

Jackson's transition
in alexie's what you
pawn i will redeem



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

In Sherman Alexie's short story "What You Pawn I Will Redeem," the twenty-four hour journey that Jackson embarks on in reclaiming his grandmother's regalia proves to do him way more good than he could have ever thought possible when beginning. Alexie uses the characterization of the main character, Jackson Jackson, in order to reveal the transformation he experiences throughout his journey. In short, Jackson is a homeless American Indian living in Seattle, Washington who goes through many trials over a twenty-four hour period in order to earn enough money to buy back his grandmother's regalia which he has found in a local pawn shop.

Jackson's original character proves to be one with absolutely no regard for family, but the moment he is introduced to the regalia this changes significantly. Alexie begins his story with a character who has a no-strings-attached kind of attitude towards life. He says at the beginning of his story how he has been married a couple of times and even fathered a few children, yet he seems to show absolutely no interest in who they are or where they are. While discussing his history and how he came to be a homeless man, Jackson mentions that "piece by piece, [he] disappeared" (Alexie). Just by this small piece of information, he is automatically alienated from what is perceived as normal by the reader. Not many people would nonchalantly say that they have just slowly let go of all their relatives. Obviously, at one point, family meant something to him, but over time it meant less and less and he started to drift away. This aspect of Jackson's character plays a key role in recognizing the change that he eventually makes. When Jackson realizes that he has found his grandmother's missing regalia in a pawn shop, he seems very concerned and goes straight in to

discuss the matter with the pawn shop owner. It is here that the transformation being made in Jackson's character becomes obvious. In order to prove himself, he tells the owner with a sense of pride in his voice that "my family always sewed one yellow bead somewhere on our regalia" (Alexie). Clearly family history means something to Jackson after all, because why else would he know this very specific piece of information about his grandmother's regalia? It's almost as if now that Jackson has something to work for, his sense of family and culture have flooded back to him. Because he has been homeless for so long, it is possible that he also lost touch with what it felt like to have a family and to have a past. The moment he sets eyes on this family heirloom it is evident that family actually does mean something to him, and thus his journey and transformation begin.

Throughout his twenty-four hour adventure, Jackson's character also goes through personality change. At the very beginning, before the regalia has even come into the picture, Jackson gives us a little bit of background information on himself. At first he is characterized as serious by revealing to the reader that "being homeless is probably the only thing I've ever been good at." This gives the reader a sense that Jackson isn't the most confident person in the world and hasn't necessarily ever had something to work for. The serious tone in his voice shows that this is not something that Jackson finds laughable. There is no way he has not ever been good at anything, but it is apparent that he has been dealt quite the rough hand over and over again which would cause him to feel this way. At first, his character seems rather pitiful and somber, but that also undergoes a transformation for the better. Over the course of his day, his friendly, humorous side becomes

visible. Eventually, something that would probably be a big stressor for someone else, such as trying to come up with \$999 within a twenty-four hour period, Jackson just seems to laugh off and make light of the situation. Even Officer Williams, the cop that woke him up, comments and asks him "How the hell do you laugh so much? I just picked your ass off the railroad tracks, and you're making jokes. Why the hell do you do that?" (Alexie). For the cop, and for the readers, it seems strange that Jackson is able to laugh about such serious stuff. First of all, he is homeless and has basically nothing to his name and at the same time is very concerned about buying back his grandmother's regalia, yet he still finds time to laugh and have a good time. There are obvious reasons for his change of heart and change of attitude: he now has something to actually work towards.

Jackson's perspective on the world and people who are different than him also changes from beginning to end. At first, he is characterized as a person that would not look twice at someone who isn't an Indian. Before starting his story, he mentions that "Indians have to work hard to keep secrets from hungry white folks" (Alexie). From this comment it is obvious that Jackson has some issues with whites. His homelessness most likely plays a huge role in this attitude. While living on the streets, the treatment he got from those more fortunate than him, in this case it would be white people, caused a bitterness that is hard to get rid of. The moment he finds the regalia though, this aspect of his character seems to improve rather quickly. He now has to rely on others to find different sources and outlets to earn money, and beggars can't be choosers. Although he does tend to still hang out with primarily Indians, he must seek help from others. After his many ups and

downs throughout the day, Jackson comes to the conclusion that there are some good people out there (Alexie), and race doesn't determine that. It isn't until a serious time of need comes up that one realizes there is more to people than what is on the outside. His change in character is proved through his willingness to show compassion and understanding towards a different group of people, which all came about through the journey in reclaiming his grandmother's regalia.

In conclusion, it is indisputable that Jackson transforms throughout the story in a multitude of ways. He goes from someone who shows absolutely no regard towards family to wanting to protect and redeem a precious family heirloom; he goes from someone who is down in the dumps about his life in general to a very lively, funny human being; he goes from someone who would not look twice at a person different than him to relying on others and noticing the good in everyone. All in all, it is safe to say that the character of Jackson Jackson faced an incredible improvement over the course of his twenty-four hour journey.