

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven

by Sherman Alexie

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Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

"Every Little Hurricane"

On January 1, 1976, an emotional hurricane dumps nine-year-old Victor out of his bed on the Spokane Indian Reservation during his parents' New Year's celebration. His uncles, Adolph and Arnold, fight in the yard. Victor reflects on Christmas Eve, 1970, when his father wept because he had no money to buy gifts. His mother made soup. Victor's stomach ached from hunger. He hates rain and fears drowning like the old Indian who fell into a mud puddle. Victor recalls individual insults to his parents—his father's being spit on and the doctor's illegal sterilization of his mother after Victor was born. At the party, he finds his parents passed out on the bed and sleeps between them.

"A Drug Called Tradition"

Thomas Builds-the-Fire gives a party after receiving lease money from Washington Water Power. Victor promises Junior a new drug. They drive toward Benjamin Lake and stop to pick up Thomas on the way. On the effects of the drug, Thomas sees Victor stealing a horse or cow. A dream pictures the theft of a black pony, which Victor rides over the plain. Junior sees Thomas naked and dancing around a fire. Victor dreams about joining a Ghost Dance to recover the Indians killed in the Indian Wars and to send the ships of white explorers back to Europe. Victor next dreams about Junior singing on stage about Crazy Horse.

When the drug wears off, Thomas tells a story about three Indian boys playing like real Indians seeking a vision. Victor insults Thomas for his unbelievable narrations about walking between skeletons. Junior and Victor remain at the lake until dawn, then park in front of the Trading Post. Big Mom, a spiritual leader, knows about the drug dreams. She gives Victor a tiny hand drum as a way of summoning her when he needs her.

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

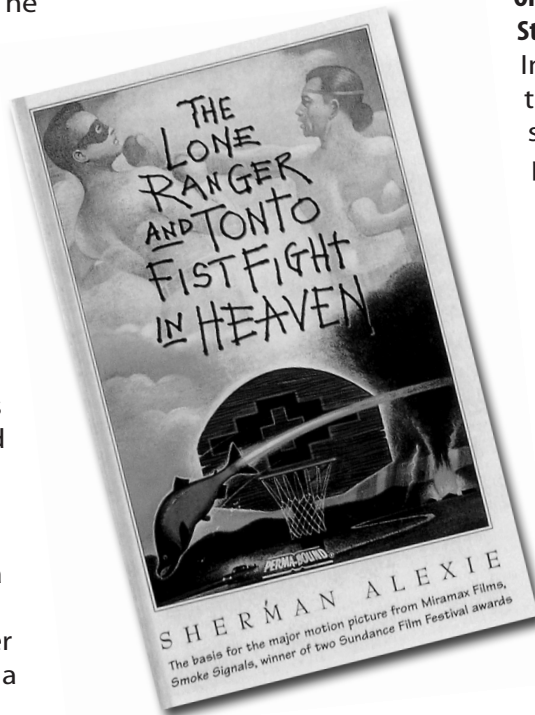
In the 1960s, Victor's father protested the Vietnam War during a demonstration in Spokane, Washington. His photo won awards. He was arrested and spent two years in Walla Walla State Penitentiary for assault with a deadly weapon. On his release, he hitchhiked to Woodstock. Twenty years later, he wore out a tape of Jimi Hendrix playing the "Star-Spangled Banner." The father tells Victor about meeting Victor's mother at a party in Spokane and about conceiving Victor during a night of drunkenness.

Victor's father notes that his son has had not a war to fight except for Desert Storm. Victor recalls his parents making love

and the acrimony of their divorce. His father receded into listening to music and riding a motorcycle. After he wrecked, his ex-wife visited him daily. The father migrated about the Southwest and gradually stopped writing to Victor, who wept nightly in his bed.

"Crazy Horse Dreams"

At a powwow, Victor waits to be served at the fry bread stand and walks to the stickgame pavilion. He gambles on Willie Boyd's dice game. Victor shares with an unnamed woman a night of love-making in her Winnebago and relates memories of



being stuck on an elevator. He insults the woman and stalks out, wishing he could impress her by being as powerful and grand as Crazy Horse.

“The Only Traffic Signal on the Reservation Doesn’t Flash Red Anymore”

In summer, Victor, a former basketball team member, plays Russian roulette with Adrian and drinks beer on the front porch while observing a broken traffic light. They observe four boys out to make trouble. One of them is 15-year-old Julius Windmaker, the best basketball player on the reservation. Victor recalls waiting for the coach to arrive for the state finals his senior year. During the wait, Victor terrifies himself by looking at first-aid manuals and thinking about grisly forms of death.

Adrian and Victor reminisce about Silas Sirius, who scored only one basket in his career. In the distance, glass breaks. A tribal cop arrests Julius for throwing a brick through a pickup windshield. A year later, Julius has become a staggering drunk. Adrian and Victor decide to drive to Spokane. They return to find Julius asleep on Victor’s living room floor. Victor and Adrian turn their hopes on a female athlete named Lucy.

“Amusements”

Victor and Sadie observe Dirty Joe, who passes out at the carnival in view of whites who laugh and point. The couple load Joe into a roller coaster, pay \$20 for an uninterrupted ride, and then flee from disapproving whites. Victor wants to retrieve Joe, who is waking up. After Joe stumbles into the grass, the crowd draws the attention of security guards. Victor runs into the mirror house as though fleeing his past.

“This Is What It Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona”

After Victor loses his job at the Bureau of Indian Affairs, his father dies of a heart attack in Phoenix. Victor borrows \$100 from the Tribal Council. Thomas Builds-the-Fire, who diagnosed the father’s weakness and fear when Victor was seven, offers the rest of the money for the trip to Arizona. At age ten, he and Thomas went to the fairgrounds on the Fourth of July. At age 15, the two fought until Norma Many Horses stopped Victor from harming Thomas.

The two men board a plane, where Thomas meets Cathy, a former member of the 1980 Olympic gymnastics team. Victor’s father died in a trailer. His decaying remains stayed inside for a week. Thomas recalls saving 12-year-old Victor from an underground wasps’ nest. There is little left at the trailer except photos, a stereo, and a truck. Thomas remembers having a vision and walking to Spokane at age 13. He encounters Victor’s father, who wants him to watch out for Victor. Victor remembers when Thomas jumped off the school and flew, then crashed and broke his arm.

For the ride north, Victor and Thomas load the father’s ashes in two batches. They arrive in Nevada after 16 hours. After seeing no wildlife for hours, they spot a jackrabbit, which dies under the truck wheels. A loner in school because of his constant storytelling, Thomas remembers his father’s death on Okinawa in World War II. Thomas’s mother died giving birth to him. At sunrise, the two men arrive at the reservation. Thomas knows that Victor can’t afford to be his friend because others would laugh at a companion of the storyteller. Victor offers him half his father’s ashes, which Thomas wants to toss over Spokane Falls. Victor promises to listen to one of Thomas’s stories.

“The Fun House”

A mouse runs up Victor’s Aunt Nezy’s leg while she sews. Because her husband and 30-year-old son laugh, she regrets cooking for them. Thirty years past, the aunt and her husband danced at a cowboy bar. On their way home, he wrecked the truck in a ditch and spent a night in a hospital. Walking down the road to Tsimikain Creek, she strips down to her shoes and swims. Her husband complains that she is naked. She recalls giving birth to her son and the illegal tying of her tubes. To change her life, she puts on a heavy beaded dress and struggles to dance to drumming.

“All I Wanted to Do Was Dance”

After a woman leaves him, Victor dances drunkenly with a Lakota woman in a Montana bar. A Flathead drives him to Arlee. By the river, he watches a beautiful woman. He recalls how his woman told him that people change. Instead of exercising, he watches televised news. At around age eight, he fancydanced in his father’s old outfit while his parents passed out drunk under a table. His woman

advised him to stop drinking. Following a violent night, she left him while he slept. Victor drove a BIA garbage truck, cooked at a cafe, and bought beer. He buys wine at the Trading Post and shares it with a stranger who is celebrating his birthday. Victor walks away thinking about dancing.

