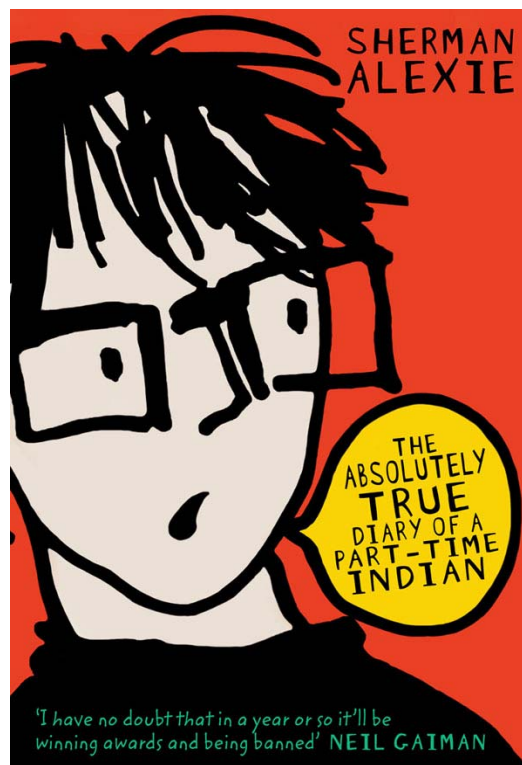


THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN

SHERMAN ALEXIE



TEACHING SUPPORT KIT

by
Kathleen Noone

THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME
INDIAN
Teaching Support Kit

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1. INTRODUCTION

When Junior throws his geometry book at his teacher, little does he know the chain of events that are to follow. On Mr P's advice he decides to leave the Spokane reservation and its problems with poverty, domestic violence and alcoholism, and find the school with the most hope; the rich, white school in Reardan.

In between telling his best friend Rowdy (and being punched hard in the face for his troubles), Junior must avoid the ire of the community and somehow find a way to travel twenty-two miles each day. That's even before he gets to the school and faces isolation, racist taunts, insensitive teachers and the small issue of how to get back home again.

Junior is an incredibly likeable character and you cannot help but be drawn into his world, cheering him on and admiring his tenacious spirit. He develops friendships with the most unlikely people and eventually realises that being a Spokane Indian does not mean he cannot be part of other tribes as well.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian is a very enjoyable and authentic coming-of-age story. The fresh and engaging writing style, alongside the often irreverent humour make this a book that is sure to appeal to young people.

2. NOTES ON GENRE, STRUCTURE AND STYLE

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian is a coming-of-age story written in first person narrative from the perspective of fourteen-year-old Arnold Spirit Jr, better known as Junior. As the title suggests, the narrative has a confessional quality, as Junior reveals his feelings to the reader through the use of verbal and visual language. The style is humorous and often irreverent, as Junior is at times unflinchingly honest about his emotions and experiences. Though this may be uncomfortable for the reader at times, such as when Junior learns of his sister's death and is concerned because, 'Yep, I had a big erection when I learned of my sister's death' (p. 202), it is this quality that helps make the voice of the protagonist so authentic. The ongoing action of the novel is combined with an exploration of Junior's emotions and feelings.

Of note is the unique structure of the novel. Interspersed within the narrative are pictures; cartoons that Junior draws because 'words are too limited'. (p. 5) It is an engaging and effective technique that could lead to interesting discussions about visual imagery in the classroom, particularly about how the cartoons assist the readers' understanding of the text. The often irreverent and black humour expressed in the cartoons develops the character of Junior more than would be possible with text alone. Further, the use of cartoons has a thematic link to the poverty experienced by Junior and his community. He draws because he 'want[s] the world to pay attention to [him]' (p. 6) and he knows that drawing is the 'only way [he] can become rich and famous'. (p. 6) Junior acknowledges that being rich and famous 'might be [his] only real chance to escape the reservation.' (p. 6) Therefore, the visual imagery has an added poignancy to it, illustrating both Junior's emotions and feelings, alongside his desire to make something of his life.

