

A NEW YORK TIMES FINEST PARAN

The Absolutely  
True Controversy  
OF A  
Part-Time  
Smutty Author



AN ANALYSIS BY

TESSA  
ROSA

ART BY ELLEN FORNEY  
AND TESSA ROSA



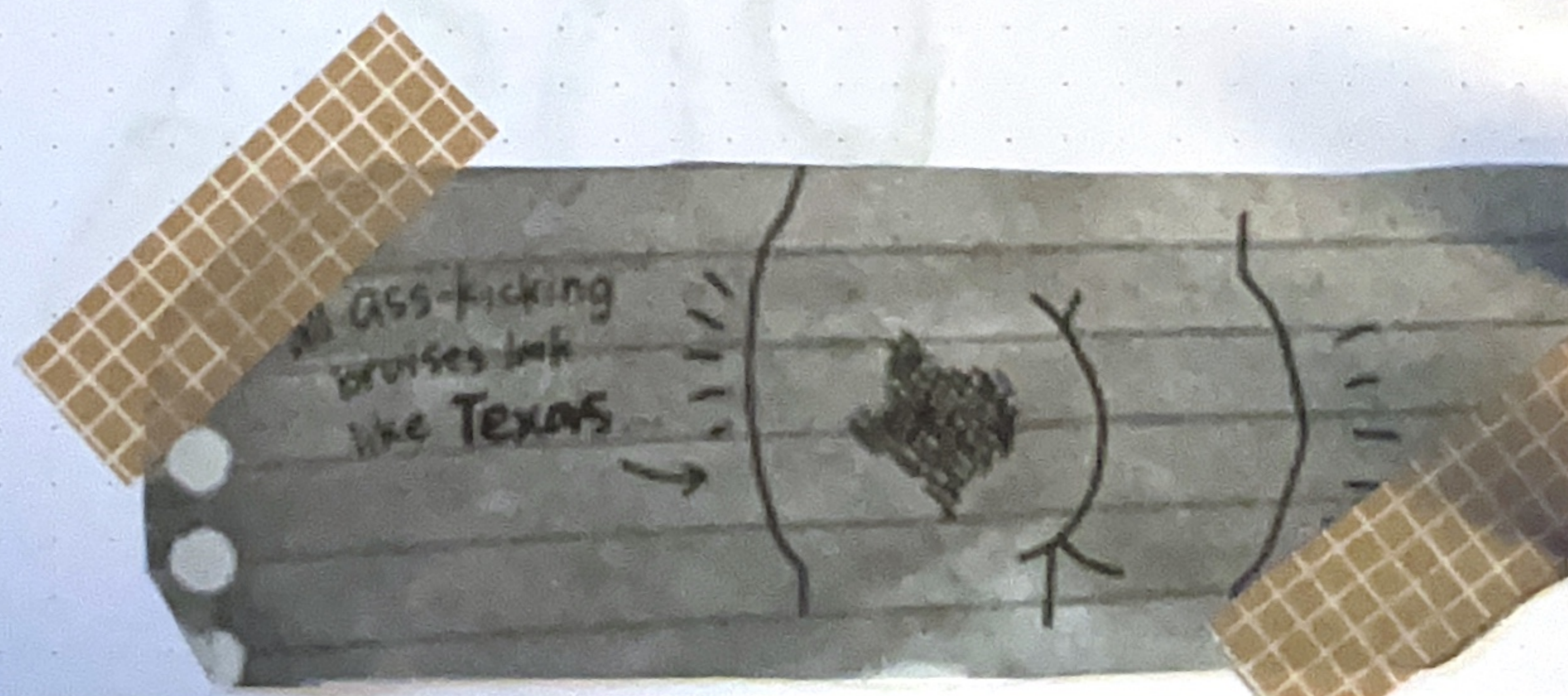
## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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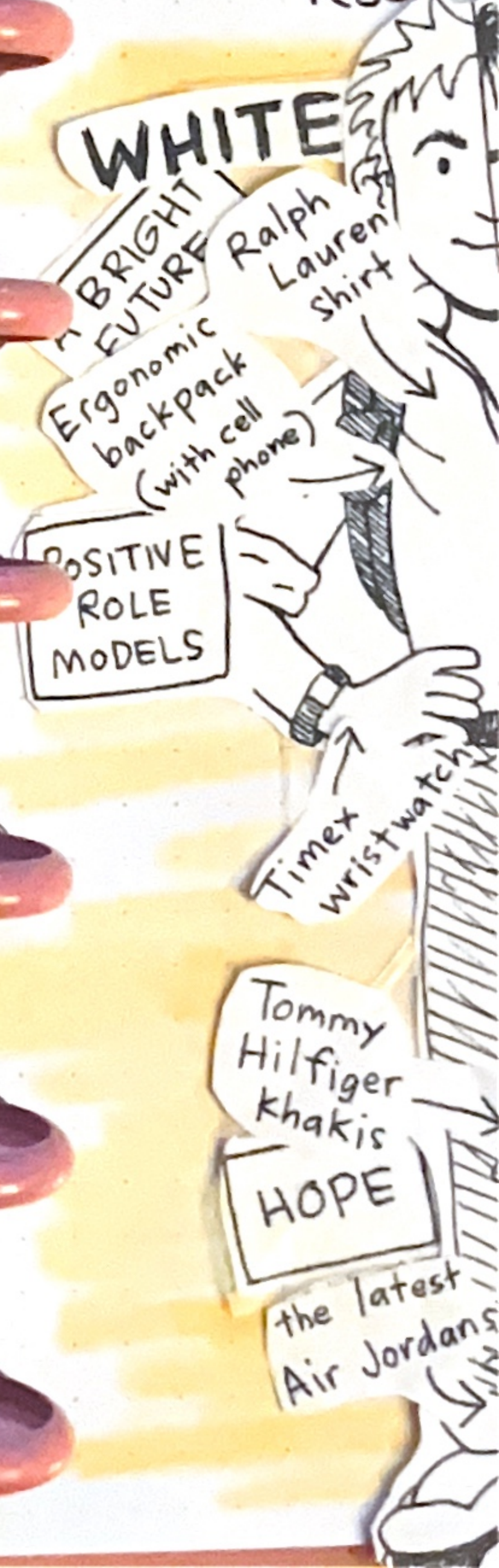
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# Black-Sheep-of-the-month club