“The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire”

Locked in jail, Thomas has been silent for nearly two decades. He feels stories crowding into his mind. BIA officials consider a felony charge to place before the judge the next day. In court, Thomas breaks his silence to contest the charge. On the stand, he testifies that he was a pony stolen from Chief Til-co-ax by Colonel George Wright on September 8, 1858. Thomas is spared the mass slaughter of 800 ponies. In the next story, Thomas is Qualchan, a guerrilla warrior along the Spokane River. Because Wright holds Qualchan’s father on a capital charge, Qualchan comes out of hiding and is hanged along with six other Indians. The city of Spokane builds a golf course named Qualchan. At this point, Eve Ford encourages Thomas to continue his narration. For her disruption, two officers handcuff her and lead her away from the courtroom.

After the judge restores order, Thomas answers the prosecuting attorney with his whereabouts on May 16, 1858. Thomas claims to have been at Rosalia with 799 warriors waiting to fight Colonel Steptoe. Bearing the name Wild Coyote, Thomas, then age 16, joined the dawn attack. Soldiers escaped the circle of Indians that held them prisoner on a hilltop. Wild Coyote killed one soldier and suffered a shoulder wound from the second man he shot. A newspaper article describes Thomas’s sentencing to two concurrent life terms at Walla Walla State Penitentiary for the two murders. On the bus transporting him to a cell, he tells stories to four blacks, a Chicano, and a white man.

“Distances”

The prophet Wovoka encouraged Indians to dance to summon the Great Spirit. Dancing would cause the whites to drown in a great flood. The speaker joins other Indians in burning a house belonging to whites. He loves Tremble Dancer, an Urban (city Indian) whom Skins (reservation Indians) can’t marry. Noah Chirapkin is the only Skin to travel beyond the reservation, where there are no indications of white life. The elders die and are burned

to rid the tribe of a white man’s blood disease. The speaker meets in a tree with Tremble Dancer, who is disintegrating. The Others return from 1,000 years past. One drowns Noah. Tremble gives birth to salmon before dying. Judas WildShoe finds a watch, a white man’s artifact. The speaker keeps a transistor radio, but can’t find a station, only white noise.

“Jesus Christ’s Half-Brother Is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation”

In 1966, Rosemary MorningDove gives birth to a son named James. In 1967, Frank Many Horses joins the 20-year-old speaker and Lester FallsApart in drinking until a fire at Rosemary’s house interrupts them. Frank saves James and tosses him to the speaker. Because James’s parents die, Moses MorningDove chooses the speaker to rear James. The next year, the speaker takes care of James as though child care were a religion. James is strangely silent as the speaker plays basketball. In 1969, the speaker has James examined at the Indian clinic because the baby doesn’t cry.

The speaker drinks with Seymour, then returns home to make love to Suzy Song. While the speaker plays ball, Suzy babysits. The speaker breaks a leg, but can’t afford surgery. In winter 1970, the bad knee keeps the speaker indoors with James. At age five, James gets another examination that suggests he is slow developing. The speaker expects great things of the boy. On James’s birthday, the speaker gets drunk and accepts a challenge to one-on-one with Jana Wind’s father Ray. Police arrest Ray and Joseph for beating a white man.

In 1971, drunkenness overtakes the speaker. When Jesse WildShoe dies, ten Indians thaw the ground with kerosene to dig a grave. The speaker is arrested for abandoning James and dries out in a cell while fighting DT’s. The next year, the speaker feels better, but James still doesn’t talk. In 1973, James says “potato.” At Christmas, he talks with the speaker. The next year, the two attend the World’s Fair in Spokane. The speaker depends on James to care for him in old age.

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

On his birthday, Samuel Builds-the-Fire, a skilled storyteller, receives no cards from his children. He

loses his job as a maid at the Third Avenue Motel, where he tries to rehabilitate prostitutes. He turns to beer as his new lifestyle and moves from the reservation to Spokane, where he shapes and paints his room to look like a tipi. The sight of a boy dead from an overdose ends Samuel's storytelling. He collapses in the path of a train on the Union Pacific line.

"A Good Story"

Victor's mother accuses him of telling sad stories. Victor tells a story about Uncle Moses, who entertains Arnold with storytelling. The telling precedes Victor's mother's song.

"The First Annual All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue"

Victor buys a used grand piano and brings tears to his listeners' eyes with a performance of a piece by Béla Bartók. Simon wins a storytelling contest and compares basketball to a native religion.

"Imagining the Reservation"

Victor works the graveyard shift in Seattle while clerking at the 7-11. He describes reservation survivalism as the union of anger with imagination.

"The Approximate Size of My Favorite Tumor"

Jimmy Many Horses harasses his wife Norma, who leaves to dance at the Powwow Tavern. He joins her and apologizes about the cancer jokes about his tumor looking like a baseball. She leaves him. He recalls their wedding at the Spokane Tribal Longhouse. Three months after Norma's departure, Jimmy receives a radiation treatment in Spokane and jokes with Dr. Adams, who offers no hope of recovery. Jimmy recalls a trooper shaking him down for \$100. Norma returns from Arlee to help Jimmy die.

"Indian Education"

Junior Falls Down accustoms himself to bullying in the first grade. The next year, his teacher, Betty Towle, torments him. Mr. Schluter, his fourth grade teacher, urges Junior to become a doctor. In fifth grade, the year Steven Ford sniffs rubber cement, Junior discovers basketball. He befriends Randy, a new kid from Springdale.

Junior separates himself from the reservation in the seventh grade by kissing a white girl. Unlike bulimic white girls, he is happy to have free food. In the ninth grade, he passes out from diabetes,

but the Chicano teacher stereotypes him as a drunken Indian. He graduates valedictorian.

"The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven"

After breaking up with his girlfriend, Victor works at the 7-11 and gets stopped by the police for driving in a white neighborhood. He returns to the reservation and begins playing basketball again. He tries to beat the son of the BIA chief, who is an accomplished athlete. Victor's girlfriend calls and apologizes.

"Family Portrait"

Victor recalls his family's hunger and his epileptic seizures. His siblings danced to forget poverty. His father remembers a surreal image on the first television he ever saw.

"Somebody Kept Saying Powwow"

Norma tries to save the tribe. She encourages Junior Polatkin to witness the dancing and covers his basketball wins for the tribal newspaper. She is curious about life in the white world. He regrets ridiculing an ex-con who entered college to remake his life.

"Witnesses, Secret and Not"

In 1979, Victor's father answers questions about the disappearance of Jerry Vincent in 1969. While driving on ice in Reardan Canyon, Victor's father describes Jerry's shooting death in an alley. At the police station in Spokane, the father repeats all he knows about the death to Detective Clayton.

Timeline of Fictional and Historical Events

Prehistory	Migrants from Asia cross the Bering land bridge into North America.
1763	Sir Jeffrey Amherst urges Colonel Henry Bouquet to kill Indians by giving them blankets carrying smallpox bacteria.
May 16, 1858	At Rosalia, Washington, 800 warriors wait to attack Colonel Edward J. Steptoe; that night Steptoe's men escape from their Indian captors.
Sept. 8, 1858	Colonel George Wright steals a pony herd from Chief Til-co-ax.
Sept. 24, 1858	Wright hangs Qualchan, a guerrilla warrior.
June 25, 1876	General George Armstrong Custer dies at the Little Big Horn, Montana.

1888 Wovoka, a Paiute visionary, introduces the Ghost Dance in Nevada.

December 1890 White officials ban the Ghost Dance.

Dec. 29, 1890 General Nelson Miles leads the massacre at Wounded Knee, South Dakota.

1945 *Thomas's father dies at Okinawa during World War II.*

1950 The Associated Press names Jim Thorpe the greatest athlete of the past half century.

1960s *Victor's father protests the Vietnam War in a Spokane demonstration.*

1965 Billy Mills sets U. S. records for the 10,000 meter and the three mile race.

1966 *After Victor's birth, doctors sterilize his mother illegally. Rosemary MorningDove gives birth to James.*

1967 *Frank Many Horses saves James from a housefire that kills James's parents.*

1968 N. Scott Momaday sparks the Native American Renaissance with the publication of *House Made of Dawn*, winner of a Pulitzer Prize.