The chapters are quite short and the dialogue is snappy and realistic, creating an authentic voice for each of the characters. The protagonist is funny and surprisingly matter-of-fact about his life. Though his story is often sad, he does not invite the reader to feel sympathy for him, instead forcing admiration for his undeniable spirit.

3. PRE-READING: BACKGROUND NOTES

As part of your class study of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*, answer the following research questions using the internet and your school library.

- Who are the Spokane Indians? Where are they located? What is their history? What are their customs and traditions?
- Why were reservations set up in America? What was their goal? Has it been successful?
- What are some of the issues and problems facing Native Americans?
- Where in America is the Spokane Indian reservation located? Make a copy of a map with the area highlighted. How big is the reservation? How many people live there?
- 'That's how we were taught to teach you. We were supposed to kill the Indian to save the child.' (p. 35) What does Mr P. mean when he says this? Why were they encouraged to 'kill the Indian culture' (p. 35)?
- What do Americans celebrate at Thanksgiving?
- What is the Bureau of Indian Affairs?
- What is the Spokane Powwow?
- How can the plight of the Native Americans be compared with the journey of the Indigenous Australians? How are their experiences similar? How do they differ?

4. THEMES, MOTIFS AND SYMBOLS

THEMES

Identity and self-esteem

- 'I am zero on the rez. And if you subtract zero from zero, you still have zero.' (p. 16)
- 'There's probably no place more isolated than my reservation, which is located approximately one million miles north of Important and two billion miles west of Happy.' (p. 30)
- "'I want you to say that you deserve better.'" I couldn't say it. It wasn't true. I mean, I wanted to have it better, but I didn't deserve it.' (pp. 40-1)
- 'He was the loser Indian father of a loser Indian son living in a world built for winners.' (p. 55)
- 'Reardan was the opposite of the rez. It was the opposite of my family. It was the opposite of me. I didn't deserve to be there. I knew it; all of those kids knew it. Indians don't deserve shit.' (p. 56)
- '. . . I woke up on the reservation as an Indian, and somewhere on the road to Reardan, I became something less than Indian. And once I arrived at Reardan, I became something less than less than less than Indian.' (p. 83)
- 'I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other. It was like being Indian was my job, but it was only a part-time job.' (p. 118)
- 'Well, life is a constant struggle between being an individual and being a member of the community.' (p. 132)

Junior finds it difficult to feel optimistic about himself and his culture during the novel. His poor self-esteem is connected with the idea of being poor and even believing that he deserves to be poor. It is not until Mr P points out that he deserves better and is worth

more that he actually starts to believe it. Even so, when he first attends Reardan he will not believe for a second that 'those white people aren't better than [him]'. (p. 55) In fact, he is so used to believing that because he is Indian he is inferior in some way to the people around him.

Junior is considered to be a traitor by his people and when he gets to Reardan, he is considered inferior for being Indian. His experience is reminiscent of the migrant experience the world over, the feeling of not belonging to either culture or being completely accepted by either culture. He battles to find his individual identity within his cultural identity.

Poverty

- 'Poverty = empty refrigerator + empty stomach' (p. 8)
- 'My parents came from poor people who came from poor people who came from poor people, all the way back to the very first poor people.' (p. 11)
- 'It sucks to be poor, and it sucks to feel that you somehow *deserve* to be poor . . . It's an ugly circle and *there's nothing you can do about it.*' (p. 13)
- 'I lied about how poor I was.' (p. 119)

The reader is confronted by the extent of the poverty facing Junior and his family when his beloved dog Oscar, 'the only living thing [he] could depend on' (p. 9), is sick and, as the family cannot afford any treatment, Junior's father shoots the dog to put him out of his misery. The poverty faced by his family is a never-ending cycle. Junior knows that his family is unable to break the pattern for him and that he needs to break the cycle on his own. Whilst he initially tries to hide his poverty from his new friends at Reardan, once he tells them they are sympathetic.

