



**About the USA – Virtual Classroom
Newsletter for English Teachers**

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The Appeal of Hip-Hop

"America, 1973. Nixon is president, Carly Simon rules the charts... and deep in The Bronx, kids with seemingly few opportunities and even less resources are creating one of the most influential cultural movements of the 20th century and beyond." [Experience Learning Community](#)

Looking at hip-hop's multi-racial and cross-class appeal, these articles, websites, and eJournals trace the origins of hip-hop and line out its increasing appeal.

"According to many Hip Hop aficionados, Hip Hop culture consists of at least four fundamental elements: Disc jockeying (DJing), break dancing, graffiti art, and rapping (emceeing). (1) Since its emergence in the South Bronx and throughout the northeast during the early and mid-1970s, Hip Hop has encompassed not just a musical genre, but also a style of dress, dialect and language, way of looking at the world, and an aesthetic that reflects the sensibilities of a large population of youth born between 1965 and 1984." **Hip Hop in History: Past, Present, and Future.** Derrick P. Alridge and James B. Stewart. The Journal of African American History, Summer 2005, v90, #3 *[Download article](#)

Articles

- **Hip Hop.** By Peter Katel, CQ Researcher, June 15, 2007: "The hip-hop label gets pasted on rap songs with dirty lyrics, on voter-registration campaigns and on everything in between. Hip-hop can also be a punching bag for politicians, usually when they're decrying the culture of inner cities. These condemnations have finally led even hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons to call for self-censorship by radio stations and record companies." [ARTICLE](#) - Please contact the IRC for a copy.
- **Hip Hop Planet.** By James McBride, National Geographic, April 2007: "Whether you trace it to New York's South Bronx or the villages of West Africa, hip-hop has become the voice of a generation demanding to be heard." An author and musician — who'd spent years ignoring hip-hop — travels throughout the country and to Africa to understand hip-hop's wide appeal. [ARTICLE](#)
- **Parental Advisory: Explicit Lyrics.** By Terry McDermott, LA Times Magazine, April 14, 2002: In a narrative filled with colorful characters, the author traces gangsta rap to its very beginnings. [ARTICLE](#)
- **Hip-Hop and Youth Culture** - Contemplations on an emerging cultural phenomenon. By Carl S. Taylor and Virgil Taylor, Journal of Urban Youth Culture: Hip-Hop, once limited to urban music and dance has become a widespread form of communication exhibited and enjoyed by young people throughout the world. [ARTICLE](#)

The **U.S. Embassy Berlin's Cultural Section** has organized a Teacher Seminar on: **Hip-Hop: American Youth Culture At Home and Abroad** Hip-Hop is a transnational language of dissatisfaction and anger, but also of cultural resistance and cultural pride. Hip-Hop is considered an expression of youth culture, yet it has been around for more than 30 years and transcends generations. What does it tell us about youth culture in American and European society today? Please see the reader at: <http://usa.usembassy.de/classroom/hiphop.htm>



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[The Hip Hop Timeline](#) - interactive chronicle tracing the development of hip-hop as a musical form, from its beginnings as a Bronx-based underground scene in the early 1970s to the worldwide phenomenon that it is today.

Links & Teaching Resources

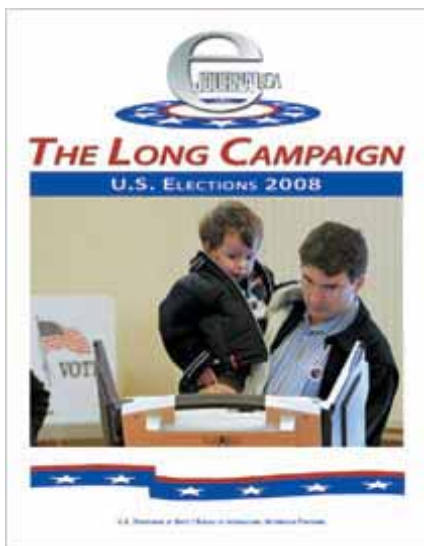
- PBS [The Hip-Hop Phenomenon](#)
- PBS [Transcending Poetry, Jazz, Rap & Hip Hop](#)
- HipHop Archive Project: [Vocab Fundamentals](#)
- Lesson Plan: [Anti-Drug Messages in Hip-Hop](#)
- USINFO eJournal (July 2005): [American Teenagers](#)



© AP Images/Jim Slosiarek/The Gazette

USInfo eJournal "Dynamic English": [What's New? The Effect of Hip-Hop Culture on Everyday English.](#) Whether it is the addition of the phrase "bling-bling" to the Oxford English Dictionary in 2003 or the inclusion of the term "crunk" in the 2007 volume of the Merriam-Webster Collegiate Dictionary, hip-hop culture is changing the nature, the sound, and the rules of the English language.

