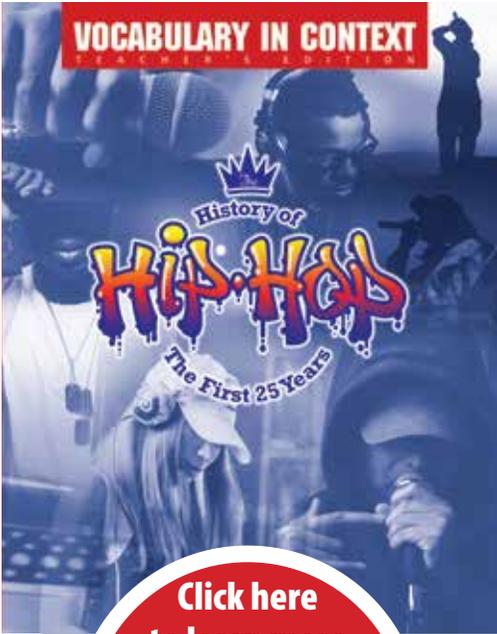




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The First 25 Years

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# THE QUEEN

**S**EXISM IN HIP-HOP is **prevalent**, with many male rappers sexualizing and degrading women. Yet, some artists work to counter that treatment with positive portrayals of females. Queen Latifah, in particular, empowers women through her music. In the late 1980s, Latifah defied common ideas about rap artists and uplifted women in her songs. She was **idolized** by girls who viewed her as an inspiration.

Queen Latifah was born Dana Owens on March 18, 1970. “Latifah” is an Arabic word that means “delicate” or “sensitive”; she added the “Queen” herself. Her interest in music started at a young age, and she sang in her church choir and performed as Dorothy in the musical *The Wiz* at St. Anne’s parochial school. In high school, she formed the rap group Ladies Fresh with two friends. Her mother tried to popularize the group and invited DJ Mark James to hear their music; James, in turn, brought a demo tape of Queen Latifah to Tommy Boy Records, and she signed to that label. Latifah’s first single, “Wrath of My Madness,” showed her self-pride and **aplomb** as she proclaimed herself the “new Queen” and believed in “the woman inside of [her].” Her following album, *All Hail the Queen*, proved that she was a talented, **respectable** hip-hop artist.

In a hit song from *All Hail the Queen*, “Ladies First,” Owens challenged the messages and attitudes of male rappers. Yet, she remained **eloquent** and civil, **alluding** to the problems of hip-hop culture rather than calling them out directly. Although rap music videos often showed women **gyrating** their hips in revealing clothes, the video for “Ladies First” did not include anything suggestive. Instead, Latifah portrayed black women as powerful and historically important by paying homage to Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, Angela Davis, and Winnie Mandela. With this tribute, Owens and accompanying rapper

Monie Love illustrated black women’s civil rights activism. Queen Latifah, who calls herself “a proud, black woman,” not a feminist, spoke about women and political causes; music critics and fans loved her **righteous** message. *All Hail the Queen* soon climbed to the top ten on R&B charts.

Latifah’s second album, *Nature of a Sista*, sold fewer copies than her first, and Owens’s career hit its **nadir** when Tommy Boy Records did not renew her contract. Then, less than a year later, she suffered a personal tragedy: Her brother died in a motorcycle accident. Despite Latifah’s grief, she **persevered** and worked hard on her music. She signed with Motown Records and released her third album in 1993. This album, *Black Reign*, sold half a million copies in the United States and included her most popular single, “U.N.I.T.Y.” In this hit song, Latifah declared that she will not **tolerate** negativity about women—whether it’s insulting comments, harassment, or domestic abuse—and she insisted that men treat women with proper respect. “U.N.I.T.Y.,” probably her most **memorable** song, earned her a Grammy for Best Solo Rap Performance.

After receiving the award, Queen Latifah took a five-year break from music. During this time, she acted and expanded her entertainment career. She starred in movies and made appearances on TV. In 1998, however, Latifah released *Order in the Court*. On her next two albums, Owens showcased her vast musical talent by performing jazz. She returned to rap in 2009 with *Persona*, working with Missy Elliott, Mary J. Blige, and other hip-hop artists. As her collaboration with female rappers suggests, Queen Latifah continues to support women and encourage young girls, while consistently remaining true to the values she considers important.

## EXERCISE 1 / WORD LIST

Use the context in which the word is used to determine what the word probably means. Write a brief definition in the space provided.

