



The Absolutely True
Diary of a Part-Time
Indian by Sherman
Alexie

Julie, Judy, Charles, and Daniel



Summary

Right: Picture of author Sherman Alexie.



- Main character: Arnold Spirit (Native American, 14-year-old teen); lives on the Spokane Indian Reservation.

Summary (cont'd)

- Junior's best friend is Rowdy.
- Junior throws a book and breaks a teacher's nose.
- Junior transfers off the reservation to the white high school in neighboring Reardan
- Rowdy stops being his friend.
- Junior is at first ignored by his new classmates.

Summary (end)

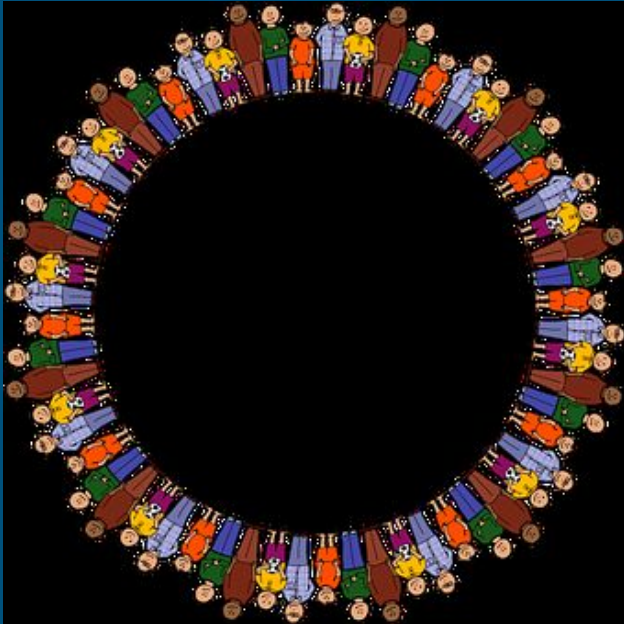
- Junior become friends with Roger the jock.
- He has a girlfriend, Penelope; he makes friends with one of the nerds (Gordy).
- Rowdy gives him a concussion during a basketball game.
- Junior wins a second match against his former school.
- Junior's grandma dies
- His his sister moves away and dies; and his uncle dies as well.
- At the end of the school year, Rowdy and Junior become friends again.

Age Range Recommendation



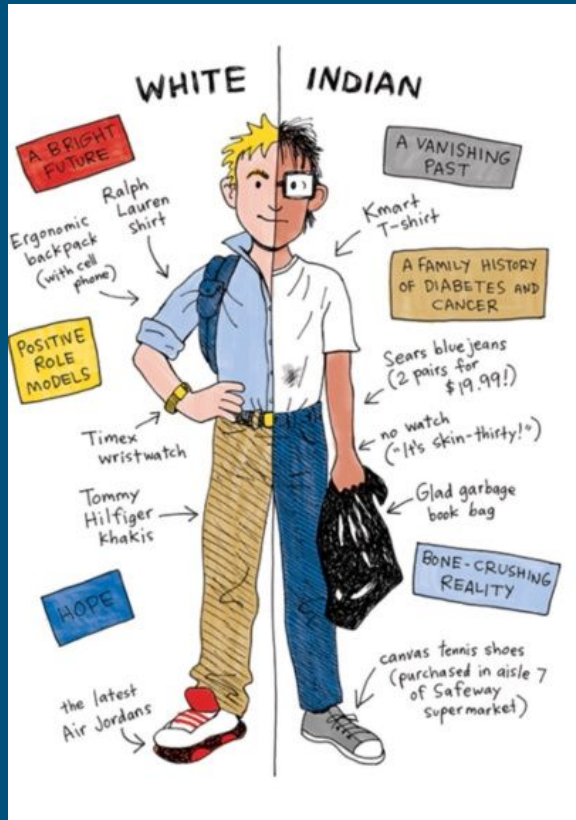
- Suitable for grades 8-12
 - Recommended for grade 9/10
 - Coarse language
 - Mature themes (e.g. racism, abuse)
 - Easy to read
 - Cartoons
 - Later in the term/year
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Racism



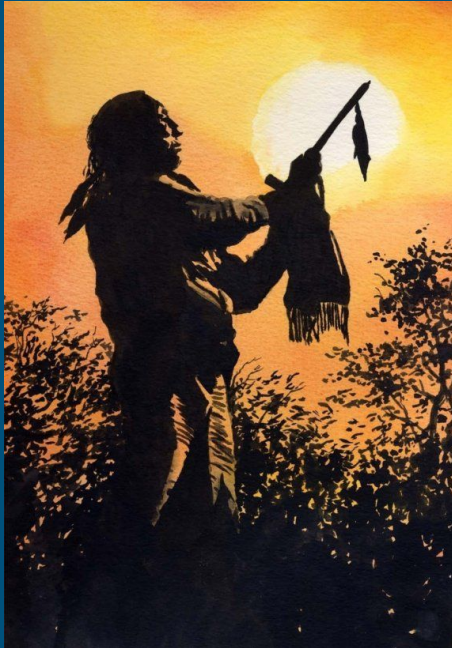
- Name Calling
 - Stereotypes
 - Discrimination
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Identity



