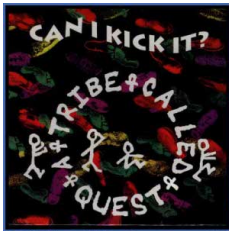




"CAN I KICK IT?"



Music by: A Tribe Called Quest
Published: April 10, 1990 - Jive Records
Instrumentation/Voicing: Hip Hop

[Recording](#)

BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Composer

A Tribe Called Quest was an American hip hop group formed in [St. Albans, Queens](#), New York, in 1985 originally composed of rapper and main producer [Q-Tip](#), rapper [Phife Dawg](#), DJ and co-producer [Ali Shaheed Muhammad](#), and rapper [Jarobi White](#). Members of the [Native Tongues](#) collective, A Tribe Called Quest is regarded as a pioneer of alternative hip hop, influencing numerous hip hop and R&B musicians.

The Composition

Released as the third single from A Tribe Called Quest's debut album, *People's Instinctive Travels and the Paths of Rhythm* (1990), "**Can I Kick It?**", was recorded in 1989, when the ensemble members were aged 18-19.



[Samples](#)
[Playlist](#)

Hip-Hop Music is steeped in the tradition of borrowing samples or loops from other sources. This can be done for one of two reasons, the first is for the musicians to place themselves in the context and history of the song, in homage to the original artists. The second way that sampling can be used is to flip it around and use it as a talking point or reaction to an artist or piece of music. "**Can I Kick It?**" contains samples of "[Walk on the Wild Side](#)" by [Lou Reed](#), "Spinning Wheel" by [Dr. Lonnie Smith](#), "Fun" by Sly and the Family Stone, and "Sunshower" by [Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band](#). Phife Dawg has stated that, because of the use of the "Walk on the Wild Side" sample, the group did not receive any money from the single, with Lou Reed instead claiming the profits.

To Kick It = To Hang Out, Express Ideas and Have Fun... Or is there a [Deeper Meaning?](#)

By using the bass sample from "Walk On The Wild Side" ATCQ is made a statement about Lou Reed's lyric which portrays New York City as a place full of cross-dressers and prostitutes. By using the sample, not as an homage to, but as retaliation to the stereotypes of the black cultural identity in NYC, ATCQ tells their own story of optimistic Afrocentric life growing up in Queens, NYC as 18 and 19 year olds in the late 1980's. [Mix Online Article](#)

ELEMENTS OF MUSIC:

Lyrics

Can I **kick** it? (**Yes**, you can!) x 7
Well, I'm **gone** (Go on then!)

Can I **kick** it? To all the **people** who can **Quest** like A **Tribe** does (A) **Personification-Simile**
Before **this**, did you **really** know what **live** was? (A) **Life?**
Comprehend to the **track**, for it's **why** 'cause (A)
Getting **measures** on the **tip** of the **vibers** (B **close rhyme**)
Rock and **Roll** to the **beat** of the **funk** fuzz (A) → Alliteration, commentary on Rock borrowing
Wipe your **feet** really **good** on the **rhythm** rug (C)
If you **feel** the urge to **freak**, do the **jitterbug** (C)
Come and **spread** your **arms** if you really **need** a hug (C) **Affective, everyone is welcome**
Afrocentric living is a **big** shrug (C) **Pride in African American culture**
A **life** filled with (**fun**) that's what I love (D) **Use of "fun" sample**
A **lower** plateau is what **we're** above (D)
If you **diss** us, **we** won't even **think** of (D)
Will **Nipper** the **doggy** give a **big** shove? (D) **Dog from Gramophone, maybe on the Prokofiev LP?**
This **rhythm** really **fits** like a **snug** glove (D) **like → simile**
Like a **box** of **positives** is a **plus**, love (D) → simile, optimism for the future
As the **Tribe** flies **high** like a **dove** (D) → imagery, dove of peace

Can I **kick** it? (**Yes**, you can!) x7
Well, I'm **gone** (Go on then!)

