
KÖNIGS ERLÄUTERUNGEN

Sherman Alexie, **THE ABSOLUTELY TRUE DIARY OF A PART-TIME INDIAN**
von Patrick Charles

SAMPLE EXAM QUESTIONS WITH ANSWERS

In Ergänzung zu den Aufgaben im Buch (Kapitel 6) finden Sie hier zwei weitere Aufgaben mit Musterlösungen.
Die Zahl der Sternchen bezeichnet das Anforderungsniveau der jeweiligen Aufgabe.

Task 5 **

Characterise Mr. P.

INTERPRETATION

Because Arnold "Junior" Spirit is at school during the year described in *The Absolutely True Diary*, teachers play a big role in his life. Many of his teachers at both schools, in Wellpinit and Reardan, appear in the novel. Some of them are minor characters who are only referred to once. But two of them – Mr. P in Wellpinit and Coach in Reardan – have a huge influence on Junior's life and development.

Mr. P is introduced on p.38 (including a detailed caricature on p.39), when he comes into the classroom to teach geometry and hand out the geometry text books for the class. Junior describes him as "weird" – he looks weird and he behaves weirdly. He is small, bald and has a huge nose. He is sleepy and distracted, and he is relatively popular with the kids because "he doesn't ask too much of us" (39.6). Some people think he's an ex-Mafia accountant who is now living in a witness protection programme, but Junior believes he is just "a lonely old man who used to be a lonely young man" (40.24–5).

Mr. P is important in the book because of a conversation he and Junior have after Junior is suspended for throwing a book at him and breaking his nose (pp.43–55). Basically, he comes to confess to Junior about how badly he has treated Indians in the past, in particular through his work as a teacher on the reservation. He doesn't hate Junior for having attacked him: what he actually feels is that the passion and righteous anger Junior displayed show that the boy deserves more from life than the dead-end despair of the reservation. Mr. P likes Junior and respects him – he calls him a "bright and shining star" and "the smartest kid in the school" (51.22–4). He taught his big sister Mary, whom he also liked and respected, and he tells Junior that before she retreated into depression and inactivity she was also a good student and a bright, curious and imaginative girl. He tells Junior that "you threw that book in my face because somewhere inside you refuse to give up" (54.10–11) – "you have to take your hope and go somewhere where other people have hope" (54.24–5). He is trying to help Junior: he obviously likes the boy, he has paid attention to him and noticed that he is different from the other kids, that whereas Rowdy will never escape – "Rowdy is just going to get meaner and meaner" (52.25) – there is still hope for Junior. *If* he leaves the reservation.

Mr. P's conviction that reservation life is so bad and would eventually kill Junior comes from his own experience of living and working there for many years, and most importantly from his own participation in systematic efforts to "kill Indian culture" (45.29–30). His apology and confession to Junior has a very real cause: he has spent years as a teacher abusing and trying to crush the Indian kids in the school, by destroying their culture and traditions. He has been willingly and knowingly contributing to efforts to destroy what remains of an Indian "identity". He feels guilty and ashamed of this. He knows that what he has done is wrong and that he has damaged countless lives. He can also see that, to a point, the Indians themselves are also to blame – the children for having given up, and their parents and grandparents for also having given up. He sees that the tribe on the reservation is defeated, as are the white people like himself who live and work there.

Mr. P is the single greatest direct influence on Junior's decision to leave Wellpinit and go to school at Reardan – he is fuelled by his own guilt in encouraging the boy to escape while he can and try at least to make a better life for himself. Without Junior's angry attack and Mr. P's recognition of the positive, life-affirming energy behind it, Junior would probably not have taken the chance to escape from the crushing despair of life on the reservation.

Task 6 **

Explain Rowdy's reaction to Junior leaving the rez in the chapter *Rowdy Sings the Blues*.

INTERPRETATION

After talking to Mr. P and then to his parents about what the teacher has encouraged him to do – to leave the reservation – Junior tells his best friend Rowdy that he will be going to school in Reardan from now on (pp.60–64).

Rowdy is furious. Their conversation ends with Rowdy punching Junior in the face and screaming that he hates him, calling him a “white lover”. Why does he suddenly hate his best friend, and why is he shouting abuse at him?

They have always been friends, and they give one another comfort and companionship. Junior entertains Rowdy with his wit and his cartoons, and the strong and violent Rowdy protects his much weaker and smaller friend from bullies on the reservation. Their friendship is very important to both of them, and we can see through the course of the book that both suffer from their separation and the break in their friendship. But as Mr. P has pointed out to Junior, Rowdy is already very damaged – above all, by his abusive home life. Rowdy is full of anger and hatred and hostility, and this has already made him a mean and dangerous boy who punishes others to make them feel as bad as he does. Junior can't save Rowdy from himself.

When Junior tells Rowdy that he is going to leave Wellpinit, Rowdy at first doesn't believe him. The idea is too absurd. The school at Reardan is their enemy. Nobody from the reservation ever leaves. Rowdy thinks it's a stupid joke. When he finally grasps the truth, he is furious. He spits on the floor, and then lashes out at Junior – “Don't touch me, you retarded fag!” (63.17) – in the most hurtful way he can. Junior begins to cry, and is then shocked when Rowdy also starts crying – and then screaming. “It was the worst thing I'd ever heard. It was pain, pure pain” (63.24–25). Then he accuses Junior of thinking he's better than him, and eventually punches him in the face and screams that he hates him.

Rowdy has a dark and miserable life. He and his mother are beaten by his alcoholic father. He is not good at school, he has no friends, his hostility has made him a person to be feared and avoided. Junior is the only person in his life who can make him laugh: his closest friend, maybe his only friend. When Junior tells him that he is leaving, Rowdy feels a dangerous combination of sadness and betrayal. He is terrified of his own emotions, so he hates feeling sad – it makes him feel weak and vulnerable. And he feels betrayed because his supposed best friend is leaving him to go to a better place – a whiter place. Rowdy does not understand at first why Junior would want to leave. He embodies what Mr. P warned Junior about – that everyone on the reservation has given up. Rowdy has given up on himself and on any effort to create a better future for himself. He can't understand how and why Junior is doing what he is doing: all he can understand is that the best thing in his life, the only good thing in his life, is leaving him. What he feels is sadness, anger and betrayal. And because he has a damaged and violent nature, he immediately attacks the thing which is causing him pain – in this case this is Junior, his best friend.