



## **Memoir, Identity and History in the Works of Sherman Alexie: An Insider's Outsider Perspective**

Curriculum Unit 15.01.02

by James P. Brochin

### **Introduction and Rational**

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"I wish I were magical, but I am really just a poor-ass reservation kid living with his poor-ass family on the poor-ass Spokane Indian Reservation." (From *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* by Sherman Alexie) ("ATDPTI")

"Yep, my daddy was an undependable drunk. But he'd never missed any of my organized games, concerts, plays or picnics. He may not have loved me perfectly, but he loved me as well as he could." (ATDPTI)

Victor Joseph: "You gotta look mean or people won't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean. You gotta look like a warrior! You gotta look like you just came back from killing a buffalo!"

Thomas Build the Fire: "But our tribe never hunted buffalo - we were fishermen."

Victor Joseph: "What? You want to look like you just came back from catching a fish? This ain't "Dances With Salmon" you know!" (From *Smoke Signals*)

"I used to think the world was broken down by tribes,' I said. 'By Black and White. By Indian and White. But I know this isn't true. The world is only broken into two tribes: the people who are assholes and the people who are not." (ATDPTI)

"You know what a reservation is? A prisoner of war camp. Where they keep defeated people." (Sioux Indian man, from interview in Fort Peck Reservation, Bicentennial Summer, 1976)

Sherman Alexie is one of the very few writers capable of making students laugh, cry, get angry, and gain a deeply personalized understanding of American Indian history and identity. He uses irony and humor, and expresses them in a conversational, nearly always irreverent style liberally sprinkled with cursing. But then, he is also poetic, deeply reverent, and grateful for his identity. How did he develop his identity? By choosing to leave the reservation. He is an insider's outsider, with a perspective that is a gold mine for students to learn history and especially to express themselves. Teenagers are by nature insider outsiders, with powerful antennae capable of figuring out what is true and what is false. Alexie will be the main focus of this unit, and,

combining a close study of his writing with at least two films, *Little Big Man* and *Smoke Signals*, along with words and images from *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices* and other texts, students will develop some of the following skills: journalistic writing, memoir analysis and writing, film review writing, critical analysis of Indian History, as well as gain some appreciation of the varied experiences of Native communities, and podcast recording of class presentations or discussions.

The New Haven School District's history curriculum, as far as Native American History goes, is sorely lacking. In most textbooks the subject is mostly limited to the Trail of Tears, westward expansion, and attempts to impose assimilation. The textbooks' treatment of the subject essentially stops in the 1870's. Native American History is not included in the New Haven District US History II curriculum and there are no questions about the subject in any New Haven District US History II Examination. There is no effort to explain, interpret, or to deeply describe the origins of the reservation system and its evolution to its current form. And there is no effort whatsoever to explain history's effect on Indian identity in the present.

## Academic Setting and Assessments

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Next year, for the second time in many years, I will be teaching Honors US History II/Civics and Journalism. All classes will be block classes of about 80-90 minutes each, two or three times a week. This should present greater opportunities for a rigorous, rewarding and deep treatment of the subject.

My students generally understand the fact that reservations came about, but have little understanding of their evolution, purpose and near extinction during the termination era during the 1970's. One of the problems with understanding Native American tribes, their rights, and their supporters is that "[p]ublic understanding of distinctive Indian issues comes slowly, and understandably so. Indian rights are indeed "special" in that they are uniquely complex and history-based, emerging from the distant past rather than arising from well-known modern circumstances." (Wilkinson, *Blood Struggle*, at 266-267)

US History II and Civics are consecutive half-year courses, and the unit could be taught in either. The unit could be taught in an honors class, and perhaps also in a college level class. Journalism class may be a better fit for the unit, as it's focus is a writer who has a journalistic, conversational, ironic and inviting style. The segments of the unit have as their objectives improvement in writing in a memoir style. Journalism students will find Alexie inspiring as a writer, screenwriter, and filmmaker. Part of the unit has been previewed by having students in Journalism class read ATDPTI excerpts and actively view *Smoke Signals*. The reaction has been positive, very positive.

