



Tony Hawk

Professional Skateboarder & Entrepreneur

Finding Your Passion

Lesson Introduction

Interview Log: Interviewed on August 31, 2023 by Ari Fishman

- Access *The Thread* episode of Tony Hawk 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

- Understand the path of a niche subculture into a global market and sport
- Examine the power of youth subculture in shaping new cultural movements – artform, sport, and cultural movement
- Learn a different model of entrepreneurship – sport and gaming
- Understand the interplay of risk-taking, hard work, and creativity

English Language Arts Focus

- Explore topics of identity and subcultures
- Explore the idea of purposeful work and a meaningful life
- Examine the American Dream in a new light
- Examine perspective taking from the point of view of one athlete and entrepreneur
- Use Tony Hawk’s interview as evidence for a rhetorical argument, commentary, or synthesis essay using excerpts of his life story as evidence

Episode Overview

Tony Hawk describes his journey in skateboarding as a mix of passion and determination, talks about overcoming challenges by obsessively honing his skills, and recalls the iconic moment of landing the 900 at the 1999 X Games. Hawk reflects on the entrepreneurial spirit that led him to start Birdhouse Skateboards in 1992, shaping a culture defined by art, lifestyle, and sport.

Biography

Tony Hawk was born on May 12, 1968, in San Diego, California. He received a skateboard from his older brother when he was nine, and it didn’t take long for him to excel. By age 12, he got his first sponsor, Dogtown Skateboards, and went pro two years later. Hawk was considered one of the top skateboarders in the world by the time he was 16 years old. In 1992, he co-founded a skateboarding company, Birdhouse, with fellow pro Per Welinder. Their company struggled until the rise of extreme sports generated new interest. Hawk competed in the first Extreme Games (later called the X Games) in 1995, becoming one of the best-known skateboarders in the world. His ability to perform impressive stunts fueled Hawk’s popularity. He has created amazing tricks, including the “900,” in which the skater rotates 900 degrees in midair. Hawk was the first to successfully complete this move in competition, at the 1999 X Games. In his 17-year professional career, he won more than 70 skateboarding contests, including gold medals at the 1995 and 1997 X Games. In 1999 Hawk launched a highly successful line of video games, *Tony Hawk: Pro Skater*, generating over \$1 billion in sales. Hawk has worked to help young people by creating public skateboard parks through the Tony Hawk Foundation. Since 2002, the foundation has provided grants and technical assistance for new parks in all 50 states, especially in low-income areas.



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 Tony Hawk's episode aloud to students:

"As I started Birdhouse, I was trying to – I was trying to boost the brand as much as I could. I would join in when we would go out in the streets and hit the rails and hop fences and things. At some point I went through some pretty bad ankle injuries because of what I was doing out on the streets and hitting rails and rolling my ankles and I realized that if I want to continue to do this, especially if I want to continue to do this at a relevant level, I've got to go back to skating ramps. It's way safer for me to ride a 14-foot half-pipe than it is for me to jump down four stairs."



- Ask and Discuss:** What do you learn about Tony Hawk 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 the reasons they think the filmmakers choose this opening for the episode?



Photos: 1978, Tony Hawk skating. (Tony Hawk Instagram, Lenore Hawk) top; Tony Hawk skateboarding at Pizze Park Gold Coast, 1989. (Tony Hawk Instagram) lower left; Tony Hawk's American Wasteland. (Tony Hawk Activision) lower right



Teaching Tip:

THE THREAD Up Close

After watching the interview, have students debrief his life story with these suggested questions:

- ▣ What are things or activities that you feel passionate about?
- ▣ How did Tony Hawk explain skating as a passion?
- ▣ Why do you think skating appealed to youth who don't fit into mainstream culture?
- ▣ How has Tony Hawk's passion as a skater evolved over the years?
- ▣ What do you know about skating as a sport, art form, lifestyle, and cultural movement? How do you relate to it? What is your opinion of its influence in American culture and worldwide?
- ▣ What were the biggest challenges that Hawk faced and how did he face them and overcome them to be successful?

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 interrogating the idea of the American Dream, Tony Hawk's story is a novel approach to this enduring myth.

Connections

- ▣ Why do you think Tony Hawk's episode is titled "The Power of Narrative?"
- ▣ How would you describe his character?
- ▣ Why is he so successful? What values and characteristics support his success?
- ▣ Tony Hawk says that skaters and the culture surrounding skaters, is not mainstream. What is considered mainstream? Who decides?
- ▣ What new insights did you gain about (yourself, your community, your world) from his struggles during childhood and his tremendous success in skating and as a "living legend"?





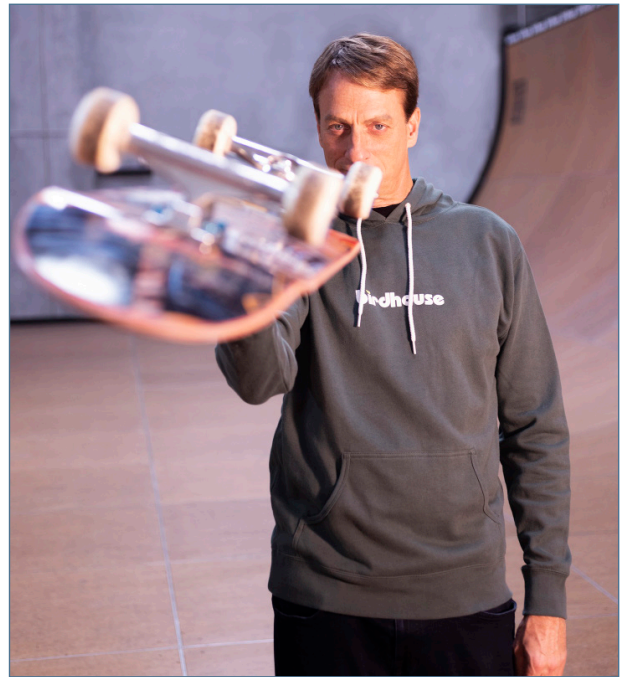
Activity: Finding Your Passion

In 2020, Tony Hawk's first skateboard became part of the collection at the Smithsonian's National Museum of American History. He shared in his episode that at 12 years old, he was a boy that didn't fit in, was bullied, and was an outcast. Today, he is a successful entrepreneur, philanthropist, game developer, innovator, and some say a living legend. He says at the end of his episode:

"I want to do this because I love it and what it brings to me, what it brings to my sense of self and confidence and what it brings to me mentally. I mean, that's why I chose skateboarding. I finally found something that spoke to me, that I felt a sense of accomplishment with and that I could do at my own pace, in my own style, and not have to listen to a coach, but still have a sense of community that was supportive."

Pull out your computer or journal, and spend 10 minutes writing in response to this prompt: **What do you feel passionate about? Do your passions give you a feeling of accomplishment and success? What do you feel is the connection between passion and success?**

This writing exercise will only be for you to see. You will not be expected to turn it in or share it in class. This is your opportunity to reflect on what brings you joy.



Additional Resources

- Learn more about [The Skatepark Foundation](#), the non-profit organization Tony Hawk spearheaded
- Understand the trajectory and growth of skating by learning about [skateboarding and the Olympics](#), IOC
- If you don't know about the [X Games](#), here's your chance to dive in

