



storytellers

VH1 Storytellers: Jay-Z **Life of an American Gangster**

VH1 Music Studio
Cable in the Classroom

Lesson for Music Classes, Grades 7-12
Lesson 2 - Fallin'

Note to Teachers: The programs viewed in conjunction with these lesson plans may include references, consistent with the eras portrayed, to substance abuse, violent acts, and topics of a sexual and/or political nature. Because this may be considered inappropriate for classroom use in some communities, you are encouraged to review the programs before presenting them to your students, and if necessary, choose those sections that enhance your lesson and are acceptable for use in your classroom.

Objectives

- Students will be better able to understand the life and personal journey of Shawn Corey 'Jay-Z' Carter and in turn, make connections within their own lives.
- Students will be able to analyze the poetry of 'Jay-Z' and compare it to that of Shakespeare and Langston Hughes.
- Students will be able to compose a rap in the style of 'Jay-Z' using his song "Fallin'" as an example.

National Standards for music education:

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the arts, and disciplines outside the Arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Materials

- VHS/VCR Player
- Television
- Audio playback equipment
- *VH1 Storytellers: Jay-Z: American Gangster*
- Recording of “Fallin” (available for mp3 download via American Gangster mp3 Album Only Download [mp3] through www.amazon.com)
- PC/MAC with speakers or CD Player
- Students copies of the Lyrics to “Fallin” (provided below and available at: <http://music.yahoo.com/JayZ/Fallin/lyrics/51115496>)
- Pencils

Prior Knowledge:

- Background information on the life and works of William Shakespeare [1564-1616] is readily available in both traditional media and on the world-wide web.
 - Students at the ‘Middle School’ or ‘Proficient Level’ may find the following introductory site on Shakespeare of benefit as a precursor to this activity.
 - Students at the ‘High School’ or ‘Advanced Level’ may visit the following sites with regards to the Sonnets in general and Sonnet #29 in particular.
 - Review at both levels of the term *vernacular* [Vernacular literature is that which is written in the speech of the “common people”] with reference to culture in both Renaissance and Modern Eras would also be of great benefit to students and teachers alike.
- Background information on the Harlem Renaissance is readily available in both traditional media and on the world-wide web.
 - Students at the ‘Middle School’ or ‘Proficient Level’ may find the following introductory site on American poet, Langston Hughes [1902-1967] of benefit as a precursor to this activity.
 - Students at the ‘High School’ or ‘Advanced Level’ may visit the following sites with regards to his Poetry in general; a review of his 1942 book *Shakespeare in Harlem and Democracy* in particular.

Procedures

1. Play video, *VH1 Storytellers: Jay-Z: Life of an American Gangster* video from indexed position Title: 1 - - - Chapter: 4 - - - Time: 32’35” through Time: 37’20” for inclusion of the song ‘Fallin’.
2. After the video, lead a short class discussion about the:
 - a) *Vernacular* in which this poem [it IS a poem, isn’t it?] is or is NOT written.
 - b) *Historical Setting* in which it was written.
 - c) *Audience* for and to whom it is or is NOT intended to be performed.
 - d) *Thematic Elements* and *Social Issues* addressed.

3. Now, divide your class into the same groups of 5 or 6 students as were used in the previous lesson. Distribute the Lyrics Sheet to “**Fallin**” (below) and give students a few minutes to read the lyrics. Give them plenty of time to read and discuss in their own small groups both their opinions and interpretations as well as inferences drawn by the text.
4. Let individuals OR an entire group pick their favorite lines or entire verse to read aloud to the class. Use or have your students develop a mini-rubric of your expectations for what a good ‘Performance’ will contain. ***Important*** Be prepared for [and quite frankly, encourage] students to sing, read, rap, beat box and/or express the lyrics in any way desired. Discuss the group or individual ‘Performances’ of the verse or section chosen using a ‘Safe – Positive ONLY’ rubric of your choosing. **Make certain to encourage LOTS of applause for all!**

~ Transition Time ~

Instructors at all levels may wish to divide this and the following lesson into several sessions for better pacing and processing of information. This transition time may serve as a way in which teachers and their students can move into pragmatic use of more ancient, ‘Classic’ forms of literature such as those of Shakespeare and Langston Hughes below.

- Poets throughout the ages have touched on these very same themes. Themes of love, war, injustice, greed and politics have always been at the forefront of artist’s minds and inevitably, their prose.
- Consider handing out the Shakespeare Sonnet and Hughes poem as ‘Anonymous’ texts to be studied as a precursor to Lesson 3.