## Unit Purpose, Overview and Essential Questions

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The District's curriculum's shortcomings may be addressed by having my student's research, write, discuss, and record podcasts of oral presentations on some of the following topics:

1) What are the lessons to be learned from the origins and evolution of the Reservation system, focusing from

the late 1800's to the threat of termination in the 1970's, including learning about the Indian Wars of the later 1800's? We will do this partly by viewing *Little Big Man* as a way to get some history and many tall tales. Students will learn the language of satire and irony, historical tragedy, and mythology. Irony doesn't come naturally to teenagers. Jack Crabb is an insider outsider for reasons that the film makes clear, and is the perfect narrator for the film. Crabb is 121 years old when the film begins, and he speaks his memories into an oral historian's tape: "I am, beyond a doubt, the last of the old-timers. My name is Jack Crabb. And I am the sole white survivor of the Battle of Little Big Horn, uh, popularly known as Custer's Last Stand." The film is a series of flashbacks: Crabb kidnapped by Cheyenne Indians, who call themselves the "Human Beings" and who adopt him as one of their own; Old Lodgeskins, their chief, becomes Crabb's adoptive Grandfather. Crabb captured by white soldiers and brought back to white society to be raised by a cruel Reverend and his bawdy wife Louise Pendrake; Crabb as partners with a snake oil salesman; Crabb married to his Swedish wife Olga; Crabb meeting General George Armstrong Custer who advises them to go west after Crabb's store fails; Olga is kidnapped by the Human Beings; Crabb returns to the Cheyenne looking for Olga; Crabb becomes Custer's "mule skinner" while looking for Olga, and is shocked when Custer's soldiers massacre an Indian village; Crabb discovers the young Sunshine who is pregnant by a dead Cheyenne Crabb; Crabb returns to the Human Beings with Sunshine. Crabb finally joins Custer as a scout. Saying more would give away too much.

The white characters in the film are used largely as objects of ridicule though satire. They act out counter-stereotypes. If whites have been largely presented in history or popular books as culturally, religiously, and educationally superior to Indians, the film turns that on its head: The Indians are not all alike: the Pawnee are presented as cruel and willing partners of the whites and endlessly trying to win approval from whites; Custer is sadistic and cruel; white soldiers all hate Indians; Grandfather is wise, gentle, and brave; most of the Human Beings are brave and just trying to survive the onslaught of the whites; the white snake oil salesman is an atheist who believes that lying to make a living is alright; Louise Pendrake becomes a prostitute. Jack Crabb is only as good, brave, and loyal as his upbringing by the Human Beings made him. There is practically nothing to recommend white society in the film. It serves the purposes of 1970's white America, which had a bad conscience about the Indian wars of the late 1800's. Indians' main destiny in the film is to disappear. Nothing could be done to stop the whites.

Here are some illustrative quotes from the film:

Jack Crabb: Grandfather, I am glad to see you.

Old Lodge Skins: Glad to see you too, my son. My heart soars like a hawk. Do you want to eat? I won't eat with you, because I'm gonna' die soon.

Jack Crabb: Die, grandfather?

Old Lodge Skins: Yes, my son. I want to die in my own land, where Human Beings are buried in the sky.

Jack Crabb: Well, why do you want to die, grandfather?

Old Lodge Skins: Because there is no other way to deal with the White Man, my son. Whatever else you can say about them, it must be admitted: you cannot get rid of them.

Jack Crabb No, I suppose not, grandfather.

Old Lodge Skins: There is an endless supply of White Man. But there always has been a limited number of

Human Beings. We won today... we won't win tomorrow.

Jack Crabb No, I suppose not, grandfather.

