

Fistfighting "Super Injun"

Reinscribing Native American Literature in the English Classroom.

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Abstract

This thesis examines ways in which Native Americans are portrayed in literature by analyzing two of Sherman Alexie's short stories *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*, and *Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play "The Star-Spangled Banner" at Woodstock*, as well as the movies *Pocahontas* (1995) and *Smoke Signals* (Alexie, 1998). The Native American/Indigenous methodology presented, provides insights into Native American culture that is necessary to see the nuances and layers of meaning in these narratives. The thesis discusses internalized colonization, Spivak's idea of the "Other", and DuBois' concept of a "double-consciousness" in relation to identity. Through my analysis it becomes evident that *Pocahontas* presents both a somewhat uniform and stereotypical portrayal of Native Americans, but also that it includes layers of depth to some of the characters. The thesis presents Alexie's narratives as ridden with dark humour, sarcasm and hyperboles which he has used to deconstruct the already existing stereotypes of Natives. In the analysis we see that they work as revisionist history by re-membering the past. Throughout, the thesis presents opportunities, advice and it advocates teaching Native American literature in the English classroom. Chapter 5 addresses didactics, more specifically, teaching from a global and multicultural perspective. It covers interconnected aspects of teaching, in general, that are specifically relevant to teaching the narratives presented. These aspects are teaching humour, controversial topics, "the danger of a single story", short stories, and teaching movies as narratives. In sum, the thesis aims to reinscribe Native American literature in the English classroom.

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“*There are things you should learn. Your past is a skeleton walking one step behind you, and your future is a skeleton walking one step in front of you. Maybe you don’t wear a watch, but your skeletons do, and they always know what time it is. Now, these skeletons are made of memories, dreams, and voices. And they can trap you in the in-between, between touching and becoming. But they’re not necessarily evil, unless you let them be*” (Alexie 21-22)¹.

1. Introduction

The short story composite *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* and the two movies *Pocahontas* and *Smoke Signals* all deal with Native Americans. Historically, one can say that a problem with a lot of the representation, presentation, and portrayal of Native Americans in literature and movies is that it is too one-sided, Eurocentric, flat, stereotypical, and/or uniform. Be that in textbooks for students or in literary works; movies and prose, the problem has often been the same. And when that problem occurs in mass media; when that problem is just as easily found in canonizations of American Literature as well as children's movies we have an even bigger problem since these ideas and perceptions are mass produced. Scholars in the fields Indigenous studies and/or Native American studies have looked at and dealt with misrepresentations of the Native Americans. In fact, there are *a lot* of different questions that has been asked concerning Native American Literature. And even now, mid-read, you might ask yourself "What exactly is Native American Literature?"

That is part of what the discussion has been about. The definition that most people agree on is "literature by and about Native Americans" and it is the definition I will be working from as well. Scholars have asked and dealt with questions such as "What is "authentic" Native American literature?", "What makes Native American literature Native American literature?", "What if a Native American person writes about something that does not concern Native American peoples, is it still Native American literature?" And "What if a

¹ *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (21-22)

Euro-American writes about Native American peoples?" Some examples of that would be James Fenimore Cooper and John Neihardt. Other concerns that have been dealt with by scholars in the field are historicity, identity, Native American traditions and trying to decide what is specific and original about Native American Literature.

The Native American Renaissance (NAR) during the late 1960s and the 1970s was what really initiated the area of Native American literature. A lot of the well-known writers today wrote in what was later dubbed the NAR, these are writers such as; N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Gerald Vizenor, James Welch, and Duane Niatum. Later waves of the NAR were writers who were highly inspired by these first pioneers; Paula Gunn Allen and Louise Erdrich, as well as Sherman Alexie. But even the term and idea of a Native American Renaissance has proved problematic as well as it has received a lot of criticism of what it implies. It brings up questions about the earlier narrative traditions of the Native Americans such as their longstanding oral traditions.

I am not writing from a Native American perspective because I am not a Native American. I am not, as Allen states that she is, "Kochinnenako in Academe". However, unlike some scholars (such as Elizabeth Cooks-Lynn) I believe that the Native American worldview, culture, and traditions can be understood by Westerners (such as myself) when it is given a fair chance of making an impression, which it definitely has on me. I have headed the cautionary warning given by Allen in *The Sacred Hoop*: "I would caution readers and students of American Indian life and culture to remember that Indian America does not in any sense function in the same ways or from the same assumptions that western systems do" (7). I have therefore provided the reader with some basic and general overview of Native American culture, tradition and history. I am writing this thesis with the utmost respect to the Native American culture and hoping that the Native writers and critics have guided me to a righteous path. I hope to portray a just and new perspective on teaching about Native Americans.

I hope to deconstruct stereotypes and enlighten the reader to the problem of misrepresentation (such as Alexie does in his literature). Firstly, by recognizing negative portrayals and then mending some of the damage. This means hindering the unacceptable portrayal(s) of Native Americans to spread further by analyzing the portrayal of them in literature and movies by the use of Native American methodology. What I mean by the use of Native American methodology is the use of Indigenous perspectives and sensibilities; looking at how the Native American peoples, traditions, cultures, and belief systems are being portrayed in the narratives. Although this has been done by many great literary scholars concerning the representation of stereotypical Native American identities in prose, poetry and movies, I do not feel that it has had the necessary effect in the Norwegian school system. This will therefore be my focus and addition to the field. Still, too little is taught about Native

Americans, or what is taught is too narrow and/or Eurocentric. This is unacceptable since this helps further these ideas and negative images of Native Americans in the Norwegian students' minds', it maintains their position as an almost forgotten, and often thought of as dead, minority.

My aim is that schools, publishers, authors of textbooks for use in schools, editors of canons, and educators be aware of their influence on the portrayal of Native Americans. That their awareness is to such an extent that they are willing to take a stand and choose to respect the people, their culture, their history, and every individual. This includes that they do not publish, present or portray Native Americans as stereotypical, flat and uniform characters but show that they are much more than just "bows and arrows". For the purpose of the diversity, originality and the ever-changing Native American society to progress, and for the knowledge about them to do so as well, it is important to teach from a global and multicultural perspective.

What I want to investigate is how Native Americans (peoples) are portrayed in the three literary works *Pocahontas* (Disney, 1994) and selected short stories from *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (Alexie, 1993) as well as *Smoke Signals* (Alexie, 1998). I have chosen to analyze Sherman Alexie's work in this thesis because of his own contribution to changing the stereotypical representation of Native Americans. Also because of his position as a pioneer in the use of humour in Native American literature and in doing so creating a Native humour and *re-presenting* Native Americans. I chose the movie *Pocahontas* because it is, in my opinion, imbedded in popular culture as *the* representation of Native Americans, alongside movies such as *Dances With Wolves* (1990). I will be taking a comparative view on the movie *Smoke Signals* and the short stories *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona* and *Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock*. I have chosen to work with these two short stories because the movie is based on and inspired by them. I will be looking at the differences in the two representations, mostly to investigate how the movie can be a useful tool in teaching about Native Americans.

By moving from a literary analysis of *Pocahontas* to an analysis of "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" I wish to exemplify how I would teach these two very different portrayals of Native Americans. *Pocahontas* is not as multidimensional as Alexie's work, therefore I see it as a good starting point for teaching about stereotyping and Native Americans in upper secondary school. The works of Sherman Alexie are imaginative, but also historical and cultural. In many ways you can say that they work as revisionist history. This is an effect I want his narratives to have on the students so that they can move past a Eurocentric, oftentimes glorified history of the U.S (including Native Americans). And towards a

diversified, cross-cultural understanding and respect for Native Americans. I also hope that this knowledge will have transferability to other Indigenous peoples as well as minorities.

For the didactical point of view I will also be focusing on the representation and portrayal of the Native Americans since I find this very important in relation to the deconstructing and fighting negative stereotypes. My didactic focus concerns itself with teaching about minorities/Indigenous peoples as a general subject and teaching about Native Americans as a more specific topic. It will exemplify and discuss what tools are necessary to teach this topic and what considerations teachers should have in doing so. This is done by using examples from the literary pieces presented in the thesis and didactical theory concerning teaching from a global and multicultural perspective which is something I see as necessary to provide a nuanced portrayal of Native Americans. Lastly, I have provided a discussion revolving around teaching humour, teaching short stories, and using movies in teaching because they are elements I see as tools for teaching Alexie.

2. Theory: Complicating Stereotypes

The theory I have chosen to include in this chapter is meant as a tool to complicate stereotypes so that one is able to decolonize and deconstruct them. The chapter will start with a discussion of the terminology used on and by Native Americans and Euro-Americans. It will then present and discuss Native American methodology and Indigenous methodology, because these approaches best suited to analyzing the literary works in the subsequent chapters. Additionally, the third part of this chapter will present some differences between Euro-American and Native American culture. To be able to fully appreciate and understand Native American literature this type of contextualization is necessary for us. The next part of this chapter concerns itself with the Native American tradition of storytelling. In order to investigate the ways in which this tradition is carried on in the contemporary works of Sherman Alexie and to look at what parts of this longstanding Native American tradition he has chosen to uphold. The last part of this chapter stands somewhat separate from the others since it contains didactical theory. This theory deals with how to teach about Native Americans in Norwegian schools, as well as a broader aspect - namely teaching about Indigenous peoples. The discussion will then revolve around being able to present the peoples, their culture and history in a neutral, respectful and meaningful manner that does not further the stereotypical portrayal of them but rather counteracts this.

