

Against the Current

What does it mean to be Native American? One of the original American journeys is the displacement of so-called 'Indians' from their homelands. Before we begin Tommy Orange's novel, *There There*, which ultimately lands at a ceremonial Powwow, let's back up to consider what we already know about what it means to be a Native American. More importantly, brainstorm questions that you have about what it could mean to identify as a Native American today. In the spaces below, complete a K/W/L chart (Know, Want to Know, Learned).

KNOW: What does it mean to be a Native American? What do you know about their culture and belief system?	WANT TO KNOW: What questions do you have about what it means to be a Native American (especially in the 21st century)?
LEARNED: In the space below, write new information you learn about Native American culture through either our class discussion or through watching the film.	

Against the Current

Native American teen activist 17-year-old **Daunnette Moniz-Reyome** shares her family's journey to retain the sacred rituals and values of their culture in the wake of centuries of loss due to disease, war, and government policies.

The effects of this cultural and physical devastation continue to reverberate through the lives of today's Native Americans, especially young people, who grapple with oppression, poverty and racism.

Daunnette is a member of the Winnebago Ho-Chunk tribe of Nebraska and a senior at Walthill Public School, on the Omaha Reservation where she lives. Daunnette documents life for herself, her family and her friends as they attempt to juggle modern society and Native American values and rituals.

Featured Individuals

- **Daunnette** (director)
- **Alton** (owner of HaWaTay's gift shop; the person making Daunnette's centerpiece)
- **Launa** (Daunnette's mother)
- **Rodney** (Daunnette's father)
- **Shelby** (Daunnette's family friend; the person who is giving Daunnette her feather at the Powwow and making her dress; Iraq War Veteran)
- **Sidnee** (Shelby's daughter)
- **JuRay** (Daunnette's friend who identifies as Two Spirit)
- **Marisa** (Daunnette's relative and mentor)
- **Sam** (Daunnette's grandpa)

Topics Covered

- Powwows
 - Feathering Ceremony
 - Grand Entry
 - Regalia
 - Drum Circle
 - Dances (Traditional, Fancy, Jingle, Grass)
 - Final Day Feast
- Importance of Representation
 - *Teen Vogue*
- [Two Spirit Identity](#)
- Historical and Generational Trauma
 - American Indian Boarding Schools
 - Native American Adoption by White Families
 - Indigenous Veterans
 - Mental Health Issues (PTSD, Depression, Alcoholism, Drug Abuse, Suicide)
 - Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women
 - Dismantling of Belief Systems; Outlawing of Ceremonies
 - Stopping the Cycle of Historical and Generational Trauma through Connection to Native Culture

Open Response

1. After watching *Against the Current*, how do you think the film challenges common stereotypes about Native American communities and their relationship to modern society?
2. In what ways does the film explore the tension between tradition and modernity within Native American communities? How do the characters navigate this tension?
3. The film presents various perspectives on the importance of cultural preservation. What do you think the filmmakers are trying to communicate about the role of cultural knowledge in shaping the future of Native American communities?
4. In what ways does the film illustrate the significance of intergenerational relationships within Native American families? How do elders and younger generations support each other's growth?
5. What lessons from *Against the Current* do you think are most relevant to your own life? How can the film's messages be applied to challenges you might face in your own community or identity?
6. **Current Events:** In one of his many executive orders on the first day of his second term as President, Donald Trump announced that he would change the name of a mountain in Alaska *back* to Mount McKinley after President Obama formally changed the name of the mountain to Denali in 2015. "Denali" is an Athabascan word meaning "the high one" or "the great one" (the Athabascan people are indigenous to Alaska). A prospector in 1896 dubbed the peak "Mount McKinley" for William McKinley, who was elected president that year, but McKinley had never even been to Alaska. Why is this name change significant? Why would Trump make this executive order, and why would it be so important that he would do it on his first day back in office? ([Associated Press](#)).

Criteria for Success:

- ☐ Write at least a half of a page and no more than two pages.
- ☐ Times New Roman, size 12, double spaced. Use an MLA heading.
- ☐ Use first person pronouns (I, me, my).
- ☐ Be specific. Include at least **two** [quotations](#) from the film.
 - ☐ Either integrate the quotations or use the quotation sandwich structure.
- ☐ Vary your vocabulary (avoid vague language like "thing").
- ☐ Be brilliant and interesting. This is my first impression of your writing!
- ☐ Use only your brain and your notes (and the *AP* article if you are writing about prompt #6). No other sources may be used unless you consult with me first.
- ☐ Proofread!