

The Lone Ranger & Tonto Fistfight in Heaven

by Sherman Alexie

(Published in 1993, 2005)

Approved for use in English III or IV

Summary of the Work:

This work chronicles modern life on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Victor, through whose eyes we view the community, is strongly aware of Native American traditions but wonders whether his ancestors view today's Indians--mired in alcohol, violence, and an almost palpable sense of despair--with sympathy or disgust. In spite of the bleakness of reservation life, the text brims with humor and passion as it juxtaposes ancient customs with such contemporary artifacts as electric guitars and diet Pepsi. The author of two previous poetry collections, Alexie writes with grit and lyricism that perfectly capture the absurdity of a proud, dignified people living in the squalor, struggling to survive in a society they disdain. (From Library Journal)

Bogey, Dan. "Prepub Alert." Library Journal. Vol. 118. No. 9 (1993): 53.

Rationale:

This work is appropriate for senior-level students who will be drawn in by Alexie's humorous, if somewhat critical, picture of the plight of modern Indians. Many of the stories are set in nearby Washington, on the Spokane Indian Reservation. As his characters seek to blend ancient history and culture with contemporary issues and modern settings, students will be able to explicate the myriad lessons found in each short story and in the interplay between the stories.

This text could be used to specifically emphasize cultural and personal identity, coming-of-age/Bildungsroman, survival, memoir, descriptive writing, short stories, and more.

The collection can also be analyzed in conjunction with *Smoke Signals* (1998), a film adaptation of the work. *Smoke Signals* (PG-13), was the first motion picture with an exclusively Native creative team (written, directed, produced, and acted by Native Americans) to be distributed by a major motion picture corporation (Miramax Films). It won numerous awards, including several awards at the Sundance Film Festival, and the Best Film at the 1998 American Indian Film Festival.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Kirkus Reviews (1996)
Booklist (1993)
Library Journal starred

"Critical Essay on the Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" by Chris Semansky in Novels for Students 2003. (Gale)

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

PEN/Hemingway Award: Best First Book of Fiction Citation Winner
Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award
Washington State Governor's Writers Award
The Best American Short Stories 1994 includes "This is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona"

Readability

- Lexile Score: 830
- Readability Level: 7.9

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2004

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

There are many similarities between both the characters and the events in Alexie's stories and his own life. Through his storytelling, Alexie creates a mythology that acts as a stunning depiction of real-life, searching for meaning, and trying to combine modern influence with unique history and Indian culture.

Connection to the Curriculum:

This text fulfills the requirement for studying Native American literature, while asking readers to examine the trials modern Indians face as they search for, and try to assert, cultural and personal identity in a world filled with misrepresentation of Indians and Indian culture.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

The reading level allows for use at the Applied, Regular, and Honors levels. The potential for critical analysis and discourse could easily push this book to an Honors level.