

# SHE SLAY I TEACH



A LESSON PLAN | WHEN LIFE GIVES YOU BEYONCÉ, TEACH WITH LEMONADE

BY NIKKI LANE

## LESSON OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, you should be able to:

- use the name of at least one Black feminist scholar in a complete sentence
- discuss the main points of their critique (or lack thereof) of Beyoncé's *Lemonade*
- identify the tenants of "pop feminism"
- be able to understand the main points of intervention within mainstream Feminism that Black Feminism offers
- perform your own Black Feminist reading of Bey's *Lemonade*

## RESOURCES NEEDED

- Beyoncé's "visual-album" *Lemonade* available everywhere music is sold
- Internet access
- 75 minutes of instruction time (at least)
- For best results: access to a University library's books and journal articles

## HIGHLY RECOMMENDED READING

These are my highly recommended picks, however, visit [thedoctorlane.com/2016/05/lemonade-lesson-plan](http://thedoctorlane.com/2016/05/lemonade-lesson-plan) for complete list.

"Popular" Texts: Blog Posts, "Thought" Pieces, Relevant News Articles

- [bell hooks. "Moving Beyond Pain" May 9, 2016](#)
- [Melissa Harris-Perry. "A Call and Response with Melissa Harris-Perry: The Pain and the Power of 'Lemonade'" April 26, 2016](#)
- [Aimée Lutkin. "Amber Rose Explains Consent, Short Skirts and Having Fun With Your Girls to a Stumped Tyrese" February 20, 2016](#)
- [@FancyCapitalist "11 References You Missed in Beyoncé's Formation"](#)

Theory Readings: Theory heavy, maybe dense, but most likely just heavy on concepts

- Shimizu, Celine Parreñas. *The Hypersexuality of Race : Performing Asian/American Women on Screen and Scene* . Durham: Duke University Press, 2007.
- McRobbie, Angela. "Post-Feminism and Popular Culture." *Feminist Media Studies* 4.3 (2004): 255-64.
- Rose, Tricia. *The Hip Hop Wars : What We Talk About When We Talk About Hip Hop—and Why It Matters* . New York: BasicCivitas, 2008.
- Nash, Jennifer C. "Strange Bedfellows." *Social Text* 26.4 97 (2008): 51-76.
- Morgan, Joan. *When Chickenheads Come Home to Roost: A Hip-Hop Feminest Breaks It Down*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000.
- hooks, bell. *Feminism Is for Everybody: Passionate Politics* . Taylor & Francis, 2014.

Application Readings: Applications of important theory or concepts

- Brown, Jayna. "Hip Hop, Pleasure, and Its Fulfillment." *Palimpsest: A Journal on Women, Gender, and the Black International* 2.2 (2013): 147-50.
- Johnson, E. Patrick. *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003.

## IN CLASS ACTIVITIES

On the next three pages are activities I've designed to engage students in a discussion about Bey's *Lemonade*. Pick one of you have 75 minutes or two of you have longer and let students guide the rest of the conversation; in fact try to talk as little as possible.

## Questioning the Lecture

### 15 min Lecture + 5 minute silent reflection followed by guided discussion

In this lecture, pose a question of interest to you that arises from watching the “visual album” *Lemonade*.

It must be a question.

You must tell/show students that question before you start and you must stay on task—lay out the question and give it context. You are demonstrating what critical inquiry looks like. How you ask questions of the things that don't have easy answers or simple, yes or no responses. I strongly suggest you write this lecture out—4.5-5 pages double-spaced. Yes. Read it. You want this lecture to be free of “ums” and “uhs” and “likes.”

They need to hear you speak academically and confidently, they need to hear what good questions sound like. Extra points if you challenge Bey's point of view. At the end, restate the question. Ask the students to pull out a piece of paper. Give the students 4-5 minutes to reflect and respond to the question you pose on their own.

Play a Beyoncé track on low as they write. Use their reflections as your “entre” point into a discussion.

### POSSIBLE TOPICS THAT MIGHT GENERATE QUESTIONS

- “The Cult of Personality” surrounding Beyoncé, her Bey Hive
- Responses to her Superbowl performance
- Black men and women's heterosexual relationships
- Neoliberalism, Capitalism & Race
- Post-feminism, pop feminism, and academic feminism
- Race & Veganism (Beyoncé's Veganism)
- Lynching and the “martial law” in black communities
- Violence against black women
- Black women's motherhood (historical depictions, and Bey as mother, mothers of murdered children)

Note: This is very easily “Flipped.” You could record and post a 15 minute lecture to your learning management system (Blackboard, Canvas, etc), ask students to write a 1 page response and bring it to class.

# Get in Formation: Guided Analysis

## Guided critical reading of Formation video



Before you screen the Formation video, describe the elements of a cultural analysis which usually speak to issues of genre, context, structure/form, discursive features, ideology, and issues of representation. Then what you'll do is guide them through a reading of Formation by posing questions and letting the class debate/discuss the answers. Alternatively, you could ask the questions and give everyone 60 seconds to write down what their answers are and then share.

Here's the set of questions\* I like to use to help guide students in their readings of cultural texts.

