



Paul Carlson, Superintendent  
New London-Spicer School District  
101 4th Ave SW  
New London, MN 56273

Dear Mr. Carlson and district advisory committee members:

I am writing on behalf of the Minnesota Council of Teachers of English. I know you are currently debating the use of Sherman Alexie's book *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in the 8th grade curriculum at New London-Spicer, and I encourage you to keep this text in the classroom.

There are so many reasons Alexie's novel should remain a part of the curriculum. This is a decorated YA novel, honored for its excellence, boasting awards including the 2007 National Book Award Winner, *The New York Times* Book Review Notable Books of 2007 (children's books), and a Boston Globe- Horn Book Award, as well as garnering Best Books of the Year honors from Kirkus Review, School Library Journal, Publisher's Weekly, and the New York Public Library, just to name a few. Alexie is one of the most relevant contemporary writers of our time, and *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* is his most celebrated text.

The book is recommended for students ages 12 and up, according to its publisher. Junior, the protagonist, is 14 so 8th grade is an ideal time to be introduced to his self-doubting, idiosyncratic, and lovable character. He says and draws what thinks, trusting the reader with a vulnerability and honesty that invites them to reflect upon a fully-formed and complex life that both plays on stereotypes and breaks them down: about culture, about childhood, about maleness, about family.

Respected institutions, including Scholastic, PBS Learning Media, and the University of Minnesota have created curriculum around this book for students as young as 6th grade, with most recommendations leaning toward 8-9th grade as an ideal time to introduce students to this literature.

As a mother, I can say that my own daughter was introduced to Alexie's novel by her 8th grade teacher, then later read Leslie Marmon Silko's *Ceremony* as a sophomore, and Sherman Alexie's *Flight* in a junior/senior elective. Having the foundation of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in middle school was central to her developing understanding of Native American culture, reservation life, and poverty. On a personal level, I appreciated the opportunities we had for conversations in our family about how Junior is candid and offensive in ways that provoke thinking and empathy; about how he uses humor to cope with grief; and about how the book made my child think through issues she would never experience. To this day, now as an adult, she talks about this novel as a cornerstone of her education, and her middle school copy still resides on her bookshelf.

The New London-Spicer district is known for progressive and inventive thinking: from research into how to make your buildings more environmentally friendly with solar power to the photos currently posted on your school website of science club members building boats from recycled milk cartons. Clearly you want your students to think of a world larger than their own and you trust them to meet that world as intellectual and compassionate individuals who consider myriad responses to what comes their way.

Reading Alexie's book, with the guidance of thoughtful and qualified English teachers, provides students with one more tool that helps in the tremendous journey of growing up. It introduces them to behaviors, speech patterns, ways of seeing the world, ethics, and principles -- some of which align with their values and culture, some of which are vastly different -- and invites them to reflect on self-knowledge and unpack difference.

That's the kind of real world, critical thinking we want offered to all our students. Please defend the inclusion of Alexie's novel in the 8th grade curriculum and empower your teachers to continue to use this incredible text in the classroom.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Campbell  
Intellectual Freedom Chair  
Minnesota Council of Teachers of English  
[www.mcte.org](http://www.mcte.org)