

# This is what it means to say phoenix arizona essay sample

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Slowly we see many civilizations and cultures lose themselves as time goes by. New generations start forgetting history of themselves becoming people living in the present as well as writing their own history, while others bass in the pass, never forgetting where they came from and who they are. The same happened in “ This is What it means to say Phoenix Arizona”, by Sherman Alexie, the story followed two men who traveled to retrieve the remains of a deceased one while learning more about themselves and their culture. Victor and Thomas Builds-The-Fire are the two main characters that are both Native Americans and are connected through a loved one. Though they are both Native American, their heritage and traditions are actually quite different. Embodying different tradition and views in life; Thomas Builds-The-Fire, shows a deeper connection with tradition, however Victor represents a modern view severing his connections with his heritage.

Thomas Builds-The-Fire is more traditional and seems to hold a deep connection with his heritage. Thomas is known throughout the village for his envisioning stories, which come from his ability to see and hear visions or dreams. The stories itself are not popular or well-liked by members of the community. Regardless, Thomas talked to anyone, whether or not they were listening. In addition, he also spoke to inanimate objects including animals, rocks, and even walls. No matter who or what, Thomas would tell stories. Thomas Builds-The-Fire proves to be a traditional name itself. In typical Native American heritage, parents give their children names that have spiritual meaning. For example, Thomas Builds-The-Fire’s name represents the intellectual fire he starts by utilizing his tradition storytelling and having other Native Americans question their traditions, roots, culture, and values.

Thomas Builds-The-Fire represents the past, a deeper connection with the Indian heritage, spiritual visions, strong connection with nature, and visions of renewal and rebirth. Thomas Builds-The-Fire is recognized for having strong connections with his Indian heritage. He has visions in which he is able to see the future or is essentially taught a deeper meaning in life. In the past, Native American's were told to possess having visions which strengthens the fact that Thomas is viewed as traditional. Thomas follows his visions and believes it was meant to be or tries to find a reason why he was there. When Thomas was young, he had a vision to go to Spokane and wait by the falls. " I remember when I had this dream that told me to go to Spokane, to stand by the falls in the middle of the city and wait for a sign.

I knew I had to go there but I didn't have a Car... so I walked all the way, took me all day, and I finally made it to the fall. I stood there for an hour waiting. Then your dad came walking up, ' what the hell are you doing here?' he asked me. I said, ' waiting for a vision.' Then your dad said, ' all you're going to get here is mugged.' ... For a long time, I was mad because I thought my dreams had lied to me, But they hadn't. Your dad was my vision. Take care of each other is what my dreams were saying. Take care of each other" (Alexis 27.) Thomas always looked for a greater meaning through his visions, that it held a significant purpose to his future and purpose in life. Not only did he keep his Native American roots with storytelling, he held a deep bond with life around him.

Thomas Builds-The-Fire stayed true to his heritage, by staying in touch with the nature around him. Thomas had a strong connection with nature. He

recognized the significance of the living creatures around him. On their trip back home from Arizona, Thomas killed an animal by accident. ““ Oh man, he’s dead,”” Victor yelled, and Thomas did stop and back the pick up to the dead jackrabbit. “ Oh, man he’s dead” Victor said as he looked at the squashed animal. “ The only thing alive in this only state and we just killed it” “ I think it was suicide.” Victor looked around the dessert, sniffed the air felt the emptiness and loneliness and nodded his head. “ I can’t believe this,” Thomas said. “ You drive for a thousand miles and there ain’t even any bugs smashed on the windshield. I drive for ten seconds and kill the only living thing in Nevada” (Alexis 29). Thomas clearly had a better understanding of nature around him.