2.1 Terminology

Alexie is a teller of stories, and since the term "Indian" is a name that has a story, and stories held within it, I found it necessary to incorporate a discussion of the use of certain terminology and its implications. There has been much discussion about the naming of the Indigenous peoples of North America, their culture, heritage, history and methodology. The oldest term stemming from Columbian time is "Indian", because Columbus at his point of arrival in 1492 thought he had reached India and not the Americas. This is a problematic term, for one it is a naming from the outside, meaning that outsiders of a community have decided the term fit to use about that group of people. Secondly, it is an incorrect naming seeing that they were and are not from India. People have tried to solve this error by referring to them as American Indians. Even the National Indian Education Association refers to them as American Indians or as in the title of their association merely Indian. But even so, the term itself still contains the word "Indian" which is a term that carries negative connotations. "Indians" have, for much of history, been hated, persecuted and subjected by Euro-Americans. It seems to me, to be a term that belongs to the past and that refers to a historically, somewhat, extinct Indian who never even existed.

The term "Indian" might also carry associations of the first and longstanding descriptions of them as savages, heathens, and an uncivilized people. Most prominently, it is not what they have called themselves, but even so it is the name that has been around the longest. A more correct term to use is Native North American since this specifies where they are from and their status as a native people. For practical reasons the term Native American is easier since it is shorter and still encompasses the geographical location and their primacy in America without carrying negative connotations to the same extent that "Indian" does. Therefore, the terms Native North American, Native American or Native are the terms I will predominantly be using in the thesis, which all refers to Native North Americans. If and when I am using the term Indian, no negative implications are from my part laid upon the term. Although a lot of Native writers have chosen to operate with the terms American Indian or just Indian, it seems to me that in some sense this is a privilege only given to those who are Native Americans themselves. Therefore I will respect this by trying to use it as little as possible. But this raises a serious question which I am unfit to answer - why is it okay for Native Americans to call themselves Indian(s) or is it? And what implications does this have?

Not only is there a naming discussion of what the correct, politically and culturally,

term to use for Native Americans is, the naming of the majority population of America is also something of discussion. A lot of the time they are referred to as "White people" which is a term with as much negative connotations in this context as "Indian" inherits. The only term that may inhabit more negativity than White people would be colonizer(s), which immediately refers to their position as "the bad guy", in a historical aspect². However, the term has a very functional aspect, because it explains an event. I will therefore use it some in my writing. Most often, and maybe shockingly, it is Native writers who use the term "Whites/White people", even though they are the ones who have criticized Euro-Americans for their wrongful use of the term "Indian" and of racism. Theorists such as Paula Gunn Allen, Duane Champagne and LaVonne Brown Rouff all use the term "White people" or "Whites". Referring to them as "White people" is, in my opinion, inappropriate because of its focus on race and biological traits. In this regard, I believe I have a valuable perspective as an outsider to Native American culture. Additionally, using these terms can be as wrong as using "Indian" on all Native Americans because the people they are referring to are not the whole number of white people, but the people that were European settlers or colonizers who came to America in the 1400s and onwards. Since I feel "White people" and all similar terms that focus on skin color are unfit for use, I have chosen to work with the term Euro-Americans. This because they are the ones who are now referred to as "Americans" and because of their geographical heritage to Europe.

2.2 Native American Methodology / Indigenous Methodology

Seeing and discussing literature from a Native American perspective, sensibility and with them as the focal point is what is meant by the use of Native American methodology and/or Indigenous methodology. This does not mean that one could boast of being able to completely examine the literature from a Native American perspective such as a Native American would be able to. But it is possible for a non-Native to look at Native American literature in the perspective of and with a sensibility to Native Americans. With this perspective, accompanied by an immersion in Native American writing, literature, history and cultural contextualization a person with a non-Native background can competently analyze Native American literature. And with the knowledge, guidance, opinions and perspectives of Native Americans themselves a non-Native is able to analyze Native American literature with a Native American perspective in mind.

Such an analysis might involve using postcolonial theory, which has been done in the

² How deserved this association is would be a whole other discussion which I will not delve into at this point.

past, and it is certainly a useful approach in many ways. One could therefore use a postcolonial approach based on the similarities that exists between Native Americans and colonially subjected peoples to draw lines and use it to analyze Native American literature. However, one could argue that the Native American peoples are not living in a postcolonial world, but are still living in some sort of a colonial world. What is more relevant to this thesis is looking at it as decolonizing Native American literature and more specifically decolonizing the portrayal of Native Americans. A decolonization or "postcolonializing" process according to Ato Quayson is: [...] the critical process by which to relate modern-day phenomena to their explicit, implicit or even potential relations to this [a colonial] fraught heritage" (11). What this means is to investigate how the Native Americans are portrayed in literature, what parts of this is furthering colonialism and what is counteracting colonialism with a specific focus and intent to counteract colonialist ideals, images and stereotypes.

Especially relevant for analyzing texts that chart a culture, such as the Native American culture, that is in the process of change and is full of contradictions and ambivalence is the use of "postcolonializing" theory. As Quayson argues in *Postcolonialism*, colonialism or postcolonialism is not an event but a series of events which means that it should be thought of as a process. A process that is still ongoing, he therefore calls it a "process of postcolonializing"; "It is important to highlight [...] a notion of the term as a process of coming-into-being and of struggle *against* colonialism and its after-effects" (9). The reasoning he uses when arguing for the use of a postcolonializing theory as opposed to using postcolonial theory is firstly, that the postcolonializing theory does not state the colonial era to be over. Secondly that in a Native American perspective their position in the United States today is quite similar to a society still under colonial power (Quayson 10).

Maori author Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in *Decolonizing Methodologies*, rejects the term postcolonialism. She argues with the fact that colonialism still has a profound influence on Native Americans or Indigenous peoples as a whole. Theories and perspectives outside a narrow Native American experience can also be useful in some ways, this would mean theories concerning other Indigenous peoples or Indigenous peoples as a whole. The use of a more global Indigenous methodology would benefit the students seeing that their competency aim concerns itself with Indigenous peoples in general terms, meaning also the Maori of New Zealand, the Inuit of Canada, the Aborigines of Australia, and possibly to draw lines to the Sami people of Norway.

The term internalized colonization becomes relevant to this discussion. It is a complex psychological phenomenon that encompasses a lot of historical context. Starting in basic terms internalized colonization is when a group that has been colonized inherits their colonizer's mindset about them, this is most often not a positive self-image but rather a very

negative one. In the case of Native Americans one would be talking about Natives adopting the thoughts and ideas European settlers and colonizers had of the Native Americans. Meaning the stereotypical representations created by Euro-Americans. Westerners often interpreted and saw Native Americans in a Western patriarchal tradition which resulted in a very skewed and often erroneous interpretation of them, their culture and way of life. This led to the stereotypes we see today which have lived on since the beginning of Native American - Euro-American relations.

Stereotypes of Native Americans are abundant. The most prominent stereotypes, in Allen's words, are: "the noble savage" and "the howling savage" (4). The noble savage is further described by Allen as "the appealing but doomed victim of the inevitable evolution of humanity from primitive to postindustrial social orders," (4) and the howling savages are described as the "howling denizens of a terrifying wilderness" (5). These are just two of many stereotypical representations of Native Americans. Some other stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans are the "Indian warrior"; a stoic and often blood-thirsty figure, the "Ecological Indian"; whose interest to live "in harmony" with nature was more valued than anything else (Nichols), the "Indian princess" most commonly associated with the Disney character Pocahontas, and lastly, more contemporary stereotypes such as the drunken, lazy, good-for-nothing Indian or the casino-owning Indian.

Taking this into consideration internalized colonization means that these kinds of stereotypes are internalized by the Native Americans inhibiting a positive personal and societal growth. Internalized colonization is also a product of the concept of a colonial discourse and closely related to theories about the "Othering" of minorities by majorities³. As Gruber explains in *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature*, the colonizers used these types of misrepresentations of Native Americans as a "self-conceptualization"; "The guise of the deficient 'heathen devil' (who had to be either 'civilized' or exterminated) proved vital in the creation of an Othering discourse on Native Americans, justifying and rationalizing the civilizing mission of manifest destiny" (19-20). An intentional defamiliarization of Native Americans as a minority from a Euro-American/majority standpoint is further facilitated by the kind of "Othering" mentioned earlier. It involves seeing them as the "Other" to their "correct" way of being, this type of polarization creates a one-dimensional, flat and uniform representation of Native Americans and is therefore unwanted.

Another relevant theoretical approach in relation to "Othering" and internalized colonization is W.E.B. DuBois' *The Souls of Black Folk* (1973). DuBois discusses the idea of a split self, a self that involves two cultural identities. He uses the term double-consciousness

³ The term "Othering", coined by G. Spivak, is further explained in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (188).

in relation to this idea and relates it to African Americans, it is easy to relate this to a person of Native American identity as well. For Norwegian students this might be relatable to people of Sami origin as well as other multicultural students. DuBois describes this feeling of a double consciousness as

[...] a peculiar sensation,[...] this sense of always looking at oneself through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness - An American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (DuBois 8).

DuBois' idea can be applied to a double-consciousness in relation to who you are in terms of the community you live in and for that community as a whole to question its "self".

All stereotypes carry both negative and positive connotations and all stereotypes inhabit some form of truth. Listing six stereotypes of Native Americans, Frederick W. Turner III states that "Two things are true of all stereotypes. One is that they fulfill some needs of the makers; and the other is that they are partially correct". He goes on to describe that while there is some truth in a lot of the stereotypes, they are still inaccurate representations and harmful. The cause of this is that when dealing with the realities of the Native Americans one is dealing with;

hundreds of tribes speaking perhaps as many as a thousand mutually unintelligible tongues, and differing in cultures from sedentary agriculturalists to nomadic hunters, from tribal confederacies to wandering bands, from nations as large as twenty thousand to ones hardly more than a hundred (*The Portable North American Indian Reader* 11).