- Junior struggles with his identity throughout the novel. His identity changes throughout the text from seeing himself as a weakling the beginning of the book to becoming more sure of himself and what he actually has accomplished at the end of the novel

Perseverance



- The novel theme of Junior beating the odds is prevalent in every chapter of the book. From his birth to his life on and off the reservation.



Our Recommended Activity

Comic Connection

- 2 passages, choose 1
- Draw a cartoon/comic that connects to the passage

Alternative for students who don't wish to draw. [Comic Creator](#)

Example 1
"I am going to Rearden tomorrow"



"You're really serious?"

"Rowdy," I said. "I'm as serious as a tumor."

He coughed and turned away from me. I touched his shoulder. Why did I touch his shoulder? I don't know. I was stupid. Rowdy spun around and shoved me.

"Don't touch me, you retarded fag!" he yelled.

My heart broke into fourteen pieces, one for each year that Rowdy and I had been best friends.

I started crying.

That wasn't surprising at all, but Rowdy started crying, too, and he hated that. He wiped his eyes, stared at his wet hand, and screamed. I'm sure that everybody on the rez heard that scream. It was the worst thing I'd ever heard.

It was pain, pure pain.

"Rowdy, I'm sorry," I said. "I'm sorry."

He kept screaming.

"You can still come with me," I said. "You're still my best friend."

Rowdy stopped screaming with his mouth but he kept screaming with his eyes.

Example 2 “Such a retard”



You wouldn't think there is anything life threatening about speech impediments, but let me tell you, there is nothing more dangerous than being a kid with a stutter and a lisp.

A five-year-old is cute when he lisps and stutters. Heck, most of the big-time kid actors stuttered and lisped their way to stardom.

And jeez, you're still fairly cute when you're a stuttering and lisping six-, seven-, and eight-year-old, but it's all over when you turn nine and ten.

After that, your stutter and lisp turn you into a retard.

And if you're fourteen years old, like me, and you're still stuttering and lisping, then you become the biggest retard in the world.

Passage Choices

On Being Poor

And white people everywhere have always believed that the government just gives money to Indians.

And since the kids and parents at Reardan thought I had a lot of money, I did nothing to change their minds. I figured it wouldn't do me any good if they knew I was dirt poor.

What would they think of me if they knew I sometimes had to hitchhike to school?

Yeah, so I pretended to have a little money. I pretended to be middle class. I pretended I belonged.

Nobody knew the truth.

An Apple

"The people at home," I said. "A lot of them call me an apple."

"Do they think you're a fruit or something?" he asked.

"No, no," I said. "They call me an apple because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside."

"Ah, so they think you're a traitor."

"Yep."

"Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community."

Sherman Alexie

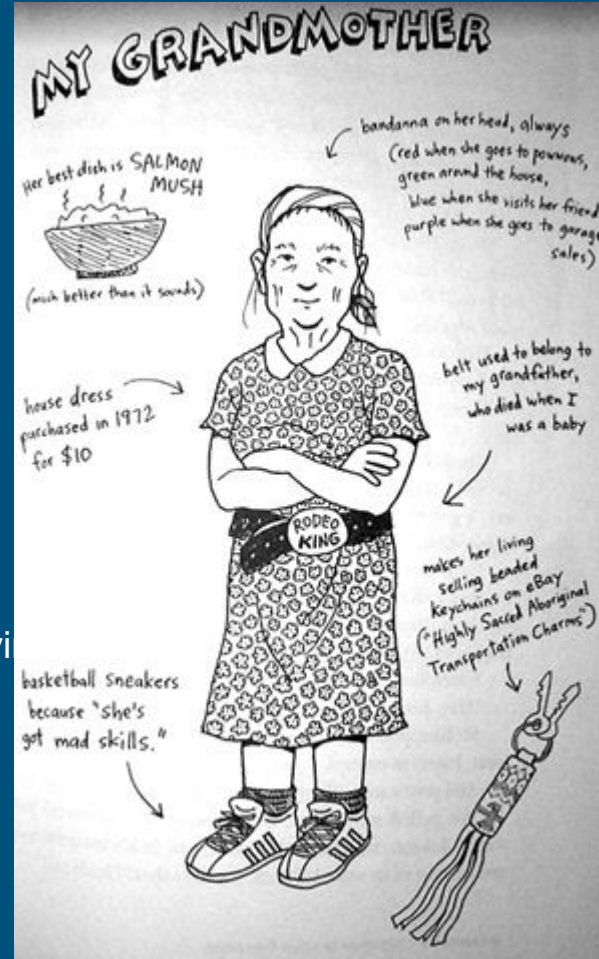
Are you poor?