During his trip, Thomas had a good aura and feeling about how the rabbit felt. He knew the rabbit wanted to die in lifeless dessert. He knew the rabbit was in pain living in the empty, lonely barrow of a dessert. Thomas not only had a great sense of nature around him, but he also had respect for life now and then. Through his strong Indian heritage, Thomas had strong beliefs about the afterlife and rebirth of others. Some Native American cultures believe that the afterlife will take a form of nature; rocks, trees, or even people. Thomas also believed in such beliefs. After coming back to the reserve or home from the long trip, he received half of the remains of Victor’s deceased father ashes. Due to his strong Native American ties, Thomas believed Victor’s father would become something significant in the afterlife.

“ I’m going to travel to Spokane Falls one last time and toss these ashes into the water. And your father will rise like a salmon, leap over the bridge, over me, and find his way home. It will be beautiful. His teeth will shine like silver, like a rainbow, and he will rise, Victor he will rise.” (Alexis 30). The Salmon in the endless river represents Victor’s Father’s spirit never ending even if it comes across problems such as obstacles, the salmon will always leap over it and move continue to its journey’s end. On the other hand Victor’s vision wasn’t as spiritually connected as Thomas. Unlike Thomas, Victor, the main protagonist, is the complete opposite from Thomas Build-A-Fire. He is not calm, spiritual, and can be easily tempered. His character is not described with much detail such as Thomas. Victor is very self-centered, he does not care for himself yet he cares what other thinks about him, while Thomas does not care for what others think.

Comparing these two characters side by side shows that though they are both Native Americans, they are very dissimilar. Unlike Thomas’s full name, Victor last name wasn’t mentioned; the author did not leave Victor’s last name out on accident but on purpose. Victor’s name portrays the modern day. Instead of making it obvious as to give Victor a traditional last name, the author make sure to leave it out. Going back to modern versus traditional, the author made Victor’s name just to demonstrate the point he is trying to make. Though Victor is more of a modernized Native American, he still holds a bit tradition. After hearing Thomas Story about the two boys stealing a car and walking back to the village, Victor states “ That’s a good one, I wish I could be a warrior” (Alexie 24). This indicates Victor still wanting to become a warrior.

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Though Victor still holds on to tradition, he does not say what path he is willing to take, whether it's traditional or modernized. Little did he know, the journey they are taking, is the journey to become a warrior. The journey indicates the path to becoming a warrior, but afterwards, the author leaves the readers to decide if Victor has changed to becoming more traditional or still modernized. At the end of their journey, Victor knew that he could not be seen with Thomas. He states that his " friends will give him shit" (Alexie 28). As a result, it seems like Victor has not changed. That is when Victor offered Thomas half of his father's remains and told Victor what he was going to do with them. After discovering what Thomas decided to do with the remains, Victor stated that he also was going to do the same but instead of a salmon.

While Thomas is connected with his heritage, thinking about rebirth, new life and symbolic telling victor that nothing stops such as tradition, while Victor had something else in mind. Instead of writing out what Victor actually did with the remains, the author left it out on purpose. Instead, Victor states " I didn't imagine my father looking like a salmon. I thought it'd be like cleaning the attic or something. Like letting things go after they've stopped having any use" (Alexie 30). Cleaning out an attic indicates throwing things out, while letting things go when they've stopped having any use means throwing away. This suggests that Victor is letting go of the past and start figuring out what works best for him. Will Victor do something spiritual and more traditional, or will he do something that is more of modernized symbolism? The author did this on purpose to allow the readers to wonder if Victor ever became more of a traditional Native American, or a Modernized Native American.

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Throughout the generations, some people hold on to tradition tightly. Some are forced while some are not. In some cases people do not want to hold onto tradition at all. As time goes by, fewer and fewer people do not hold on to customs like they use to. Some expand out leaving the old, while others stick with the old and continue their heritage. In “ This is What It Means to Say Phoenix Arizona”, by Sharman Alexie, two boys that are the same ethnicity, Native Americans, take a journey together but show two different type of generations within each self. Thomas Builds-The-Fire is a pure Native American that holds on to his heritage and spiritual state, while Victor breaks all his relationship in the Native tradition and learns new heritage in the modern day.

#### Works Cited

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