



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative  
2018 Volume III: Adaptation: Literature, Film and Society

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## **Native American Literature Adaptation: From Smoke Signals to Reading Comprehension**

Curriculum Unit 18.03.05, published September 2018  
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### **Introduction**

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Kayenta Unified School District (KUSD) is a public school in northeastern Arizona deep within the borders of the Navajo Reservation. The school serves over 2,000 students from Kindergarten through 12th grade. The student population is approximately 99% Native Americans, mostly Navajo students. Kayenta USD serves students from 7 communities within a 50-mile radius of the town of Kayenta, Arizona. Some students have to catch the bus as early as 6 AM to make it to school on time. Approximately 30 buses run out to these communities and haul students to the school every day.

A majority of the students are bilingual, speaking both Dine Language and English Language. Those who are Native Dine Speakers are identified as English Learners based on what the family wrote on the enrollment form and the Primary Home Language Other Than English (PHLOTE) survey form. PHLOTE survey form is a form that families fill out to determine what language is spoken in the home. Parents who have written down Navajo or other languages as one of the languages spoken in the household are often placed in Structured English Immersion classes until they are assessed for English language proficiency. Most of these students are considered potential English Learners and assessed for proficiency in English using the AZELLA (Arizona English Language Learner Assessment). Students who fail to score proficient on their English Proficiency Assessment must be serviced in Structured English Immersion (SEI) classes. Students who test proficient on AZELLA are moved into mainstream classrooms. Of the 2,000 students in the Kayenta School District, less than 100 students are officially identified as English Learners at Kayenta Elementary School. The goal of SEI classrooms is to help students become fluent speakers, readers, and writers of the English Language so they can be reclassified into mainstream classrooms.

This curriculum unit will focus on developing reading comprehension skills for fourth grade, Stage III (3rd - 4th), English Learners. Reading comprehension has always been a challenge to teach to Navajo students, and it is especially hard for students who are English Learners. The students in my class have learned enough English to communicate in Basic English, but most of the students lack basic reading skills, and inadequate comprehension skills due to their limited vocabulary. Many English Learners have taken longer than mainstream students at the same grade level to develop basic speaking, listening, reading, writing skills, and language skills. Most EL students are still struggling with learning to read rather than reading to learn. At

fourth grade, it is especially crucial for students to start developing reading comprehension skills. A lot of the state assessments use knowledge of informational texts and literature to assess for reading comprehension skills and reading strategies. In this unit, my goal is help my EL students develop reading comprehension skills and reading strategies using film and literature. I will focus on four reading skills: identifying and sequencing plot events, problems and solutions, cause and effect, and compare and contrast.

The unit will use the film *Smoke Signals*, a screenplay of the film, and one short story, "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" from the book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfightin Heaven*, all by Sherman Alexie. Using Film and Literature to teach reading comprehension is ideal because many of my students love to watch movies. They can recall and retell every detail and effectively sequence every event in a movie. In addition, I believe that using visuals will help students develop the skills and strategies necessary for reading comprehension.

The plan is to read the short story first with the students. The plot event has a beginning, middle, ending, a problem, and solution. One activity is to outline the plot by using a graphic organizer. With the aid of the graphic organizer, the students will create a storyboard to demonstrate their comprehension and abilities to visualize. The next step is to read the parts of the screenplay that correlate with the selected scenes. The selected scenes will be used for two reasons: to teach them to find the main idea and details, and to compare and contrast the journey of the characters. Then the students will see the parts of the film that correspond to the sections covered. The students will compare the film to the short story, and to the screen play. Are there differences, are there similarities? Are there sections that were included, and were there sections that were completely left out? Why do you think that happened?

## Content

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The goals as an SEI teacher is for my students to become proficient in listening and speaking, reading, writing, and language domains so they can reclassify into mainstream classroom. In order for a student to become proficient, they must pass the Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA). In previous years, most students often reclassified as proficient English Learner if their total combined score reached proficient on the scale score. This year, Arizona Department of Education adjusted the scoring requirements for AZELLA. A child may have a combined score within proficiency range, but they may not reclassify unless they scored proficient in the reading domain and writing strand.