[BLACK-EYE-OF-THE-MONTH CLUB]

Sherman Alexie wrote *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* in 2007, and it was quickly welcomed and loved by Society. In the novel he depicts the life of a 14-year-old boy, known as "Junior" through first-person narrative. The layout of the book mimics that of a diary. A diary that belongs to a teenage boy, and its contents are realistic in the thoughts, stories and interactions documented.

Junior, also known as Arnold Spirit Jr., leaves the Spokane Reservation to attend school elsewhere. As a freshman, he began his career at Reardan High School - a freshman and the only Indian - he ~~stood~~ out like a sore thumb. He is the black sheep so to speak, and not just at school, he doesn't fit in on the reservation either. He faces exclusion at school largely because he is Indian and there is no escape back on the reservation because he ~~chose~~ chose to go to a white school.

And it is likely because of this persistent experience of being ostracized that he journals. It is not generally seen as a male's role or interest to journal. Regardless of this socially constructed philosophy, Junior writes in his diary. Despite being atypical in some facets the things he depicts in his diary are pretty typical. It is evident ~~that~~ through his entries that he is a lascivious individual. It is because of these salacious entries the book, while given ~~general~~ genuine love from a vast amount of readers, that such extreme controversy arises.

So while Junior embodies the ideology of a black sheep within the pages of the novel, the novel itself is a member of the **Black-Sheep-of-the-month club**. The contention around the novel largely stems from its unruly and unapologetic depictions of **alcohol, poverty, bullying, violence, sexuality,**





**profanity and slurs of homophobic and ableist nature.** These attributes are often challenged when they are in literature. In 2007 when the novel was first published, it divided society much like Junior experiences in his own head. Junior struggled with consistent contradiction internally with about who he is, and he explores his identity through experiences of profane and sexually explicit nature. While it is normal for a teenage boy to have such experiences or interactions as Junior documents, the novel is still challenged (and even banned) for exactly those reasons.

Junior experiences bullying in the manner of violence and slurs, and because of this aspect the book faces more challenges. He is a victim of blatant racism on multiple occasions, from other Indians on the reservation and kids at school (extreme bullying). There have been some concerned individuals who have felt that a story which their child, or other children, will be exposed to bullying, homosexuality and mental disability related slurs, racism and violence is unfit for existence.



Violence, that is irrefutable, it is not the main point and makes for a strong argument. Further, despite the fact that violence is not the best message to convey, it is a rather normal attribute of teenage years.

