The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven Study Guide

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven by Sherman Alexie

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Introduction

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, published in 1993 by Atlantic Monthly Press, was Sherman Alexie's breakthrough book. Comprised of twenty-two interconnected stories with recurring characters, the work is often described by critics as a short-story collection, though some argue that it has novel-like features similar to Louis Erdich's *Love Medicine*. The book's central characters, Victor Joseph and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, are two young Native-American men living on the Spokane Indian Reservation, and the stories describe their relationships, desires, and histories with family members and others who live on the reservation. Alexie fuses surreal imagery, flashbacks, dream sequences, diary entries, and extended poetic passages with his storytelling to create tales that resemble prose poems more than conventional narratives.

The book's title is derived from one of the collection's stories, which details the experience of a Native American who leaves the reservation to live in Seattle with his white girlfriend and then moves back. The Lone Ranger and Tonto are symbols for white and Native-American identity, respectively. The names are taken from a popular radio and television show of the 1950s in which a white man, the Lone Ranger, teams up with an Indian, Tonto, to battle evil in the old west. Alexie, who claims the title came to him from a dream, studs his stories with other references to popular culture to underscore the ways in which representations of Native Americans have played a part in constructing the image they, and others, now have of them. The book's popularity, in part, stems from James Kincaid's effusive praise of Alexie's collection of poetry and stories, *The Business of Fancy dancing* (1992), in *The New York Times Book Review*. With Kincaid's review, Alexie, who had published with small presses, was thrust into the national spotlight. He deftly depicts the struggles of Native Americans to survive in a world that remains hostile to their very survival, and he does so in an honest and artful manner. *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* won a PEN-Hemingway nomination for best first book of fiction and was adapted into a feature film, *Smoke Signals* in 1998, for which Alexie wrote the screenplay.

Author Biography

Poet, novelist, and screenwriter, Sherman Alexie has helped to reshape conventional images of Native Americans through his lyrical, yet blunt portrayals of life on the reservation. Born Sherman Joseph Alexie, Jr. October 7, 1966, in the tiny town of Wellpinit on the Spokane Reservation in eastern Washington, to Sherman Joseph, a Coeur d'Alene Indian, and Lillian Agnes Cox, a Spokane Indian, Alexie almost did not make it out of childhood. At six months old, he was diagnosed with hydrocephalus, which required surgery. Although doctors were not hopeful of his recovery, Alexie did recover, though he suffered from seizures during childhood. Alexie credits his difficult childhood with helping him to develop his imagination. He became a voracious reader and excelled at math. Later, and like many of his friends, he also developed a problem with alcohol. However, after a series of increasingly self-destructive episodes, Alexie quit drinking at age twenty-three.

Although he initially planned to pursue a career in medicine, Alexie changed his mind after taking a poetry workshop with Alex Kuo at Washington State University. With Kuo's encouragement, he began writing in earnest, and in 1991 when he graduated from WSU with a bachelor's degree in American Studies, he received a Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship. In 1992, he was awarded a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship and published two collections of poems, *I Would Steal Horses* and *The Business of Fancy-dancing: Stories and Poems*. The latter was favorably reviewed in the *New York Times Book Review*, and Alexie's reputation as a fresh and vital voice in literature was established. His first book of prose, a collection of linked stories titled *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, published in 1993, was highly praised and won Alexie a wide audience. Alexie adapted the book into a feature-length film called *Smoke Signals* in 1998, which won awards from the Sundance Film Festival. Alexie received a Lila Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award and a Washington State Governor's Writers Award for the book, and it was also a PEN/Hemingway Best First Book of Fiction Citation Winner. Alexie is a prolific writer who also works hard at marketing his work; his recent projects include the novels *Reservation Blues* (1995), which received the Before Columbus Foundation: American Book Award for 1996 and the Murray Morgan Prize, and *Indian Killer* (1996), which was a New York Times Notable Book; his short-story collection, *The Toughest Indian in the World* (2000), was awarded the 2001 PEN/Malamud Award. Alexie lives in Seattle, Washington, with his wife, Diane, and their son, Joseph.

Plot Summary

Every Little Hurricane

This first story of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* introduces Victor, his parents, and his uncles, Arnold and Adolph, who are quarreling during a New Year's Eve party when Victor is nine years old in 1976. The weather forecast is for a hurricane, and the narrator surveys the bizarre behavior of many of the Indians on the reservation, many of them drunk and angry, recalling some wrong that had been done to them. The story also contains a flashback to when Victor was five years old and his parents could not afford to buy him anything for Christmas. Alexie introduces the themes he will develop throughout the book such as the relationship between the real and the imaginary, reservation poverty, and the idea of memory as an index of social and individual identity. Victor is a fictionalized version of Alexie, as the author has admitted.

A Drug Called Tradition

In this story, Thomas Builds-the-Fire is hosting the "second-largest party in reservation history." The first was the New Year's Eve party in the first story. Thomas, Junior, and Victor take a ride to Benjamin Lake, where they ingest an unspecified drug and proceed to have visions during which they earn their adult Indian names by stealing horses. Events from the past frequently bleed into the present during this story, illustrating Victor's claim that "Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you."

Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play "The Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock

In this story, Victor recounts memories of his father coming home drunk during the 1960s and listening to Jimi Hendrix play "The Star Spangled Banner." As a child, Victor would share in his father's drunken ritual, putting the song on the stereo as he walked in the house, and then curling up and sleeping at his feet after he passed out. Jimi Hendrix, part Cherokee Indian, was a Seattle-born rock and roll star who gained fame for his masterful guitar playing. He died in 1970 at 27, choking on his own vomit while being taken to the hospital, purportedly due to drug abuse. Victor recounts that his father's love of Hendrix played a role in the breakup of his parents' marriage, as did his alcoholism and desire to be alone.

Crazy Horse Dreams

In this very short story, Victor relates an experience he had with a woman at a powwow. He draws on the image of Crazy Horse, a famous Sioux warrior, to show how contemporary Indian men cannot measure up to the ideal of Crazy Horse. The woman Victor meets at a fry bread stand and seduces wants him to be something he is not. "His hands were small. Somehow she was still waiting for Crazy Horse."

The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Don't Flash Red Anymore

In this story, Victor and Adrian, reformed alcoholics, sit on their front porch, drink Pepsi, and discuss basketball and the reservation's rising star, Julius Windmaker, who, like Victor and other rising stars before him, eventually succumbs to alcoholism. The story ends with the two having a similar conversation about a talented young Indian girl named Lucy. Adrian and Victor hope that she can develop her talents and not begin drinking.

Amusements

In this story, Sadie and Victor play a prank on an old drunk Indian called Dirty Joe, putting him on a carnival ride when he passes out. A security guard chases Victor, who runs into the Fun House and sees his image distorted in "crazy mirrors."

This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona

This is one of the stories adapted for the film *Smoke Signals*. After learning that his father has died in Phoenix, Arizona, Victor decides to retrieve his belongings and his ashes. Thomas Builds the Fire offers to give Victor the money to make the trip if he can go with him. The two retrieve Victor's father's ashes, a photo album, and his father's pick-up truck. Along the way, the two reminisce about Victor's father and reach an understanding of one another. At the end of the story, Victor offers Thomas some of his father's ashes.

The Fun House

In this character sketch of his Aunt Nezzy, Victor recounts an episode during which a mouse crawls up his aunt's leg, and her son and uncle mock her. Nezzy becomes fed up with her son and her husband's ingratitude, and leaves the house to swim naked in Tshimikain Creek, refusing to leave even when her husband and Victor plead with her. At sundown, she leaves the creek, but she also knows that her life will be changed as a result of the day.

All I Wanted to Do Was Dance

Victor recounts a number of drunken episodes from his life and how drinking destroyed his relationships and led to an all-consuming despair. He ends the story by describing the day he decided to stop drinking.

The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire

In this fabulous story, Thomas Builds-the-Fire is put on trial for unspecified crimes, after he begins speaking following twenty years of silence. A man from the Bureau of Indian Affairs describes Thomas's behavior: "A storytelling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth. Dangerous." The story contains passages from the court transcripts in which Thomas tells stories of white injustices to Indians from the nineteenth century, including an incident in 1858 in which Colonel George Wright steals 800 horses from the Spokane chief Tilcoax. In this story, Thomas speaks as if channeling the voice of one of the ponies. In other stories, he speaks in the voice of those involved in the ensuing battle between the settlers and the Indians. Thomas Builds-the-Fire was sentenced to two concurrent life terms for his "crime."

Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation

Containing elements of parable and allegory, this story covers the years 1966-1974 and chronicles the relationship between the narrator and an orphaned baby he adopts who takes on Christ-like characteristics. The baby's mother is Rosemary Morning Dove, who claimed she was a virgin when the baby was born, around Christmas. After a fire kills her and her lover, Frank Many Horses, the narrator adopts the baby, named James. A heavy drinker, the narrator quits in 1971 in order to keep James. The last three years of the story detail his life as a sober man and his growing relationship with James, whom he hopes will take care of him when he grows old.

A Train Is an Order of Occurrence Designed to Lead to Some Result

On his birthday, Samuel Builds-the-Fire, grandfather to Thomas Builds-the-Fire, is laid off from his job cleaning rooms at a motel. Although he has never had an alcoholic drink his entire life, Samuel Builds-the-Fire drinks this day. He drinks so much he passes out on railroad tracks as a train approaches.

A Good Story

Quilts are used as a metaphor for the story's structure. Junior's mother, who is making a quilt, tells him all of his stories are sad, so Junior tries to tell one that is not. He relates a tale about Uncle Moses, and his nephew, Arnold, which ends with Uncle Moses beginning the very tale that Junior just told. This self-reflexive story underscores how storytelling helps to ensure the continuity of Indian identity.

The First All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue

This densely poetic story, the most upbeat in the entire collection, describes the event of its title. There are hot dogs, Pepsi, Kool-Aid, a horseshoe pitch competition, and talk of making basketball the new tribal religion.

Imagining the Reservation

In a collage of scenes, Victor describes the differences between "Urbans," Indians who left the reservation to live in the city, and "Skins," Indians who stayed on the reservation. He also describes burning down houses because white people had inhabited them, dancing with Tremble Dancer, an Urban, and assorted dreams about Indians from the past.

Alexie explores the ways in which Indians use their imaginations to battle their culturally and physically impoverished lives on the reservation. His symbolic descriptions dart between "what if" fantasies of the past, memories of an impoverished childhood, and the reality of the present. As in other stories in the collection, Alexie peppers this one with allusions to popular culture such as television shows and rock and roll music. Addressing Adrian and writing, "I am in the 7-11 of my dreams, surrounded by five hundred years of convenient lies," the narrator underscores his belief that "imagination is the only weapon on the reservation."

The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor

The narrator, Jimmy Many Horses, who has cancer, describes his on-again, off-again relationship with his wife, Norma. She leaves him because he cannot stop joking about the terminal illness, saying that it is the size of a basketball, and that in an X-ray he could see the stitches on it. His wife returns to live with him at the end of the story because the person she was living with was "too serious."

Indian Education

This story is structured as a series of short descriptive vignettes, each depicting a grade in Victor's education, from first grade through twelfth. Recounting representative

incidents from each grade that illustrate his life on the reservation, battles against discrimination, and hopes for the future, Victor describes himself as intelligent, athletic, and despairing.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven

In this title story, Victor leaves the reservation to live in Seattle with his white girlfriend, who plays out the role of the Lone Ranger to Victor's Tonto. When the relationship sours, Victor returns to the reservation, stops drinking and finds a job answering phones for a high school exchange program.

Family Portrait

This story describes Junior's family members and their propensity for storytelling. It bears a remarkable similarity to the story Alexie tells about his own life. Alexie structures the story by "translating" what people say into what he heard. Superficially, he blames the sound from the always-on television as distorting words. However, the television itself acts as a metaphor for how popular culture and European ways have ruined Indian traditions.