Old Lodge Skins: Come out and fight! It is a good day to die! Thank you for making me a Human Being! Thank you for helping me to become a warrior. Thank you for my victories, and for my defeats. Thank you for my vision, and the blindness in which I saw further. You make all things and direct them in their ways, oh Grandfather. And now, you have to silence the Human beings! We'll soon walk a road... that leads nowhere. I am going to die now, unless death wants to fight. And I ask you for the last time: to grant me my old power to make things happen.

Old Lodge Skins: [ *Proceeds to lie down on the ground. After a few seconds, he props himself up and adds one more thought* ] Take care of my son here. See that he doesn't go crazy.

2) As part of the historical record about the Indian Wars, students will evaluate classic photographs by Edward Curtis and others who recorded what they considered to be the remnants of traditional Indian Culture, along with text, from the book *Touch the Earth*. Students will learn how to describe photos in detail, and to analyze the effect that these images have had on identity, most especially white society's identification of Indian life, and the implicit sense that Indian society was disappearing. Here is the book's critique of the white man, which sounds very similar to the words of Old Lodge Skins in *Little Big Man* :

"We did not think of the great open plains, the beautiful rolling hills, and the winding streams with tangled growth, as 'wild'.

Only to the white man was nature a 'wilderness' and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame.

Earth was bountiful and we were surrounded with blessings of the Great Mystery.

Not until the hairy man from the east came and with brutal frenzy heaped injustices upon us and the families we loved was it 'wild' for us.

When the very animals of the forest began fleeing from his approach, then it was that for us the 'wild west' began."

-Chief Luther Standing Bear of the Oglala band of Sioux

"The white people never cared for land or deer or bear. When we Indians kill meat, we eat it all up. When we dig roots we make little holes. When we built houses, we make little holes. When we burn grass for grasshoppers, we don't ruin things. We shake down acorns and pine nuts. We don't chop down the trees. We only use dead wood. But the White people plow up the ground, pull down the trees, kill everything. The tree says, "Don't. I am sore. Don't hurt me." But they chop it down and cut it up. The spirit of the land hates them. They blast out trees and stir it up to its depths. They saw up the trees. That hurts them. The Indians never hurt anything, but the White people destroy all. They blast rocks and scatter them on the ground. The rock says, "Don't. You are hurting me." But the White people pay no attention. When the Indians use rocks, they take little round ones for their cooking... How can the spirit of the earth like the White man? Everywhere the White man has touched it, it is sore."

- Wintu Holy Woman

The photos and most of the quotes from *Touch the Earth* reveal mostly a white society's elegiac view of American Indian culture and history. This is a presentation of what was or what may have been true about some aspects of tribal culture and values in the 1800's, and is rooted in the values and concerns, especially guilt, of 1971 white America. What is left out of the book is any hint of tribal life and identity in 1971, when I bought the book as a high school senior. It fit perfectly into a Woodstock Festival, Earth Day, anti-Vietnam War, Kent State, Black Panther Trial, Outward Bound, anti-Nixon bookshelf, but it got me nowhere closer to experiencing American Indians as individuals or members of a tribe or culture, on or off the reservation, in 1971 or anytime since.

3) What were the origins and evolution of the concept of Tribal Sovereignty/Self -Determination? Charles Wilkinson's book *Blood Struggle*, summarizes both in the book jacket, as follows: "There are some three million Native Americans in the United States today. Indian nations hold reservations totaling 60,000,000 acres countrywide . . . These tribes are sovereign nations. They control their own schools, colleges, courts, police, banks, supermarkets, and more - and in their story lies a modern miracle." (the failed efforts at "termination" and the growth of tribal sovereignty, both historically recent).

*Blood Struggle's* heart is a legal history rooted in mid to later 20<sup>th</sup> Century struggles, many successful, to 1) soundly defeat the termination/assimilation efforts by Congress; 2) recover tribal lands and reestablish other rights such as salmon fishing, religion, gaming, and self determination, and 3) reduce poverty, improve tribal health, halt massive adoption of Indian out of Indian families, create schools and colleges, and protect culture and religions. The book has value for its specificity and for its detail. Nothing in the book lumps all tribes together and stereotypes are banished in favor of discreet stories. This book may be the perfect link to Alexie's writings, because he is an individual, with a particular tribal history and identity, defiantly so. *Touch the Earth's* patronizing simplifications are discarded for the microcosmic and miraculous.