USINFO eJournal "the Arts in America": [Music. The Quintessential Sound](#) - Two music genres have exerted an extraordinary hold for the past two decades or so -- rap and its close cousin, hip-hop. Rap replaces sung melodies with rhythmically punchy, mostly rhymed recitation set to an insistent beat. Hip-hop uses many of the same features, but it is a more dance-driven, rather than message-driven, phenomenon.



A father and son in Ohio use an electronic voting machine to vote during the 2006 election. © AP Images/Amy Sancetta

The ballot box is the surest arbiter of disputes among free men.
President James Buchanan

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Political observers are confident that some candidates in both parties have absolutely no chance of being elected President. Assuming they are right, why do you think these candidates continue to campaign?
- Identify two or three issues — besides the Iraq war — that you believe the presidential candidates should address.
(Source: [The New York Times Upfront](#))



[YouTube Democratic Debates](#)
For the first time in a presidential campaign, ordinary citizens instead of journalists sat in front of Web cams asking the questions.

The Constitution makes no reference to political parties, primaries or conventions. - In our next edition we will look at the Democratic and Republican parties.

Principles of Government

- U.S. Constitution
- Legislative Branch
- Executive Branch
- Judicial Branch
- Political Participation

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

- Benefits of E-learning
- Search
- Index Search
- Copyright Policy
- Standards
- Grants and Fellowships
- Special Offers
- C-SPAN Classroom Bulletin

Campaign 2008 Clips

ELECTIONS 2008

Every four years, voters head to the polls to elect the next U.S. president. The process begins with a series of primaries and caucuses in the winter and spring, and ends with the November general election. To mark the start of the 2008 presidential election season, we decided to introduce a news series on elections. Leading up to November 2008 you will find interesting articles, background information and useful web links on the elections in your *Newsletter for English Teachers*.

U.S. 2008 Presidential Election Campaigns off to an Early Start

Although the election is not until November 4, 2008, almost all of the expected contenders already have announced their interest in running for the highest office in the United States. Not since the presidential elections in 1952 has the race for the White House been so wide open, as neither an incumbent president nor vice president are on the ballot. This unusual circumstance is made even more historically significant by the Democratic Party frontrunners, Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama. There are currently 16 declared contenders for the two major parties: [Meet the 2008 Presidential Candidates](#) (USInfo).

Resources

- USInfo eJournal: [The Long Campaign - U.S. Elections 2008](#)
In a true democracy, people are free to disagree. As we enter the 2008 election cycle, we will see candidates, voters, pollsters, and pundits agree and disagree on just about everything. Do voters choose the president based on issues or leadership qualities? Does the Electoral College work or should the election system be changed? Do political polls mean anything months before an election?
- USInfo [About America: How the United States Is Governed](#) describes how federal, state, and local governments are elected, how they operate, and how the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government relate to each other under the U.S. constitutional system.

Links

- Information about the U.S. electoral process: [Online sources](#)
- Facts for Features: [The 2008 Presidential Election](#)
- About the USA: [Elections](#)

Articles

- USInfo: [Young People Play Key Roles in Presidential Campaigns](#)
"In the Republican and Democratic parties, much of a candidate's volunteer base is made up of students "who have the time and also the energy to do neighborhood walks and knock on doors and make phone calls," said Jordan Sekulow, who was 22 when he served as national youth director for the 2004 Bush-Cheney campaign."
- USInfo: [Candidate Thompson Follows Tradition of Actors Entering Politics](#)
"When Fred Thompson entered the contest for the Republican presidential nomination in September, he became the latest of a growing number of actors seeking to translate stage and screen skills and charisma into political success."

Introducing



[C-SPAN Classroom](#) - Over the past several decades, C-SPAN has brought many hours of fascinating programming to the generally curious. Many teachers have used their programming to edify their students about various aspects of U.S. government, and now C-SPAN has created this very nice site to complement those informal activities. The formal mission of the C-SPAN Classroom site is "to enhance the teaching of Civics & U.S. Government through C-SPAN's primary source programming."

Visitors can start their journey by viewing the "Clip of the Week", and then looking through the other thematic sections on the site, which include "Principles of Government", "Legislative Branch", and "Political Participation". Along with each clip, users can also view a short clip description, and take advantage of the discussion questions as well. Visitors will need to complete a short free registration form to access all of the clips, and this only takes a few minutes.