This year, out of 11 EL students, only one student reclassified as proficient because she was the only one who scored proficient in reading comprehension and writing, and had a total combined score reach proficient using the scale score. An additional 7 students also scored proficient in the total combined score, but were not reclassified because they did not achieve a proficient score in reading comprehension and/ or writing. According to English Language Proficiency (ELP) standards, a student is considered proficient if they show their competency in reading based on the knowledge, skills, and abilities specified in the performance indicators. The students are expected to analyze texts for expression, enjoyment, and response to other related content areas. The students need to demonstrate reading comprehension by summarizing and retelling a story or event with a beginning, middle, and end using transitional words, complete sentences, and supporting details from text and film using appropriate academic vocabulary. Students must also make connections to text and film.

Movies and films have become mainstream media for students on the Navajo reservations, especially with a local movie theatre that shows two current movies. In addition, internet services and cell phone services have vastly improved in our rural communities within the last five years. Instead of competing with mainstream media, why not use it as a tool to teach students reading comprehension?

### **Chris Eyre- Director**

*Smoke Signals* is a directorial debut for Chris Eyre who is an enrolled member of Cheyenne and Arapaho Tribes. He was born in Portland, Oregon in 1969 and was raised in a Presbyterian church. Before pursuing his career in films, he discovered a love for images and landscape photography in high school. He earned an Associate's Degree in television from Portland. He received his B.A. in Media from the University of Arizona and attended the prestigious Tisch School of the Arts at NYU. His occupations include film director and film producer. Other films he produced and directed include *Skins*, *Episodes of PBS Mystery! A Thief in Time*, *Skinwalkers*, and *Edge of America*.

### **Sherman Alexie**

Sherman Alexie is an author, poet, filmmaker, and screenwriter who draws on his Indigenous American experiences. Born on October 7, 1966, Alexie grew up on the Spokane Indian Reservation. Six months after he was born, he had to have brain surgery because he was born with hydrocephalus, an abnormally large amount of brain fluid in his brain cavity. The surgery was considered a high risk because death and mental disability were the only two possible outcomes. Fortunately, the surgery was a success and did not yield any brain injury, but Alexie suffered side effects. The side effects included an enlarged head, bed wetting, and seizures. The large head was especially agonizing because it led to teasing and bullying at school. He was known as "The Globe." Furthermore, Alexie grew up with alcoholic parents. Fortunately, his mother Lilian reached sobriety. His father continued to drink and often disappeared for weeks at a time. Because of the hardship he suffered, Alex was often excluded from many activities. His escape was the library, where he read everything that was available to him. Alexie excelled in school.

Alex decided to attend school off the reservation, so he could have a better education. At his new school, he was the only Native American in an all-white school. That did not stop him from excelling at his new school. He participated in various activities including basketball, debate team, and became class president. After high school, he was offered a scholarship to Gonzaga University, a Roman Catholic University in Spokane, Washington. He originally majored in pre-med, but could not handle dissection. Eventually, he transferred to Washington State University, where he was inspired to become a writer when Alex Kuo became his mentor. Alex Kuo, a poet himself, changed Alexie's life when he gave Alexie an anthology of Native American poetry which taught him to look at literature from a different perspective. *Songs of this Earth on Turtle's Back*, by Joseph Bruchac inspired Alexie to write his collection of poetry and short stories, *The Business of Fancydancing: Stories and Poems*. With the success of his first published book of poems and short stories, he dropped out of school and quit drinking. Although he did not complete college, Washington State University eventually awarded him a bachelor's degree.

Sherman Alexie became successful as author, poet, screenwriter, and filmmaker. Alexie's other notable work also includes *The Absolute True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*, *Smoke Signals*, *Reservation Blues*, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, *Indian Killer*, and *War Dances*. He is also a founding member of a non-profit organization that teaches filmmaking skills to Native American youths.

## **Indigenous Background**

### **Coeur d'Alene Indian Tribe**

Coeur d'Alene Indian Reservation is in northwestern Idaho and has a population of 6,551 people. The name of the tribe is a French word meaning “Heart of Awl,” named for their bartering abilities when they traded. It is one of the five recognized tribes in Idaho. Coeur d'Alene people practice respect and reverence for Natural Laws, which means that they are responsible for the environment. The tribe is especially active in protecting, conserving, and enhancing fish and wildlife.

