



Kurt “Big Boy” Alexander, Radio Host

A Hip Hop Odyssey

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on September 1, 2023 by Ari Fishman

- Access *The Thread* episode of Kurt Alexander on our [YouTube channel](#) or at [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)
- Access his long-form interview on [LifeStories.org](#) and download the transcript [here](#)

Learning Objectives

Social Studies Focus

- Explore the history of hip-hop through the life story of Kurt Alexander

English Language Arts Focus

- Analyze Kurt Alexander’s story as memoir
- Explore the power of music as a form of cultural expression
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one radio host
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Use Kurt Alexander’s episode as evidence to write a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay

Episode Overview

Kurt “Big Boy” Alexander recalls growing up in a household filled with love despite financial struggles and highlights the impact of music and hip-hop on his early years. He provides insights into his resilience facing homelessness and the transformative power of pivotal moments in his life, including narrowly avoiding arrest and receiving a radio opportunity that marked the beginning of his successful career.

Biography

Radio personality Kurt Alexander was born in Chicago. The man who became famous as the larger-than-life Big Boy was working as a 400-pound bodyguard for hip-hop group The Pharcyde when he began his radio career in 1994 at KPWR/Los Angeles. His comedic and conversational skills led to success with overnight and afternoon shows before KPWR asked him to host the station’s morning show in 1997. The result was *Big Boy’s Neighborhood*, a show that combined hip-hop music, celebrity guests, Hollywood gossip, and prank phone calls (performed by alter ego Luther Luffeigh). With the help of a supporting cast that over the years has included Hollywood reporter Luscious Liz Hernandez, “stuntman” Louie G, and entertainment correspondent Natalia Perez, *Big Boy’s Neighborhood* quickly enjoyed became a hit among younger urban listeners. The success of the morning show led to the 2006 creation of *Big Boy’s Hip Hop Spot*, a weekend show focusing on hip-hop and Hollywood news. After a decade on the air in Los Angeles, ABC Radio Network began syndicating Kurt Alexander’s daily and weekend shows nationwide in 2007. At its peak, Big Boy’s programs were heard in 35 major markets. In 2015, Kurt Alexander moved his show to KRRL/Los Angeles. In that same year he was inducted into the Radio Hall of Fame. The National Association of Broadcasters has also recognized Kurt Alexander’s exceptional talent with the Marconi Award, a very rare three times. Kurt Alexander is married to Victoria Alexander; they have two children.



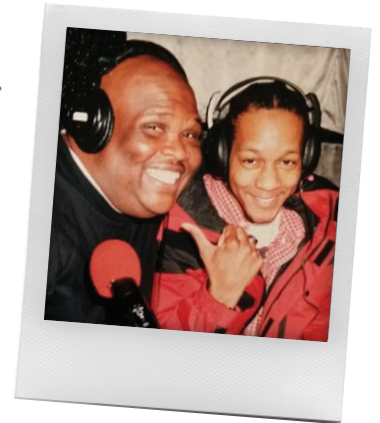
Teaching Tip: First Take

A **First Take** is a warm-up writing or conversation exercise created uniquely for *The Thread* that strengthens media literacy skills. Like an opening song in a musical, the first stanza of a poem, or even the first impression one person makes on another, the First Take asks students to reflect and share their initial thoughts and feelings about the episode's opening.

Suggested Steps

- ▣ **Read** the opening of Kurt Alexander's episode aloud to students.

"I remember I'm sitting with the Baka Boyz, right? And they say, we want to give you a contract. Eric wants to give you a contract. And I'm like, Dude, I don't know what a contract is. How much should I ask for? And I remember Nick took his phone and he typed some numbers in and he handed it to me. I look at the phone and I'm like, I can't ask for that. He was like, just ask for it. You may get it. If not, you get something close to it. Bro, I can't ask for that. Just ask for it. Like, do you think they really pay me \$35,000?"



