

# Study Guide for Teachers

## Brian Gillie

*American Song and Dance*

[www.briangillie.com](http://www.briangillie.com)

Connecticut Commission on Culture and Tourism  
Master Teaching Artist



Young  
Audiences  
Arts for  
Learning  
Connecticut

### ABOUT THE ARTIST



Brian Gillie, 1999 YAC Artist of the Year and CCT Master Teaching Artist, is the rare artist who does it all: singer, dancer, pianist, educator and historian.

His interactive performances and workshop showcase the histories, stylings and novelty of America's social dances and popular songs from 1776 to today.

### OBJECTIVES

- Art vs. entertainment: Entertainment confirms what we already know; art is outside of what we already know. This cultural arts program empowers students with notions of what is possible.
- Students will actively engage in the processes that constitute performance, invention and improvisation, and participate in their roles as listener, songwriter, singer, choreographer and dancer.
- Students will be knowledgeable about materials and resources available for understanding the facets of song and dance history, singing, songwriting and dance structures.
- Students will learn to exercise the art of response-ability as they evaluate a variety of song styles and dance steps, comparing and contrasting one style to another and one generation to another.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Stimulate the hearts, minds and critical thinking skills of your emerging artists during this 50-minute journey into the realm of different cultures and possibilities. Brian proves that **anyone-can-write-a-song** and **anyone-can-invent-a-dance**. Students learn what makes a song or dance a “craze,” then they create their own clever variations while daring to break the rules of creative writing, movement and “pop” culture. Students may change the rhythm, lyrics melody or style of a radio favorite, sing a ragtime classic in doo-wop style, or insert rap rhythms into a jazz tune. Students listen to a medley of improbable “hits” and say, “Yeah, I could’ve written songs like that.” Then, students learn some hip dance formulas and choreograph a new dance by simply mixing and matching some familiar moves - like a dance that’s half charleston and half Y.M.C.A., or part hip-hop and part swing. They learn the secrets of composition while learning to trust their own creative instincts and critical thinking skills.

Studies show (the *Mozart Effect* and learning curves based on the *Multiple Intelligences*) that early music and movement experiences improve overall academic performance and well-being. Brian’s program addresses **CT Academic Standards for Music and Dance** which call for students to create, evaluate and perform art works that express concepts of music, movement and song. Song and dance history illuminates human experience and values and reveals facets of different cultures. In creating songs and dances students learn to apply principals of math, language arts, theater, history, physical education and analytical thinking and to make connections between song, dance, personal accomplishment and healthful living.

This program helps students to gain self-confidence and to trust their own creative abilities and critical thinking skills through the process of writing a song and inventing a dance. Students learn the major ingredients of a song (rhythm, style, theme, lyrics, melody and harmony) and then learn how to modify the rules of song writing and pop culture to arrive at something personal and unique. Students can re-write a favorite song by modifying its rhythm, lyrics or style; or sing a ragtime song in doo-wop style, or try a jazz tune with a rap rhythm. Similarly, students will build a dance from scratch by simply adding one dance step to another. They will learn the structure of a 1920s’ charleston dance, then create a new dance by mixing and matching moves, i.e., a dance that’s half charleston and half hip hop; or a new version of the Y.M.C.A. that spells out the name of their town or school. Students also get to hear many songs with unusual and humorous lyrics and themes that nevertheless became hit songs; and all get to perform the ten most famous rock dances of the sixties, proving that anything is possible.

## PERFORMANCES AND WORKSHOPS

### Song, Dance and the Possibilities (Grade K-6)

Try Brian's *anyone can write a song* and *anyone can invent a dance* experience! Learn the predictable ingredients of song and dance and then dare to break the rules to create the extraordinary. Sing a ragtime classic in doo-wop style, add rap rhythms to a jazz tune and create a hip-hop Charleston. Length: 60 minutes

### Song, Dance and the Possibilities – the Holiday Version (Grades K – 6, families)

Flying reindeer? Dancing snowmen? Students invent outrageous new versions of some old, holiday song favorites and then create a hip, holiday dance to a funky seasonal tune; all this while exploring language, poetry, music and pop culture. Ho Ho Ho!