1969 Jimi Hendrix performs "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock. *Victor's father is arrested. Jerry Vincent is murdered in an alley.*

ca. 1970 *Victor's father leaves Walla Walla State Penitentiary.*

Sept. 18, 1970 Jimi Hendrix dies in his sleep.

Dec. 24, 1970 *Victor's father weeps because he has no money to buy Christmas gifts.*

1971 *When Jesse WildShoe dies, ten Indians thaw the ground with kerosene to dig a grave.*

ca. 1973 *Thomas Builds-the-Fire diagnoses weakness and fear in Victor's father.*

1973 *James says "potato."*

1974 *James and his foster father attend the World's Fair in Spokane.*

January 1, 1976 *On the Spokane Indian Reservation, Victor's parents hold a New Year's party.*

July 4, 1976 *Victor and Thomas go to the fairgrounds.*

1978 *Thomas saves Victor from an underground wasps' nest.*

1979 *Victor's father answers questions about the disappearance and murder*

of Jerry Vincent. Victor's father wears out his Jimi Hendrix tape. He asks Thomas to look out for Victor.

1980 *Cathy is part of the U. S. Olympic gymnastics team.*

1981 *Norma Many Horses stops Victor from hurting Thomas.*

January 16, 1991 Desert Storm begins in Iraq.

fall 1992 The Qualchan Golf Course opens.

Author Sketch

A force of the American Indian literary renaissance, Sherman J. Alexie, Jr., befuddles critics with his post-modern style. He was born on October 7, 1966, fifty miles northwest of Spokane, Washington, to a Spokane mother, Lillian Agnes Cox, and Coeur d'Alene father, Sherman Joseph Alexie. The author came of age among 1,100 residents of the Spokane Indian Reservation at Wellpinit, which included his maternal grandmother, Etta Adams, a spiritual leader. He suffered seizures from hydrocephalus and required surgery in March 1967. By age three, he disproved predictions of mental retardation by learning to read. Isolated for his brilliance, he attended integrated public schools in Reardan, Washington, and played on the basketball team. On scholarship at Gonzaga University in Spokane, he drank heavily like his parents did, but he continued to thrive academically. He finished his last two years of pre-med training at Washington State University in Pullman.



After weaning himself off alcohol, Alexie abandoned hopes of becoming a doctor, switched majors to American studies, and, under the direction of Alex Kuo, read the verse of Joy Hargo and Linda Hogan. His career flourished in 1991 with a Washington State Arts Commission Poetry Fellowship and a year later with a National Endowment for the Arts Poetry Fellowship. At age 26, he published *The Business of Fancydancing* and *I Would Steal Horses*, which prefaced his award-winning collection *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and *Reservation Blues*. He settled in Seattle with his Hidatsa-Pottawatomi wife Diane and their two sons and contributed poems and short fiction to *Another Chicago*, *Beloit Poetry Journal*, *Black Bear Review*, *Caliban*, *Journal of Ethnic*

Studies, New York Quarterly, Raven Chronicles, Red Dirt, Salon, and Slipstream.

Of his provocative writings, Alexie stated, "We are more than just writers. We are (Native) storytellers. We are spokespeople. We are cultural ambassadors. We are politicians. We are activists. We are all of this simply by nature of what we do, without even wanting to be." His talents also direct him toward comedy routines, vocal recordings, public readings, television debates, editing, and writing and directing independent film. At age 37, he earned a distinguished alumnus citation from Washington State University.

Alexie and the Critics

The playful, disconnective style of Sherman Alexie's short stories perplexes critics, who acknowledge the disarming candor and offbeat pacing of his fiction as testimonials to Native American despair. Joseph L. Coulombe claims that the author "uses humor—or his characters use humor—to reveal injustice, protect self-esteem, heal wounds, and create bonds." Through irreverent storytelling, ambiguity, satire, and paradox, Alexie plays the trickster, for whom provocative humor serves multiple ends. Key to his motivation is the obliteration of stereotypes and the renewal and joining of individuals through storytelling, which flows over time constraints in a form of magical realism. Alexie's version of oral tradition allows Indians to express the common ground of racist treatment and low expectations from the white world. By depersonalizing pain, his tellers of tales whittle down their frustrations and terrors into manageable size at the same time that they cultivate compassion and camaraderie in listeners.

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General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of native American losses
2. To account for the rise of alcoholism on reservations
3. To interpret social and religious customs
4. To contrast causes of bias, genocide, and police stereotyping
5. To discuss the theme of storytelling and dancing as emotional releases
6. To explain the harm of low self-esteem
7. To compare intra-tribal and extra-tribal relationships
8. To describe attitudes toward the jailing of Indians
9. To describe the atmosphere of a reservation bar
10. To analyze the roles of teachers, visionaries, and athletes

Specific Objectives

1. To explain Victor's slide into alcoholism and aimlessness
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To summarize the importance of basketball to the community
4. To account for Jimmy Many Horses's inappropriate humor
5. To recount the fostering of James MorningDove
6. To predict how future athletes will realize their promise
7. To summarize injustice in the trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire
8. To discuss the importance of dance to reservation Indians
9. To describe the roles of Detective Clayton, Tremble Dancer, Big Mom, Silas Sirius, and Junior Falls Down
10. To list events caused by Colonel George Wright and General George Armstrong Custer

Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Sherman Alexie's fiction, present the following terms and applications:

anti-hero a protagonist or central figure who lacks the usual heroic qualities of an admirable person or leader, particularly skill, grace, honesty, courage, and truth. Alexie focuses on the anti-heroics of Victor and Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Because their friendship is flawed, they lack a comfortable relationship based on mutual trust and admiration. Victor fears that others will ridicule him for listening to Thomas's stories. Thomas realizes that the life of the storyteller denies him normal camaraderie.

dream vision imaginative literature that presents dreamscapes, imagined journeys, and supernatural intervention in reality. Alexie intersperses the visions of drug users and the imagined scenarios of Indians who flee from reality through fantasy. By placing characters in scenes from native American history, the narrative encourages the reliving of heroic action, which contrasts the inertia and aimlessness of reservation life.

sociological fiction reform literature that uses character and action to delineate a social problem.

The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven studies the nature of prejudice and injustice toward residents of the Spokane Indian Reservation. The impact of Indian history and subsequent relegation of native Americans to reservations triggers generations of despair, poverty, and lowered self-esteem. Alexie stresses that, without pride and hope, Indians turn to alcohol, fighting, escapism, and suicide as an antidote to directionless lives.

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Sherman Alexie's *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* blends ordinary domestic settings—kitchen tables, beds, vehicles, porches—with dusty roads extending over flat terrain. Because the narrative focuses on internal struggles, description of the dock at Benjamin Lake, the fairgrounds, Spokane Falls, the fight in the yard on New Year's Eve, and the mystic pony ride over the plain is meager. Many encounters take place at the Trading Post and in front of the jukebox at the Powwow Tavern. A key view of Victor's friendship with Thomas Builds-the-Fire occurs at Victor's father's trailer in Phoenix, Arizona. The scene precedes the long drive north through Nevada, where the two men run over a jackrabbit, the only living creature they see in the desert. Alexie uses the animal's victimization as a symbol of the fragility of life.

Alexie creates contrast in "The Fun House," the story of Aunt Nezy's disgust with her husband and son while she sews. Her walk to Tsimikain Creek and a lengthy swim provide mental calm for her reflection on giving birth. In later stories, the bar and river in Arlee, Montana, Thomas's courtroom scene, the burning of the MorningDove house, and the bus ride to Walla Walla State Penitentiary reveal little scenic detail. The author returns to specifics of settings with declining business at the Third Avenue Motel in Spokane, where Samuel Builds-the-Fire witnesses a suicide in one of the rooms. His retreat from suffering takes him to the Union Pacific rail line, where he apparently dies on the tracks after being hit by an oncoming train.

