

The novel, two old  
women, by velma  
wallis



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The novel, *Two Old Women*, by Velma Wallis *Two Old Women*, the novel by Velma Wallis sheds light into the primitive lifestyle of the Athabaskan tribes in Alaska. To be specific, the novelist provides ample importance to the unending attempt of survival, undertaken by two old women, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak. The plot (problems faced by two old women in a nomadic society) is simple but the themes (problems faced by elder citizens (especially women), alienation, and survival of the fittest) are complex.

Thesis statement: The novel *Two Old Women* by Velma Wallis explores the mental trauma felt by old women and the basic human instinct to survive critical conditions. Plot summary: The novel revolves around two female characters (Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak) and the problems faced by them within their tribal society. As pointed out, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak belongs to Athabaska tribe in Alaska, and they used to help the other members of the tribe. During a critical incident, the tribal leader decided to leave them behind. But Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak were not ready to give up. Instead, they proved that forced alienation will not destroy their instinct to survive. In the end, Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak helped the tribal members by supplying food and taught them the value of elderly people. The themes made use by the novelist can be generalized to the broader context of the social alienation faced by elder citizens in the mainstream society. Review: Important themes: One can easily identify that the novelist gave ample importance to the themes of mental trauma felt by elderly women and survival instinct. A. The theme of mental trauma Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak, the two elderly women considered themselves valuable because the other members of the Athabaska tribe used to carry them from one place to another. When the whole tribe was forced to face food scarcity, they decided to leave the

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elderly women. Wallis states that “ In those days, leaving the old behind in times of starvation was not an unknown act, although in this band it was happening for the first time” (5). When Ch'idzigyaak came to realize that her daughter and grandson were not ready to help her, the situation became worse. The mental trauma felt by the two elderly women was unimaginable because they were considered as useless. They came to realize that they were not considered as productive members of the tribal community and were left behind without any humanitarian consideration. So, they decided to assess the problem and to implement an action plan to survive. In short, the mental trauma originating from forced alienation helped them to stick on to the action plan and to survive.

B. The theme of survival instinct To be specific, the problems faced by the two elderly women in the novel can be superimposed to the general context of elderly people. The general belief about the elderly people that they are not productive members of the society is not true. Instead, one must realize that elderly people are valuable and productive. The novelist makes use of the two elderly women as the medium to communicate with the readers. The message conveyed by the novelist is simple: human instinct to survive can solve almost all the problems in life. For instance, mere thinking may not help one to survive in critical conditions. Instead, one must show courage to take right decisions in critical conditions and must try to stick on to the same. In the novel, total alienation from the community did not harm the mental capacity of Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak. Instead, they decided to survive and to teach the tribal members a valuable lesson. This survival instinct helped them to be victorious in the end and to be accepted by the members of their tribe. Summing, the novelist made use of the themes (mental trauma and survival instinct) to attack selfishness and

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the habit of grading and valuing people according to their usefulness and productivity. Besides, by choosing two women as protagonists, the novelist provides ample importance to the mental trauma felt by women folk in the society. The survival of Sa' and Ch'idzigyaak proves that basic human instinct can help human beings to survive in critical conditions. In short, the novel proves that pondering upon ideas may not help one to survive, but implementation of the same can be helpful to be victorious in the end.

References Wallis, Velma. *Two Old Women: An Alaskan Legend of Betrayal, Courage, and Survival*. Kenmore, WA: Epicenter Press, 2004. Print.