### Dance in America (Grade K-6)

Seen your students dance lately? History, humor and period music accompany dances from Charleston to Cha Cha, Ragtime to Rumba, and Lindy Hop to Hip Hop. Students participate throughout the presentation of over 35 dances. Length: 60 minutes plus workshop.

### Salute to Song in America (Grades K-8)

An amazing multimedia mix of live and prerecorded music, biographies and history capture the essence of songs, singers and composers from patriots, Civil War, ragtime, Broadway, swing, rock and everything in-between. Length: 60 minutes

### Rhythm and Music (Family and Community Program)

Brian's original songs and dances require audience participation to help complete cool lyrics and funky moves. Creative, uplifting fun! Length: 60 minutes

### Dance Workshops and Residencies Include:

Swing Dance  
Ballroom and Rock Dances of the last 75 years  
Folk Dances 1700- 1900  
Never Too Small to Dance and Boogie!!

### Early Rock & Roll (Grade 3-12)

History, humor, costumes, props, original sound bites, standup piano playing, radio commercials and impersonations serve to reveal rock's evolution from blues to doo-wop, Motown to Beatles and more. Sh-BOOM! Length: 60 minutes

**CT Academic Standards for Music** requires that students perform songs (raps) with expressive dynamics, in rhythm and with a steady beat in solo and partnered patterns. Research shows that participation in these musical facets correlates with student reading skills. Since rapping is poetry and storytelling to music, the art form enhances language art standards for theme and character development. Similarly, learning the meters and structures of music and poetry directly relate to mathematical patterns and understanding as required by **CT Academic Standards for Math**.

Additionally, students learn to create poems and raps, to compose and analyze music and rhythms, to evaluate music and music performance, and to understand music in relation to history and culture. Research (the *Mozart Effect* and learning curves based on the *Multiple Intelligences*) has also demonstrated that early music experiences improve overall academic performance and well-being.

## BEFORE THE PERFORMANCE

- Students write a simple, four line poem which incorporates a rhythm, rhyme scheme and meter based on some school theme. Students then add a simple melody to the poem.
- Students change the lyrics to a familiar song.
- Students sing a song in its original style, then change the rhythm to perform the song in a different style of music.
- Students practice call and response exercises that repeat simple lyric, rhythmic and melodic components.
- Students take a familiar story and make it into a song.
- Students learn a simple, repetitive dance, then add improvised steps to this dance.
- Students create a dance with two or three short, repetitive sections, based on some school theme or community concern.

## AFTER THE PERFORMANCE

- Students chose a style of popular music from before 1960 and create a song from scratch incorporating original: rhythm, theme, lyrics, rhyme, melody and arrangement – with introduction, verse, chorus, bridge and ending components.
- Students write a song with appropriate elements and in a style that would make it a hit song today.
- Take a favorite tune and perform it in a different style of music.
- Take a familiar song and change the melody/rhythm/lyrics.
- Write a song based on a contemporary political event, local hero or community concern.
- Students listen to a contemporary tune and explain with as much detail as possible why that song has a positive or negative impact.
- Students create a dance in the style of: country, Latin, swing, 1960s' rock and/or hip hop, using proper terminology, utilizing both partnered and solo skills and designing choreography that displays a beginning, a repeated motif and ending.

## RESOURCES

- [The Craft Of Lyric Writing](#) by Sheila Davis
- [The Billboard Book Of Songwriting](#) by Peter Pickow and Amy Appleby.
- [Dance a While](#), by Jane A. Harris, Anne M. Pittman and Marlys S. Waller
- [Black Dance](#), by Lynne Fouley Emery.

**CT Academic Standards for Dance** call for students to create, evaluate and perform art works that express concepts of dance. Dance history illuminates human experience and values and reveals facets of different cultures. In creating hip hop dances students learn to apply choreographic principals and analytical thinking and to make connections between dance, personal accomplishment and healthful living.

YOUNG AUDIENCE ARTS FOR LEARNING CONNECTICUT  
3074 WHITNEY AVENUE  
BUILDING 2, 2<sup>ND</sup> FLOOR  
HAMDEN, CT 06518  
203-230-8101 telephone 203-230-8131 fax  
info@vaconn.org