One of the problems and aspects I want to shed light on in the representation of Native Americans is the lack of a diversified portrayal. What I want to make sure is that students are presented with a portrayal that does not only present Native Americans as individuals, but also as groups of different peoples.

Stereotypical portrayals, the use of a colonial discourse and the internalization of such negative images and portrayals of Native Americans are harmful to relationships between Natives and non-Natives. Late 20th and early 21st century Native Americans should not have to grow up in a society where they feel that their heritage and culture only brings with it negative connotations. Connotations brought upon them by the majority which they have to live alongside with, or that they face nothing but an identity struggle that can lead to a negative and devastating outcome. The problem with living in a "White world", meaning as a minority in a society where the Euro-Americans constitute the majority, is one often dealt with in Native American literature. This is the feeling of a split identity where you have to

choose whether you are Euro-American or Native American, because people will only accept you as either or. The idea that there is no in-between, no middle ground, is a theme in a lot of the Native literature. Books such as *Ceremony* (1977) by Leslie M. Silko and *House Made of Dawn* (1968) by M. Scott Momaday discuss the problem of belonging to several ethnicities, living alongside people of a different cultural background and other issues relating to having a minority status in a country that was once "your own". They also deal with the hardship in developing a sense of identity based on different and differing cultural values and cultural heritage.

James Ruppert discusses this in *Native American perspectives on Literature and History* (1994), stressing the importance of allowing for a duality in identity that does not lead to a split self but a reconciliation and communal existence of the two. To not always see Native Americans as between two cultures, but as peoples that are participants in two rich and valuable cultural traditions is the essence of Silko's book *Ceremony*. The protagonist of her book; Tayo, who embodies the confluence of Native American and Euro-American cultures, goes through a spiritual and ceremonial journey of self-identification. The book ends with him having to accept and incorporate both his Native American identity and heritage as well as his Euro-American heritage. In her book she incorporates the stereotype of a Native American struggling to come to terms with his own identity and who he wants to be. While, also, strongly counteracting the stereotype by resolving the protagonist's identity problem and showing how this can be done. She presents one possible solution, to the whole of Native Americans, that allows for a duality of identity and a confluence of Native American as well as Euro-American culture. It is this type of writing that students need; a firm opposition to and breaking down of stereotypical representations. This is one way of recognizing the existence of, while simultaneously dismantling, colonial discourse, internalized colonization and stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans.

2.3 Native American Culture

Native American culture and Western or Euro-American culture are very different in a variety of ways. I will only go through topics that are relevant to this thesis and the literary works that are presented and discussed in the thesis. It is not my wish to further or create a binary opposition between Native American and Euro-American/Western culture. Rather, my purpose is to show the differences that are apparent for the purpose of a reader to be able to recognize and understand this in the analysis of the literature that will come later in the thesis.

I will focus on some of the general beliefs most Native Americans share, then I will be discussing the different relationship Westerners and Natives have to the land/earth and animals. I will then present the differences that are apparent when it comes to the feeling one has of community in a society. Throughout this subchapter it is important to think about teaching these differences to students, so that they may be able to develop a good cultural understanding of and respect towards their own as well as other cultures.

Firstly, there is a need to state that although the differences between Western or Euro-American culture and Native American culture are large, the differences within both of these cultures are readily apparent as well. Native Americans at one time spoke about 300 different languages. They lived in numerous different ways depending on their location and what resources were available (some as hunter-gatherers, or fishermen, others as farmers), and were arranged in different types of social and political systems (*Native American Culture* 12-13). However, there are some perceivable similarities amongst all the different tribes. For example, all of them had strong, extended-family bonds, they have shown likeness in their sense of spirituality and religious ceremonies with a number of common beliefs such as animism, spirits, shamanism, and vision quests (*Native American Culture* 13-14). Additionally, all objects related to ceremonies, which often consisted of dances and songs as well as other sacred activities, were seen as a reflection of the natural and spirit world (*Native American Culture* 15).

In general, the Native American worldview includes belief in a "Great Spirit" who exists both in the physical world as well as the spirit world, alongside tricksters, monsters, giants, heroes and spirits (*Native American Culture* 14). According to Kathleen Kuiper, in *Native American Culture*, Animism "[...] is the belief that souls or spirits exist not only in humans, but in animals, rocks, trees - essentially all natural phenomena" (*Native American Culture* 14). Further on, she explains more about Native Americans' beliefs surrounding nature "[...] nature was to be celebrated, thanked, and maybe appeased for the gifts that had been bestowed on a tribe" (*Native American Culture* 14). A Shaman, in the words of Kuiper, "[...] can be seen as a sort of priest or practitioner through whom various spirits let themselves be known to humans" (*Native American Culture* 14). It was the Shaman's responsibility to pass on information to the tribal members from the spirit world, he also played the role of healer, prophet, and something called psychopomps. Psychopomps in Native American tradition is a conductor of souls, which means that they guide the dead to the other world (*Native American Culture* 14). Such a character can be found in Alexie's movie *Smoke Signals* and in the short story *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*. I will go into this in more detail in chapter 4, but in short, the character Thomas Builds-the-Fire works as a shaman in these literary works.

In Western tradition land is a commodity. One can claim ownership over it and thereby the land is yours to do what you may please with it within the limits of the law. In previous centuries, there has been restrictions to whom may own land and who may not, but the idea of a piece of land as a thing or object that can be owned by a person has always existed. This is a striking difference compared to the Native American culture.

In the Native American cultural tradition they believe in spiritual beings in some ways similar to Western ideas about God, some examples are the Great Spirit (as mentioned earlier), Mother Earth and Father Sky. Native American origin or creation stories tell of a great bond and dual relationship with the land that they live on, it can mention specific places, mountains and rivers. They believe that the earth nurtured them and feel that these places are sacred to them (Ruoff 8). Here we see a particular difference between the cultures which involves a "[...] religious consequence of this philosophical difference" (Kidwell 105). The difference being "[...] that to Indians the sacred involves a place, 'be it a river, a mountain, a plateau, valley, or other natural feature.' For Euro-Americans the sacred involves an event, for example, the crucifixion, or the original Passover" (Kidwell 105). This also shows a significant difference, namely that Euro-American culture is focused on time while Native American culture is focused on space, and spatial relations, i.e. land/earth. Something that is discernible in the difference between Native American literature and Euro-American or Western literature (Kidwell 104). For fear of furthering the stereotype of the Ecological Indian I want to express that not all and certainly not all *modern* Native Americans take this stand when it comes to the relationship they have to the land/earth⁴ (Schwarz 158).

Furthermore, Native Americans "[...] think in terms of belonging to the land, being part of it" (Kidwell 105), compared to a Euro-American mindset which "think in terms of owning it" (Ibid.), or "not being controlled by it" (Ibid.). Land, as Frank Pommersheim found in examining Native American law, is not only sacred but also a huge part of Native American culture: "Land is basic to Indian people; they are part of it and it is part of them; it is their Mother" (qtd. in Kidwell 105). This is a theme and a difference that is obvious in the Disney movie *Pocahontas* by the characters grouped as Native American and English colonizers. We are often presented with the view that Euro-Americans believe that they were given the American lands by God. Interestingly enough, this is a similar in some ways to Native Americans' belief that they, too, see the land as something that they belong to because of their Gods' generosity.

When Native Americans' and Euro-Americans' contact developed, religious missionaries were sometimes allowed in tribal areas. Furthermore, assimilation policies arranged by the US government influenced both forcibly and unintentionally Native

⁴ An example of this can be found in Schwarz (163 and 178-179).

Americans' religious beliefs. Children were sent to boarding schools and the government suppressed Native religions in favor of Christianity (*Native American Culture* 95). This did not lead to, as one might think, a complete depletion of supporters of a Native American belief system. Rather, it led to syncretism, an amalgamation of Native American beliefs with Christianity that is still noticeable today.

It is commonly acknowledged that Western approaches favor hierarchy. In a Western hierarchical system human beings are at the highest position of this hierarchy while beneath them are entities such as animals, plants, and objects. This type of hierarchical division does not exist in the Native American culture. All living things, including fauna, flora and animals are equal to human beings. This approach is reflected in Allen's book *The Sacred Hoop* where she explains that: "When I was small, my mother often told me that animals, insects and plants are to be treated with the kind of respect one customarily accords to high-status adults. 'Life is a circle, and everything has its place in it,' she would say" (1). Furthermore, Ella C. Deloria notes that her people, the Dakotas, "understand the meaning of self-sacrifice, perhaps because their legends taught them that the buffalo, on which their very life depended, gave itself voluntarily that they might live" (qtd. in Ruoff 11).

2.3.1 Community

Another considerable difference between the two cultures is the sense of community and the value that they ascribe to it. In the Western world individualism is encouraged and one will often experience an individualistic mindset meaning that you are to do what is best for yourself. There is a tremendous focus on the development of the self and the focus on the greater whole is often, at best, a secondary priority. This is supported by Roemer in *The Cambridge Companion to Native American Literature*; "[...] communal senses of identity may be most obvious to non-Indian readers because they contrast so markedly with the mainstream senses of individualism" (13). Following a Euro-American tradition one is supposed to, during a period of life commonly known as "young adult", "find oneself". While in a communal sense of identity one can look to other members of the tribe or society in this kind of search. Contemporary Native Americans are often pulled between loyalty to their community and loyalty to a more American mainstream need to "find themselves". This tends to be "crazy-making", a theme that is often portrayed in Native American literature, and thus there is a real use for humour and self-irony to be able to deal with the process.