### **Spokane Tribe**

Spokane Tribe, also known as Children of the Sun, live east of Washington and parts of Idaho. Their reservation is approximately 1,520 acres with an approximate population of 2,000 people. The tribe is known for fishing and gathering. Their diet consist of fish--mostly trout, whitefish, and salmon—game--whitetail deer and mule deer--and plants. Fish eyes are considered a delicacy.

### **Synopsis of *Smoke Signals***

*Smoke Signals* (1998) is a coming of age movie that explores friendship, relationships, abuse, and alcoholism. The movie is based on the adaptation from Sherman Alexie’s short story “This is What it Means to Say Phoenix Arizona” from the book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. The premise of the movie is a road trip where two young Coeur d'Alene men were brought together through the death of a father. As the two main characters embark on their journey, they deal with the loss differently. Victor is an angry, tough athlete who resents his father for his alcoholism, abuse, and abandonment. But, Thomas Build-A-Fire is an eccentric ever smiling optimistic storyteller who constantly retells stories based on his fond memories of Victor Joseph. In the process of retrieving the body of Victor Joseph’s estranged father from Phoenix, Arizona, the characters explore their identities and what it means to be “Indian.” Should Native Americans be more stoical or should they be more traditional? At the same time, the journey was a time for Victor to confront his resolve about his conflicting issues with his father. The trip allows the two characters to reach an understanding about each other.

### **Significance of *Smoke Signals***

The landmark Native American cinematic movie *Smoke Signals* was the first film to be directed, acted, and produced by Native Americans to have a major national and international distribution. The critically acclaimed movie is the only one of its kind to go mainstream and considered a financial success with a profit of \$6.8 Million at the box office.

### **Exercising Cultural Sovereignty**

The most significant achievement of *Smoke Signals* is the ability to challenge the conventional beliefs of Hollywood industry from within. Native Americans were never given the support, or the recognition by the film industry to tell Native American stories. Often, Native American characters were created in stereotypical and racist images. Distorted images in films influenced what and how we think of others and ourselves. The greatest threat to Native Americans is the ability of Hollywood to continue creating dehumanizing stereotypes of Native Americans and their culture. The release of the movie was an act of self-defiance and exercise of “cultural sovereignty.” According to Singer, cultural sovereignty involves using the old ways of Native

American culture and using them to adapt to our current contemporary life.<sup>1</sup> Sovereignty is the right of a group of people to be self-determining, and the power to determine how that group is represented, especially in films.<sup>2</sup>

### **Challenging Stereotypes**

The movie challenges widely accepted misconceptions about Native Americans. The movie had to pack a political punch to tear down preconceived Native American stereotypes in Hollywood. These stereotypes affected political policies for all Native American tribes across the United States. In the 1980s and early 1990s, Hollywood attempted to produce movies that were more sympathetic to Native Americans. All of sudden, Native American causes became popular among U.S. leaders, especially after the success of *Dances with Wolves*. Many senators wanted to serve on the committee for Indian Affairs. Unfortunately, the popularity of "Indian causes" goes out of fashion just as quickly as it becomes popular. The impact of the film industry on Native American policies is a concern for Native Americans.

The disconnection between Hollywood directors and Native Americans continues to promote misrepresentation. According to Cobb, many films also portray Native Americans as a vanishing or a dying race. Many Americans believe that Native Americans do not exist. If they do exist, then they are portrayed as warriors or shamans. This fictional representation has become a litmus test for authenticity.<sup>3</sup> Assumption about what a real Indian is comes from stereotypical portrayals in Hollywood movies. Native Americans were never portrayed with respect. They are usually over-romanticized or over-glorified to an iconic level.

Most Indian theme movies aren't about Indians, but about white characters searching for their identity or coming to terms with their feelings about political issues, lives, and experiences. Native Americans were used as "tools", characters or ideas, which helped whites understand themselves.

