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### Rhetorical Essay

Based on the essay “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me” by Sherman Alexie

In “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me,” Sherman Alexie uses symbolism, setting, and redundancy in order to express to the readers how he differentiates from the typical views of Native American Indians. First, Alexie uses a comic book to portray his journey to disposing of the stereotypical thinking of Native American Indians. In the 1930s, Los Angeles, Native American Indians were given low expectations. For example, when Alexie states “As Indian children, we were expected to fail in the non-Indian world. Those who failed were ceremonially accepted by other Indians and appropriately pitied by non-Indians.” (Alexie, 111). In this quote Alexie is discussing how Indians were perceived. If Indians failed, although they were pitied by non-Indians, they were accepted by other Indians. For Alexie, despite the stereotype, he pursued what he wanted, he read books every second of everyday that he could. The use of symbolism is effective because it displays Alexie accomplishing what he wanted despite the stereotypical thinking of Native American Indians.

Furthermore, in Alexie's essay “Superman and Me,” the Superman comic book symbolizes the beginning of his learning to read. For example “I learned to read with a Superman comic book. Simple enough, I suppose. I cannot recall which particular Superman

comic book I read, nor can I remember which villain he fought in that issue. I cannot remember the plot, nor the means by which I obtained the comic book.” (Alexie, 110). In this quote it explains how when Alexie was a little boy he read this Superman comic book on his own and it was the first thing he ever read. He did not exactly understand what it read or what it was about, but what Alexie did know was that by reading this comic book, his journey to becoming just like his father would begin. When Alexie says “My father loved books, and since I loved my father with an aching devotion, I decided to love books as well... The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with a sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph. I didn’t have to vocabulary to say “paragraph,” but I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words” (Alexie, 110). Going into detail, here he is trying to describe how when he started following after his father due to loving admiration for him, he began grasping the baby steps of reading. His father played as a role model for him, He challenged himself by following after his father because he began reading books above his comprehension level.

Discussing the stereotypical thinking of Native American Indians, we can see that Alexie did many things that went against this stereotype. For example when he states “I read books in the car when my family traveled to powwows or basketball games. In shopping malls, I ran to the bookstores and read bits and pieces of as many books I could. I read... I read... I read... I read... I read... I loved those books, but I also knew that love had only one purpose. I was trying to save my life” (Alexie, 112). Doing all the reading that he did, Alexie would become intelligent. Which is what during the 1930s, other Indians feared, a smart Indian. When he says

“I was trying to save my life” this explains the purpose of all the reading he did. The reason Alexie read all of these different books of many genres is because he was trying to save himself, from becoming just another figure in the Native American Indian stereotype, he was not going to be stuck on the Spokane Indian Reserve that accepts failure. Alexie needed to educate himself.

In addition to that, throughout the essay, Alexie portrays how reading can save lives. For example “These days, I write novels, short stories, and poems... I visit the schools as often as possible. The Indian kids crowd the classroom. Many are writing their own poems, short stories and novels. They have read my books. They have read many other books. They look at me with bright eyes and arrogant wonder. They are trying to save their lives” (Alexie, 112). Sherman tries to explain in this quote that there are some kids he visits at the schools, that are motivated and determined to learn. These kids wanting to be educated will save them from being stuck on the Indian Reservation. Also, when Alexie says “Then there are the sullen and already defeated Indian kids who sit in the back rows and ignore me with theatrical precision... They refuse and resist. “Books,” I say to them. “Books,” I say... I am trying to save our lives.” (Alexie, 112). This portrays that although there are kids at the schools wanting to be educated, there are others not wanting to learn, they have no motivation. For Alexie, this is just the beginning, he will not give up helping these kids he will keep striving to help the Indian kids. He wants to save their lives, getting them educated and motivated about reading books will save them all from the reservation that accepts failure.

Additionally, Alexie discusses how educating himself and other Indians can save them from the Spokane Indian Reservation. He also connects the title of his essay to his point about saving lives. For example when he says “Because he is breaking down the door, I assume he says, “I am breaking down the door.” Once again, I pretend to read the words and say aloud, “I am breaking down the door.” In this way, I learned to read” (Alexie, 111). In this quote Alexie refers to Superman “breaking down the door”, he is also referring to himself. He uses this as a metaphor for him learning how to read. Also, Superman is a major part of explaining Alexie's point because Superman was an alien to this world. He wasn't from our planet. As for Alexie, he is an alien to the Indian kids. Also like Superman, Alexie is trying to save the kids but by teaching them that reading can save their lives.

In Sherman Alexie's essay “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me” he uses setting, redundancy and symbolism to portray his message. Throughout when he says “I was trying to save my life,” “They [students] are trying to save their lives,” and “I am trying to save our lives.” He is explaining how educating himself and other Indians will save them from the reservation and they will move beyond it, they would no longer be apart of a reservation that accepts failure. Educating them and himself will show that if they don't give up and they just keep trying they can do anything. Even though, others around them may be disencouraging, by reading books and getting educated the students can do anything they set their minds to. Nothing is impossible as long as you keep pursuing without letting others get to you.

Works Cited Page

Alexie, Sherman J., Jr. *The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me* (Los Angeles Times 1998)