Another normal facet that exists in the novel, that feeds the ravishing critics is sexual content/experiences. Junior quickly finds interest in Penelope and depicts sexually explicit thoughts about her. His first encounter with her, he described himself as "emotionally erect." Giving, yet, another reason this novel is part of the **Black-Sheep-of-the-month club.**

"Hey, chief," Roger said.  
"You want to hear a joke?"  
"Sure," I said.  
"Did you know that Indians  
are proof that niggers fuck  
buffalo?" (page 64)

The violence in the novel is frequent and is seen by some as "romanticized." Early on the book Junior presents the reader with a list of the unofficial and unwritten Spokane Indian Rules of Fisticuffs, and they contain the expectation of fighting someone. This specific list is where critics often draw their ideas about how violence is portrayed in the novel. And while there is some

[April 2017]

Another large to do with the novel

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[GO MEANS GO]

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[April 2017]

Another large reason this novel has been challenged has little, if anything, to do with the novel itself.

In April of 2017 Sherman Alexie was accused of sexual ~~misconduct~~ misconduct. According to **SEATTLE TIMES**, "Sherman Alexie issued a statement acknowledging he's hurt people over the years, addressing for the first time anonymous accusations of sexual harassment against him..." He has confirmed the accusations are true. In his statement Alexie stated

→ "Over the years, I have done things that have harmed other people, including those I love most deeply. To those whom I have hurt, I genuinely apologize.

I AM SO SORRY."

"The Allegations have led to online expressions of disillusionment and betrayal from fans and an anguished conversation among booksellers, fellow writers and Native Americans," (Press). Because he is the author of the book there is belief that it should not be taught in classrooms. His novel has a sexual component to it, and there is pushback about allowing it to remain accessible to children. The sexually explicit nature creates uncertainty about how this novel, "inspired by his own experiences growing up", and the character of Junior, specifically, was created as a work of fiction. There is doubt this "Semi-autobiographical account of a real Indian," (Google) is not just the inner thought of Alexie as a 14-year-old boy.

The allegations Alexie confirmed leaves room for **disputation of the work as literary art.**

While Alexie did confirm the allegation, he did release a statement of remorse and apology. However, this apology does not sway everyone to consider Alexie and the novel to be separate entities.



# How to Fight haters



[HOW TO FIGHT MONSTERS]

While I personally do not think Alexie's actions are appropriate or ethical, I can recognize his abilities and talent as an author. Alexie has the ~~ability~~ uncanny ability to write with finesse and conviction.

I think that because the story is about a teenage boy the depictions of life, sex and overall thought processes are accurate and appropriate.

Junior has a crush on a girl named **PENELOPE**. And the way that he talks about her (the way that Alexie writes about it) is on par with how a real 14-year-old would talk about a ~~girl~~ person they ~~never~~ find themselves attracted to.