Racism and discrimination

- 'And what's more, our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the Novocain.' (p. 2)
- 'We were supposed to make you give up being Indians. Your songs and stories and language and dancing. Everything. We weren't trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture.' (p. 35)
- 'During one week when I was little, Dad got stopped three times for DWI: Driving While Indian.' (p. 46)
- '. . . some Indians think you have to act white to make your life better. Some Indians think you *become* white if you try to make your life better, if you become successful.' (p. 131)

While Junior is often flippant in his description of the discrimination he encounters, it is clear that this plays a role in his life. The stereotypes about Native Americans have become so ingrained in their society that he almost believes in them himself. Junior must battle prejudice from both sides as he attempts to be part of both worlds.

Family relations

- 'I suppose [my dad] is depressed. I suppose my sister is depressed. I suppose the whole family is depressed.' (p. 40)
- 'And my parents love me so much that they want to help me. Yeah, Dad is a drunk and Mom is an ex-drunk, but they don't want their kids to be drunks.' (p. 46)
- 'Yep, my daddy was an undependable drunk . . . He may not have loved me

perfectly, but he loved me as well as he could.' (p. 189)

Although Junior's parents are alcoholics and often cannot afford to buy food or petrol to drive him to school, in their own way they love him and do what they can for him. Junior knows that his father loves him, even as he watches his father drive away from dropping him off at school and thinks, 'I hoped he'd remember to come back and pick me up after school'. (p. 55) His parents offer him constant support and advice.

Male relations

- 'I think Rowdy might be the most important person in my life. Maybe more important than my family. Can your best friend be more important than your family?' (p. 24)
- ' "I thought you were on suspension, dickwad," he said, which was Rowdy's way of saying, "I'm happy you're here." "Kiss my ass," I said.' (p. 48)
- 'I wanted to tell him that he was my best friend and I loved him like crazy, but boys don't say such things to other boys, and *nobody* said such things to Rowdy.' (pp. 48-9)

Central to Junior's struggle between his two worlds is his friendship with Rowdy, a troubled boy, but initially a fiercely loyal friend, who struggles to accept Junior's reasons for leaving. The importance of the relationship to both characters is established early on in the novel. Junior understands Rowdy's anger and aggression and does not take offence at it, while Rowdy protects Junior from the many people who bully him. The dialogue between the characters may be crude at times, but it rings with authenticity and realism, highlighting the subtext of 'boy speak'.

Similarly, their relationship highlights the restrictions society places on interactions between boys. When Junior touches his shoulder Rowdy yells, 'Don't touch me, you retarded fag!' (p. 52) Further, when Junior tells Gordy that he wishes to be friends, Gordy responds by stepping back and saying, 'I am not a homosexual'. (p. 94) It is clear that both societies are governed by unwritten codes when it comes to interaction between males. This is again highlighted when Junior takes a cartoon to Rowdy in an attempt to mend their friendship. Rowdy's father smirks at the cartoon and says, 'You're kind of gay, aren't you?' (p. 103)

1. Analyse the cartoon on p. 218. What does this suggest about male friendships?

Sexuality

- 'Naked woman + right hand = happy happy joy joy.' (p. 26)

Junior is a fourteen-year-old male and is open about his love of masturbation. 'I'm going to talk about it because everybody does it. And everybody loves it.' (p. 26)

1. Do you find the overtly sexual references confronting or offensive? If so, why?
2. Why do you think Sherman Alexie chose to include these references in his novel? Does it add anything to the novel?

Role models

- ' "You can do it." . . . Do you understand about amazing it is to hear that from an adult? Do you know how amazing it is to hear that from anybody? It's one of the

simplest sentences in the world, just four words, but they're the four hugest words in the world when they're put together.' (p. 189)

On Junior's search to understand his identity, which becomes even more confused when he enters the 'white world', he meets many mentors, including Mr P, his basketball coach and other friends who all play a role in helping him to understand and confront his feelings.