Somebody Kept Saying Powwow

In this story, Junior, an alter ego of Victor and Alexie, describes his experiences with Norma Many Horses. For Junior, she is a role model who epitomizes the right way to live. She neither drinks nor smokes, is honest to a fault, is confident of her Indian identity, and acts as a caretaker for other Indians on the reservation, who respectfully call her "grandmother." She calls Junior "Pete Rose," comparing Junior with the baseball player who is remembered more for his gambling than he is for his record-setting career.

Witnesses, Secret and Not

Victor is thirteen in this story, and he and his father are driving to the police station so that the police can ask his father questions about a missing Indian, Jerry Vincent, who was supposedly killed ten years earlier. His father narrowly escapes crashing the car, after skidding on the icy road. At the police station, Victor's father repeats what he has told the police numerous times before: he knows nothing about Jerry Vincent other than what he has already told them. The father admits to Victor on the drive home that he was involved in a car accident once in which a white man was killed, but he was never arrested because the white man had been drinking. The story ends when the two return home and Victor's father cries into his food.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The reader introduced to Victor, a nine-year-old Native American that lives on an Indian reservation in Spokane. It is New Years Eve 1976 and Victor describes the "hurricanes" that are plaguing the Indian reservation. Two of Victor's uncles, Adolph and Arnold, are brutally fighting each other during a New Year's Eve party. The commotion wakes Victor.

Victor watches the fight in despair. Victor's parents, along with the rest of the adults on the Indian reservation, are drinking to excess. Victor explains that drinking and alcoholism is a common occurrence on the reservation. It makes Victor sad when he finds his parents passed out on the bed from drinking too much. Victor lies down next to them in bed and can feel the alcohol seeping from their bodies.

Victor explains that the alcohol has caused much sadness and trouble on the reservation. Victor's father is broke and couldn't afford Christmas presents the year before, but still bought alcohol. Victor explains the overall feelings of despair in the reservation. Victor watches the fight between his uncles from his bedroom window: they fight in the snow until they came to an agreement, but both are badly beaten.

Victor goes on to explain that fighting and unproductive, unhealthy, negative behaviors happen everyday and with everyone on the reservations. The boy believes that the trouble stems from the crimes he and his people have had to endure and witness in the past. Victor cannot understand why everyone witnesses the fight, but does nothing to stop it.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The title of the chapter is "Every Little Hurricane" which is a symbol for the hurricane that affects the lives of everyone on the reservation. Victor talks about the real weather hurricanes that devastate the lives of those that endure it and he connects this devastation to his own life on the reservation. There are hurricanes in the emotional sphere of the reservation.

Victor gives the background on some of the reasons why his family and those on the Indian reservation act the way they do. The boy explains that Indians have been witness to several crimes in the past. Alcoholism has been the hurricane that devastated the reservation.

Victor shows that the people on the reservation act in appropriately by hurting each other when they are intoxicated and engaging in risky activities. Victor demonstrates his sadness about the entire situation.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

This chapter has Victor going to a lake to experience a new drug. It starts at a party that is hosted by "Thomas-builds-fire." "Thomas-builds-fire" is the host because he supplied the beer. "Thomas-builds-the-fire" was able to buy the beer because he had inherited land that is being used by large corporations. Victor comments on how their ancestors must be laughing about this type of economic development.

Victor invites his friend Junior to go try a new drug. Junior and Victor hop in a car and head down to the lake while using the new drug. The drug causes them to hallucinate and experience strange visions. The boys describe the hallucinations in a stream of consciousness fashion. The hallucinations are piecemeal and confusing to the outsider.

The boys talk about how the drug is "Indian" and very spiritual. The boys see visions of their dead relatives and can feel that they can see the dreams of each other. Victor has visions of himself finding a pony that he rides into the night. Victor asks the horse its name and it replies that it is named "Flight."

Victor talks about how Indians make the best cowboys and can ride horses. Victor feels that Indians have the same names all their lives and he wishes that they could find adult names because he feels their names are fraught with a bad reputation.

Victor discusses the presence of skeletons in your life. There are skeletons that live in your past and those that live in your future. Victor believes you have to keep moving on in your life so your past skeletons cannot catch up with you and your future skeletons are never touched. You keep yourself in the middle of these skeletons.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, the theme of drug abuse on the reservation is highlighted once again. Drugs are used to escape their everyday lives and to experience visions. These visions symbolize things they are running from in their lives and things they wish were in their lives. For example, Victor talks about riding a horse whose name is "Flight." The name of "Flight" symbolizes that Victor wishes he could escape the reservation and fly to greener pastures.

Victor talks about skeletons that we all have in our lives and he comments that you need to continue to live life in the moment. This way you can avoid skeletons of the past and the future. This type of perspective on living symbolizes that Victor feels stuck in each day. Victor does not want to look to the past because he will have to relive painful moments. Victor is scared to look towards the future because he feels it is most likely fraught with potential painful moments as well. Therefore, he will live each day in the moment as a method of avoidance and escape.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Victor explains how his father was an Indian hippie in the 1960's that protested the Vietnam War. Victor's dad rallied against the war and was sent to jail for beating up a National Guard private at Woodstock. Since his dad went to jail, he didn't have to head off to war. However, his dad had to suffer another type of war while in the jail system. The war in jail was between Indian, white, black, and Mexican gangs. There was a daily death toll that everyone in jail was used to and would expect.

Victor's father felt at home with Jimi Hendrix's music, especially when he played the Star Spangled Banner at Woodstock. Victor would try to communicate and bond with his father by playing Jimi Hendrix music, but his father would end up passing out from being drunk. In the morning, he would tell Victor stories about how wonderful his mother was even though they had a feisty divorce in the end.

Victor's father was against fighting for the United States because they had killed so many Indians in the past. Victor's father explains to him that there is either war or this is peace. It is difficult to find a state in between.

Victor's father buys a motorcycle and rides it whenever he is fighting with his wife as a getaway. Victor's father has an accident and is in the hospital for a few months. Victor's father and mother finally divorce and they comment that it's over Jimi Hendrix. Victor's father wants to be alone to listen to Jimi Hendrix more then he wants to be married to his wife.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Victor continues to talk about the prevalence of alcohol on the reservation. Victor's mother and father are drunk most of the time and Victor yearns to find ways to bond with them. Victor realizes that his father feels bonded to Jimi Hendrix's music so Victor tries to play Jimi Hendrix music whenever he can.

Victor's father tells him that if he doesn't like to remember what happened in the past, then just change the old memories. Essentially, you can forget the painful things and remember only what has just happened. This mentality helps to explain why Victor's father talks about his mother fondly when in reality they have a dysfunctional, divorced relationship.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Victor meets a waitress at the fry bread stand. The waitress flirts with him incessantly and he does everything he can to avoid her. The waitress is insistent and finds him again at the Powwow and she invites him back to her Winnebago. The two get into bed together and Victor starts shaking. The woman asks him what he is afraid of and he talks about mundane things like escalators.

The two have a discussion about what type of Indian she is. Victor gawks at the fact that she doesn't have any scars like he does and that she is educated. Victor ends up leaving the Winnebago because he feels that she is not a real Indian.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates Victor's hesitance when it comes to becoming intimate. Victor is also judgmental as he won't give her the time of day at first and then determines that since she doesn't have scars, she is not a "real" Indian.

Victor gives a telling account of what he is afraid of in life by bringing up a scenario about bingo. Victor has a dream that he has all the bingo spots except, B-6. The bingo leader calls B-7 and everyone else in the place stands up and yells "Bingo!" This symbolizes Victor's perspective that he is close, but not quite there when it comes to luck and happiness. Victor feels that everyone else has won the chance of happiness when he is so close to it, but can't reach it.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Victor and his friend, Adrian, have refrained from drinking for awhile. However, they are playing with a BB gun. Victor holds a gun to his temple and he tempted to pull the trigger. Adrian grabs the gun, puts it to his mouth, and does pull the trigger. A BB flies into his mouth and he just spits it out. The boys laugh at this.

The boys drink diet Pepsi's on the porch as their old basketball high school buddies walk by. The two heckle each other. Victor talks about how he was a fantastic basketball player in high school and his senior year they made it to the state finals. However, their coach was late and they spent the time looking over first-aid manuals in the training room. The training manuals had such awful pictures of injuries in them that they lost their nerve to play basketball. The team ended up losing the basketball game and Victor didn't finish high school.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Victor talks about the mentality on the reservation and he comments that it is difficult to be optimistic on the reservation. Victor says that Indians don't care whether the glass is half-full or half empty; they just want it to be filled with beer. Victor wonders why Indians are able to survive the drastic problems such as war, but have trouble with the everyday problems such as a white waitress that ignores them in a restaurant.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Victor and Sadie stumble upon Dirty Joe passed out drunk at the carnival. Dirty Joe is always drunk and has many scars from bar fights. The two contemplate what to do with him as onlookers gawk and point and they are about to leave him on the ground in the middle of the carnival when they spot the Stallion roller coaster. The two bribe the carny to put Dirty Joe on the roller coaster, which he does and Dirty Joe has a rude awakening as the roller coaster flies up and down.

Security guards chase after Victor and Sadie as they escape into the house of mirrors.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Victor gets into mischief as a way of punishing Dirty Joe for his drunkenness. Victor bribes the carny into putting Dirty Joe on the roller coaster because he says Indian's have no problem with gravity and he won't get hurt. Victor ends up running into the house of mirrors. The house of mirrors symbolize to Victor the fact that even these mirrors can't distort the color of his skin nor remove his past.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Victor's father passes away. Victor is broke and asks the tribe for money. The boy comments that everyone on the reservation is broke except for the cigarette and fireworks salespeople. Victor runs into his friend Thomas-builds-a-fire at the store and he offers Victor money for her father's funeral services. Thomas-builds-a-fire offers this money as long as he can go to the funeral with Victor. Seeing Thomas-builds-a-fire prompts Victor to remember all the good times they had together when they were children.

Thomas-builds-a-fire supports Victor on the trip to Phoenix to deal with his father's ashes. Victor remembers how Thomas-builds-a-fire had helped free him from a nasty underground wasp nest when they were younger. Thomas-builds-a-fire likes to tell stories whether anyone will listen or not. Victor asks Thomas-builds-a-fire to tell him a story while they are on their trip as a way of reminiscing.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Thomas-builds-a-fire comments that everyone is placed on this earth with one determination by which everyone is measured. The boy feels that he was put on earth to tell stories that change people and change the world and he is determined to do this so he continues to tell stories even when no one is listening to him. The stories also symbolize the one good thing he can cling to in his life.

Thomas-builds-a-fire requests a favor of Victor after Victor thanks him for helping him out with his father's funeral arrangements. Thomas-builds-a-fire asks Victor to listen to him at least once when he is telling a story. Victor agrees that he will as he views this as a fair trade. Victor comments that all he wants is a fair trade. This demonstrates the fact that he feels he has not been given a fair trade in life.

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Victor talks about his Aunt that is an experienced sewer. One day she is at home with her husband and son when a mouse runs up her pants and she struggles to pull her pants off to remove the mouse. The husband and son don't help her, but only laugh and tease her instead. The woman is outraged that they have no sense or want to help and she curses her son for being 30 years old without a job and always drunk.

Victor talks about the time, thirty years ago, when his aunt and uncle got into a car accident after returning home from dancing. Victor's uncle was driving drunk and they ended up going to the hospital. Victor also tells of the story of his aunt giving birth to her son and he says the doctor tricked her into signing a document to tie her tubes.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Victor points out two themes in this chapter. The mouse story demonstrates the unsupportive and lazy nature of the men on the reservation. The men don't help his aunt, but rather tease her and continue to become drunk.

