



## *Smoke Signals*

**Director:** Chris Eyre  
**Year made:** 1998  
**Starring:** Adam Beach, Evan Adams, Irene Bedard  
**Rating:** PG-13  
**Length:** 1h 29min  
**English level:** Easy  
**Themes:** Diversity, Native American Heritage

### Warning/General Advisory

Includes death, alcohol consumption, mild violence, and smoking. There is scene in which a house is set on fire, which may be disturbing for some audiences. The film presents a negative stereotype of alcohol dependency by Native Americans.

### Context

This movie is set in the 1990s on a Coeur D'Alene American Indian reservation in Idaho. Victor, an American Indian teenager, discovers that his father has died in Phoenix, Arizona. In order to collect his father's ashes, Victor leaves the reservation for the first time with the help of his neighbor Thomas. In leaving the reservation, the boys embark on a journey to discover important things about themselves and their place in the world. When they arrive in Phoenix, they meet a woman, Suzy, a friend of Victor's father who teaches them about life as an American Indian after leaving the reservation. Throughout the movie, Victor grapples with conflicting feelings about his cultural identity.

### Key Vocabulary/Places

- **Coeur D'Alene People** – a Native American tribe located mostly in Idaho. In recognition of the inhabitants, Coeur D'Alene is also the name of a city in Idaho.
- **Indian reservation** – a legal designation for an area of land managed by a Native American tribe under the US government.
- **Lone Ranger** – imaginary character who appears in many movies; has a friendship with Tonto, an American Indian.
- **Dances with Wolves** – 1990 movie about a white man's relationship with the Lakota Indians.
- **Phoenix** – city in the state of Arizona

## Discussion Questions

- Why does Thomas accompany Victor on his journey?
- Describe Victor's relationship with his father.
- What happens to Victor and Thomas while they're traveling (on the bus, etc.)?
- Does Victor like Thomas? Why or why not? Does this change over the course of the movie? How?
- What do you know of American Indian or Native American culture? Has this movie changed or shaped your understanding of this group?
- Were there instances in the movie that showed challenges Native Americans face in the United States?
- Are there minority groups in your country? What are some of the challenges they face? How have they been integrated into mainstream society?
- What is the importance of the fried bread? Do you feel a close connection to a certain food? Why?
- This film was an all-Native American production (director, actors, writers, etc.). Why is this important?