“Sure You Can Ask Me a Personal Question”

Diane Burns[[1]](#footnote-1) (1957-2006)

How do you do?

No, I am not Chinese.

No, not Spanish.

No, I am American Indi—uh, Native American.

5 No, not from India.

No, not Apache.

No, not Navajo.

No, not Sioux.

No, we are not extinct.

10 Yes, Indian.

Oh?

So that’s where you got those high cheekbones.

Your great grandmother, huh?

An Indian Princess, huh?

15 Hair down to there?

Let me guess. Cherokee?

Oh, so you’ve had an Indian friend?

That close?

Oh, so you’ve had an Indian lover?

20 That tight?

Oh, so you’ve had an Indian servant?

That much?

Yeah, it was awful what you guys did to us.

It’s real decent of you to apologize.

25 No, I don’t know where you can get peyote.

No, I don’t know where you can get Navajo rugs real cheap.

No, I didn’t make this. I bought it at Bloomingdales.

Thank you. I like your hair too.

I don’t know if anyone knows whether or not Cher is really Indian.

30 No, I didn’t make it rain tonight.

Yeah. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

Uh-huh. Yeah. Spirituality. Uh-huh. Mother

Earth. Yeah. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Spirituality.

No, I didn’t major in archery.

35 Yeah, a lot of us drink too much.

Some of us can’t drink enough.

This ain’t no stoic look.

This is my face.

PRINTING and ANNOTATING are strongly encouraged!

Guiding Questions for one page MINIMUM journal response:

* With whom do you imagine the speaker is having this conversation? What impact does the one-sided dialogue have on your interpretation of the poem? How does it compare to “Snapping Beans” in the use and impact of dialogue?
* What stereotypes are addressed in the poem? How do you think this affects the speaker’s sense of identity?
* How does the diction change over the course of the poem? What other literary devices are used, and to what effect?
* Consider the poem’s humor. How does it impact the tone and/or theme?
1. Born to a Cheemehuevi father and Anishinabe  mother [↑](#footnote-ref-1)