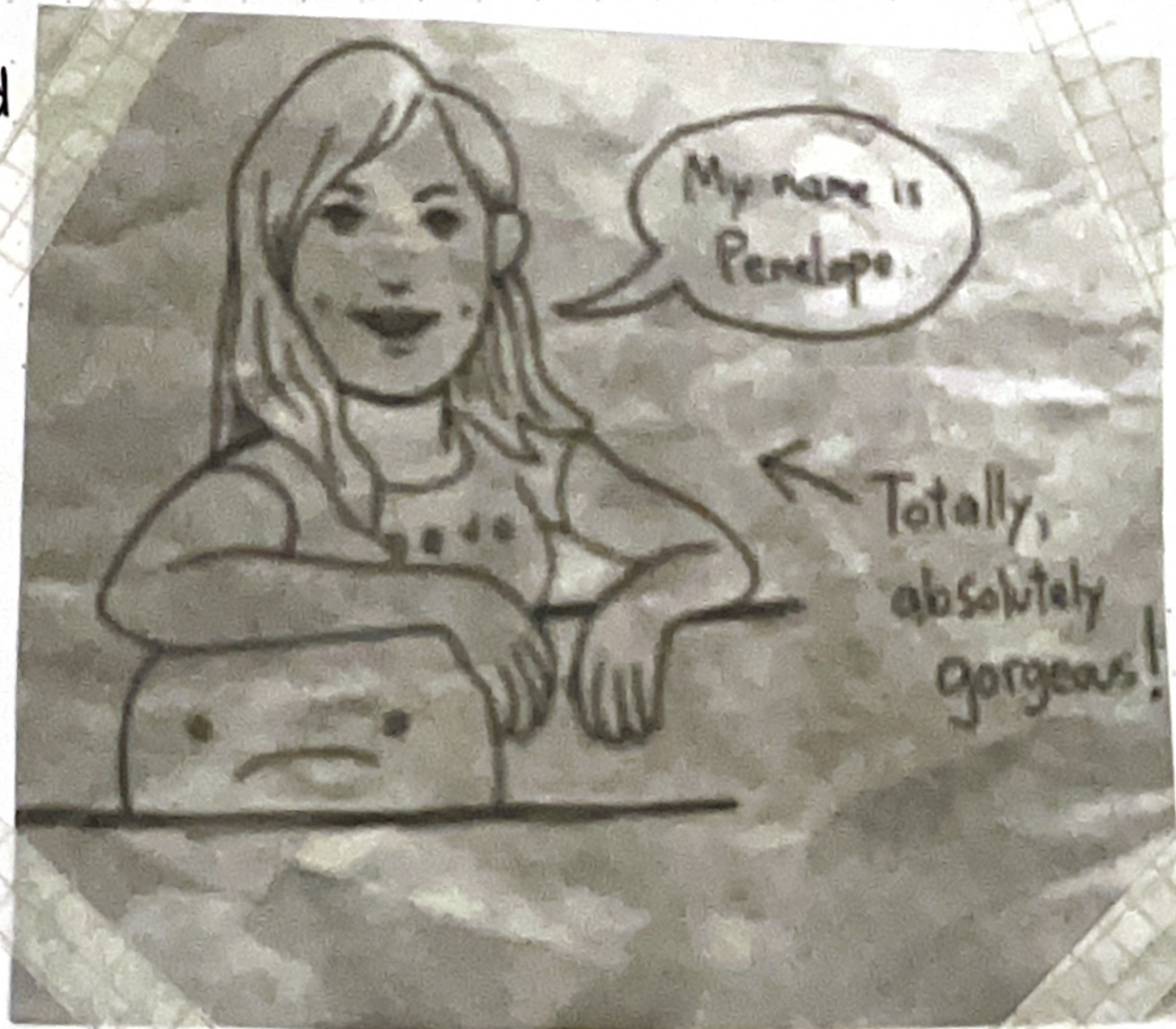
Yes, there are places left in the world where people are named Penelope!

I was emotionally erect.

"What's your name?" Penelope asked.

"Junior," I said.

(Page 59)



I first read the book prior to 2017, when the ~~one~~ allegations about Alexie initially surfaced. When I read it at that time there were still numerous people who actively challenged the book, but it was centered around its content, NOT Alexie and his behaviors.

After reading the book again this semester (FAU 2022) I had a different →



perspective. I still thoroughly enjoyed the book and firmly believe it has a place on classroom shelves and in curriculum. The book ~~represents~~ portrays adolescents accurately, and could provide students with opportunity to learn in a meaningful way.