National Standards for Music Education

1. Singing, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
2. Performing on instruments, alone and with others, a varied repertoire of music.
3. Improvising melodies, variations, and accompaniments.
4. Composing and arranging music within specified guidelines.
5. Reading and notating music.
6. Listening to, analyzing, and describing music.
7. Evaluating music and music performances.
8. Understanding relationships between music, the other arts, and disciplines outside the arts.
9. Understanding music in relation to history and culture.

Fallin'
Lyrics Sheet by Jay-Z

(CHORUS) I know I should've did that; I know it' gonna come right back.
I know it's gonna destroy everything I made; It's probably gonna get your boy sent away.
But this game I play ain't no way to fix it; It's inevitable that I'm... Fallin'!

(1st Verse) Said where I would stop before I even started;
When I get to one brick then the game I would depart with.
Got to one brick then I looked to the sky like Sorry God, I lied, but give me one more try.

Got two bricks, new cars, new whips;
But brothers never learn till they end up in the news clips.
The irony of sellin' drugs is sort of like you using it;
Guess it's two sides to what substance abuse is.

Can't stop, won't stop addicted to this new s***; Brand new convertibles, I'm so roofless
Front row fight night see how big my tube is? F*** HD brother, see how clear my view is?
But there's a price for overdoing it; Doin' it this big will put you on the map.
Stick-up kids is out to tax; Plus the FBI boys with the cameras in the back... Damn!

(CHORUS) I know I should've did that; I know it' gonna come right back.
I know it's gonna destroy everything I made; It's probably gonna get your boy sent away.
But this game I play ain't no way to fix it; Now you... Fallin'!

(2nd Verse) Now you fallin' when you should've fell back;
Right into they lap fallin' and applaudin'. And they screamin' at the screen;
Damn, you f***** up like your favorite movie scene; Godfather, Goodfellas, Scarface, Casino; You seen what that
last run did to Deniro in Heat?
Can't beat the odds; Can't cheat the Gods; Can't blow too hard; Life's a deck of cards

Now ya tumbling, it's humbling, ya fallin', ya mumbling;
Under ya breath like you knew this day as coming, fallin.
Now let's pray that arm candy that you left your ex for stay down and come in handy.

'Cause come January it get cold when the letters start to slow;
And ya commissary low and lawyer screams, "Appeal!" only thinking about a bill.
And ya chances are nil... Damn! Gravity's ill.

(CHORUS) I know I should've did that; I know it' gonna come right back.
I know it's gonna destroy everything I made; It's probably gonna get your boy sent away.
But this game I play ain't no way to fix it; It's inevitable, but you're Fallin'!

(3rd Verse) And you can't get up, all you do is push-up, pull-up, sit-up;
Lock down the town now belongs to the squares, who said they won't make the same mistakes that got you
there; And your arm candy sweet on 'em...

And the woman that you left for this heffa' got a college degree comin';
Bad news keeps comin', hard to keep somethin' on your stomach.
You're sick 'bout what ya life is becoming.

But your use-to's, has-beens raggin' bad 'bout all the new dudes talking tough on the YouTube 'bout what ya used
to do but that's old school to the new crew;
They doin' numbers like Sudoku.

They're the new you and it's damn near inevitable; They'll experience déjà vu too.
Fight and you'll never survive, run and you'll never escape; So just fall from Grace!

SONNET 29 [c.1592]
By William Shakespeare
Paraphrase and Analysis of Sonnet XXIX

When, in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes,
I all alone beweepe my outcast state
And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries
And look upon myself and curse my fate,
Wishing me like to one more rich in hope,
Featured like him, like him with friends possess'd,
Desiring this man's art and that man's scope,
With what I most enjoy contented least;
Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,
Haply I think on thee, and then my state,
Like to the lark at break of day arising
From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;
For thy sweet love remember'd such wealth brings
That then I scorn to change my state with kings.

Further Teacher Resources

- 1- Cliff Notes' Critical Commentary on Sonnet 29
- 2- Synopsis and use of Sonnet 29 in Popular Culture

Democracy [1949] ~ by Langston Hughes

Democracy will not come
Today, this year
Nor ever
Through compromise and fear.

I have as much right
As the other fellow has
To stand
On my two feet
And own the land.

I tire so of hearing people say,
Let things take their course.
Tomorrow is another day.
I do not need my freedom when I'm dead.
I cannot live on tomorrow's bread.

Freedom
Is a strong seed
Planted
In a great need.

I live here, too.
I want freedom
Just as you.

Further Teacher Resources

1- A Peer-Criticism of 'Democracy' and its meaning

A link to an article in PDF format on the
"Voice and the Visual Poetry of Langston Hughes"
by Leslie Wheeler



These standards-based materials are provided through a partnership with MENC: The National Association for Music Education. This lesson plan was created by MENC member Timothy M. Black, Kadena High School, Okinawa, Japan.