

Versa-Style Dance Reference Guide



Dear Educators,

Versa-Style is a group of young, passionate, and socially-conscious artists who work endlessly to spread love, positivity, and knowledge through the medium of Hip-Hop dance. As a non-profit organization, Versa-Style serves two purposes; one focus of our organization is to tour as a professional dance company, and the other is to give back to the youth through community outreach. Our goal is to give Hip-Hop more representation in both the professional arts world and in our Los Angeles community as an outlet for underprivileged inner-city youth.

We take pride in being able to teach both students and educators about the positive impact Hip-Hop dance and culture has on the youth while also clearing up some of the negative stigmas associated with Hip-Hop in our society.

I hope the information in the following pages resonate with some of your students. Please take the time to go through each section to the best of your ability prior to the show in order to make the performance a more meaningful experience.

Please feel free to ask me any questions you may have on this guide or Versa-Style Dance Company and our work.

Thank you for all you do for our youth!

Sincerely,
Brandon Juezan
Director of Touring & Event and Principal Dancer of Versa-Style Dance Company

History of Hip-Hop Culture

Exploring the History of Hip-Hop Culture

Hip-Hop is a youth culture that began in the parks, playgrounds, and streets of 1970's New York City. The youth used the elements of Hip-Hop (rapping, deejaying, breaking, graffiti art, fashion, etc.) as a creative and recreational outlet. Hip-Hop culture was learned and shared through observation followed by practice.

Elements of Hip-Hop Culture

The “elements” of Hip-Hop are specific practices that define Hip-Hop as a culture. There are a total of 9 elements that make up Hip-Hop culture, with the “original” 4 being DJing, Emceeing, Breakin, & Graffiti Art, as described below:

DJ

DJs aka “Disc Jockeys” provide the music at Hip-Hop events. The instruments they use are called “turntables” and DJs would mix and “scratch” songs on vinyl records to create music breaks that partygoers would dance to. A DJ could smoothly mix one song into another without a pause to change the record. A DJ could also play the same song on both vinyl records and playback specific parts of the record on “loop” if that particular part of the song was a crowd favorite.



Emcee

An “emcee” (originally written as MC) is traditionally known as a “Master of Ceremonies” and eventually developed into what we know today as “rappers”. MCing began with DJs grabbing a mic and making announcements or hyping up a crowd during a party. In time, someone separate from the DJ would be hired for parties and social events with the sole purpose of keeping the energy up in the room. The MC would make musical “calls” to the crowd and would feed off their “response”. This “call and response” is essential to Hip-Hop culture and helped develop systems of rhyming words.



Breakin

Breakin, which is incorrectly called “Breakdancing,” is a dance style that involves rocking the body in rhythm with the music as well as acrobatic stunts, freezes, spins, and floor footwork. Breakin is the original style of Hip-Hop dance. Dancers referred to as “breakers” would wait specifically for DJs to play certain drum breaks in songs on loop before they took over the dance floor.



Graffiti Art

Graffiti art is the visual art form within Hip-Hop culture. This art style is characterized by stylistic “scribbled” letters or characters that are painted on walls and other public surfaces. Graffiti artists would help create the atmosphere for Hip-Hop events by painting the environment around the neighborhood and the specific spaces social gatherings would be held.



Hip Hop & Streetdance

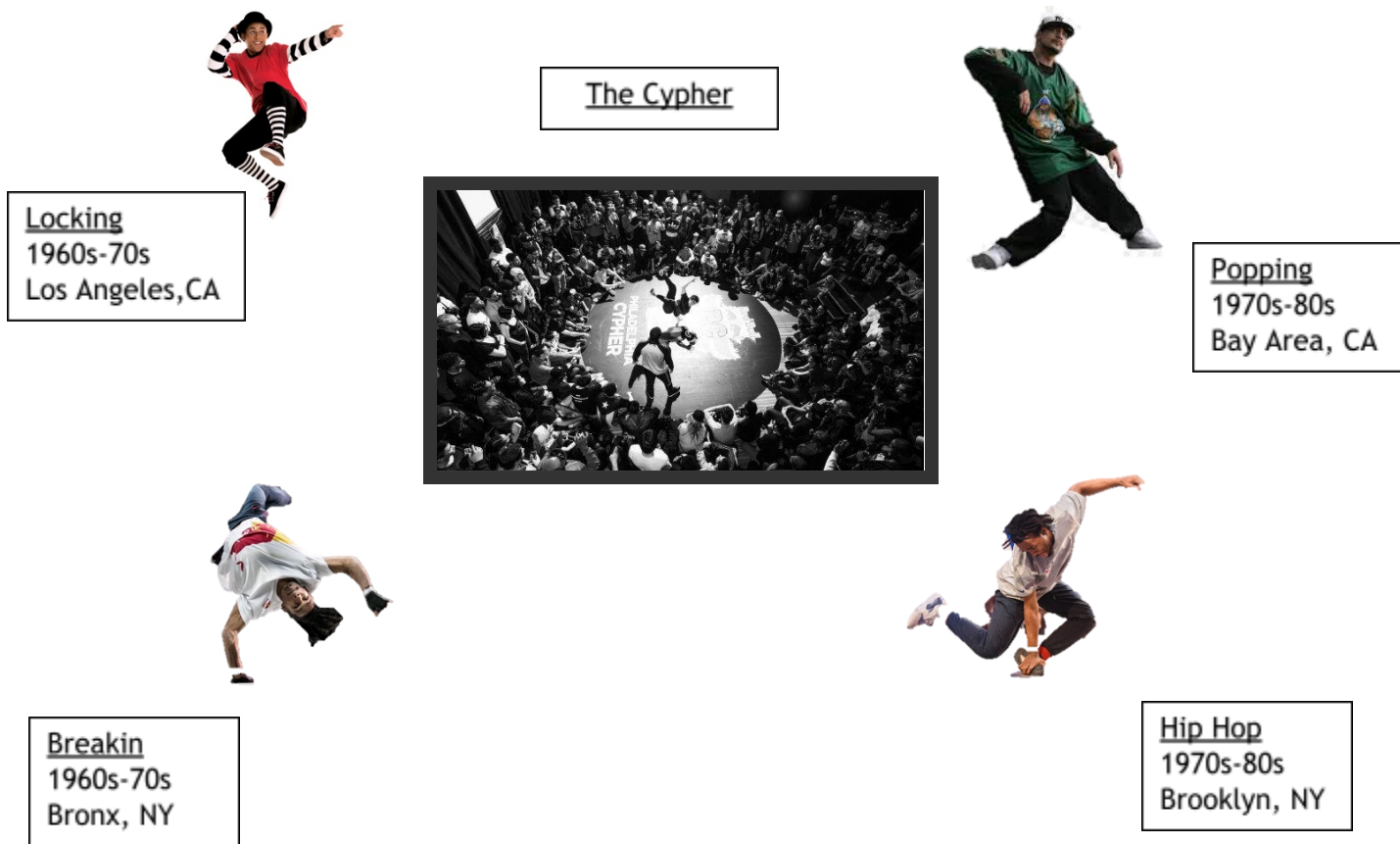
What is Hip Hop dance?