1. Which character has the biggest impact on Junior's life during the novel?

Hope and dreams

- 'But we reservation Indians don't get to realise our dreams. We don't get those chances. Or choices. We're just poor. That's all we are.' (p. 13)
- 'You kept your hope. And now, you have to take your hope and go somewhere where other people have hope . . . You're going to find more and more hope the farther and farther you walk away from this sad, sad, sad reservation.' (p. 43)
- 'The quality of a man's life is in direct proportion to his commitment to excellence, regardless of his chosen field of endeavour.' (p. 148)

In order to pursue his dreams, Junior must overcome the general apathy of his reservation. In the novel he comes from a culture of people who have forgotten how to hope and dream, and so he must strive to move away from the cycle of poverty that threatens to engulf him. The cartoon on p. 43 perfectly illustrates Junior's confusion about the choice he must make; the reservation is all he has even known but he is drawn towards a hopeful future.

Bullying

- 'And we let it happen. We let them pick on you.' (p. 41)

Though there are many young adult novels that deal with issues of bullying, few do so in a way that makes you feel such empathy for the victim and such pleasure when he is able to triumph. Junior is matter-of-fact about his differences, how he was 'born with too much cerebral spinal fluid inside [his] skull' and how this led to a range of physical problems that have him labelled 'a retard about twice a day' and a member of the 'Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club' (p. 4) Despite this, Junior refuses to be a victim and demonstrates resilience and determination to overcome his adversaries.

Alcoholism and violence

- 'Plenty of Indians have died because they were drunk. And plenty of drunken Indians have killed other drunken Indians.' (p. 158)
- 'And you know what the worst part is? The unhappy part? About 90 percent of the deaths have been because of alcohol.' (p. 200)
- 'I was crying because I knew five or ten or fifteen more Spokanes would die during the next year, and that most of them would die because of booze.' (p. 216)

The backdrop of this story is the very real plight of Native Americans. Junior's family and friends are troubled by alcoholism, domestic violence and extreme poverty. Junior is torn between school and life on the reservation, and choosing a life with hope for his future as he sees the cycle of poverty that entrapped his parents and threatens to overwhelm him. Numerous deaths occur as a direct result of alcohol and Junior recognises this is one of

the biggest threats to his community.

MOTIFS

Basketball

- 'We all cried in the locker room for hours. Coach cried, too. I guess that's the only time that men and boys get to cry and not get punched in the face.' (p. 196)
- 'We just shot lazy jumpers for a few minutes. We didn't talk. Didn't need to talk. We were basketball twins.' (p. 228)

Basketball is one of the central motifs in the novel and provides a link between Junior's old world and new life. The first basketball game illustrates the hostility between Junior and his old school and friends, whereas the second game illustrates Junior's new-found confidence and hope. One of the most poignant moments of the novel is when Junior's team wins but then he realises he cannot take any pleasure in the victory. This more than anything highlights the way Junior will always be torn between his two worlds.

Basketball also highlights how males communicate with each other and how social codes (not being able to cry or touch) can be suspended when sport is involved.

Books and reading

- 'In Wellpinit, I was a freak because I loved books. In Reardan, I was a joyous freak.' (p. 98)

Junior realises early on in life that knowledge and learning will be a tool to help him escape his life. His friendship with Gordy starts and develops through their mutual love of books. Just as it is the geometry book that acts as the catalyst for his change in schools, the library in Reardan illustrates all the possibilities open to him now that he has opened himself up to a new world.

SYMBOLS

Names

- 'I had no idea that Junior was a weird name. It's a common name on my rez, on any rez.' (p. 60)
- ' "My name is Junior," I said. "And my name is Arnold. It's Junior and Arnold. I'm both." I felt like two different people inside of one body.' (pp. 60-1)
- 'The people at home . . . a lot of them call me an apple . . . because they think I'm red on the outside and white on the inside.' (pp. 131-2)
- 'They weren't calling me by my rez name, Junior. Nope, they were calling me by my Reardan name.' (p. 143)

Names are closely linked to and help symbolise identity. Junior's two names symbolise his two worlds and all that is different and unfamiliar about them. The people at home call him 'apple', signifying that they think he is a traitor to his culture.

