



HUMAN GRIT IN SHERMAN ALEXIE'S The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian

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Abstract

This thesis explores the role of human grit: passion and perseverance in the development of the main character, Arnold Spirit Jr. in Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part – Time Indian*. Using mimetic theory and narrative qualitative methodology, this study examines how Junior's determination to pursue education and self-identity serves as resistance to the socio-economic limitations of reservation life. Despite poverty, racism, and personal loss, Junior exhibits high levels of grit, suggesting that passion and perseverance are essential for marginalized youth striving to achieve long – term goals. The findings confirm Duckworth's view that grit is a more significant predictor of success than intelligence or talent.

Keywords: grit, passion, perseverance, marginalized people reservation.

I. Introduction

The resistance of Native American tribes against white colonialists who aimed to seize their lands ultimately led to prolonged conflict, conquest, and oppression. The colonizers took over tribal lands and resources, resulting in devastating impacts such as war, disease, and cultural erosion, which nearly drove some tribes to extinction. Even after the colonial era, Native tribes continued to face marginalization, struggling to reclaim their land, culture, and identity (Sanders, 2014). Despite these hardships, their unwavering determination reflects extraordinary grit—defined by passion and perseverance. Their fight for justice and cultural survival not only symbolizes strength and resilience but also highlights the enduring relevance of grit in overcoming adversity. As Sanders (2014) emphasizes, the perseverance of Native Americans is a powerful reminder that with grit, even the most difficult challenges can be overcome (Sandres 2014).

Despite centuries of oppression, Native American tribes have shown remarkable resilience by preserving their heritage and making progress in areas such as education, culture, and economic development. Many tribes have regained rights to self-governance, revived their languages and traditions, and established schools to teach future generations (Brooks et al., 2004).

Their economic growth such as through casinos on tribal lands has strengthened community welfare. These real-life struggles reflect themes found in literature, where grit: passion and perseverance is often the key to overcoming adversity. In modern society, many pursue success through education and talent, yet often overlook the essential role of grit. As Angad (94–102) points out, talent alone does not guarantee success; instead, grit enables individuals to persist, adapt, and ultimately achieve their goals even when formal achievements fall short.

In Indonesia, studies on grit have begun to be carried out in the field of education, especially for the younger generation. People who have talent and expertise will lose to people who have grit. Grit is an important aspect for young people. The existence of grit makes children always try to overcome difficulties and academic problems at school. Children become more diligent, optimistic, have hope and struggle to face challenges to achieve their dreams (Nur 386).

Sherman Alexie was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, on October 7, 1966, to Spokane Coeur'd Alene Indian but grew up on the Indian reservation in Wellpinit the setting of *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. His father, Sherman Joseph Alexie was a Coeur'd Alene Indian and his mother, Lillian Agnes Cox was a



Spokane Indian (Wilson 13)

He is also one of the top authors in the young adult genre. She cares about the tragic events of teenagers who die every minute due to suicide, which keeps her thoughts focused on the stigma around mental health and teen. He is also a Native American writer, poet, and filmmaker. He is known for his works that explore themes of modern Native American life, often with a mixture of humor and pathos. Alexie's works frequently address issues such as racism, stereotypes, and the injustices faced by Native Americans, often with a dark yet humorous outlook. He also frequently incorporates autobiographical elements from his experiences growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Kirkus states that Alexie nimbly blends sharp wit with unapologetic emotion....Junior's keen cartoons sprinkle the pages as his fluid narration deftly mingles raw feeling with funny, sardonic insight." (240).

One of his best novels being discussed is *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, which winning the National Book Award for Young People's Literature, A Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Winner Bestselling and the Odyssey Award as the best audiobook of 2008 for young people (Nelson 38).

II. Grit In Human Life

2.1 Passion

Passion is an important element of grit itself. Duckworth defines passion as a deep and sustained interest in something we do. Passion, in this context, is not just a momentary enthusiasm or enthusiasm, but a long-term commitment to the goals or activities we choose to pursue. Duckworth states that passion is not something that suddenly appears, but something that develops over time and grows as we continue to try and experience our life journey. This passion includes two main aspects: The first, Deep Interest, which is a strong love for a field or activity. In this case, passion is not just about temporary desire or passion, but something that gives a sense of purpose and meaning in our lives.

Second, consistency in the long term, which is a commitment that lasts for a long time. This refers to a person's ability to stay involved and try despite the challenges and obstacles that come (1000-1085).

Duckworth argues that passion does not just appear, but rather is the result of a process of continuous exploration and self-discovery. The more we explore and hone our interests in a field, the more likely we are to develop a deep and lasting passion. Passion is about finding something we love and truly care about, and then directing our energy and effort to continually engage and grow in it over time. It is an integral part of grit, which also includes persistence and resilience in the face of challenges (1087–1101).

