

Leading the way

Meet Jeremy Dudley

Fifth-grade teacher, Giffen Memorial Elementary School



Q: How did you get started as a hip-hop performer?

A: I had an aunt who used to listen to hip-hop when I was young. We used to ride in her car and it was always on. She let me borrow some tapes and I was hooked. I'm sure I was drawn to the rhythms, not only the music but also the voice, the cadence. My friends and I used to write verses in high school, but it wasn't until college that I really started writing songs with messages.

Q: How do you incorporate your music in the classroom?

A: I try to use rhythm and repetition to help the students remember different things that we're working on, but I'm not rapping with the kids everyday. It definitely does a lot for our relationship. A lot of them live hip-hop culture. Since I listen to and write my own music, it gives us something we can relate to. I'm also currently working on publishing songs that are content-based and can be used in classrooms.

Q: How does your passion for your music make you a better teacher?

A: My passion for music gives me another avenue to reach my students. It goes beyond having a few songs to help memorize facts. Having a common interest in hip-hop definitely leads to real-world discussions about things that are relevant to my students. What do you see when you watch TV? Just look at the imagery of what we're being bombarded with constantly. Sometimes it conflicts with the goals that we want to achieve in education. What are the images of black men and women in hip-hop? Who's a positive role model? There are some, but not many and that's an issue for me. A lot of music, videos and TV programming send less-than-responsible messages to our children and our society as a whole. It's an issue for me both as an artist and educator. I want to teach my students more than just math, science, social studies, reading and writing. I want to teach them about life. I feel like it's one of our major jobs as educators.

Q: Do your students get involved in your music?

A: Yes. One of my most well-known tracks, "Come Home Dad," has current Albany High students on it. Another track, "Believe It," also features an Albany High student. Every one of my classes has helped write or perform an original song on stage. We've collaborated with other schools, and all of the students have been really receptive to it.

Jeremy Dudley (aka Origin) is in his ninth year at Giffen Memorial Elementary School, where he started his teaching career. He's also a three-time winner of the Best Hip-Hop Artist award in the annual *Metroland* reader's poll. He currently is working on his sophomore album, "Front Lines." Emphasizing a positive message, his thought-provoking music stresses open-mindedness, self-awareness and independence. Check out his classroom page at NYlearns.org/jdudley.