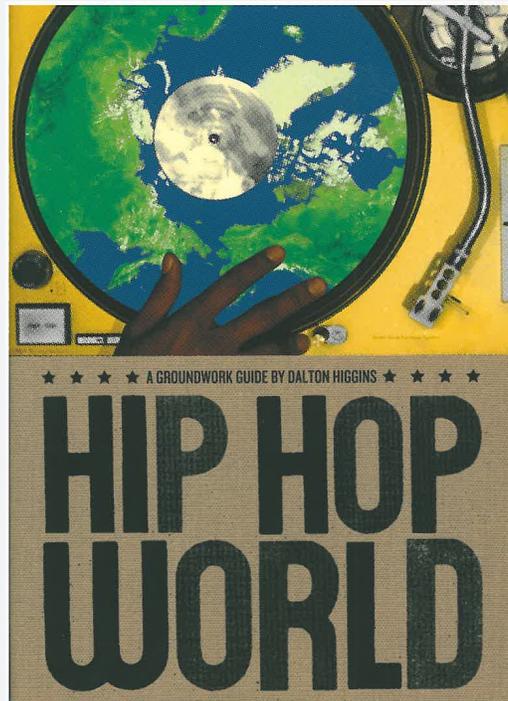


## First Opinion: Hip-Hop in the Classroom?

Higgins, Dalton. *Hip Hop World: A Groundwork Guide*. Toronto: Groundwood Books, 2009.

*Erick D. Pruitt*



"I said a hip hop, Hippy to the hippie, The hip, hip a hop, and you don't stop, a rock it To the bang bang boogie, say, up jump the boogie, To the rhythm of the boogie, the beat." (Sugar Hill Gang, "Rappers Delight"). Reading the words instills nostalgia; hearing them accompanied with the rhythmic baseline and emphatic electronic generated clap forces you up to your feet to dance and rap along with the Sugar Hill Gang. Although not a call to arms, the Sugar Hill Gang was one of the pioneering groups of hip-hop. Dalton Higgins, author of *Hip Hop World: A Groundwork Guide* explores the historical beginnings of hip-hop and creates a timeline to illustrate its evolution and possible extinction worldwide.

As a principal of a large elementary school in an urban district, I am continuously looking for books that will not only spark genuine interest and meaningful dialogue, but also deepen students' understanding of how impactful their culture is around the world.

Hip-hop's influence on race, sexuality, economics, and politics is undeniable in the United States. So, what better vehicle to incite thought and discussion than hip-hop? The first chapter, "The Audacity of Hip Hop" sets the stage for what I believed would be an in-depth analysis of the genre and its impact globally. The author identifies the elements that encompass hip-hop, demonstrates its adaptability, and explains why youth around the world are drawn to this form of artistic expression: "It's a pure artistic response to oppression—protest music where art truly imitates life, its music intended to play back society's most celebratory and inflammatory aspects" (12).

I was immediately drawn to read more. Unfortunately, my interest was not sustained past the first chapter. As a fan of hip-hop, I was interested to learn about DJ Kool Herc and how he integrated Jamaican sounds into what would become hip-hop, but I lost interest as Higgins retraces the origins of hip-hop. I found it difficult thinking of creating lessons around the themes that were discussed throughout the book. There were many missed opportunities throughout the book for the author to explain hip-hop's impact on education, politics, family structure, and criminal behavior. Although the use of derogatory language, fashion, and Ebonics are discussed, their immediate impact on American society and eventually the world are not addressed.

The author explains the global application of how hip-hop relates to the youth, calls for social change, and is a vehicle used as the voice of the voiceless. From China to England the author clearly identifies numerous individuals and groups that have used hip-hop to express their discontent with their individual struggles in order to effect change. Although this is an art form that is capable of being used for social change abroad, the author holds the musicians of hip-hop to a higher standard of accountability for their genre. Talent is an important factor for an individual having the goal of becoming a hip-hop artist; however, financial gain is also a primary reason for pursuing the profession. The educational and social implications for pursuing a career in hip-hop are not discussed.

Higgins shows how adaptable hip-hop has become around the world through providing examples of successful international hip-hop artists. The challenge for a teacher who would use this book is that students would not recognize many of the international artists since many referenced in the book are not marketed to the American public. Even though the title catches attention, *Hip Hop World: A Groundwork Guide* would not sustain the interest of middle school readers. What could be used to facilitate discussion and understanding of an art form could possibly erupt in a commentary on racial and cultural stereotypes, if this book is used in the classroom.

### **About the Author**

**Erick D. Pruitt** is currently the principal of Luke O'Toole school in Chicago, Illinois. Erick received his B.A. from Purdue University in 1998. While teaching in the Chicago Public Schools, Erick was accepted into New Leaders for New Schools, a principal preparation program, where he was able to work with a mentor principal for a year before accepting his current position at Luke O'Toole. Erick is also the 2003 recipient of Purdue University's College of Education's Distinguished Education Alumni Award.