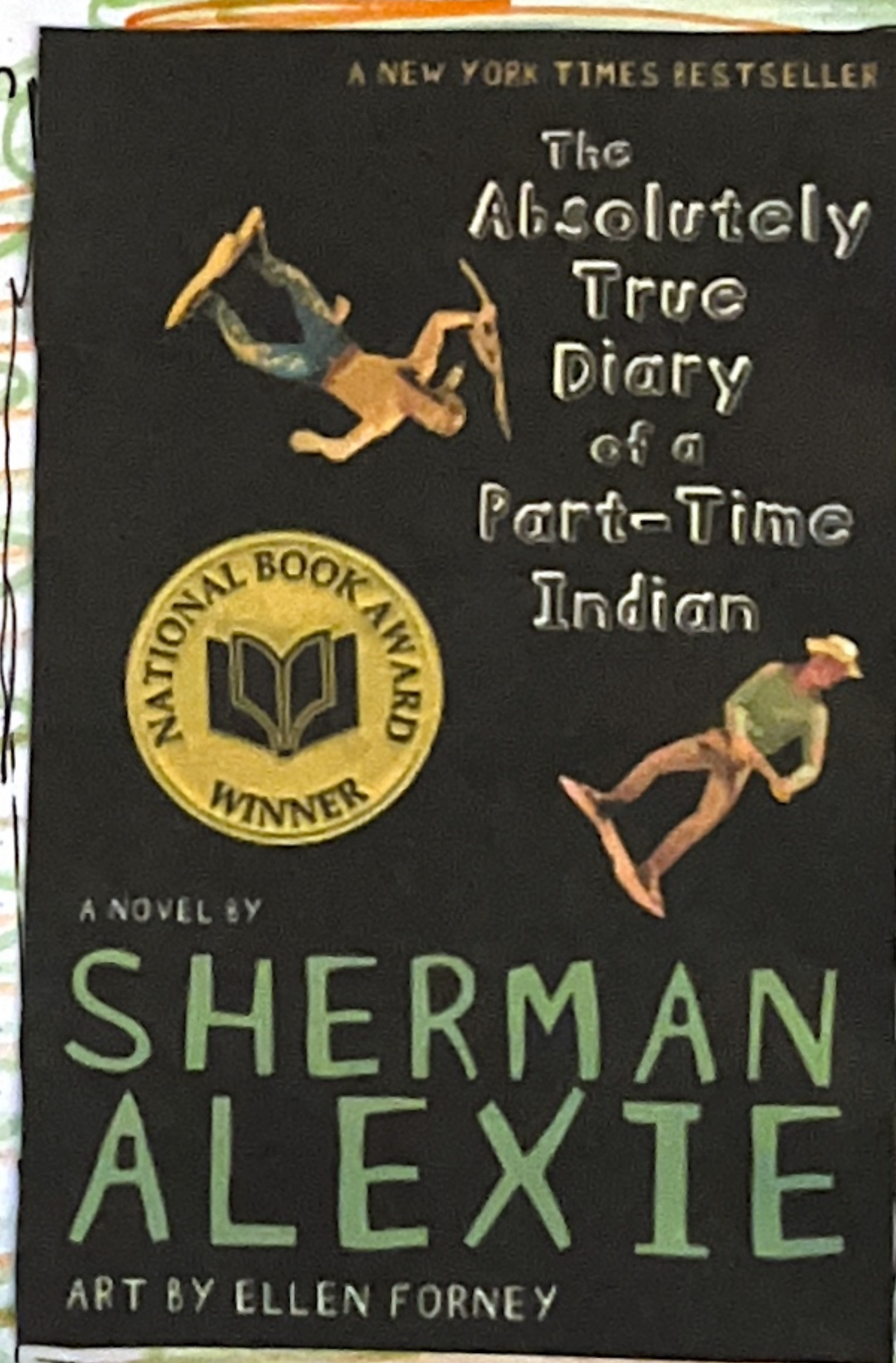
I will admit I did struggle more through this reading because of my outside knowledge I had recently acquired. But I don't believe ~~any~~ any less than I did the first reading these attributes were not of value to the book.

You do not have to agree with or like, every piece of literature to find/see its value. Arguably books that are controversial have greater value because they make us uncomfortable at times and teach how to deal with it. Growth only happens at the edge of your comfort zone, and who wouldn't agree there is value in growing.

Alexie was initially seen as a ~~great~~

**GREAT INDIAN AUTHOR,**  
and was **HIGHLY PRAISED** for his work.

despite this recent change in society's (or at least a portion of it) perception of him, and his novel, I continue to believe in its value.



