

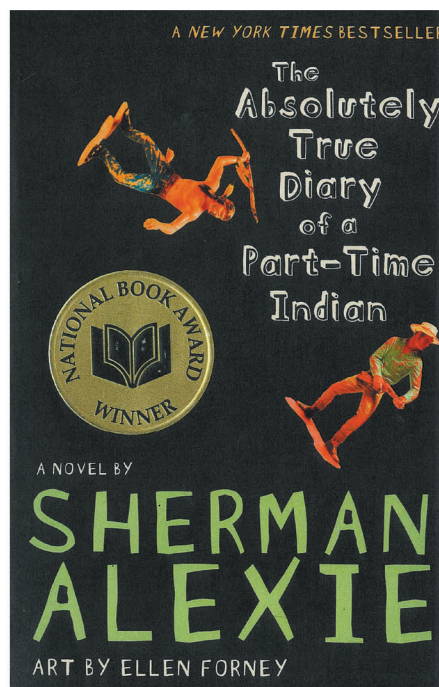
Reading ^{with} Relevance

Building INDEPENDENT READERS and THINKERS

A SAMPLE GUIDE FOR

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

A novel by Sherman Alexie



Recommended for:
Grade Levels
8th-10th

A tool to inspire change

This literacy curriculum is constructed around a content-rich novel that builds students' literacy skills and supports their character development and self-confidence. Students are motivated to read because they relate to the strong, diverse, and resilient characters featured in our selected novels and because each session gives them the opportunity to connect what they've read to their own lives.

Developed, field-tested, and refined in our own tutoring and mentoring programs, this Common Core Standards curriculum has inspired persistently low-performing students to engage with literature, make meaning in their lives, and improve their English language arts skills. Now, *Reading with Relevance* is available to help you dig deep into the social, emotional, and academic needs of your students, whether in your classroom, after-school program, or youth development agency!

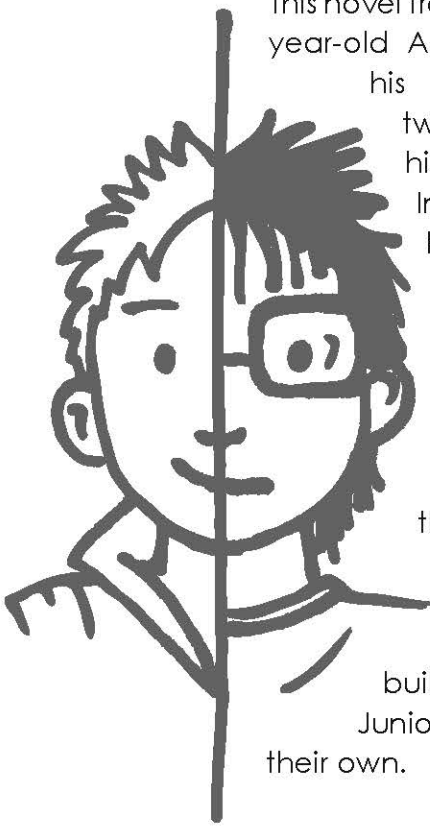
Why *The Absolutely True Diary*

of a Part-Time Indian

This novel traces the story of fourteen-year-old Arnold "Junior" Spirit and his experiences straddling two very different worlds: his home on the Spokane Indian Reservation and his place at the nearby all-white school. We chose this novel for its strong, engaging, and relatable voice and for its powerful attention to social and emotional themes of loss, poverty, hope, perseverance, and identity. This curriculum will inspire students to build connections between Junior's touching life story and their own.

A full teacher's guide includes:

- A facilitator's guide with tips and resources for implementing the curriculum.
- A map of Common Core Standards addressed through this program.
- Fifteen individual lesson plans, including vocabulary, discussion questions, journal prompts, extension activities, and all handouts.
- Two assessments to monitor student progress throughout the program.
- Regular checkpoints to help teachers assess their students' progress on ELA standards.
- A culminating essay-writing unit.
- An appendix with additional teaching resources and activities to continue exploring this novel.



Session 1

pages 1-14

Vocabulary

susceptible (pg 3): adj., easily affected or influenced

impediments (pg 4): n., obstacles or physical defects

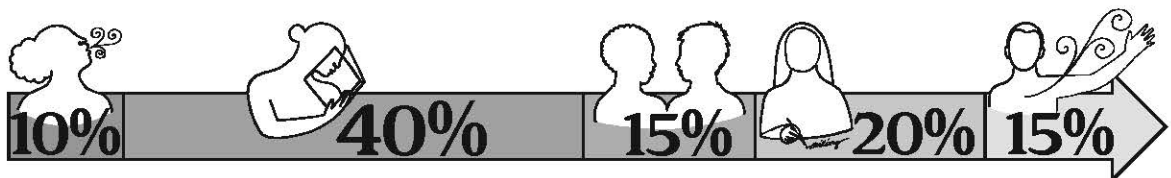
perseverance: (pg 13): n., activity maintained in spite of difficulties

