

Reconciliation with the reservation and himself, or: Has Junior grown up?

1. Describe the report card on page 196 and explain what it means in the context of Junior's story.

The top line features Arnold's name not as that of a student, but as if he were an old-fashioned adult academic (Mr., Esq., PhD). At the same time, using an asterisk he makes fun of the academic title PhD ("pretty hot dude") in the margin. Below this is a play on the school's name: Rear + dumb (for the 2nd syllable "dan"), to which Arnold has added the adjective "high" in brackets. Next to it is the Indian mascot of the school, making panting noises as though he has just run a race. Another play on words makes up the next line, where "Freshman" has become "fresh mint" with the drawing of a mint candy next to it. A list of the subjects and grades follows, which may well be a correct rendering

of Arnold's achievements. The B + in "Geology" might allude to the incident with the Science teacher (and the subject probably is Science, not Geology). The B- in what is probably meant to be woodwork class reflects the physical handicaps Arnold has told us of, such as bad eyesight and oversized hands (p. 7, ll. 6–14). The whole cartoon reflects Arnold's/Junior's joy at having completed his first year at Reardan and at being accepted by the others. If he didn't feel like this, he would not be able to make fun of his report card in that way.



2. Sum up Junior's thoughts about Indian Reservations and discuss his realization that his attempt to leave the rez might kill him, but staying would have killed him, too (p. 198, ll. 9–10).

Reservations were originally meant as a kind of prison camp for Native American tribal members (cf. p. 198, ll. 19–23), but today Indians just see them as their homelands and hardly ever want to leave them, they even feel betrayed by individuals who do leave. Junior knows that leaving the rez might be dangerous, maybe even kill him as it killed his sister, but he also knows that staying on the rez would certainly kill him because it would have frustrated him to live there and he would probably have turned to alcohol and eventually be killed by it.



3. Study Junior's list of tribes he belongs to and explain why this list makes him think he will "be okay" (p. 199, l. 11).

Arnold realizes that there are many different ways of defining your own identity, and because of that, he will always have somebody to fall back on from one of the tribes to which he belongs.

Make such a list for yourself and list at least three tribes you belong to.

- individual answers -

4. The last chapter begins with a description of the beauty of the reservation and goes on to tell a story about Rowdy and Junior that happened when they were both a lot younger. Discuss what the effect of such a digression near the end of the novel is and why the author might have wanted to achieve this effect.

(Extra) When Junior points out the beauty of his homeland, the rez, he is making it clear that he is still a member of the tribe that lives there, and that this is his real home, even though he has become only a "part-time Indian" through his transfer to the white school. His childhood memories of fun times with Rowdy on the rez make their friendship come alive again for Junior and remind the reader that the most important thing in Junior's life is still missing at the end of his school year, i. e. being best friends with Rowdy.

The memory of successfully climbing the pine tree with Rowdy is paralleled with Junior's present and his successful "survival" of his freshman year at Reardan. It also brings home to us, the readers, that he was probably destined to confront challenges from the start (cf. also what Mr. P says, p. 44, ll. 2–6).



5. The novel finishes with the words: "We didn't keep score." (p. 210, l. 26) Explain what you make out of this last sentences.

These words have a literal as well as a figurative meaning. Junior and Rowdy really didn't keep score while playing basketball, no counted points revealed who's better than the other. Reminiscing about old times and the memories of their friendship while doing something together that they have both always liked (i.e. playing basketball), they come to terms with one another, each other's decisions, actions and character. At least in this moment, there is no winner or loser in either the game just played this summer day or in the merry, exciting and entertaining encounter of their friendship.

adapted from:

Becker-Ross, I. und Porteous-Schwieger, G. (2012). *Sherman Alexie. The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian. Teacher's Manual*. Berlin: Cornelsen Verlag.

Alexie, Sherman (2007). *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Berlin: Cornelsen Verlag.