



- At the open mic, Malo starts freestyling by playing with “buck,” the word he used for his writing in school and the title of this book (p. 240). How many different meanings for “buck” can you identify in his lyrics? How do they relate to Malo and his life? What does it tell you about language – and about Malo – that a single word can have so many different connotations, histories, and meanings? What, if anything, ties them together?

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie

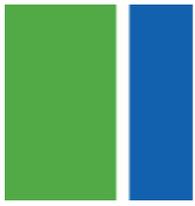
- Arnold often mixes humor, irony, and sincerity in both his words and drawings to express how he feels about the changes and events in his life. For example, think about the title of this book: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Which aspects of the title are humorous, which ironic, and which sincere? What does this combination tell you about Arnold’s character and way of thinking? What are the benefits and drawbacks of using these different approaches to self-expression? Choose some of Arnold’s drawings and discuss what the balance of humor, irony, and/or sincerity in each reveals about Arnold’s world at that moment in the narrative.
- Gordy tells Arnold that “you should approach each book – you should approach life – with the real possibility that you might get a metaphorical boner at any point” (p. 97). What do you think Gordy means by having a “metaphorical boner” for knowledge, art, and life? How can excitement and desire for these things be like (even when totally unrelated to!) sexual excitement and desire? How is it different?
- Some of Arnold’s drawings are in very different styles from one another. Find a few that seem noticeably different to you. What kinds of information and feelings do these various styles convey? How does Arnold use these “looks” to express the conflicting feelings and ideas that he carries inside himself? (You can read more about the styles that the illustrator Ellen Fornay used for Arnold’s drawings, with examples, in her interview in the back of the book – but try to see if you can find the differences on your own, too.)
- Like Malo in *Buck*, Arnold often refers to outside texts that help him to process his own experiences. He calls the first scheduled basketball game between Reardon and Wellpinit “like something out of Shakespeare” (p. 142), relates to the joylessness of Euripides’s character Medea after his grandmother and Eugene die (p.173), and suggests that “Tolstoy didn’t know Indians” when he said that “every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way” (p. 200). Why do you think that Arnold turns to these “white” western classics to make sense of the changes and challenges in his “part-time Indian” life? Do you think that the novel’s references to canonical



texts suggest that Arnold is rejecting his Indian heritage? Does it make a difference that Shakespeare, Euripides, and Tolstoy wrote in different cultures, time periods, and languages?

The Complete Persepolis by Marjane Satrapi

- During her childhood, Marji's thoughts and personality develop in ways that directly reflect or resist the changes happening in her country. For example, after the monarchy falls she and her friends plan to violently "teach a lesson" to Ramin, a neighborhood kid whose father was in the Shah's murderous secret police (p. 44-45), but her mother stops them and asks her to learn to forgive. When the new religious government kills her Uncle Anoosh, Marji rejects God and loses the religious bearings that used to be so important to her (pp. 70-1). Her parents decide to send her to Vienna after she clashes with teachers and administrators about religious and political ideas (p.144) To what extent do you think Marji is shaped by the unique circumstances of the time and place in which she lives? How much agency do you think she has in deciding what kind of person she will be?
- In certain frames, Marjane Satrapi uses images to illustrate scenes that do not literally reflect what is happening. For instance, the panel about going to Italy and Spain depicts Marji and her parents floating on a magic carpet surrounded by swirls and European-looking buildings (p. 77). Or when Marji returns to Iran as a young woman, Satrapi draws the ground as filled with gigantic corpses and broken windows (p. 251). Why do you think that Satrapi chooses to use visual metaphors at some moments? What information, if any, do they add to your understanding of what her words describe?
- Persepolis is Marji's story, but the novel also takes time to tell many other peoples' stories in both words and images: these include family members, friends, political activists, acquaintances, and even people she has never met. What is the effect of putting so many other people's narratives in one person's memoir? What do these tales tell you about how Marji came to be who she is, and what her society is like? Try looking at a few of these stories and discuss what Marji's character seems to take away from them. Do you think that individual stories (like the ones that Marji hears and shares, like Persepolis itself) have the power to change the world? Why or why not? Does it matter whether or not they are true?
- Compared to The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Marji's interest in art only really comes out in the last few chapters of the book, and then mostly just as part of her studies and work. As a teenager, Marji more often expresses herself through her appearance and through the kinds of books, music, television, and drugs that she consumes at different points in her life. How can self-invention be a kind of creative outlet? How is it different from writing or making



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art? Do you think that any of the many different aesthetic “versions” of Marji that we see over the course of the novel more “true” to who she is than others?