Rollercoaster Rowdy

A Character Analysis

 Who does not love racing down a track at breakneck speed while safely seat belted in the undulating snake of a rollercoaster? On one hand, rollercoasters are exhilarating during some moments of the ride, while in other moments they are downright frightening and some riders secretly fear they may not survive to the end without busting a lung or having a heart attack. In the novel The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian by Sherman Alexie, the protagonist, Arnold Spirit, embarks on a rollercoaster ride that sees him leaving his reservation to attend an all-white school in the hope he can make his dreams come true instead of ending up like most Spokane Indians on the reservation: defeated, depressed and drunk. There are many people, including: mentors, family, and friends who support Arnold during this ride. In fact, one of the most important people in Arnold’s life is his longtime best friend, and at one time his only friend, Rowdy. However, the relationship between Arnold and Rowdy is complicated and also resembles a rollercoaster with its numerous highs and lows as well as physical side effects. The character Rowdy can be described as violent, emotional, and sometimes supportive.

The first description of Rowdy is violent. For example, Rowdy gets into his first fistfight in kindergarten where he takes on three first graders and wins, but then goes on to punch the teacher. This shows he has been a violent person since he was a young child, so he probably does not know any other way to behave or the behaviour may be too difficult to change at this point in his life. Furthermore, it is later revealed that Rowdy’s alcoholic father regularly beats him and his mother, so this explains where Rowdy has learned some of his violent behaviour. For example, when Rowdy gets mad at Arnold for laughing at him, instead of hitting Arnold, he grabs a shovel and “Bang! Smash! Boom!” (p.20). He does serious damage to a van. This demonstrates Rowdy’s violent nature. In fact, on page 42, Mr. P explains to Arnold that Rowdy “has given up. That’s why he likes to hurt people. He wants them to feel as bad as he does”. Rowdy does not hurt Arnold because he is the only good thing in his life; however, after Arnold leaves the reservation, Rowdy feels abandoned and begins to hurt Arnold. For example, Rowdy punches him during the conversation where Arnold tells Rowdy he is leaving to go to school at Reardan. He also punches Arnold in the head during the basketball game in Wellpinit, giving him a concussion. This shows how lost Rowdy feels without Arnold, and the only way he knows how to take out his frustration is through violence. From these examples, it is clear that Rowdy is a violent person.

 Rowdy can also be described as emotional. For example, “Rowdy cough[s] and turn[s] away from [Arnold]’ (p. 52) when Arnold tells Rowdy the news; he is leaving the reservation. Rowdy, unable to contain his emotions, cries and then screams to the world the pain he is feeling. Another instance of Rowdy being emotional is when he cries at Mary’s funeral. Arnold runs into Rowdy, who is hiding in the bush watching and Rowdy breaks down in tears. It is evident that Rowdy grieves the death of Arnold’s courageous sister who left the reservation. More importantly, it means that Rowdy worries about Arnold, who has lost too many loved ones in such a short period. However, in the next moment, Rowdy accuses Arnold of killing Mary. He claims that she left the reservation only because Arnold left. Consequently, on page 53, Rowdy screams at Arnold, “I hate you! I hate you!” and runs into the woods. These examples show that, despite his attempts to appear tough and indifferent, Rowdy is, in fact, a sensitive and highly emotional person.

Finally, despite being physically abusive and sometimes insensitive towards his friend, Rowdy can also be considered supportive of Arnold. In one instance, Arnold is depressed after his dog Oscar dies and he wants to run away, but Rowdy convinces him to stay in a tough love way: “It’s not like anybody’s going to notice if you go away, so you might as well gut it out” (p. 15). This demonstrates that Rowdy cares about Arnold and helps him through difficult times. His support is also apparent when Arnold confides in Rowdy his love for Dawn. However, Rowdy tells him the truth; Dawn will never care about Arnold. As a result, Arnold cries and asks Rowdy to keep his secret, and Rowdy does. This demonstrates the importance of his friendship with Arnold and that Rowdy cares about his friend’s well-being enough to keep his secrets. At the end of the novel, on page 229-230, Rowdy recalls a dream he had of Arnold standing on the Great Wall of China and he says, “I was happy for you. You’re going to keep moving all over the world in search of food and water and grazing land. That’s pretty cool”. This shows that despite the ups and downs in their rollercoaster ride of a friendship, Rowdy supports Arnold and believes Arnold will achieve his dreams. Therefore, it is clear that Rowdy can be a supportive friend at times.

In the novel The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian, Rowdy can be described as violent, emotional and supportive. An example of his violent nature is when he punches Arnold in the face. However, Rowdy can also be described as sensitive when he cries over the death of Mary. Finally, this character can also be described as supportive when he tells Arnold he is happy for his success off the reservation and he accepts the fact that Arnold will not make his home on the reservation. Overall, Rowdy is an interesting character because he is complex and so full of conflict. He is like Dr. Jeckyll and Mr. Hyde. One moment he is calm and supportive of his friend and the next he is maniacally bashing a van beyond repair. On the outside he is tough and unforgiving, but underneath the armor, which he has created in order to survive his difficult life, he is a sensitive and caring individual with dreams of his own. Whether or not he is able to follow those dreams depends on how much hope he has for the future.

Essay Scavenger Hunt

The purpose of this activity is to help you identify critical parts of an essay and to help ensure that your essay contains these important parts.

Follow the instructions carefully.

1. Draw a box around the hook and label it with an H. What is the purpose of the hook? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Underline or highlight the name of the novel and the author. Label them B.
3. Underline or highlight the thesis statement and label it T. What is the purpose of the thesis statement? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

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1. Underline or highlight the topic sentence at the beginning of each supporting paragraph (paragraph 2, 3, and 4). Put a star beside each topic sentence. What is the purpose of the topic sentence? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
2. Underline the three examples that provide support in each paragraph – Label the examples #1, #2, #3 (this should be done three times – once for each supporting paragraph. Note: one example should be in the form of a quote “………….”
3. Put a happy face beside each quote and a box around the page each number.
4. Put a check mark by each explanation that supports and provides detail.
5. Put a box around each transition or connecting word.
6. Underline or highlight each concluding sentence for paragraphs 2, 3, 4. Label each C.
7. In the last paragraph called the conclusion, underline or highlight the thesis statement and label it T.
8. Put a check mark beside each example/description in the conclusion.
9. Put a box around the concluding statement that connects the ideas to life or human nature.



Today your exit slip from this class is a completed scavenger hunt that is put in the writing section of your binder, as well as the completed exit slip I have given you.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ DATE: \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_



What are two things you learned today?

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What is at least one question that you still have?

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