

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**The Absolutely True Diary  
of a Part-Time Indian**

by Sherman Alexie

written by Edward Ledford

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# The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

## Objectives

*By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:*

1. discuss ways the author uses images to accentuate the text, and vice versa.
2. define and explain the effects of *hyperbole* and provide examples from the text.
3. define *sarcasm* and provide examples from the text.
4. infer meaning from Ellen Forney's drawings.
5. write an autobiographical short story.
6. discuss the different ways narrative, dialogue, and images create meaning.
7. understand the differences among fiction, nonfiction, biography, and autobiography.
8. discuss how the author's choices in language affect the novel.
9. explain similarities and differences among Arnold Spirit's perception of himself, Sherman Alexie's perception of Arnold Spirit, and the student's own perception of Arnold Spirit.
10. explain differences and similarities between novels and graphic novels.
11. discuss the cultural differences apparent in the book.
12. explain the concept of being different and how it applies to the novel.
13. explain ethnic discrimination and how it functions in the novel.
14. understand the protagonist's changing view of himself.

# The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

## Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. In what ways might Forney's images contribute to the narrative, and how might they detract from the narrative?
2. Which images in the text communicate the most powerful meaning, and which images fail to achieve their apparent purpose?
3. How does Alexie's use of strong language and slang in the narrative enhance or detract from the story?
4. How successfully does Arnold Spirit navigate the divide between the world of the reservation and the world outside the reservation?
5. Discuss the differing views of life on the reservation that *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* advances.
6. How does the concept of being different contribute to the action of the novel?
7. Identify two or three of the most powerful metaphors in the story and explain how they work and contribute to meaning in the narrative.
8. Which character(s) provide(s) the most inspiration and support for Arnold Spirit, and how?
9. In what ways do Arnold Spirit's judgments of other characters change over the course of the novel?
10. How does Arnold Spirit come to understand his own identity by the end of the novel?

# The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

## The Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club

### VOCABULARY

**cerebral** – related to the brain

**epic** – very large or impressive; overwhelming or beyond belief

**impediment** – a barrier or obstacle; something that interferes with movement or progress

**lisp** – a speech difficulty, usually involving *s* and *sh*

**reservation** – an area of land set aside for Native Americans to live on

**stutter** – speech that is interrupted or blocked involuntarily

**susceptible** – prone to or liable

1. What does the narrator, Arnold Spirit, mean by “brain grease”?

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2. What literary term is Arnold Spirit using when he refers to “brain grease”?

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3. Arnold reports that he was supposed to “croak” during surgery when he was an infant, which is a use of slang. What effect does the author’s choice to use slang terms have?

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4. Arnold reports that “our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did....” Arnold seems to be accusing the dentist of what characteristic or characteristics?

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5. Do you think that on the reservation there really was a “Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club”? If not, what does Arnold accomplish by telling us that there is such a club?

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6. According to Arnold, what is the relationship between words and pictures? Which do you think are more effective?

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7. Arnold explains, “I feel important with a pen in my hand. I feel like I might grow up to be somebody important.” Why do you think a simple pen might empower Arnold?

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8. Pick either of the two images Arnold presents in this first chapter and explain how it communicates a meaning. In your opinion, would words have communicated the meaning just as well?

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9. If *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is an autobiography, why is the narrator's name not the same as the author's name? What is the difference between an autobiography and something that is autobiographical?

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10. What does the title, *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, mean?

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## Why Chicken Means So Much to Me

### VOCABULARY

**outsource** – to have some of a company’s work done by people outside the company  
**tsunami** – a wave that causes great destruction when it reaches land

1. The title of the chapter is, “Why Chicken Means So Much to Me.” Why does it mean so much to Arnold Spirit?

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2. According to Arnold, what is so hopeless about his parents?

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3. Of what is Oscar, Arnold’s dog, a symbol?

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## Revenge Is My Middle Name

### VOCABULARY

**avalanche** – a large mass of snow falling down a mountainside  
**hypothermia** – subnormal temperature of the body  
**persistent** – continuing or long-lasting despite difficulty  
**powwow** – a social gathering of Native Americans  
**troll** – a dwarf or giant living in caves or hills  
**vandalism** – a destruction or ruining of public or private property

1. How does Rowdy’s family life compare to Arnold’s?

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2. Traditionally, a powwow is a meeting among Native Americans where there is dancing and discussion, among other festivities. What are powwows like in Arnold’s world?

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3. What is the nature of Rowdy and Arnold’s friendship?

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## Because Geometry Is Not a Country Somewhere Near France

### VOCABULARY

**ambidextrous** – able to use both hands equally well

**compound** – a fenced or walled-in area containing buildings or houses

**hormonal** – affected by hormones, substances produced in the body that influence growth and development

**isosceles triangle** – a triangle with two equal sides

**liberal** – a person who believes that government should be active in supporting social and political change

**minion** – a follower

**perverted** – having or showing desires that are considered not normal or acceptable

1. Why does Arnold Spirit believe that he loves geometry?

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2. What are some reasons Arnold is worried about high school?

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3. What, to Arnold, “is absolutely the saddest thing in the world”?

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4. Arnold writes that the book he threw at Mr. P hit his own heart with “the force of a nuclear bomb.” What literary term is used here, and what is Alexie attempting to show by it?

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