

# Teaching <sup>PRE</sup>K-8<sup>®</sup>

## Rapping About Science

*An age-old discipline gets a new age treatment. P.S. They both end up looking cool*

Who gives a rap about science? Well, Tyraine Ragsdale does, and you can take that literally.

There's a simple explanation. Tyraine Ragsdale is a rapper – a very special kind of rapper. He travels from school to school using rap as a teaching tool and the rapper image as a positive role model. His mission: to turn kids on to education, science, self-respect and Black history.

That says a lot, but there's more. To get the full picture, you should know that Ragsdale – a.k.a. Grand Hank, when he's on stage – has a degree in chemistry from the University of Pittsburgh and is a former research chemist for Robert Wood Johnson Pharmaceutical Research Institute in Springhouse, Pennsylvania.

Why use rap to send a message to kids? Because, says Ragsdale, today's kids "eat, drink and sleep rap. They love rap. It's their voice, the way they communicate."

Ragsdale makes it clear that he's talking about *all* kids, not just minority kids. He firmly believes that rap music transcends all cultures. If the behavior of his audiences is any indication, he's probably right. When Grand Hank raps, "If you're hyped about school, say 'I'm hyped!'" the audience explodes, and that includes everyone.

To be sure, many of the 28-year-old rapper's lyrics are directed toward minority students. Take his rap about African American inventors, for instance.

"One key to the song is that children, especially minority children, can begin to associate themselves with African American inventors from the past," he says. "There's a big barrier that most minority children have. They believe they can't do science because they don't see a lot of Black scientists around."

"But when they find out that Charles Drew did this or Elijah McCoy did that, then they say, 'Wow, that's cool!' And they begin to think – and not only think, but believe – they



*Audience participation is an important part of the Educational Rap Lecture. Here, junior rappers dance while Grand Hank (in white coat) does his thing.*

can achieve the abstract level of thinking that's involved in the scientific process."

Ragsdale believes that his message is stronger because he *is* a scientist. "It's different when you have someone who is actually in the scientific field saying, 'Listen, I practice science. This is the lowdown about science.'"

Ragsdale started his performing career spinning records as a high school deejay. In college, he capitalized on his performing skills and launched Grand Hank Productions, a Philadelphia company that oversees his Educational Rap Lecture appearances.

So far, the schools he has visited have been mostly in the Northeast, but he hopes to branch out nationally in the near future. You can reach him care of Grand Hank Productions, Inc., P.O. Box 23488, Philadelphia, PA 19143; (215) 724-5260.

How successful is Ragsdale? Well, he estimates that so far he's reached over 100,000 people. Even if only half of them are children and he convinces only one in 100 kids that science is worth pursuing as a career, he's still set the stage for over 500 potential scientists. Chances are, his batting average is higher than that. A lot higher.



IAN ELLIOT

Black  
History  
Month

February  
1995

Want some samples of rap à la Grand Hank? You'll find portions of his lyrics accompanying some of the features in this issue. They appear in the outer margin of the page, and they look just like this. Sorry we couldn't supply the music, but you may not need it. If you're unfamiliar with rap, try putting the words on fast forward and imagining a steady, sharp beat in the background. The rhythms will just fall into place.