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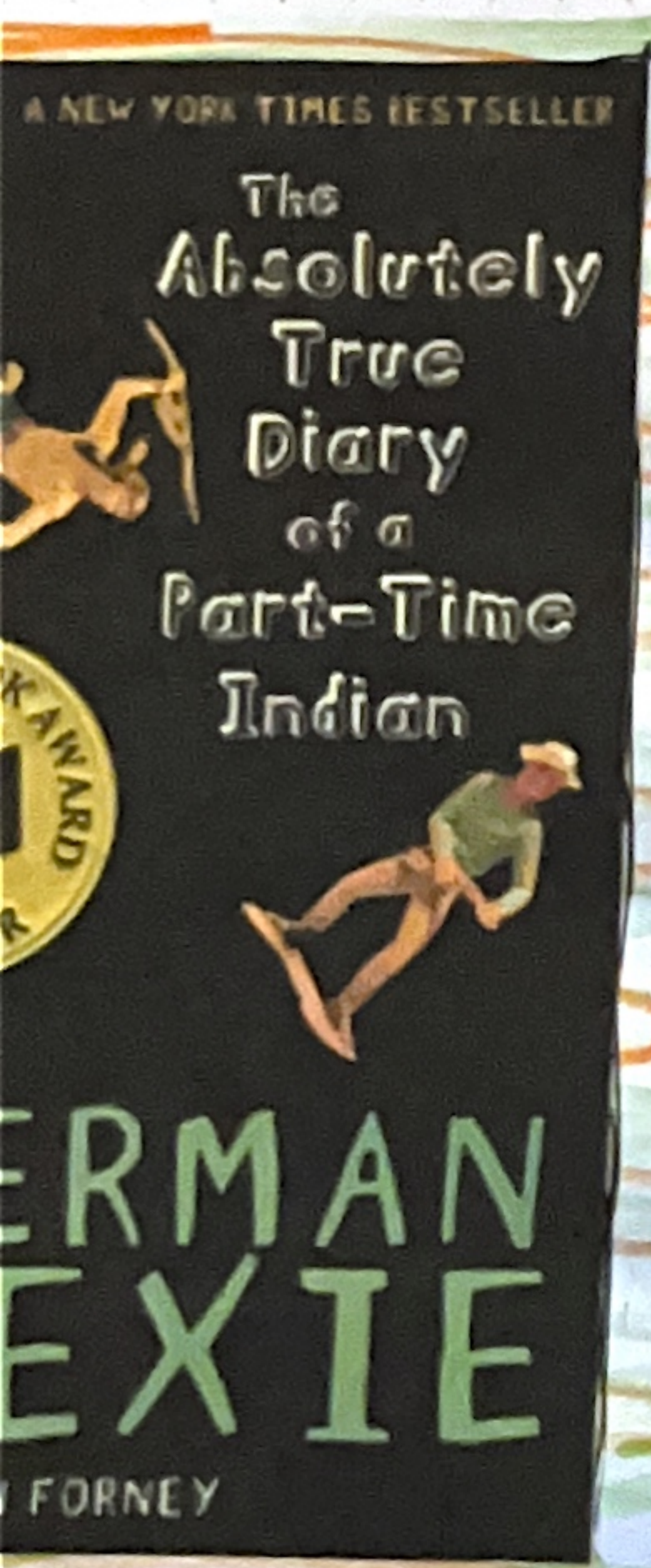
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# Hope Against Nope

[HOPE AGAINST HOPE]

This novel is not a pure work of fiction or nonfiction, regardless it provides readers with an uncanny representation of and for teenage boys. C'mon society, let's come together and come to terms with the sexual explicitness of our own teenage years.

By banning this book and its accessibility to our children will not alter the existence of the book itself. At most, it may only restrict access within the classroom, and to what benefit is that?

The blunt truth is that you cannot 100% control what your child is exposed to. The only thing you can control is HOW you support them in processing it. In order to do so effectively, and without shaming your child, when they encounter something ugly and hard, you need to look past yourself. You need to look past your own discomfort and facilitate your child's reactions to their exposures to the inevitable experiences with

Sherman Alexie writes (in his article "Why the Best Kids Books Are Written in Blood")

When some cultural critics fret about the "ever-more-appalling" YA books, they aren't trying to protect African-American teens forced to walk through metal detectors on their way into school. Or Mexican-American teens enduring the culturally schizophrenic life of being American citizens and the children of illegal immigrants. Or Native American teens growing up on Third World reservations. Or poor white kids trying to survive the meth-hazed trailer parks. They aren't trying to protect the poor from poverty. Or victims from rapists.

No, they are simply trying to protect their privileged notions of what literature is and should be. They are trying to protect privileged children. Or the seemingly privileged.



# Stephanie

## Gives Me

## Some Advice

[GRANDMA GIVES ME  
SOME ADVICE]



Stephanie D. Ashley talks about Monster Theory of Jeffrey Jerome Cohen. The overarching premise of this theory is that each and every culture creates monsters. I often ask my students to draw a monster, and once they have completed their drawing I pose one question: what makes it a monster? Monsters as we understand and perceive them

are from our own festations of anxiety and fear. once these perceptions are identified they can result in greater understanding of one another.

Ashley displays the relationship of monster theory and the novel. She points out the manifestation of trauma and traumatic themes of Junior's story. She considers, and suggests you consider viewing Junior through his depictions and dictation of humor, unfiltered honesty and pure vulnerability within the pages of his diary.



# Growing Pains



[HUNGER PAINS]

I am a firm believer that growing happens at the edge of your comfort zone. Controversy makes the average human uncomfortable therefore making them grow. While I still disagree with the actions Alexie has committed as a person, his skill as an author is phenomenal. He is capable of making great pieces of art.

While there will always be people who challenge and even ban his books, I, without a doubt, believe this novel has a place in my classroom. It teaches us about the unadulterated and true curiosity of the teenage mind. Junior truly emulates the reality of a teenage boy and we all crave discovery of our own mirror characters.

