



HOW REPRESENTATION & CONNECTION ARE THE SECRET INGREDIENTS FOR STEM STUDENTS

AN INTERVIEW WITH MAYNARD OKEREKE

Maynard Okereke is an award-winning Science Communicator, having received both the Asteroid Award for "Best Streaming Content" and the People of Change Award for his community outreach efforts. Since graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in Civil Engineering, his passion for science and entertainment, along with his curiosity for new innovation, have taken him on an incredible life journey.

Better known as the Hip Hop M.D, Maynard now uses his knowledge of science to help inspire minorities and youth by bridging the gap between music, entertainment, and science, encouraging more diverse involvement in STEM. His weekly vlogs and daily social media posts provide both humorous and informative science content.

And we recently had a fun chat with him!

[Arduino Education:](#) Hi Maynard, thank you for chatting with us today. Why don't we begin with you telling us something interesting about you that most people don't know?

[Maynard Okereke:](#) Hi! So, even though I have a background in civil engineering, I worked as an artist for a number of years. Music was always my number one passion. I was a hip hop artist before I was a science communicator, that was always something that I loved doing. And so I think people are always surprised to hear that.

I also want to be able to influence that next generation, people that have interest in different areas show that you can be multifaceted, you don't have to be one stereotype, you don't have to be one dynamic, that you can have passion and creativity and all sorts of different elements, but still also be a nerd at heart and pursue whatever it is that you want to pursue in STEM.



AE: That's a great approach to have. So all of this interest in science and music and entrepreneurship, where did it all start?

MO: I'm half Nigerian, half Cameroonian, and I was born in the States, but I was raised in Cameroon. I lived there for the first five years of my life. And so I had this kind of cultural foundation of growing up in West Africa, having West African parents. And coming back to the US, I think that really sparked a lot of different curious things in my life. It was always just an adventure from the start.

I started off in computers because I was really excited about getting into games, and building games and programming games. And that's still great. But after the first few years, I realized that there were so many other things that I could actually be doing with computers that were really interesting, creative, and fun.

AE: How did these three things, music, entertainment and science, come together for you?

MO: I was in LA, trying to get booked as an actor and I just thought to myself, rather than just bouncing around and going to auditions and trying to get booked for projects, I should create something myself and develop that right. So I saw it as an opportunity to create more content, utilize my social media and do something funny! Comedy was always something I loved doing and I'm a huge nerd at heart, so I'd be that guy who would just drop random science facts.

Now I have a platform where I investigate music and all these different pop culture topics, I find the science within them and I discuss the science in them. Then I present it in a way that's kind of unique, where I'm dropping references, we're talking about different trends that are going on. And now it's become this whole educational outreach platform, where I use music, comedy, and entertainment to educate on all sorts of different topics. It's fun!

AE: They're very fun to watch too, we've seen them. In a lot of your content, you stress the importance of representation in STEM. Can you tell us more about that?

MO: Whether it's representation from a gender perspective or from a race perspective, it's important that we have people who look like us in the spaces we're trying to reach. It could be anything, from gender to race to sexual orientation - as long as we feel like we have someone else like us in the room. That perception of whether we belong can be broken by just simply seeing more people who look like you.

For me, I never saw any black engineers growing up. My parents weren't in the STEM fields, they were blue collar workers. Representation is so key to feeling included, to draw that passion into going into the STEM fields. Because if you don't see people who look like you in those fields, why are you going to want to study them?

AE: That is so important. Aside from a lack of representation, can you think of another reason that children might not want to pursue careers in STEM?

MO: I think the way in which students actually make the connection is super important. We've probably lost many brilliant minds because they just couldn't connect with the material. It's not enough to just throw a textbook at someone and make them remember facts, we now have to be able to put students through an experience, we have to show them that this now applies to their day-to-day life. That's really what I try to stress with the hip hop science platform.





That's why I use hip hop and music and pop culture to educate, because these are things that we consume on a daily basis. For example, you go on Netflix, you watch your favorite show, and you talk about your favorite show with your friends - you make these different connections with entertainment, so why not make that conversation happen in science as well? That fusion of science and entertainment is really just a way to make it palatable and make that connection and make the discussions about scientific topics just as relatable as it would be with the rest of the entertainment that you talk about.

INSPIRED? HERE'S WHAT YOU NEED TO GET STARTED WITH ARDUINO EDUCATION

The [*Arduino Student Kit*](#) can be used for both home learning and classroom teaching. It will help you get started quickly and easily with robotics, electronics, and coding.

[*Find your country's distributor*](#), or [*buy the kit online*](#).