Bizarre details litter the remaining stories. Victor's crashing of a used grand piano into a tree symbolizes the disharmony that results from 19th-century

Indian wars. The interruption of Norma's marriage to Jimmy Many Horses at the Spokane Tribal Longhouse stresses out-of-control public behaviors similar to street drunkenness and passing out in alleys. Alexie contrasts the undignified wedding with Jimmy's useless radiation treatments in Spokane and his return home to die in his own bed. More detailed is Victor's purchase of a dream-sicle at a 7-11 and his confrontation with police about driving in a white neighborhood. In the final story, "Witnesses, Secret and Not," the author energizes setting with the icy road conditions in Reardan Canyon and the questioning of Victor's father at the police station in Spokane concerning Jerry Vincent's shooting death and burial in Manito Park.



Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Alexie Sherman, Indian Wars, General George Wright, Spokane Indians, native customs, Washington state, alcoholism, Qualchan, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

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Audiocassette

- American Indian Music for the Classroom*, Canyon Records
- American Indian Oral History Collection*, Labriola
- Owl Dance Songs*, Canyon Records

Books

- Black Elk Speaks*
- Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*
- Fighting Firewater Fictions*
- General George Wright: Guardian of the Pacific Coast*
- Indian Wars of the Pacific Northwest*
- Ishi*
- I Will Tell My War Story*
- The Journey of Crazy Horse*
- Warrior of the Mist*

Filmstrip

- Self-Fulfillment*, Guidance Associates

Internet

- "Historical Readings about the Spokane Indians," <http://www.wellpinit.wednet.edu/sal-hist/reading.php?include=../sal-hist/timeline.txt>
- "Spokane Indian Reservation," <http://www.spokaneoutdoors.com/indirese.htm>
- "Spokane Tribe of Indians," <http://www.spokanetribe.com/>

Map

- Map of the Spokane Indian Reservation, U.S.*
Historical Archive

Multimedia Kit

- Writing about Family Roots*, Interact

Poems

- "Birdfoot's Grandpa," Joseph Bruchac
- "She Had Some Horses," Joy Harjo

Reference Books

- Race and Prejudice in America Today*, Knowledge Unlimited
- Red Dawn*, Spokane Indian Education Program
- Spokane Country: The Way It Was*, Spokane Heritage

Short Stories

- "Yellow Woman," Leslie Marmon Silko

Slides

Inside the Cigar Store: Images of the American Indian, Iowa State University

Video

Hand Game: The Native North American Game of Power and Chance, Lawrence Johnson
The Real People, Great Plains National Instructional Television Library

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* should include these aspects:

Themes

- poverty
- cultural bias
- despair
- reservation life
- unemployment
- family
- racism
- child neglect
- loss
- injustice
- alcoholism

Motifs

- coping with racial bias
- understanding the reservation mentality
- loving and losing
- assuming the role of rescuer
- coping with emotional trauma

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the anthology. Explain each in context. Title and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. He was sleeping in his bedroom in the basement of the HUD house when it happened. ("Every Little Hurricane," p. 1)
(In 1976, the federal government relinquished one-half of Lake Roosevelt to the Spokane and Colville tribes. The Housing and Urban Development bureau built 20 houses for low-income families.)

2. She would pull air down from empty cupboards and make fry bread. ("Every Little Hurricane," p. 5)
(Native fry bread is a baking powder biscuit dough cut into thin rounds and fried in hot oil. Additives and accompaniments include raisins, jam, jelly, honey, or syrup.)
3. When he was five years old, an old Indian man drowned in a mud puddle at the powwow. ("Every Little Hurricane," p. 7)
(A powwow is a native American gathering that involves giveaway ceremonies, dancing, native costumes and fashions, singing, drumming, native foods, and craft shows.)
4. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. ("A Drug Called Tradition," p. 17)
(In November 1890, the Paiute prophet Wovoka, called the "Red Messiah," led a native revival and introduced the Ghost Dance. Based on visions he experienced the previous year, the ritual foretold an Indian renaissance, native unity, the resurrection of the dead, and the return of the buffalo and ancestral hunting grounds to Indians.)
5. He stood on a stage in a ribbon shirt and blue jeans. ("A Drug Called Tradition," p. 18)
(A dress-up or ceremonial garment, the ribbon shirt bears native symbols—circles, zigzags, arrows—stitched in bright colors across the chest and yoke in a T-shirt or collared shirt.)
6. I lower a frayed rope into the depths and hoist the same old Indian tears to my eyes. The liquid is pure and irresistible. ("Amusement," p. 54)
(A favorite of Sherman Alexie, poet and college teacher Adrian C. Louis is a Paiute writer from northern Nevada who describes the problems of modern Indians. Louis has published in Circle, Cortland Review, Ploughshares, View from the Loft, and a number of anthologies, including Identity Lessons, In Their Own Voices, Native American Songs and Poems, Songs from This Earth on Turtle's Back, and Wild Indians & Other Creatures.)
7. There was so much to fear on that day when Colonel George Wright took me and 799 of my brothers captive. Imagine, 800 beautiful

ponies stolen at once. ("The Trial of Thomas Builds-a-Fire," p. 96)
(A cavalry officer trained at West Point, Wright earned fame as an Indian fighter during the Seminole War, Mexican War, and the Indian Wars in Washington and Oregon. On September 8, 1858, he directed a military expedition against the Coeur d'Alene, Palouse, Spokane, and Yakima that concluded in the murder of 800 ponies. The purpose of wholesale slaughter was to cripple the Indians, circumvent trade, and end their dominance of the plains.)

8. Do you think it's any coincidence that basketball was invented just one year after the Ghost Dancers fell at Wounded Knee? ("The First Annual All-Indian Horseshoe Pitch and Barbecue," p. 147)
(Simon makes a connection between the outlawing of the Ghost Dance ceremony, the massacre at Wounded Knee, and the invention of basketball. The battle of Wounded Knee is the dramatic end of the Indian Wars. Fought on December 29, 1890, the massacre of the 200 Sioux led by Chief Big Foot involved the U.S. Cavalry in an attack on noncombatants encamped at Wounded Knee Creek, South Dakota. Machine gun fire wiped out women, children, old people, and horses. The army buried the victims in a mass grave.)

9. I was Indian when it counted, and this BIA kid needed to be beaten by an Indian, any Indian. ("The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven," p. 189)
(A part of the U.S. War Department, the Bureau of Indian Affairs got its start in 1775, when the Continental Congress established three supervisory divisions to oversee neutrality and negotiate treaties. In the 1820s, government aims extended to trade mediation and the resettlement of tribes on reservations. Assimilation becomes the focus in the 1880s, when Indian agents established schools, courts, food distribution, supply depots, and land allotment.)

10. Juvenile diabetes. A tough life. ("Witnesses, Secret and Not," p. 221)
(Called Type 1 or insulin-dependent diabetes mellitus, juvenile diabetes begins in childhood. Symptoms include high urine output, raging thirst and appetite, elevated blood sugar, dehydration, and weight loss. To protect victims from

cardiovascular disease, blindness, nerve damage, and renal failure, immediate treatment involves dietary control of sugar intake and insulin injections or insulin pump.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the story collection.

Motivation

1. What causes alcoholism among Indians?
(The aimlessness and discontent of Indians at the Spokane Indian Reservation derives from the gradual dissolution of tribal traditions and self-empowerment. After American cavalry forced natives from their ancestral homelands, reservation life consisted of loss of personal and civil rights and enforced assimilation through missionary work and standardized education. Sherman Alexie picks up the threads of spiritual decline in the second half of the 20th century, when individuals have few heroes to admire. The absence of educational opportunity and employment forces Indians into unskilled labor at jobs like collecting trash for the BIA or at work that takes them into Spokane and Seattle and away from their homes, such as clerking at a 7-11. During periods of unemployment, parents have no way to feed children or buy them Christmas presents. Worsening the situation are the deceptions of bureaucrats, particularly the Indian Health Service, which tricks women into sterilization. Indians retreat into the fantasy of storytelling, the release of dancing, and the escapism of rowdiness, crime, drugs, sexual promiscuity, lawlessness, and alcohol.)