People with obsessive passion may feel depressed or even anxious if they are unable to engage in the activity they love. According to Vallerand, the main difference between the two types of passion is how much control the individual has over the activity they are engaged in. Harmonious passion supports life balance, while obsessive passion often causes imbalance or problems in life. This passion model is used to explain how a strong drive towards a particular activity can affect a person's psychological well-being and quality of life, and how passion can contribute to goal achievement and success (756–767).

2.2. Perseverance

Perseverance according to Angela Duckworth is the ability to continue to strive towards long-term goals despite difficulties, obstacles, or failures. Duckworth first introduced the concept of grit and its emphasis on perseverance in a series of studies that showed that persistence in the face of adversity is more important than talent in achieving success. Perseverance is a core component of grit, people who are highly persistent tend to be able to overcome failures and obstacles on their way to long-term achievement. Duckworth also emphasizes that while talent is important, greater persistence and mental toughness are often the key



differentiators in achieving larger goals (1087-1101). Duckworth adds that people overcome all challenges through persistence, discipline, and hard work that are held together throughout their lives. Perseverance is more influential in achieving success than factors that we cannot control, such as innate talent or chance opportunities. In her view, continued perseverance is the key that allows someone to survive obstacles and achieve extraordinary results, more than relying on talent or luck (123).

DiNapoli highlights that perseverance as initiating and sustaining, and re-initiating and re-sustaining, in-the-moment productive struggle in the face of one or more obstacles, setbacks, or discouragements. Concept of perseverance concerns working toward a short-term goal with the recognition that a consistent tendency to persevere, over time, can accumulate and develop into long-term pursuits. In this way, perseverance has been discussed as productive persistence, defined as perseverance plus effective strategy because an individual or group may need to employ different plans to make progress on a problem if their first plan was unsuccessful. At the core of perseverance is the intersection of self-regulatory and metacognitive skills: regulating oneself to not only continue engagement in the face of challenge but to notice progress or the lack thereof and decide to change course when necessary (402). Rahman says that facing challenges and difficulties with perseverance is the essence of how we handle challenging situations facing mental and emotional resilience, as well as continuously striving to improve the conditions to face various obstacles. This perseverance reflects a dedication to achieving better results and a higher quality life (120).

2.3 Theory and Method

This is a narrative qualitative research proposed by Creswell stating that narrative is a kind of qualitative in which the investigator illustrates the lives of characters,

accumulates and tells stories about individual's life, and write narratives of characteristic experiences (54). The data in this study is the text of the novel collected with the note-taking technique and narration by highlighting the important events, various books, online journal and author's official website.

This study applies mimetic theory by M.H. Abrams, which views literature as an imitation of real life. This perspective allows for the examination of how Junior's grit mirrors real struggles faced by marginalized communities. Supporting sources include psychological research on grit, as well as scholarly works on Native American identity and resilience (8-9).

III. The Analysis

The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, a novel of 242 pages written by Sherman Alexie, is a story about the life of Arnold Spirit Jr., often called "Junior", a Native American teenager living on the Spokane reservation in Washington. He was born with a number of physical and medical problems, including hydrocephalus that causes him to suffer from severe headaches and is physically weaker than other children his age. He lives on the reservation with his mother, father, and sister, Mary. Life on the reservation is difficult, marked by poverty, alcoholism, and a sense of hopelessness. His decision to attend the mostly white Reardan school is met with resistance from his community (including his best friend, Rowdy, who feels betrayed), Junior is determined to improve his life. At Reardan, he faces racism and isolation as the only Native American student, but he finds some success in academics and athletics. He also begins to make new friends, including a girl named Penelope, and becomes a star player on the basketball team. His skills on the court earn him respect, but his experiences at school are still challenging, as he is constantly reminded of his difference. Throughout the novel, he reflects on his identity as a Native American, the violence and trauma on the reservation, and hopes for a different future, the importance of self-



identity, and the difficult but necessary journey toward change. The main characters are Arnold Spirit Jr,

3.1 Passion

Sherman Alexie as the author is inspired by his personal experiences, social observations, and reflections on identity, struggle, and hope for young people, especially those growing up on reservations. He creates character Junior to represent people, especially young people who have grit to get a successful life with passion and perseverance. Passion is at the heart of Junior's journey. His desire to get a better education, to escape poverty, and to find a clearer identity motivates many of his major life decisions. Although he faces many obstacles, both social, emotional, and physical, his passion for achieving a greater purpose and creating a better life is the driving force that allows him to persevere and move forward. As state by Duckworth (5) that people with grit are able to maintain their enthusiasm and motivation over the long term, even in the face of failure or adversity.

