

Finding a person to connect with is a struggle that defines high school life. "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" written by Sherman Alexie, is a story about hope, perseverance, and inspiration. This young adult novel has touched and been loved by many of all ages. It was also one of the most challenged books in America in 2012. Adults and Guardians of teenagers found that the sexual content and profanity exhibited through the book was inappropriate and should not be read in the classroom. One specific challenge was made by parents against the use of the book in the West Valley school district-- particularly towards sophomore classes.

There may be content believed to be inappropriate, but the main theme of the book is so strong that that material is not what stands out and stays with the reader for longer. "Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" is narrated by a young, Native American boy who is entering high school on the reservation where he lives with both parents, his older sister, and his grandmother. Growing up with serious health difficulties has caused Junior, the narrator, to be prone to physical and verbal abuse by peers and community members. The strong culture of alcoholism and violence existing on reservation has lured Junior's curious nature and his want for a better life to come through in his actions. A teacher noticed this and inspired Junior to leave the reservation. He takes the teacher's advice and transfers to a school in a small, white dominant community twenty two miles away from his home. This book is a true American story about an underdog with conflicting feelings pushing past the expectations of fellow people. Due to it's easy, comical nature it has inspired and allowed students to create strong connections with the characters and their relationships with one another. Not only it this story appropriate for the age group, but also potentially beneficial for all high school students who have the opportunity to read it.

The struggles that Junior deals with are not specific to his age or ancestry. When Sherman Alexie went to talk with different schools he came to a conclusion that surprised many: "...it was the student speakers who told the most important stories about survival." Teenagers, and even children, experience the same pain and joy that the main character does throughout the story. This builds an emotional connection with the book that students can draw parallels with. Everyone can identify a childhood hero. Well, for some kids, Junior is their hero. " 'I want to be myself, just like in your book.' " A student says to Alexie, the author of the book. The young man who said this was a millionaire's son who did not want to follow his father's footsteps. He may have nothing physically in common with the character, but still faced a similar identity crisis; do I become what my family is, or do I become who I think I am, or want to be? The young adult novel has even given kids as young as ten hope; they wrote letters written in crayon with drawings inspired by the book for it's author. The setup of the novel is very relatable and easy to read which allows all students to gain something from it. Yes, ten year olds may be a little young, but the main character is in the ninth grade. If people as young as ten go through similar situations, what makes tenth graders too immature?

I personally have grown up in an incredibly open household; all topics were on the table. Not only do I know how to avoid unfortunate situations because of this, but I also understand what goes on in my community and the nation and entire world. It is not as much of a shock as it is to some when we began looking at current news at school. Sheltering students from many of the topics exhibited through this novel can be more harmful than reading the book. "I realized that I may be a lonely Indian boy, but I was not alone in my loneliness." (Alexie, page 217). It is important to make connections with people growing up and to understand that you are not alone even though you may be someone who is ostracized. Being able to discuss problems in a professional, mature way is a skill that should be taught all throughout high school. It

is something that will come up throughout one's entire life. The difficulties Junior faces have to be taken care of in this way.

People have a great influence on others such as Gordy, a new friend that Junior makes at his new school. "In his own way, Gordy the bookworm was just as tough as Rowdy." Gordy, from Reardan, may not be as physically proficient as Rowdy (Junior's closest friend on the reservation), but the way he speaks to Junior and the fact that he makes him 'think' has a profound affect on Junior through the rest of the book. People have a great influence on others. "Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian" shows exactly how much and the way certain people have different effects on others. "She went searching for her dreams, and she didn't find them, but she made the attempt." (Alexie, page 216). The fact that Junior decided to leave and go find himself was because a teacher told him that if he wanted to live a better life he needed to leave the reservation. This in turn caused his sister to try and search for something, and to leave. "I wasn't expected to be good so I wasn't." (Alexie, page 180). Junior felt so empowered by his basketball coach at Reardan that he made a play that confirmed the outcome of the game. As students, we should not be under the expectation that we are unaware of the profanity and sexual content that comes up in the novel. The narrator is a year younger than the students the challenge was aimed at. Understanding how people have an affect on our behavior and actions can help us find the people that affect us in a positive way.

This young adult novel is appropriate for high school students and can be very beneficial to read for many reasons: it has inspirations for all ages, information that can help someone in the future, and is better to read in class than on one's own. The parents in the West Valley School district who are against this book must not really know what it is about. It is not just a look into a young boy coming of age, but an eye opener to the difficulties faced by teens and how they can also overcome them like the protagonist. "It all gave me hope. It gave me a little bit of joy." (Alexie, page 176). The inspiring novel closes well, but you leave with the sense that this young adult will go on to do great things. That is also the message that teachers want to send to their students. There is no better way to relate and convince them than someone the students' age who has already overcome so many expectations.