Setting

2. Describe life in the city.
(Indians believe that they can't reside in the city, but they can live only among other Indians on the reservation. For those who flee the Spokane Indian Reservation to Seattle and Spokane, Washington, life is often unrewarding and at times dangerous. Norma Many Horses moves from state to state in search of contentment. Victor's father also bums around on his motorcycle and dies in Phoenix, Arizona, in a squalid trailer, where his body decays for days before it is

found. Jimmy Many Horses receives radiation therapy that has no chance of halting growth in his inoperable tumor. Thomas Builds-the-Fire serves two years in Walla Walla State Penitentiary for a trumped-up charge. Indians who drift along city streets earn the scorn of white passersby. At the fairgrounds, white crowds ridicule Dirty Joe for being drunk and sick after a long roller coaster ride. At school, children like Victor receive the contempt of teachers who believe stereotypes of native Americans.)

Character Development

3. How does James change over time?
(In 1966, James is born to Rosemary MorningDove in a difficult delivery room scene. The next year, he is at home when the family's house catches fire. After Frank Many Horses dashes in to save James, the infant's head appears dented. Moses MorningDove arbitrarily selects a foster father for the baby. James grows up in the care of an alcoholic who realizes that the baby does not develop normally by walking and talking. At ages two, three, and five, James passes to doctors at the Indian Clinic for examination, but seems normal "for an Indian." James appears to dream because he kicks in his sleep. At age seven, he says "potato." That Christmas, he begins talking to Victor about being born with fetal alcohol syndrome. James wants Victor to get a job and open a fireworks stand. James develops into a philosopher and a promising caretaker for Victor.)

Historical Milieu

4. How does the story collection reprise Indian history?
(Offhand references to Christopher Columbus, General Custer, Crazy Horse, Chief Til-co-ax, Wovoka, and Qualchan sprinkle the narrative with provocative bits of history. Thomas Builds-the-Fire, according to a BIA official, has "a story-telling fetish accompanied by an extreme need to tell the truth. Dangerous." Thomas fills in details of history in a courtroom scene in which he pictures himself as various participants in native events, once as a pony. When Indians amass on May 16, 1858, at Rosalia, Washington, to fight Colonel Edward J. Steptoe, Thomas becomes 16-year-old Wild Coyote, one of the 800 warriors awaiting battle. After Wild Coyote

is injured, he lies looking at the sky until a comrade ties him to his body and rides away. Nearly four months later on September 8, Thomas becomes one of the ponies that Colonel George Wright steals and slaughters, but Thomas claims that he escaped the massacre. On September 24, Thomas becomes Qualchan, one of seven Indians whom Wright hangs for their guerrilla activities along the mouth of the Spokane River. Ironically, Thomas goes to Walla Walla State Penitentiary for the two murders that Qualchan committed.)

Theme

5. How does alcohol become an insidious villain?
(Indians seeking escape from poverty, boredom, and cultural bias retreat into alcohol, drugs, television, and other escapes. Characters joke about attending Alcoholics Anonymous meetings and about holding weekly class reunions at the Powwow Tavern. In a setting rife with beer and loud music, couples dance away their cares in all-night carouses. One model youth, Julius Windmaker, a promising 15-year-old athlete, ruins his chances for a scholarship by taking up drinking.

For contemplative characters like Victor, alcohol becomes a stalker. He is unable to shake the urge for drink and recognizes the onset of the DT's while he attempts to foster James, the orphaned son of Rosemary MorningDove. Victor manages to stay dry through AA meetings, but still longs for beer as an antidote to depression. The author indicates that the urge to drink never dies.)

Interpretation

6. Why does Alexie call his main character Victor?
(The choice of a name bears ironic significance to a character who grew up among rowdy drunks and ne'er-do-wells. He remembers the drinking bouts of his parents and uncles and thinks of their rowdyism and passing out under tables as normal. During difficult phases in his life, he struggles to survive an onslaught of obstacles to happiness. Even journeying to Phoenix, Arizona, to retrieve his father's remains and belongings requires charity from the tribal council and from Thomas. In the final story,

Victor describes his maturity under his father's influence. Victor learns from his father's tears that adult sufferings are an unavoidable part of life and that Victor must accept the burden if he wants to survive. The choice of his name becomes a subtextual hint that Victor will achieve a competent manhood.)

Conflict

7. How does Alexie describe the racism that engulfs reservation Indians?
(In cities outside the Spokane Indian Reservation, Indians find no welcome to participate in society, to attend college, or to find employment, even in dead-end jobs. Characters experience casual put-downs from whites that all Indians are mentally slow and morally dissolute. The story of Samuel Builds-the-Fire pictures a faithful hotel maid who finds dignity in his job and an opportunity to help prostitutes attain better lives. After the manager fires Samuel during a recession, Samuel retreats into alcohol, a substance he has never tasted. Samuel's death on the Union Pacific rail line is symbolic of native Americans who live outside the pale of white technological advancement and the demands of assimilation. Victor encounters a similar test from society by going to the 7-11 to buy a dream-sicle. His purchase from a terrified clerk satirizes the Indian failure to taste the American dream.)

Atmosphere

8. How does Thomas Builds-the-Fire create a mystic aura?
(Thomas's storytelling and predictions disarm other Indians, causing them to shun him as an outsider, the one whom others beat up in childhood. He is an orphan from birth who relies on internal narrative as a means of communicating with the world. When Victor is seven years old, Thomas creates a fearful atmosphere by closing his eyes and examining Victor's father for weakness. Thomas states that the father has a weak heart because he fears his family. The man's fears cause insomnia and escapism. He rides away from the family on a motorcycle and dies alone.
- Later, Thomas divulges to Victor that Thomas obeyed a dream by walking toward Spokane. After encountering Victor's father, Thomas real-

izes that the older man is the vision Thomas awaits. The vision urges "Take care of each other." It is Thomas who provides Victor with enough funds to make the flight to Phoenix, Arizona, to retrieve the father's remains after he dies of a heart attack. Thomas's predictions about the father's hermetism prove correct. Thomas's price for guiding and protecting Victor is listening to one story. Victor considers the request a fair trade.)

Author Purpose

9. Why do the stories appeal to readers?
(Sherman Alexie is what one native scholar, Dr. Lotsee Patterson, calls "a breath of fresh air." Alexie captures the daily humiliations and unremitting obstacles to happiness, such as government commodity cheese and canned beef that the dogs won't eat. He characterizes survival in lyric terms: "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." Alexie finds in women like Victor's mother, a professional dancer, in Aunt Nezza, the seamstress, and in Norma Many Horses, a "cultural lifeguard," the pervasive female strength that revitalizes native males. Seers like Big Mom and Thomas carry forward the internal wisdom that enables natives to survive ongoing slaughter of history and tradition.
- Using an aggregate method, Alexie recognizes the centrality of family and community in Indian life. He vocalizes the social anonymity and spiritual pain of native American history, which Thomas calls a skeleton walking behind. Victor experiences the squeeze of past and future in "All I Wanted to Do Was Dance," in which he reflects on the white heroes Christopher Columbus and Neil Armstrong and cringes at the sight of his parents' public drunkenness. Because of the author's brutal honesty, readers of any race can understand the cause of escapism, violence, and self-pity in people who feel they have neither a respectable past nor a hopeful future.)

Structure

10. How does the author rely on ambiguity? *(By stringing together stories, vignettes, visions, and verse, Sherman Alexie creates an aggregate similar in value to the quilts stitched by Indian women and the beads sewn on buckskin. Because his quilt scraps are the momentary flashes of knowledge in native experience, they present a uniqueness that defies easy definition and categorization. Some of the characters, such as James's alcoholic foster father, are anonymous, yet parallel to Victor, the most pervasive presence. The oddments of reservation memories adhere to each other only through theme—the shame and guilt of mistreating or ridiculing other Indians, the yearning for heroes in a world overwhelmed by powerful whites, and the despair of seeing no horizons in the future. Without generalizing, Alexie implies that all Indians recognize the malaise and inertia that envelops the reservation. His fractured images, like the fun house mirrors, turn inward to reveal a soul hunger for something to believe in.)*

How Language Works

The author enriches narrative with images that resonate between reality and symbolism:

1. In Victor's discussion with the unidentified woman, he brags about historic females: "They were the best light cavalry in the history of the world." His hyperbole implies his need to brag about an absolute—the best, strongest, fastest, most admirable warriors—even if his boast is idle.
2. Thomas's compulsion to narrate stories surprises the judge. Thomas asks, "If I may continue there is much more I need to say. There are so many more stories to tell." Alexie indicates that Thomas, as the tribe's most vocal spokesperson, feels an urgent need to relate the Spokane past from the native point of view.
3. Samuel Builds-the-Fire comforts himself with high hopes that his children ignore his birthday because they are successful: "Got their own fry bread cooking in the oven. Got a whole lot of feathers in their warbonnets."

