

## The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

### Character Sketch Activity (with material from Seaquam School's Notes on Character)

Reading fiction allows us to enter worlds outside of our own personal experience and deepens our understanding of humanity. Authors strive to people their imaginary worlds with believable characters who may be similar or very different from the people we know. When we develop a curiosity about the characters in a novel or short story we become involved in the story. We want to know what they will do or say next, and what motivates them to behave in the way that they do. We come to understand a character through various methods. The author may tell us directly that a character is for example, lazy, helpful or intelligent. Frequently, however, we must infer what the character is like from what the character does, says, or thinks and from how other characters react to him or her. Rather than inform the reader directly that a teenage character is lazy for example, the author may indicate his laziness by writing that the boy spends his days watching TV, that he sleeps in late and never does his homework, and that his mother frequently yells at him to help around the house.

#### **Pre-Write to Organize Your Ideas**

Before beginning to write a character description, take the time to engage in a pre-writing activity to fully explore the character you are studying. Your teacher may provide you with a graphic organizer to help you do this, or you can use a web to organize your thoughts. Place the name of your character in the center of your web and draw connecting lines to four circles with the following categories:

- physical appearance
- actions
- thoughts and speech
- other characters' reactions

Carefully re-read the story while making notes on your web for each category. The main character in a story is usually, round, or many-sided and believable, therefore he or she possesses many qualities, just as real human beings do.

#### **Physical Appearance**

When describing the character's appearance think about what his appearance signifies about him. If his clothes are dirty, for example, is it a sign that he doesn't care what he looks like because he has low self-esteem, or are his clothes dirty simply because he is athletic, was playing baseball and dove to catch a fly ball.

#### **Actions**

Pay close attention to characters' actions. What characters do is often the best indication of who they are. More important than what happens to characters in the story is how they react to what happens. When analyzing a character's actions ask, "Why did the character do this?" and "What does this tell me about his personality?" "Do his actions indicate he is cunning, domineering, or courageous?" Next to each of your notes about what the character has done write a descriptive word about the character's personality. For example, if a character continues to play basketball in the final game of the season, despite being injured earlier, he could be described as tough, determined, stubborn or dedicated.

#### **Thoughts and Speech**

Analyze what the character thinks and says in the same way you did for his actions. Make brief notes about the character's thoughts and speech. Then consider what they indicate about his

personality and describe it in one or two words.

### **Other Character's Reactions**

Note what other characters say about the character you are studying, and how they react to what she says and does. Do the other characters see her in the same way she sees herself, or differently?

### **How Does the Character Change?**

The main character in a story is usually, dynamic, undergoing an important change in some aspect of his personality or outlook on life. Ask yourself how the character changes throughout the story. What does he learn about himself or about life by the story's end?

### **Write the Character Description**

After finishing the pre-writing activity you should have a good understanding of what the character is like and have enough information to write a well-developed paragraph. Look for similarities among the different categories in your web and choose what you believe are the key traits or qualities of the character you are describing. In the topic sentence of your paragraph mention the 2-3 key traits that the character possesses and then describe them in more detail in your paragraph, supporting your statements with examples from the story. Finally, state a prediction for the character, how the character has changed or what he has learned as a result of what he has experienced. Your paragraph should be a minimum of 150-200 words and use at least one direct quotation in the support of a trait.

You will be completing a character sketch on a character of your choice from the novel.

Here is a sample:

Key traits of Rowdy: 1) friendly; 2) athletic; and 3) violent.

Rowdy, a secondary character within Sherman Alexie's The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, is Arnold's violent, but, at times, friendly, athletically talented best friend. Rowdy's violent streak is often referenced throughout the story. Mr. P, one of the lonely white teachers, warns Arnold that "Rowdy is just going to get meaner and meaner" (p. 41). In fact, Arnold reports to us that Rowdy hands out random black eyes to school kids after he has suffered a similar fate at the hands of his father (p.41). Despite his violent actions, Rowdy is the one person to whom Arnold tells his secrets. Rowdy provides Arnold someone to confide in and get advice from. One such secret is Arnold's confession concerning his love of Dawn. In this way, Rowdy's character provides us with an insight into some of Arnold's most inner thoughts. The secrets are not just confessions, but activities as well. Both share a love of comics; Arnold reads superhero comics, while Rowdy reads "goofy old ones, like *Richie Rich*" (p.22). The comic books provide, according to Arnold, "a fake life inside a cartoon [that] is a lot better than his real life" (p.23). Rowdy's athletic ability plays an important role. It provides a foil for Arnold's lack of athleticism. What Rowdy can do on the field, often Arnold cannot. Where Arnold is the waterboy, Rowdy is the player who can score. Rowdy's character provides an important role within the book. I feel that his presence allows us to better understand Arnold and life on the Spokane reserve. I predict that Rowdy will continue to change and give up his violent ways, so that he can be accepted by Arnold after calling him a "white lover"(p.53).

## Quick Scale: Grade 9 Writing Personal Views or Response

The Quick Scale is a summary of the Rating Scale that follows. Both describe student achievement in March-April of the school year. Writing personal views or response is usually expected to be checked for errors, but not revised or edited.

Aspect	Not Yet Within Expectations	Meets Expectations (Minimal Level)	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
<b>SNAPSHOT</b>	<i>The writing shows problems in logic, style, and mechanics.</i>	<i>The writing is generally easy to follow and understand, but does not engage the reader.</i>	<i>The writing is clear and analytic; flows smoothly.</i>	<i>The writing is engaging with some sophistication in ideas or language.</i>
<b>MEANING</b> • ideas and information • use of detail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• often very brief; may make unsupported generalizations</li> <li>• reasoning is difficult to follow</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clear point of view; some relevant ideas</li> <li>• some explanation and examples</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• develops a reasonable point of view with some individuality</li> <li>• builds a position through detail, example, explanations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offers an engaging perspective; mature; shows individuality</li> <li>• builds a convincing position; may use sophisticated strategies (e.g., irony)</li> </ul>
<b>CONVENTIONS</b> • spelling • punctuation • sentence structure • grammar (e.g., modifiers, agreement, verb tense)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• frequent, repeated errors in basic words and structures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• some errors, but meaning is clear</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• may have occasional errors</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• generally correct</li> </ul>