

# Study Guide for Teachers

## Brian Gillie

*Raps, Rhythms and Moves of the Hip Hop Culture*

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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.

Brian Gillie joined the roster of Young Audiences of Connecticut as a “hooper” in 1983 and was their artist of the year in 1999. He has toured New England with the Reel Nutmeg Colonial Dance Company, The Elm City Vintage Dancers and the Mountain Laurel Cloggers. Brian was principal choreographer with the Connecticut Swing Dancers for five years and currently has two nationally available swing dance instructional videos. Brian has been an annual lecturer/performer at Yale and Wesleyan Universities and was recently an adjunct professor of dance at Naugatuck Valley Community College. Brian believes that early movement and dance experiences improve overall academic success and well-being.

Brian has performed professionally as a piano/vocalist and percussionist since high school. Brian runs his own music and recording studio, has four albums of original songs and an award-winning radio jingle. Brian is a music historian with a Masters of Education Degree, and he has been a member of the Connecticut Songwriters' Association and BMI. Brian has written the reference text titled, [A Guide to the Best Vocal Harmonies of Rock 'n' Roll](#), and he teaches adult education classes on the Evolution of Rock 'n' Roll. Brian is also a regular in the restaurant circuit and provides weekly, piano/vocal entertainment at senior communities throughout Connecticut. Finally, Brian is a Master Teaching Artist with the CT Commission on Culture and Tourism and travels New England with the Commission's Touring Artists program.

### PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

Through poetry, rapping, hip hop music, rhythm making and hip hop dance, Brian's workshops and residencies are designed to address and enhance **critical thinking skills** of your students. Through the camaraderie of team accomplishment, hip hop arts build community and facilitate communication, transformation and growth.

### OBJECTIVES

- Objective 1 – **Doing**: Students become familiar with the elements of poetry and rapping through listening and writing exercises then use the elements to create original compositions. Study elements of songs and raps include rhythm, style, theme and lyrics; performance (singing and movement); and composition and arrangement. Study elements of poems include meter, rhyme, structure, metaphors, imagery and point of view. Students write original poems and learn to read them with good intonation and to a hip hop beat. Students create original rhythm sequences and incorporate them into their poetry to create raps. Finally, students participate in live dance performance and learn patterns of robotics, popping and other basics of hip hop dance.
- Objective 2 - **Evaluation**: Students critique the components and effectiveness of popular rap songs, original compositions and hip hop rhythms and dance sequences. When evaluating peer compositions, students determine what works and what does not in a supportive manner, using correct musical and poetic and dance terminology, by comparing the result to similar sounding pieces and dance performances, and by addressing the specific elements of poetry, rap rhythm and movement with the appropriate respect of a good audience.
- Objective 3 – **American History**: The lyrics, raps and moves of the hip hop culture reflect the concerns of the urban experience and today's youth culture in general. Students learn about the interconnected pathways between music and culture and how some gifted composers, musicians and dreamers influence the direction and evolution of popular song and dance by reshaping the musical possibilities.
- Objective 4 – **Career Choices**: Students learn more about the business side of songwriting/choreography, including copyrighting, publishing, style choices, marketing, studio technology and contemporary “requirements” of a successful performer.

## PRE PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

- Ask your local library or record store to recommend compilation CDs of music from the hip hop culture. Be aware that many hip hop/rap tunes contain “explicit” lyrics, so be sure you listen to the selections before adding them to your class listening experience. The first rap hit was titled “Rapper’s Delight” by the Sugar Hill Gang (1979), and this is a safe introduction for your students.
- Students change the lyrics to a familiar song.
- Students sing a song in its original style, and then change the rhythm to perform the song in a rapping style.
- Discuss and read examples of poems by Langston Hughes
- Students learn to write a simple four line poem based on some school theme which incorporates a rhyme scheme and meter. Students then add a simple beat to the poem.
- Students practice paraphrasing a familiar short story. Create a four-line poem based on the paraphrasing.
- Students practice call and response exercises that repeat simple lyric, rhythmic and melodic components.
- Invite a local rap artist or “slam” poet to present his/her work for your class.
- Invite a local b-boy or b-girl team (break dancing) to perform.
- Share contemporary dance moves to a favorite hip hop CD.
- Teachers lead call and response rhythm patterns using hands on a desk or “patting” different parts of the body.

## POST PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

- Students chose a contemporary rap selection and describe in detail why the song has a positive or negative impact.
- Students are given a four-line poem. Using these same lines, add a beat to create a rap sequence; and expand the poem with another four lines in the same rapping style
- Take a favorite “melody” song and perform it as a rap.
- Write a short topical poem based on a current political event or societal concern
- Explain the African-American contribution to American music.
- Share original rhythm patterns.
- Share original dance moves.

## RESOURCES

- Reebee Garofalo’s text, [Rockin’ Out \(Popular Music in the USA\)](#)
- Jeff Chang’s text, an overview of hip hop history, [Can’t Stop, Won’t Stop](#)
- Break dance videos like “Flashdance” or “Breakin”
- CD by the Sugar Hill Gang called “Rapper’s Delight.”
- On-line poetry samples from Langston Hughes, Shel Silverstein, Maya Angelou and Robert Frost
- Internet study guides available through the Rock ‘n’ Roll Hall of Fame: [www.rockhall.com/programs/forstudents.asp](http://www.rockhall.com/programs/forstudents.asp)
- On-line information and teacher training at and classroom ideas at: [www.hiphopmatters.org](http://www.hiphopmatters.org)

## RESIDENCIES

### Raps, Rhythms and Moves of the Hip Hop Culture Workshop or Residency (Grades 3 & up)

Hollywood and 5th Avenue continue to use the elements of hip hop to reach the next generation of children; **why not educators?** Hip hop is the perfect catalyst for exploring elements of poetry, rhythms and dance in the language of contemporary youth. Language-based experiences alone put many students at a disadvantage, but hip hop arts use sights, sounds and movement to accommodate multiple ways of understanding.

Hip Hop arts provide important vehicles for learning about metaphors, rhymes, meter, movement capabilities, self-awareness, social consciousness and collaboration. First, students learn facets of poetry and style, discuss the poems of Langston Hughes and the lyrics of Public Enemy in preparation for creating poems based on topical concerns. Next, students learn and create hip hop rhythm patterns that will accompany their new poems to create full-fledged raps. Finally, students master basic pops, locks and robotic dance moves enabling them to take their raps and rhythms to a whole new level of performance.

Through these expressive arts, students awaken to joys of their own hidden talents and experience the therapeutic effects of an enhanced emotional vocabulary. When most media sources do not address their concerns, hip hop is reputable counsel for youths coping in today’s environment. Lively! Interactive!! Thought-provoking!!!

## CURRICULAR LINKS

**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.

**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.

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