The Native American communities are a collectivist society, meaning that they rely on a collective memory which again results in a great respect for the Elders of the tribes. Community for the Native Americans includes mutual accountability, interdependence and

cooperation. This can be seen in contrast to Euro-American society in the way that they uphold freedom as a core necessity. Steven Leuthold, in *Contemporary Native American Cultural Issues*, describes this as: "Even the most central American value, freedom, is largely understood as freedom from external constraints and obligations (being left alone) rather than the freedom to be involved in community governance and participation" (197). The feeling of community, the support and comfort that it gave Native Americans was considered vital to them; "[...] all ceremonies, whether for war or healing, create and support the sense of community that is the bedrock of tribal life. This community is not made up only of members of the tribe but necessarily includes all beings that inhabit the tribe's universe" (Allen 63).

This type of collectivist society is reflected in their rituals, traditions, ceremonies and religious beliefs. An example of such is the tradition of having a powwow, which is often referred to in Native American literature. According to Kuiper a powwow is a celebration: "[...] of American Indian culture in which people from diverse Indigenous nations gather for the purpose of dancing, singing, and honoring the traditions of their ancestors" (*Native American Culture* 150). This type of social activity reinforces the feeling of community.

A problem for contemporary Native Americans has been the lack of a feeling of community, "[...] the fracturing, decentering, and confusing multiracial expanding of communal identities" (Roemer 13) has caused what can be seen in characters such as Tayo from *Ceremony*, or Arnold from "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*", to go about as, in Roemer's terms "restless-young-men-with-nothing-to-do" often accompanied by a severe alcohol problem. Furthermore, Roemer states that: "These male characters are 'so lonely, so nonsocial'; they avoid or lack traditional community guidance that could offer restorative alternatives to the Euro-American concepts of 'work' and 'doing' that foster self-hatred" (14). The new infusion of "mixed-blood" marriages and "urban Indians" has added so much confusion to the communal identity that it has caused horrible fragmentations in the Native American peoples. The contemporary Native American literature functions in many instances as a remedy for these kinds of societal problems, because they shed light on the problems and most often offer a solution. Alexie's "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" is one of those books. By producing the movie *Smoke Signals* Alexie was able to reach out to a much wider audience, which might have helped the communal feeling.

2.4 The Tradition of Native American Storytelling

Native Americans did not have written skills until well after the Europeans came to the Americas. Rather, Native Americans have a longstanding tradition of oral and aural storytelling; literature and narratives that came before the contemporary Native American literature. Native American oral literature allows for a lot more than words to express meaning; facial features, grimaces, gesticulations and other hand and body movements, as well as costumes and body paint could also be important to the story. Since the Natives did not have a written language, all of their history was kept in oral literature, in oral storytelling until they acquired written skills. One of the major differences between oral literature and written literature is the fact that one can (and usually do) read a book alone, while in oral storytelling one (usually) has an audience, this relates back to the cultural aspect of community.

Ruoff states, in *American Indian Literature*, that storytelling is a major part of Native traditional life, it is an important way of both educating children in the beliefs and history of the tribe and at the same time it functions as entertainment (39). It was considered a very important feat to be able to recite oral stories, the children were duly trained in this and had to memorize entire stories at an early age (Ruoff 39). The stories serve several functions; they would: "[...] help the tribal members learn about the world and their place in it, how to behave, and how to live harmoniously with nature" (Ruoff 39-40). This, after all, is something they depended on for the survival of their history and for today for the revitalization of their traditional culture. But the fact that the Native Americans did not have a written language does not mean that they did not value or ascribe power to the word; written or spoken. They frequently use(d) symbols, as we would call them in a Western terminology, a word that inherits more meaning than what the word literally tells you (Ruoff 39-40).

Native Americans' devotion to the power of thoughts and words are very apparent in their belief system, this due to the power they ascribe(d) to them as symbols, many believed that it could alter the universe for good and evil. They would pray for a good hunt, victory against their enemy, rain, a good harvest, or to heal physical and mental illnesses (Ruoff 7). When engaged in storytelling Natives would often use audience-response, this means that the audience was expected to give a response to the storyteller at several intervals during the story. The storyteller could even stop telling the story if the audience did not give the proper feedback (Ruoff 42-43). This is one way of describing the different aspects between written and oral literature.

The literary traditions that are the most distinctive to Native American literature is closely related to their belief system. Native Americans focus on directionality and circularity. Directionality refers to the four cardinal directions; north, east, south and west. This also relates to the sacred number four and their focus on the four seasons: spring, summer, autumn

and winter (Ruoff 9-10). Circularity or cycles relates to their belief that everything in life is circular by nature, as Ruoff states: "Following the natural order of the universe, humankind moves in a circle from east to south to west to north to east" (9). They believe that everything comes and goes in cycles and also relates this to the stages of human life (Ruoff 9-10). These aspects of their belief systems are often incorporated into literature by Native Americans. In contrast to Euro-Americans' focus on linearity Natives' focus on circularity plays a crucial role when it comes to how a story is told. In Western tradition, stories commonly have a clear beginning, a middle and an end. Westerners' focus on linearity supports their linear timeline, but in the Native American tradition one can often see a more cyclical timeline. In much of Native American literature a cyclical timeline is where the protagonist moves from one place, which they or that person returns to in the end completing a cycle. This is presented as a somewhat binary opposition, but this kind of cyclical timeline can also appear in some Western fiction and poetry.

A common figure in Native American literature who often served as a humorous element to the story is the trickster. The trickster's role in a story is usually to outwit evil, to violate taboos, ignore authority, add comic relief and act as a cultural hero; "who refuse[s] to be serious even in the face of evil" (Kidwell 109). Even so, the trickster is a character that gains the sympathy of the reader throughout, even though s/he is just as easily the criminal as the hero in the story (Kidwell 108-09). The trickster figure; "[...] provide[s] outlets for socially unacceptable feelings and impulses and teach[es] the consequences of unrestrained or taboo behavior" (Ruoff 47). The relevance of the trickster figure becomes apparent when investigating Alexie as the author of *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."*, because he is a trickster in every meaning of the term. This is further discussed in Chapter 3.

At one point in history Native American literature encountered a whole new problem - mediation. When the Europeans arrived in the Americas the Natives were no longer the only ones to tell stories about themselves, but after a while they started producing written literature themselves. At first questions of authenticity and reliability were the predominant ones as Euro-Americans wrote about Native Americans and as some of them claimed to have written down what was narrated to them in a Native American language. The question that lies within this realm is whether or not Native American traditions from the oral literature were kept and furthered in the written literary genre, if European influence took over the Native American voice, or if the two different cultural traditions fused into something new. A question that will be answered in the subsequent chapters.

Contemporary Native American literature is a product of its time (Ruppert). The fact that Native Americans are living largely outside of reservations, as well as on them, and that they have more contact and relationships with Euro-Americans has had an impact on their

literature. However, as Ruppert writes, even though Native American literature: "[...] overlay Western narrative plotting, they are essentially ritualistic in approach, structure, symbol and significance" (8-9). Authors such as Silko, Momaday, and Alexie are examples of this type of contemporary Native American literature. Further on, Ruppert states that: "They 'rely on native rather than non-Indian forms, themes, and symbols and so are not colonial or exploitative. Rather they carry on the oral tradition at many levels, furthering and nourishing it and being furthered and nourished by it' (Sacred, 79)" (9). Ruppert's statement supports the idea that Native American literature has been influenced by and has infused parts of Euro-American literary traditions. The change allows a Western readership to access a better understanding of Native American literature, compared to some of the literature written by non-Natives about Natives. This is an important step in deconstructing the stereotypical representations of Native Americans which are distinguishable both in the collective imagination and popular culture of both Norwegian and Euro-American society.

3. Analysis of *Pocahontas* (1995)

In this chapter I will firstly present mass media, Hollywood as part of mass media and then again Disney⁵ as part of both these concepts, and its impact on popular opinion. Secondly, I will discuss how the movie *Pocahontas* (1995)⁶ mostly reinforces stereotypes but also its positive aspects regarding its portrayal of Native Americans, and what effect the positive and negative portrayals have. I will look into how stereotypical portrayals affect teaching and how the movie can be used in teaching. Lastly, I will conclude about the overall impression left by *Pocahontas* (1995), and how to move from teaching *Pocahontas* to teaching Sherman Alexie.

3.1 Mass Media, Hollywood, and Disney

Hollywood movies have had and still have a large influence on popular imagination. Mass Media, Hollywood and Disney have a considerable impact on the creation and furthering of stereotypes, misconceptions and prejudices. Therefore, the ways in which

⁵ I have shortened the name of the Walt Disney Company, Walt Disney Pictures, etc. to Disney.

⁶ I will analyze this movie as a single work, which means that I will not include or take into consideration, in any way, the sequel *Pocahontas II* (1998).

Pocahontas (1995) reflects and reinforces clichéd images of Native Americans is worth analyzing. Seeing that Disney's portrayal of Native Americans, Native American women, and Native Americans' relationship with colonizers/settlers in *Pocahontas* is questionable in relation to how accurate and positive the portrayals are, the effect Disney has on the collective imagination of the majority concerning Native Americans can be detrimental, and at the least very impressionable.

As mentioned earlier in this thesis, a multitude of stereotypes of Native Americans exists today. Mostly, they can be categorized into two main categories; either "Bad Injun" or "Good Indian". In the former category lies stereotypes such as the "uncivilized heathen", "drunk Indian", "stoic warrior", and the "ignoble savage". In the latter category we find the romanticized stereotypes, such as: "Noble savage", "peaceful, mystical and highly spiritual Indian", "Indian Princess", and "Tonto". Seemingly, both the "Good Indian" and the "Bad Injun" category commonly infers the "Indian" as vanishing. All of these stereotypes deem Native Americans as monolithic, static, and in lack of any kind of differentiation instead of providing a contemporary portrayal of not just Native Americans' ethnicity, but also their cultural identity. Native American writers and artists such as Sherman Alexie take part in deconstructing and illegitimizing these stereotypes. Mass media, Hollywood and Disney on the other hand seems to further and strengthen these stereotypes.