Can I **kick** it? To my **Tribe** that flows in **layers** (E) → imagery, musical humor (flow and layering)
Right **now**, Phife is a poem **sayer** (E) → metaphor
At **times**, I'm a studio **conveyor** (E)
Mr. **Dinkins**, would you please be my **mayor**? (E) **Political commentary**
You'll be **doing** us a really big **favor** (E)
Boy this **track** really has a lot of **flavor** (E) → metaphor
When it **comes** to rhythms, Quest is your **savior** (E) → metaphor
Follow **us** for the funky **behavior** (E)
Make a **note** on the **rhythm** we **gave** ya (F) → Musical humor, double entendre
Feel free, drop your pants, check your **hair** (E) → alliteration
Do you **like** the garments that we **wear**? (E)
I **instruct** you to be the **obeyer** (E)
A **rhythm** recipe that you'll **savor** (E) → alliteration
Doesn't **matter** if you're minor or **major** (E) → Personification, musical humor
Yes, the **Tribe** of the game, rhythm **player** (E)
As you **inhale** like a **breath** of fresh **air** (E) → simile, optimism

Form

Introduction - Instrumental Build-up
Chorus (Call and Response) - Vocals over bass and drum samples
Verse 1 (Q-Tip) - over drum beat with ruptured bass sample
Interlude - Features Organ line from SW (0:59-1:12), layers of other samples

Introduction - Instrumental Build-up

Chorus (Call and Response) - Vocals over bass and drum samples

Verse 2 (Phife Dawg)

Outro - multiple layers of previous and unsampled material, Abrupt ending

Samples

Walk On The Wild Side - Lou Reed, sampled at 0:00 and throughout

Spinning Wheel - by Dr. Lonnie Smith, sampled at 0:19 (drum beat) and 1:27 (organ solo)

Sunshower - by Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band, sampled at 0:09 and throughout

Fun - by Sly and the Family Stone, sampled at 1:12

<https://www.whosampled.com/A-Tribe-Called-Quest/Can-I-Kick-It%3F/samples/>

Rhythm

The tempo of 97 beats per minute is 10 beats slower than Lou Reed's *Walk On The Wild Side*. This slower tempo gives the song swagger and provides a solid rhythmic background for the contemplative vocals.

The vocal Call and Response on the chorus of *Can I Kick It?* primarily use a syncopated feel with a two sixteen note pick-up. This places emphasis on the downbeats with the word *Kick* and *Yes*, reaffirmed in the Gospel-like sermons from Q-Tip (verse 1) and Phife Dawg (verse 2).



The hip-hop vocals always end on the downbeat of the measure in the verse, generally with two eighth notes for the last two syllables of the couplets. This creates space for rupture (stop beats in Phife Dawg's lyrics) and hits (such as the *Fun* interjection in Q-Tips lyrics). It also creates two 8 measure sections of rap in each verse.

Melody



Can I Kick It? is primarily spoken word driven. There is one melodic sample in the doubled bass line from *Walk on the Wild Side*. The higher bass line (fretless electric) focuses on the third of each chord. The ascending nature of this melody provides an uplifting feel contrary to the downward moving lower bass

line. The lower bass line (pizzicato double bass) tonicizes the IV chord, giving the track a soulful bluesy feel.

Harmony

C Major, likely based on the Key of the *Walk on the Wild Side* sample. The C major tonality provides an optimistic sound, which supports the future forward tone of the work. The entire work is composed simply with two chords from the sample, the Tonic (I) and the Subdominant (IV). The simplicity of this harmonic structure helps place emphasis on the spoken word.

Timbre

The timbre of the samples provides some interesting perspective into *Can I Kick It?* The most obvious sample, *Walk On The Wild Side* provides a sultry and slinky bass line with a clean tone (no effects or distortion). However, there is a rupture of static in *Can I Kick It?* that muddies the sample. *Spinning Wheel* is from a Blue Note recording by Dr. Lonnie Smith, which has a definitive Soul Jazz sound of the Hammond B3 Organ against a solid drum groove. While this may be foreshadowing of ATCQ's future endeavors blending Hip-Hop and Jazz, it is also reminiscent of earlier times of Afrocentrism (Bebop, Soul Jazz, Funk, etc). *Fun* by Sly and the Family Stone would have definitely had an influence on these young musicians growing up in the 1970's and 1980's. This sample is only used for a couple of chords, mainly as interjections during the first verse.

