

Activity 18

A way to get the attention of youth?

– Muslim Hip Hop and points arising

Summary

Young people listen to various Muslim rappers and visit their websites, and look at some of the debates that have taken place, and continue to take place, within Muslim communities about whether Islam and Hip Hop music are compatible with each other. If their judgement is that there is no inherent incompatibility, they compose, perform and record their own work.

Why?

The benefits that young people gain from this exercise include the following. They:

- practise discussion, negotiation and cooperation skills in interaction with each other, and skills in explaining and justifying their views and ideas
- develop knowledge and understanding of the teachings, values and wisdom of Islamic traditions, and appreciation of Islam's diversity as well as of its unity, both in the present and in the past
- use their imaginations to consider other people's experiences in order to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are different from their own
- develop pride in their own identity and strengths
- gain in readiness to look critically at the influences and pressures they experience, and in resilience and strength to withstand those they consider harmful
- identify what is valuable in the teachings and influences of others and of the past, and make it their own.

They may also, of course, practise and develop linguistic, musical and performance skills.

Preparation

You need some recordings, plus a selection of extracts from current and recent debates. Handout 32 contains a range of views on this subject that you may use.

Procedure

In pairs, small groups or as individuals, young people may:

- select the pieces of music they would most like to download themselves, and/or the artists whom they would most like to see in performance
- write reviews of recordings or performances
- establish and use criteria for evaluating and appreciating poetry and music
- rank and arrange viewpoints about whether Islam and Hip Hop are compatible
- express their own opinions
- compose and perform their own work.

Continuation

It may be relevant to compare and contrast Muslim Hip Hop with work advertised at the British Muslim Song website. 'Here you will find,' it says, 'a growing collection of beautiful songs and sounds from the rich but little-known heritage of British Islam. As well as timeless classics from the age of Sheikh Abdullah Quilliam, and several new arrangements written in the same spirit, you can enjoy a unique cross-cultural experiment: great songs written in English to ancient and much-loved Rumelian and Anatolian melodies. Whether you are a music teacher, an entertainer, or simply a lover of beautiful sounds, we hope you enjoy your journey through this fascinating world'. <http://www.britishmuslimsong.co.uk/>

Identity, Empowerment and Change, Handout 32

Muslim Hip Hop, for and against

I love it

I love it! I listen to Soldiers of Allah, MRW, and Iron Sheik. They talk about true Islam, they criticize our fake Islamic leaders and also the West. They speak true Islam. It is a way to get the attention of youth, and give them Islam. It is better to have a good Islamic beat and lyric in your head than some nasty ones in the mainstream. I do not think people like Mos Def is what I would call a Muslim rapper... he doesn't really rap about Islam... he does other stuff too... Islam is either all or nothing... not some of this and some of that.

Aminah

Work in harmony

Poetry and music has been a median for spreading 'pure thoughts' and the belief of a divine existence all the way from the times of poets such as Zhang Qi, Tamim ibn Bahr, Andrew of Longjumeau, Ibn Battuta, who included accounts about the sea routes around South Asia to the Middle East. Poetry and music work in harmony and one is not possible without the other, may it be rap about drugs, violence and society or an emerging era of religious rap.

Tawreeda

U are mocking with it

I am a Muslim sister brought up in B'ham and I am disgusted with this idea... how can u possibly mix the words of the lord with music? God has forbidden music - this means the use of instruments full stop. So there is no point in saying u are spreading the message of Allah because u are mocking with it.

Sadia

The right path

There is one verse in the Koran which is used to argue that music is not allowed in Islam. The verse explains that music could lead Muslims away from the right path. But it is important to consider the events of the time, and this verse was relevant for that time. Today, 'Islamic Hip Hop' could actually bring people closer to Islam and at the same time spread a positive message. Hip Hop, as with all music, is art. Art has always excelled in Islam. From the very start of Hip Hop, Islam has played an important role - from Afrika Bambaataa to Public Enemy. I hope it continues to do so.

Asif

Simple drum beat

I see this form of music as perfectly valid as long as it keeps musical instruments out. Islam has a tradition of Islamic poetry and songs which are all considered fine by most as long as they do not contain anything more than a simple drum beat as accompaniment. So what is wrong with Rap? OK it is a little aggressive at times, but still isn't rap just a form of street poetry?

