

Stages 10

STARTING POINT

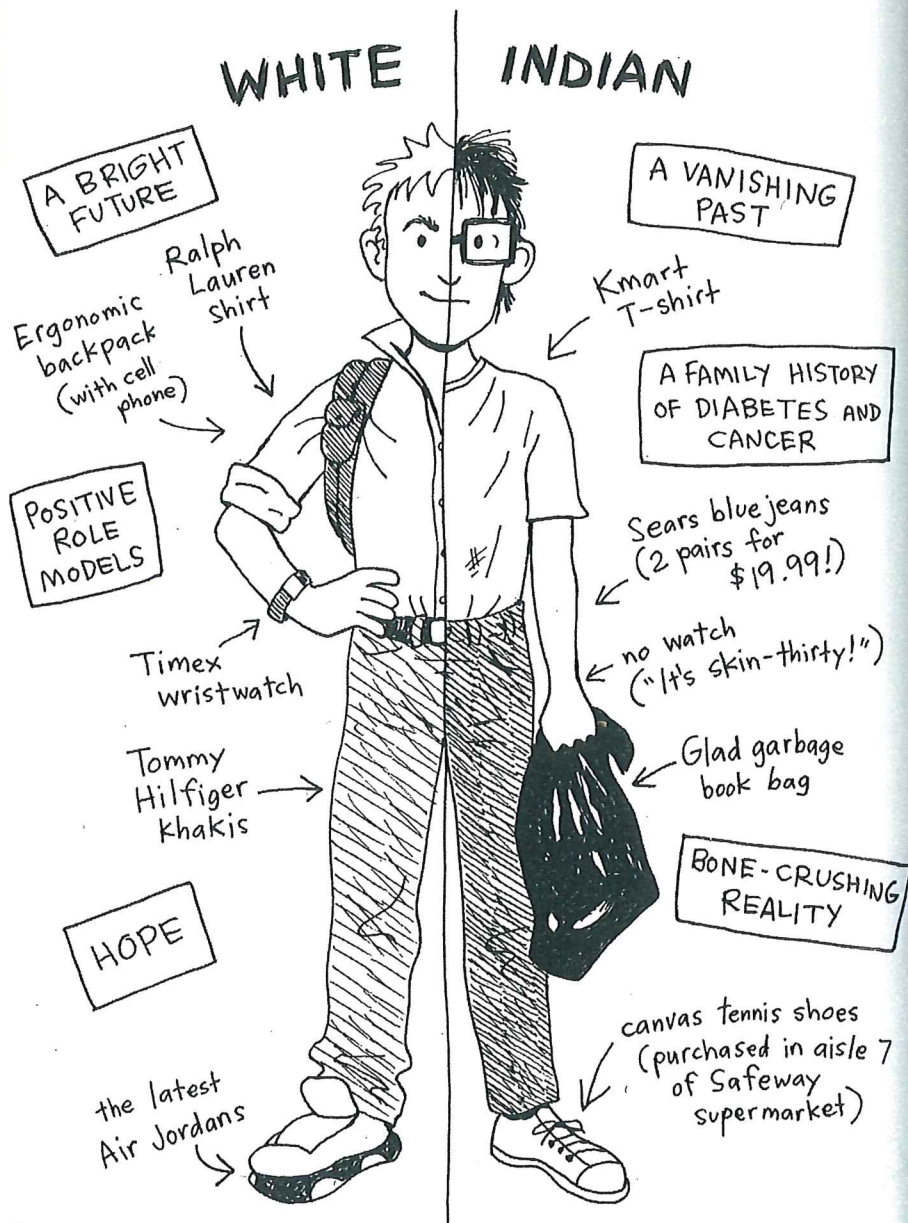
This illustration from *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* shows the contrasts between the lives of young whites and young Native Americans. What general statements can you make about the differences between these two worlds?

Sherman

Alexie (1966-) is an award-winning poet, writer and filmmaker. He is a Native American and grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Washington State. Alexie's work explores the lives of Native American people with compassion and humour. His 2007 novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is semi-autobiographical.

Ellen Forney created the artwork in *Part-Time Indian*.

compassion medfølelse
semi-autobiographical
 delvis selvbiografisk



Sherman Alexie

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

Junior lives on the Spokane Indian reservation, "located one million miles north of Important, and two billion miles west of Happy." When his maths teacher, Mr P, passes out the geometry books on the first day of high school, Junior discovers that his copy once belonged to his mother. His school and tribe are so poor and sad that the students have to study from the same books as their parents. This makes him so angry that he throws the book – and it smashes into Mr P's face and breaks his nose. Junior is suspended from school. A few days later, Mr. P comes to his home to talk to him.

"You're the smartest kid in the school. And I don't want you to fail. I don't want you to fade away. You deserve better."

I didn't feel smart.

"I want you to say it," Mr. P said.

"Say what?"

"I want you to say that you deserve better."