### GENRE:

- What genre does the object belong to (e.g., in film, this could be a Western, a musical, a documentary, and so on)?
- How does the genre effect the way you experience the text?
- How does it fulfill or deviate from the expectations of the genre? (E.g., if a Western, are there clear heroes and villains, as in a traditional John Wayne movie, or are the characters more ambiguous?)

### CONTEXT:

- What are the significant social, cultural, and/or political-economic contexts within which this 'object' (e.g., film, song or album, ad campaign, app, web site, etc.) has been produced?
- Who produced it, how was it produced, and for whom or to what end (or as a response to what)?

### IDEOLOGY AND POWER:

- How are power relations and political agency represented?
- Are certain people/groups shown to be passive and others active, and, if so, is this presented in a critical light, or does it appear 'natural' and unchangeable?

- What dilemmas or problems are the characters faced with, and are the underlying structural causes highlighted or are these left unquestioned or unaddressed?

### NARRATIVE FORM:

- What kind of story is told?
- What happens, and to whom?
- Who is the subject or active 'agent'?
- How is the story told? And from whose perspective?
- What is the structure of the narrative – i.e., how could its 'skeleton' be portrayed? (E.g., a common narrative structure follows the following form: Equilibrium; Disruption by the appearance of an opposing force or problem; Search/quest addressing the conflict; Restoration of (previous or new) equilibrium.)

### DISCURSIVE FEATURES:

- What recurrent images and textual tropes are emphasized (i.e. recurrent ideas & devices, figures of speech, metaphors, equations, metonymies i.e. part standing in for whole, etc.)?
- What meanings are created through the combination or juxtaposition of elements (e.g. words, images, sound,

narrative structure, etc.)?

- What are the 'oppositions' that structure the text – e.g., how do basic dualisms (good/bad, male/female, white/black, rich/poor, et al.) map onto each other – which 'goes with' which (according to the movie or text)?
- What is said and what is left unsaid?
- What do the images make us think about? (Often images are used to stand in for ideas)

### REPRESENTATION OF CULTURAL AND OTHER DIFFERENCES: HOW ARE THE FOLLOWING REPRESENTED:

- Gender and gender relations?
- 'Race' and race relations?
- Socioeconomic class?
- Ethnicity and cultural identity?
- Sexuality and sexual orientation?
- Normalcy and deviance?
- Nonhuman nature (animals, specific landscapes and places) and human-nature relations?
- What is represented as 'natural' and/or 'unnatural'?
- What capacities for action are portrayed, and how are they distributed between different actors?

For high-school students, I would simplify this even more, by asking specific questions that ask them the same things but in a much easier frame. But be sure not to baby them. They often will come up with some really interesting insights if you let them. So when asking about context ask them something like, "Why do you think Beyoncé's video is filmed in New Orleans?"

\*These questions are borrowed and adapted from an assignment sheet posted online by Adian Ivakhiv of the University of Vermont: <http://www.uvm.edu/~aivakhiv/2013-Critical-analysis.doc>

## Feminism Is... Feminism Ain't: Debate

### Semi-structured debate about whether Bey is or ain't feminist

**Note:** Best suited for a Womens'/Gender Studies, Feminist Studies classroom—students need to be familiar with basic tenants of feminist thought.

For this exercise, you will need to curate 10 different PPT slides that will include portions of lyrics/images/video clips from the Bey canon. To prepare, your students should come having read or engaged with theory pieces that deal with feminism (e.g. hooks, Nash, Collins). They should have some notes that relate these texts to Bey.

#### **RULES:**

- At the beginning of the exercise, you will randomly split the class in half, forming a “Side Is” and a “Side Ain’t.”
  - » “Side Is...” should be directed to defend anything that you show them from Beyoncé, arguing that it is feminist.
  - » “Side Ain’t...” should be directed to challenge anything, arguing that those things are not feminist.
- The trick is that each side **MUST** use evidence from their notes on the readings and be specific. They also can't use the same argument twice.
- You will show them a PPT slide containing a lyric, image, or video clip from Beyoncé's Lemonade.
- You will give each side 3-5 minutes to develop an argument about why this particular image, lyric, etc. is/ain't feminist.
- Each side will have an opportunity to make a convincing argument. They must use a feminist theory/theorist to situate their argument. For example, something that starts like this: “Collins argues that black feminism is this... When Beyonce says that she is demonstrating her...” would be the start of a “convincing argument.”
- The side who does the best job and makes the most compelling (evidence driven argument), gets a “point.”

**Up the stakes:** The side with the most points will have proven that Beyoncé is or ain't a feminist! And the matter must be settled for all time (or at least for the remainder of the semester). So anytime she is mentioned, it must be in the context of her being feminist.

**Leave at least 10 minutes at the end for discussion. You should land on something like:**

While it is very difficult to pin down a specific, all-encompassing version of feminism, “pop feminism” lacks teeth—often calling for “equal rights for men and women”—but lacking any discussion of systemic dissolution of patriarchy, or racial, sexual, or class hierarchies.

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This lesson plan was designed by Nikki Lane, Ph.D  
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