At least two different stereotypic representations of Native American women exist. The aforementioned "Indian Princess" (can also be referred to as "Indian Maiden") is described as a "[...] seductive and sensual, wom[a]n of the earth [...]" (Büken 54). The other stereotype of Native women, as described by Gülriz Büken, is the "[...] the asexual roly-poly Marilyn type squaw" (54). It is also common that some kind of exoticizing and eroticizing⁷ is part of these portrayals. King states, in his book *The Truth About Stories*, that "Within the North American imagination, Native people have always been an exotic, erotic, terrifying presence" (79). This is part of the portrayal that is given in *Pocahontas* by choosing to characterize Pocahontas as a young (but sexually mature), beautiful, and mysterious seductress. Disney has, by the characterization of Pocahontas, opened up for a sexual, sensual eroticizing and exoticizing of Native American women.

⁷ What is meant by the terms eroticization/eroticizing and exoticizing/exoticization is also a part of the kind of "Othering" Spivak has coined. Firstly, a person of a minority is seen as the Other to a person from the majority, by this type of Othering the majority has created a binary opposition in which they are the opposite of the Other. Secondly, the majority finds this opposition, the fact that the Other is in fact Other - different - sexually, sensually, and erotically attractive. It is deeply related to the concept of "wanting what you cannot or should not have/want". Therefore, what is instigated, is an eroticizing and exoticizing of the minority. They, as Others, because of their exoticism and unfamiliarity become sexually attractive to the majority. Most common, is this kind of exoticization by men of the majority towards females of the minority, and inextricably linked to this kind of Othering/exoticization is race. As a result, Judith Butler in *Bodies That Matter: The Discursive Limits of Sex*, discusses this term in relation to an African American character in a book called *Passing* (1929) by Nella Larsen.

This type of exoticizing is intimately connected with the "Othering" discussed in Chapter 2⁸. The effect this kind of exotic stereotyping of Native Americans has does not only affect non-Natives view's on Native Americans, it also shows to what extent mass media and/or main stream media promotes assimilation. As Hearne states in *Smoke Signals: Native Cinema Rising*: "The most serious effect media stereotypes have, however, is on Native individuals' thoughts and perceptions of ourselves and the world we live in" (xxv).

Disney is such an overreaching business that one can see ripple effects of Disney products everywhere. The term Disneyfied relates to other similar terms in use, such as "Disneyfication", "Disneyization", and "Disney Universe". What all these terms have in common is a belief that Disney produced entities, such as movies, theme parks, and toys, all have similarities in common. The term "Disneyfied" here is similar to what Bryman discusses in *The Disneyization of Society*, where he states Real and Wasko's denotation of the "Disney Universe":

[...] the use of this term is meant to denote the near-universality and hence global reach of the company and its products and the fact that it 'has created a self-contained universe which presents consistently recognizable values through recurring characters and familiar repetitive themes (Wasko, 1996: 349). Thus, Wasko notes that the classic Disney Universe, as revealed primarily in the feature films, comprises: escape and fantasy; innocence; romance and happiness; sexual stereotypes; individualism; and the reinvention of folk tales (28).

3.2 Analysis of *Pocahontas* (1995)

Historians, ethnographers, literary scholars and sociologists have been in search for what can be called an accurate and true history of the character most widely known as Pocahontas. The story and legend has been studied from different perspectives such as a feminist, postcolonial and Native American perspective. She is one of the most mythologized, legendary and immortal figures in Native American as well as North American history. Nonetheless, few have actually been able to come to any historical certainty because of the lack of archival material available. Most likely, the historical uncertainty has been an instigator or necessity for the creation of the legends surrounding her character. Pocahontas is disclosed in John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles* (1624), which is one of the only sources in timely closeness to her life. He writes of her as his rescuer and as a romantic involvement. Scholars have written extensively on the subject trying to decipher the various narratives that exists to find some substantiating evidence to

⁸ See footnote 2.

what can be deemed as the truth. Some are very reluctant to believe John Smith's narrative, some are inclined to, while others deny its accuracy altogether.

LeMaster presents four books on the matter, in her article *Pocahontas: (De)Constructing an American Myth*. Allen, a known scholar in terms of Native American Studies is one of the authors, C. Townsend, H. C. Rountree, and D. A. Price are the other writers. They all have a different take on what the truth is, what methods they have used to deduce the "truth", and what parts of the legend is acceptable as true. Price, in contrast to a lot of scholars, fully believes John Smith's own accounts of the incident. Smith's account states that he was saved by Pocahontas right before the Powhatan tribe tried to execute him and that she warned him (just in time) before one of Powhatan's planned attacks. Allen on the other hand, in line with other scholars, is of the opinion that the ceremony Smith interpreted as an execution was actually an adoption ceremony. Rountree and Townsend both argue that the rescue/adoption ceremony never happened and base their claims on the unaccountability of Smith as a narrator (LeMaster 774). The disagreement on the matter is only possible because of the lack of archival material.

Whether or not John Smith's accounts of what happened during Pocahontas's life is accurate or not, it is told from the perspective of a colonizer. In 2007, Linwood Custalow and Angela L. Daniel published *True Story of Pocahontas: The Other Side of History*. Both are from the Mattaponi tribe, and state that they are "of her own people" (xxiii), of Pocahontas' and the Powhatan's people. This book is, in contrast to John Smith's recollections, Pocahontas' story told from a Native American perspective, but it too is not based on archival material. This thesis will not (at length or in-depth) indulge the discussion so many have had before concerning what is historically accurate, seeing that in my opinion, no accurate historical narrative is available because of the lack of material. However, this lack of material suggests that we should question the legends. Clearly, all the uncertainty has led to the common conceptions and representations that we are influenced by today, that has influenced textbooks and students. Therefore, I will discuss how the portrayal of Pocahontas, Native Americans, and Native - English relations given in the movie *Pocahontas* has affected collective opinion and ideas, if it has and how it has furthered stereotypical representations of Native Americans and lastly, relate this to teaching.

3.2.1 The Powhatan People

3.2.1.1 Pocahontas

3.2.1.1.1 Feminist perspective

In the movie we are introduced to a tall and extremely naturally beautiful woman with long black sleek hair, luscious lips, tan skin, a miniscule waistline, and long sensual legs, accompanied by ethereal music. She is portrayed as athletic, brave, adventurous, intelligent, mischievous, and caring - all in all a complex character. Dundes (2001), discusses the transformation, she thinks, the character of Pocahontas goes through in the movie. She states that in the beginning she seems more selfish and childish, but that throughout the movie she becomes more selfless and nurturing (Dundes). In Dundes' analysis, which takes a more feminist approach the character of Pocahontas does not come out as a positive role model. Dundes argues that she abnegates her own wants and needs and stays "at home with the family". Furthermore, she is presented as the "supreme female virtue" (Dundes 359) in abandoning selfishness and preparing for motherhood by being nurturing and abnegating self-wants. Exemplified by Pocahontas putting Willow's bark on Smith's wound and thereafter deciding to stay rather than accompany him to England which Dundes feels is Pocahontas' wish.

However, Henke et. al. (1996), according to Dundes, "[...] examines Disney heroines and proclaims that Pocahontas 'break[s] new ground' (p. 234). The authors claim that 'Her dreams direct her choice. . . . of autonomous womanhood. . . . [S]he takes her place as an unattached female leader of her people' (p. 240)" (354). Both of these interpretations are valid and offer interesting insights. I concur with Henke's view that Pocahontas acts autonomously in some ways and behaves, in the end, like a strong female leader. Therefore, Dundes' argument that Pocahontas goes through a change in the movie to becoming selfless and preparing for the role of motherhood is something I would contest. Rather than seeing this kind of transformation, I see Pocahontas as first being a strong, intelligent, athletic, but also somewhat childish young woman. Throughout the movie she matures, because of the experiences she has, into a more responsible woman. I see these as positive traits of a strong responsible, intellectual female rather than that of a subdued woman. If John Smith is the instigator of these traits, or, in Dundes' view presented as the reason for the transformation is another discussion.

In the discussion concerning whether or not Pocahontas is steered or controlled by an English male i.e. John Smith, there are interpretations that will both support and oppose this view. Although some of her choices are steered by her love for John Smith, she has chosen to

love him and chosen to be with him, even though she is not supposed to. The choice is highlighted in the movie through the song "Just Around the Riverbend" where she struggles to decide whether she wants to be with Kocoum or see where her vision will lead her, i.e. to Smith. In this sense, by choosing Smith and then letting him leave by himself to go to England she is more autonomous than if she had chosen to be with Kocoum, since Kocoum was who her father wanted her to marry (although choosing Kocoum does not end up as an alternative since he is killed). However, in the end, she does not end up with any of the men. Rather, she stands as a strong female leader of her people.

On the other hand, Pocahontas does let her love for Smith control some of her actions. If she had not been with Smith even though she was not supposed to, Kocoum would most likely not have been murdered by the Englishmen. She would have heeded her father and Nakoma's warnings to stay inside the village. But even this does not suit Pocahontas' personality seeing that she is characterized as adventurous and brave. Pocahontas is exoticized in the movie, but at the same time she exoticizes Smith. They both create their own identities as "Other" to each other, which seems as, at least, part of the attraction they have towards each other.

