally **take the quiz** that Quizlet generated from your flashcards. Please send me a link to your Quizlet flash cards and quiz for points.

## Part 2--During Reading Activities

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/03/learning/lesson-plans/teaching-ideas-and-resources-to-help-students-make-sense-of-the-george-floyd-protests.html>

### 1. Watch video. Listen and read “The Message”

lyrics <https://www.google.com/search?q=the+message+lyrics+grandmaster&oq=the+message+lyrics&aqs=chrome.4.69i57j0l6j69i61.18108j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>, by Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five, and watch their YouTube performance:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PobrSpMwKk4>

Notice similarities and differences between the “The Message” and the will.i.am rap (see the Before Reading section above).

*“With ‘The Message’ [Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five] moved rapping into a far richer field, away from the nonsense ‘good-time-and-get-down’ lyrics, into pungent social observation with more than a touch of desperation.” --Paolo Hewitt, “Melody Maker,” October 1982*

### 2. Discuss “The Message”

Do you “see” and “hear” the Black American voice describing how they live and what was happening in the Bronx during 1982? The listener gets an eye-witness account of the social injustices two decades after the Civil Rights period. **List separate lyrics and explain what racial injustice is being described. For example:**

Lyrics: *“Don’t push me because I am close to the edge. It’s like a jungle sometimes It makes me wonder how I keep from going under.”*

Meaning: Rich Bunnell writes, “With its spare rhythm track, shimmering synthesizer riff, and nakedly direct vocals from rapper Melle Mel, Flash’s 1982 song, “The Message”, instantly charted a musically rich, socially conscious new path for the genre.

Between each verse, Mel delivers the track’s iconic hook. If there is a single message that unites “The Message”, it’s that living this life day in, day out comes at an enormous psychological cost that adds up.”

Cherese Jackson in “Liberty Voice” said, “Don’t push me because I am close to the edge,” was actually a cry for help ...or at the least, an acknowledgment. People who felt trapped in these inhumane circumstances were lamenting that life was not all good in the “hood.” The hood had become the place where dreams and people were forgotten. Tucked away neatly out of the line of sight of America, the government could easily throw money, subsidized housing and food stamps at them in hopes they would kill themselves and keep it quiet. But out of those concrete streets grew a restlessness that would not be quelled. There was a story that needed to be heard, and hip-hop became the vehicle in which that was possible.”

*“The Message” was a total knock out of the park,” says Chuck D of Public Enemy. “It was the first dominant rap group with the most dominant MC saying something that meant something.” It was the first song to tell, with hip-hop’s rhythmic and vocal force, the truth about modern life in inner-city America.*

### 3. Read a timeline and articles

As a group, select one racial injustice from the “The Message”:

- a. prison reform
- b. environmental racism/ health
- c. economic racism
- d. criminal justice reform /police brutality
- e. schools

Take notes about the facts surrounding the issue from 1982 to present using the interactive timeline from a Brown University

lesson: <http://cdn.knightlab.com/libs/timeline3/latest/embed/index.html?source=1hKEHsG1nec6wYwX7thFZrBTqyDsURcRAXb7d0X8PiY>

The above interactive timeline includes videos, images, and information about black activism since the 1950’s. Note-It (<https://note-it.en.softonic.com/>) works best to make the timeline full screen and then reduce the bottom time line. Please enlarge the top section to get the facts from the date with descriptions.

### 4. Read & Write

Using that same issue, do more in-depth research by reading an article

(e.g., [https://graphics.reuters.com/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/index.html - homeownership](https://graphics.reuters.com/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/index.html-homeownership)) published in the last ten years that explains the same issue now in 2000-2020. Compare/contrast what has happened with the racial injustices listed in “The Message” to today. Write a summary and report back to the class what has changed (good or bad) and what is the same? Include a clear thesis statement declaring the importance of that event in comparison with other events on the timeline, followed by research-based evidence to support your thesis.

### 5. Read & Write

Read the article, “Are Racial Attitudes Really Changing? Some Black Activists are Skeptical” by Astead W. Herndon (<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/11/us/politics/black-lives-matter-chicago-roseland.html>). The article states, “Today, [as] activism against racial inequities raises questions of whether anything will actually change for many Black Americans.”

The article goes on to challenge the reader, “How should America’s year of racial reckoning be measured? The community activists in Roseland are collectively suggesting a standard different from polling, or an election, or the millions of dollars that have poured into progressive organizations.” After discussing with your group different ideas that would improve Roseland’s Black neighborhood, much like the Bronx in “The Message”, write a one-page response and include ideas from these questions: Why do you think the social injustice (like police brutality)

continues? What are the types of changes that need to be made for it to stop? Think about hurdles or obstacles to enacting these types of changes.

### **Part 3 -- Post Reading Activities**

The following quotes may inspire you as you think of a way to do something with the racial injustice you studied in this lesson starting with “The Message” and continuing today.

*Trevor Noah said, “In America, it does feel like this conversation is about is there racism, as opposed to how do you begin moving forward as a nation to get rid of the racism that has in many ways defined how people react with one another across racial barriers in the U.S.”*

*Shortly before his death, John Lewis, the senator from Georgia for 22 years and civil rights leader wrote, “Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart and stand up for what you truly believe. In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace, the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way. **Now it is your turn to let freedom ring.**”*

**Cap Stone Project** - Select an activity from the five options below to be done as an individual or with a group: Create your own anti-racist action plan in the form of:

#### **Option 1**

Is there an active voice for racial equality at school? If there is, what or who facilitates awareness and activism for racial equality on campus? If not, what is the significance of this absence? Write the steps that it would take to organize a group or event for discussion and further learning about racial inequality.

