Pre-Reading Activities
Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian

Includes:
• Banned Book Research Handout
• Pine Ridge Reservation Context Article
• Sherman Alexie’s *On Indian Education* reading
• Stationed Discussion Activities
• Along with a Video & Article to Assess Informational Text
• A short Written Pre-Reading Reflection with Grading Guide

Ideal for Grades 9-12

Cross Discipline Potential: ELA & SOCIAL STUDIES
Pre Reading for Absolutely True Diary
With Sherman Alexie’s Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian

Outline of Assignments:
Pre-Reading & Research:

1. Why do we Ban Books? What Books are Banned Today? (Pairs) **Handout Included**
   Have students complete the Pre-Reading Activity

2. What is Life Like on a Reservation? (Groups) **Handout Included & QR Codes** to the Sources
   History
   Article & Video “Liquid Genocide: Alcohol Destroyed Pine Ridge Reservation - then they fought back”.

3. Mini-Response on Author Purpose & Current Issues (Individual) **(Handout Included)**

4. Introduce the Author with his Short Story and Discussion Questions (Stations) **Questions Included**
   **Note on the Stations:**
   - Everyone does these differently. I’ve provided questions on individual handouts.
   - You could have students physically write at the stations (big paper or on the handouts)
   - Each station could also be to a doc for the question thats there (I didn’t provide those).
   - You could even just use the questions for your own activity, feel free!
Banned Books Website

https://bannedbooksweek.org/about/
Article on Pine Ridge Reservation

Banned Books:

Go to the Provided Pages to Learn about Banned Books and Specifically "The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian" by Sherman Alexie.

Have you ever read any of the top 10 banned books from last year? Would you like to if you haven’t? Which ones sound interesting?

Do you think books should be banned from schools for reasons like the ones given? Why or why not?

Why might authors include some of the material that they are banned for?

What content do you and other students have at your fingertips that deals with the same issues these books are being banned for? Can you not gain access to it after it has been "banned"? (hint: apps/sites)
What is life like on Pine Ridge Reservation?

FIRST: Read the Article Together
• Go to the Article “Liquid Genocide: alcohol destroyed Pine Ridge reservation - then they fought back”
• In your Group Read together and Identify the Main Idea/Message of the Writing
• Take notes (you will turn in) of Support that is provided to the Main Idea (facts/examples/anecdotes)
• Choose a photo from the article and discuss in your group how it relates to the reading.
• Write down also, what you learned about the Pine Ridge Reservation as a group from this reading?

SECOND: Watch the Video Together
• Discuss Together, How does the video reinforce what you read as a group?
• Write down things that were made clearer, or additional evidence that supports the main idea of the article.

Turn in your group notes.
Pre-Reading Reflection

• Given what you have learned about where the author grew up and the setting of this book, would it be realistic for the author to leave out swears, sexuality, alcohol, and drugs from the story?

• What could these choices (to include more explicit content) made by the author provide readers with in the end?

• What potential purpose do you think the author could have for writing a book about Pine Ridge Reservation, based on what you have learned? What could he want people to learn?

_____/10: Provide Quotes from materials we have used up until now (Banned Books Site & Article).

_____/30: Address each of the questions from above.

_____/10: Displays thought and writing conventions.

_____/50: Comments:
Station Activity Addresses the Following Questions:

Response to Reading of “On Indian Education”

• What overall impression does Alexie create of life on the reservation? Point to specific EXAMPLES in the text that contribute to this impression.

• Notice those places in the essay where Alexie describes how Native Americans face prejudice and negative stereotyping. What does this focus suggest about his PURPOSE?

• The title "Indian Education" refers here to more than just formal schooling. What are some other implications of the title?

• Alexie refers to his hair in the opening sentence of the essay and in the sections on second grade and twelfth grade. How, and of what, is his hair a SYMBOL?
Station 1:

• What overall impression does Alexie create of life on the reservation? Point to specific EXAMPLES in the text that contribute to this impression.
Station 2

• Notice those places in the essay where Alexie describes how Native Americans face prejudice and negative stereotyping. What does this focus suggest about his PURPOSE?
Station 3:

• The title "Indian Education" refers here to more than just formal schooling. What are some other implications of the title?
Station 4:

- Alexie refers to his hair in the opening sentence of the essay and in the sections on second grade and twelfth grade. How, and of what, is his hair a SYMBOL?
I was born with water on the brain.

Okay, so that's not exactly true. I was actually born with too much cerebral spinal fluid inside my skull. But cerebral spinal fluid is just the doctors' fancy way of saying brain grease. And brain grease works inside the lobes like car grease works inside an engine. It keeps things running smooth and fast. But weirdo me, I was born with too much grease inside my skull, and it got all thick and muddy and disgusting, and it only mucked up the works. My thinking and breathing and living engine slowed down and flooded.
Why do you think he is humorous around a serious illness that occurred to himself?

