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Student Response: *Smoke Signals*

“But place and class are only part of the story. Many people tell me that they had no picture of contemporary reservation life, or even urban Indian life, before reading ‘The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven.’ To break Indians out of museums and movies and Chief Wahoo—that’s a legacy for any book. ‘The Lone Ranger’ and ‘Smoke Signals’ gave many people their first picture of contemporary Native American life.”

--Jess Walter in interview with Sherman Alexie, *The New Yorker*, 5 Aug. 2013.

Sherman Alexie and Chris Eyre’s film *Smoke Signals* will be a nice introduction to Alexie’s novel *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* because many of you likely have “no picture of contemporary reservation life.” Stereotypes of Indians dominate most Americans’ understanding of Native culture, whether those stereotypes are negative, like the mascot Chief Wahoo, or romantic, like many white liberals’ ideas of Indians as uniquely spiritual or noble. Most Americans have no idea what life for natives on a reservation or in urban areas is really like. *Smoke Signals*, by contrast, provides a more realistic portrait of life on a reservation, and it is one that closely resembles the reservation in the novel you will read for Unit 3.

Today, you will watch *Smoke Signals* in class. Before you watch the film, you should review the lists you made earlier in the week: the **first** is a list of Native American stereotypes, and the second is a list of Native American attributes that you feel are more accurate. You may recall that in the course of our discussion, we considered whether these supposedly more accurate attributes might be stereotypes as well.

Once you have reviewed the lists, you will watch the film--It should not take the whole class period as it is only 89 minutes long. After taking a break, you will return to class and use the computer lab to type a response to the film.

In your response, please answer the following questions—they are intended to connect the themes in *Smoke Signals* to those in *Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*.

1) What struck you about the representation of native life in this film? Were there connections made to the stereotypes or more realistic attributes of native culture that you anticipated? Were there aspects of native culture that you were completely not expecting? Were there any things about this portrayal of native culture that confused you?

2) How do Victor and Thomas grow and change in the film? What has to happen for them to be able to grow?