4) Although Alexie is listed here as a later focus of the Unit, because he is chronologically later and because by hearing him after the other materials, his writing makes sense. There is another option here, to begin with Alexie and to return to his writing throughout the other segments of the unit, as a foil, in order to critically engage with *Little Big Man* , *Touch the Earth* , *Blood Struggle* , and *Strong Hearts* . How does Sherman Alexie express the essential human elements of reservation life and Indian identity and history as an insider's outsider? For this, students will read from *ATDPTI* in segments throughout, and finally will view *Smoke Signals*. Alexie addresses stereotypes, one way by facing the fact of reservation alcoholism, and expresses universal themes, using his unique style. Students will read aloud, will analyze, and will record one or more podcasts. This will be the thematic heart of the unit.

"I'm fourteen years old and I've been to forty-two funerals.

That's really the biggest difference between Indians and white people.

A few of my white classmates have been to a grandparent's funeral. And a few have lost an uncle or aunt. And one guy's brother died of leukemia when he was in third grade.

But there's nobody who has been to more than five funerals.

All my white friends can count their deaths on one hand.

I can count my fingers, toes, arms, legs, eyes, ears, nose, penis, butt cheeks, and nipples, and still not get close to my deaths.

And you know what the worst part is? The unhappy part? About 90 percent of the deaths have been because of alcohol." ( *ATDPTI*)

"Why are you leaving?"

"I have to go. I'm going to die if I don't leave."

I touched his shoulder again and Rowdy flinched.

*Yes, I touched him again.*

What kind of idiot was I?

I was the kind of idiot that got punched hard in the face by his best friend.

*Bang!* Rowdy punched me.

*Bang!* I hit the ground.

*Bang!* My nose bled like a firework. ( *ATDPTI*)

5) How will students express and analyze perceptions of native culture, using images and text from *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*?

"In *Strong Hearts*, popular visions of American Indians are challenged by artists and writers for whom self-representation is often as much a political as an artistic statement." (from the book jacket) Three writers in the book write about overcoming stereotyped perceptions of Native Americans. Photographs and poetry reveal central traditions. The book "offers rare insight into complex questions of personal identity, race, politics, family, and society." (book jacket). Students may benefit from a trip to the Yale University Art Gallery to view depictions of art by white artists of long ago events, and also by contemporary Indian Artists.

## Recommendations for prior knowledge

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Students should come to the subject with some basic understanding of American Indian History, including the Indian Wars, the start of the reservation system, as well as White society's efforts to assimilate Indians.

QUESTIONS NEEDED TO BE ANSWERED IN ORDER FOR THE UNIT TO BE MOST EFFECTIVE:

1) How can students quickly get into a dialogue about the subject (s) so that they are learning from one another and so that I lecture only when necessary? (What the learning will look like)

2) How can students teach themselves and each other, in such a way that deepens, extends, and makes relevant the subject matter? (What the learning will be about)

3) How can students explain and interpret Indian History so that the usual narrative is replaced by a narrative which include sovereignty and self determination, identity, memoir, irony, and respect for Indian heritage?

## Day One Classroom Activities: Sherman Alexie, Introduction to The Unit and the Unit Themes

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to

1. describe their personal reactions to the reading from *ATDPTI* ;
2. interpret the reading from the diary;
3. describe students' prior knowledge about Indian wars and establishment of reservations, Indian religion, Indian life and culture
4. describe classic views by white society of Indian life and culture.