My brain was drowning in grease.

But that makes the whole thing sound weirdo and funny, like my brain was a giant French fry, so it seems more serious and poetic and accurate to say, “I was born with water on the brain.”

Okay, so maybe that’s not a very serious way to say it, either. Maybe the whole thing is weird and funny.

But jeez, did my mother and father and big sister and grandma and cousins and aunts and uncles think it was funny when the doctors cut open my little skull and sucked out all that extra water with some tiny vacuum?

I was only six months old and I was supposed to croak during the surgery. And even if I somehow survived the mini-Hoover, I was supposed to suffer serious brain damage during the procedure and live the rest of my life as a vegetable.

Well, I obviously survived the surgery. I wouldn’t be writing this if I didn’t, but I have all sorts of physical problems that are directly the result of my brain damage.

First of all, I ended up having forty-two teeth. The typical human has thirty-two, right? But I had forty-two.

Ten more than usual.
Ten more than normal.
Ten teeth past human.

My teeth got so crowded that I could barely close my mouth. I went to Indian Health Service to get some teeth pulled so I could eat normally, not like some slobbering vulture. But the Indian Health Service funded major dental work only once a year, so I had to have all ten extra teeth pulled in one day.

And what’s more, our white dentist believed that Indians only felt half as much pain as white people did, so he only gave us half the Novocain.
What a bastard, huh?

Indian Health Service also funded eyeglass purchases only once a year and offered one style: those ugly, thick, black plastic ones.

My brain damage left me nearsighted in one eye and farsighted in the other, so my ugly glasses were all lopsided because my eyes were so lopsided.

I get headaches because my eyes are, like, enemies, you know, like they used to be married to each other but now hate each other’s guts.

And I started wearing glasses when I was three, so I ran around the rez looking like a three-year-old Indian grandpa.

And, oh, I was skinny. I’d turn sideways and disappear.

But my hands and feet were huge. My feet were a size eleven in third grade! With my big feet and pencil body, I looked like a capital L walking down the road.

And my skull was enormous.

Epic.

My head was so big that little Indian skulls orbited around it. Some of the kids called me Orbit. And other kids just called me Globe. The bullies would pick me up, spin me in circles, put their finger down on my skull, and say, “I want to go there.”

So obviously, I looked goofy on the outside, but it was the inside stuff that was the worst.

First of all, I had seizures. At least two a week. So I was damaging my brain on a regular basis. But the thing is, I was having those seizures because I already had brain damage, so I was reopening wounds each time I seized.

Yep, whenever I had a seizure, I was damaging my damage.

I haven’t had a seizure in seven years, but the doctors tell me that I am “susceptible to seizure activity.”
Susceptible to seizure activity.

 Doesn’t that just roll off the tongue like poetry? I also had a stutter and a lisp. Or maybe I should say I had a st-st-st-stutter and a lisssssssstthththp.

 You wouldn’t think there is anything life threatening about speech impediments, but let me tell you, there is nothing more dangerous than being a kid with a stutter and a lisp.

 A five-year-old is cute when he lisps and stutters. Heck, most of the big-time kid actors stuttered and lisped their way to stardom.

 And jeez, you’re still fairly cute when you’re a stuttering and lisping six-, seven-, and eight-year-old, but it’s all over when you turn nine and ten.

 After that, your stutter and lisp turn you into a retard.

 And if you’re fourteen years old, like me, and you’re still stuttering and lisping, then you become the biggest retard in the world.

 Everybody on the rez calls me a retard about twice a day. They call me retard when they are pantsing me or stuffing my head in the toilet or just smacking me upside the head.

 I’m not even writing down this story the way I actually talk, because I’d have to fill it with stutters and lisps, and then you’d be wondering why you’re reading a story written by such a retard.

 Do you know what happens to retards on the rez? We get beat up. At least once a month.

 Yep, I belong to the Black-Eye-of-the-Month Club. Sure I want to go outside. Every kid wants to go outside. But it’s safer to stay at home. So I mostly hang out alone in my bedroom and read books and draw cartoons.
Name:

• Based on the descriptions draw a picture of the narrator below:
• Provide key words around the drawing from the text to display the reasons you added specific attributes
Contract for Reading:

I agree and understand that what is said in the book “The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian” by Sherman Alexie is intentional and filled with artistic purpose.

I will not use the words in this book out of context or to hurt others.

If I have a question around why something was added or why we are reading the text due to this nature I will ask the teacher.

Printed:__________________________________________
Signed:__________________________________________