#### **Option 2**

**RAP** - Write and perform your own rap.

**25 points-written original rap** (15 line minimum)

**25 points-video performance**

*Background building info-* Rap is a musical way to draw attention to oppressed and marginalized people. This will require you to think critically, to practice writing in the narrative form, to increase vocabulary, and to develop an understanding of rhyme and rhythm. Please review the raps included in the lesson sections “Before and During Reading” or google others.

#### **Option 3**

**PROTEST ART** – Create your own protest art form as a way to draw attention to oppressed and marginalized people.

**25 points-** a photo or screenshot of your original art

**25 points -** a short written description of the art and what kind of emotional response you are trying to evoke or communicate to the viewer.

*Background building info–* The following examples of protest art are provided as inspiration.



Do a closeup examination of the artist's latest cover of The New Yorker, in which the murder of George Floyd embodies the history of violence inflicted upon black people in America:

<https://www.newyorker.com/culture/cover-story/cover-story-2020-06-22>.

Read the following two articles and watch the YouTube video about a local Phoenix artist, Martin Moreno, to understand his thinking behind his art (see image below).

[Chicano Artist Martin Moreno, and the Social Responsibility of Art](#)

[SB1070 Inspired a Decade of Social Justice Protest Art in Phoenix](#)

[Artist Diaries: Martin Moreno--Channeling Anger](#) (video)



#### Option 4

**POETRY** – Write a poem as a way to draw attention to oppressed and marginalized people.

25 points- original poem

25 points- explain the facts or experiences you used as a basis of your message in the poem

*Background building info* - How do we — the artists, the writers, the ones who are so used to squaring off with the worst of ourselves, our world, our humanity — find a language suitable for our current state of disaster.

The following poetry examples are provided as inspiration.

Listen to the [poem](#), “Ode to the only Black Kid in the Class” by Clint Smith, and an [interview](#) with the author.

Listen to ten young Black writers—who are youth poet laureate and organizers and rappers, examine and fight back against an America that threatens to swallow them. Read their words. Hear them speak. And watch them walk through flames. [https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/09/arts/young-black-poets.html?campaign\\_id=37&emc=edit\\_rr\\_20201010&instance\\_id=23023&nl=race%2Frelated&regi\\_id=109773973&segment\\_id=40535&te=1&user\\_id=2221bf8034f7eab8250aab8f639e9d3d](https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/10/09/arts/young-black-poets.html?campaign_id=37&emc=edit_rr_20201010&instance_id=23023&nl=race%2Frelated&regi_id=109773973&segment_id=40535&te=1&user_id=2221bf8034f7eab8250aab8f639e9d3d)

Read a poem that was written as a response to “*Why We Can’t Wait*,” by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (1964)



“The pale history books in Harlem and Birmingham told how the nation had fought a war over slavery, Abraham Lincoln had signed a document that would come to be known as the Emancipation Proclamation. The war had been won but not a just peace. Equality had never arrived. Equality was a hundred years late.”

Late

*By Joseph Ross*

Late is never.

This is why we can't.

A hundred years does not  
taste like late.

It tastes like forgotten.

It looks like never  
happened. This is why  
children sang their way  
into jail. This is how  
a country moves  
forward. By burning  
itself on its own  
summer.

### Option 6

**The Race Card Project** (<https://theracecardproject.com/on-location/>) -

25 points-Submit a Race Card of your own to the website.

25 points- Include a backstory and photo to share more about what is behind your six-word statement.

*Background building info* – Visit the Race Card Project's website to see how you could distill your thoughts, experiences or observations about race into one sentence that only has six words. Request that your college become an On-Location Partner. Check the website for more information.

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## References

Anti-Racism Project

<https://www.antiracismproject.org/>

Brown University “Black Lives Matter, the Killing of George Floyd, and the Long Fight for Racial Justice”

<https://www.choices.edu/teaching-news-lesson/george-floyd-and-the-long-fight-for-racial-justice/>

Georgetown University Anti-racist

Toolkit <https://guides.library.georgetown.edu/antiracism/glossary>

Herndon, Astead, “Are Racial Attitudes Really Changing? Some Black Activists Are Skeptical”, The New York Times, Aug. 11, 2020 <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/11/us/politics/black-lives-matter-chicago-roseland.html>

Racial Equity Tools

<https://www.raciaequitytools.org/glossary#anti-racism>

Bunnell, Rich

<https://www.loc.gov/static/programs/national-recording-preservation-board/documents/TheMessage.pdf>

Lewis, John

<https://thehill.com/homenews/house/509727-john-lewis-now-it-is-your-turn-to-let-freedom-ring?fbclid=IwAR2zpMvQvboECgrK26qFDroxValiy1iU-tZq6DgtWjCVMB6I0Gn33IfnPIQ>

Noah, Trevor

<https://variety.com/2020/tv/news/trevor-noah-george-floyd-death-police-protests-1234623066/>

Showing Up For Racial Justice

<https://www.showingupforracialjustice.org/>

Teaching Tolerance

<https://www.tolerance.org/classroom-resources/lessons>

Reuters Graphic, “The Race Gap From birth to death, Black people face systemic disadvantages in American life more than 150 years after slavery was abolished.”

<https://graphics.reuters.com/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/index.html - 0>

<https://graphics.reuters.com/GLOBAL-RACE/USA/nmopajawjva/index.html> - 1

DEI Information and Resources

[https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRMNyjzy-YxQTIrghxIjSTsxccYh8EBz\\_h5iVvuDsjOfrIPbP\\_9CttKtiCWtm3fT9OIsVyBptKsQrl3/pub](https://docs.google.com/document/u/1/d/e/2PACX-1vRMNyjzy-YxQTIrghxIjSTsxccYh8EBz_h5iVvuDsjOfrIPbP_9CttKtiCWtm3fT9OIsVyBptKsQrl3/pub)