The story about his aunt giving birth to her son shows how Indian women were treated by doctors. The doctor had her aunt sign a waiver that he told her was to prove that she was an Indian. When in reality, the waiver gave them permission to tie her tubes. This story falls in line with Victor's perception that the Indian's are not given a fair deal in life.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Victor goes out dancing and talks to women, but he is very, very drunk. Victor passes out and heads home. Victor has insomnia and misses his white lover, because she had left him. When he wakes up in the morning, she is back. The woman had gone to a party the night before with cocaine at the party. Victor tries to go through his day being productive, but falls back on drinking.

Victor continues to drink and feels upset at the world for its difficulties and having to deal with the absence of his white woman. Victor feels that if he drank just one more beer then everything in his life would be better.

Chapter 9 Analysis

This chapter revolves around Victor's drunkenness in response to the loss of his most recent love. Victor explains that his mentality is that one more beer will make life better. For example, one more beer will save the world. One more beer will make him love her and sign treaties for her. This shows that he desperately wants things to be right, but doesn't have the strength or courage to do so while he is sober. Victor falls back on his vice of drinking.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Twenty years ago, Thomas-builds-a-fire had held the reservation postmaster hostage at gunpoint because he wanted tribal revisions. Thomas-builds-a-fire surrendered and was cleared regarding the charges. However, he went from constantly telling stories to being completely silent. Victor believed he was telling stories internally. Now, Thomas-builds-a-fire was talking again and he was sent to jail for calling the tribal police chief's wife "a savage in polyester pants."

In his trial, Thomas-builds-a-fire tells a story about a battle he was involved in and he tells a story of how he killed soldiers in 1858. The courtroom is in chaos as Thomas-builds-a-fire continues to tell stories. Thomas-builds-a-fire is sent to prison for the crimes he admits to through his stories.

Chapter 10 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the power of stories. Thomas-builds-a-fire talks about being a soldier in the 1800's and he is so convincing that he is convicted of the crimes in the story.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Victor talks about how be believes Custer destroyed everything the Indians held sacred. Victor describes cleaning out a house that they are going to burn down. The Indians are burning down the house because it has to do with the white men and they want to destroy anything that reminds them of the white men.

Victor talks about a girl that he loves named Tremble Dancer. The girl is an Urban Indian, which are the Indians that escaped the reservation before it went into shambles. Most the Urban Indians have died off since and those that remain are ragged and look old for their age. Victor talks about the scars and burns Tremble Dancer has all over her legs.

Victor comments that those who remained on the reservation when the Urban Indians left cannot marry Urban Indians. It is believed that the Urban Indians have contracted illnesses and will plague the reservation Indians with these illnesses. An illness overwhelms the reservation and the Tribal Council believes that it is a disease from the white man.

Victor talks about secretly meeting up with Tremble Dancer. The two kiss and hold each other, naked, while her diseased body flakes away. The tribe burns more houses that are linked to the white man. One of the reservation Indians brings a watch to a Tribal Council meeting explaining that it is a sin because it is the watch of a white man.

Chapter 11 Analysis

The title of this chapter is "Distances." This title refers to the distances the reservation Indians are trying to put between themselves and the white man. The Indians believe that the white man is the root of all the disease, heartache, and misfortune they are suffering. The Indians remove and burn down anything that is even remotely linked to the white man in an effort to distance themselves from this perceived sin.

The reservation Indians are called the Skins and they do not want to associate with the Urban Indians. The Skins feel that the Urban Indians have mixed with the disease infested white man and should not be allowed to procreate with anyone that remained on the reservation.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

This chapter begins with the birth of a boy named James by Rosemary Morning Dove in 1967. Some of the Indians are drinking when they hear sirens. The Indians are used to hearing sirens because it is commonplace for people to burn things down on the reservation. The Indians jump at the chance to go see what is happening and they rush to the scene to find Rosemary Morning Dove's home in flames. One of the Indians rushes into the house to save James and he runs out with him and they both are on fire. The Indian throws James out of the window. One of the other Indians picks him up to find that he appears to be fine, but his head is dented in.

Victor talks about going to visit James, Frank, and Rosemary at the hospital, but he is scared of going so he becomes drunk first. Victor feels that James is in a sad state, but will end up on welfare anyway, so he takes James home to take care of him.

The chapter continues to give snippets of events in each consecutive year from 1968-1974. Victor talks about taking care of James during 1968-1969 and always waiting for James to cry. However, James hasn't cried yet and finally takes James to an Indian clinic to find the root of the problem. Victor explains that James is strong enough to move around and do physical things, but doesn't seem to have the strength to speak or cry.

Victor talks about taking care of James through the years waiting for him to talk. Victor is often drunk and one night forgets where he left James. Then he was incarcerated for abandonment. After this incident, he joins Alcoholics Anonymous and becomes sober.

James finally talks in 1973 to his astonishment. However, James won't talk again. Victor takes James to the doctor and the doctor wonders if he just imagined hearing James' voice.

Chapter 12 Analysis

This chapter talks about the constant struggles many Indians have with drinking. Victor has trouble focusing on being sober and is worried that young James will turn out this way as well. The night he forgets where he left James is very telling of his guilt. Victor goes to jail and has visions of being in the mass of graves from the past. Victor is stuck in the bones and death created by the white men in the past and he feels trapped. Victor's alcoholism also makes him feel trapped and he wishes to be pure.

The intense visions from the drunken night in jail prompt him to join Alcohol Anonymous. Victor had hit rock bottom when he forgot where he left James and he realized he had to something to save not only James' life, but his life as well.

In the end of the chapter, we learn that everything is a matter of perception. This line covers the way he thinks about the reservation, Indian life, and everything in the world. It is a more sophisticated outside look at the state of their lives.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

This chapter tells the story of Samuel-Builds-a-Fire. Samuel is one of the very rare Indians that have not had a sip of alcohol in the past and he has respectable job as a maid at motel. On his birthday, he is excited and decides to show up for work a half an hour early. Samuel-builds-a-fire arrives to work only to discover that he is being let go: he is saddened by this news and finds himself in a bar.

Samuel-Builds-a-Fire is a profound storyteller and makes some money telling stories to his friends. The man always remained sober in the past because he thought that alcohol would lessen the greatness of his stories.

Samuel-builds-a-fire has not had anything to drink in the past because he has witnessed its vengeance upon many on the reservation. The man has watched his brothers, sisters, and friends fall victim to the temptation of alcohol. Today, however, he decides to take his first drink. When he sips a beer for the first time, he realizes instantly why the other Indians prefer to drink and he swigs down a few beers.

Samuel-builds-a-fire finds that he wants have alcohol in his life and continues to tell stories. The man becomes drunk and stumbles outside where he passes out on the railroad tracks with a train heading straight toward him.

Chapter 13 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the trend that nearly all Indians succumb to alcohol. Samuel-Builds-a-Fire had never had a drink in life until the day he was fired from his cleaning job. The man took pride in the fact that he hadn't been a drinker and that he was good worker at his job. However, his viewpoint changed when he was let go from his job on his birthday. Samuel felt this was a twist of fate that might be alleviated by trying alcohol.

The instant preference for alcohol signifies the disastrous and all encompassing effects alcohol has on the Indians on the reservation. Samuel-Builds-a-Fire's fall from grace shows that no Indian is immune to alcohol.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Victor is talking with his mother and she wonders why he writes the stories that he does. Victor's mother feels his stories only show the negative side of life on the reservation and she asks Victor why he doesn't write stories about the positive aspects of Indian life. Victor tells his mother the story of Uncle Moses.

Victor describes Uncle Moses as a man that will be remembered by all. Uncle Moses befriends Arnold, watches Arnold play basketball, and realizes that Arnold is a star basketball player. Uncle Moses comments that Arnold has the gift of basketball, however improbable that type of gift might be.

Chapter 14 Analysis

The prevalent theme of this chapter is that "We are given something to compensate for what we have lost." (pg 143) Moses knows this and feels that the gifts can vary in nature. For example, Arnold has been the gift of great athletic ability as he dominates the basketball court.

Victor's mother follows Moses' feelings by asking Victor to focus on the positive aspects and gifts in life. Victor's mother realizes that as a people the Indian's have lost a great deal. However, she also feels that they have been given gifts no matter how small or unusual they may be.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

This chapter focuses on a barbecue where Victor plays a piano. Victor had brought the piano home earlier that summer, but he didn't play it until the day of the barbecue. Victor felt that there was "a good day to die and a good day to play the piano." (pg146)

Descriptions of small things regarding the barbecue are highlighted. For example, he talks about the grass and how it feels smooth to the touch. Victor talks about the beauty of the black hair of an Indian boy and the beauty that a cracked piece of glass can create.

Victor talks about the dreams of the Indians and he includes the notion of the range of their dreams and how they can hear those dreams in the campfire. At the end of the chapter, a baby is held up that is born of a white mother and red father. The parent's cherish this baby and say that it is beautiful.

Chapter 15 Analysis

This chapter builds upon the positive theme started in Chapter 14. The small gifts and the little beautiful things in life are highlighted. Plus, the optimism is further expanded by the focus on dreams. The dreams are gifts of hope.

The baby that was born of a white mother and red father is accepted and cherished. This acceptance is profound as they normally shun anything that has to do with the white man. The Indians now accept that the two races can be paired together successfully and beautifully.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

This chapter starts with a quote about imagination and it is the theme of the chapter. Victor asks what would happen if the atom bomb was invented by an Indian and detonated in Washington, D.C.? On the other hand, what if when Columbus landed in 1492 a tribe of Indians drowned him? Victor is using his imagination to contemplate how historical events could have occurred differently.

Victor uses the 7-11 store as a location for his imagination and he feels that the he is in a 7-11 store that is surrounded by 500 years of lies. Victor worked at a 7-11 in the past only to be robbed of all his possessions and he feels like there is an equation for survival. The equation is: Survival = Anger X Imagination. The Indians are already angered by the lies and imagination is their only defense and means of survival.

Victor goes on to talk about forgiveness and speaks of a child that appears to have psychic abilities. Victor and his brother believe the child because he told them personal information that the child couldn't have possibly known and he even believes the child when the child advises him to break all the mirrors in his house and tape the broken glass pieces to his body. This only caused laughter from his friends when he actually did it.

Victor asks what you believe in. Victor mostly ate potatoes growing up and his sisters put food coloring in the potatoes. The girls did this so they could imagine that the potatoes were a different type of food besides potatoes. This type of process, they imagined, would help them to change the world.

Chapter 16 Analysis

The themes of this chapter include imagination and forgiveness. Victor wants everyone to use their imagination to help them survive and he feels that if we use our imagination we can begin to see a better reservation. We can forgive those that have done bad things against us. We can set our sights on changing the world through imagination. Victor wonders what the effects would be if all the Indians on the reservation thought this way.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

This chapter is through the eyes of Jimmy One-horse. Jimmy One-horse returns home to find his wife thoroughly upset with him. Jimmy One-horse's wife storms out and heads off to the Powwow Tavern go dancing, as she won't fight with him, she just storms out instead. Jimmy One-horse feeds the kids and then hitchhikes to the Powwow Tavern, because he doesn't want his wife to find another dance partner.

Jimmy One-horses' wife was mad at him because he had told her that he had cancer throughout his entire body. Jimmy One-horse made a game of it by describing it as the size of a baseball and being flippant about it and this angered his wife.

Jimmy One-horse finds his wife at the Powwow Tavern and apologizes for making jokes about his cancer. Jimmy One-horse goes on to tell about how he first met his wife at the Powwow Tavern in the past, where they hit it off and she moved in the night that they met.

Jimmy One-horse talks about their wedding and how one of the Indians rushed in to tell everyone that ten Indians had just been killed in a car accident. Jimmy made a joke about the ten Indians by singing an Indian song.

Jimmy's wife left him for a few months, even when he was in the hospital fighting cancer. Jimmy's wife left him because he had cancer, he was not serious about life, and she felt he joked too much about everything. Jimmy's wife returned when her mother passed away and Jimmy tried to alleviate her pain by humor. Jimmy felt that humor was the best medicine.