- allude:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Yet, she remained eloquent and civil, **alluding** to the problems of hip-hop culture rather than calling them out directly.
- aplomb:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Latifah's first single, "Wrath of My Madness," showed her self-pride and **aplomb** as she proclaimed herself the "new Queen" and believed in "the woman inside of [her]."
- eloquent:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Yet, she remained **eloquent** and civil, alluding to the problems of hip-hop culture rather than calling them out directly.
- gyrate:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Although rap music videos often showed women **gyrating** their hips in revealing clothes, the video for "Ladies First" did not include anything suggestive.
- idolize:** \_\_\_\_\_  
She was **idolized** by girls who viewed her as an inspiration.
- memorable:** \_\_\_\_\_  
"U.N.I.T.Y.," probably her most **memorable** song, earned her a Grammy for Best Solo Rap Performance.
- nadir:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Latifah's second album, *Nature of a Sista*, sold fewer copies than her first, and Owens's career hit its **nadir** when Tommy Boy Records did not renew her contract.
- persevere:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Despite Latifah's grief, she **persevered** and worked hard on her music.
- prevalent:** \_\_\_\_\_  
Sexism in hip-hop is **prevalent**, with many male rappers sexualizing and degrading women.

10. **respectable:** \_\_\_\_\_

Her following album, *All Hail the Queen*, proved that she was a talented, **respectable** hip-hop artist.

11. **righteous:** \_\_\_\_\_

Queen Latifah, who calls herself “a proud, black woman,” not a feminist, spoke about women and political causes; music critics and fans loved her **righteous** message.

12. **tolerate:** \_\_\_\_\_

In this hit song, Latifah declared that she will not **tolerate** negativity about women—whether it’s insulting comments, harassment, or domestic abuse...

## EXERCISE 2 USING WORDS IN CONTEXT

Fill in the blank with the vocabulary word that best completes the sentence. In some cases, you may need to change the tense or form of a verb or the number of a noun.

tolerate	aplomb	gyrate	eloquent	persevere	nadir
memorable	prevalent	idolize	righteous	respectable	allude

- Many early songs by Queen Latifah didn’t just \_\_\_\_\_ to the mistreatment of women—they condemned it.
- People frequently feel that hip-hop simply uses the language of the streets and do not realize that many songs are quite \_\_\_\_\_.
- Even though she was the new student in the class, Stephanie showed great \_\_\_\_\_ when she delivered her first speech.
- A(n) \_\_\_\_\_ belief in gangsta rap is that nothing else in life is as important as girls, violence, and money.
- The most \_\_\_\_\_ time of Lawrence’s entire vacation was when he caught a fish that weighed more than 150 pounds.
- My grandmother says she cannot \_\_\_\_\_ my music; I don’t like her choices in music, either.
- It’s important not to \_\_\_\_\_ famous people because they are not perfect and can easily disappoint their fans.
- If Public Enemy hadn’t \_\_\_\_\_ and remained committed to their music when their first record didn’t sell many copies, they might not have made a second one.

9. The music promoter said, “We don’t just want a(n) \_\_\_\_\_-looking group on stage. What we want is a group that looks good, but has an inner-city feel to it.”
10. Few sayings are as simple or as \_\_\_\_\_ as “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”
11. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the disastrous concert happened when the lead singer forgot the lyrics to the band’s most famous song.
12. As the strong winds began to \_\_\_\_\_ and form a tornado, my family and I gathered some supplies and ran to our basement.

### **EXERCISE 3** / **READING COMPREHENSION AND ANALYSIS**

Select the best answers to the following questions based on a close and thorough reading of “The Queen.”

1. According to the passage, why did Queen Latifah take a break from recording?
  - A. Tommy Boy Records failed to renew her contract.
  - B. She was tired of the work and needed some free time.
  - C. She did not appreciate being called a feminist.
  - D. Latifah wanted to expand the limits of her career.
  - E. “U.N.I.T.Y.” was not treated with the proper respect.
2. The main idea of this passage is that Queen Latifah
  - A. stands up for women’s rights.
  - B. is the writer of the song “U.N.I.T.Y.”
  - C. is a great female rapper.
  - D. doesn’t like the term “feminist.”
  - E. is the first female rap star.

3. What is the name of Queen Latifah's first single?
  - A. *Order in the Court*
  - B. "U.N.I.T.Y."
  - C. *All Hail the Queen*
  - D. "Ladies First"
  - E. "Wrath of My Madness"
  
4. The word *however* in the last paragraph is a signal that the reader should expect
  - A. an entirely new topic.
  - B. an explanation of the topic.
  - C. a different opinion on the topic.
  - D. a change within the topic.
  - E. a conclusion of the topic.
  
5. In the sentence "With this tribute, Owens and accompanying rapper Monie Love illustrated black women's civil rights activism," which phrase can best be substituted for the word *illustrated*? Other facts in the paragraph will help you decide.
  - A. made a painting on the cover of
  - B. showed their own support for
  - C. reworked an old approach to
  - D. proved that America believed in
  - E. pointed out the power of