Teaching Literature

Old School by Tobias Wolff

In Tobias Wolff's *Old School* (2003), the characters talk and think about literature as if their lives depend upon it. Wolff's narrator, a secretly half-Jewish scholarship student from the Northwest, is nearing graduation at a classy all-boy prep school during the Kennedy era. The first three sections take the form of campus visits by the poet Robert Frost, the philosopher Ayn Rand, and novelist Ernest Hemingway, whose anticipated arrival drives Wolff's hero-worshipping narrator to an act of desperation. The fourth section comes decades later as the adult narrator reckons with his earlier conduct while visiting the school as a guest writer himself. *Old School* examines the price of sacrificing integrity and the powerful allure of artistic fame. (Source: [The Big Read Catalog](#).)

In his novel, Wolff depicts the attractions and dangers of the writing life and, especially, its philosophical exploration of the meaning of honesty, academic and otherwise. The novel is written with a great ear for language and a deceptive sophistication that creeps up on readers as they race through the pages.

The Author

Born in Birmingham, Alabama, in 1945, Tobias Wolff is an accomplished writer and teacher. The memoirs *This Boy's Life* (1989) and *In Pharaoh's Army* (1994) recall his adolescence in Washington State and four years in the military. This Boy's Life and *Old School* were each nominated for the National Book Critics' Circle Award. Wolff teaches at Stanford University and lives in northern California.

Articles

Interview with Tobias Wolff. By Curtis Sittenfeld, *The Atlantic.com*, Nov. 12, 2003. *Old School* is an examination of literary ambition gone awry: "The books we read fall into one of four categories: those we don't bother to finish; those we finish because we believe for some reason we should; those we finish because we enjoy them; and those we are so consumed and overwhelmed and thrilled by that merely reading them feels inadequate—we have the impulse to inhale them, or perhaps to tear out the pages and chew them up. For me, Tobias Wolff's new novel *Old School* was such a book." [ARTICLE](#)

Back to Eden. Book review of *Old School*. By Molly Haskell, *The New Leader*, Nov/Dec 2003, v86, #6:

"The young don't have voices. They have literature. Not yet individuals, these adolescent wordsmiths need writers and teachers to tell them who they are. The narrator spends hours copying Hemingway verbatim, and he and his self-consciously literary friends ape the great writer in elaborate and funny parodies." [ARTICLE](#) Please contact the IRC for a copy.

TEACHING IDEAS

- Use this novel as a companion with lessons on Robert Frost or Ernest Hemingway. It may help students appreciate these writers even more, and in turn, appreciate the narrator's admiration for them.
- Discuss Tobias Wolff's portraits of these authors—do they ring true to what you know of them, based on their works?
- Is the narrator's admiration, and in some case, idolization of these authors deserved?
- Are there authors writing today who are as captivating to young readers as those beloved by the narrator? If so, who are they, and how do they compare?
- Ask your students to write a poem or a brief short story in the tradition of your favorite writer. Assess together in the classroom whether the works read like homage or satire, and explain why.
- Research a recent plagiarism case in the news, preferably one that entails a fiction writer or memoirist. Discuss in the classroom the details of the case, compare it to the narrator's predicament, and explain the distinctions between derivation, imitation, and plagiarism. (Source: Random House, Academic Resources: ["Old School"](#))



The [National Endowment of the Arts](#) (NEA) is a public agency dedicated to supporting excellence in the arts. Established by Congress in 1965 as an independent agency of the federal government, the NEA is the largest annual funder of the arts in the U.S. [The Big Read](#) is an initiative of the NEA. "The purpose of the Big Read, like the purpose of literature itself, is pleasure. Not necessarily an easy pleasure, but a deliciously rich and complex one." In 1998, [Nancy Pearl](#) - a librarian with a love of books so strong it has been officially classified as [lust](#) - spearheaded Seattle's first communitywide reading program, a model the NEA used to create the Big Read. No matter the mood, moment or reason, Nancy Pearl can recommend the perfect literary companion. [Nancy Pearl's Book Lust Wiki](#)

"Robert Frost made his visit in November of 1960, just a week after the general election. It tells you something about our school that the prospect of his arrival cooked up more interest than the contest between Nixon and Kennedy, which for most of us was no contest at all."