B. Initiation Strategy: TW, for no more than 10 minutes, describe the Unit and its Essential Questions: 1) How do we internalize our identity? 2) Is our identity as a result of history or what adults do, or is our identity self created? 3) How can we describe American Indian culture and identity as it is today as opposed to how it has been described in the past? and 4) What were the cause and the effects of the white/Indian conflicts of the past and the near disappearance of many Tribes?

C. Lesson Strategy:

In order to get them right into it, students broken into six groups of four, and students take turns reading aloud from *ATDPTI*, for about 20 minutes or so.

1. Students discuss their reactions and their interpretations within the group.
2. Students share their reactions and interpretations with the class, group by group.
3. Students are given another section of the book, and again read aloud, this time with the readings being recorded as a podcast on Garageband.
4. Students are recorded one by one giving their reactions and interpretations to the second section of the book.
5. Keeping in mind the questions of identity, students have an open discussion of who they are and how they got this way, which will also be recorded.

D. Closure: Teacher poses and explains the homework question.

## Day Two Classroom Activities: *Little Big Man*

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. describe their personal reactions to the reading from *ATDPTI* ;
2. interpret the reading from the diary;
3. describe new knowledge about Indian wars and establishment of reservations, Indian religion, Indian life and culture;
4. describe classic views by white society of Indian life and culture, and
5. Actively view and take notes about the film *Little Big Man*

B. Initiation Strategy:

Students share their homework on Alexie reading from the class before. TW inquire about students' prior knowledge of General Custer, Little Big Horn, and will introduce the film especially as it 1) explains or uses satire to criticize white society; and 2) uses "tall tales" to tell history, and 3) explains the developing identity of Jack Crabb through his back and forth between white and Indian society.



C. Lesson Strategy:

Teacher starts and plays the film, stopping intermittently in order to point out what is notable: use of satire, back and forth, white hypocrisy, turning points. Students use a handout as a guide. Here is a series of quotes:

**Jack goes back to the white world and is living with Reverend and Mrs. Pendrake (Jack's "religion period"):**

**Reverend Pendrake:** *We shall have to beat the lying out of him.*

*(while Mrs. Pendrake gives Jack a bath)*

**Jack Crabb :** *I love Jesus and Moses and all of them...*

**Louise Pendrake :** *[authoritatively] There's quite a difference. Moses was a Hebrew, but Jesus was a gentile, like you and me.*

**Jack Crabb :** *She was calling him a devil and moaning for help, but I didn't get no idea she wanted to be rescued. That was the end of my religion period. I ain't sung a hymn in 110 years.*

D. Closure: Teacher stops the film in order to get students to discuss their reactions among themselves and then to share out (the last 10 minutes of the class)

E. Homework: Each student completes the part of the note-taking guide up to that point in the film. (can use 20 minutes of the start of the next class)

**Day Three Classroom Activities: Little Big Man**

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. describe new knowledge about Indian wars and establishment of reservations, Indian religion, Indian life and culture;
2. describe classic views by white society of Indian life and culture;
3. Actively view and take notes about the film *Little Big Man*

B. Initiation Strategy:

Students discuss film in groups for 5 minutes and share 5 minutes; then teacher restarts the film.

C. Lesson Strategy:

Teacher completes the film, stopping intermittently in order to point out what is notable: use of satire, back and forth, white hypocrisy, and turning points:

**Grandfather (Old Lodge Skins), who has laid himself down to die, wakes up :**

**Old Lodge Skins :** *Am I still in this world?*

**Jack Crabb :** *Yes, Grandfather.*

**Old Lodge Skins :** *[groans] I was afraid of that. Well, sometimes the magic works. Sometimes, it doesn't.*



**Old Lodge Skins** : Let's go back to the teepee and eat, my son. My new snake wife cooks dog very well.

**Jack Crabb** : All right, Grandfather.

**Old Lodge Skins** : She also has a very soft skin. The only trouble with snake women is they copulate with horses, which makes them strange to me. She say's she doesn't. That's why I call her "Doesn't Like Horses". But, of course, she's lying. (last lines of the film)

**Jack Crabb** : Well, that's the story of this old Indian fighter. That's the story of the Human Beings, who was promised land where they could live in peace. Land that would be theirs as long as grass grow, wind blow, and the sky is blue.