Possible responses.



Merits

- appeal to boys, basketball players
- Easy read
- The comics are a wonderful addition
- Author is award winner and celebrated
- Discusses disability challenges / addresses bullying
- Addresses overcoming adversity
- Pro-family unity, value of loyal friendships



Merits - Discussion Resources

Possible Discussion Questions

Why is it important for YA books to earn awards?

Why is the way in which characters with physical challenges portrayed important to society?

Many YA novels are about overcoming adversity? Why is this theme important for youth readers?

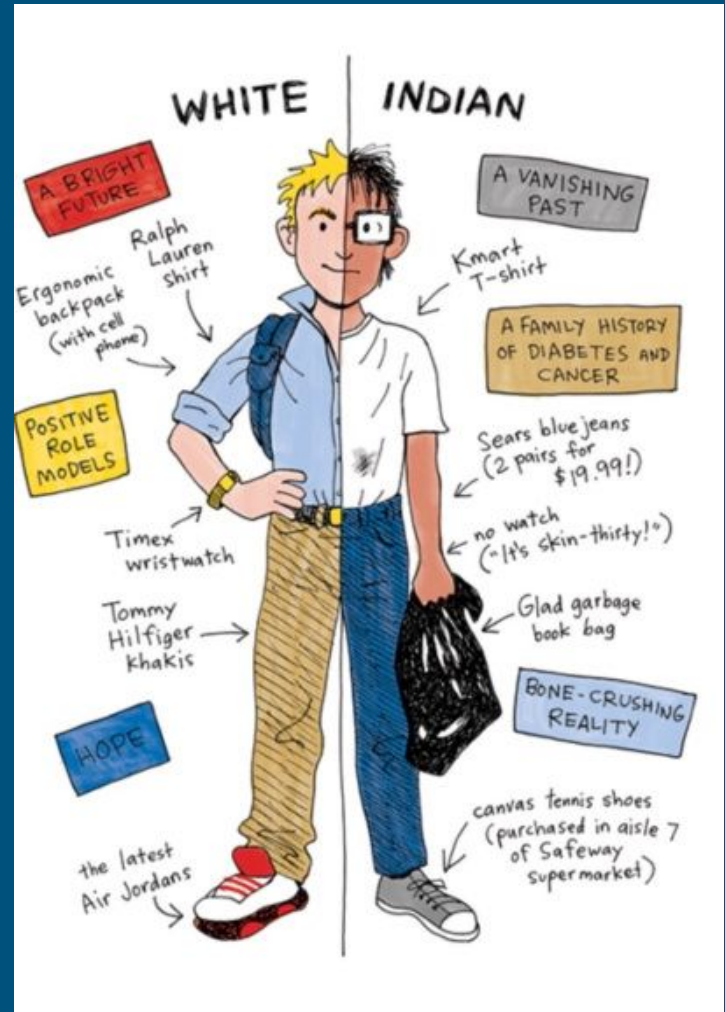
What is the function of a book review?

Teacher/Student Resources

- Author [Award site](#)
- [Huffington Post Article](#) - Stories about people with physical challenges
- [YA fiction about overcoming adversity](#)
- [Guardian Book review](#) "A Brave Life"

Challenges

- Author was accused of sexual misconduct.
- Author accused of stereotyping aboriginals - especially those on reservations
- Portrays realistic bullying, racist attitudes, and violence
- Frankly discusses teenage sexuality (masturbation, fantasy)



Challenges - Discussion Resources

- Why is a negative portrayal of reservation life controversial?
- Can you separate art from the artist? (See NYT article opposite)?
- Why would there be such a backlash for one writing honestly about their own life experiences?
- Would you continue to read or listen to an artist who is accused of a crime such as sexual misconduct? Convicted of such a crime?
- [Some background re: Sherman Alexie allegations](#)
- [Why Alexies sexual misconduct feels like a betrayal](#) - Monique Laban article
- [On #metoo accused in general](#)
- [Can You Separate art from artist?](#)
- [New York Times article - Now what do we do with their work?](#)
- [Wikipedia entry](#) - with description of controversies
- [Why book is controversial and should be read](#)
- [Negative stereotypes analysis of novel](#)

Discussion



Comments? Questions?