

## FRAMESTORY:

**PLOT:** "This Is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona," is about two young Native American men who live on the Spokane Reservation in Washington, U. S. The story is neatly structured around news of Victor's father's death in Arizona and the task of retrieving his ashes, and metaphorically the lost father for Victor, his old pickup truck and modest savings and returning north. It is this goal of the journey that drives the plot, but through the flashbacks are the stereotyped descriptions of Victor, the stoic warrior, and Thomas, the storytelling shaman who "was a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to" (62) presented.

**SETTING:** Late 1900s Spokane Reservation, western Washington + Phoenix, Arizona.

**CHARACTERS:** Victor and Thomas Builds-the-Fire, around 20 years old.

**THEME: "Personal hurricanes"** is introduced in the very first paragraph: "Victor hadn't seen his father in a few years, only talked to him on the telephone once or twice, but still there was a genetic pain, which was soon to be pain as real and immediate as a broken bone" (59). This is a story about a pain on a personal level but also personal pain in general and the conflict a person may have within him- or herself because of broken relationships and loss of important people in one's life and the identity crisis this may cause. **"Storytelling":** Although Victor had a problematic relationship with his father, as well as with Thomas, part of their trip to Arizona involves Thomas recounting experiences with Victor's father and telling other stories. This creates a sort of modern storehouse of new tales, with one frame story in which there are many flashbacks, like memories or visions. The flashbacks serve to provide information of the characters history and explain their actions.

**1<sup>st</sup> Flashback** → triggered by Victor's **memory** of his relationship with Thomas as the one who "always had something to say" (61): "Once, when they were seven" (61) and Victor's father still lived with the family, Thomas anticipated how he would abandon his family → Explains the boys relationship + present them as stereotypes = social critique.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Flashback** → triggered by Thomas' **memory** of Victor and his many stories when they were ten and still friends and Victor liked his stories: "Thomas Builds-the-Fire sat on the bicycle, waited in Victor's yard. He was ten years old and skinny" (62) → Explains the boy's relationship and history + Native American history.

**3<sup>rd</sup> Flashback** → Thomas' **memory** of "two Indian boys" (63) who wanted to be warriors → Explains Native American history → is inside the 2<sup>nd</sup> flashback.

**4<sup>th</sup> Flashback**  
→ 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator – **memory:** "When they were fifteen and had long since stopped being friends, Victor and Thomas got into a fistfight" (65) → Explains their relationship and Victor's struggle with himself.

**5<sup>th</sup> Flashback** → 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator – **memory:** "When Victor was twelve, he stepped into an underground wasp nest" (70) → Thomas rescued him and shows that he is a good friend + Victor's shamefulness → Explains the boys' relationship.

**6<sup>th</sup> Flashback**  
→ Thomas' **memory** – Triggered by Victor's question to Thomas about what he remembers about Victor's father (70) → Thomas had promised to look after Victor → Explains human relationships.

**7<sup>th</sup> Flashback** → 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator – **memory:** "Thomas Builds-the Fire could fly" (70) → Explains hope – how dreams can come true.

**8<sup>th</sup> Flashback** → 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrator – **memory:** "Thomas Builds-the Fire walked through the corridors of the tribal school by himself. Nobody wanted to be anywhere near him because of all those stories. Story after story" (72) → Explains how hard it is for Victor and the others to accept Thomas and his stories and therefore part of the Native American tradition.

**CONCLUSION:** It is the journey that drives the plot, but through the flashbacks we hear about how these characters' struggle, both in relationships between each other and with themselves. Thomas continues to tell his stories throughout the story as both stereotype image of an old shamanistic tradition and an ironic commentator on it. Even though Thomas's mother died in childbirth, and he was raised by his grandmother, he knows the loss that Victor feels in losing even an absent father. The story concludes with the two young men back in Washington State. As they part after their long journey, Victor gives one-half of his father's ashes to Thomas, and both men plan to return the ashes to the river at Spokane Falls, continuing to add chapters to the stories which Thomas has already been telling and retelling.