The road to Reardan

- 'Traveling between Reardan and Wellpinit, between the little white town and the reservation, I always felt like a stranger. I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other. It was like being Indian was my job, but it was only a part-time job.' (p. 118)

The road between Reardan and Wellpinit symbolises the difference between the two worlds and the two identities that Junior must adopt to fit in with both places.

5. CHARACTER ANALYSIS

CHARACTERS

Junior

- 'You are a good kid. You deserve the world.' (p. 41)

Junior's growth and development are central to the novel. Create a mind-map, either using the computer program *Inspiration* or on a large piece of poster paper. Referring closely to the text and using quotes, include the following information:

- Three adjectives to describe Junior at the start of the novel
- Three adjectives to describe Junior at the end of the novel
- Turning points for Junior
- Important relationships and how they develop
- Physical description
- Characteristics and personality
- Three symbols to represent the character. Include a picture and explain each one.
- Key actions and events in the novel
- High points in the novel
- Low points in the novel

Rowdy

- 'Rowdy is the toughest kid on the rez. He is long and lean and strong like a snake. His heart is as strong and mean as a snake too.' (p. 15)
- 'He was always crying and screaming and kicking and punching . . . Rowdy fought everybody.' (p. 18)
- 'Your friend Rowdy, he's given up. That's why he likes to hurt people. He wants them to feel as bad as he does.' (p. 42)

1. Why is Rowdy so angry? What is he fighting?
2. Use five adjectives to describe Rowdy.
3. What is Rowdy's home life like? How does this impact on Rowdy?
4. Why is it significant that Rowdy likes comics? What does this suggest about his personality?
5. Why is Rowdy so upset when Junior tells him that he is changing schools?
6. What does Rowdy do at the first basketball game? Why?
7. Does Rowdy change during the novel? If so, how? Use quotes to support your ideas.

Mary Spirit

- 'After high school, my sister just froze. Didn't go to college, didn't get a job. Didn't do anything. Kind of sad, I guess. But she is also beautiful and strong and funny.' (pp. 26-8)
- 'She was the smartest kid I ever had. She was even smarter than you.' (p. 36)
- 'She kept writing in her book. And she kept working up the courage to show it to somebody. And then she just stopped.' (p. 39)

1. Why does Mary freeze after high school?

2. Why does Mary hide her love of reading and writing romance novels?
3. Why do you think Mary just stopped writing one day? What encouraged her to start writing again?
4. What encouraged Mary to leave the reservation?

Penelope and Roger

- Create social networking site profiles for Penelope and Roger. Include information such as: likes, dislikes, hobbies, age, picture, friends, personal motto, messages from friends and other information.
- What do Penelope and Roger really think about Junior? Write an email from each character to a friend explaining their thoughts. Use textual detail to support your ideas.

Mr P, Coach and Grandmother

- Copy the following chart into your book and fill in the character information:

	<i>Advice to Junior</i>	<i>Personal attributes</i>	<i>Significant quotes</i>
<i>Mr P</i>			
<i>Coach</i>			
<i>Grandmother</i>			

Junior's mum and dad

- 'Yep, my daddy was an undependable drunk . . . He may not have loved me perfectly, but he loved me as well as he could.' (p. 189)
1. How do Junior's parents show their love for him? Use quotes.

6. ACTIVITIES

CHAPTER RESPONSE QUESTIONS

The Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club

1. Why is Junior a member of 'the Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club'?
2. Why does Junior draw cartoons? What do the first two cartoons depict? What does this tell us about Junior?
3. Describe the style of writing in the first chapter.