His native imagery implies that his offspring flourish because they are Indians, rather than in spite of their racial minority.

4. The resilience of tradition permeates Alexie's fiction. He regrets that "the reservation doesn't sing anymore," but he takes hope from the fact that "the songs still hang in the air. Every molecule waits for a drumbeat; every element dreams lyrics."

Across the Curriculum

Religion

1. Make a wall chart of religious rituals common to tribes of the U.S. Northwest. Include examples of sacred dance, drumming, visions, and storytelling.
2. Compose a speech explaining why salmon have sacred meaning to tribes of the Northwest. Cite myths that tie the salmon run to the cycles of nature and to earth's regenerative powers.
3. Write a paragraph summarizing the importance of wise elders and visionaries to animistic religion.
4. Compose a character sketch of Wovoka, a prophet who launched the Ghost Dance.

Drama

1. Draw stage settings for a dramatization of fancydancing in a beaded costume, buying a dreamsicle at the 7-11, turning 360 degrees on icy pavement, rescuing James from a burning house, recovering from a shoulder wound, answering a police detective's questions about a missing person, making fry bread, playing basketball with the son of the white BIA chief, sharing ashes, offering prostitutes money to take the night off, testifying in court to a felony charge, and hallucinating about stealing a pony. Supply sketches of costumes and props, such as ribbon shirts, beer bottles, pickup truck, oven, basketball goal, a created corpse, television, Diet Pepsi, bow and arrows, ponies, cavalry flag, tennis shoes, drugs, fry bread, crib, baby clothes, sewing machine, and beading.

2. Create a storyboard account of James Many Horses's life. Indicate the place and time of his birth, his rescue from his mother's burning house, the deaths of his parents, his rearing by a drunken foster father, three medical examinations of his abilities, abandonment during his foster father's drinking spree, James's first word, and his advice to his foster father about getting a job and opening a fireworks stand.
3. Perform a shadow tableau or bag puppet performance of the fights of Indians against Colonel George Wright and Colonel Edward J. Steptoe in Rosalia, Washington, of Custer's Last Stand at Little Big Horn, Montana, or of General Nelson Miles's massacre of an Indian village at Wounded Knee, South Dakota. Illustrate variant accounts of historical events, particularly the escape of prisoners of war from a hilltop position.

Education

1. Role-play the types of information that alcoholics obtain from Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Include networking, support systems, gaining forgiveness, seeking a healthy lifestyle, and developing spirituality and self-esteem.
2. Propose curriculum for a reservation class to teach Indian children the whole truth of the Indians Wars. For texts, choose Dee Brown's *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee* and Black Elk's *Black Elk Speaks*.
3. Brainstorm ways of preparing James Many Horses for the life of a tribal visionary. Use as an example the experiences of Thomas Builds-the-Fire or Big Mom.
4. Compose a newspaper feature on the value of basketball in keeping students interested in high school and preparing them for college. Explain the importance of Title IX to school athletics, particularly to Lucy.

Speech

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle or demonize identifiable

groups, especially members of a minority race or religion? How do humor and storytelling defuse tense times or extensive despair? How do editorials, speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, sports, dances, and holiday celebrations help quell hatred and prejudice?

2. Compose a verbal tour of the Spokane Indian Reservation. Express the importance of the cities of Spokane and Seattle to native life. Contrast the current status of Indian tribes to their number and prosperity in 1900, 1800, 1700, 1600, and 1500.
3. Outline a speech honoring a native hero. Choose from Crazy Horse, Qualchan, Wovoka, and Til-co-ax.

Cinema

1. View films about native American struggles, such as *Little Big Man*, *Dances with Wolves*, *Ishi*, *Squanto*, *Gone to Texas*, *Cheyenne Autumn*, and *Tell Them Willie Boy is Here*. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*. Comment on the interplay of authorities with people of different ethnic, religious, social, educational, and professional backgrounds, particularly Indians with members of the U.S. cavalry, missionaries, traders, reservation police, or agents of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

Science and Health

1. Compose a lecture on the symptoms of juvenile diabetes. List current treatment, including diet, drugs, and insulin shots. Account for the danger to eyesight, limbs, and major organs from untreated diabetes.
2. Discuss immediate needs of chronic alcoholics. Project long-term care for a victim of alcohol poisoning, fights, car accidents and falls, malnutrition, depression, suicidal urges, and unemployment. Explain methods to halting recidivism, including drugs like Antabuse.

Geography and Culture

1. Create a mural or web site on life at the Spokane Indian Reservation. List the positive aspects of living among fellow tribe members, discipline by elders and tribal police, free medical care from the BIA, sharing of native heroes and legends, and schooling and sports among people of the same race and cultural background. Compile a contrasting list of negative aspects of isolation, including ignorance of world events and trends, lack of perspective about the past, lack of educational and job opportunities, and a failure to develop American citizenship.
2. Make a web site or bulletin board characterizing attitudes of whites toward Indians. Discuss the stereotype of the drunken Indian, a target of police harassment. Explain why doctors think that James's slow development is normal for an Indian baby and why they trick women into having their tubes tied. Account for the eagerness of white basketball teams to beat Indian teams.
3. Provide a map of the Indian Wars in the Pacific Northwest. Place names of combatants and dates of engagements at each site, particularly the last Ghost Dance, the Little Big Horn, and the massacre at Wounded Knee.

Art

1. Make an illustrated notebook of touches of Spokane Indian arts, including sewing dance costumes and ribbon shirts, beading, quilting, playing stickball, organizing powwows, fancy-dancing, storytelling, and making fry bread.

Law

1. Read aloud state laws governing the rights, privileges, and responsibilities of native Americans living on a reservation. Include education, housing, medical care, private ownership of property, tribal and national voting rights, and social services to the needy and to abandoned children.
2. Make a chart of advice to nonwhite motorists whom white police offers target for frivolous questioning, taunts, and false arrest.

3. Compare the legal, psychological, and economic situations of Victor on the Spokane Indian Reservation with that of Wild Coyote at Rosalia, Victor's father at Woodstock, Dirty Joe at the fairgrounds, Jimmy Many Horses at an oncology ward of a hospital, Thomas Builds-the-Fire in court and at the Walla Walla State Penitentiary, or Thomas's father at Okinawa during World War II.

Social Studies and Economics

1. Discuss with a small group family patterns of behavior and expectations after serious financial setbacks, such as the inability to buy food or Christmas presents for children, the lack of cash for the retrieval of a father's remains, an infant's need of foster care after his parents die in a house fire, and the need of expensive medical care for a broken leg. Explain why destitute Indians continue to wreck vehicles and to spend their cash at home and in bars on soft drinks, junk food, wine, liquor, and beer.
2. Report orally on the purpose of emergency funds from the tribal council. List situations from the short stories that constitute serious need, especially hunger, cold, illness, and parental neglect.
3. Divide the class into small groups to brainstorm ways to improve family relations after couples separate or abandon their parental responsibilities. Suggest mentoring between youth and respectable elders and group counseling.
4. Compose an extended definition of social and emotional isolation. Explain why the term describes Dirty Joe, Victor, Silas Sirius, James, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, Tremble Dancer, Wild Coyote, Norma, Victor's father, and Julius Windmaker.

Psychology

1. Describe aloud the types of humor that accompany the short stories, including exaggeration, teasing, joking, ridicule, mockery, and fantastic visions. Explain why Sherman Alexie employs a variety of comic responses to serious subjects, especially the denigration of Indians as a race.

2. List evidence of serious maladjustment in characters. Include alcoholism, fighting, over-sleeping, solitude, moodiness, hopelessness, sarcasm, eating junk food, aimlessness, running away, arguments, cruelty, victimizing, rationalizing, suicide, and physical inactivity. Discuss how dancing and storytelling counter some of these negative behaviors.
3. Write an encyclopedia entry on seers. Add details that explain why Thomas Builds-the-Fire feels isolated and why he grandstands in the courtroom by reprising native American history. Determine whether formulating new stories is a normal activity or a method of retreating from reservation malaise.

