

School Matinée Study Guide

23 Skidoo and the Secret Agency



**Hopkins
Center for
the Arts**
at Dartmouth

Tue, Apr 23 • 11 am
Kimball Union Academy



Welcome to Hop presents at KUA

A performance needs an audience, so be prepared to play your part!

Theater Etiquette

When entering the hall, show consideration for all those sharing the building by remaining quiet and respectful in common areas. Applause is the best way to show your enthusiasm and appreciation! Backpacks, food, drink and gum are not allowed in the theater. Please turn off all cell phones and note that recording the performance or taking photos is strictly prohibited.

Information for Teachers

Review this study guide for context and activities that will help your students engage with the performance. Please read the email that accompanies this guide—Hop staff often request details about your visit including how many buses you'll be bringing and what accommodations you need.

This study guide's content was created by Aaron Rivkin, the Hopkins Center's Manager of Impact and Community Alliance. If you have questions about this guide, please direct them to Aaron Rivkin at aaron.s.rivkin@dartmouth.edu.

To download copies of this and other guides, visit
hop.dartmouth.edu/study-guides

Enjoy the Show!

The Hopkins Center's mission is to ignite and sustain a passion for the arts within Dartmouth and its greater community and to provide the core educational environment for the study, creation and presentation of the arts.

Did You Know?

- The Hopkins Center is located on the ancestral homelands of the Abenaki people.
- The Hop presents over 100 live performance events each season
- In 1988, the Hop was named by the National Endowment for the Arts as one of the nation's exemplary performing arts centers.
- Currently the Hop is under construction until winter of 2025!

About the Show

Rhymers with deft styles and deep vocabulary trade verses with singers whose harmonies are as sweet as they are strong. The Secret Agency is an interactive and inspiring hip-hop experience for families everywhere, mixing the highly literate lyrical style of golden age hip hop with soul, funk, reggae and storytelling alongside rapper and beat-maker 23 Skidoo.

Celebrated as the King of Kid-Hop, Secret Agent 23 Skidoo is a Grammy-winning, internationally touring, purple velvet tuxedo-wearing family funk phenomenon. Combining the positive, primal power of hip hop with the surreal storytelling of science fiction, 23 Skidoo has concocted a potent potion that wows family crowds across the planet.



23 Skidoo and the Secret Agency

About the Artists

In 2007, **23 Skidoo** had already spent over a decade touring the nation with various live band/hip hop groups as a rapper and producer. He'd opened up for MOS DEF, RUN DMC, P-Funk All Stars and The Sun Ra Arkestra. Taking a break from the road, Skidoo taught his daughter, little Saki (aka MC Fireworks), how to rap, and together they made the world's first album of family hip hop, literally from a family that makes hip hop. It caught on quick, and they soon had a #1 hit on SiriusXM's family channel, which started planting seeds across the nation and beyond. In the next decade, 23 Skidoo, MC Fireworks and Bootysattva (aka Mom) rocked lots of shows with a bunch of awesome friends who sang, scratched records, danced, played instruments and did backflips. They played Lollapalooza, Austin City Limits and the Smithsonian. They flew to Canada for the Winnipeg Folk Festival, and to India for the Buddy Daddy Family Festival. They got glowing reviews in *TIME*, *USA Today*, *People* and a bunch of other magazines. They racked up a total of ten #1 hits on SiriusXM, and ended up on NPR's *All Things Considered* twice. Their music videos are currently playing on NBC's kids' show *Sprout House*. And in 2014, they got nominated for a Grammy, and in 2017, they **WON** the Grammy for Best Children's Recording! That was cool. Got to go onstage in a tophat and everything. As well as releasing six full-length albums, two books, one record, a line of hot sauce and an EP that combines the entire Asheville Symphony with beats and rhymes, 23 Skidoo has written and produced the music for the US Library's Summer Reading Program for six years running.