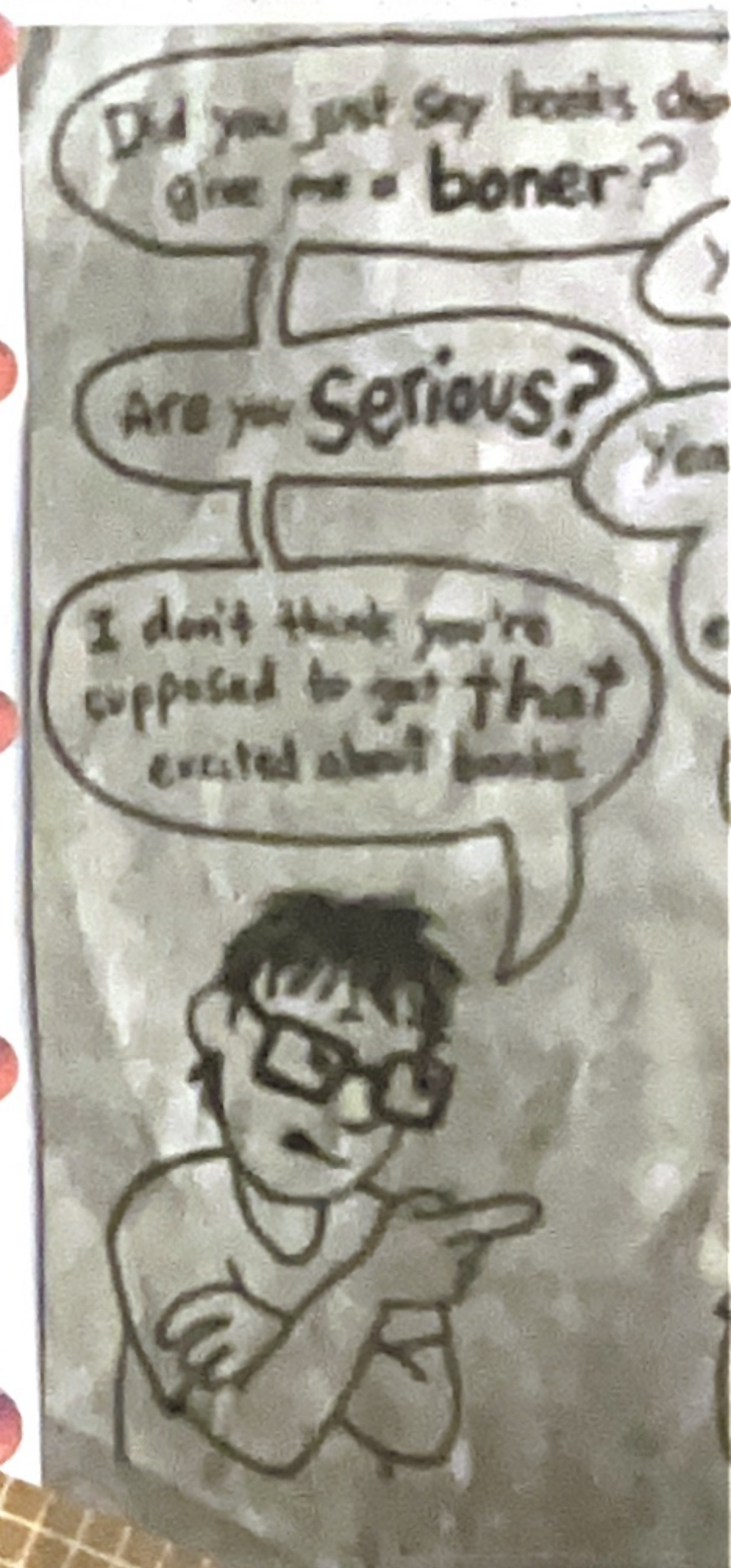
Sherman Alexie may have his faults as an author, but he has his strengths as a creator of an artistic reality.