Mathematics and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing, make a web site or bulletin board that identifies these terms: Nagasaki, fry bread, Indian Health Service, Wounded Knee, Paiute, Great Spirit, Chicano, Coeur d'Alene Mission, extortion, Lakota, tsunami, Okinawa, pueblos, A. A., DT's, Mount Rushmore, Béla Bartók, compensate, dissonance, Adrian C. Louis, inertia, Crazy Horse, cryptology, Naismith, Pine Ridge, Ghost Dance, owldance, stickgame, ribbon shirt, Blackfoot, BIA, stoic, Billy Mills, boycott, Holy Grail, Jim Thorpe, HUD, valedictorian, disembodied, juvenile diabetes, Flathead, sweat-house, Hiroshima, assimilation, Jimi Hendrix, Bering Bridge, "it's a good day to die," pow-wow, Woodstock, and grand mal seizure.
2. Lead a panel discussion of the effects of racism, alcoholism, suicide, poverty, debt, displacement, low-paying jobs, limited education, thwarted ambition, terminal illness, lawlessness, violence, and imprisonment on native Americans. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and employment surveys. For source material, consult the U.S. Census Bureau at <http://www.census.gov>.

Composition

1. Prepare a dialogue dramatizing Norma's reunion with Jimmy Many Horses, Jerry Vincent's murder in an alley, Lucy's athleticism, the imprisonment of Thomas Builds-the-

Fire, Julius Windmaker's arrest, the death of James MorningDove's parents, Samuel Builds-the-Fire's death on the train tracks, Tremble Dancer's disappearance, Aunt Nezy's dance in a heavy beaded dress, a game of Russian roulette, or the return of Victor's father's ashes to Washington.

2. Outline a series of media features on Northwest Indian history and heroes, particularly Billy Mills, Qualchan, Wovoka, Jim Thorpe, Crazy Horse, and Til-co-ax.

Literature

1. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe incidents of racism, crime, gender or economic bias, and injustice similar to that suffered by Spokane Indians. Include Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Joseph Bruchac's "Birdfoot's Grandpa," Joy Harjo's *She Had Some Horses*, Forrest Carter's *The Education of Little Tree*, Michael Dorris's *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*, Walter Dean Myers's "The Treasure of Lemon Brown," Amy Tan's *The Kitchen God's Wife*, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*, Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees* and *Animal Dreams*, Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream," Leslie Marmon Silko's "Yellow Woman," William E. Barrett's *Lilies of the Field*, Terry McMillan's *Mama*, Theodore Taylor's *The Cay*, Velma Wallis's *Two Old Women*, Hal Borland's *When the Legends Die*, James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston's *Farewell to Manzanar*, Toni Cade Bambara's "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird," Conrad Richter's *The Light in the Forest*, and Ruthann Lum McCunn's *Thousand Pieces of Gold*.
2. Explain in a theme the significance of individual story titles, particularly those that refer to loss, despair, and regret. Why does the author choose "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven" as the title of the whole collection?

3. Write a theme in which you explain the role of a minor character, such as Aunt Nezy, Noah Chirapkin, Suzy Song, Willie Boyd, Lucy, the unnamed Lakota woman from Montana, Dirty Joe, Detective Clayton, Silas Sirius, Cathy, or the 7-11 clerk. Determine which characters express superiority toward people of other races and backgrounds.
4. Explain in an impromptu chalk talk why Sherman Alexie names his pervasive character Victor.

Related Reading

Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*
Toni Cade Bambara, "Blues Ain't No Mockingbird"
William E. Barrett, *Lilies of the Field*
Hal Borland, *When the Legends Die*
Forrest Carter, *The Education of Little Tree*
Michael Dorris, *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*
Joy Harjo, *She Had Some Horses*
Khaled Hosseini, *The Kite Runner*
James Houston and Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston,
Farewell to Manzanar
Victor Hugo, *Les Miserables*
Martin Luther King, "I Have a Dream"
Barbara Kingsolver, *The Bean Trees* and *Animal Dreams*
Ruthann Lum McCunn, *Thousand Pieces of Gold*
Terry McMillan, *Mama*
Walter Dean Myers, "The Treasure of Lemon Brown"
Conrad Richter, *The Light in the Forest*
Leslie Marmon Silko, "Yellow Woman"
Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*
Theodore Taylor, *The Cay*
Velma Wallis, *Two Old Women*

Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of violence and lawlessness in the lives of the characters, for example, Norma slapping Jimmy, Victor and Thomas fighting, the arrest of Julius Windmaker, the murder of Jerry Vincent in an alley, the New Year's Eve fistfight in Victor's front yard, the massacre at Wounded Knee, Wild Coyote's first battle, Colonel George Wright's slaughter of 800 ponies, prostitutes and a suicide by overdose at the motel, a trooper's demand of \$100, the abandonment of James, crashing a baby grand piano into a tree, and the theft of a car.
2. Compile a list of actions and statements that demonstrate racism at the Indian Service Hospital, at the Spokane police station, in school, at the 7-11, in white neighborhoods, at Woodstock, within the U.S. Cavalry, at the gym, during job hunts, at the World's Fair in Spokane, and among pedestrians viewing a drunken Indian.
3. Compose a scene in which Norma, Victor, Thomas, Suzy Song, Seymour, Aunt Nezy, James, and other characters attend a memorial service for Jimmy Many Horses.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including: Victor's hopelessness, Thomas's constant storytelling, Aunt Nezy's annoyance at her husband and son, Junior's interest in illegal drugs, Jimmy's strange sense of humor, Norma's anger, Samuel's defeatism, the doctor's willingness to sterilize Indian women, the 7-11 clerk's racist suspicions, Julius Windmaker's juvenile delinquency, the trooper's demand of a bribe, Colonel George Wright's cruelty, and James's refusal to speak.
5. Account for the cycle of native American poverty engendered by European exploration in the New World in 1492 and brought to climax at the massacre at Wounded Knee.

Vocabulary

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate word from the list below. You will have answers left over when you finish.

anorexia, assimilation, BIA, boycotting, capitalized, commodity, compensate, concentrating, cryptology, disembodied, dissonance, distorted, extortion, footage, Ghost Dance, grand mal, HUD, inert, jesters, juvenile, Lakota, misdemeanor, neutral, owldance, perception, powwow, pueblos, seismic, sterilized, sweathouse, technology, tradition, tsunami, valedictorian, wry

1. Victor's uncles were in the midst of a _____ that would remain one even if somebody was to die.
2. They screwed the 1980 Olympic team by _____.
3. She thought he could take her hand and _____ her around the circle.
4. They were jury and judge for the twentieth-century fancydance of these court _____ who would pour Thunderbird wine into the Holy Grail.
5. The editors _____ on my father's Native American identity.
6. I played a song I wrote for his great-grandfather, the famous _____ warrior who helped us win the war against the whites.
7. Victor's mother remembered how the Indian Health Service doctor _____ her moments after Victor was born.
8. The television was always loud, too loud, until every conversation was _____, fragmented.
9. It was grand mal seizures punctuated by moments of extreme _____.
10. Intentional misuse by deliberately _____ and inhaling the contents can be harmful or fatal.
11. I could hear voices from the girls' bathroom, nervous whispers of _____ and bulimia.
12. We are all given something to _____ for what we have lost.
13. This was the generation of HUD houses, of car wrecks and cancer, of _____ cheese and beef.
14. There is a moment when an Indian realizes he cannot turn back toward _____ and that he has no map to guide him toward the future.
15. He says the earth is our grandmother and that _____ has become our mother and that they both hate each other.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions with a person. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|--|--------------------|
| _____ 1. has to find out what it means to be a man and an Indian | A. Thomas |
| _____ 2. leaves home on a motorcycle and dies in a trailer | B. Julius |
| _____ 3. wears a heavily beaded garment | C. Suzy |
| _____ 4. tells stories on the bus ride to prison | D. Tremble Dancer |
| _____ 5. works as a motel maid | E. Victor |
| _____ 6. seems destined for a basketball career | F. Jerry |
| _____ 7. offers a small drum as a means of communication | G. Nezy |
| _____ 8. hates her husband's sense of humor | H. Big Mom |
| _____ 9. survives a house fire | I. Silas |
| _____ 10. stumbles off the roller coaster | J. James |
| _____ 11. is murdered in an alley | K. Norma |
| _____ 12. babysits for James | L. Dirty Joe |
| _____ 13. beats the Chargers with one jumpshot | M. Junior |
| _____ 14. dunks one basket in his career | N. Samuel |
| _____ 15. disintegrates | O. Victor's father |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Victor works the graveyard shift at the 7-11.
- _____ 2. Victor shares the ashes with Thomas.
- _____ 3. Norma sends no postcards to her dying husband.
- _____ 4. Lucy shows promise as an athlete.
- _____ 5. Colonel Wright denies killing the ponies.
- _____ 6. Nezy tries to dance in the heavy outfit.
- _____ 7. The used baby grand is useless after it crashes into the tree.
- _____ 8. Thomas Builds-the-Fire's father dies at Okinawa.
- _____ 9. Radiation therapy can't rid Jimmy Many Horses of a fatal cancer.
- _____ 10. Detective Clayton implies that the witness knows more than he is telling about Jerry Vincent's murder.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in each blank below with a word or phrase which completes the sentence. Place your answer in the space provided at left.