### **Indians Playing Indians**

The casting of Native protagonists is an important accomplishment, considering that most Natives were cast as the enemy, sidekicks, or a love interest. The film created multi-dimensional and complexed characters. The tension does not center on white and Native American conflicts, but rather focuses on the internal struggle of Victor to come to terms with his father. One conclusion we draw from the movie is that Native Americans have individual personalities. The uniqueness of the film is that Native Americans are playing Native American characters, directed by a Native American. For the first time, Native Americans were on both sides of the camera.

Historically, Native American parts were often cast with non-Native actors. Alexie insisted on using Native American actors to play Native American roles because they give a better performance. The actors and actresses he chose to play reminded him of people he knew, especially since Thomas Builds-The-Fire is a character that is an autobiographical representation of himself. The actors and actresses were also able to draw on their experiences of losses and on the experiences of growing up on reservations to portray the characters realistically and effectively.

### **Alcoholism**

Although the "Drunk Indian" is a typical Hollywood stereotype, the reality is drinking does exist, and alcoholism is prevalent in most Native American communities. The film does tackle the effects of alcoholism in three ways: fighting alcoholism, recovering, and those who do not drink. In the film, Arlene and Arnold are

portrayed as alcoholics. They both have several scenes throughout the movie in which their drinking leads to complications: at the Fourth of July party, and drinking in front of young Victor. Eventually, Arlene decided to stop drinking once she realized the effects of her addiction on her son. Although Velma and Lucy are supporting characters and their appearance in the film is limited, their dialogue suggest that they are dealing with recovery. In one scene, Lucy asks for a beer to quench her thirst, but Velma reminded her that they do not drink anymore. Velma had to quench her thirst with a soda. Victor and Thomas represent the Native Americans who do not drink alcohol. Victor had to clarify that they do not drink, when they were questioned by the white police officer at the police station.

## **Film Adaptation**

### **Voiceover**

The voiceover of the narrator of the story plays a crucial role in the development of the movie. This was the first time the narration of the voiceover was performed by a Native American. Often, the voiceovers are narrated by non-natives, even in American Indian themed movies. In this movie, the narration is provided by the character Thomas Builds-The-Fire. The narrator has two distinct functions: at the beginning of the movie, the voiceover set up the movie. Furthermore, the voiceover provides a narrative for the flashback.

As the movie begins, we hear the music fade out and hear the voiceover by the disc jockey. The voiceover was recorded by John Trudell:

DISC JOCKEY

Good Morning, this is Randy Peone on KREZ radio, the voice of Coeur d'Alene Indian reservation. And it's time for the morning traffic report on this rainy Bicentennial Fourth of July. Let's go out to Lester FallsApart in KREZ traffic van broken down at the crossroads.

LESTER FALLSAPART

A big truck just went by.

*(Beat)*

Now, it's gone.

DISC JOCKEY

Well there you go folks. Looks like another busy morning. And I just got a news bulletin that Maddie and John Builds-The-Fire are hosting a Fourth of July party at their house this evening. And remember, folks, it's B.Y.O.F. Bring your own fireworks.<sup>4</sup>

The voiceover was extremely critical because the humor was an odd contrast with the seriousness and tragedy of the house fire. However, after many screen tests, the decision was to keep the voiceover because the audience needed "permission to laugh." The strategy was to allow the audience to realize that the movie was both dramatic and humorous. It was a joke that was funny, but not too funny, before the house fire scene.

Another critical voiceover was inserted into the beginning scenes during the house fire. There weren't enough scenes shot required for scenes 1-6 because the whole house burned down too quickly. To alleviate the confusion, the solution was to create a voiceover instead. Since Thomas Builds-The-Fire is a storyteller, he was the one who had to tell the story of the house fire.

### **Flashbacks**

The flashbacks provided two functions in the story. Some of the flashbacks served as memories for our characters Thomas Builds-The-Fire and Victor Joseph when they were growing up. Other flashbacks served to illustrate stories that Thomas Builds-The-Fire tells.