This can be used to teach students about how women are portrayed in literature and introduce them to a feminist perspective by looking at examples such as Pocahontas (Strong, brave and independent) and Snowwhite (Passive and weak). Furthermore, Pocahontas teaches the viewer that in conflicts peaceful resolutions by speaking to each other is better than going to war. Lastly, we see throughout the movie the importance of cross-cultural understanding, tolerance and respect.

3.2.1.1.2 Native American Perspective

Pocahontas is one of the few Disney princesses that is not rescued by a male protagonist but rather, rescues the male protagonist. In this sense, she is a good role model for women or young females in some ways. But from a Native American perspective one can interpret it as her choosing the Englishman over her own kin (Kocoum). Even though Pocahontas choosing Smith over Kocoum can be seen as positive from a feminist perspective, from a Native American one, it can be interpreted as an instance of "the winner i.e. the white man, gets the girl". We cannot see these two aspects of her as individual aspects, rather the combination of these equal her character which then becomes complex and not simplistic. Therefore, it is important to remember that Pocahontas does not end up "riding into the sunset with her Prince Charming", Smith leaves Jamestown/the Powhatan village and she stays. Furthermore, I would argue strongly that Pocahontas chooses not only to save Smith's life, but

to save her people from a war and restore peace to their society.

The portrayal given of Pocahontas in the movie is not either entirely positive nor entirely negative. The physical portrayal of Pocahontas is an instance of both a furthering of the stereotype "Indian Princess"/"Indian Maiden" and an instance of exoticizing and eroticizing of Native American women, an undeniably negative portrayal of Native Americans (women). She is described and portrayed as being extremely at one with nature, to the extent where she can pick up a bear cub without further ado. Her best friends are two animals, a raccoon and a hummingbird named Meeko and Flit. These two also function as the "angel" and "devil" i.e. consultants sitting on Pocahontas' "shoulders". Meeko represents the "devil" urging her to do whatever she wants and always rooting for Smith, while Flit is more traditional and "angelic" seeing that he is the one who warns her and wards off Smith.

In the movie, nature represents a part of the world of Native Americans. Nature is presented as pristine, idyllic, and perfect, it flows, ebbs, grows, and is endlessly bountiful. It is so romanticized that even the otters get their own little love story, small critters follow Pocahontas wherever she goes, deer stalk and run right by her and birds chirp in tune with her songs⁹. She is a masterful, athletic navigator who has no trouble jumping off cliffs the height of skyscrapers, maneuvering through rocky rivers and high waterfalls with her canoe is presented as something everyday-like. All these are examples of how Disney romanticizes nature, portrays Native Americans as "wild" and Pocahontas as an "Indian Princess".

Pocahontas' movements while stalking Smith are excessively exaggerated and portrayed as animalistic. We see her sneaking up towards him like a panther, hiding in the bushes, crawling towards him, and walking towards him using monkey-like movements. The fact that they have portrayed her movements as animalistic and especially like a monkey is extremely stereotypical and racist. Even the fact that she, who knows the surrounding area far better than Smith, is caught in stalking him, like a prey who has finally fallen victim to the hunter, in the mystical mist of the water, is surrealistic at best. The whole ordeal is solved by Smith and Pocahontas looking deeply into each other's eyes, ethereal music, and a wind carrying leaves of many colors and unidentifiable (but probably "Indian") symbols further imprinting the predestined nature of their love and her status as a "Forest/Indian Princess". One can say that it is pretty astounding that Pocahontas is able to learn a new and completely foreign language by "listen[ing] with your heart" (*Pocahontas*) an achievement to which even Meeko and Flit stand amazed.

The choice Pocahontas struggles with in the beginning of the movie is highlighted

⁹ This is a commonality in a lot of other Disney movies, an example of such would be *Sleeping Beauty*.

through the song "Just Around the Riverbend"¹⁰, she struggles to decide whether she wants to be with Kocoum or see where her vision will lead her, i.e. to Smith. The idea the movie creates, that it is a higher power, a dream giver, that guides Pocahontas to choose Smith suggests something entirely more dramatic than a forbidden love affair. It suggests predestined relations between Native Americans and whites, and how these relations will develop. The fact that her heart leads her to want to be with an Englishman because he is so much more adventurous than Kocoum who is so "serious" (Pocahontas says this while talking with her father when he tells her Kocoum wants to marry her) can be seen as an allegory for an uncomplicated union between England and America blessed and predicted by the Native American spirits/dream giver.

The movie uses Grandmother Willow and songs to portray the Native American belief system. Although they seem to try to do this in a respectful manner, it, too, ends up being oversimplified. The best example of this is that Grandmother Willow (a Willow Tree) acts as an actual grandmother, teacher or a spiritual guide for Pocahontas. Firstly, the fact that they have chosen a tree as Pocahontas' spiritual guide rather than a person is an exaggeration of the connection most Native Americans have with nature. Secondly, Grandmother Willow teaches the viewer about how "All around you are spirits, child. They live in the earth, the water, the sky" (*Pocahontas*) which in itself is passable because most Native Americans believed that everything had a spirit, but then you hear a "faint singing" and Pocahontas stands up and says "I hear the wind" (*Pocahontas*). This scene depicts Pocahontas trying to communicate with the wind.

Disney has in many ways romanticized and exaggerated Native Americans' world view. The Native American world view is not portrayed only through the characterization and personification of Grandmother Willow, the song "Steady as the Beating Drum" (*Pocahontas*) with which we are introduced to the Powhatan people, also relates to their belief systems. It is written to resemble a Native American chant or prayer for a good harvest and a good life. The song is accompanied by a steady drum beat, music associated with Native Americans even though they have performed on a variety of instruments in a variety of styles, and then the rest of the melody is highly "Disneyfied". The song also focuses on "keep[ing] the ancient ways" (*Pocahontas*), instead of progress, revitalization and modernization.

Chief Powhatan, Pocahontas' father is presented as a great leader to a happy people. He is seen from a worm's-eye view, making him seem even bigger and stronger than how he is portrayed. Worm's-eye view is also known as seeing from a humbler position. Furthermore, he wears a headpiece made of eagle feathers, a coat made of hide and raccoon tails that shows

¹⁰ The songs are here referenced to by song title, this because it makes it easier to distinguish which song I am referring to. They can easily be found either on the album *Pocahontas: An Original Walt Disney Records Soundtrack* (1995) or you can search for the song title on YouTube. The movie is my source.

a bare and muscular breast, and a walking stick making him seem a very stereotypically "Indian", strong and powerful¹¹. Although the Powhatan people seem like a happy people, here, Disney has decided to portray them as no less angelic than the English seeing that they have just returned from a war, which they won, fighting other Native Americans. The Powhatan people are portrayed as a warrior people, and the first scenes where we get to know them concerns itself with a ceremony celebrating feats in war. The effect this has on the viewer is that we see the Powhatan people as just as much "a warrior people" as the English.

3.2.2 The Englishmen and Native American - English relations

Another interesting aspect of this movie is the portrayal of the Englishmen - the colonizers/settlers. Its interest lies in the fact that even though they, by songs and actions, portray Native Americans as "savages" and "barely even human", are portrayed by Disney as "the bad guys", which might not be the way you expected it to be portrayed. In this way, Disney does not challenge any ideas, but rather reverses the good/bad frame that hinders critical thinking. The initial portrayal of the Native Americans i.e. the Powhatan people the Englishmen will meet in "Virginia"/"Jamestown" is indisputably negative, they are mostly referred to as "savages" whom they want to kill and one of the crew members even impersonates a Native by sticking a feather in a mop. We are told of their intentions in "the new world" by the introductory song "The Virginia Company" (*Pocahontas*), they are sailing "For glory, God, and gold" and to be "rich and free" (*Pocahontas*), and somewhat mockingly added by Disney; "for so they have been told by the Virginia Company (*Pocahontas*). Most of the Englishmen are portrayed as bad guys, scoundrels and greedy, this is achieved through the use of colors, tone in songs (such as "The Virginia Company"), and camera angle.

However much the Englishmen in general are portrayed as bad guys, Governor Ratcliffe is portrayed as the ultimate villain. He is portrayed as an old, dark haired, greedy, and unsympathetic over-weight man dressed in "upper class clothes" not fit to work in. Additionally, he is the one who first presents us with the image of the Native Americans as "blood-thirsty savages" (*Pocahontas*).

A possible interpretation of the character Governor Ratcliffe can focus on the similarities between him and former President Andrew Jackson. Jackson was president in the 1830s and is described by Zinn in *A People's History of the United States* as: "[...] a land speculator, merchant, slave trader, and the most aggressive enemy of the Indians in early

¹¹ The effect made by characterizing Chief Powhatan in this manner can seem similar to how police have described African American men whom they have claimed they had to defend themselves against, and shoot, as in the Ferguson case in the US last year. The "Other", i.e., the "black" man is in this case portrayed as a "superhuman". For more information, see < <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/u-s-clears-darren-wilson-ferguson-case/>>.

American history" (127). Furthermore, Zinn states the Americanized version of history often portrays President Jackson as a great war hero, frontiersman, and man of the people while he was also an "[...] executioner of dissident soldiers, [and an] exterminator of Indians" (130). Zinn's work is a part of the serious rethinking scholars have been doing since the 1980s and it is out of this context that Alexie's work comes. Taking this interpretation into consideration one can say that the movie *Pocahontas*, by portraying Governor Ratcliffe as similar to Andrew Jackson, is taking part in the revisionist ideas. Lastly, it is this kind of thinking that can lead the students to a global and multicultural perspective.