Jimmy One-horse talks about being pulled over by a cop on the highway even though he done nothing wrong. The cop pulled him over on purpose to take advantage of him. The cop made him pay $99 to not have the bogus violation appear on his record and he paid the fine, but was not happy about it. Jimmy understood that he had to play this game or things would be much worse.

Jimmy and his wife made fun of the officer by telling him that they would write his department to tell them he was polite and followed the law. The two were sarcastic of course. This outraged the police officer who decided to give them their money back instead.

Jimmy's wife writes letters to him even after she has left him. Jimmy's wife admits that she doesn't want to watch his life deteriorate and he tells her that she is practical. Jimmy's wife ended up coming back after she had an affair, but this affair severely hurt his feelings and his pride. Jimmy's wife says she left the other guy because he was too serious.

Chapter 17 Analysis

This chapter shows how people can run off on you when you need them most. Jimmy's wife always thought he joked too much and she couldn't deal with his cancer. So she abandoned him and had an affair. After awhile she became fed up with the affair because the man was too serious. This demonstrates her inability to stay in the tough times.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

This chapter talks about his experiences in every grade from first grade to twelfth grade at a farm school off the reservation. In first grade, he was teased constantly by bullies and had his lunch money stolen more than once. Victor reaches the limit of his patience when a boy named Frenchy throws snowballs at him. Victor feels the warrior come out in him and he beats Frenchy to a pulp. Then he is sent to the principal's office.

In second grade, he has a missionary teacher that wants him to apologize for everything. Victor doesn't understand what she means by everything and she thinks she needs to teach him respect. The teacher makes him stay in for recess and hold books with his arms straight out like an eagle. The teacher told his parents to cut his braids or he can't come to class. The parents rebelled by wiping their own braids across her desk.

In third grade, his depiction of a stick figure going to the bathroom was taken away. Victor felt that was censorship. Victor's fourth grade teacher told him he should be a doctor so he can help heal his tribe members. Victor refers to basketball and first experiences with drugs in fifth and sixth grade.

In seventh grade, he talks of a white girl that was raped by her foster-father that was white. The family lived on the reservation with the Indians. Victor comments about seeing girls in the eighth grade suffering from anorexia and bulimia, but he doesn't understand why they choose to do it because he is starving involuntarily on the reservation.

During his ninth grade through twelfth grade years, he talks about playing basketball and drinking. The common perception is that Indian children start drinking very young, but he is the valedictorian of his class and looks forward to a bright future.

In contrast, the high school on the reservation doesn't have very many graduates. The Indians prefer to look forward to partying instead of a productive life. Everybody seems to remain on the reservation and is not motivated to make their life better.

Chapter 18 Analysis

This chapter presents the difference between attending school on the reservation versus going to a farm school outside of the reservation. The reservation was fraught with problems that included lack of guidance, motivation, and optimism. This was apparent when you focused on the low high school graduation rate and the high incidence of alcoholism.

Victor proved that the environment played an integral role in success. The fact that someone was Indian did not solely determine their level of success. Victor also pointed

out that when you go to school off the reservation you will have to deal with people who don't like you. This shows that these people didn't understand the Indian culture and are racist.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Victor goes to the 7-11 during the graveyard shift. The 7-11 clerk looks at him suspiciously like he is going to rob the place and he talks about how his girlfriend used to look at him this way as well. The girlfriend looked at him like he was a criminal and then their love was over. Victor thought this was a logical flow of events.

Victor describes his previous girlfriend as becoming afraid of him because she thought he was angry too often. Victor would jump in his car and drive away after fights. Then he would get lost and would often feel lost in life. One night he ends up in a wealthy neighborhood and is pulled over by the police. The police officer tells him to be careful where he drives because he has made people nervous. Victor doesn't fit the profile of the neighborhood. Victor has heard this comment before and thinks that he doesn't fit the profile of the entire country.

Victor talks about how the 7-11 clerk assumes he is a criminal because he has long black hair and is an Indian. Victor watches the clerk flinch and plays games with him mentally. The clerk ends up giving him the Creamsicle for free.

Then he talks about his girlfriend again and how they argue. The girlfriend tells him that he is always drunk and stupid. Victor breaks lamps when they fight so they sometimes end up fighting in the dark. Victor comments about his dreams. In his dreams, he has a relationship with a white girl. This causes a commotion and he sees Indians killing whites and whites killing Indians.

Victor returns home and is lazy for weeks on end. Victor watches TV and drinks all the time, while his mother circles the want ads and tries to get him motivated to find a job. One day he finds a job that he wants at the high school exchange program. The job is in Spokane where he now lives alone.

Chapter 19 Analysis

Victor talks about his dreams. Victor's dreams center around the relationship he has with a white woman. This relationship is shunned and he sees Indians and whites uprising against each other. Victor finds a stable job in life, but still has trouble sleeping.

The insomnia that he suffers from stems from his constant fight against both the Indians and white man. Victor fights for them to accept who he is and his relationship with a white woman. Victor comments that it will take him years to sleep again, but it was ok because he already understands the end of his dreams. By this, he means that he already understands the way life works and that he doesn't have the power to change it.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

Victor uses the television as a means to explain different events in his life. Victor talks about how his sisters were so hungry that they scraped bits of food off the table with their teeth and he talks about his brothers and sisters sniffing gas from an exhaust pipe.

Victor comments on how his father was drunk and stumbled down the stairs. Victor talks about starting a car in the cold winter with his father and his father's description of the first television he ever saw. Victor provides snippets of family history all during various television shows.

Chapter 20 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates how his family pieces together their family history. The family watches the television, which is so loud that it distorts conversations. This same kind of distortion shows up when they remember the past. Victor explains that they piece their history together from the various television shows that were on at the time.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Victor talks about knowing Norma before she married James Many Horses. Norma was slightly older then he was, but he still called her grandmother out of respect. Victor sees her at fry bread stand and they shake hands with their fingers as only Indians do. Victor listens to Norma.

Norma says that Indians are the most sensitive people on the planet, even more sensitive then animals. Norma comments that when you are watching something happening you become part of the happening. Norma also says that everything matters. The Indians love to sit with Norma and listen to her speak this wisdom. Norma didn't drink and smoke.

Victor talks about dancing the night at the Powwow Tavern with Norma. Victor dreams about her and thinks he might have a crush on her, but she doesn't believe he has a crush on her and hopes that his dreams about her are positive.

Victor describes Norma's trips to the Powwow Tavern as commonly ending in her taking a man home to her tipi. Victor saw this practice as good when most would consider it reckless. Victor has heard rumors that Norma has brought home women before as well.

Victor talks about how a sober Indian has infinite patience with a drunken Indian. This is because of the Indians that have become sober, many do not remain sober. The Indian may go through the same routine of being sober, falling off the wagon, and then showing up at Alcoholics Anonymous again.

Norma asks him about life off of the reservation, as she wants to know what the city is like. Victor comments that "It's like a bad dream you never wake up from." (pg207) Victor feels like part of him remains in the city. This part is constantly laughed upon by white men and he feels like he is going around in circles.

Chapter 21 Analysis

This chapter demonstrates the view on relationships within the tribe. Victor views Norma's sexual habits as healthy, while others in the tribe do not. This view stems from his experience off of the reservation in the big city. Victor feels stuck between the two worlds and he believes in some of the ideas of the reservation as well as some ideas in the big city. The tribe members want to learn about the big city and he tells them of the moral and ethical trials and tribulations of living in the big city.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

In this chapter, he talks about turning 13 and then spending every year until he was 25 trying to figure out what it meant to be 13. Victor is also trying to figure out what it means to be Indian. Victor learns more about what it means to be an Indian when his father is called by the Witness Protection Program in Spokane.

The Witness Protection Program asks his father about the disappearance of a man that happened ten years ago. Victor's father explains that he was friends with the man at one time and wasn't surprised that he had disappeared. Many Indians have disappeared at one time or another because of the various Indian relocations. The Indian relocations sent them to cities where they just seemed to disappear into the vastness of the city.

Victor's father tells the Witness Protection Program that the man was shot in the head in the alley behind a bar and he explains that the Witness Protection Program calls him in once year to answer the same questions. Victor's father always replies that he knew the man and was with him the night he was shot. However, his father claims he doesn't know who shot the man.

Victor talks about driving around the reservation with his father, when his father gives one of the broke Indians some money. Victor's father gives him just enough money to buy some alcohol. The two go out to eat and he talks about how people are products of what they eat. Victor comments that he and his father would be potted meat, corn beef hash, fry bread, and hot chili.

Victor asks his dad if he has ever killed anyone and his father says that he killed someone accidentally, but it definitely wasn't on purpose. Victor's dad was in a car wreck that killed another man. Victor's dad was sober, but the police didn't believe him because they didn't think any Indian in a wreck could possibly be sober. The other man in the wreck that died was drunk.

The two go to the police station and talk to detectives about the disappearance of the man. The detectives offer them candy, which they have to give up because they are diabetics. Victor talks about how diabetes hurts you from the inside just like a lover and says that he feels like he is much closer to his diabetes than to any of his friends or family.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter shows the relationship between Victor and his father. Victor learns that his father must talk to detectives about the same case every year, even when his father has

nothing more to talk about on the subject. This demonstrates the distrust his father has of the police.

This distrust is also present when his father talks about the police not believing that he was sober when he got into a car accident. The police couldn't fathom an Indian in a wreck that wasn't drunk.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

This chapter talks about John-John who has saved money. John-John packs up his things, including a picture of his older brother Joseph. Joseph had been in military action and had been taken as a prisoner of war. John-John talks about the wonderful things Joseph did on the reservation before he went off to war.

Joseph sang with a voice that made everyone listen, even Indians that had far too much to drink. Joseph paid the rent and John-John waited everyday for John-John. John-John drank often and looked for signs of the time for Joseph to come home.

John-John hears a jet land outside and he greets the jet to find Joseph as the pilot. Joseph was battered from being a prisoner of war. Joseph doesn't seem to remember John-John, but we find out that this is John-John's imagination. John-John sometimes imagines that Joseph returns by bus, train, and car. The stories and details vary.

John-John talks about his having two first names. There are various reasons for him having two names. John-John believes that he has two names because it is easier to remember that way and that his parents needed to name him that way.

John-John continues to wait by the window for Joseph. John-John is waiting and hoping and he continues to imagine ways Joseph can return home.

Chapter 23 Analysis

This chapter symbolizes the heartache of waiting for a relative to come home from war. John-John can't deal properly with the fact that Joseph is gone. To alleviate his pain he imagines different scenarios of Joseph returning home. Joseph continues to wait by the window symbolizing how he is paralyzed by the grief.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

This chapter talks about Junior Polatkin. Junior Polatkin has dreams of being a gunfighter and he goes to Gonzaga University in Spokane. Junior explains that this school was originally built to educated Indians, but now mostly consists of white students that wish to move far away from their parents.

Junior listens to a blonde girl in his history class. The girl argues with the teacher in class and he is eager to listen to her points. Junior falls in love with the blonde when she talks about the old West in a disparaging way. Junior believes that she understands what it was really like for Indians and everyone else.

Junior follows the blonde into the cafeteria because he wants to talk to her. The girl spies him following her and rudely asks him what he wants. Junior is speechless and she asks him again. Junior wants to talk with her about her views on the West and Indians, but the only words that come out are that he wants coffee. The blonde thinks he is a threat and dismisses him. Junior feels like a complete jerk.

Junior didn't return to the reservation during Christmas break, instead he stayed in the dorms and read several books. While reading, he would often stare out the window. Junior wondered about white people and how happy they really were. Junior didn't know if they were happier than Indians or not. The boy couldn't imagine them being happy all the time, but he thought they must be happier than Indians.

On December 29th, he runs into the blonde girl while checking his mailbox. The girl had also stayed in the dorm over the holidays and was lonely. The blonde tries to strike up a conversation with him and she talks about the history class.

