

COURSE CONNECTIONS - ASSIGNMENT IDEAS

SMOKE SIGNALS

- Find examples of metaphors, symbols, stories as powerful purveyors of: truth/fiction/mystery/magic/humor
- What does it mean that Victor and Thomas are "pillars of flame and ash?" How do they represent two sides of the same "coin" of identity?
- A phrase in Lakota is "Hoka hey" meaning "it's a good day to die." How is this a recurring theme? Explain how/why Native Americans may choose to live in the moment acknowledging all life as precious, fleeting, accepting fate?
- "Heyoka medicine" means contrary; doing everything backwards (literally/figuratively) to see and challenge others to see from a different point of view. What are some examples?
- Discuss how Indian children (parallels with other minorities) may be socialized into bitter realities—such as, alcoholism, domestic abuse, violence, poverty, high rate of accidents, death.
- Explain how making fry bread parallels the "loaves and fishes" parable. What does Arlene mean when she says, "...I never make it alone?"
- How is the road trip a metaphoric journey of personal transformation, healing the past?
- Discuss the symbolism of long hair: power, identity, e.g. Arnold Joseph after the fire, Victor grieving his father's death.
- Using the image of the stoic, warrior as a message about masculinity, explain the incident on the bus when Victor says, "You gotta look mean or people won't respect you...white people will run all over you" and "Cowboys always win."
- Examine the power of trust and sharing secrets, truck breaking down/parallel with broken family/broken hearts.
- Discuss the basketball game as a metaphorical struggle of Indians vs. Christians; how is the truth what we make it? Magic can be seen as fact; explain Thomas' statement "all traveling heavy with illusions."
- Find examples of double standards of justice/injustice
- Examine messages of true friendship/brotherhood; search for identity, faith, dreams shattered and revealed
- How does the film have a universal message of healing wounds between fathers/sons?
- Discuss how fire and smoke are used in Native American culture as part of sending prayers to the Great Spirit.
- Power of forgiveness—what are some contradictions and paradoxes?