The portrayal given of the Englishmen as "bad guys" in the beginning of the movie, includes Smith, who has not yet been convinced of the humanity and beauty of the Natives. Over all, we are painted a picture of the Englishmen as a cruel, greedy, unsympathetic and ignorant people as we learn what "a proper English greeting" (*Pocahontas*) means to Ratcliffe and how much fun and adventure they will have killing "Injuns". This is as much a stereotyping of colonial settlers and "Westerners" as the stereotypes pertaining to the Native Americans. The English are portrayed as simplistic Westerners who are only interested in wealth and other commodities.

The fact that Disney chose to make a movie concerning this particular time in history; the settlement of Englishmen named Jamestown in North America, is interesting, and it also puts a lot of pressure on them concerning how they portray it. Sadly, it is an oversimplified, romanticized, and mostly untrue narrative of how the relations between Native Americans and the English colonizers actually transpired. *Pocahontas* portrays both peoples as equally warlike and simplistic, but worst of all; they portray their relations as ending and peaceful. The English leave to go home since they were, at last, convinced there was no gold to be found, seemingly - never to return. Disney's portrayal of the relations is far from the truth, it does not include the entirety of the tobacco ordeal that transpired or the endless threats the Native Americans suffered by the English for their want of land, commodities, "secrets"/knowledge to grow crops, and other holy things.

John Smith is, from the onset, presented as a main character who is a brave and adventurous soldier and leader. In the introductory part of the movie, Smith is the focal point as the viewer follows behind him (portraying him as a leader), we see he is armed with a rifle, a sword, and a helmet. Thereafter, he hops a canon to board the ship while talking to his crew mates about how "you can't fight Indians without John Smith" (*Pocahontas*). During the song "Mine, Mine, Mine" (*Pocahontas*), which includes a pun on the word "mine" seeing that it is a possessive pronoun and refers to the verb "to mine", the Englishmen's' greed, selfishness and lack of respect for nature is further portrayed. During this song Smith is no longer included as the "we" that refers to the English, it is the beginning of a split in relation to the

character of Smith, as a special example/a special kind of Englishman compared to the others.

Smith, also, while exploring the surrounding woods when his fellow men are digging for gold and felling trees, says that he has been looking and longing for a land that "I can claim / A land I can tame" (*Pocahontas* "Mine, Mine, Mine"). At the same time, he sees the beauty of the surrounding landscape and is more interested in the fact that "Hundreds of dangers await and I don't plan to miss one" (*Pocahontas* "Mine, Mine, Mine") than he does mining and digging for gold. Also portrayed in this scene is Smith's ability to "mount" the wilderness as he climbs trees, cliffs, and swings in lianas while simultaneously deducing that Pocahontas is following him. She appears in the palm of his hand, both literally and figuratively, in the reflection of the water.

Seeing that Smith is not portrayed in the same manner as the other Englishmen are (seeing the movie as a whole), his character, as well as Pocahontas', is more and grows more complex during the movie. He agrees to talk to Pocahontas' father to restore peace and avoid war. Additionally, the fact that he is willing to stay with the Powhatan people shows that he has gained a more complex and positive attitude towards the Native Americans. The love relationship between Smith and Pocahontas also shows that he sees some similarities between them, such as their lust for adventure. In many ways, his lesson is the lesson the viewers gain as well - that fear of others and the prejudices he held were wrong.

Throughout the movie and especially during the song "Savages - Part 1" the Englishmen and Ratcliffe talk about the Native Americans as "dirty redskin devils", "filthy little heathens", and "their whole disgusting race is like a curse" emphasizing how inconvenient they are to the English. Ratcliffe states that "They're not like you and me which means they must be evil" (*Pocahontas* "Savages - Part 1") which portrays a fear of the unknown that can lead to Spivak's type of "Othering". The movie portrays the Englishmen's undoubtedly imperialistic attitude as negative. But then, as we move from the scene where Ratcliffe is motivating his men to go to war, we fade into the scene where Chief Powhatan is motivating his people to fight, in both these instances they have used pictures of fires to further emphasize the heated mood.

The way Disney has used this transition from Governor Ratcliffe to Chief Powhatan, again, situates the two as equals in terms of mindset, worldview and ideas. We are presented with the idea that the Native Americans are not any "better" than the Englishmen or the other way around. The Powhatan people start calling the Englishmen by disrespectful and racist terms, such as using terms like "milky hide" (*Pocahontas* "Savages - Part 2"), and characterizing them as an unsympathetic, heartless, greedy people. Kekata further states, almost in echo and response to Ratcliffe, that; "They're different from us, which means they can't be trusted" (*Pocahontas* "Savages - Part 2"). Then the same refrain that the Englishmen

sang; "savages, savages, barely even human" (*Pocahontas* "Savages - Part 2") is sung by the Powhatan people, followed by fast paced shots of both Natives and Englishmen yelling "savages!" at each other, again restating that they are equally "savage". The song portrays them as mirror images of each other, it shows how they project their own "Otherness" onto the "Other" people. The portrayal complicates the idea of race as the holder of the assigned traits to "Others".

The two animals Meeko and Flit are mostly used as comical elements, but they serve a greater purpose as well, as we see their, and especially gluttonous Meeko's relationship, with Ratcliffe's spoiled dog Percy develops. They serve as an allegory for the bond between the English and the Native Americans, they represent and portray how one can and should learn from each other and each other's differences. Meeko, in this case, represents the uncivilized "heathen" while Percy represents the "civilized" Englishmen who have come to unknown territory. What is most interesting is that the two animals' portrayals are far less static, flat and stereotypical than what is portrayed when it comes to the actual human's interactions. However, Percy and Meeko are also mirror images of each other, projecting their own "Otherness" onto the "Other".

Meeko and Percy meet before the English meet the Native Americans and they are seen arguing from the start, as Meeko has attained a love for the English "crackers" and is willing to do anything to get them. While Percy and Meeko are having a huge argument, Smith explains that "Once two sides want to fight, nothing can stop them" (*Pocahontas*). Here he uses the two animals as an example to show how the Powhatan people and the English are just like Meeko and Percy, they are equated and portrayed as equally barbaric, the only exception seems to be Smith and Pocahontas. Nevertheless, this is not reality and they are not equals in actions either, the Englishmen came to the Powhatan peoples' home and started digging it up, felling trees, and attacking them. The Powhatan people are responding to the Englishmen's actions, but the Englishmen are just out for gold and want to obtain it by any means necessary.

In the end, both Meeko and Percy stand beside the Native Americans when Pocahontas rescues Smith, which suggests that the Powhatan people are morally better than the Englishmen at this point. The two animals serve as an allegory throughout the entire movie. Lastly, when Smith is leaving, we see Meeko wearing Percy's posh collar while Percy is wearing an "Indian" cape and a headband with feathers in it. This is also a simplification of what it takes to be a Native American, this implies that all that is needed is the costume, which they normally wore at only regal, ceremonial, and other special occasions.

Edward S. Curtis, a well-known photographer of Native Americans, provided an extensive picture and sound series where he tried to capture Native American culture (late

1800s to early 1900s). His works have had a huge impact on the visual images of Native Americans in popular culture. Still, even though Curtis meant well and did great work in documenting the culture at that time, the pictures mostly seen by the public does not explain why the Natives in the pictures are dressed as they are, what tribe they are from or the circumstances surrounding the pictures (Edwardscurtis.com). Unfortunately, the spread of his pictures might have led to a simplification and stereotyping of Native Americans in popular culture.

When Powhatan has decided that Smith shall be executed at sunrise, Pocahontas goes to Grandmother Willow for council. She then understands that her dreams meant she should choose Smith. Afterwards, when the sun starts to rise, she realizes she has to try to save Smith. Grandmother Willow councils her to "Let the spirits of the Earth guide you! You know your path, child. Now follow it!" (*Pocahontas*). Pocahontas then departs to save Smith, as we see her running she sings a song to ask the spirits for help; "Eagle, help my feet to fly" (*Pocahontas* "Savages - Part 2") while the shadow she casts is that of an eagle, "Mountain, help my heart be great" (Ibid.), running over a hill top with a huge magical eagle flying above her, "Spirits of the Earth and Sky, please don't let it be too late" (Ibid.) where she is followed both by the magical eagle shadow and a horde of various animals. This is maybe one of the most romanticized, idealized and simplistic portrayals of the Native American belief system.

With a blood-red sunrise as background we see Chief Powhatan and Governor Ratcliffe getting ready for the coming battle, the blood-red sunrise has a dramatic and sincere effect on the scene. Pocahontas leaps onto Smith's body right before her father is going to execute him, this being one of the most mythologized moments in Pocahontas' history, stating: "Look around you. This is where the path of hatred has brought us. This is the path I choose, Father. What will yours be?" (*Pocahontas*) urging him one last time to make peace with the Englishmen. This portrays Pocahontas as the supreme female virtue and an "Indian Princess", a furthering of the stereotype. On the other hand, there is more complexity to this scene. Her actions are definitely considered courageous and as her father says, she shows: "a wisdom beyond her years" (*Pocahontas*). Chief Powhatan's answer to Pocahontas: "We have all come here with anger in our hearts... but she comes with courage and understanding. From this day forward, if there is to be more killing... it will not start with me" (*Pocahontas*), infuriates Ratcliffe, who now obviously is exposed as being only interested in gold and definitely not peace. Ratcliffe fires at Chief Powhatan, but Smith jumps in front of him and saves the day, like a true Disney Prince, which almost furthers the real John Smith's (over)dramatic and romanticized accounts of the events.