Junior blurts out that he is Indian. The girl says, yes, she knows he is Indian. The blonde girl asks him what it is like to be an Indian at the University. Junior comments that it can be quite lonely sometimes. The girl then asks him if he drinks often. The two continue a conversation and talk about actors that could play them if they were in a movie.

The blonde told him that she liked his hands. Junior was nervous about her compliment. The two had eaten lunch together and got up to leave. When they were leaving, they ended up kissing. Junior had never kissed a white woman before and he was curious to see if the experience would be different. The girl told him that she was Irish.

The couple has a passionate night of sex. The blonde girl ends up becoming pregnant. Junior asks what they are going to do about the baby, but she won't marry him because she doesn't love him. The girl won't have an abortion because she is Catholic and will go to Hell and she won't give the baby up for adoption because she would have a bond with the child. The girl is nervous about what to do and what the baby will look like.

The baby was born and named Sean Casey. Junior only had very limited visits with Sean. The girl's parents rejected the Indian heritage of the baby and remained in denial about the situation.

Junior focused all his attention on history class and he tried to debate with the History teacher, but his teacher just ignored him. The History teacher finally gave him attention by giving the entire class a pop quiz. Junior got an A on the pop quiz. Junior abruptly dropped out of college and headed back to the reservation in protest against the actions of his History teacher.

Chapter 24 Analysis

This chapter points to the relationship turmoil that can arise between interracial relationships. Junior wants to be part of his son's life, but he can't because she won't let him. The girl is Irish and can't be associated with Indians.

This same theme is demonstrated through the History teacher. The History teacher ignores Junior during lecture. The History teacher reluctantly gives Junior attention, which prompts Junior to leave the situation. Junior is pained that he has to do so much to receive attention that others, such as white men, receive easily.

Junior heads back to the reservation and realizes that life will not have a happy ending. Junior will continue to endure painful setbacks, as they are a prevalent part of his life.

Characters

Adrian

Adrian appears in a few stories but figures prominently in "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Don't Flash Red Anymore." In this story, he and Victor sit on their front porch and discuss how drinking has ruined so many members of the reservation and cut short the dreams of many Indian teenagers, like Victor, who aspired to play basketball.

Samuel Builds-the-Fire

Samuel Builds-the-Fire is the grandfather of Thomas Builds-the-Fire and the main character in the story, "A Train Is an Order of Occurrence Designed to Lead to Some Result." In this story, Samuel loses his job on his birthday and begins drinking alcohol, something he has avoided his entire life. Like his son and his grandson, he is a storyteller, but younger tribal members on the reservation have tired of him and do not have time to listen to his stories, and his children have all moved away. Samuel leaves the reservation to live in the city and takes a job cleaning motel rooms.

In this story, Junior, an alter ego of Victor and Alexie, describes his experiences with Norma Alexie illustrates the idea that the Spokane Indians are becoming more like Americans in abandoning their elders, and he suggests they are losing touch with their tradition of storytelling. The final image in the story is of Samuel passed out drunk on the railroad tracks.

Thomas Builds-the-Fire

Thomas Builds-the-Fire is a visionary and compulsive storyteller whom most people on the reservation ignore. He is a central figure in "A Drug Called Tradition," "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," and "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire." In the latter story, readers learn he once held the postmaster hostage with the idea of a gun. He is being tried for speaking the truth, after remaining silent for twenty years. During the trial he speaks in the "voice" of a young pony that survived a horse massacre in 1858, in the voice of the warrior Qualchan, who was hanged, and in the voice of sixteen-year-old warrior Wild Coyote at the Battle of Steptoe. Thomas Builds-the-Fire represents the Spokane Indian's link to the past and the traditions they are losing.

Crazy Horse

Crazy Horse was a mid-nineteenth-century Lakota Indian known for his courage in battle and for his fierce resistance to white encroachment on Lakota lands. He appears in "Crazy Horse Dreams" as a symbol of what male Indians had once been.

Lester Falls Apart

Lester Falls Apart is a comical figure who appears in a number of stories.

Victor Joseph

Named after two famous Nez Perce chiefs, Victor Joseph narrates a number of stories in Alexie's collection and is a primary character in others. Along with Junior Polatkin and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, he is an alter ego of Alexie, who often uses events from his own life as a basis for Victor's stories. Readers first meet him in "Every Little Hurricane," when he is nine years old and waiting for a hurricane to descend upon the reservation on New Year's Eve. The subjects he presents in this story—drunken tribe members fighting, poverty, unemployment, and humiliation—recur throughout the collection. He was once a basketball star on the reservation, drives a garbage truck for the BIA, and like other characters, he drinks to excess. However, he quits drinking after realizing the damage it has done to himself and others.

James Many Horses

James Many Horses is the central character in "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor." In this story, he is dying of cancer but cannot stop telling jokes about it. As a result, his wife, Norma Many Horses, leaves him, only to return later because the next man she is with was "too serious." Like most of Alexie's characters, James is sarcastic, self aware, and fatalistic, joking with his doctor about his impending death.

Norma Many Horses

Norma Many Horses is a primary character in "Somebody Kept Saying Powwow" and "The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor." She is married to James Many Horses, does not drink, and loves to dance. For Victor, she is a kind of ideal Indian woman, who is deeply committed to her people and undaunted by the problems they face. People refer to her as "grandmother" out of respect.

Aunt Nezzy

Aunt Nezzy, a middle-aged cousin of the narrator who sews buckskin dresses, appears in "The Fun House." After her son, Albert, and husband laugh at her when a mouse crawls up her leg, she leaves the house in disgust to go swimming naked in a local creek. She is disgusted by the way her family has taken her for granted, and is taking steps to change her life. At the end of the story she tries on a beaded dress that is too heavy and buckles from its weight. Refusing help, she rises. The dress is a symbol of salvation. At the beginning of the story, Nezzy says about the dress: "When a woman

comes along who can carry the weight of this dress on her back, then we'll have found the one who will save us all."

Junior Polatkin

Junior Polatkin, named after a Spokane chief from the nineteenth century, is another of Alexie's alter egos, and readers first meet him in the story, "A Drug Called Tradition," when he, Victor, and Thomas (all of Alexie's alter egos in one story) take a drug and experience a number of visions during which they steal horses to win their Indian names.

Sadie

In "Amusements," Sadie helps Victor put Dirty Joe on an amusement ride when he is passed out drunk.

Victor's father appears in a number of important stories in the collection including, "Because My Father Always Said He Was the Only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner,'" "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," and "Witnesses, Secret and Not." He is a hard-drinking, and at times emotionally distant man who nonetheless loves his family, and is idolized by his son. After he dies in "This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," Victor flies to Phoenix with Thomas Builds-the-Fire to retrieve his father's ashes.

Julius Windmaker

Julius Windmaker appears in "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Don't Flash Red Anymore." A rising fifteen-year-old basketball star, he begins drinking and loses interest in the game. His character is symbolic of how other reservation Indians have ruined their lives and dreams with alcohol.

Themes

Postcolonialism

Postcolonial literature seeks to describe the interactions between European nations and the peoples they colonized. Alexie's stories focus on this type of interactions, showing, for example, the United States government's attempt to control Native Americans by occupying their land, and then placing them on reservations that are run with the "help" of the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Alexie's stories illustrate the emotional complexities of living in a community torn apart by alcoholism, stripped of its larger social purpose, yet unwilling to assimilate the values and purposes of a culture that has oppressed its people for centuries. Characters such as Junior, Victor, and Thomas Builds-the-Fire are frequently humiliated during their interactions with whites, especially the police, and often respond with anger and black humor. In the allegorical and Kafka esque story "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," Alexie illustrates the absurdity of his tribe's, and all Native Americans', situation as Thomas is sent to jail for life for a "murder" that occurred more than one hundred and forty years earlier. Alexie underscores the continued victimization of Native Americans in this story by symbolizing the unfairness of the American system of justice.

Language

Alexie uses colloquial dialogue, paradox, and zeugma to effect an ironic, though realistic voice. He studs the speech of his characters with "enit," which means, "ain't it," and "eh," and other colloquialisms to illustrate how Indians speak on the Spokane Reservation. Alexie's use of paradox to show the contradictions of reservation life is evident in statements such as this one about Norma Many Horses: "Norma, she was always afraid; she wasn't afraid." Zeugma, the yoking together of two or more words in a grammatical construction to achieve a surprising effect, appears throughout the stories, and Alexie uses it for dazzling poetic effect. One example occurs when Victor says: "I walked back in the house to feed myself and my illusions." In this instance, he is using "feed" literally to suggest food, and figuratively to mean, "sustain his self-deception."

Psychological Abuse of Native Americans

Alexie details the various kinds of abuse Native Americans have endured living under the United States government. Not only have Native Americans had their lands taken from them, but they have also been forced to live in reservations and to give up their entire way of life. By forcing them to live on government handouts and labor at jobs that have little meaning to them, the federal government, in effect, has ensured that Native Americans will continue to live impoverished lives—emotionally, spiritually, and psychologically. Victor's numerous and ironic references throughout the stories to "five

hundred years," alludes to the length of time that Europeans have occupied Native-American lands and reshaped how Native Americans see themselves and their relationship to others. Alexie especially focuses on the damage done to Native-American males who, because of their compromised traditions and the loss of their fathers to alcoholism, have no good role models. Many of the males in Alexie's stories are proud, but desperate. The bitterly ironic story, "Indian Education" illustrates how the educational system on the reservation, run by the BIA and missionaries, tries to strip young Native-American children of their identity by forcing them to cut their braids and punishing them for not knowing their place. Alexie also sprinkles his stories with anecdotes of racial discrimination against Native Americans outside the reservation.

Imagination

In "Imagining the Reservation," Alexie writes, "Survival equals Anger X Imagination. Imagination is the only weapon on the reservation." What he means by that is that Native Americans have to be emotionally and psychologically resourceful to keep their sense of humor and their traditions alive in conditions hostile to their existence. Much of the imagination in his stories comes in the form of dark humor, a response to desperate straits in which many of his characters find themselves. Alexie himself demonstrates imagination and resourcefulness in the very way he has constructed the book as a kind of fictional memoir of his own life on the reservation. In an interview with John and Carl Bellante in *Bloomsbury Review*, Alexie refers to the characters Victor Joseph, Junior Polatkin, and Thomas Builds-the-Fire as " the holy trinity of me." And indeed, the stories are peppered with details and events from Alexie's life. For example, 1966, the year of Alexie's birth, is also the year of Victor's birth and of another of his narrators.

Style

Style

Alexie employs postmodern practices of writing to tell his stories. Some of these practices include weaving historical figures and figures from popular culture with characters created by Alexie. For example, in "Crazy Horse Dreams" he uses the Sioux warrior Crazy Horse as a symbolic presence to explore how the imagination effects ways in which people in the present respond to one another. In other stories, he uses Jesus Christ, Jimi Hendrix, the Lone Ranger, and Pete Rose as cultural icons that serve as touchstones of personal meaning. Alexie also challenges readers' ideas as to what makes a story by cobbling together diary entries, dream sequences, aphorisms, faux newspaper stories, multiple narrators and stories within stories to tell his tales. One of the most obvious examples of this occurs in the story, "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," in which Thomas takes on the persona of a number of historical figures, human and animal, to relate events occurring more than a century earlier.

In postmodern writing such as Alexie's, the lines between fiction and fantasy, reality and dream are erased, and the storyline—if there is one—is often blurred. Alexie also mixes tones, moving from comedy in one sentence to tragedy in the next. Such rapid shifts of tone create a playful linguistic surface that at times mocks the very story he is telling. Alexie mocks whites and Native Americans alike. For example, in "Indian Education," Victor parodies the Spokane Indian tradition of naming children, writing, "I was always falling down; my Indian name was Junior Falls Down. Sometimes it was Bloody Nose or Steal-His-Lunch. Once, it was Cries-Like-a-White-Boy, even though none of us had seen a white boy cry." This ironic stance towards tradition, genre, and self permeates the collection.