Texture/ Layering

Texture and layering in hip-hop is an essential aspect to songwriting. Texture in hip-hop may refer to *rupture*, but this can also be a rhythmic element. Static from LP recordings and other imperfections create a timeless feel to recordings. *Can I Kick It?* builds up from a single sample with record static augmented by the electric guitar slide of Dr. Buzzard's Original Savannah Band. After 8 measures the drum sample is layered in. The texture is fairly thin during the Chorus with the vocal call and response featured only over the *Spinning Wheel* drum break. This texture is expanded and layered during the interludes to

include more of the *Sunshower* and the Lonnie Smith's Organ solo. The alternating between thin and thick texture focuses attention on the socially charged lyrics.

Dynamics Many of the dynamic changes throughout this work are subtle and based on the number of layers present in the track at the time. Notably the introductions and interludes draw the volume back down and build up into the chorus. The outro crescendos into an abrupt ending.

Musical Selection "Can I Kick It?" is a wonderful introduction to Hip-Hop Production and Afrocentric culture. From its tasteful use of sampling to its optimistic but social commentary lyrics, A Tribe Called Quest gives students a school appropriate introduction to using Hip-Hop as a means of self expression and discussion.

THE HEART STATEMENT The heart of "Can I Kick It?" is the layering of sampled and syncopated rhythms, creating a colorful palette for individual and collective group expression.

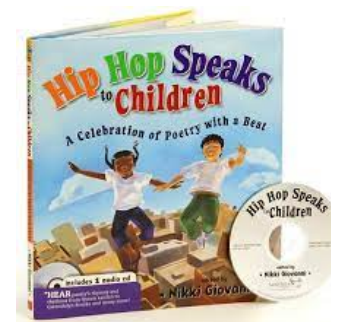
Introducing The Piece [How Sampling Transformed Music - Mark Ronson](#) Wanting to be a part of the history and context of the music.

OUTCOMES:

Skill Outcome Students will explore, develop and perform syncopated rhythms within the context of hip-hop music.

Strategies

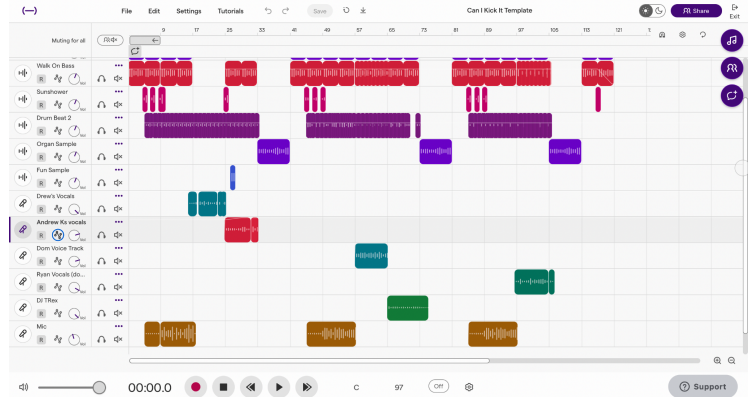
1. **Build a Beat** - Build and perform basic Beats with the Drum Pads/Soundtrap Tap. Add these beats to the Soundtrap Loop Library to use in projects.
2. **Cypher It!** - Take various elements of poetry and [cypher](#) it. Alliteration, rhyme, relevant topics, anything to get the mind moving.
3. **Words Have Rhythm** - Analyze the rhythms of the poetry, especially the ends of phrases. *Kick It* over the blank backing track - write and perform collectively eighth measure verses of rap.
4. **Introduce Yourself** - Students will write an 8 measure introduction about themselves. They can include their name or Hip-Hop name, and rap about some things that are important to them.
5. **Poetry Reading** - Students will write their own verse or recite a poem from [Hip-Hop Speaks to Children](#) and



partner up to create a backing beat for it. If the student wants, they can use their poetry reading as part of their Hip-Hop Sample Project.

