

Sherman Alexie is a Native American writer who has published many books of short stories and poetry. The main characters in his stories from *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* are almost always Native Americans who live on a reservation or grew up there. These Indians have problems with drinking and drugs and basic personal problems. When Alexie writes about these Indians, they seem almost real, like they are people transplanted onto the page. Their stories take on life in the reader's imagination. One of the ways Alexie achieves this effect is through a constant, fluid transition between reality and fantasy. Oftentimes, the characters will be in one place doing something ordinary, then they will be in a fantasy or transported back in time to a distant memory or ideal. This technique works for these stories because it mimics how the mind works in real life. People are not always in the present: memories and dreams float into and out of our consciousness many times throughout the day. This is what makes Alexie's characters seem more real. Without relying on this particular rhetorical strategy, Alexie might end up with characters that fall flat and ring false. The characters are what give life to a story, and without full development of the characters Alexie's stories would be pointless and dull.

*The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is a compilation of short stories written by Native American author Sherman Alexie. Born in 1966 on the Spokane Indian reservation located in eastern Washington, Alexie has become one of the current leading Native American authors and filmmakers. Throughout his stories, Alexie's characters deal with the struggles of Indian life on the reservation, and the impending threat of their dying culture. In his stories, Alexie uses an array of literary techniques and devices to help portray and illustrate better the love, passion, happiness, longing and hardships of everyday life in the Spokane Tribe. Alexie's use of realism, humor and visual imagery seen through the filter of Indian folklore plays a major role in bringing the reader *into* the lives of the characters in his stories. In particular, these somber tales are strategically broken up by the author's use of humor. Alexie's depiction of humor serves many functions here, and is deployed throughout his work in various ways, but he primarily uses humor to help illustrate how his characters cope with the daily despair they face in a culture defined by poverty, racism and alcoholism. Through it all, Alexie makes an outstanding effort of using humor to paradoxically mirror the despair faced by his Indians but at the same time make them appear more human and, hence, more hopeful, less pitiful and forgotten.

Sherman Alexie is the author of *The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, a book of short stories centered on or around the Spokane Indian reservation northeast Washington State. The characters in Alexie's stories undergo various dilemmas that revolve around substance-abuse, families fighting with and between one another, and abhorrent living conditions. Alexie's depiction of Indian life on the Spokane reservation is one of alcoholism, violence and poverty; living in such conditions pushes the inhabitants to actively search for something better. The search of this "something" leads many of the characters in Alexie's stories to imagine, desire, long for something, anything better than what they currently have. In order to escape the reality they're living, Alexie's characters indulge in thoughts of the past, before reservations even existed. They transport themselves back into a history of proud Native American tradition and culture, when people braided their hair, rode horses, told stories, saw visions, wore loincloths and lived as brave warriors. Alexie's characters often experience a longing and a deep felt desire to return, to turn back the hands of time and live a better, more storied Indian life; his Spokane Indians long for something better than what they currently have on the "res." It is remarkable how Alexie's characters are so persistent in their individual searches for better lives, despite and in spite of the pervasive alcoholism, violence and poverty. Although the world seems to be crashing down around them, Alexie's characters constantly struggle to persevere. Heedless of the obstacles before them, his figures continue to dwell in thoughts of hope and fantasies of becoming warriors once again and living the Native traditions in every sense of the word. By allowing his characters to occupy this space of longing and desire for a better life, Alexie is able to capture and incorporate into his fictional narratives the deep, ongoing and very real struggles he sees his Spokane Indian tribe fighting every day in real life.