### **Landscape**

Director Chris Eyre, got into filmmaking through photography. In high school, he discovered his love for taking pictures of landscapes. He translated the Coeur d'Alene reservation landscape into the movies. Landscape is an important element of the story since it shows the spirit. The spirit of all reservations are different, and they look different. Choosing the right landscapes become part of telling a story because it turns into a character. Eyre especially enjoyed watching the changing landscape through a car window, and likes to take framing shots that are way. He incorporated the changing landscape in the movie. In one scene, Victor gazes through the windows of the bus as it drives away from town. As the bus pulls away, the shot is of rolling green hills covered with trees, typical of the Coeur d'Alene reservation landscape.

### **Soundtrack**

The soundtrack is a mixture of traditional Native American music, contemporary rock, and "49" songs that added another layer to the story. According to Alexie, the music was an organic part of the film. Alexie wrote some of the lyrics himself, including John Wayne's Teeth. Using music is a way to tell a story.

### **Scene Selection**

#### **Fry Bread**

The fry bread scene was inspired by biblical stories. In this scene Thomas describes the fry bread of Victor's mom as the best fry bread in the world.

Thomas

Yeah, it's so good they use it for communion back home. Arlene Joseph makes some Jesus fry bread, enit? Fry bread that can walk across water. Fry bread raising the dead.<sup>5</sup>

Later on in the flashback scene, as Thomas continues to tell a story about how one time Arlene had to feed 100 Indians at a feast, but only had 50 loaves of fry bread. To solve the problem, she holds the fry bread above her head and tears it apart. This scene is in reference to the Biblical story of how Jesus was able to miraculously feed numerous people bread and fish.

#### **Dances with Wolves**

In this scene, Victor, a tough guy, insults Thomas's appearance, and his story telling as a way to get him to

quit talking. Thomas's appearance reminds Victor of a stereotypical Hollywood medicine man. In the same instance, he insults his friend for watching *Dances with Wolves* numerous times.

Victor

I mean, you just go on talking about nothing. Why can't you have a normal conversation? You're always trying to sound like some damn medicine man or something. I mean, how many times have you see *Dances with Wolves*? A hundred, two hundred times?

*Embarrassed. Thomas ducks his head.*

Victor

*(Cont'd)*

Oh geez, you have seen it that many times, haven't you? Man. Do you think that shit is real? God. Don't you even know how to be a real Indian? <sup>6</sup>

Two things are going on in this scene. First of all, watching *Dances with Wolves* romanticizes the character of Thomas. Furthermore, the film is poking fun at a successful movie to undermine the mainstream stereotypes. Although *Dances with Wolves* portrays Native Americans in a positive light, it still has some Native American stereotypes. The Native Americans were just props to tell the story of a white man coming to terms with his identity in a new world.

### **How to be a Real Indian**

Victor

First of all, quit grinning like an idiot. Indians ain't supposed to smile like that. Get stoic.

Thomas tries to look stoic but fails.

Victor

No-- like this.

*Victor looks very tough and serious.*

Victor

You got to look mean or people won't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean. You got to look like a warrior. You got to look like you just came back from killing a buffalo.

Thomas

But our tribe never hunts buffalo. We are fishermen.



Victor

What? You want to look like you just came back from catching fish? This ain't Dances with Salmon, you know? Thomas, you gotta look like a warrior.

*Thomas attempts to look stoic a second time, with better results.*

Victor

There, that's better. And, second, you got to know how to use your hair.

Thomas

My hair?

Victor

Yeah, I mean, look at your hair, it's braided up and stuff. You've got to free it. An Indian man ain't nothing without his hair. And last, you've got to get rid of that suit, Thomas. You just have to. <sup>7</sup>

Victor insisted that Thomas should practice being more stoic to "look mean" and act more like a warrior in an attempt to get Thomas to be more like him. Typical Hollywood Native American stereotypes portray warriors wearing their long hair free, and they do not wear a three piece suit. Victor's insistence that Thomas should act like a warrior is also a stereotypical for the character because Coeur d'Alene were fishermen rather than hunters like Plains tribes. Again, the stereotype is presented with humor when Thomas comes out with his hair down and wearing a Fry bread Power t-shirt.

