

Native American Literature
Discussion Questions

***The Toughest Indian in the World* by Sherman Alexie**

Created by Dorothea M. Susag for OPI library project

1. In the first story, the narrator says, “race, whatever its construction, is real.” How do the stories in the collection confirm or negate this statement?
2. How does the theme “Looking for love” appear in these stories? What is love and how do characters love the best?
3. The last story repeatedly asks the question, “what is an Indian?” How does this story, and the rest in this collection, answer this question?
4. In “Saint Junior,” Roman has learned “one basic truth: It was easy to make another person happy.” How do characters in these stories save each other and themselves?
5. What do the characters dream about? How do their dreams affect their choices?
6. In “The Sin Eaters,” how does the experience of the narrator and his family compare—and contrast—with the Holocaust of the Jews? What does this comparison/contrast reveal about the experience of Indians in America from the Indian perspective?
7. How do the stories and characters support or contradict popular beliefs about Indians?
8. The last story is entitled “A Good Man.” What is a good man? Why?
9. “Regarding love, marriage, and sex, both Shakespeare and Sitting Bull knew the only truth: treaties get broken.” How do characters in these stories succumb to or survive such brokenness? Who are the winners and who are the losers? Why?
10. Readers might find some of the more graphic or intimate details in these stories disturbing. How can the stories themselves build understanding of love and human need while they provide opportunities for readers to move beyond their own cultural constructs?