

Lesson 1.10: The Absolutely True Diary of A Part-Time Indian

Grades: 6-10

Goals/Objectives:

The student will learn the importance of developing a strong and healthy self-identity, having dreams, and the role goal-setting plays in achieving personal success.

Rationale:

There is a reason why adolescence is referred to as the formative years. It is during a person's formative years that s/he will build a strong sense of self, explore what it means to be who s/he is, and make decisions that will influence the direction her/his life will take in the future. The purpose of this lesson (unit for upper grades) is to illustrate to the student, the importance of developing a strong self-identity, having dreams, and following through with ones' goals.

Content:

- The Elements of a Story
- Introduce the Novel
- Read & Discuss
- Activities & Assessments
- SMART Goal Setting

Materials:

- Class Copies of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
- Copies of class handouts and discussion questions
- Student Journals
- Poster paper & Art Supplies

Time:

- Three to Four Weeks (upper grades) OR One Week (lower grades)

Lesson Activity #1: The Elements of a Story

Introduction: Storytelling is a very important element of First Nations cultures. Prior to contact with the first explorers, the Gitksan recorded their history, traditions, and cultural beliefs orally. This tradition is still carried on today, however, unlike the past, the stories are now recorded using written communication, making the stories accessible to a broader range of people. In this lesson, we will learn about the elements that make up a story and how authors use those elements to write entertaining and thought provoking works of art.

Please Note: This unit is suggested for students between 8th and 10th grade (grade 11 and 12 students may also enjoy this unit), as the novel does contain some content that requires a certain amount of maturity. However, included in this unit are activities that can be completed by students from 6th to 8th grade using small portions from the novel. For instance, you can read some of the suggested quotes aloud to your students and ask them to complete the identity poster suggested on the "Final Projects" assignment page at the end of the student workbook. You can also use the cartoon drawings included in throughout the book to generate discussion and assign the "Personal Identity Introduction Activity" suggested at the start of the novel study. You can also modify some of the "Final Projects" found on the assignment page to meet the needs of younger students. Finally, S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting is important for students of all ages. You can give your students a synopsis of the book then teach them how to set S.M.A.R.T. Goals.

Before the students arrive:

- Familiarize yourself with the novel, the elements of a story notes, and all of the activities.
- Create copies of the assignment booklets included with this lesson. You can give the sheets to the students one at a time as needed, or use all of the worksheets to create an assignment booklet.

- Write "Elements of a Story" on the board.

When the students arrive:

- Lead a brainstorming discussion about the elements of a story. Most students should know the elements already, making this activity a simple review. However, if you find that your students are struggling with the elements, you may decide to spend some extra time working through the elements one at a time, providing a clear example of each element.
- Distribute the "Elements of a Story" handouts to your students for future reference as you work your way through the novel. Encourage your students to study and memorize the "Elements of a Story" in the event that you test their knowledge later on.
- You will notice that the "Student Notes: The Elements of a Story" are much shorter than the teacher version. This is done deliberately to ensure that your students learn and not simply read the notes. In addition to the notes supplied, you should help your students to identify the "elements" throughout the novel

study using the space provided on the worksheet.

Journal Activities

- Journaling is an effective way for students to demonstrate their understanding of the “Big Ideas” and to make connections between the content of the book and their lives. Included in the student work book is a list of quotes from the book that you can use as writing prompts for your students.

Final Projects

- Included in this unit is a list of potential “Novel Study Final Projects” that your students can complete following the novel study to demonstrate their knowledge. You may decide to include the list of options with the novel study booklets so your students can begin taking notes for their chosen project as soon as you begin reading the book, giving them ample time to produce the best projects possible.

Lesson Activity #2: Introduce the Novel

Introduction: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is a semi-autobiographical story written by the Indigenous poet, author, and screenwriter, Sherman Alexie Jr. The novel was chosen for this curriculum based on its undeniable relevance for First Nations youth and for the positive messages presented throughout.

Please Note: The word “Indian” is used repeatedly throughout this unit, as it is the term Alexie uses to identify the Indigenous people of the Spokane Reservation. However, aside from references to the novel itself, it is important that you teach your students to use the appropriate names of the First Nations of Canada (ex. Gitksan, Wet’suwet’en, Nisga’a, etc.). The term “Indian” is no longer an acceptable moniker as it denotes a homogeneity among all First Nations that does not exist.

Before the student arrive:

- Collect artefacts that are relevant to the book’s theme and display them on a table. Your artefacts might include: an outdated textbook, a basketball, a well known stereotype, such as a photo of the Cleveland Indians’ team mascot), an enlarged copy of the cartoon of Junior found on page 57 of the novel, a photograph of Sherman Alexie, a map that clearly identifies the Spokane Indian Reservation and the nearby town of Wellpinit, WA, a diary, a list of lifelong goals, and college/university applications.

