

The red convertible

Government, Army



The Red Convertible In "The Red Convertible", written by Louise Erdrich, Henry Lamartine makes three unforgettable trips off the Chippewa reservation. The first journey, taken with his brother, Lyman, becomes a pleasurable summer trip across the country. The next time Henry leaves is when he is drafted by the military to fight in the Vietnam War. The third and final time he ventures off the reservation is when he takes a drive to the river to commit suicide. Although each of these journeys are different, the red convertible that the brothers share, ties the endeavors together. While walking down a street in Winnipeg, both of their pockets full of money, Henry and Lyman find a car for sale. "Then, before we had thought it over at all, the car belonged to us and our pockets were empty" (111). The brothers, "free of daily responsibilities, they take to the open road in their flashy automobile" (Bochynski, par. 2). Along the way, the brothers pick up a hitchhiker, Susy, and take her home to Alaska. They spend the remainder of the summer in Alaska with Susy and her family. When the weather starts turning colder, the brothers begin to head home. At this point, "the car itself symbolizes many things: the boys' youth, freedom, spontaneity, partnership, and ultimately Henry's connection with Lyman and home in general" (Puchalik, par. 2) When they return home, they find that Henry, "who has volunteered for military service, has been called to report for duty" (Bochynski, par. 2), thus his second adventure from the reservation. Henry tries to give Lyman his key to the car before he leaves for the war but Lyman dismisses the gift. "Lyman considered the car as Henry's alone and valued it as if it were taking Henry's place while he was away" (Puchalik, par. 2). To Lyman, the car becomes an intangible part of Henry. During Henry's

absence, his brother restores the car. He writes letters to Henry telling him of the repairs even though Henry never replies. " Henry's lack of correspondence with Lyman symbolizes his newly broken connection with home and his previously happy past" (Puchalik, par. 2). When Henry returns from the war, he cannot reconnect with his past life. Even the red car does not bring life to Henry. In desperation, Lyman destroys the car in hopes that Henry will restore it. " When Henry repairs the car, it becomes his symbolic effort to repair himself and to reconnect with all that the car represents, although he is unsuccessful" (Puchalik, par. 3). Henry asks Lyman to go for a ride with him down to the river. Sitting on the banks, " Lyman becomes aware of a squeezing sensation in his chest and realizes that he is feeling the same anguish that Henry is experiencing at that moment" (Bockynski, par. 5).