

To: Bemidji School Board
From: Challenged Resource Committee
Date: January 20, 2022
Regarding: Recommendation from the Challenged Resource Committee in reference to a request to review the book The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, by Sherman Alexie

Recommendation submitted by the following Challenged Resource Committee

Members:

Kathy Van Wert, Chairperson/Administrator
Colleen Cardenuto, Director of Curriculum
Bob Smith, Community Member
Stephen Pfleger, Media Specialist at GDE/BMS
Maureen Whelen, Community Member
Sue Bruns, Community Member
Erin Curran, Media Specialist at BHS
Gina Bernard, English Teacher at BHS
Julie Maus, Social Studies Teacher at BHS
Doyle Turner, Teacher at Bemidji First City School
Valerie Olson, Social Studies Teacher at BMS
Stephanie McDermott, 2nd Grade Teacher at Horace May

The Committee's Recommendation:

The Challenged Resource Committee met on January 13, 2022 to review and discuss the challenged resource: The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian by Sherman Alexie following a request for a review by a parent. This book has been a choice for students to read in ninth grade English classes for a number of years. The request for review brought forth a number of concerns: alleged sexualization of women, the language and content that make the book controversial and the insults used in the book. The challenger acknowledges this book is a choice between two to read but “feels giving teenage kids an option between two books and told one of them is essentially controversial is going to encourage them to choose the controversial book out of curiosity.”

The committee met to review the request, discuss the book, examine the reviews and formulate a recommendation. The committee read the challenge and the submitted rationale from the High School English Department. At this moment it was pointed out that the challenger's paperwork noted that she read only one third of the book, not the whole book. Many of the committee members felt that if the entire book was read the

challenger would more than likely have had a different perspective of the book. Next the committee discussed, at great length, the challenger's concerns regarding the sexualization of women, the language and content, and the insults used in the book. Upon the finalizations of the discussion the committee felt that the educational value of the thematic topics shared by the English Department and rationale for its use outweigh the concerns brought by the challenger. They also determined that this novel is well suited and appropriate for the ninth grade audience.

The committee recognizes the literary value of the novel and the strong appeal it has to young people. The narrator faces many challenges; racism, internal struggles with identity and self-esteem, and extreme familial challenges. The author creates a character that young adults can identify with and understand. The book provides an honest expression of a teenage perspective. There is a strength of character that is woven throughout the book; a classic coming of age story with the narrator weaving two worlds together culminating in a reconciliation of the narrator's present with his past and future. The committee was impressed with the author's ability to address many difficult topics that young adults grapple with. As stated by the English department, the committee agrees that the novel serves as both a window and a mirror for some of our students, providing an opportunity to educate and discuss relevant topics for ninth graders.

The BHS English Department has followed the Bemidji School Board policy, SBR 400-30-5, Instruction - Controversial Issues. This ninth grade English course has a syllabus with an electronic click response noting that the student and parent have read through it and understand the requirements. In this course, students are given the option of reading The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian or If I Ever Get Out of Here by Eric Gansworth.

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, has been awarded the National Book Award Winner for Young People's Literature, 2007; Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Fiction; #1 New York Times Bestseller; Time Magazine Best Young Adult Book of All Time; Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year; American Library Association Best Book of the Year and the Odyssey Award for best audiobook, 2009.

Recommendation:

Upon review, the **Challenged Resource Committee strongly and unanimously recommends that The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian novel continue to be retained in the ninth grade curriculum.** The committee recognizes the challenger's concern and appreciates the time she took to bring the resource to the committee's attention.