Why Chicken Means So Much to Me

1. What does Junior identify as the worst thing about being poor?
2. 'And hey, in a weird way, being hungry makes food taste better.' (p. 8) What does this statement show us about Junior?
3. What happens to Oscar? What does this illustrate to the reader?
4. How is poverty a cycle for Junior's family?
5. Use five adjectives to describe Junior's personality so far.

Revenge Is My Middle Name

1. Describe Rowdy and Junior's relationship. What do they do for each other?
2. What is the Spokane Powwow?
3. What does Rowdy do to the Andruss brothers? Why? What does this demonstrate about his friendship with Junior?

Because Geometry Is Not a Country Somewhere Near France

1. Describe Mr P.
2. Why is Junior so cynical about white teachers?
3. What angers Junior about his geometry book?

Hope Against Hope

1. Why does Junior throw his geometry book? What does it signify?
2. Why does Mr P say the following? 'Every white person on this rev should get smashed in the face. But, let me tell you this. All the Indians should get smashed in the face, too.' (p. 40)
3. What is Mr P's advice to Junior? Why does he give him this advice?

Go Means Go

1. How do Junior's parents react to his decision to change schools? What does this show about them?

Rowdy Sings the Blues

1. How are sporting results used to compare the two schools? Why is it significant that Rowdy performed well at most competitions?
2. How does Rowdy react to Junior's decision to move schools? Why does he react in this way?

3. How does Rowdy disguise his pain?

How to Fight Monsters

1. Why is Junior deemed to have betrayed his tribe?
2. Describe the cartoon on page 57. What does this symbolise about Junior's insecurities?
3. How does the confusion over Junior's names demonstrate his change in culture?
4. How do the students react to Junior at Reardan?
5. How could Junior have reacted to being called names?
6. How does the fight illustrate the differences in social codes?
7. 'Maybe I was telling the world I was no longer a moving target.' How is this a significant moment for Junior?

Grandmother Gives Me Some Advice

1. 'I realized how much of my self-worth, my sense of safety, was based on Rowdy's fists.' How does Junior learn to stand up for himself?
2. What is Junior's grandmother's advice?

Tears of a Clown

1. What does Junior's story about Dawn illustrate to the reader?

Halloween

1. How does Junior try to establish a connection with Penelope?
2. How does trick or treating remind Junior of Rowdy?

Slouching Toward Thanksgiving

1. How does the author illustrate Junior's loneliness?
2. What is significant about Junior speaking up in class?
3. How does Mr Dodge reply and how does this make Junior feel?
4. Examine the cartoon of Junior's journey to school on p. 88. Contrast this to how you normally get to school. How many kilometres is twenty-two miles?
5. What does Mary do? Why?
6. How does Junior become friends with Gordy? What do they have in common?

My Sister Sends Me an E-mail

1. Summarise Mary's email in three dot points.

Thanksgiving

1. Why does Junior think of Rowdy at Thanksgiving time?
2. Describe the cartoon Junior draws. Why is Rowdy's respect still so important to Junior?
3. How does Rowdy's father regard the cartoon? Is this type of reaction typical in today's society? How could the fear of being considered 'gay' limit male interactions?

Hunger Pains

1. How does Penelope and Junior's friendship develop?
2. How are Penelope and Junior using each other?
3. What advice does Junior give Penelope? Is it good advice?

Rowdy Gives Me Advice About Love

1. Why does Junior refer to how 'white' Penelope is? What is the effect of this?
2. 'White girls are privileged. They're damsels in distress.' (p. 116) What does this mean?

Dance, Dance, Dance

1. Why is the novel called *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian*?
2. Examine the cartoon on p. 120. Analyse each of the pictures. Why do you think Alexie presents the information in this way?
3. How do Penelope and Roger react to Junior's admission that he is poor?
4. What does Junior learn by the end of the chapter?