Narrator

The narrator is the person through whose eyes the story is told. Sometimes that person is a character in the story and sometimes not. Alexie uses a number of narrators in this collection including Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Jimmy Many Horses, Victor Joseph, and Junior. Though he primarily uses the latter two, by varying narrators, and using both first and third-person point of view, Alexie creates a complex portrait of Native-American life as filtered through multiple sensibilities.

Setting

Setting refers to the place, time, and culture in which the characters live and the story occurs. Alexie's primary setting is the world of the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington, though he occasionally sets part of a story in Spokane or Seattle. He represents the reservation as a seedy and poverty-stricken place where despairing inhabitants spend their days drinking and playing basketball. If characters work, they

use their hands, driving trucks, sewing quilts, or clerking. Their diet consists of commodity beef and cheese supplied by the federal government, beer, and fry bread, a traditional Indian food, and they live in houses built by HUD (Housing and Urban Development). Most of the stories take place in the 1960s and 1970s, when reservation life was particularly bleak, but also when many tribes began to assert their rights and lobby for more self-governance and compensation for lands taken from them. Characters both work for and loathe the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), the arm of the federal government responsible for administering reservation life.

Historical Context

History and Culture of the Spokane Indians

As an enrolled Spokane Coeur d'Alene Indian, Alexie draws on his experience on the reservation in Wellpinit, Washington, to craft his stories. Approximately 1,100 Spokane tribal members live on the Spokane Indian Reservation located about 50 miles northwest of Spokane, which includes a school and offices of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). The Spokane Indians belong to the Interior Salish group, who had made their home in northeastern Washington, northern Idaho and western Montana. "Spokane" means "Sun People." White settlers who moved into the Spokane's territories in the middle of the nineteenth century often skirmished with the Indians, and many from both sides were killed. In 1881, the Spokane Reservation was established by executive order of President Rutherford B. Hayes, and in 1906 land allotments were made to the inhabitants. In 1940, by an act of Congress, the United States acquired tribal land along the Spokane River for the construction of Grand Coulee Dam, affecting both the Spokane Indians' and the Coeur d'Alene Indians' ability to fish for salmon. The tribes had few avenues through which to challenge the government until 1946, when the Indian Claims Commission was created to settle claims filed by Indian tribes against the United States. The Spokane tribe filed a claim arguing that the government under-compensated them for land in an 1887 cession of land agreement. In 1967, the tribe was awarded a $6,700,000 settlement. Currently, the tribe owns 104,003 acres of land.

1960s-1970s

Many of the stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* take place in the 1960s and 1970s. These decades were rife with conflict between the federal government and Native Americans. Alexie refers to abuses by the BIA numerous times in his stories, including "Indian Education," in which he describes the blatant attempts by government teachers to humiliate him and strip him of his Indian appearance. Although Native Americans were, and remain, among the poorest people in the United States, their population doubled between 1945 and 1975, from 500,000 to more than one million. A number of activist groups emerged during this period demanding autonomy from the federal government and redress for past injustices. In 1969, a group of militant Native-American activists occupied Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay for eighteen months, calling for the creation of a Native-American educational center. In 1972, thousands of Native Americans participated in the "Trail of Broken Treaties" march to Washington, D.C., where they occupied the offices of the BIA. In 1973, the American Indian Movement (AIM), a group founded to help tribes assert their rights to their heritage and lands, seized the town of Wounded Knee, South Dakota, where United States troops slaughtered more than 300 Sioux in 1890. Arguing that the Oglala Sioux tribal government had been corrupted by its association with the BIA and that the Sioux had been cheated in the 1868 Sioux treaty of the Black Hills, AIM took hostages and demanded the United States reopen treaty negotiations. AIM leaders Russell

Means and Dennis Banks pressed the United States to give back 1.3 million acres in the Black Hills the government had taken from the Sioux. They also argued that 371 treaties between the Native Nations and the Federal Government had been broken by the United States, and demanded an investigation. The occupation ended after 71 days, after a violent confrontation between AIM and United States Armed Forces who had surrounded the Pine Ridge Indian reservation. A few AIM members were killed and the government arrested 1,200 people. During the next few years, the Pine Ridge reservation became a hotbed of unrest and violence, as the BIA and the Federal Bureau of Investigation sought to root out "instigators" and quell Indian activism.

Critical Overview

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven is Alexie's first full-length collection of prose and has been universally praised, both by reviewers and by academic critics. Reviewing the collection for *Whole Earth Review*, Gramyo Tokuyama describes the book as "twenty-two masterfully crafted stories of the human potential to pull oneself up from dark humiliating circumstances." Sybil S. Steinberg, of *Publishers Weekly*, claims "Alexie writes with simplicity and forthrightness, allowing the power in his stories to creep up slowly on the reader." Steinberg notes the inter-relatedness of the stories, and praises Alexie's ability to depict the rich complexities of modern Native-American life. Of Alexie's unblinking representation of life on the reservation, Steinberg writes, "He captures the reservation's strong sense of community and attitude of hope tinged with realism as its inhabitants determine to persevere despite the odds."

Comparing Alexie to other Native-American writers such as Louis Erdich, N. Scott Momaday, and James Welsh, all of whom have written both poetry and novels, Alan Velie writes, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* "establishes him not only as one of the best of the Indian writers but as one of the most promising of the new generation of American writers." In an essay for *The Review of Contemporary Fiction*, Brian Schneider argues that it is Alexie's voice that holds the stories together as a coherent narrative. Schneider writes: "Alexie's remarkable collection deserves a wide audience because of his original narrative voice, which mixes mythmaking with lyrical prose and captures the nation-within-a-nation status of American Indians and the contradictions such a status produces."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2

Critical Essay #1

Semansky is an instructor of English literature and composition and writes on literature and culture for several publications. In this essay, Semansky considers the role of storytelling in Alexie's stories.

In oral cultures, storytelling is the primary means by which history and tradition are passed from generation to generation. Alexie foregrounds the role of storytelling in his writing, however, not only as a means by which Native Americans can keep their collective memories alive, but also as a way that individuals can survive the daily assaults of Eurocentric culture on their imaginations and sensibilities. More often than not, rather than presenting a chronological narrative of events as one expects in conventional stories, Alexie's "stories" evoke states of mind and grapple with the numerous and conflicting representations vying for attention in the contemporary mind.

In her review of the collection in *American Indian Quarterly*, Denise Low writes, "Sherman Alexie's short stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* could not have been written during any other period of history." Low is alluding not only to the numerous references Alexie makes to popular culture such as 7-11 stores, television shows, and baseball celebrities such as Pete Rose, but also to the peculiar condition in which Native Americans find themselves in the late twentieth century, having to constantly renegotiate their identity among the welter of conflicting signs that saturate their lives.

These signs are everywhere, in the image of Indians on television shows such as *The Lone Ranger*, in history books and in popular movies like*Dances With Wolves*, that attempt to portray "real" Indians, and they exist in the tribal lore that inhabits the imagination of Native Americans themselves. Living on the reservation, segregated from white American culture at large, but vulnerable to its relentless sign system and its (mis)representations of Indians, Alexie's characters battle to achieve some sense of authenticity in a world where that very notion has become suspect. The fractured narratives and stories inside stories emphasize the desperation and urgency that drive these characters in their search for meaning.

One way his characters cultivate meaning is by mythologizing the reservation and its inhabitants. In "The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Don't Flash Red Anymore," Victor and Adrian practice this brand of storytelling in their discussions of basketball talent on the reservation. They focus on Julius Windmaker, "the latest thing in a long line of reservation basketball heroes," who "had that gift, that grace, those fingers like a goddam medicine man." In his study of Alexie in *Contemporary American Literature*, Kenneth Millard writes that this story "establishes the reservation in terms of a community of shared hardship where stories of survival help to protect Indians from erosion and disappearance." Erosion comes from within and without. As more and more Indians leave the reservation, ties to community and family are broken, and those who remain must battle alcohol, a crippling sense of stagnation, and an increasing isolation from the "outside" world. Adrian and Victor retain hope for life on the reservation by

building myths around gifted individuals. Seemingly insignificant events such as a few minutes of a high school basketball game take on epic proportions each time Julius's story is retold. By creating contemporary myths around living Indians, the two keep alive the hope that conditions can change and that individuals can transcend their bleak circumstances.

Mythologizing takes on other forms as well. In "Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation," the narrator adopts a baby, James, after its parents have died in a fire. The baby does not walk or talk until the Christmas of his seventh year. When he finally speaks, he speaks with the wisdom of an elder:

He says so many things and the only thing that matters is that he says he and I don't have the right to die for each other and that we should be living for each other instead. He says the world hurts. He says the first thing he wanted after he was born was a shot of whiskey. He says all that and more. He tells me to get a job and to grow my braids. He says I better learn how to shoot left-handed if I'm going to keep playing basketball. He says to open a fireworks stand.

Full of practical advice that counter ideas often associated with Christianity, James directly responds to the Christian notion that Christ died for the sins of humankind so that human beings may live, by telling the narrator that "we should be living for each other instead." By mythologizing James as someone who is more interested in helping Indians survive this world than he is in saving their souls for the next world, Alexie responds to the Christian missionaries who were so prevalent on reservations and who helped run their schools. It is James who literally saves the narrator from the ravages of alcoholism, as he is forced to give up the bottle if he is to keep custody of the child. Even Alcoholics Anonymous, which the narrator joins, is built upon the act of storytelling, as members meet to tell stories about how alcohol has ruined their lives and how they are going to stop drinking and change their lives. By listening to the stories of others and telling one's own story, members of AA derive the strength to stay sober.

The idea of salvation is at the heart of storytelling in Alexie's stories—salvation from one's own destructive impulses, salvation from the appropriation of Native-American history and traditions by others, salvation from the onslaught of technology that supplants human connectedness and colonizes family life. A year after he quits drinking, the narrator of "Jesus Christ's Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation," says, "Every day I'm trying not to drink and I pray but I don't know who I'm praying to." Storytelling is akin to praying in these stories. The act alone is enough. In "The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire," inspired by Franz Kafka's novel, *The Trial*, Thomas, after being convicted of absurd charges, finds himself on a bus with convicts heading to prison. After being prodded, he begins to tell his stories, just as he had done at his trial. Thomas is both a tribal visionary and a walking archive of Spokane Indian history, and in Alexie's ironic representations of Indian culture, a parody of the modern Indian who cannot stop talking about his Indian identity and his tribal past. In "Family Portrait," the narrator describes television as a force that eats into his family's emotional life, and something they need to be saved from:

The television was always loud, too loud, until every emotion was measured by the half hour. We hid our faces behind masks that suggested other histories; we touched hands accidentally and our skin sparked like a personal revolution. We stared across the room at each other, waited for the conversation and the conversion, watched wasps and flies battering against the windows. We were children; we were open mouths. Open in hunger, in anger, in laughter, in prayer. Jesus, we all want to survive.

There are so many similarities between the characters in Alexie's stories and Alexie's own life that the collection can also be seen as Alexie's attempt to tell the story of his life by mythologizing it. Such self-mythologizing has become a staple of postmodern writing and can be seen in writers as diverse as John Berryman, Mark Strand, Ann Sexton, Gerald Vizenor, and Mark Leyner. At a time when many consider literary realism to be antiquated and an insufficient way to depict how people live now, creating mythologies around and of oneself has become an effective and provocative way to depict reality.

Source: Chris Semansky, Critical Essay on *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, in *Novels for Students*, The Gale Group, 2003.