Introduction: Now that the students have “met” the author of the book, you can begin by reading the first chapter of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Begin this lesson by reading the synopsis of the book found on the back cover and lead a discussion focusing on the discussion questions that follow the synopsis below.

Lesson Activity #3: Read and Discuss the Novel

Share the biographical information included in the “About the Author” reproducible notes pages included in the student booklet following this lesson. If time permits, you may decide to spend extra time introducing the author, as he is a phenomenal author, a very successful Indigenous person, and a good role model for First Nations youth.

- Introduce the novel by directing your student’s attention to the display table you prepared before class. Give them a few moments to study the items and to generate theories about the content of the novel.
- Give the students ten to fifteen minutes to record their inferences in their journals.
- Bring the class back together so the students can share their inferences with the class.
- Write the title of the novel on the board and lead another brainstorm session about the content of the book. Ask the students to make connections between the artefacts and the title of the book.
- Write “Stereotypes” on the board and have your students complete the “K” and “W” columns of their KWL sheet included in their novel study booklet using “Stereotypes” as your topic.
- Ask the students to share the questions they wrote in their “W”
- Discuss “Stereotypes” and the role stereotypes played in First Nations culture in the past and in the present. Ask your students to identify some of the stereotypes presented in the synopsis of the novel they are about to read.
- Ask your students to complete the “L” column of their KWL sheet.
- Distribute the books to the class and direct the students to the author page found at the back of the book. Ask the students if they know who Sherman Alexie is.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

Junior is a budding cartoonist growing up on the Spokane Indian reservation. Born with a variety of medical problems, he is picked on by everyone but his best friend. Determined to receive a good education, Junior leaves the rez to attend an all-white school in the neighboring farm town where the only other Indian is the school mascot. Despite being condemned as a traitor to his people and enduring great tragedies, Junior attacks life with wit and humor and discovers strength inside of himself that he never knew existed. Inspired by his own experiences growing up, award-winning author **Sherman Alexie** chronicles the contemporary adolescence of one unlucky boy trying to rise above the life everyone expects him to live.

- Read the title of chapter one aloud to the class and ask your students to complete the "K" and "W" columns of the KWL sheet.
- Read chapter one aloud to the class and have your students complete the "L" column of their KWL worksheets. Your students will complete this quick exercise at the beginning and end of each chapter.
- Lead a class discussion based on the questions below.

Class Discussion Questions:

1. Consider the adjectives "absolutely true" and "part-time." What concepts appear to be emphasized by the images found on the cover of the book and the title?
2. Study the images on the front cover of the book. What do the images of the "Cowboy and Indian" suggest? What type of a struggle or conflict might our protagonist Junior face in the book?
3. In what way does Alexie's personal history influence this book? Since there are some obvious connections between his life and the narrator's, why do you think he chose to write this book as a work of fiction, and not an autobiography?

Personal Identity Introduction Activity:

- To stimulate ideas, examine one of Ellen Forney's illustrations from *Diary*, a picture of Arnold/Junior with a line drawn down the middle of his body (page 57). The left side is labeled "white" and drawn and labeled with "appropriate" characteristics. The left side is labeled "Indian." Ask students to respond by drawing their own versions, thinking about what areas of their life might feel split

in similar ways. Their images might illustrate racial, cultural, geographic, or religious differences, or differences in personal characteristics such as that of "half obedient child" and "half rebellious teenager." They might split their drawings in more than two ways.

- From this exercise, students can be prompted to free write about what it feels like to "walk in two or more worlds" at once: "How do these identities synchronize, clash, or something else? How do these differences impact decision making, such as deciding what is the right or wrong thing to do?"

- As a more formal project, students could compose a more formal essay to accompany their drawing. (*From the NCTE Publication "Sherman Alexie in the Classroom."*)

Suggested Activities:

- You can continue to read the book aloud to the class and lead a discussion based on the questions provided in the student novel study booklet or you may decide to read some of the book in class and assign chapters for homework each day until the entire book has been read.

- Upon completion of the book, the students will have a final project to complete based on the book. You can choose to use the projects suggested along with this unit or create your own. The important thing is that your students learn how to identify and summarize the main story elements and main messages within the story.

Lesson Activity #4: S.M.A.R.T. Goal Setting

Introduction: Arnold Spirit, the protagonist from the novel has big dreams and the courage to make his dreams a reality. Every person is born with the same potential and it is up to each individual to find the strength and the courage to act upon their desires to reach their fullest potential. Perhaps, more people would chase their dreams if they knew how to plan for success and/or if they knew they could not fail. In this lesson, the students will learn how to set goals that will guide them on their journey to life-long success.

Before the students arrive

- Collect and display artefacts that illustrate your success as a person and as an educator. Your artefacts should represent significant stages and people throughout your life that helped you to achieve your dreams. This would be a