

# Free thomas builds a fire, and his unique spirituality essay example

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The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in heaven was a novel written by Sherman Alexie in order to demonstrate the unique strain that has been placed on his people, the Native American peoples, in a changing world. One way in which he distinctly demonstrates the impact that environment, or a changing environment can have on the Native American people is through the story telling of the Character Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Thomas is, at his core, a character that seems to live in the spiritual realm. As such, he tells stories that extend beyond himself, and demonstrate what he sees as major issues effecting the beliefs and mode of living for the tribe.

The first indication that Thomas lives in the realm of the spirit, is related to his birth. He tells the reader “ My father, he died in Okinawa my mother died giving birth to me, died while I was still inside her (Alexie, PG #).” This indicates something different about his birth, that he was born a ghost, in a sense, from those already dead. He indicates that it is this that makes him a story teller. Further, that it has placed the stories inside of him, and that he knew them even before he could speak: “ I have only my stories, which came to me before I even had the words to speak. I learned a thousand stories they are all I have. It’s all I can do (Alexie, PG#).” In this, it is clear that he allows his role, as it is guided by the spirits who gave them the story, as his calling, or his true purpose.

In one such story he says “. I'll dance a Ghost Dance. I'll bring them back. Can you hear the drums? I can hear them, and it's my grandfather and grandmother singing. Can you hear them? I dance one step and my sister rises from the ash. I dance another and a buffalo crashes down from the sky onto a log cabin in Nebraska. With every step, an Indian rises. With every

other step, a buffalo falls (Alexie, PG#)." In this, and in many of the stories, he reflects on the way that times, and the changes in the world around the Native American's has changed their way of living. The buffalo are lost, and as result, everything about their lifestyle, and environment has also changed. They no longer live in the homes they once built with their own hands, and many of their traditions are lost. To raise them is like raising the ghosts.

This way of thinking, or concern is not only reflected in Thomas's own stories, but also in Sherman Alexie's own rhetoric. He says, in an interview with Moyers and Company " I know more about being White than you know about being an Indian." Further, when asked what it is like to be an " alien" in the country of his birth, he describes it as " destructive." This aligns with the concept that the Native American culture is largely lost, or has been ghosted by the changes in their tribal culture and environment. Similarly, in an interview by Time, Alexie refers to his people as " reviled and dehumanized" for a generation, but now made " magical," denoting how the perceptions of Native American culture change over time.

Sherman Alexie is known for writing, and speaking, about the changing nature, or lifestyle of the Native American people, and the plight they face in trying to find their way in modern America. He expresses much of his frustration and loss of culture in his written works, including Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven. The character, Thomas Builds-the-Fire, is a storyteller who is very spiritual in nature, and who seems to hold a unique perspective on the effect the environment has on the native people. As such,

he tells stories that extend beyond himself, and demonstrate what he sees as major issues effecting the beliefs and mode of living for the tribe.

### **Works Cited:**

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