

# My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights

## EDUCATOR'S GUIDE

Includes Common Core State Standards

### A note from the author, Brooks Benjamin...



Dear Educator,

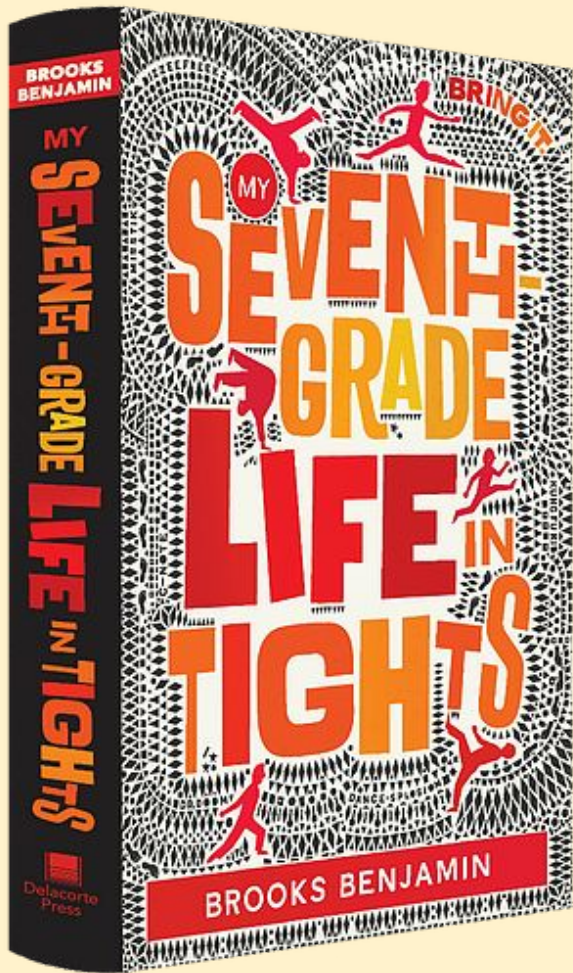
Why dance? I get that question a lot, but I'm always happy to answer it. I've been a fan of the performing arts since I was a young kid. To me, though, dance was always the most all-inclusive art form out there. It doesn't matter how old you are, what you look like, what language you speak, where you're from, or how experienced you are. Dance exists for anyone and everyone.

Sometimes I tell people that *My Seventh-Grade Life in Tights* is really just the true story of seventh-grade me. While I am joking when I say that, there's still some truth in this statement. Dillon and I share a lot of the same qualities. We both love our friends dearly, we both wish we were better at the things we enjoy doing, and we both have spectacularly awkward dance moves.

However, this isn't a story about me. And it's most certainly not a story *for* me, either. This book is for every person who, like Dillon, has ever felt as though they were being pulled in different directions. Dillon's dad wants him to play football, his friends want him to stay away from dance studios, but all Dillon wants is to feel like his dance style—that less-than-stellar technique he's most comfortable with—actually matters. I wanted this book to be about discovering who you are and who you want to be, about finding that balance between loyalty and independence, about learning to appreciate what makes you so unique.

I wanted this book to be about breaking free and finding the moves that fit.





Grades 3 and up

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## PRAISE

***"Dillon and the Dizzee Freekz are en pointe. This book will rock you!"***

—Kristin O'Donnell Tubb, author of *The 13th Sign*

***"This first novel is a fun exploration of middle-school friendships and the stigmas that come with certain hobbies...a fresh and winning debut about the power of self-expression."***

—Booklist

***"A rollicking, big-hearted breakdance of a book."***

—Kate Hattemer, author of *The Vigilante Poets of Selwyn Academy*

***"An earnest first novel with a solid message about finding out who you are on your own terms."***

—Kirkus

***"I couldn't stop smiling. Equal parts hilarious and heartwarming."***

—Jessica Cluess, author of *A Shadow Bright and Burning*

## ABOUT THE BOOK

### LIVE IT.

All Dillon wants is to be a real dancer. And if he wins a summer scholarship at Dance-Splasion, he's on his way. The problem? His dad wants him to play football. And Dillon's freestyle crew, the Dizzee Freekz, says that dance studios are for sellouts. His friends want Dillon to kill it at the audition—so he can turn around and tell the studio just how wrong their rules and creativity-strangling ways are.

### WORK IT.

At first, Dillon's willing to go along with his crew's plan, even convincing one of the snobbiest girls at school to work with him on his technique. But as Dillon's dancing improves, he wonders: what if studios aren't the enemy? And what if he actually has a shot at winning the scholarship?

### BRING IT.

Dillon's life is about to get crazy . . . on and off the dance floor.



# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Discuss different types of dance students are familiar with and whether they associate those styles with boys or girls and why they make those connections. Have them write down any myths or misconceptions they have experienced or know about regarding gender stereotypes (“what boys do” and “what girls do”). Then have them research important figures who have defied traditional gender stereotypes and discuss how these figures have demonstrated that gender roles are limiting.

- ★ Correlates with: **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.7** Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.

Have students read the NewsELA\* article located at <https://newsela.com/articles/girls-brilliance/id/26309/> and discuss the gender stereotypes outlined in the article. Have them consider this article as they write a short narrative about a kid choosing to pursue a hobby or interest not considered “typical” for their gender.

- ★ Correlates with **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.3-5.3** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences.

# VOCABULARY/USE OF LANGUAGE

Students may find unfamiliar reading or dance-related vocabulary in the novel. Using either context clues or traditional dictionaries, have students define new words. Some examples are *roundoff* (p.6), *hermit* (p. 24), *choreography* (p.46), *développé* (p. 62), *plié* (p.62), *jeté* (p. 177).

- ★ Correlates with **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.3-5.4** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning word and phrases based on grade 3 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

# INTERNET RESOURCES

<http://cbtdance.org/about/glossary-of-ballet-terms/>

This website defines traditional ballet vocabulary in descriptive, easy-to-understand terms.

<http://boysdancing.org>

This is a British website covering the activities of a project dedicated to encouraging interested boys to dance. It is a fabulous resource for videos, pictures, and articles about boys in dance.



## CLASSROOM DISCUSSION

- Dance is often thought of as a “girl thing”. Dillon and his crew obviously don’t think this is true. Why don’t they consider dance “girly”?
- Throughout the book, Kassie is very strongly against dance studios and it makes Dillon uncomfortable. How does Dillon deal with this discomfort?
- Who is DeMarcus? How does he help Dillon see that dancers are athletes (and that athletes can be creative)?
- Dillon starts to learn new moves. Why does he do this? Why is it important for him to feel like he fits in at the studio? Is there more than one reason?
- Carson has a crush on DeMarcus but there is a lot of miscommunication between the two of them. Why do you think they have a hard time communicating their feelings? What obstacles stand in their way?
- Discuss the courage it takes for Dillon to admit that he prefers dance. Why is it hard for him to admit it to both himself and others?
- The characters in the book use YouTube and text each other. How does technology change the way we communicate? Does it make communication more challenging in any way? How can putting yourself on the Internet change the way people see you? How can we control how people see us on the Internet?
- What is the significance of “tights” to Dillon? What do they represent to him when he plays football versus when he dances?

Discussion questions correlate to Common Core Language Arts Standards in Reading Literature: Key Ideas & Details RL. 3-8.1, RL. 3-8.2; Craft & Structure RL. 3-8.5, RL. 3-8.6; Speaking & Listening: Comprehension & Collaboration SL. 3-8.1, SL. 3-8.3; Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas SL. 3-8.4, SL. 3-8.6; Language: Conventions of Standard English L. 3-8.1; Knowledge of Language L. 3-8.3.