Don't Trust Your Computer

1. What does Junior email Rowdy and how does he reply? Why does this make Junior laugh?
2. Why do the people at home call Junior an 'apple'?
3. What does Gordy say about the role of the tribe? How is this applicable to Junior?

My Sister Sends Me a Letter

1. What does Junior think of Mary's 'gorgeous new place'?

Reindeer Games

1. Why does Junior try out for the basketball team?
2. What happens at try-outs? Why does Junior get in?
3. Why does Junior say 'it was like something out of Shakespeare' (p. 142) when he discovers their first game is against Wellinpit?
4. What happens when Junior enters the gym? How does he react? Why?
5. What happens during the basketball game? Write a short news report.

And a Partridge in a Pear Tree

1. Describe Junior's Christmas.

Red Versus White

1. What good things about his culture does Junior realise?
2. Why does Junior describe his grandmother as tolerant?

Wake

1. 'We all have to find our own way to say good-bye.' (p. 161) How does Junior do this?
2. Who is Billionaire Ted and what is his story?

3. 'We lived and died together.' (p. 166) What does this show about Junior's community?

Valentine Heart

1. How does Junior cope with his grief?
2. What do Junior's cartoons (pp. 170 & 171) reveal about his emotions?
3. What happens in Mrs Jeremy's class? Why is this so significant to Junior?

In Like a Lion

1. How does Junior explain his improvement in basketball?
2. What does the cartoon on p. 182 demonstrate about his feelings?
3. How does Sherman Alexie build tension towards the game?
4. What is the Reardan game plan? Is this successful?
5. How does Coach give his team confidence?
6. What happens during the game? Why does Junior cry when the game is finished? What does he realise?

Rowdy and I Have a Long and Serious Discussion About Basketball

1. Why is the chapter title humorous?

Because Russian Guys Are Not Always Geniuses

1. How does Mary die?
2. How does Junior react to Mary's death? Why does he react in this way?
3. Why does Junior feel responsible in some way for Mary's death?
4. How do the students at Reardan show they care?

My Final Freshman Year Report Card

1. Describe Junior's report card.

Remembering

1. What realisations does Junior arrive at?
2. What tribes does Junior belong to? How does this help him feel better?

Talking About Turtles

1. Why do Junior and Rowdy climb the tree? What does this symbolise?
2. How does Rowdy compare Junior to a nomad?
3. 'We didn't keep score.' (p. 230) What does the final line signify?
4. Do you think Rowdy and Junior will remain friends? Explain.

TOPICS FOR CLASS DISCUSSION

- Why does Junior decide to attend Reardan? Are they valid reasons?
- Why does Junior's decision to change schools cause so much anger from his community? Is this justified?
- What steps does Junior take to fit in at his new school? Are his strategies successful? Why or why not?
- 'The sexual references in the novel are necessary in order to give Junior an authentic voice.' Do you agree or disagree? Why?
- At the end of the second basketball game Junior 'wept like a baby'. (p. 196) Why was he crying? What did Junior realise during the after match celebrations?
- Junior describes himself as having a head 'so big that little Indian skulls orbited around it'. (p. 3) He also has a stutter, a lisp, is susceptible to seizures, wears 'ugly, thick, plastic' (p. 3) glasses and is skinny with huge hands and feet. Due to this people call Junior a 'retard' and he is beaten up at least once a month (p. 4). Why do people tease and bully those who look different? Would Junior be bullied or teased in your school? Why/why not? How does this novel make you feel about the people who bully Junior?
- What role do teachers play in Junior's journey? Who are his role models and mentors? Who are role models and mentors in your own lives?
- When Junior hears of his sister's death, he 'laughed until [they] were about halfway home, and then [he] fell asleep'. (p. 206) What does this suggest about human reaction to grief and death? Is Junior's response 'normal'? Is there a 'normal' response to death?
- Junior's mother makes him promise her he'll never drink (p. 208). What effect has alcohol had on Junior's family? What effect does alcohol have on Junior's community?
- Why is Rowdy so angry and violent?
- The dialogue and interaction between Junior and Rowdy is often crude and rude. What is the effect of this?
- What makes the writing style humorous?