He now takes his books like this for "[he] vividly remembered felt like to be a everyday and epic (The Best...Written in

There are millions who read because they are lonely, enraged and other "UGLY FEELINGS"

because the world in which they live is just that. Terrible. callow protestation. They read because **ones will save the**

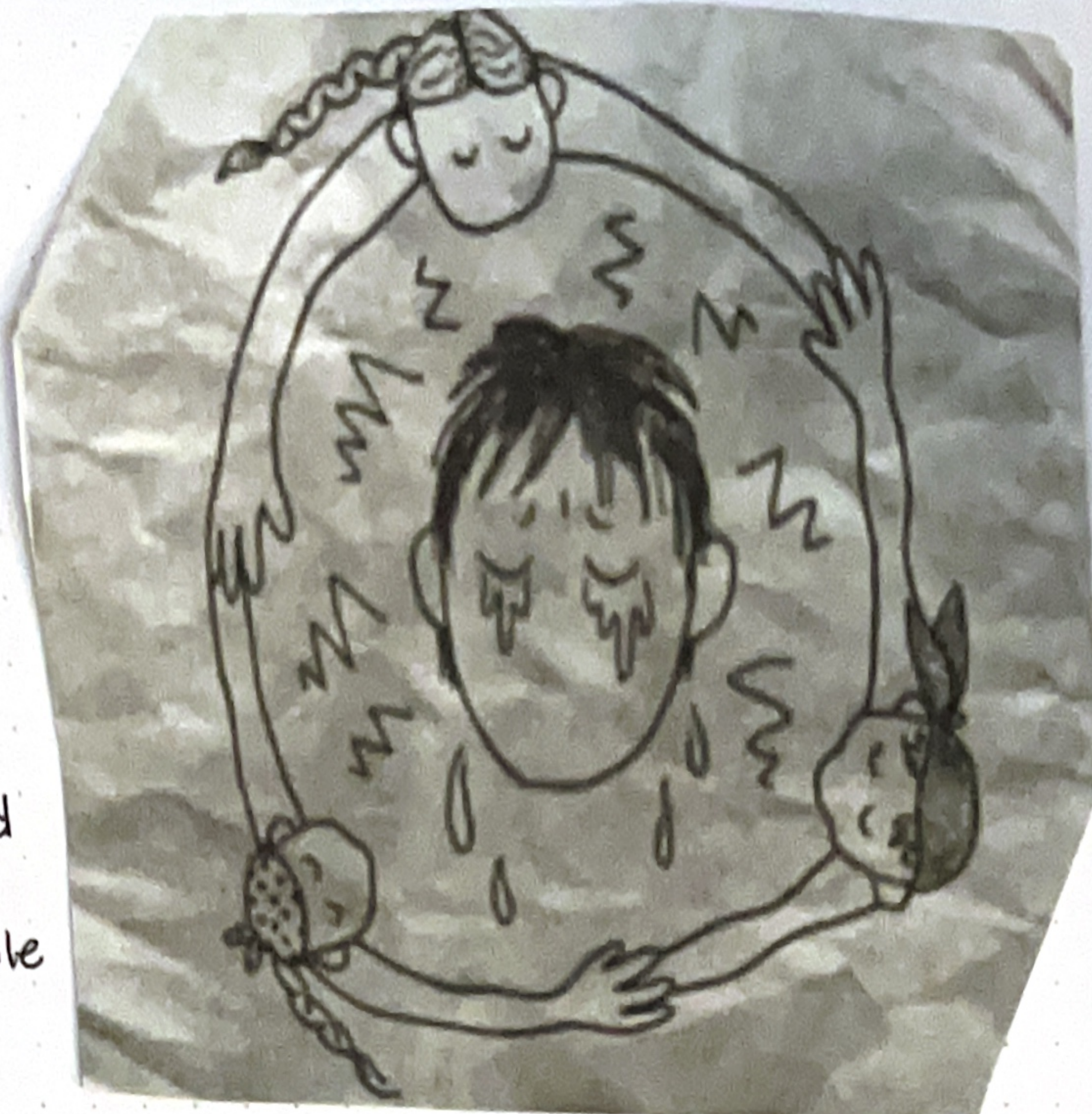




He now takes his talents and writes books like this for teenagers because "[he] **vividly remember(s)** what it felt like to be a teen facing everyday and epic dangers." (The Best...Written in Blood)

There are millions of teens who read because they feel sad, lonely, enraged and so many other "**UGLY FEELINGS**". They read

~~to write~~ because the often-terrible world in which they live is just that. Terrible. Despite the callow protestation of some adults, they continue to read. They read because they **believe books, especially the taboo, ugly ones will save them.**



**" I DON'T WRITE TO PROTECT THEM. IT'S FAR TOO LATE FOR THAT. I WRITE TO GIVE THEM WEAPONS- IN THE FORM OF WORDS AND IDEAS- THAT WILL HELP THEM FIGHT THEIR MONSTERS. I WRITE IN BLOOD BECAUSE I REMEMBER WHAT IT FELT LIKE TO BLEED. "**

- SHERMAN ALEXIE