

# The absolutely true diary of a part-time indian by sherman alexie: depiction of n...

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Native Americans have made traditions that remain strong after millenniums of them living in North America. Natives have a rich culture and history, much that we do not know of, as they lived on a separate continent completely unknown to us before the 17th century. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007) tells us a tale about Arnold Spirit, sharing in the form of a diary, his experiences over the time period of a few months. The novel is based on several of the author's, Sherman Alexie's, personal experiences from growing up on the reservation as a Native American. The story is set on the Spokane Indian reservation. The protagonist, Arnold, decides to transfer to an all-white high school, located outside of the Indian reservation. Throughout the book, we get to learn about the challenges Arnold faces, both inside and outside of the reservation. The impact that the government has had on the Spokane native reservation has initiated negative effects for the Indians, from living freely out in nature to being forced into living in an enclosed area, however Natives of the Spokane tribe are good at maintaining their important family qualities and historical traditions.

First and foremost, The Absolutely True Diary of a Part - Time Indian explains the typical living conditions of today's Native Americans. Their society is heavily impacted by poverty, and that is what Arnold describes in the beginning of the second chapter. He comes from a poor family, which sadly forced the father into euthanizing Arnold's dog as they were unable to afford its medical payments. Statistics show that Native Americans have the lowest employment rate of all ethnic or racial groups in the United States. The reservations which Native Americans live are owned and managed by the

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government. Just imagine if the government had to approve all your decisions, and with it followed a huge set of regulations. This is exactly how the people living in reservations feel. It is debatable whether the government is doing the best job in looking after the reservations, but one thing is certain, what they are doing now is not helping Native Americans develop a steady economy. With poverty, and not coming anywhere economically speaking, the Natives live in dreadful hopelessness. This has caused countless of natives to resort to alcohol, as a way of forgetting their struggles.

Alcohol is sadly a huge part of the Native American society today. The federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention released a report back in 2008, showing that 11.7 percent of deaths among Native Americans and Alaska Natives between 2001 and 2005 were alcohol-related. Arnold learned from growing up on the reservation that every Indian drinks, and if an Indian does not drink, he or she is the rarest kind of Indian. This statement from Arnold " And you know what the worst part is? The unhappy part? About 90 percent of the deaths have been because of alcohol" shows that he also acknowledges this. Facts make it clear that the percentage of alcoholism is undoubtedly higher in poorer areas. Professor Mark Bellis, the director of the Centre for Public Health at Liverpool John Moores University, has found out that the poorest 20 percent of the population suffer twice the levels of alcohol-related harm as the richest 20 percent. This may have something to do with poverty creating grief and despair and people losing their hopes and dreams when going through hard economic times, so instead of pursuing

their dreams, they drink. Arnold has a very true statement, connecting poverty and dreams: “ But we reservation Indians don’t get to realize our dreams. We don’t get those chances. Or choices. We’re just poor. That’s all we are”. There is also another quote, supporting this point: “ We lost our native land, we lost our languages, we lost our songs and dances. We lost each other. We only know how to lose and be lost”.

On a lighter note, the book expresses the fine family qualities that Native Americans believe in. They believe in extended families, meaning that family is not limited only to the people you share blood with, but also to your entire tribe. Unity is an essential keyword for natives when it comes to family. This section portrays Arnold’s opinion on Indian families: Indian families stick together like Gorilla Glue, the strongest adhesive in the world. My mother and father both lived within two miles of where they were born, and my grandmother lived one mile from where she was born. Ever since the Spokane Indian Reservation was founded back in 1881, nobody in my family had ever lived anywhere else. We Spirits stay in one place. We are absolutely tribal. For good or bad, we don’t leave one another. And now, my mother and father had lost two kids to the outside world. Arnold tells us that his family has never left the Spokane reservation. They have been there since its beginning in 1881. This may be a contributing factor into Arnold having a tough time leaving the reservation to attend school at Reardan. He showed great courage and willpower by leaving the reservation, in an attempt to break the evil cycle many Indians live in, with poverty and alcohol. On the other hand, Native Americans are traditionally meant to be a

nomadic people, as they were constantly on the move before the reservations came along. Some would then argue that Arnold was being more Native American than the rest, as he searched for better opportunities for himself. Furthermore, the novel tells us about different traditions the Spokane tribe celebrate and worship, and have done for a very long time. For instance, Arnold mentions the annual powwow that is being held for the 127th time in the Spokane tribe. He states that it contains a lot of nice things, such as dancing, storytelling, and laughter. Yet, he does not want to a part of it. A powwow is a place where alcohol is present, and Arnold tells us that it often results in violent alcoholic brawling. Arnold is also saying that it is the people who do not care about these Native American traditions, like the powwow, who are most likely to “beat the shit out of any available loser”. This may be due to the fact that they have nothing left to care for, and then start to drink instead of facing reality. This is exactly why Arnold thinks the Native American society does not develop and is something he does not want to be associated with.

In conclusion, there is a lot to learn about Native American culture, society, and history by reading *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part - Time Indian*. The novel expresses the problems of poverty and alcohol that are highly relevant in the native community. This causes a malignant cycle that is perceived as impossible to break free from, by natives. There is also a lot to read about the strong family qualities that the Indians believe in. They consider the entire tribe as a family, as they are united not by blood, but by the community as a whole. Lastly, the novel also contains some information on

the traditions Indians have. One that is frequently mentioned is the Powwow, which is an annual social gathering for the Spokane tribe. The unfortunate situation Native Americans have gotten into has brought upon destructive behavior, which is causing no drive nor ambition in their society. Yet, the pleasant Native American qualities and traditions of life remain solid.