**Historian** : Mr. Crabb, I didn't know...

**Jack Crabb** : Get out. Get out.

D. Closure: If time allows, students work on handout, and discuss for plans for podcast about the film on Day Four.

E. Homework: Each student completes the handout and prepares something to say during the podcast.

#### **Day Four Classroom Activities: Podcast about *Little Big Man* , etc.**

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. record a podcast about *Little Big Man* (30 min);
2. describe photos and reactions to text from *Touch the Earth* (30 min);
3. read and respond to another segment of *ATDPTI*

B. Initiation Strategy: Student introduces podcast about *Little Big Man*

C. Lesson Strategy:

1. Students record podcast about *Little Big Man*;
2. TW project about 5 images and text selections from *Touch the Earth*;
3. SW be given time to write one-paragraph descriptions/reactions to the photos and the text. TW will give guidance/students will come up on their own with the observation that the book is about a lost world, about what Indians were, not what they are.
4. SW be given relevant section of *ATDPTI* and will read it aloud and respond on tape. They will be directed to address the was/are issue and how it fits into an understanding of *ATDPTI* and the issue of identity in general.

D. Closing: Teacher previews *Blood Struggle* for day five

#### **Day Five Classroom Activities: Blood Struggle: The Rise of Modern Indian Nations**

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. research a topic from *Blood Struggle*
2. present, in groups, that topic, making a podcast

B. Initiation Strategy: Teacher assigns each group a topic from *Blood Struggle*

C. Lesson Strategy:

1. Students research a topic from *Blood Struggle*. Examples: the rise and fall of the termination movement, leaders on the reservation, turning points for self-determination, tribal gaming and Connecticut's casinos, major legal cases in the history of reservations and self-determination.
2. Students will present each of their topics, in groups, while recording the presentations as podcasts either on that day or the next day.

D. Closing: Teacher previews *Strong Hearts* for day six:

### **Day Six Classroom Activities: Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices**

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. respond to photos and text from the book
2. discuss the book and how it reveals a change from "Indians were" to modern/contemporary perspective on Indian culture and identity.
3. read a relevant third section from Alexie, and compare his writing to *Strong Hearts* focusing on the change from *Touch the Earth*

B. Initiation Strategy: Teacher projects and/or hands out material from the book.

C. Lesson Strategy:

1. Students write their descriptions/responses to the images, writing from the book;
2. Students will present, in groups, and recorded as podcast, their descriptions and responses;

D. Closing: Teacher previews *Smoke Signals* for day six:

### **Day Seven and Eight Classroom Activities: Smoke Signals and ATDPTI**

A. Learning Objectives-The students will be able to:

1. Actively view the film *Smoke Signals*
2. read a fourth and final section from Alexie, and compare his writing to *Smoke Signals*.
3. Create a podcast about the film also addresses students' understanding of Indian culture and identity from Alexie's work

B. Initiation Strategy: Teacher hands out final segment of Alexie's book, and begins the film

C. Lesson Strategy:

1. Students actively view the film over two days;
2. Students read, for homework the first of the two last class days, the final segment from *ATDPTI*;
3. Students discuss film and record podcast about the film, *ATDPTI*, and the unit as a whole, addressing the Unit Themes and Objectives.

D. Closing: Students take an exam in the form of a survey/student evaluation about the unit.

## Resources

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Resources for teacher and students include those that are contained in the annotated bibliography, and will also include visual resources, first person accounts, and films. The following are three sample lesson plans out of a total maximum of eight lesson plans (three teaching weeks: nine 80 minute classes).

