“Imagining the Reservation” by Sherman Alexie

1. What do you imagine the reservation to be? Identify ten words to identify how you imagine it.

“We have to believe in the power of imagination because it's all we have, and ours is stronger than theirs.”
– Lawrence Thornton

2. What does this quote mean?

Imagine Crazy Horse invented the atom bomb in 1876 and detonated it over Washington, D.C. Would the urban Indians still be sprawled around the one-room apartment in the cable television reservation? Imagine a loaf of bread could feed the entire tribe. Didn't you know Jesus Christ was a Spokane Indian? Imagine Columbus landed in 1592 and some tribe or another drowned him in the ocean. Would Lester FallsApart still be shoplifting in the 7-11?

3. How would you categorize this paragraph's focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 1=

I am in the 7-11 of my dreams, surrounded by five hundred years of convenient lies. There are men here who take inventory, scan the aisles for minute changes, insist on small bills. Once, I worked the graveyard shift in a Seattle 7-11, until the night a man locked me in the cooler and stole all the money out of the cash register. But more than that, he took the dollar bill from my wallet, pulled the basketball shoes off my feet, and left me waiting for rescue between the expired milk and broken eggs. It was then I remembered the story of the hobo who hopped a train heading west, found himself locked in a refrigerator car, and froze to death. He was discovered when the train arrived at its final destination, his body ice cold, but the refrigerator car was never turned on, the temperature inside never dropped below fifty degrees. It happens that way: the body forgets the rhythm of survival.

Survival = Anger x Imagination. Imagination is the only weapon on the reservation.

4. Why this formula? Why anger and imagination? How can imagination be a weapon?

5. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 2=

The reservation doesn’t sing anymore but the songs still hang in the air. Every molecule waits for a drumbeat; every element dreams lyrics. Today I am walking between water, two parts hydrogen, one part oxygen, and the energy expelled is named Forgiveness.

6. Why doesn’t it sing? When did it sing?

7. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 3=

The Indian child hears my voice on the television and he knows what color shirt I’m wearing. A few days or years ago, my brother and I took him to the bar and he read all of our futures by touching hands. He told me the twenty-dollar bill hidden in my shoe would change my life. Imagine, he said. But we all laughed, old Moses even spit his false teeth into the air, but the Indian child touched another hand, another, and another, until he touched every Skin. Who do you think you are? Seymour asked the Indian child. You ain’t some medicine man come back to change our lives. But the Indian child told Seymour his missing daughter was in community college in San Francisco and his missing wedding ring was in a can of commodity beef high up in his kitchen. The Indian child told Lester his heart was buried at the base of a pine tree behind the Trading Post. The Indian child told me to break every mirror in my house and tape the pieces to my body. I followed his vision and the Indian child laughed and laughed when he saw me, reflecting every last word of the story.

8. So, what's with this kid? Is he real? What does he know? Does he even know anything? Why did the child laugh at him when he saw him in the end, reflecting each and every last word?

9. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 4=

What do you believe in? Does every Indian depend on Hollywood for a twentieth-century vision? Listen: when I was young, living on the reservation, eating potatoes every day of my life, I imagined the potatoes grew larger, filled my stomach, reversed the emptiness. My sisters saved up a few quarters and bought food coloring. For weeks we ate red potatoes,
green potatoes, blue potatoes. In the dark, “The Tonight Show” on the television, my father and I telling stories about the food we wanted most. We imagined oranges, Pepsi-Cola, chocolate, deer jerky. We imagined the salt on our skin could change the world.

10. How could the salt on their skin change the world? What else could change the world? Can the world even be changed?

11. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 5 =

July 4th and all is hell. Adrian, I am waiting for someone to tell the truth. Today I am celebrating the Indian boy who blew his fingers off when an M80 exploded in his hand. But thank God for miracles, he has thumb left to oppose his future. I am celebrating Tony Swaggard, sleeping in the basement with two thousand dollars’ worth of fireworks when some spark of flame or history touched it all off. Driving home, I heard the explosion and thought it was a new story born. But, Adrian, it’s the same old story, whispered past the same false teeth. How can we imagine a new language when the language of the enemy keeps our dismembered tongues tied to his belt? How can we imagine a new alphabet when the old jumps of billboards down into our stomachs? Adrian, what did you say? I want to rasp into sober cryptology and say something dynamic but tonight is my laundry night. How do we imagine a new life when a pocketful of quarters weighs our possibilities down?

12. He thinks at first a new story is being born, but quickly realizes it is just the same old story . . . how/why is it the same old story?

13. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 6 =

There are so many possibilities in the reservation 7-11, so many methods of survival. Imagine every Skin on the reservation is the new lead guitarist for the Rolling Stones, on the cover of a rock-and-roll magazine. Imagine forgiveness is sold 2 for 1. Imagine every Indian is a video game with braids. Do you believe laughter can save us? All I know is that I count coyotes to help me sleep. Didn’t you know? Imagination is the politics of dreams; imagination turns every word into a bottle rocket. Adrian, imagine every day is Independence Day and save us from traveling the river changed; save us from hitchhiking the long road home. Imagine an escape. Imagine that your own shadow on the wall is a perfect door. Imagine a song stronger than penicillin. Imagine a spring with water that meds broken bones. Imagine a drum which wraps itself around your heart. Imagine a story that puts wood in the fireplace.

14. What would a story that puts wood in the fireplace offer?

15. How would you categorize this paragraph’s focus and topic? When you write this down put Paragraph 7 =

16 – 19 Choose four of the zones reading activities to complete (identify the zone in your response):

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First Thoughts:</th>
<th>Analysis/Closed Reading:</th>
<th>Making Inferences:</th>
<th>Evidence:</th>
<th>Making Connections:</th>
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<td>Write down your thoughts about the text in general</td>
<td>Pick a passage that’s important to the way you understand or experience the text. Which words or phrases are most central to the meaning and/or beauty of this passage? Why is this passage important to the text as a whole?</td>
<td>What question is this text answering? What makes it speak? Is there trauma at its center? What do you imagine it to be?</td>
<td>Examples, facts, illustrations, statistics, anecdotes, definitions, comparisons, quotations, reasons, images, metaphors, similes, symbols, words, or structures – which of these seem important to the argument, the author’s intention, or the overall effect and/or meaning of the text? Explain.</td>
<td>What texts, voices, memories, experiences come to mind as you read and write? How do they illuminate your reading?</td>
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