Old School, page 1, Read an [excerpt](#)



© Random House

"Writers are very loath to admit the influences on them. They all want to be as if it had sprung full-blown from the head of Zeus and just arrived there writing their best work. Writers learn by imitation. There is no other way to learn. [...] I mean, one can take this thing too far, of course, but influence is something that is key to understanding how a writer becomes a writer."

The author discusses "Old School," [NPR Interview](#), *Weekend All Things Considered*, 11/08/2003.

Links

- Reading Group Guides: ["Old School"](#)
- National Public Radio (NPR): [Listen](#) to an Interview with Tobias Wolff, 12/22/2003
- The Literature Network: [Robert Frost](#)
- The [Hemingway Resource Center](#)
- The [Ayn Rand](#) Institute



[USinfo](#): Fancy Dancer, Josh Hill, dances during the annual Pow Wow of the American Indian Inter-Tribal Cultural Organization. © AP Images

Thanksgiving Poetry

After Apple-Picking by Robert Frost

*My long two-pointed ladder's
sticking through a tree
Toward heaven still,
And there's a barrel that I didn't fill
Beside it, and there may be two or three
Apples I didn't pick upon some bough.
But I am done with apple-picking now.
Essence of winter sleep is on the night, ...*[POEM](#)

In Robert Frost's poem apple-picking slides gradually away from simply harvesting fruit to considering how life has been experienced fully but with some regrets and mistakes.

THIS MONTH American Indian/Alaska Native Heritage Month & Thanksgiving Day (Nov. 22)

"In 1620, the area from Narragansett Bay in eastern Rhode Island to the Atlantic Ocean in southeastern Massachusetts, including Cape Cod, Martha's Vineyard and Nantucket, was the home of a village people who called themselves the Pokanoket ..."

Teaching Resources

- *Harvest Ceremony: Beyond the Thanksgiving Myth*, assists teachers in preparing lessons about the first Thanksgiving. The study guide includes information on which Native peoples met the first European immigrants in 1621, the harvest celebration, the Wampanoag today, the importance of corn, and instructions on how to make Johnny cakes. National Museum of American Indians: [Harvest Ceremony: Study Guide](#)

Who celebrated the First Thanksgiving? - If you guessed "Plymouth Colonists," you might be surprised ... Library of Congress: [Wise Guide](#)

Discussion Question for the Classroom

Imagine yourself at the first Thanksgiving feast. Would you have been a Pilgrim or a Native American? Explain.

Links

- Federal Resources for Educational Resources: [Native Americans](#)
- Library of Congress: [The People ... Native Americans](#)
- USinfo: [American Indians](#)
- About the USA: [Thanksgiving](#); [Native Americans](#)
- Indian Health Service: [American Indian Tribal Listing](#)
- U.S. Mission Germany: A@yourSchool PPT – [Native Americans](#)
- TeachersFirst's [Thanksgiving Resources](#)
- Website [Thanksgiving World](#)
- Library of Congress: [Thanksgiving in American Memory](#)
- USinfo: [Thanksgiving Is a Time for Tradition and Sharing](#)
- Facts for Features: [Thanksgiving Day 2007](#)
- USinfo eJournal: [Americans at the Table. Reflections on Food & Culture](#)

Webchat Station

EducationUSA Webchat:

Wednesday, Nov. 13, 2007, 15:00

No registration required, a live link will be provided.

Representatives from the U.S. Embassy, DAAD and Fulbright will chat about U.S. exchange opportunities for young people. Do you have students who are considering a high school year or later a study year in the U.S.? Or who are perhaps interested in an AuPair program or an internship? We invite you and your students and their parents to chat with us – about programs, finances, visa requirements or other questions.

[EducationUSA Germany](#)
[EducationUSA Worldwide](#)
[Study & Exchanges pages](#) of the U.S. Embassy

International Education Week

From Nov. 12-16 we are celebrating [International Education Week](#)



International education enlarges our perspective and widens our knowledge of the world; we gain access to cultures and new ideas.

"In a world where challenges transcend borders, education is essential for making the world more peaceful and more prosperous."

Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice

Find out more about EducationUSA by visiting the new portal at <http://www.educationusa.de> starting November 13. We will introduce the portal with a webchat (see sidebar).



usa.usembassy.de

About the USA is a digital collection of background resources on American society, culture, and political processes. In addition to featuring selected websites, it provides access to documents in full text format (E-Texts) on topics ranging from the history of German-American relations, government and politics to travel, holidays and sports.

This newsletter is produced by the Information Resource Centers/U.S. Diplomatic Mission to Germany.

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