

Native American Literature  
Discussion Questions

***Indian Killer* by Sherman Alexie**

Created by Dorothea M. Susag for OPI library project

1. “We are what/We have lost” is the introductory quote by Alex Kuo, Chinese-American poet, essayist, and former professor of Sherman Alexie. Consider Kuo’s focus on the occupation of China during WW II and the pre-WWII impact on Chinese of signs in America and its allies that said “No Chinese or Dogs Allowed.” What are the implications of this quote for our understanding of Alexie’s novel *Indian Killer*?
2. What do we learn about Indian/white relationships from reading this novel? What does the novel reveal about the differences between what white people think about Indians and what Indians know about themselves?
3. How do the circumstances of John Smith’s birth and adoption impact his life? Did he ever bond with any parent? Consider the image of Olivia’s “dry breast.”
4. What is John Smith looking for in the Indian people he meets? How does what he sees differ from what he’s learned from his adoptive parents? What explains the difference?
5. John Smith has a “need to kill the white man who was responsible for everything that had gone wrong.” (276) What is “everything”?
6. Who are the “frauds” that Marie fights against? Why does she make this judgment? Is it fair?
7. Describe a character in the novel you find most disturbing? For which character do you have the most sympathy? Why?
8. Reviewers have called this novel a mystery. Is it? How?
9. How is the title *Indian Killer* a play on words? Who is the Indian Killer in the novel? (Clue – does the narrator ever call John Smith “Indian killer”? In the end, Marie tells the interviewer that John Smith “wasn’t the Indian Killer.”)
10. References are made to Ira Hayes, Black Kettle, Crazy Horse, and others. What are their stories and what’s their connection to this story?