WRITING TASKS

- Write a series of postcards from Mary to Junior as she makes her way to Montana and sets up her new life.
- The Reardan Indians versus Wellpenit Redskins basketball game is big news, especially in Wellpenit. Write a front page news report based on each game. Include a headline, photo and report.
- Write an expository news story about life on an Indian reservation. Refer to specific sections from the novel and conduct your own research.
- Write a series of diary entries from Rowdy's point of view after Junior leaves Wellpenit High. Try to capture Rowdy's voice and emotions.
- Towards the end of the novel Junior tries to convince Rowdy to come to Reardan High with him. What would happen if he agreed? Write an additional chapter for the novel that includes Rowdy's first day at Reardan.
- Choose three cartoons from the novel and write a sustained analysis of each one. Consider: what can we see? What does it reveal about Junior? How does it complement the written text?
- Just before the second basketball game Junior tells the reporter, 'I'm never going to quit living life this hard, you know? I'm never going to surrender to anybody. Never, never, never'. (p. 186) What are your dreams in life? What are you prepared to sacrifice to ensure your goals are achieved? Write an extended reflective piece.

- Mr P advises Junior to leave the reservation to pursue hope for his future. Write a letter to Mr P from Junior at the end of the novel where he tells him whether or not his search for hope has been successful.
- By the end of the novel Junior realises that he is a member of many tribes, that he is a 'Spokane Indian . . . but I also [belong] to the tribe of American immigrants. And to the tribe of basketball players. And to the tribe of bookworms.' (p. 217) List all the tribes that you belong to. How important is belonging to a community? Write an extended reflective response.

ORAL PRESENTATIONS

Work in small groups to complete the following presentations.

1. Before the Reardan Indians versus Wellpenit Redskins basketball game a news crew comes to interview Junior. Working in small groups, write a script for the entire news story, including interviews with Coach and Rowdy. Rehearse and then either present the news story for the class or videotape and then show the class.
2. Both Mr P and Coach have a big impact on Junior due to their motivating words and advice. Prepare and present a motivational speech, to be delivered to the Wellpenit basketball team just before their second game against Reardan.
3. In ten years time Junior returns to Wellpenit High to deliver a speech to the graduating class. What is his message to them? What has he done since high school? Prepare and present his speech.
4. Choose your favourite three cartoons from the novel. Explain to the class why you have selected these cartoons as your favourite and explain the significance of each one.
5. Working in small groups, choose a scene from the novel to act out. Write your own script before you rehearse and then present to the class. Choose from one of the following scenes:
 - a. Junior's first day at Reardan.
 - b. The class walk out on Mrs Jeremy.
 - c. Junior and Penelope go out for pancakes after the dance.
 - d. Junior and Rowdy play basketball at the end of the novel.
6. Prepare an argumentative speech, using one of the following topics:
 - a. The pursuit of personal goals is more important than the expectations of the community.
 - b. Boys should be freer to express their feelings.
 - c. More education is required to eradicate racism from our society.
 - d. The misuse of alcohol has devastating effects on our community.
 - e. Self-belief is the most important quality to ensure success.

ESSAY TOPICS

Write an essay on one of the following topics.

1. 'Most crucial to Junior's success in Reardan is his personal courage and spirit.' Do you agree?
2. To what extent do the people around Junior support and encourage him?
3. 'It is Junior's drawings more than his words that depict his emotions and feelings.' Do you agree?
4. '*The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* is about the search for personal and cultural identity.' Do you agree?
5. To what extent is the novel about overcoming racism and adversity?
6. 'Before Junior can succeed he must first learn to believe in himself.' Do you agree?
7. 'Even worse than the crippling poverty that Junior experiences is his low-self esteem in himself and his culture.' Discuss.
8. What does Junior learn during the novel?
9. What does Junior teach the people around him?