**Passage 1**

A stereotype is an idea based on an oversimplification or generalization. These ideas are not accurate. Stereotypes ignore that a group is made of diverse people. Stereotypes are harmful because they limit how we think and what we expect of others.

There is a common stereotype that hip-hop is all about status symbols and wealth. Some popular rappers do brag about wealth and might even wear gold chains and expensive sunglasses. But this is not what all, or even most, rap is about. Hip-hop is much more than that. Rap can and does explore deep and personal topics, as well as urgent issues. It’s innovative and artistic. When you write raps, don’t perpetuate negative stereotypes about hip-hop culture or about rap. Know the history of the genre, and don’t oversimplify and underestimate what rap and rappers can be and do.

**Passage 2**

Clive Campbell is often credited as a founder of hip-hop. At a young age, Campbell immigrated to the US from Jamaica. He was influenced by musical traditions from both places, including soul, funk and reggae. In the 1970s, he started experimenting with turntables. Campbell would scratch records to loop a beat so that people could dance. At his sister’s birthday on August 11, 1973, Campbell performed in front of his biggest crowd yet. From there, Campbell went on to perform at clubs all around the city. He brought in “hype men” who rhymed on microphones in the style of Jamaican dancehall toasts. This would become the art of rapping. Campbell would become known by his stage name, DJ Kool Herc. While hip-hop shares roots and traits with other, older musical styles, many consider Campbell’s sister’s birthday in 1973 the birthday of hip-hop, too.

**Passage 3**

Hip-hop culture includes a lot of different elements. MCing, DJing, breakdancing and graffiti are considered four classic elements of hip-hop culture. MC, or emcee, stands for “Master of Ceremonies” and is another term for a rapper. DJs were the artists who first created beats by scratching vinyl records. Breakdancing, or breaking, is an acrobatic and inventive style of dance. Finally, graffiti is the use of spray paint to create murals or “tags,” typically in public spaces, though nowadays you can see graffiti in art galleries. A tag is like an artist’s signature, a way of saying “I was here.” When people talk about the four elements of hip-hop, they are typically referring to these four art forms. But there’s even more to hip-hop culture, from fashion to values to wealth of knowledge.

**Passage 4**

Hip-hop artists often rap about topics from their own lives. Early rappers bragged and poked fun at their friends. Many rappers still do that today. Hip-hop artists use the genre to explore sensitive and emotional themes, too. If you’re a hip-hop fan, you know that rappers often discuss their struggles, poverty and the effects of race and racism. Not all rap is strictly personal either. It also examines broader issues from current events, politics, history and more. No matter what you decide to rap about, it’s important to know your topic well before you get started.

**Passage 5**

Hip-hop culture refers to the beat, rap, dance and visual styles associated with the music of hip-hop. Colorful murals on city streets are part of that culture. Breakdancing is part of it, too. Since the 1970s, hip-hop has grown in many ways. It has become one of the most popular genres worldwide. It still serves as a means of self-expression, particularly among young people. But you can find hip-hop culture in many new places. In 2018, hip-hop artist Kendrick Lamar won a Pulitzer Prize for his fourth album. He was the first rapper ever to do so. In 2015, the musical “Hamilton” made its Broadway debut and remains a critical and box office success. The musical features rap and incorporates hip-hop to re-examine American history through the life of Alexander Hamilton, a Founding Father and immigrant.

**Passage 6**

No matter what you rap about, you’re going to need to understand it. If you’re planning to rap about you and your life experiences, you still might want to “research.” That research might be to free-write about your emotions and memories. Make sure you understand why the experience you’re writing about matters to you and why it might matter to others. If you’re rapping about something else—like history, biography or current events—your research might include finding and reading resources about that topic. It’s just as important to understand your topic and why it matters to you. It will likely take more time to understand a topic when it isn’t about you. Take that time, and do that work! Understand what you as the rapper have to say before you start thinking about rhythm and rhyme.

**Passage 7**

Finding your voice is important to any art form. Finding your voice means figuring out what you have to say and how you want to say it. In hip-hop, that might mean you take inspiration from other rappers you admire. You might spend time analyzing their lyrics. What is it you like about them? How can you imitate it? But be careful. Finding your voice should not mean you try to be someone you’re not. A poseur is someone who does and says things just to fit in. Poseurs are not their authentic, or true, selves. When it comes to performing music, it’s easy for audiences to see when someone isn’t being themselves. It also doesn’t feel good to be inauthentic. You can avoid all that by knowing who you are, what you want to say and how you want to say it. Experiment until you find what feels right to you.