The author describes the lives of marginalized people on the reservation. Where everything is limited, for example poverty, lack of education, identity, violence, alcoholism, which is very different from the lives of the white community. Arnold Spirit Junior is a 14-year-old Spokane Indian lives is the reservation. He has several health problems (extra teeth, big head, speech disorders) caused by hydrocephalus, which is water on the brain at birth (2-3) which makes him often bullied by his friends, even so, as supported by Duckworth (1-7) Junior remains enthusiastic and has the spirit to move forward. Junior has a dog that is considered his best friend, but when the dog gets sick, his family cannot afford the vet so his father has to shoot him to end his suffering: ... Sorry, but we don't have money for Oscar (9). Junior does not blame his parents for his family's poverty, after all, they also grew up in poverty, and because they are reservation Indians.

He is very happy with geometry class

but when class starts, he sees the geometry book his mother used and Junior uses it again after almost 30 years (24-30). He starts to think about how poor and sad his tribe is because the books used must have been from the previous generation. So he threw the book and accidentally his teacher, Mr. P's face and he is suspended. A week later, Mr. P came to Junior's house and suggested that he leave the reservation and look for hope outside the reservation "... You will find more hope the further you get away from this sad reservation." (41). Junior's older sister, Marry, is a smart child, she wants to be a novelist but she doesn't dare to leave the reservation and is afraid of being made fun of (35). After hearing Mr. P's words, Junior dares to leave the reservation even though he has to face challenges and ridicule from his friends but because he has spirit, he is not afraid of his decision. He decides to transfer schools to Reardan which is full of white people which is twenty two miles from the reservation. His parents agree with Junior to move to Reardan, and want their child's life to be better unlike those who are drunkards.

This is not only a big step, but also full of risks, because he has to leave his close community and face discrimination in his new school. From here it can be, see Junior's passion to continue his education outside the reservation even though he has to walk far, but he realizes that education on the reservation will not give him enough opportunities, so he is inspired to seek a better education outside the reservation. Duckworth states that children who travel long distances to school often develop stronger resilience, because they learn to face physical challenges, time, and weather that make them more disciplined and persistent (37-99). It is told as follows:

"I want to go to Reardan" I said again. I couldn't believe I was saying it. For me, it seemed as real as saying, "I want to fly to the moon"...

"No, if I don't go now, I never will. I have to do it now."

"Okay," they said (44).

During Junior's first week at Reardan, the other students seems to hostile and look



down on him. When a boy named Roger tells a racist joke, Junior decides to defend himself and punches Roger in the face even though Roger is big and strong. Junior is surprised when Roger does not fight back. It is told as follows:

"Did you know that Indians are living proof that niggers fuck buffalo?" (61). Roger and his friends burst out laughing. I hated them. I knew I had to do something big. I couldn't let them get away with this. I wasn't just defending myself. I was defending the Indians, the blacks, and the buffalo (61).

I felt like Roger had kicked me in the face. That was the most racist thing I'd ever heard in my life (61).

Junior was worried that Roger will retaliate, but his grandmother things Junior has earned Roger's respect.

Junior's grandmother is proven right and Roger began is to be friendly and respectful to him. Despite the insults and feelings of being unaccepted, he still has the passion within him to be better and show that he can get ahead too. This condition is in him with Brooks and Goldstein saying that mental toughness is the key to surviving and advancing even when insulted or looked down upon. Emotionally resilient people are not easily shaken by criticism or failure, and they continue to move forward with enthusiasm even in the face of great obstacles (200-300).

Junior's passion is also seen from his love for basketball. When he arrives in Reardan, Junior is initially afraid to join the team but his father encourages him and allows him to dream big. He tries to join by passing several tests and finally he is chosen to be one of the core teams because the coach sees that even though Junior has lost to Roger he does not give up and he continues to fight until he can defeat Roger. His first match is against his old school on the reservation. The members of his tribe in the audience booed Junior and turns their backs on him, they are pelted with snowballs by the Spokane people and say: Ar-nold sucks! Ar-nold sucks! Ar-nold sucks! (137). After the match is over

Reardan lost and Wellpinit won. That is the peak of Junior's passion in sports even though he fails but he continues to try to be enthusiastic about training to become a better basketball player because he knows this is a journey to achieve a bigger goal as pointed out by Duckworth (1-7). He says: I want to play. I want to win. (141)

Junior tries to navigate between two worlds: the challenging world of the reservation and the more promising world outside. This leaves him to find a balance between maintaining his Spokane tribe and building a new, more expansive life. He feels torn between his loyalty to his community, his family on the reservation, and his desire to pursue opportunities outside. Despite this, Junior maintains his desire to remain himself, which ultimately helps him navigate a more meaningful journey. Just what Fanon emphasizes that often considers their culture inferior, it is important to maintain one's identity and self. Maintaining one's authenticity is the key to achieving psychological and social freedom, even in a highly oppressive environment (355-361).