23 Skidoo and the Secret Agency

Contextual Background: Musical Styles

Hip Hop

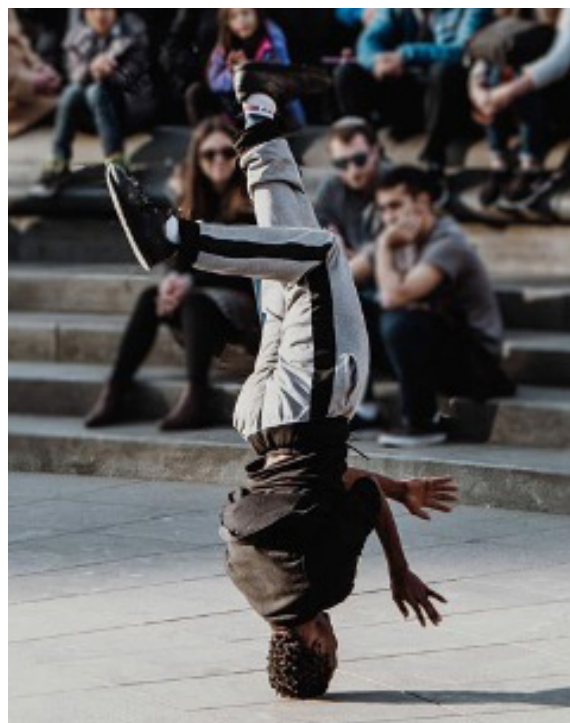


A DJ mixing records at an NYC block party

Hip hop is a very American phenomenon, mixing aspects and contributions from many ethnicities and time periods into an ever changing culture. It is some of the funkier music ever created. Starting as an underground world of block parties and dance battles in the early 1970s, this culture was created by the youth of NYC, and still speaks to the hearts, minds and souls of youth all across the planet. The inventor of hip hop is mostly recognized as Clive Campbell, but he is much better known as DJ Kool Herc.

One day, when his sister Cindy had a birthday party in the rec room of their apartment building, Clive was playing his favorite funk records. As he played, he realized that during the sections in certain records called the “breaks,” where the music simplified and the drummer took the lead for a short while, the people danced the hardest. So he developed a technique of using two turntables and two copies of the same record to just play the break over and over. He’d start on one turntable, then when the break section was almost done, he’d start the same break on the other turntable, keeping the funkier part going for minutes on end. And the crowd loved it! Other DJs, such as Grandmaster Flash and Grand Wizard Theodore, learned Kool Herc’s technique. They perfected and added to it, inventing record scratching along the way. The break beats, with the same records being looped over and over, were hypnotic and funky. It was 1973, and they had created a brand new sound.

The night of Cindy’s birthday, Kool Herc and his friend also had a microphone plugged in. As the beat heavy breaks thumped out of the speakers, they had fun messing around on the mic, shouting out their friends’ names and making little phrases rhyme. This fit so perfectly with the new sound that, before long, some of the Bronx locals started actually writing and reciting longer rhymes. The vocal style became known as “rap,” but the lyricists referred to themselves as “MCs.” MC stands for “Master of Ceremony,” but eventually it also stood for “Move the Crowd” and “Mic Control,” as the MCs took pride in sounding great and making the crowd respond to their lyrics. Inspired by the funky new music being invented before their eyes and ears, dancers came up with new styles as well. They took the crazy dance steps of James Brown, the godfather of funk music, and mixed them together with the sweeping kicks and jumps they had seen in kung fu movies and even gymnastic moves. The amazing, acrobatic dance style they created was called “breaking,” because they were dancing to the “breaks” in the records.



A break dancer about to do a headspin

Contextual Background continued

Later, some people called it “breakdancing,” but just like a lot of rappers prefer to be called “MCs”, these dancers prefer to be known either as “breakers” or “bboys and bgirls.” There were also a lot of artists involved in this emerging scene who used spray paint to adorn the crumbling, abandoned landscape of the Bronx and similar neighborhoods with graffiti. Big cartoon letters and characters covered buildings and subway trains with vivid color. Graffiti has been around about as long as human civilization, but these artists began a new style, developing techniques to make their art pieces more intricate and three dimensional. Their art looked as wild as the breakers when they danced, and as funky as the DJs and MCs sounded through the speakers.