Daw'ud Abdullah

Muslims themselves

I think Islamic Hip Hop is an excellent idea. It's the modern medium with which to educate people about Islam not just non-Muslims but Muslims themselves.

Irfan

Alternative role model

I think it is great that music of Islamic nature is introduced to the population. In the world where Eminem rules and Britney Spears is so popular, it is important that young Muslims have an alternative role model to model after. It could also expand Islam and encourage non-Muslims to learn about Islam. This could lead to greater understanding and appreciation of non-Muslims towards Muslims and diminish the stereotype view of Muslims as terrorist. It could also influence younger Muslim generation to learn more about their religion and to always remember the teachings of Islam. I cannot say whether this genre of music is permitted in Islam, but I'm sure the gospel type ('nasshid') of music are permitted.

Haidir

Message

Music is a way of expressing one's thoughts... and if these artists are talented enough to use their voice to express their thoughts, I don't see any harm in that. I think it's absolutely appropriate to use Hip Hop to deliver the message as long as artists don't curse and use negativity in their songs. As a student I barely have time in my hands, so isn't it better to hear the message through music, then not to receive the message at all?

Naveed

The spirit of the religion

I think Muslim rappers are great! I am a Muslim, and I firmly believe that our religion encourages expressing creativity... Islam and rap are totally compatible. It's an amazing way to develop spirituality, and really shows how Muslims can assimilate into 'Western' society well, while still retaining their beliefs. Anyone who believes that appropriate and uplifting music cannot be a part of a healthy Islamic practice, is misguided about the spirit of the religion and its rules.

Nadia

No boundaries

I think people should embrace this message of Islam in Hip Hop. It's a good way of keeping the youth informed about their religion. At least it's coming from credible sources and not from media that aims to brain-wash and dull young people's minds. Music has no boundaries and no limits; anything should be available through music, especially spirituality and religion. At least these rappers are rhyming about how to get closer to God and they're sharing their joy of spirituality instead of corrupting young valuable minds with drugs, careless sex and other nastiness. How can it be bad to get closer to Allah through music? I think it's a beautiful thing.

Sahar

One of love

Delivering the message of Islam via music is an age old formula. Islam was brought to the Sikhs of India via music and great numbers converted to Islam via this format. Even today the life of the Prophet Mohammed is expressed with such love in the forms of poetry, Nasheeds and Qawaali. If the message is one of love for the Prophet and the invitation to discover Islam then I agree, but if it's a tool to express anger and incite malice then I disagree, this is not the message of Islam and would be counter productive.

Cappa

Narrower interpretations

Music is not forbidden by Islam, and for Muslims to use this as just another medium to communicate the religious message to Muslims and non-Muslims alike is commendable and should be encouraged. As for the more conservative Muslims who believe that music is 'haram' and that rapping about Islam should be discouraged, while I respect their opinion I believe that they should express themselves by consciously refraining from taking part - not telling other people what they should do or shouldn't do according to their own narrower interpretations of the faith.

Tariq

Blasphemous

It is blasphemous and profane to mix such a vulgar and profane 'music' as rap with the sublime message of Islam. Islam and rap are antithetical in their very essences, since rap reflects the decadence and rottenness that characterize modern Western societies.

Salim

Speaks to their identity

I thought it might be worth mentioning a truly talented Danish Hip Hop group, Outlandish. The group is made up of two Muslims and one Catholic each of whom expresses their faith in their music. Hip Hop for them speaks to their identity as immigrants in Europe. Theirs is truly moving music to listen to and makes me proud to be Muslim at a time when some Muslims are involved in shameful things around the world.

Hakim

Joy

music is not banned in Islam; get your facts right. Rap is poetry, the prophet had his own poets who praised Islam. Groups like Mecca2medina are great because they remind me of Allah. Also I became a Muslim 12 years ago by listening to music so what do you say about that? There are many new Muslims that have become Muslim by listening to groups like Mecca2medina and others. How can that be wrong? Also there are many scholars who have expressed joy in hearing rappers praising Allah.

Authodox

Source: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/extra/tx/documentaries/islamichiphop.shtml>