Although Junior and Rowdy's relationship is often strained, their friendship is rooted in a shared desire to survive on the reservation, however in different ways. Furthermore, although Junior is often disappointed and angry with his parents (who often smoke, drink, and feel helpless), he still has a passion for providing for them and trying to help his family out of difficult situations. He says: I was half Indian in one place and half white in the other (113). I realized that, sure, I was a Spokane Indian. I belonged to that tribe (204)...Treuer reviews life on the reservations, saying that while alcohol is often seen as one of the main problems hindering progress in the lives of indigenous people, many communities are also working hard to combat the negative effects of alcoholism (87-203).

Junior loves writing, reading books, and drawing cartoons. Junior draws because he wants to express himself, talks to the world, and wants the world to pay attention to him and he hopes that by drawing everyone can do it. He expresses: So I draw



because I feel like it might be my only chance to escape the reservation (6). By using art, Junior has a desire to find a way to connect with others and also prove to himself that he has the ability to go beyond the limitations set by the world around him. By drawing, he feels like a real escape to get out of the limitations. He says:

“But when you draw, everyone can understand it...”

“So I draw because I want to talk to the world. And I want the world to pay attention to me...”

“An artist. Maybe a famous artist. Maybe a rich artist.”

“That's the only way I can be rich and famous” (5)

Passion plays a significant role in the development of the main character, Junior. Junior's passion is seen in various aspects of his life, both in pursuing education, art, and his personal identity. It is one of the main drivers for Junior, who has a dream of escaping the poverty and hardship he experiences on the reservation. Despite facing many challenges, such as having to go to school far away and feeling alienated in the second world, Junior remains determined to get a better education, which he sees as a way to improve his fate. Junior is able to overcome feelings of disappointment and internal conflict, while also conveying his views and feelings about the world around him. In the midst of a life divided between the reservation and the reardan world, he tries to understand who he is and what he wants from life. Junior shows that the desire to achieve something is greater than fear and challenge, and that passion is the key to finding meaning and purpose in life.

3.2 Perseverance

Alexie writes this novel inspired by his personal experience so that he can motivate especially teenagers to always be gritty, and get support from the community and other writers. This novel is a portrait of grit of a reservation youth who always perseveres so that he can get what he doesn't get on the reservation even though there are many challenges from within and outside his tribe.

In this case, to convey this grit, Alexie creates character Junior to represent perseverance. As Duckworth states that perseverance is a person's ability to keep trying even though facing difficulties, obstacles or failures, not giving up easily and continuing to try to achieve goals (5).

Because of the trauma from previous colonization, someone may be afraid to start something new and move forward. So that many residents who are Spokane only remain silent and do not dare to do things outside the boundaries of the daily life on the reservation. For that, Junior, a young man from the reservation, tries to dare to do something new and leave the reservation in order to find his. He moves schools to Reardan where the majority there are white-skinned even though he feels inappropriate, but he remains persistent in hoping to get a better education. Drucker (339-553) speaks about the importance of planning in and decision making. To achieve the desired goal, we must have a clear plan, but more importantly, do the hard work to make it happen. Success does not come from just planning, but from the ability to turn intentions into planned and consistent actions. It is told as follows:

“...Yes, there is place in the world where the white people are even poorer than you ever thought possible.”

“I want to go to Reardan,” I said

“Reardan is the rich, white farm town that sits in the wheat fields exactly twenty-two miles away from the rez...” (43)

Even though Junior has to face difficulties to go to school, he often walks twenty two miles to Reardan, he remains enthusiastic and has high hopes. Einstein emphasizes that success is not the result of talent or intelligence alone, but of hard work, perseverance, deep curiosity, and consistency in facing challenges. He taught us that persistence in overcoming problems and continuing to seek solutions is the key to achievement (97-309). It is narrated as follows:



After school, I'd ride the bus to the end of the line and wait for my folks. If they didn't come, I'd start walking Hitchhiking in the opposite direction. Somebody was usually heading back home to the rez, so I'd usually catch a ride.

Three times, I had to walk the whole way home.

Twenty-two miles

I got blisters each time (82).

