

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian

by Sherman Alexie

(Published in 2007)

Approved for use in English II

Summary of the Work:

"In his first book for young adults, bestselling author Sherman Alexie tells the story of Junior [whose real name is Arnold Spirit], a budding cartoonist who leaves his school on the Spokane Indian Reservation to attend an all-white high school. This heartbreaking, funny, and beautifully written tale, coupled with poignant drawings that reflect the character's art, is based on the author's own experiences and chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one Native American boy as he attempts to break away from the life he seems destined to live." (from [The Official Alexie Website](#): 1 September 2008. <http://www.fallsapart.com/truediary.htm#awards>)

Rationale:

Arnold Spirit is an independent, brave, and funny character, whose strength of resolve leads him to challenge the pressures of his tribe to stay on the reservation, and better his life by attending an all white school, where he knows he will receive a better education. He battles the wrath of his best friend, the dysfunction within his own family, as his dad is often too drunk to get him to school, and the disdain of many of his fellow tribal members, but perseveres and discovers the pleasures of intellectual growth and the approval of new friends. While the young adult novel is accompanied by engaging illustrations, it is not for younger or less mature readers, as the difficulties of contemporary Indians are exposed by Alexie. To truly understand Arnold's story is to understand the dilemma of Indians today, who battle poverty, alcoholism, and despair, while seeking to maintain their cultural traditions. Alexie's irony is clear, yet his hero survives, and wins our admiration. This largely autobiographical novel is a compelling read, light-hearted yet at the same time deeply serious.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

See <http://www.fallsapart.com/truediary.htm#awards> for links.

The New York Times, "Off the Rez," by Bruce Barcott
November 11, 2007

The Columbus Dispatch, "Novel celebrates resilience of youth," by Kelli C. Trinoskey. October 22, 2007

Chicago Tribune, "Angst and comedy. Tales of racism, amnesia, fantasy and death," by Kristin Klobberdanz
October 13, 2007

NPR All Things Considered, "Alexie's 'Absolutely True Diary'," by Alan Cheuse, October 1, 2007

[teenreads.com](#), "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian," by Jana Siciliano. October 2007

[Book Page](#), "Negotiating the Boundaries Between Two Worlds,"
October 2007

San Francisco Chronicle, "Sherman Alexie's new novel takes teen off the reservation," by Reyhan Harmanci
September 30, 2007

Chicago Sun Times, "A year in the life of a nerdy American Indian," by Karen Cruze, September 23, 2007

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

2008 Boston Globe-Horn Book Awards for Excellence in Children's Literature in Fiction
2008 Capitol Choices Noteworthy Books for Children
2008 Book Sense Book of the Year Children's Literature Honor Book
2008 Pacific Northwest Book Award
2008 American Indian Library Association American Indian Youth Literature Award
2007 National Book Award for Young People's Literature
2007 Los Angeles Times Book Prize Finalist
Publishers Weekly 2007 Best Books of the Year - Children's Fiction
The New York Times Notable Children's Books of 2007
Los Angeles Times Favorite Children's Books of 2007
National Parenting Publication Gold Winner 2007
Amazon.com Best Books of 2007
Barnes & Noble 2007 Best for Teens
School Library Journal Best Books of 2007
Kirkus Reviews Best Young Adult Books of 2007 (pdf file)
Horn Book Fanfare Best Books of 2007
The Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books Blue Ribbon Winner
Kansas City Star's Top 100 Books of the Year

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 600
- Readability Level:

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: *(link)*

Approval:

Submitted to Committee: September, 2008

Approved for Adoption: September, 2008

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety)

While *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is humorous and deeply satirical, it is also quite serious. Students will benefit from background information about Native American history, and their situation on the reservation today.

The novel has some explicit sexual references. Less mature readers would do well to remember not to let these passages detract from the meaning of the novel.

A NCTE published accompanying resource is available, *Sherman Alexie in the Classroom*. Written by Montana teachers, the book features an accompanying website: <http://alexie.website.googlepages.com>

Connection to the Curriculum:

Arnold's story sheds light on the plight of Native Americans today. In addition, it affirms the power of best friends to both hurt and heal. Teens will relate to Arnold's efforts to lift himself out of an imperfect situation and better his life.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

For older teen readers, Arnold's story presents connections to the situation of Native Americans today. See the Notes on the Text for additional resources for the novel.