Today's Themes

Today's themes are **being different** and **accomplishing your dreams**. Junior is physically and emotionally different from those around him, which makes him insecure (and he gets beat up!). You might use this opportunity to talk with students about their own differences. Help them think about how Junior's differences might be assets, and how their own differences can be, too. Additionally, in this reading we learn that Junior's parents weren't able to accomplish their dreams because of the circumstances of their lives (they are impoverished American Indians who faced racism and had little opportunities or resources). You might have students think about how racism played into Junior's parents' lack-of-opportunity and what impediments they might have to their own dreams. Encourage them to think about how they will ensure that their dreams are accomplished, no matter what things might try to get in the way!

Story Setup

This book was written in 2007 by Sherman Alexie, an American Indian author who based this book loosely on his own childhood and teenage years. This book takes place near Spokane, Washington on an Indian reservation. Indian reservations are places the U.S. government designated for American Indians to move to when much of their native land was taken over by the government for new, non-native settlers.





During Reading

seizures (pg 2): Junior suffers from seizures because he was born with too much fluid in his brain. Seizures are a sudden attack of convulsions or loss of consciousness resulting from abnormal electrical discharges in the brain.

“We Indians really should be better liars, considering how often we’ve been lied to” (pg 10): American Indians had their land taken from them during the colonization (forceful overtaking by another country) of various parts of what is now the United States. The U.S. government repeatedly lied to Indian tribes and broke treaties (agreed-upon laws).



Discussion Questions

- Describe three things about Junior that are unique.
- What does the cartoon on page six show about Junior's deepest desires? What kind of cartoon would you have drawn?
- How was the prejudice of the white dentist revealed? How does that make you feel?
- What three jobs are available to Junior? What does that tell you about his life?
- Why do you think Junior uses humor to talk about his impediments? How do you think you would cope?
- Why didn't Junior's parents get to achieve their dreams? How does that make you feel?
- Did Junior's dad do the right thing with Oscar? Why or why not?

Journal Prompt

BEING DIFFERENT

- Junior is different from other kids because he has a physical disability and is sensitive and artistic.

How are you different from others?

- » Have you ever felt insecure around your peers because of differences you have?
- » How do you deal with feeling different?
- » How can your differences be assets?

ACCOMPLISHING YOUR DREAMS

- Junior knows his parents weren't able to accomplish their dreams.

What do you need in life to accomplish your dreams?

- » What personal characteristics do you think you need?
- » What outside factors (like school, parents, etc.) do you think you might need?
- » What do you think you could accomplish if you had people in your life always pushing you to pursue your dreams?
- » Do you have anyone in your life like that?

Checkpoint

- **Students should demonstrate a strong command of the standard written conventions of English, while establishing and maintaining a formal writing style.**
 - » Students should use capital letters appropriately, end each sentence with a period, and use other punctuation accurately. Student writing should be formal in style rather than conversational.
 - » For example, "I can relate to the experiences of the main character, Junior, who has faced so many obstacles."

Extension Activity

Junior draws a picture of what his parents would have been if someone had paid attention to their dreams (pg 12). Have students think about their own dreams—what things do they want to accomplish when they are adults? Encourage them to think about what college they want to go to, what career they want to have, if they want a family, to travel, or to help others. Have students draw a picture of their future ideal self. Remind them that people are paying attention to their dreams and that they can make them come true! Be sure they answer the questions and label additional important parts of their pictures.

Materials:

- » Future Self Handout

Name: _____

Example



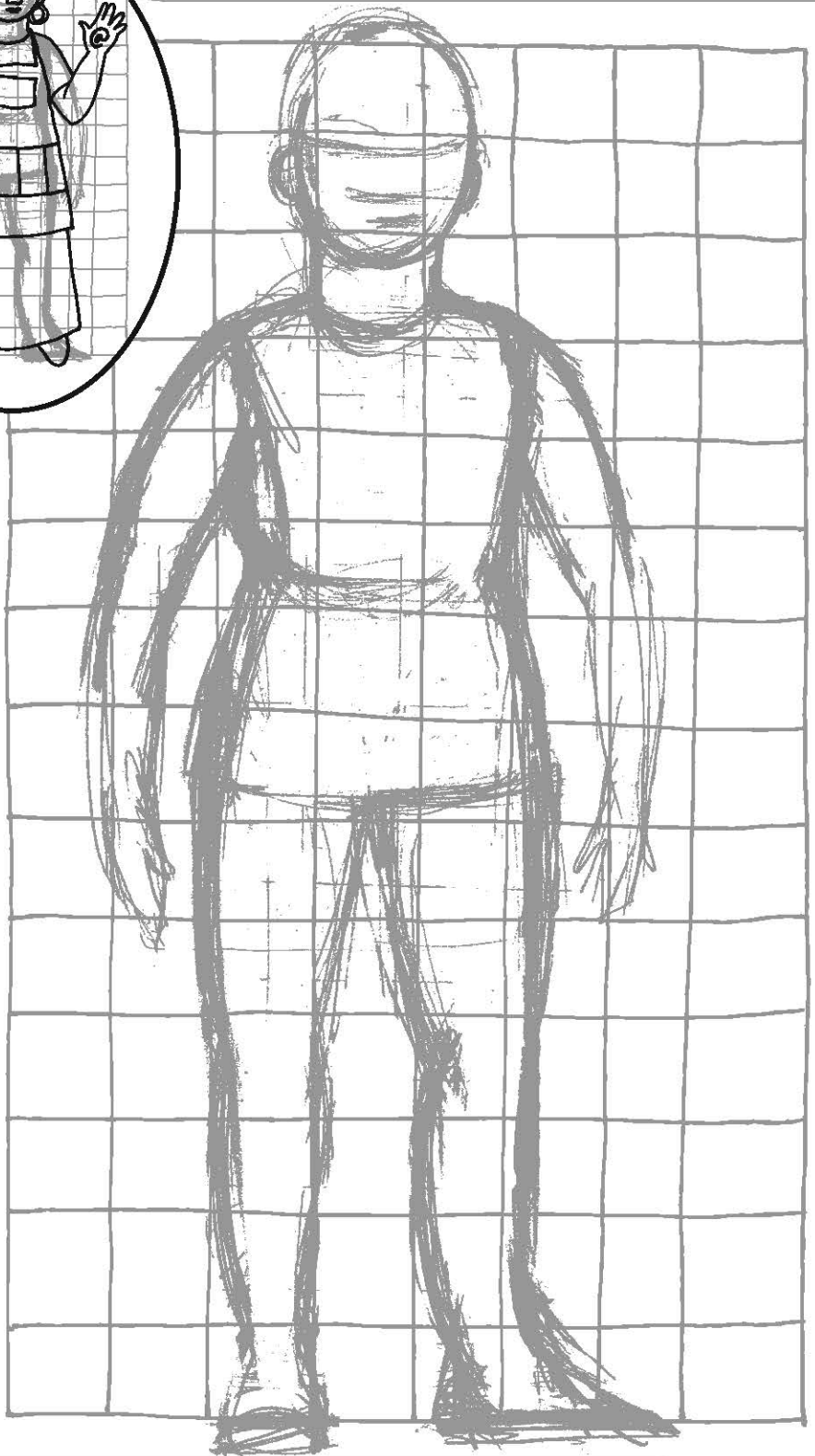
My Future Plans

My job will be:

My hobbies will be:

I will travel to:

My Top Goals



Junior draws a picture of what his parents would have been if someone had paid attention to their dreams (pg 12). Think about your own dreams—what things do you want to accomplish when you are an adult? Draw a picture of your future ideal self. Know that people are paying attention to your dreams and you can make them come true! Fill in the questions, and be sure to label additional important parts of your picture.

Future Self

Appendix

Additional Activities

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Get to Know MFI

Moving Forward Institute is a nonprofit publisher of social justice educational materials. The organization was created by the founders and staff of Moving Forward Education, a multi-generational tutoring and mentoring organization aimed at fostering academic and emotional success for underserved students in California. Since our founding in 2003, MFE has provided tutoring and mentoring services to thousands of students and has trained hundreds of young adults to enter careers in the educational field. This reading curriculum was developed by our leadership team and its advisory group, including credentialed teachers and college professors. This program has been successfully facilitated throughout California by achieving powerful and measurable results for students and schools. To learn more about our organization, or our research and data, please contact us today.

Our Purpose

At Moving Forward Institute, we know that students can be successful learners when their social and emotional needs are met.

We empower educators to meet the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students by using culturally-relevant and gender-responsive reading curricula.

Training and Professional Development Services

While lesson plans are designed to be easily facilitated by classroom teachers and after-school staff alike, our in-person training and professional development services will ensure fully effective implementation of the literacy curricula.

Additionally, we offer technical support, classroom observation, and program evaluation services to help your program be successful. Contact us for more information about these services!

Contact Us

Contact us today to learn more about how the Moving Forward Institute can support your students and staff!

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If your students liked *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-time Indian* . . .

*...they might love some of our other book selections! We suggest that you check out *We Beat the Street*, *The Hunger Games*, or *Street Life*. Please visit our website today to browse our full selection of socially and emotionally rich novel-based curricula!*