

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian



Harkness Seminar Assignment for Thursday, October 20, 2016

What is it?

A Harkness Seminar is a **student-led** discussion that allows us to delve deeply into the text. Because this is our first official seminar, I am going to help you prepare.

- **The text** – Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*
 - **The leader** - Offers the initial question then plays a dual role as leader and participant. (I usually don't select a leader, but I wait for a leader to arise. It's everyone's responsibility to keep the conversation moving, but the leader generally assumes a larger responsibility).
 - **The participants** - Study the text in advance, listen actively, and share ideas using evidence from the text for support. You should also connect your ideas and arguments to outside texts.
- ❖ **Your task: Think about what Sherman Alexie's text offers us. In other words, what can we learn from studying the text closely?** You will prepare five meaningful questions for our class discussion. The questions should be based on specific passages from the text. Again, because this is our first time with this discussion format, I am going to give you a few ideas. You might start by thinking about major themes in the text. For example, what role does poverty play in developing a person's identity? What about place? Does your childhood community determine your future?

Step #1: Start by looking closely at a passage, chapter or theme that you intrigues you.

Step #2: Find Evidence from *Absolutely True*. Find specific examples from the book that lead you to meaningful questions.

Step #3: Create 3 Quote Sandwiches. These sandwiches will help you to prepare your questions. The sandwiches will also help you to participate in the seminar.

- Introduction gives context. Tells what is happening at the time.
- Quote. Words taken directly from the text.
- Paraphrase. A simple rephrasing of the quote.
- Commentary. What is the significance of the quote?

Step #4 Create 5 Meaningful Questions.

Quote Sandwich Example (introduction, quote, paraphrase, commentary)

Introduction: Junior is sitting at home suspended from school.

Quote: "We weren't trying to kill Indian people. We were trying to kill Indian culture."

Paraphrase: Mr. P tells Junior the truth about how the whites have looked at Indians throughout history.

Commentary: Junior realizes now that the odds are against him to succeed. Even the schools and the government want to keep him down. He and his family have been victimized from the very beginning. This line from Mr. P serves as a type of confession. It's interesting that Mr. P feels that he must tell Junior this information. It seems like maybe Mr. P is trying to make up for past wrongs by helping Junior to escape this hopeless situation.

Quote Sandwich #1 (introduction, quote, paraphrase, commentary)

Quote Sandwich #2 (introduction, quote, paraphrase, commentary)

Quote Sandwich #3 (introduction, quote, paraphrase, commentary)

Discussion Questions: Write down 5 discussion questions that you might introduce to the group. Remember, good discussion questions are “open ended” and produce more than just “yes/no” answers, or answers that are easily found in the book. **Ask deep, “so what” questions to enrich your discussion!**

❖ **Question:** Why does Mr. P feel that he must help Junior?

❖ **Question:**

❖ **Question:**

❖ **Question:**

❖ **Question:**

❖ **Question:**



What am I supposed to do when I'm in a Harkness Seminar?

- Refer to the text when needed during the discussion. A seminar is not a test of memory. You are not "learning a subject"; your goal is to understand the ideas, issues, and values reflected in the text.
- Ask questions about the reading or issues related to the reading.
- Ask for clarification of something you don't understand.
- Make judgments that can be defended with the text.
- Locate facts and examples that can be cited as evidence for an argument.
- Connect the reading to the real world
- Do not participate if you are not prepared. A seminar should not be a bull session.

- Stick to the point currently under discussion; make notes about ideas you want to come back to.
- Move the seminar forward—avoid repetitions.
- Don't raise hands; take turns speaking.
- Listen attentively and patiently.
- Exhibit mature behavior with patience and self-control.
- Speak up so that all can hear you.
- Talk to each other, not just to the leader or teacher.
- Be aware of time in terms of how long you speak and in terms of the needs of others to speak
- Use specific examples when you speak and avoid generalizations.
- Avoid speaking for the group; use "I statements" when possible.
- Avoid interrupting someone when he or she is speaking and avoid side conversations.

How will you be graded?

- Come to the seminar prepared with five excellent discussion questions, three quote "sandwiches", and an annotated (marked with post-its) copy of The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian **(10 points)**
- Participate multiple times in a **meaningful** way during the seminar. To participate in a meaningful way means to make a comment, make a connection to the text, ask a question that builds on what other participants are saying **(20 points)**
- Being an academic participant. I will be watching your conduct and grading you accordingly **(10 points)**. Do you...

*Speak loudly and clearly.

*Stick with the subject.

*Avoid inappropriate language (slang, technical terms, sloppy diction, etc.).

*Seem prepared/interested.

*Listen to others respectfully.