Junior's perseverance is also seen on the basketball court, where he not only tries hard to adapt to new friends, but also to win the basketball game even though Reardan is previously defeated by Wellpinit. He remains enthusiastic to show everyone that he can defeat Wellpinit. It is narrated:

"...I feel like I have something to prove to the people in Reardan, the people in Wellpinit, and to myself."

"I have to prove that I am stronger than everybody else. I have to prove that I will never give up... I'm never going to quit living life this hard, you know? I'm never going to surrender to anybody. Never, ever, ever" (176)

And then I took my three-pointer and buried. Just swished that sucker.

My coach was jumping up and down and spinning in circles.

My teammates were screaming my name.

Yep, all of that fuss and the score was only 3 to 0.

But, trust me, the game was over (183).

This condition is in line with the importance of focusing on achieving big goals in life to avoid unproductive distractions and prioritize things that bring long-term progress, whether it is in work, self-development, or relationships. Focus is essential, such as planning, building relationships, and self-development can increase productivity, reduce stress, and help achieve a better life balance to ensure that our time and energy are focused on things that make a positive impact. So this habit is

not just about time efficiency, but also about living a more meaningful life.

Junior faces many emotional losses, from the loss of his best friend, Rowdy, who used to be his constant companion and protector, to the death of his wise, kind, tolerant grandmother who is run over by a drunk, and the death of his daughter, Mary, who was burned with her husband due to alcoholism without realizing that their house was already on fire. These are major tragedies in Junior's life. Although these losses are devastating, Junior does not give in to grief or run away from reality. Instead, he continues to fight and move forward in a way that shows his perseverance in maintaining hope for the future, even though he is very sad. One of Junior's greatest journeys is finding his own identity between being a child on a poor reservation and a student at a wealthier private school. His perseverance in understanding who he is, and how he can fit into these two very different worlds, shows Junior's ability to survive and thrive in adversity as agreed with Duckworth (50-67). It is narrated:

"I have to go. I'm going to die if don't leave."...

...I knew that my best friend had become my worst enemy.

But I missed Rowdy (96)...

I was really missing Rowdy (125)...

...she was walking back home from a mini powwow..., when she was struck and killed by a drunk driver (149).

My grandmother's last act on earth was a call forgiveness. Love and tolerance

She wanted us to forgive Gerald (150)...

Miss Warren said. "Your sister, she's dead."

I was stunned. But I wasn't sad (190)...

Perseverance is a strong thing that reflects Junior's character. Despite facing various challenges both on the poverty-filled reservation and in his new school, Junior shows incredible perseverance in pursuing his dreams and overcoming every obstacle



that he faces. Junior's perseverance is reflected in every aspect of his life. Despite living in limitations and hardships on the reservation, he never gives up. When he decides to move to a better school outside the reservation, he realizes that his choice makes him an outcast in the second world both in the new school and in his own community. However, Junior remains steadfast in his decision because he believes that a better education is the path to a brighter future. Even when faced with problems in personal relationships and feelings of alienation, he continues to fight not to give up and continues to move forward.

In addition, Junior's perseverance is also seen in his search for his identity. In the midst of a life full of loss, poverty, and suffering, Junior continues to struggle to find who he really is and what he wants in life. His perseverance is the key to facing all the trials that come, proving that even though life is full of challenges, with determination and courage, one can change one's fate. Overall, this novel teaches that perseverance and the spirit to keep moving forward are the keys to surviving and achieving dreams, even though we are often faced with difficulties. Junior shows that perseverance is a very important quality to achieve success and find life's purpose, no matter what obstacles lie ahead.

IV. Conclusion

Analysis The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, it is concluded that this novel plays an important role in showing the importance of grit to society or readers. Overall, grit emphasizes the importance of determination and persistence, not only in short-term achievements, but also in facing bigger and longer obstacles. It teaches that success is often not the result of natural talent or luck alone, but rather a person's ability to keep trying, learn from failure, and stay focused on the bigger goal. In the context of education, career, or personal life, grit is one of the key factors in achieving long-term success, because it encourages individuals to persist and try, despite difficulties. Thus, the importance of grit in life shows that with perseverance and the courage to keep

moving forward, a person can overcome existing obstacles and reach their full potential, even though the world around them is often full of challenges and failures. Grit is a quality that can be cultivated and developed, and is one of the keys to achieving true success in life.

Alexie conveys a message about the importance of having grit, namely passion and perseverance. Even in situations that are full of challenges, difficulties and uncertainties. Through the character of Junior, it is depicted how someone who was born into very difficult conditions and lives in a marginalized community can still pursue their dreams and face various difficulties with courage and an unwavering spirit.

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