- ▣ **Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Kurt Alexander from these opening sentences? What insights can you infer?
- ▣ **Next,** have students do a one-minute quick write reflecting on what he shared, or have students get into pairs and share their thoughts and feelings.
- ▣ **Last,** as a class, discuss why they think the filmmakers chose this opening for the episode.



Photos: Kurt with DJ Quick. (top); "Big Boy" Morning's billboard. (lower)



Teaching Tip:

THE THREAD Up Close

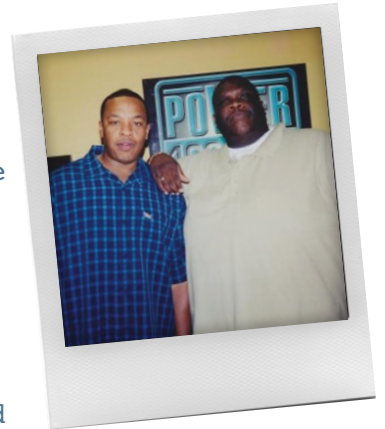
After watching the interview, have students debrief Kurt Alexander's life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ What does the title "A Hip Hop Odyssey" mean to you after watching this episode?
- ▣ What is an odyssey?
- ▣ How did Kurt Alexander navigate his run-in with the law? What did he learn from these experiences? What did you learn from his story?
- ▣ If you were interviewing Kurt Alexander, what would you like to ask him?

After discussing, have students return to *The Thread* episode and engage students in a close read and analysis of his interview using the video and transcript. Depending on the lesson, question, or theme you are aligning *The Thread* with, have students annotate the transcript, select passages that reflect the assignment, and explain their reasoning in class.

Here is an example of *A Thread* connection: If you are exploring the history of hip-hop as a cultural movement, artform, or musical genre, Kurt Alexander's origin could be shared starting with this section:

"So I always knew that I wanted to be around hip-hop. I knew I wanted to – you know, everything. Hip-hop. I wanted to rap. I was a deejay. You know, everything. You know, I would try to do graffiti. Everything that came with this culture, I wanted to be a part of it, you know? And so at one point, I started deejaying and I had, like, no equipment. You know, my first piece of so-called deejay equipment was like our home stereo that had that, you know, it was like a piece of furniture, big wooden piece in the the record with drop down and it had no belt and it would just hover when I had another turntable on top of that. But that was my equipment. And I fell in love with the art of deejaying. I wanted to deejay. I wanted to rap."



Connections

- ▣ Who were the biggest influences on Kurt Alexander?
- ▣ What role did they play in his challenges and his success?
- ▣ What qualities would you use to describe Kurt Alexander?
- ▣ Kurt Alexander says when he got his break in radio, "I couldn't let my gift be my curse." What do you think this means in the context of his life story?
- ▣ What new insights did you learn about (yourself, your community, your world) from his stories of difficulty and his stories of success?



Activity: A Hip-Odyssey: 50 Years Later

Explore these resources or go on your own odyssey over the past 50 years of hip-hop. Choose one story or artist to research more in depth and prepare a short summary of their contributions.

- ▣ [AP News: 50 years of Hip-Hop: Rhythm, Rhyme, Reinvention, Respect](#)
- ▣ [AP News: 50 years of Hip-Hop: Artists in Their Own Words](#)
- ▣ [Interviews With Some of the Greatest Names in Hip-Hop](#)
- ▣ [History of Rap and Hip-Hop: Timeline](#)



Additional Resources

- ▣ You can find everything you want about Kurt Alexander’s work here: [Big Boy’s Neighborhood](#)
- ▣ See his work celebrated:
 - Radio Hall of Fame - [Kurt ‘Big Boy’ Alexander](#)
 - [Hollywood Walk of Fame](#)
- ▣ Read more about Kurt “Big Boy” Alexander’s life and his struggle with his weight in [An XL Life: Staying Big at Half the Size](#)

Photos: Kurt Alexander aka “Big Boy” with son Jay Money Alexander and daughter Jaide Chula Alexander at ceremony. (top left); Kurt’s mother and his sisters. (top right); Kurt Big Boy Alexander. (lower left); Kurt with some family members. (lower right)

