

LESSON PLAN- Contemporary People/ Sherman Alexie

EALRS:(Reading 1)The student understands and uses different skills and strategies to read.
(History 1) The student examines and understand major ideas, eras, themes, developments, turning points, chronology, and cause -and-effect relationships in US, World, and Washington State history.

GRADE LEVEL: Secondary

BASIC CONCEPTS: Too often history books only give biographical backgrounds to historical figures and students often find it extremely difficult to relate or even find such individuals remotely interesting. There are many contemporary American Indian/ Native American people who have contributed as much to our present culture as any historical person, oftentimes more.

ORGANIZING GENERALIZATION: Sherman Alexie is a writer, poet, comedian, activist, politician, spokesperson, storyteller, cultural ambassador, and more. This 33-year-old from Spokane, Washington is an author of four works of fiction and several volumes of poetry. He has more than half a million books in print and was named by The New Yorker last year as one of the best writers under 40.

CULTURE AREA: Washington State

TIME PERIOD: Present

BACKGROUND: “Alexie once seemed fated for nothing but early death. A Spokane Indian raised on a reservation about 50 miles from the Washington city, he was born hydrocephalic, with water on the brain. At six months, he underwent surgery and wasn’t expected to live. When he did survive, doctors predicted he would be severely retarded. Instead, he became a prodigy. By age two he could read and by kindergarten he had completed (if not understood) *The Grapes of Wrath*.” - quote from *The many lives of Sherman Alexie* by Hillel Italie. (see below)

OBJECTIVES:

Knowledge

Students will: (Reading 1.1) use word recognition and word meaning skills to read and comprehend text, (Reading 1.2) build vocabulary through reading, AND (History 1.3) examine the influence of culture on US, World, and Washington State history.

Skills

Students will: After reading the various written work and watching the movie, students should be able to analyze and synthesize the value of the contributions of contemporary Native American people to our pluralistic society.

Values

Students will: synthesize information when reading from a variety of sources, examine and increase vocabularies relevant to different contexts, cultures, and communities AND examine and discuss historical contributions to US society of various individuals and groups from different cultural, racial and linguistic backgrounds,

ACTIVITIES: Students should view the movie *Smoke Signals*, read Chapter 7 of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and read the article about Sherman Alexie. A writing assignment that examines the unique humor that is portrayed in these various sources should be undertaken by the students.

EXTENSIONS: Students could read the rest of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (parental permission would be necessary - adult language) and suggest another chapter that could be made into a movie, could write up a script in the style of Alexie, and could even be performed by the class (voting on the best portrayal).

Other works from Sherman Alexie could be read, such as *Indian Killer* or *Reservation Blues*, and compared to the previously read works.

EVALUATION: Exposing students to successful individuals from various cultural and racial backgrounds empowers all students that might have been having problems in their own lives. Positive role models come from all walks of life, sometimes when we least expect it. Sherman Alexie has already inspired many American Indian people and deserves recognition for his accomplishments.

MATERIALS/ RESOURCES: *Smoke Signals* -movie available at most video stores
The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven -by Sherman Alexie
Indian Killer - by Sherman Alexie
Reservation Blues -by Sherman Alexie
The many lives of Sherman Alexie - article by Hillel Italie - published in *News from Indian Country*- July 2000, p. 14B-15B