All of these styles, from looping record breaks and rhyming to battling with acrobatic dance and spraying up nicknames in colorful paint, became the culture known as hip hop. First it spread across New York City, and then across the world. It was created as an alternative lifestyle to negativity and violence, and to be a guiding light to the youth who practiced it. The principles of hip hop as laid down by its founders are “peace, love, unity and having fun,” and that’s why so many people who have gotten involved with the culture have changed their lives for the better.



Run DMC rocking the microphone

Pre- and Post-Performance Discussion Questions

Pre-Performance

- What kind of music do you like and why?
- Where and when do you listen to music?

Post-Performance

- What kinds of feelings are in the music you heard?
- Did you think the music at the concert was good music? Why?

Learning Activities

The DJ

Activity 1. Understanding the DJ (10 Minutes)

DJs choose which records to play in what order, and therefore help create the mood and energy in a party or show. Sometimes in doing this, they are contributing to or helping create a scene, which can bring different types of people together. Watch this YouTube interview with DJ Kool Herc about his role in creating hip hop, then discuss: [youtube.com/watch?v=7qwml-F7zKQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7qwml-F7zKQ)

- a) How do you think a handful of DJs in the Bronx and Brooklyn in the early 1970s helped create an entire culture that has grown worldwide in the decades since?
- b) Can you think of any other time in history where musicians or artists helped define or create a culture or movement?

Activity 2. Understanding Sampling (10 Minutes)

DJs play, and sometimes create, hip hop beats for MCs to rap over. A lot of these beats involve “sampling,” the use of small sections of pre-existing songs rearranged into a new context. There is debate over whether sampled music is cheating, or whether it is a legitimate art, like musical collage. Watch this YouTube clip that shows songs that have been sampled, and what was created out of the samples. Then discuss. [youtube.com/watch?v=_4CTMVWnAK0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_4CTMVWnAK0)

- a) Is sampled music still an original form of music?
- b) How many genres of music can you think of that currently rely on sampling or looping?
- c) What’s the line between stealing, plagiarism and being inspired by an earlier piece?

Activity 3. Learning to Beatbox (15 Minutes)

Along with DJs, beatboxing is another method of creating a beat to rhyme over. Beatboxing is the act of creating a beat with nothing but the sounds you can make with your mouth. There are some really amazing beatboxers in the world, and there are even competitions where beatboxers try to outdo each other in skill and originality. Watch this tutorial on the basics of beatboxing, and see if you can learn to make beats yourself! [youtube.com/watch?v=0RTrq4vfUSY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RTrq4vfUSY)

The MC

MCs are the lyricists who craft rhymes to go along with the beats. There are many styles of lyrics, from simple to very complex, and many topics for songs, ranging from playful bragging and battling, to imaginative storytelling, to thorough breakdowns of political and social issues. One of the greatest things about hip hop lyricism is that while it takes a lifetime to master, it only takes a little while to begin learning. Talking is something you already know how to do, and rhythm is something that all of us have. Your heart beats in rhythm and you breath and walk in rhythm, so you know you have it! Hip hop enables every person to tell their own stories in a creative way, taking what you care about and turning it into a song.

Learning Activity: The MC *continued*

Activity 1. The MC as an Activist (10 Minutes)

MCs can become a voice that speaks for a larger movement or cause. The Earth Guardians are a team of two brothers from Colorado that use hip hop to promote environmental awareness.

Watch the video for their song, *Live as if Our Future Matters*, then discuss.
[youtube.com/watch?v=ANrxvmHUuVO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANrxvmHUuVO)

- a) How do you think the lyrics in hip hop songs create actual change in the world? Do you think the fact that these MCs are children have any different effect on people than if they were adults?

