

Who is Sean Forbes?

Name _____ Class · period _____ Date _____

THE SHORT VERSION

Sean Forbes (1982–present) is a Deaf rapper, producer, and Deaf advocate from Detroit. He founded D-PAN, released *Perfect Imperfection* with a DVD of 12 ASL music videos, and has performed for more than 150,000 people.

EARLY LIFE

Growing up Deaf in a house full of music

01 DETROIT, MICHIGAN

- 01 Sean Forbes was born hearing in Detroit, Michigan. However, Sean lost the majority of his hearing after he contracted spinal meningitis when he was only a few months old.
- 02 Both of his parents were supportive of Forbes, especially when it came to his interest in music.
His parents would take him to concerts, let him watch MTV, and exposed him to classic rock at home.
- 03 Sean's life was also full of musicians.
His mother played the piano, while his father and uncle were part of a local rock band.
- 04 Forbes' parents also had a focus on his lip-reading and speech skills, wanting him to be able to communicate with both the Deaf and the hearing, and he started learning American Sign Language (ASL) at age 12.

02 FROM MOTOWN TO ROCHESTER, NEW YORK

- 01 Sean's birth in Motown gave him a strong connection to music, and moving to Rochester, New York to go to the National Technical Institute for the Deaf (NTID) didn't waver that connection at all.
- 02 During his time at NTID, he continued to make connections with people who shared his interest in music. However, he realized that, while he had developed an understanding of music, many others with hearing loss had not.
Because of this realization, Sean founded DPAN.TV, "an online, sign language media platform that hosts a multitude of sign language content in one place."

- 03 Sean graduated from NTID with a degree in management, accounting and communications, and before starting his music career he interned at a Chicago engineering company and was offered a graduate scholarship.

A DEAF RAPPER?

How a CD labeled “BEATS” turned into a debut album

03 PERFECT IMPERFECTION

- 01 While visiting a recording studio that worked with Eminem and the Bass Brothers, Sean discovered a CD on the mixing board labeled “BEATS.”

Sean took it home and wrote lyrics to accompany the tracks, and then learned the creator of those beats was the son of one of the Bass Brothers, Jake Bass.

Sean was then signed with Web Entertainment Records, and released his debut album *Perfect Imperfection*.

- 02 *Perfect Imperfection* bridges the Deaf and hearing cultures by including a DVD of 12 ASL music videos that pair with the signs.

In them, Sean vocalizes and signs his lyrics at the same time, while a large screen displays animated lyrics with cartoon graphics to provide meaning for everyone.

04 BUT STILL — A DEAF RAPPER?

- 01 Even with his success, people still wonder **how** he does it. Sean uses hearing aids to assist with performance, and meticulously listens to the lyrics and mixing until he is confident that each track has met his standards.

Sean also uses his body to feel the beat of his music.

- 02 Hip hop had a strong impact on Sean growing up because he could follow the strong beats and drums.
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- 03 As Forbes says, hip-hop is “*like drumming with words*.”
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05 OTHER WORK AND AWARDS

- 01 Along with his music career, Sean works as a motivational speaker and Deaf advocate while continuing his work with D-PAN.
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02 Sean was dubbed the outstanding hip-hop artist of the year at the Detroit Music Awards in 2013, and has performed for over 150,000 people in 60 cities, sharing the stage with people such as Stevie Wonder.

03 Forbes has also been featured on NPR and CNN, and his YouTube channel has gone viral.

The most important thing is to believe in yourself!

SEAN FORBES

06 NAMES AND TERMS TO KNOW

NAME OR TERM	WHY IT MATTERS IN THIS STORY
NTID	The National Technical Institute for the Deaf in Rochester, New York, where Sean earned a degree in management, accounting and communications.
D-PAN / DPAN.TV	The online sign language media platform Sean founded after realizing how many people with hearing loss had not developed an understanding of music.
<i>Perfect Imperfection</i>	Sean's debut album, released on Web Entertainment Records, packaged with a DVD of 12 ASL music videos.
Jake Bass	The son of one of the Bass Brothers and the creator of the beats Sean found on the mixing board.
Detroit Music Awards	Where Sean was named outstanding hip-hop artist of the year in 2013.

CHECK YOUR UNDERSTANDING

Answer in complete sentences using what you read

07 WRITTEN RESPONSE

01 How did Sean Forbes become Deaf, and how old was he?

02 Name two ways Sean's family helped build his connection to music.

03 What did Sean notice at NTID that led him to found D-PAN, and what does that platform do?

04 What makes *Perfect Imperfection* different from a typical album, and why does that matter for Deaf and hearing audiences?

05 Sean calls hip-hop “like drumming with words.” What do you think he means, and how does that connect to the way he experiences music?

06 Sean says the most important thing is to believe in yourself. Where in his story do you see him doing that?

08 WHERE THIS INFORMATION COMES FROM

AllMusic allmusic.com/artist/sean-forbes

“Meet Sean Forbes, the Deaf Rapper Who Is Inspiring a Generation” Ellie Parfitt · hearinglikeme.com

Sean Forbes, *Deaf and Loud* deafandloud.com/bio

“Deaf Rapper Sean Forbes Makes Himself Joyfully Heard on the Hip-Hop Scene” Alex Stone · The Washington Post