Although there are many misconceptions and conflicting ideas on what defines “Hip-Hop” as a dance style, the most commonly accepted definition amongst cultural practitioners and historians is that Hip Hop dance began with Breakin in the 1970s and later evolved into its own genre of music and dance in the 1980s. The foundational movements and dance vocabular for Hip-Hop are the following PARTY GROOVES:

- Bounce
- Rock
- Roll
- Skate
- Wave
- Social Dances

What is Streetdance?

Streetdance is defined as any dance form created in an informal setting, outside of a traditional institution, that utilizes freestyle and gives dancers space to create their own stylistic approaches to the form. A common misconception is that dance styles like Popping and Locking are all Hip-Hop dances, when in fact, they are all Streetdances, because they were developed at a different time and place from Hip-Hop. As explained before, Hip-Hop is a unique style on its own, and it is NOT an umbrella term for all other forms of Streetdance and choreography. A cultural practice unique to many Streetdance forms is THE CYPHER, also commonly known as a dance circle, where dancers gather together in a circle to exchange energy, share movement, and freestyle.



Learn More About Versa-Style

If you are interested in learning more about Hip-Hop culture, Streetdance, and our work as an organization, please visit us online via our website and social media platforms. We have digital Hip-Hop & Streetdance performances, tutorials, history videos, and more available for FREE on our sites below:



@versastylela



Versa-Style Dance Company



YouTube

VersaStyleLA



www.versastyledance.org

Glossary

Breakin (Breakdance) - a style of acrobatic dancing originating in the mid 1970's, often performed to rap music usually by teenage males in the streets, and characterized by intricate footwork, pantomime, spinning headstands and tumbling.

Choreography - the sequence of steps and movements in dance or figure skating, especially in a ballet or other staged dance.

Choreographer - a person who creates dance compositions and pieces

Culture - the customs, arts, social institutions and achievements of a particular nation, people or other social group

Cypher - one of the original definitions of the word "cipher" is that it's another name for the figure zero. In Hip-Hop culture, the spelling was changed to "cypher" and was used to describe any type of energy that is passed in a circular or cyclical motion. For Hip-Hop dancers specifically, we call a dance circle a "cypher" because it is a circular shape and the energy travels within the circle

DJ "disc jockey" - Spelled "Djay". A person who mixes different sources of pre-existing recorded music as it is playing, usually for a live audience

Element - an important part of something abstract

Foundation - an underlying basis or principle for something

Freestyle - Movement improvisation. These movements are not pre-meditated or choreographed

Graffiti - writing or drawings that have been scribbled, scratched or painted illicitly on a wall or other surface, often within public view

Locking - style of funk dance in which the dancer freezes from a fast movement and "locks" in a certain position. They hold that position for a short while and then continue in the same speed as before

MC "master of ceremonies" - Master of Ceremonies or Microphone Controller is a rapper who hosts an event or neighborhood party (also referred to as Emcee)

Party Grooves - style of social dance that is foundational to Hip-Hop dancing. Movements include bouncing, rocking, waving, rolling, and skating

Popping - style of street dance based on the technique of quickly tightening and relaxing muscles to cause a jerk in the dancer's body, referred to as a pop or a hit

Social dance (aka Party dances) - social dance is a large category composed of many dance styles. In a social dance, people are focused on connecting with others by dancing in a large group. In Hip-Hop, these dances are called "party dances"

Vocabulary (in dance) - the words used in a particular language. In the "language" of dance, these words are specific non-verbal movements attached to a particular dance style