



Diamonds and DJs: Introducing Appropriation and Inspiration

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Facilitator's Guide

Lesson Overview (Grades 7-12)

This lesson is designed to introduce students to the idea of appropriation and to help them begin to think critically about the ethics of appropriating a creator's work for a new purpose. Students will watch two sets of videos: 1) a Project New Literacies Media Exemplar video about the differences between remixes and mash-ups; and 2) the video of a song that has been remixed and the original song that inspired it. The class will then engage in a group discussion about the purpose and meaning of remixing and appropriation.

Ethical thinking skills highlighted in this lesson:

- **Roles and Responsibilities**—The role of creator involves many distinct responsibilities. The creators and users of content have responsibilities to their audiences, the broader community, and, if they are using source content, to the original content and its creator.

New media literacies highlighted in this lesson:

- **Appropriation**—the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content



Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Define the key concepts of appropriation and inspiration and how they relate to creation.
- Consider the perspectives of the original creator, potential audiences, and the broader community when appropriating others' material.

Materials Used

- **HIGH TECH NOTE:** You will need a computer that connects to the internet.
- Project New Media Literacies DJ Exemplar Clip, 'DJ Culture':
<http://newmedialiteracies.org/exemplars/o8DJ/#>
- Shirley Bassey 'Diamonds are Forever' (1971) clip:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XW6ZUfbqZtU> (stop at 57 seconds)
 - This song became an iconic James Bond film theme.
- Kanye West's 'Diamonds are from Sierra Leone' (2005) clip:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=92FCRmeggNqQ> (stop at 1:57).
 - West's video addresses the ethics of the diamond trade.

Lesson Introduction

1. **Lead a discussion about students' experiences with appropriation and inspiration.**
 - Do they make songs, write fan fiction, create video mashups?
 - If not, have they used pictures they find on the Internet for other purposes—e.g., for school reports, MySpace layouts?
 - When they create something, like a collage, fan fiction, or remix, how are they inspired? Where do they get their materials and ideas?
 - How do they think the original creators are affected by their work?



- Today’s lesson addresses where we find ideas for creative projects and how people use other people’s creative works and make them into new creative projects. These concepts are called inspiration and appropriation.
- The following video shows ways that DJs/artists make two types of musical art. In making their works, the DJs/artists appropriate materials—make sure to point out that the students also appropriate when they use pictures for MySpace or write fan fiction. Appropriation is the ability to meaningfully sample and remix media content. See “Ownership” Glossary for more information on appropriation.

2. Screen and discuss the NML DJ Exemplar Clip, “DJ Culture.” Use the questions below to guide discussion.

- Q: What is the difference between a mash-up and a remix?

A: A **mash-up** is a song created by putting together a preexisting vocal track and a preexisting instrumental track. The DJ’s main work is identifying the two tracks and splicing them together. A **remix** is a song created by putting together an original track and a preexisting one.

- Q: DJ M Singe mentions that when making a mash-up, the two pieces of music should be iconic. What does iconic mean? Why do you think iconic pieces make the best mash-ups?

A: Mash-ups rely on the audience’s recognition of the source materials and their feelings about such materials. Iconic songs have many meanings and associations; therefore, DJs and other musicians have many themes available to them when using such materials.

(NOTE: With this question, the idea of appropriation may come up.)

- Q: What are some of the most common materials that inspire DJs? In other words, what kinds of materials do they tend to appropriate?

A: Vocal tracks (for example, DJ C mentions Shinehead’s rendition of “Billy Jean”), musical beats, instrumental tracks. However, inspiration can come from anywhere!

- Q: What are the potential downsides or harms of these forms of appropriation?



A: Original creators may not want their creations to be used in unintended ways. If appropriation is done improperly, original creators may not get the credit they deserve for their creations.

Lesson Instruction

3. Screen the Shirley Bassey and Kanye West Clips.

NOTE: This lesson can also be done with other remixes and mash-ups that may be more current for your students. Encourage them to provide you with examples. Two further suggestions include:

- A mash-up of Jay-Z's song *Encore* and the Beatles' song "Glass Onion," which can be found here: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3zJqihkLcGc>
- A mash-up of 2007's top 25 Billboard hits by DJ Earworm called "The United State of Pop," which can be found here: <http://www.djearworm.com/united-state-of-pop.htm>

4. Lead the class in a **group discussion** about West's remix using the discussion questions below.

Lesson Discussion Questions

1. What do you think of Kanye West's appropriation? Is it different enough from the Shirley Bassey song to be an innovative remix?
2. Did West change the meaning of Bassey's song in his remix? How?
3. Compare the two videos—what is different about the artists' approaches to diamonds?
4. Why do you think West used Bassey's song?
5. What are the benefits and burdens to both creators? Financial? Social? Emotional? Creative?

Concluding Takeaways

- Novice and professional artists gain inspiration through the natural world, individuals and communities around them, and the artistic creations of others. To varying degrees, all creative work builds upon the previous work of others.



- Appropriation is the ability to sample and remix media content to create alternative interpretations of the ideas/themes/aesthetic qualities exemplified in source material. Appropriating source material is an important part of the creative process for all artists.
- However, when appropriating others' material, artists/creators should consider the perspectives of the source material, the original artist, potential audiences, and the broader community. Think through what the consequences, and their severity, may be for key constituents—for example, financial harms or harms to a person's personal life. Appropriated material can and should be used for critical commentary, but the creators should use their best judgment in assessing how their creation will affect others.

Assessment

Through participation in class activities and discussions and/or answers to optional assessment questions, students should demonstrate they can:

- Define the key concepts of appropriation and inspiration and how they relate to creation.
- Consider the perspectives of the original creator, potential audiences, and the broader community when appropriating others' material.

Assessment Questions (Optional)

- What is appropriation? Are some appropriations more “appropriate” than others?
- What is inspiration? What does it mean to be inspired?
- Are inspiration and appropriation an important part of creation? Why or why not?
- What do artists stand to gain from having their work appropriated by someone else? Community and individual relationship building? Emotional benefits? Financial benefits? Social benefits?
- What do they stand to lose? Community and individual relationships? Emotional burdens? Financial losses? Social losses?