I couldn't say it. It wasn't true. I mean, I wanted to have it better, but I didn't deserve it. I was the kid who threw books at teachers.

"You are a good kid. You deserve the world."

Wow, I wanted to cry. No teacher had ever said anything so nice, so incredibly nice, to me.

"Thank you," I said.

"You're welcome," he said. "Now say it."

"I can't."

And then I did cry. Tears rolled down my cheeks. I felt so weak.

"I'm sorry," I said.

Traveling between Reardan and Wellpinit, between the little white town and the reservation, I always felt like a stranger.

I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other.

Junior

Find Spokane, Washington on a map.

Indian reservation
indianerreservat
fade away visne bort
deserve fortjener

"You don't have to be sorry for anything," he said. "Well, you better be sorry for hitting me, but you don't have to feel bad about crying."

"I don't like to cry," I said. "Other kids, they beat me up when I cry. Sometimes they make me cry so they can beat me up for crying."

"I know," he said. "And we let it happen. We let them pick on you."

"Rowdy protects me."

"I know Rowdy is your best friend, but he's, he's, he's, he's -," Mr. P stuttered. He wasn't sure what to say or do. "You know that Rowdy's dad hits him, don't you?"

"Yeah," I said. Whenever he came to school with a black eye, Rowdy made sure to give black eyes to two kids picked at random.

"Rowdy is just going to get meaner and meaner," Mr. P said.

"I know Rowdy has a temper and stuff, and he doesn't get good grades or anything, but he's been nice to me since we were kids. Since we were babies. I don't even know why he's been nice."

"I know, I know," Mr. P said. "But, listen, I want to tell you something else. And you have to promise me you'll never repeat it."

"Okay," I said.

"Promise me."

"Okay, okay, I promise I won't repeat it."

"Not to anyone. Not even your parents."

"Nobody."

"Okay, then," he said and leaned closer to me because he didn't even want the trees to hear what he was going to say. "You have to leave this reservation."

"I'm going to Spokane with my dad later."

"No, I mean you have to leave the rez *forever*."

"What do you mean?"

"You were right to throw that book at me. I deserved to get smashed in the face for what I've done to Indians. Every white person on this rez should get smashed in the face. But, let me tell you this. All the Indians should get smashed in the face, too."

I was shocked. Mr. P was *furious*.

"The only thing you kids are being taught is how to give

pick on hakke på
protects beskytter
stuttered stammet
black eye blåveis
at random tilfeldig
meaner slemmere
temper temperament
leaned lente
rez forkortelse for reservation
furious rasende

up. Your friend Rowdy, he's given up. That's why he likes to hurt people. He wants them to feel as bad as he does."

"He doesn't hurt me."

"He doesn't hurt you because you're the only good thing in his life. He doesn't want to give that up. It's the only thing he hasn't given up."

Mr. P grabbed me by the shoulders and leaned so close to me that I could smell his breath.

Onions and garlic and hamburger and shame and pain.

"All these kids have given up," he said. "All your friends. All the bullies. And their mothers and fathers have given up, too. And their grandparents gave up and their grandparents before them. And me and every other teacher here. We're all defeated."

Mr. P was crying.

I couldn't believe it.

I'd never seen a sober adult cry.

"But not you," Mr. P said. "You can't give up. You won't give up. You threw that book in my face because somewhere inside you refuse to give up."

I didn't know what he was talking about. Or maybe I just didn't want to know.

Jeez, it was a lot of pressure to put on a kid. I was carrying the burden of my race, you know? I was going to get a bad back from it.

"If you stay on this rez," Mr. P said, "they're going to kill you. I'm going to kill you. We're all going to kill you. You can't fight us forever."

"I don't want to fight anybody," I said.



shame skam
defeated her: resignert,
 gitt opp
sober edru
refuses nekter
burden byrde
bad back dårlig rygg

seizures anfall

"You've been fighting since you were born," he said. "You fought off that brain surgery. You fought off those seizures. You fought off all the drunks and drug addicts. You kept your hope. And now, you have to take your hope and go somewhere where other people have hope."

I was starting to understand. He was a math teacher. I had to add my hope to somebody else's hope. I had to multiply hope by hope.

"Where is hope?" I asked. "Who has hope?"

"Son," Mr. P said. "You're going to find more and more hope the farther and farther you walk away from this sad, sad, sad reservation."

UNDERSTANDING

- 1 Answer the following questions.
 - a Who is the smartest kid in school?
 - b What words does Mr P want to hear Junior say?
 - c Why does Junior start crying?
 - d Who is Junior's best friend and what does Mr P think about their friendship?
 - e What does Mr P tell Junior he has to do?
 - f Why is Mr P furious?
 - g What does Mr P say that young people are being taught on the reservation?
 - h Junior says "I'd never seen a sober adult cry." When has Junior seen adults cry?

Freedom ahead?
Road sign near
Spokane,
Washington.