#### **"John Wayne's Teeth" (Western Influence)**

In one scene, following a failed confrontation with "redneck" cowboys who have taken Thomas and Victor's seat, the characters are forced to take another seat. Thomas asserted that maybe the warrior look does always work, and the cowboys always win. Thomas cited John Wayne, one of the toughest cowboy as always winning against Native American opponents. Although Victor concedes to defeat, he used humor to cope with the stereotype by mocking John Wayne with a 49ers song. This was an example of an explicit reference to challenge and to refute Western stereotypes. Singing "John Wayne's Teeth" was also a way for the characters to keep their dignity and pride while making other people on the bus uncomfortable. The significance of the scene is that stereotypes impact both Native Americans and non-native Americans.

John Wayne's teeth, John Wayne's teeth

Are they plastic, are they steel? <sup>8</sup>

#### **Trapdoors**

Trapdoors are the irony or in-jokes only a Native American will understand. According to Sherman Alexie, Indians and those familiar with Indian Culture will fall in, everyone else will keep walking. "Rez Cars" is an example of a trap door. Yes, it's humorous when people first realize that Velma and Lucy are driving in

reverse. Non-Natives may overlook the irony, but Natives will recognize it and internalize it as something they identify with. A Native American who's grown up on a reservation will automatically realize that the vehicle's transmission is out because they have experienced it at one time or another. In Native culture, if a vehicle can still run, even at low gear, it is still usable.

Basketball, plenty of basketball scenes are prevalent in the movie. Alexie and Eyre use basketball as a trap door because basketball is a "religion" on the reservations. The phenomenon of "rez ball" have Native Americans obsess over high school basketball games and players. The best players are often idolized by both young children and often adults. Many schools on the reservations close down during the state playoff so fans can attend the basketball games. Basketball is an important physical and cultural landscape in the movie.

The many humorous inferences to "being Indian" in the movie are the biggest trap doors. "Being Indian" means the ability to barter. In one scene, the only way Thomas and Victor get a ride is to "barter" for it.

First Lucy and Velma ask the two boys if they needed a ride.

Velma

What are you going to trade for it? We're Indians, remember? We barter. (*Smoke Signals*)<sup>9</sup>

Then Thomas proceeds to tell the story about Arnold Joseph and how he was the perfect hippie. At the conclusion of the story, the girls gave Thomas and Victor a ride to the bus station. Bartering is indigenous to the Coeur d'Alene tribes. Coeur d'Alene is a literal translation meaning "good barter." Their ancestors were well known for their abilities to trade with white settlers.

Junior

Hey Victor, who do you think is the greatest basketball player ever?

Victor

That's easy. Geronimo.

Junior

Geronimo? He couldn't play basketball man. He was Apache, man. Those suckers are about three feet tall.

Victor

It's Geronimo, man. He was lean, mean, and bloody. Would've dunked on your flat Indian ass and then cut it off.<sup>10</sup>

First of all Native Americans identify themselves in two ways. Most Native Americans will identify themselves by their tribe, like how Victor identifies himself as Coeur d'Alene. Second, Native Americans identify themselves in a more general term when they refer to themselves as Indian or Native American. The reference to Geronimo, although Apache, is a more general term. Pan ethnic Indianness refers to the commonalities of all indigenous tribes such as powwows and fry bread.

## Teaching Strategies

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### Notice and Wonder

Notice and Wonder helps organize their thinking and promotes knowledge building. Using a Notice and Wonder chart, the students simply record what they Notice by observing written texts or multimedia. The wonder part of the strategy encourages students to look at texts or multimedia and come up with questions about historical significances, the meaning, or the purpose of what they see. Provide a scaffold for EL students. Sentence frame will help students discuss what they see and what they wonder about a text or multimedia.

### Think Pair Share

Think Pair Share is designed for differentiating instructions by providing time and structure on a given topic to promote classroom participation. It creates classroom environment where all students are given an opportunity to share, as opposed to one student answering all the questions. Students are given an opportunity to formulate ideas, share ideas, and most importantly give them a sense of belonging. It's also a great opportunity for informal assessment.

There are three steps to think pair share. When a question is posed about a given topic, the students are given a chance to think about their answers individually. After that, students pair up with another student and share their answers. Finally, the students share their answers with the whole group.