Assessments

1. Build a Beat - Assess ability to play with steady beat and create syncopation
2. Words have Rhythm
3. Introduce Yourself
4. Poetry Reading - Partner Up to Read with Rhythm and Create a Backing Beats
5. [Performances of "Can I Kick It" Fall 2022](#)
6. [Performance of "Can I Kick It" Spring 2023](#)



Knowledge Outcome

Students will explore the history of Hip-Hop, how 'sampling' is used to create musical textures for expression, and build their own collection of samples.

Strategies:

1. [How Sampling Transformed Music](#)- Mark Ronson - Ted Talk (Introducing the Piece)
2. [Recreating "Can I Kick It?"](#) - Through demonstration, record and edit the samples using the Sample Chrome Extension. Bring these samples into Soundtrap. Use stretch to line up Samples with the metronome. Layer the samples to recreate the Introduction, Chorus and Verse.
3. [What's in Your Crate?](#) Build a Crate of Samples. Use the Record, Vocal and Instrumental Editors, and Transpose to manipulate the sounds to fit your new idea. Share your Google Drive Crate with the class.
4. [Hip-Hop Sampling Project](#) - Use Moises app and Soundtrap to create and refine samples in creating a work for an individual or collective Hip-Hop Project. Includes some spoken word poetry or rap if inclined.

Assessments

1. What's In Your Crate? (Also Affective Strategy/Assessment)
2. Hip-Hop Sampling Project

Affective Outcome

Students will explore their individual musical preferences and how these preferences are used to convey a depth of cultural understanding and expression. *What's In Your Crate? Why?* (Personal Knowledge - Identity-Self Awareness SEL).

Strategies:

1. **What's In Your Crate?** Student playlist - Students will collect samples of music that is meaningful to them. (From "The Musical Soundtrack to My Life" activity by Scott Edgar: Music Education and Social Emotional Learning)
2. **The Words Mean Something** - [Poetic Analysis](#) - Students will analyze a set of lyrics collectively and individually for poetic elements using the [Poetry 101](#) structure. (From *The Words Mean Something* activity by Scott Edgar - Music Education and Social Emotional Learning).
3. **Personal connections** - Select one piece from your playlist. How does this piece relate to you and/or your cultural identity? Journaling activity.
4. **Not Just Dead White Guys** - Scavenger Hunt Activity, students bring in some of their favorite songs addressing social issues. (From "Not Just Dead White Guys" activity by Scott Edgar: Music Education and Social Emotional Learning)

Assessments

- Student Playlist
- Scavenger Hunt on music that addresses social issues - Journal
- Personal Connections - Journal

10 Ways To Take Out The Piece

1. Built on samples that varied from funk, folk, rock, jazz and classical music.
2. That featured lyrics written by 18 and 19 year olds from Queens, New York City
3. That was a social commentary sharing the positive afrocentric culture
4. That the ensemble never made any money on because of the use of a famous rock sample from Lou Reed
5. That featured two Hip-Hop rappers, Q-Tip and Phife Dawg
6. Which featured members of the [Native Tongues](#) collective, which also includes Queen Latifah, Busta Rhymes and De La Soul.
7. That uses contrasting textures which highlights the lyrics of spoken word against a thicker instrumental interlude
8. That features an organ sample from Dr. Lonnie Smith's Spinning Wheel
9. That was a track on the first album to receive Five Mics from *The Source* magazine, the highest rating.
10. Which uses Chorus before Verse, instead of the more traditional Verse-Chorus pattern.