### **Annotated Bibliography: Resources for Teachers and Students**

Alexie, Sherman. *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2007. (Gripping, funny, and sad, Alexie's novel is written as an autobiography, from the perspective of a teenager. There some similarities to *Catcher in the Rye*, Alexie's main character Holden Caulfield: Alexie is brutally honest about adult failings, including alcoholism on the reservation. He his also deeply critical of substandard education on the Reservation and the self satisfied arrogance of entitled white students. Caulfield and Alexie both know who the phonies are.)

Wilkinson, Charles. *Blood Struggle*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005. (Amazon has the following review on its site, admiring a breakthrough work of history: "For generations, Indian people suffered a grinding poverty and political and cultural suppression on the reservations. But tenacious and visionary tribal leaders refused to give in. They knew their rights and insisted that the treaties be honored. Against all odds, beginning shortly after World War II, they began to succeed. *Blood Struggle* explores how Indian tribes took their hard-earned sovereignty and put it to work for Indian peoples and the perpetuation of Indian culture. This is the story of wrongs righted and noble ideals upheld: the modern tribal sovereignty movement deserves to be spoken of in the same breath as the civil rights, environmental, and women's movements.")

Deloria, Philip J. *Indians in Unexpected Places*. Lawrence, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 1999 (In a sometimes ironic way, the book explores stereotypes which may confine Native peoples to the past.)

Aperture Foundation, Inc. *Strong Hearts: Native American Visions and Voices*. New York: Aperture. (This book offers one pleasant surprise after another to those used to depictions of Tribal Culture only in the form and style of *Touch the Earth*. One hundred twenty-five images by thirty-four Native American photographers are combined with poetry. The book offers rare insight into complex questions of personal identity, race, politics, family, and society. " *Strong Hearts* will stimulate real cultural exchange for a long time to come, as it conveys the experiences and insights of American Indian artists and writers defining their cultures today." (Amazon.com)

McLuhan, T.C. *Touch the Earth*. New York: Promontory Press, 1971 (An elegiac vision of American Indian life as it was in the late 19th Century, told through quotes of Indian alive at the time and photographs taken primarily by whites, with such classic images by Curtis. According to the review by The Village Voice at the time of its publication : "A beautiful, moving collage which touches on almost all significant aspects of the Indian sensibility."

### **Annotated Filmography**

*Smoke Signals*. Dir. Chris Eyre. 1998 (Young Indian man Thomas is a nerd in his reservation, wearing oversize glasses and telling everyone stories no-one wants to hear. His parents died in a fire in 1976, and Arnold saved Thomas. Arnold soon left his family (and his tough son Victor), and Victor hasn't seen his father for 10 years. When Victor hears Arnold has died, Thomas offers him funding for the trip to get Arnold's remains, but only if Thomas will also go with him. Thomas and Victor hit the road.)(summary from IMDB).

*Little Big Man*. Dir. Arthur Penn. 1970 (Jack Crabb is 121 years old as the film begins. A collector of oral histories asks him about his past. He recounts being captured and raised by Indians, becoming a gunslinger, marrying an Indian, watching her killed by General George Armstrong Custer's troop, and becoming a scout for Custer at Little Big Horn.) (summary from IMDB) In important ways,

despite the film's irony, the film is largely a view of Indians as they were, not as they are. It is no coincidence that the film and the book *Touch the Earth* came out within a year of one another. The film is less reverential than the book, and could serve as a solid start to the unit.)

*The Ways: Great Lakes Native Culture and Language* (*The Ways* is a series of stories, in video, map and digital form, from Great Lakes Native Communities, is reachable at its web site [theways.org](http://theways.org) and is the product of Wisconsin Media Lab. The short documentary films include such topics as Warriors Boxing, Spearfishing, Living Language, and Lady Thunderhawks (girls' basketball). The tone and subject matter of the films would engage students and stimulate discussion.)

## Appendix

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### Standards Addressed:

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.7 Conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.8 Recall relevant information from experiences or gather relevant information from print and digital sources; summarize or paraphrase information in notes and finished work, and provide a list of sources.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.5.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

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