### Story Map

Story map is a framework for identifying elements of a story in texts or films to improve students' comprehension. It helps students organize information and ideas effectively. The strategy encourages students to read slowly to identify the characters, setting, plot, setting, character traits, and/or problems/solutions. Story maps are used before, during, and after reading the text.

## Classroom Activities

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### Storyboard

Comprehend strategies are integral parts of the fourth grade reading standards. One strategy that I want to use in this activity is visualization strategy using a storyboard. Visualization allow students to form mental pictures of what they are reading in a text. It helps them better remember main ideas or events in a story. One strategy for visualization is to use sensory words from the text to readjust as they read for details.

In this activity, I will explain that good readers read, they create a kind of "movie" in their minds. I will tell students to close their eyes and visualize the first part of "This is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona" from the book *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. We will talk about what they visualized, and direct them to the story board. Students will etch and sketch what they visualized adding as many details as they can. Another strategy for visualizing text is for students to look for words they can picture. Then I will ask

them what keywords in the text (adjectives, adverbs, prior knowledge, etc...) helped them “draw” the text. Is it easier to visualize mountains, rez cars or alone? It is easier to visualize mountains and rez cars because these are something they see every day. I will explain that they need to look for words that represent things they can see in real life. I will read longer passages in the story and stop once in a while to add to the story board. As we read more, I will explain that students can learn more about a character by visualizing his or her actions. In the story, it describes Thomas Builds-The-Fire's physical attributes and character traits in details. What keywords helped you visualize what he looks like? What about the other characters? After we complete the story, I want students to pair up and retell the stories. There are two things I am looking for in this activity. One, is as a pre-assessment. I want to know how many students use comprehension strategies, such as visualization, keywords, and ideas. Secondly, can students sequence the events in the story?

### **Key Ideas and Details**

According to Arizona’s College and Career readiness Standards, students in fourth grade should be able to read texts closely to determine main ideas and details. I will explain to the students that in this curriculum, they will look for the main idea or message of a passage. They will also find details that best supports the main idea. Sometimes, writers do not always clearly state the main idea of a passage, so you have to figure out the main idea. Details tell us more about the main idea. Sometimes, sequencing events in a story help us understand passages. Understanding the order of events help us with comprehension.

In this activity, students will read the screen play that correlates with the selected scenes from the curriculum unit. Again, students will be asked to visualize the scene using keywords and character actions. This time, however, students will determine the main idea of the scene. For example, in *Dances with Wolves* scene, there is no doubt that Thomas likes the movie, but what evidence in the story determines that he likes the movie? How do we know? I will explain to the students that they have to pay close attention to the passage to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences. Then we will reread to determine what evidence we can find to support our conclusion. Here, I will be using guided practice to help them find the conclusion.

### **Compare and Contrast**

Compare and Contrast are reading skills that students need to develop to have good comprehension. In fact, the Arizona standards states that students can compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics and patterns of events in stories. Again, I will be using the scene selections, and the screen plays are similar and different? How are they similar or different from the short story? How are the characters different in each story? How are the stories told differently in the movie and in the short story? How are the quests of the boys the same or different? In the movie, a whole scene was added to show how Victor was able to come to terms with his absentee father. In the short story, he came to terms with his father in a subtle way, and almost have to reread the story to get to the same conclusion. I want students to search for the differences especially, and discuss why the movie had the extra scenes. Did it help with the story or did it not help? This last activity will conclude our unit.

At the conclusion of the screenplay and film, students will go back to their storyboard, compare and contrast activities, and main ideas and details activity to see if it is what they visualized from the beginning. Have they learned any new strategies? Do they have a better idea on how to visualize texts? Eventually, I will have the students re-view the film in its entirety, and see if that made a difference than seeing it a section at a time.

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## Endnotes

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2. Rollins, *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, 207.
3. Rollins, *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film*, 216.
4. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 152.
5. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 74.
6. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 61.
7. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 61-63
8. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, Miramax Films.
9. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 37.
10. Alexie, *Smoke Signals*, 17

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