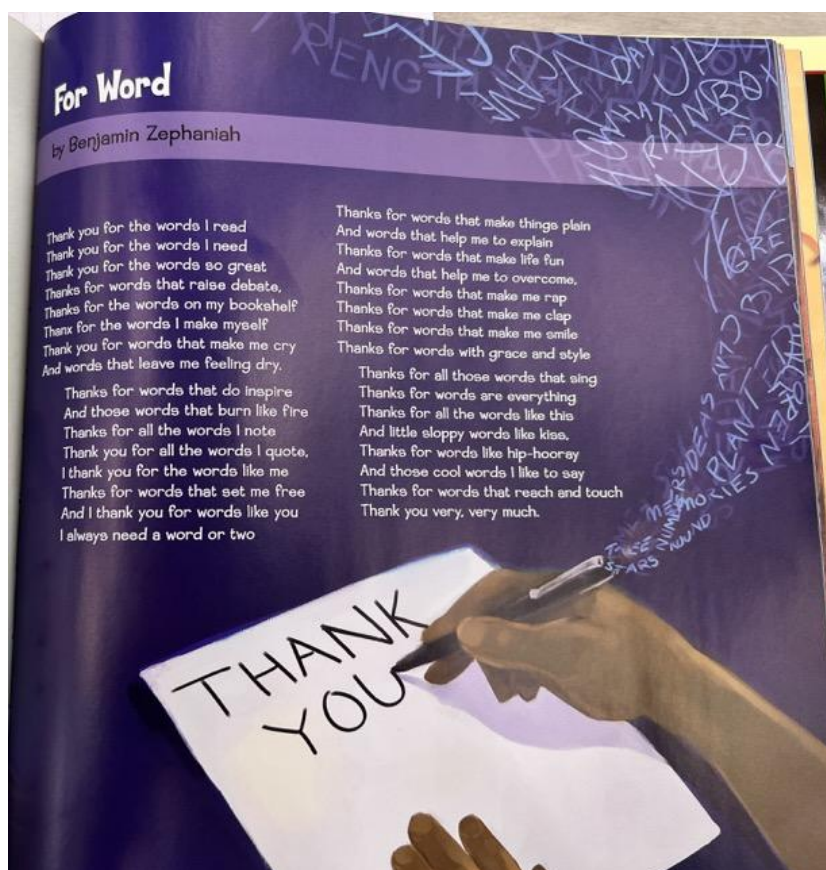
Checklist of Items Needed To Teach This Piece

- Soundtrap Subscription
- Templates
- Google Forms & Questions Set Up in Advance
- Notecards
- Journals, Pencils
- Rubrics
- Legal Pads
- Poetry 101 Sheet
- Hip-Hop Speaks to Children

Other Resources:

Compliment Battle Rap - Trolls

Compliment Battle Rap - Trolls Lyric



Poetry 101

TERMS: Here are some poetry terms you will need to know as we begin our poetry unit.

*** Use the 'Poetry 101' list on www.quizlet.com to help you study!

Playing with the SOUNDS of words:

1. **Rhyme**- word endings that sound alike including at least the final vowel sound (Ex. Slime, time, mime)
2. **Rhythm**- a regular pattern of accented syllables (Ex. i **THOUGHT** i **CLOSED** the **DOOR**.)
3. **Repetition**- the recurrence of words and phrases for effect (Ex. I was so so so so excited!)
4. **Alliteration**- repeated consonant sounds at the beginning of words (Ex. **F**ast and **f**urious)
5. **Assonance**- repeated vowel sounds (Ex. **Why** did I **swat** the **fly** last night?)
6. **Onomatopoeia**- words that sound like their meanings (Ex. Swoosh, Zip, Gurgle)

Playing with the MEANINGS of words:

7. **Simile**- a comparison using "like" or "as" (Ex. He's as fast as a cheetah.)
8. **Metaphor**- a direct comparison (Ex. He is a cheetah on the track.)
9. **Personification**- giving non-human things human characteristics (Ex. The willow tree danced in the wind.)
10. **Hyperbole**- exaggeration used for effect (Ex. The baby weighs a ton!)
11. **Symbol**- an object that represents something else (Ex. Trees representing life.)
12. **Contrast**- closely arranging things with strikingly different characteristics (Ex. He was dark, sinister, cruel; she was radiant, pleasant, kind.)
13. **Paradox**- a seeming contradiction (Ex. The faster I go, the more behind I feel.)
14. **Irony**- something said that is opposite its intended meaning or reader's expectations (Ex. The rich, popular girl felt very lonely.)

Playing with the IMAGES of words:

15. **Imagery**- the use of vivid language to generate ideas and/or evoke emotion through the five senses
Examples:
16. **Sight**- The winding street disappeared in the moonlight.
17. **Sound**- Tom heard a loud thump, thump, thump against the door.
18. **Touch**- The soft velvet curtains slipped through her fingers.
19. **Taste**- A salty tear ran across her lips.
20. **Smell**- Cinnamon! That's what wafted into his nostrils.