Critical Essay #2

In the following essay, McGrath examines The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven *as both a literary work and as an artistic cultural representation.*

In Sherman Alexie's story, "*A Drug Called Tradition*," from his story collection, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, Victor, the narrator, speaks about what he calls the skeletons of the past and the future: "There are things you should learn. Your past is a skeleton walking onestep behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you . . . Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices. And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. But they're not necessarily evil, unless you let them be. What you have to do is keep moving, keep walking, in step with your skeletons . . . no matter what they do, keep walking, keep moving . . ."

This idea about skeletons, or the hauntings and the remnants of tradition, and the bones absent of flesh, but animate and manifest, is metonymic of the larger ideas and questions Alexie grapples with in this work: that is, how can a member or a performer of a tradition negotiate the seemingly incompatible drives of that tradition—the desire to perpetuate, to conserve, to maintain an idiom and its meaning, but at the same time, to accommodate the need to innovate, to create, and to move forward in a tradition, and explode and shape its word power? How can a participant in a tradition walk with the skeletons and traditions, but walk and innovate at a pace that avoids being trapped by their embrace?

My discussion of Alexie's work challenges the dogmatic and conservative insistence that, while a written, authored work can be considered a folklore text, it is not and cannot be called folklore. This essay is directed toward both scholars entrenched in the study of literary texts and to academic folklorists who insist on conventional and conservative parameters for what constitutes folklore. My aim is to articulate an approach to this particular authored text which would prevent the incorrect and casual identification of folklore in literature, as well as any preemptive dismissal of its presence in this novel. By reading Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* as a literary construction as well as a work born of a particular culture and artistic tradition, I insist on a more complicated understanding of its content, shape, and meanings in a critique of folklore theories which limit and confine our concepts of the power and dimensions of shaped words. I also challenge the popular but simplistic notion that Native American writing is somehow more "oral" than other texts, and I combat in part the increasingly useless distinction between the written and oral manifestation of verbal art by relying on some ideas of Dell Hymes as well as John Miles Foley. Foley, who considers text a medium for representing parts of an oral traditional performance, argues in *The Singer of Tales in Performance* (1995) that a text (or the material written representation of folklore) cannot be declared something "different in species" from the oral tradition to which it is related, asking instead "how a given text continues the tradition of reception?" We can achieve an understanding of Alexie's text's reception and its place in a tradition, of course, by understanding the

written representation on its own terms, by relying on textual indications of performance, and by learning or understanding the "institutionalized meanings" within the register of the tradition. That is, we can examine Alexie's text for its literary practices which represent those signals of performance, and then we can begin to seek a truer understanding of traditional meanings and ideas. Alexie, of course, relies on our readerly knowledge that we inscribe into his text, and then he uses literary devices that are both conventional and which subvert and d disrupt western literary principles. I assert, however, that besides easily dissecting Alexie's story collection and recognizing textual indications of meaning and performance, and beyond identifying keys to performance which indicate how this text might register with people in Alexie's folk group, I also contend that there is a kind of living dimension to the authored, printed word that cannot be summarily discounted unless we are unwilling to examine and enflesh our understanding of word power and a living tradition, and I argue for a more expansive notion of how folklore processes can be exchanged and represented.

Sherman Alexie, a Spokane and Coeur D'Alene American Indian, is an academically trained writer and political activist who wrote and produced the film *Smoke Signals*, based upon his work *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Born in 1966, Alexie grew up on the Spokane reservation in central Washington, and attended Gonzaga State and Washington State University, where he earned a BA in 1991. Alexie, who cites Adrian C. Louis, Simon Ortiz, Joy Harjo, and Linda Hogan as models, has published thirteen books, including seven collections of poetry. He asserts that his writing is primarily autobiographical: "It's fiction as autobiography, or autobiography as fiction, I'm not sure which one." This self-described life writing, accompanied by a skewering humor and scathing wit, earned Alexie a reputation as an ego-driven and opportunistic writer. In a feature interview on National Public Radio, Liane Hansen quotes a woman who grew up knowing the author: "What people on the reservation feel is that he's making fun of them. It's supposed to be fiction, but we all know whom he's writing about. He has wounded a lot of people." He has also been criticized by other Native American and non-native novelists for his position that only Native Americans can write characters who are Indian, and he is known for vilifying white authors for attempting to do so, particularly Barbara Kingsolver. Kingsolver insists she resents his attitude because it would "limit the scope" of most authors; presumably she resists confining authors to composing characters of their own ethnic and cultural background. Alexie explains, "I write what I know, and I don't try to mythologize myself, which is what some seem to want, and which some Indian women and men writers are doing, this Earth Mother and Shaman Man thing, trying to create these "authentic, traditional" Indians. We don't live our lives that way." I find myself torn between agreeing with his criticism of writers such as Kingsolver or Tony Hillerman, who capitalize on the popularity of the Native American novel genre and perpetuate romantic stereotypes in their characterizations of Indian people, and my own rejection of the impossibility of non-Natives studying, reading, and writing about Native American people and culture in ways that are not colonizing and destructive. I think, however, that Alexie's own work is important because of its consumption by a variety of audiences, and I attribute the variety of response to his work to the confluence of traditions and multiple registers he taps in the creation of his art.

Alexie has earned critical acclaim from the literary establishment, but I find book reviews typically misunderstand the forces at work in his writing. Critics frequently praise his work as lyric, humorous and comic, and, of course, make use of the fabulous catch-all phrase critics use for any phenomena they can't easily categorize, "magical realism." In one review titled, "The Despair and Spirit of American Indians," Lawrence Thornton criticizes Alexie's work without considering its Native culture and political context, dismissing all its phenomena as postmodernism. Another critic, Michael Castro, says, "Plot and character, the classical main elements of fiction and drama, do not stick with us after reading these stories," clearly an example of a critic working from a Western literary aesthetic. Another critic, Gramyo Tokuyama, writes, "Using poignant humor he exposes the cultural demise of a nation steeped in sacred tradition and surrounded by a passionless society." Tokuyama, by identifying this as a central theme of the book, seems to venerate the romantic notion that pure and true Native American cultures would still be gloriously uncorrupted if isolated from the surrounding "passionless" society. Of course, Alexie provides a sharp critique of stultifying and isolationist traditional practices as he simultaneously skewers disconnectedness and apathy, demonstrating how these factions consistently intermingle. In Alexie's books, one society doesn't surround another—rather, societies disintegrate together.

Native American author Leslie Marmon Silko is the only critic who calls *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* a set of interlinked short stories, and examines its folkloric qualities, especially its traditional referentiality; nearly all the other critics treat each stow as a separate piece and judge it using purely literary vocabulary. Silko wrote a review for *The Nation* in which she explains how traditions of Native American oral narratives demonstrate a legacy of "lengthy fictions of interlinked characters and events" as commonplace. Silko's comment indicates the importance of tradition to the writing of Alexie's work, and she contextualizes his authored literature in relationship to oral tradition and composition, for, as Silko points out, the structure and chronology of Alexie's book does not reflect standard components of Western literature, because Native American literature has traditionally taken a different shape which does not necessarily include features like Castro's "plot and character." Silko also points out that Alexie is, in fact, drawing on a canonical Western tradition as well as a native tradition, and she argues that he uses ghosts sometimes in the same way as Henry James or Shakespeare, as symbols instead of real beings, as well as images from Indian culture. She suggests the way he writes about a small town is within the tradition of communities evoked in literary works like *The Scarlet Letter*, *Babbitt*, *Sanctuary*, and *The Last Picture Show*. I think the vast majority of critics cannot arrive at the same combination of Western and non-Western literary criticism Silko uses to read this work, as the relies on some aspects of folklore theory as well as her training as a literary critic to review Alexie's novel more responsibly.

Louis Owens, another Native American literary critic who examines the construction of third wave Native literatures, relates the syncresis of Alexie's work to what he calls the initial problem confronting any Native American author. Owens argues that a Native American writer's art is initially problematized by its complicity with linguistic colonization. Owens writes about the complexity of the task confronting a novelist who would write about Indians and Indian concerns: "every word written in English

represents a collaboration of sorts as well as a reorientation (conscious or unconscious) from the . . . world of oral tradition to the . . . reality of written language." While seemingly falling into the trap of polarizing the solely written and the solely oral composition of word art, Owens focuses on the political ramifications of negotiating these multiple registers. Indeed, after understanding the implications of incorporating one cultural form of expression—that is, Native American verbal art—with a literary genre that has historically and contemporarily dominated and oppressed it, we can more thoroughly comprehend how Alexie simultaneously disentangles himself from what Owens calls a collaboration with a tool of colonization.

Furthermore, Alexie's writing strives to subvert and critique stereotypes about Indians that are maintained by mainstream culture. At the same time, the artistic features of his work undermine the traditional forms of the novel and traditional character types and themes of literature. Alexie creates art that successfully exposes interrupts, and unsettles Western patriarchal notions about Indians and Indian beliefs. Scott B. Vickers explains this artistic innovation: "The most successful Native American writers have adopted the forms, but not necessarily the traditional motifs, of the Western cannon, and have often brought to these genres the distinctive story-telling traditions of their own culture." Alexie syncretically innovates on myriad traditions to produce work that is revolutionary and transformative, shifting the idiom of his work away from static fiction and toward a tradition of dynamic and audience-altering art. If his work is not conventionally a living performance and communal exchange, its deeply powerful and weighted expressive nature propels his work into an expression that defies containment, definition, and the limitations of existing scholarship to dissect its expressive and affective communicative ability.

Louis Owens, another Native American literary critic who examines the construction of third stories, themes, and characters, as well as keys to performance, including special codes, figurative language, parallelism, special paralinguistic features, special formulae, and appeals to tradition. We can sort through his work and pick out multiple demonstrations of this text's relationship to the folklores in which the author participates. Furthermore, we can uncover how Alexie percieves his authorial role in relationship to his membership in his American Indian community; Alexie is a master of literary convention, and the confidence he displays in interviews indicates he is in fact comfortable with the primacy of authorship; however, he explains his complicated role as one which depends on more than singular individuality: "I'm a Spokane Indian who just happens to be a writer. I'm proud of who I am, and it defines everything I do. I think all too often, brown people buy into the Western civilization idea of looking at the artist as the individual. That's only part of it. We are also members of tribes. Nothing gets me madder than a brown person who says, 'I just want to be a writer.' It's denying who you are simply because of the pressures white culture puts upon you."

Alexie refuses to extricate his art from its traditional and community context, and repeatedly claims his creative contribution and his tradition's creative contribution are equitable. Indeed, we can examine his content for the hallmarks of Native American literature and traditional narrative themes, including repetition, the "recasting of tribal narratives into modern day story lines, a certain admixture of sacred and profane

influences, and the enunciation of tacitly Indian worldviews and personal experiences." These are certainly all elements Alexie incorporates in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, and though the end product is a marketable literary work which conforms to canonical values (in that it is shaped like prose, has characters, plot events, a beginning and ending, literary symbolism and metaphor), the actual stories undermine many western literary conventions, in both content and the literary tactics employed.

To outline the work briefly, *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is composed of twenty-two short stories; there is no conventional plot connecting them, but they are interlinked, much like Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*, a storytelling style some critics characterize, because of the additive development, as inherently oral traditional. This collection is narrated from multiple points of view and replicates traditional pan-Indian myths such as trickster and metamorphosis tales, in addition to many other "old-time" themes and motifs. Alexie, who has also published two novels and one other story collection (*Indian Killer* 1996, *Reservation Blues* 1995, and *The Toughest Indian In the World 2000*), blurs the chronology of the stories and the collection itself does not have a dominant narrative or story frame, causing many critics to label this a collection of short stories (a term Alexie does not use). Two of the characters appearing most frequently, Thomas Builds-the-Fire and Victor Joseph, became the protagonists of the film *Smoke Signals*. Thomas is a nerdy storyteller who tells stories and seems to serve as a surrogate for Alexie while providing a running commentary on oral tradition in tribal culture. Victor, caught between reservation community and his own individuality, tries to present himself as the stereotypical warrior Indian, and is a habitual persecutor of Thomas and a harsh critic of his stories. However, and despite himself, Victor often enjoys, or is at least fascinated by, Thomas's stories, and on one occasion he wonders whatever happened to "a sense of community."