1. Victor's family lives in a HUD _____ on the _____ Indian Reservation.
2. At the battle, _____ lies staring at the sky until his friend _____ him to his body and rides away.
3. _____ fails to speak until age seven, when he says "_____."
4. _____, the creator of all things, accidentally made white man from his _____.
5. After taking a new drug, _____ sings a song about _____.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Describe how dance uplifts characters on the reservation.
2. Explain why Norma Many Horses returns home.
3. Discuss Thomas Builds-the-Fire's hatred for George Wright.
4. Account for the sterilization of Victor's mother.
5. Summarize events that precede Samuel's death.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following descriptions with settings from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| _____ 1. Three Indians test a new drug. | A. house of mirrors |
| _____ 2. U.S. cavalry massacres Indians. | B. Benjamin Lake |
| _____ 3. Thomas wants to dump ashes. | C. longhouse |
| _____ 4. Victor hides from security guards. | D. motel |
| _____ 5. Norma spends a whole night dancing white and Indian style. | E. Rosalia |
| _____ 6. Thomas's father dies. | F. bus |
| _____ 7. Victor locates his father's pickup. | G. Manito Park |
| _____ 8. Thomas tells stories to blacks, a Chicano, and a white prisoner. | H. Wounded Knee |
| _____ 9. A clerk is terrified of an Indian. | I. plane |
| _____ 10. Warriors gather to fight Colonel Steptoe and the U.S. cavalry. | J. Phonenix |
| _____ 11. Cathy describes herself as an Olympic gymnast. | K. Okinawa |
| _____ 12. A drunk interrupts a wedding. | L. Spokane Falls |
| _____ 13. James attends the World's Fair. | M. Spokane |
| _____ 14. Jerry is buried. | N. Powwow Tavern |
| _____ 15. An Indian boy dies of an overdose. | O. 7-11 |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided.

- _____ 1. Where is the penitentiary?
- _____ 2. Who selects a foster parent for James?
- _____ 3. Who weeps because there is no money for gifts?
- _____ 4. What does Victor's father reject from the detective?
- _____ 5. Where did Jimi Hendrix play "The Star-Spangled Banner"?
- _____ 6. Who lets Dirty Joe ride the Stallion all day for \$20?
- _____ 7. What do the boys park at the police station?
- _____ 8. What terrifies Nezy while she sews buckskin?
- _____ 9. Who drives a garbage truck?
- _____ 10. Who claims that passengers can't ride in a car with an Indian driver?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Select the phrase that completes each of the following sentences. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Norma believes that Jimmy has
- A. a tumor stitched like a baseball.
 - B. the heart of a dancer.
 - C. DT's.
 - D. juvenile diabetes.
- _____ 2. Tremble Dancer hides from the
- A. cavalry.
 - B. Urbans.
 - C. Skins.
 - D. owdancers.
- _____ 3. The manager blames the job loss on
- A. alcoholism.
 - B. prostitutes and drug addicts.
 - C. a police investigation.
 - D. a recession.
- _____ 4. Thomas reveals that, on the way to Spokane, he
- A. encounters Victor's father.
 - B. tells a story about being a pony.
 - C. reads Norma's article about a basketball game.
 - D. ridicules Dirty Joe.
- _____ 5. Victor drives for miles before
- A. throwing 24 beers out the window.
 - B. apologizing for beating Thomas.
 - C. locating a dreamsicle.
 - D. applying for a job with the BIA.
- _____ 6. Nezy once
- A. made fry bread for the orphaned boy.
 - B. taught lessons at the Arthur Murray studio.
 - C. wanted to save the world.
 - D. begged the tribal council for \$100.
- _____ 7. On the way to the principal's office,
- A. the son of the BIA agent threatens Junior.
 - B. Julius is arrested for vandalism.
 - C. the student sings "It's a good day to die."
 - D. Victor wonders whether Naismith or Indians invented basketball.
- _____ 8. Victor describes survival as
- A. the same as blowing up Mount Rushmore.
 - B. a natural Indian skill.
 - C. the purpose of living on reservations.
 - D. anger X imagination.
- _____ 9. In childhood, Victor is aware that Indians
- A. don't hide their lovemaking.
 - B. prefer fighting in the snow.
 - C. make poor police officers.
 - D. are prone to juvenile diabetes.
- _____ 10. After losing his job,
- A. Uncle Moses tells Junior's mother a sad story.
 - B. Thomas stands on the street awaiting listeners.
 - C. Samuel buys his first beer.
 - D. Judas WildShoe turns over his watch to the tribal chairman.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain Sherman Alexie's views on reservation life.
2. Contrast Victor, Thomas, and James as sons.
3. Account for the tribal council burning the houses of whites in "Distances."
4. Account for Victor's shame at fighting Thomas.
5. How do dreamscapes create a separate reality in Alexie's stories?

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|----------------|-------------------|----------------|
| 1. misdemeanor | 6. Lakota | 11. anorexia |
| 2. boycotting | 7. sterilized | 12. compensate |
| 3. owdance | 8. distorted | 13. commodity |
| 4. jesters | 9. perception | 14. tradition |
| 5. capitalized | 10. concentrating | 15. technology |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. E | 6. B | 11. F |
| 2. O | 7. H | 12. C |
| 3. G | 8. K | 13. M |
| 4. A | 9. J | 14. I |
| 5. N | 10. L | 15. D |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. F |
| 3. F | 8. T |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. house, Spokane
2. Wild Coyote, ties
3. James MorningDove, potato
4. Coyote, toenail clippings
5. Junior, Crazy Horse

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. K | 11. I |
| 2. H | 7. J | 12. C |
| 3. L | 8. F | 13. M |
| 4. A | 9. O | 14. G |
| 5. N | 10. E | 15. D |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

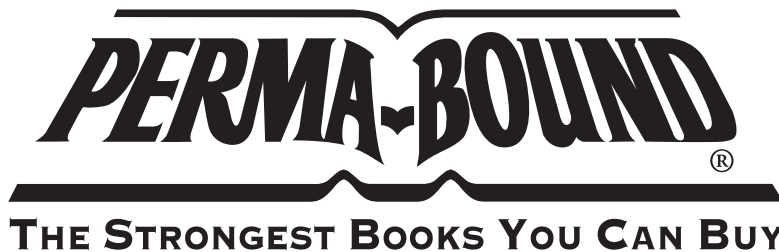
- | | |
|----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Walla Walla | 6. carny |
| 2. Moses MorningDove | 7. stolen car |
| 3. Victor's father | 8. mouse |
| 4. hard candy | 9. Victor |
| 5. Woodstock | 10. trooper |

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. B |
| 2. C | 7. C |
| 3. D | 8. D |
| 4. A | 9. A |
| 5. A | 10. C |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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