Activity 2. Freestyle Rhyming (10-20 Minutes)

One aspect of hip hop lyricism is “freestyling,” or improvising rhymes on the spot. Watch this TedX Talk about freestyling and the use of improvisation in life, then discuss. [youtube.com/watch?v=6mkyfQKwHdA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6mkyfQKwHdA)

- a) Can you think of any place in your own life where you improvise? How do you think people get better at freestyling?
- b) Do you think you could freestyle rap? Give it a try over these beats, or beatbox for each other!
[youtube.com/watch?v=dLyge6ZLUCI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dLyge6ZLUCI)
[youtube.com/watch?v=WRItl0z-nPg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WRItl0z-nPg)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=djAN7Z_iXjl

The Breaker

Breakers, also known as bboys and bgirls, are the dancers who embody the spirit of hip hop. Although some classes teach “hip hop dance,” they usually are referring to the type of choreographed moves that you see in modern hip hop music videos. Breaking was the original dance form that actually emerged along with hip hop culture. There are sometimes synchronized moves and choreography that a number of crew members may do simultaneously, but for the most part, breaking focuses on individual expression and rocking your own style.

Activity 1. Understanding Breaking (10-15 Minutes)

Bboys and bgirls come in every size, shape and color. Check out this amazing battle. Bgirl Terra is only 6!
[youtube.com/watch?v=J5s1ZJXkarw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J5s1ZJXkarw)

And here’s another battle between two of the original breakers. Crazy Legs is 50, and Bboy Storm is 45! Watch both videos, then discuss. [youtube.com/watch?v=YMOQLXqgcVo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YMOQLXqgcVo)

- a) Can you feel the differences in the breakers’ personalities through their moves and styles?
- b) Breaking battles are friendly even when they act aggressive, and even though they’re competing, breakers will cheer each other on when they rock impressive moves. How do you think friendly competition can help you advance your skills?

Learning Activity: The Breaker *continued*

Activity 2. Learning to Break (15-30 Minutes)

Here is a great tutorial on the basics of breaking. It's not too tough to learn the first steps, and then you can progress to whatever level you feel comfortable. Depending on how much time you put into it, you may be amazed at what you can achieve! [youtube.com/watch?v=zPdQ1gN7Ngo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zPdQ1gN7Ngo)

Graffiti

Throughout its long and winding history, graffiti has been looked down on as visual pollution and criminalized, but has also been seen as neighborhood beautification, as cutting edge popular art, and as the voice of oppressed people with no other way to get their messages out. And although the act of inscribing thoughts and ideas on public spaces is many centuries old, the graffiti and “street art” styles specific to the last few decades have exploded across the planet on wall murals, in galleries and in advertising and fashion.

Activity 1. Understanding Graffiti (10 Minutes)

It has been a debate for quite a long time whether graffiti is art or vandalism. Is it possible that it is both? Watch this Ted Ed video on the history of graffiti, then discuss. [youtube.com/watch?v=4GNoUYZhrTO](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4GNoUYZhrTO)

- a) Do you think graffiti is art or vandalism?
- b) Have you seen any graffiti around your town that you think is ugly or beautiful, or that makes you feel happy or angry?
- c) Why do you think people write their names over and over?

Vocabulary

Bboy: A male breaker

Bgirl: A female breaker

Break: The part of a song where the music becomes more simple and the drums and percussion take the lead

Breaking: A style of dance that originated along with hip hop music.

DJ: A person who plays records to entertain others

Funk: A type of music that combines elements of R&B and Soul music

Graffiti Writer: An artist who writes words in public and private spaces, usually with spray paint

Hip Hop: A creative culture involving music, dance and art that began in NYC in the 1970s

MC: A lyricist that performs vocals in hip hop music

Sampling: The use of small sections of pre-existing music when making new music

The South Bronx: A neighborhood in New York City

Street Art: Usually legal art in public spaces. Though street art uses a wider range of mediums including stencils and wheatpaste, there is a large crossover between street art and graffiti.

Resources

23 Skidoo and Secret Agency's Website: secretagent23skidoo.com

More resources about 23 Skidoo and the Secret Agency: dandelionartists.com/secret-agent-23-index

References

static1.squarespace.com/static/5a23f5e464b05f46907b4d2c/t/5a37eb19085229e36d16c284/1513614108878/23SKIDOO_StudyGuide.pdf

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