As for replicating orality in a text, Alexie consistently tries to evoke oral performance by addressing the reader and marking the beginning of a performance with page breaks and snippets of poetry or related traditional narratives. These tactics are Alexie's attempts at ethnopoetics, and change the appearance of the text on the page, dividing the prose into a form that is interrupted and perhaps even conversational. For instance, one performative technique Alexie repeats is addressing commentary or questions toward the reader. In "The First Annual All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue," the story is told in first person, but at the end, a series of questions are posed to the audience by the narrator, a device repeated in several stories: "Can you hear the dreams crackling like a campfire? Can you hear the dreams laughing in the sawdust? Can you hear the dreams shaking just a little bit as the day grows long? Can you hear the dreams putting on a good jacket that smells of fry bread and sweet smoke? Can you hear the dreams stay up late and talk so many stones?"

Alexie addresses the reader throughout the work, informing us: "Now, I'll tell you that I haven't used the thing . . ."; commanding us: "Believe me, there is just barely enough goodness in all of this . . ."; questioning us: "Didn't you know?" These questions are intended to elicit my participation in the telling of the story, as I pause and respond, in my mind or out loud. The call for reader response goes far beyond the provincial "dear reader" that Western canonical writing invokes. Alexie also incorporates specialized

language that is reflective of current Indian lexicon, but is also recognizable to readers who are outside the tradition, including the formula "enit," a word used to punctuate sentences which has multiple meanings depending on context, including "true," "yes," "alright," among others. But Alexie refuses to define or explain this usage, insisting that we decode it by visiting for a time in the presence of his Indian characters.

Besides picking out the keys to performance articulated by oral traditional theories, we can locate other evidence that Alexie is pushing toward a kind of "new" tradition. Evidence of innovation on both traditional narratives and the traditions of print journalism is developed by Alexie in newspaper stories throughout the work. First, after the murder trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the text offers us an article describing his conviction, a straight news story in the *Spokesman Review*, presumably written by a non-Native journalist, with quotes from all parties and conforming to the style and expected uninterpreted content of conventional journalism. Later, we are given another news clipping, this time written by Norma, a reservation In-dian, about a basketball game. She reports, "He hit a three thousand foot jumper at the buzzer . . ." "I think he was Crazy Horse for just a second," said an anonymous and maybe-just-a-little-crazy-themselves source . . ." Alexie seems to be innovating, through Norma, on both the conventions of print journalism and the traditional hero motif. The contrast between the "straight" news and the more mythic rendering of the Indian-created news suggests the latter is a socially created text which changes between event and transmission, a representation of a dynamism not present in the straight news. Perhaps Alexie recreates a newspaper article in two separate stories to demonstrate the differences between two disparate traditions for recording an event. These two versions indicate that the community news story is a kind of folklore, based on an event and interpreted in a traditional manner by a storyteller who is a member of the oral collective.

The most interesting innovation on a traditional figure is the development of the character Thomas Builds-the-Fire, for as Alexie himself explains in an interview, "Thomas explodes the myth and stereotype about the huge, stoic, warrior Indian. He's the exact opposite of what people have come to expect—the idea of an Indian geek just doesn't happen. He's something of a trickster figure, sort of a coyote figure, and he's mythological in that sense. He's always subverting convention, not only Indian conventions about Indians but white conventions about Indians." Thomas is in many ways very humorous, and the fact that he is a disregarded storyteller who cheerfully tries to maintain the oral tradition of his community, but who frequently offers stories which incorporate new themes, figures, and formula in traditional material, seems to be Alexie's vehicle for commenting on and manifesting the complications of oral tradition. Certainly, the work suggests that Thomas Builds-the-Fire is NOT a valued conduit of tradition; as Victor explains to us, "Thomas was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to . . . Nobody talked to Thomas anymore because he told the same damn stories over and over again."

In his innovative creation of a literary work Alexie has crafted stories which illustrate the tensions within living traditions (both the oral tradition in which he participates, as well as the literary tradition of authored text). Through his "new-time" storyteller, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Alexie complicatedly both rages against and replicates what is static

and conservative about an oral tradition and what results from that stasis in his Native American community. Through his treatment of Thomas he suggests that stasis of tradition is part of what continues to oppress and cripple American Indians socially and economically. At the same time, Alexie offers ideas about both the value and the problematic nature of innovation according to tradition—the very innovation needed to overcome the results and effects of stasis is frightening because it is change, and it is new and unrecognizable. This is a fear illustrated in the characters of Norma, an American Indian woman who rejects alcoholism and unemployment, and who fancydances as well as she boogies. The innovation according to tradition in her own life makes her declare, "Every one of our elders who dies takes a piece of our past away . . . and that hurts more because I don't know how much of a future we have." This fear of the new and its impact is manifest in the character of one unnamed narrator, who hopes for innovation but questions its possibility: "Driving home, I heard the explosion of a house catching fire and thought it was a new stow born. . . . But. . . . it's the same old story, whispered past the same false teeth. How can we imagine a new language . . . and a new life when a pocketful of quarters weighs our possibilities down?" The question for Alexie often seems to be whether the risk and the imperative of innovation on tradition, and the radical and revolutionary disruption his work can wreak on readers who belong to the dominant culture as well as on American Indians is worth the seeming loss or decay of oral tradition and traditional meaning.

In his article "Custer and Linguistic Anthropology," Dell Hymes declares, "One can believe, I do believe, that about the dry bones of print, words heaped up in paragraphs, something of the original spirit lingers. That spirit need not be lost to comprehension, respect, and appreciation. We are not able to revive by singing, or stepping over a text five times, but by patient surrender to what a text has to say, in the way it has to say it, something of life can again become incarnate." Hymes, of course, is arguing for the value in reading and studying the textual remnants of folk traditions, believing that manuscript forms may retain certain keys to performance which allow us to tap into how a text means.

This same idea can be applied to literary works like Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, but I would venture to say that beyond the embodiment of literature or collected texts with traditional meaning lies the prospect that the revivification of the "dry bones" of words incarnates more than the spirit of a living tradition. Those words, I assert, are more than dry bones, but are important genetic material, if you will—those words contain something of the humanity of the person who commits those words to text. I challenge us to expand—to explode—our ideas about what the word is and how it means. I assert that an electronic medium, or inked, printed text retains some essence or skeleton of the human being who committed the text to fixity. We must wonder if the medium of printed text is as limited as we insist. Native American literary critic Scott B. Vickers explains that, "For Native Americans, writing is an opportunity to re-invoke the poetry of the oral tradition, and thus a whole new cultural ethos, so that oral tradition can once again flourish in a new medium and even change the medium itself." I think, as writers like Sherman Alexie try to innovate on the medium of printed, fixed literature, so too can folklorists innovate on their conventional understanding of the power of text on a page.

cannot collect and explicitly describe, but the recognition of that possibility, that step over the bones, may open a world of life incarnate that exists too deeply to be seen or touched, but can only be known.

Source: Jacqueline L. McGrath, "'The Same Damn Stories': Exploring a Variation on Tradition in Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven,*" in *Southern Folklore*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2000, pp. 94-105.

Adaptations

Directed by Chris Eyre and winner of two Sundance Film Festival awards, *Smoke Signals* (1998) is adapted from stories in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. It is available at most video stores and many libraries.

Topics for Further Study

Read Leslie Marmon Silko's "The Storyteller," and then compare and contrast it with stories from Alexie's collection. Describe how each of them describes the value of storytelling as a tradition and a survival skill. Provide specific examples from the respective texts.

Research the relationship between the Coeur d'Alene Indians and the Spokane Indians and present your findings to your class.

Alexie's characters often respond to the way in which Native Americans have been stereotyped in popular culture. Research films and novels for illustrations of these stereotypes and list them on the board. Next, construct a list of the ways in which Alexie's stories respond to these stereotypes. Discuss as a class.

Alexie frequently describes how the Bureau of Indian Affairs has humiliated Native Americans. Research the BIA, and write a short essay about the ways it has changed in the last twenty years.

Argue for or against the idea that *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* can be considered a memoir.

The idea of the "authentic Indian" appears frequently in Alexie's stories. What does this term mean, and how is Alexie using it? Discuss as a class.

Analyze the films *Dancing with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans* in terms of how they do or do not perpetuate stereotypes of Native Americans. Discuss as a class.

Research the Native-American ritual of the Ghostdance, and write a short essay about how it functions as a symbol in Alexie's stories.

Compare *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* with its film adaptation, *Smoke Signals*. Discuss what is left out and what is included in the film and the possible reasons behind these decisions.

What Do I Read Next?

Alexie's novel *Reservation Blues* (1995) solidified his reputation as one of America's strongest writers. Alexie draws on the Faust legend in telling the story of an Indian blues band called Coyote Springs.

N. Scott Momaday's Pulitzer Prize-winning first novel, *House Made of Dawn* (1968), helped pave the way for other Native-American writers such as Alexie. The novel tells the story of a Tano Indian named Abel who returns from World War II army service to his home in New Mexico. Momaday charts Abel's struggles to reaffirm the ways of his people while living in a world often antagonistic towards those ways.

Megatrends 2000: Ten New Directions for the 1990s (1990), written by John Naisbitt and Patricia Aburdene, provides a social forecast for the 1990s, describing trends and their contexts, including the emergence of free-market socialism, global lifestyles, and cultural nationalism.

American Indian Myths and Legends (1985), edited by Alfonso Ortiz and Richard Erdoes, gathers 160 tales from 80 tribal groups to survey the rich Native-American mythic heritage.

Manners & Customs of the Coeur d'Alene Indians (1975), by Jerome Peltier, is a useful introduction to the customs of Alexie's tribe.

Further Study

Cline, Lynn, "About Sherman Alexie," in *Ploughshares*, Vol. 26, Issue 4, Winter 2000, pp. 197-202.

Cline's essay succinctly covers the major developments in Alexie's life and writing career.

Donahue, Peter, "New Warriors, New Legends: Basketball in Three Native American Works of Fiction," in *American Indian Culture and Research Journal*, Vol. 21, No. 2, Spring 1997.

Donahue discusses the significance of basketball in Native-American culture in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues*.

Can we argue, then, that when writers like Alexie innovate on both literary conventions and oral traditional narrative conventions, his work becomes caught in "flux," much as, perhaps, our understanding of folklore in literature is? I challenge us to make room for a vision of folklore as a phenomena so powerful and ephemeral that it can transcend the confines of written text in ways we

Hirschfelder, Arlene, and Martha Kreipe de Montano, *The Native American Almanac: A Portrait of Native America Today*, Prentice Hall General Reference, 1993.

This useful reference book includes history of Indian and white relations, Native Americans today, treaties, tribal governments, languages, education, religion, games and sports, and Native Americans in film and video.

McFarland, Ron, "Sherman Alexie," in *Dictionary of Literary Biography*, Vol. 206: *Twentieth-Century American Western Writers*, First Series, edited by Richard H. Cracroft, The Gale Group, 1999, pp. 3-10.

McFarland provides a thorough overview of Alexie's writing and life.

Waldman, Carl, *Who Was Who in Native American History*, Facts on File Publications, 1990.

Alexie occasionally makes references to Native-American heroes from history. This book provides biographies of Indians and non-Indians important in Indian history, from early contact through 1900.

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1,Winter 1996, p. 123.

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Steinberg, Sybil S., Review of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, in *Publishers Weekly*, Vol. 240, No. 29, July 19, 1993, p. 235.

Tokuyama, Gramyo, Review of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, in *Whole Earth Review*, No. 86, Fall 1995, p. 57.

Velie, Alan R., Review of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fist-fight in Heaven*, in *World Literature Today*, Vol. 68, No. 2, Spring 1996, pp. 407-408.

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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