The end of the movie is also quite interesting in terms of Native American - English relations, and its accurate portrayal. After the English and Native Americans have now

seemingly become friends, and "no harm" seems to be done, the Englishmen leave for England and the Natives stay in America. This conclusion is the most simplistic, romanticized representation of them all. There are no hints to any further, in fact, decades and centuries of conflict between the settlers/colonizers and Natives. The movie does not portray all the epidemics left in the wake of the settlers that wiped out almost entire Native tribes. Neither, does it foreshadow the forcible removal of Natives from their homeland, nor complicate the tension between the two peoples. The movie *Pocahontas* does in many ways exhibit the characteristics that would deem it an instance of "Disneyfication"¹². By "Disneyfication", in this context, I mean that Disney has taken "[...] an approach to literature and history that simplifies and cleanses an object of unpleasantness" (Meamber 126). In this case the objects that have been cleansed of unpleasantness and simplified are the English-Native American relations, Native Americans, the events in colonial Jamestown, and the history that follows.

3.2.3 Complexity

Considering the movie as a whole, it is the general and first relations between Native Americans and Englishmen that is portrayed in the most simplified and romanticized manner, but the movie also portrays more complexity. The realizations the Englishmen (except for Ratcliffe) and the Powhatan warriors comes to in the end, after being convinced by Pocahontas' speech shows depth to the characters. Furthermore, when Pocahontas and John meet, they are immediately able to communicate easily with each other, they also seem to immediately fall in love, and their differences in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language, or age does not seem to concern them at all, one song and introduction to her world by Pocahontas is enough to work through all of these barriers. Pocahontas and Smith's encounters, although romantic, are more intricate than we might think, if we are able to overlook the obvious misrepresentations. They both struggle to understand each other's world and culture, but seem eager to try. The representation in the movie is, mostly, oversimplified, nostalgic and romanticized, but it also shows multilayered characters and issues.

The movie portrays a simplified version of the Native American belief systems, mostly by the use of Grandmother Willow as a character. Additionally, Pocahontas is definitely exoticized; a furthering of the stereotype "Indian Princess" seeing that she fits all the characteristics. Nevertheless, Pocahontas questions and discredits Smith in stating that they are "uncivilized" and that her people are "savages". Through the conversation before and in the song "Colors of the Wind" (*Pocahontas*) she describes and demonstrates several

¹² see Chapter 3.1 for a more detailed description of the term/concept.

characteristics involved in the process of "Othering"; "You think the only people who are people / Are people who look and think like you" (*Pocahontas* "Colors of the Wind"). She also concludes with the statement that; "whether we are white or copper-skinned / We need to sing with all the voices of the mountain / We need to paint with all the colors of the wind" (*Pocahontas* "Colors of the Wind"), signaling that she has understood that cooperation and cross-cultural understanding and respect is a necessity in society.

The use of Native American voice actors /actresses is a remedy to the furthering of stereotypes relating to Native Americans that the movie presents, but some credit is due to the choosing of Irene Bedard¹³ (Inupiat Eskimo/French Canadian/Cree) as the voice of Pocahontas, and Russell Means (Oglala/Lakota Sioux Indian, first national director of AIM) as Chief Powhatan's voice. In relation to teaching, this movie and the legends surrounding Pocahontas is so well imprinted in the collective imagination, popular culture and publicized through mass media that most of the students will (most likely) have an idea of who she is. Therefore, one can use clips, the overall plot, songs or books from the movie to show students examples of negative stereotypes, how they simplify and romanticize Native Americans, their culture and beliefs and how it also complicates things and contains a valid message.

To show the negative and positive aspects of *Pocahontas* in teaching will help the students move from a beginner level understanding of Native Americans and stereotypes to a more complex and advanced level of understanding. Even though the stereotypic representations are bad, they can be used to show the students why cross-cultural understanding, and respect and knowledge of other cultures are necessary. The students can work on finding the positive and negative aspects of the movie, explain why they have labeled them in the way that they have and work with them in a critical manner to see how one can overcome such negative stereotypes. The movie and the legends of Pocahontas also serves as a spring-board for working with Sherman Alexie since his work and portrayal of Native Americans is even more complex than the fairly one dimensional portrayals in *Pocahontas*.

¹³ Same actress for the character Suzy Song in *Smoke Signals*

4. Analysis of *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven and Smoke Signals*

In this chapter I aim to analyze the short story composite *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* to see how Native Americans are portrayed as well as look at how the book would function as a teaching tool for students at Upper Secondary School level 1. I will start by introducing the author of the book, namely Sherman Alexie. Then I will move on to discussing his use of humour in his writing as well as humour in Native American literature. Additionally, this will involve a discussion of how humour can be used as an educational tool. The third part of this chapter is an analysis of the short story *Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix Play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock*. The fourth part of this chapter is an analysis of another short story from "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" named *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*. I have chosen these two short stories for several purposes. Firstly, they are the ones the movie *Smoke Signals* is mostly based upon. Secondly, I think they are excellent short stories for teaching purposes which I will get into at a later point in the thesis.

The last part of this chapter will deal with the movie *Smoke Signals*, starting with a discussion on what it means to make a Native American movie. The discussion and analysis of the movie will be more brief than in-depth, this is because I want to highlight some elements in the movie using a comparative view in relation to "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*". Additionally, I will look at what effect a movie (as a visual text) has compared to a written narrative as to portraying Native Americans, and by extension how this effect reflects in teaching. Firstly, Sherman Alexie co-produced the movie and it is said to be the first "all Native" movie ever made by Natives that has received a major distribution deal. Secondly, because a lot of the stereotypes that are apparent in today's society stem from movies such as the "Western" and other Hollywood movies, this includes *Pocahontas*(1995).

Many scholars have written about Sherman Alexie's work and discussed it in a number of ways, in fact the wide range of analyses goes from a narratological focus to a feminist approach. My focus will lie on the analysis of the characters and how they are portrayed since the focus of my thesis is how Native Americans are portrayed in literature and movies. With this analysis I want to bring in more nuances to the stereotypical portrayal so often given of Native Americans. Additionally, I aim to unpack and air the already existing stereotypes so that their fallacies might be thoroughly considered. By doing so, I want the reader to have gained a more nuanced perception and idea about Native Americans' as a people, as well as their culture, history and literature. Additionally, I want to show how and why it is so

important for teachers to provide a nuanced and complex portrayal of Native Americans that will not reinforce or further the stereotypical portrayals that already exist.

4.1 Introducing Sherman Alexie

Sherman Alexie is a Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indian, born in 1966 and raised on the reservation. He became an "urban Indian" in 1994 when he moved out of the reservation, he now lives in Seattle with his family (Fallsapart.com). Alexie is a poet, performer, novelist, screenplay and short story writer. He has won several awards for his talents as a writer, amongst them he has won three awards for both of the works that will be presented in the thesis; the PEN/Hemingway Award: Best First Book of Fiction Citation for *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* (1993), as well as Lila-Wallace-Reader's Digest Writers' Award and Washington State Governor's Writers Award. For his work in relation to the movie *Smoke Signals* (1998): in 1998 the Sundance Film Festival Audience Award, in 1999 Christopher Award, and also in 1999 a nomination for the Independent Spirit Award For Best First Screenplay.

One can easily distinguish Alexie's personal life in his narratives. Apart from the fact that he is a Native American who has firsthand knowledge of Indian reservation life, he was a star player on the basketball team at Reardan High. He also struggled through a period of alcohol addiction as a young adult until the age of 23 when he chose to get sober because Hanging Loose Press wanted to publish his book; *The Business of Fancydancing*. In general, all of Alexie's work is strongly Native American; the problems his characters are faced with, the characters themselves and the settings of his books are all highly relatable to Native Americans. He portrays different aspects of being a Native American; a minority in the USA during the 1960s to the 90s. But Alexie does not only act as a storyteller, he is, also, a passionate advocate for the Native American peoples. In his work he presents and deals with historical, contemporary, cultural and Indigenous issues.

Alexie, in his struggle for Native Americans, takes up issues concerning assimilation and asks the question: "What is a Native American today?", which also involves the questions: "What happens to the culture, the traditions and the people in today's society?". What makes Alexie more than a Native American writing for and about Native Americans is that he has incorporated Euro-American culture, ideals and problems in his works as well. The result is literature that resonates throughout the world. His work is highly relatable not

just to Native Americans, not just to Indigenous peoples, not just to colonized peoples, but to everyone, including students at upper secondary school in Norway. Through his work one can see the necessity of a definition of a people that is not static, but highly fluid. Also apparent, is the necessity for a cultural and an individual identity constructed by its own and not from the outside by others.

Sherman Alexie's work is also known for its somewhat dark humour. His incorporation of irony and sarcasm to what is mostly sad tales of miserable characters is, as he says himself, the only way to survive. The short story *The Approximate Size of my Favorite Tumor* from "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" is an exquisite example of his dark and sarcastic humour. His, is a choice to *use* humour, not just insert, but really *use* and employ humour *as a tool* to overcome the devastating history that belongs to the Native Americans, and to overcome, surpass and flip stereotypical portrayals and ideas about Native Americans. In the next subchapter I will discuss Alexie's use of humour further and in more detail. Humour is an important part of teaching literature, and humour as a rhetorical tool inspires young adults to read. When it comes to building a bridge between the characters in the story and the students humour is a useful educational tool. Both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can stem from the use of humour in literature depending on the student's own sense of humour.

When it comes to genre, Alexie is known as a writer who often uses a mix of genres, which is very appropriate to Native American literary tradition. He accomplishes this by incorporating, furthering and fusing Native American oral and written literary traditions and Western/Euro-American literary traditions. His book *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* is known as a collection of short stories, but at the same time there are numerous characters that move throughout all of the stories, there are certain main characters that appear more often than others and there is an apparent connection between and in the plot of the stories. This means that the characters and stories are built incrementally, in other words by accumulation through different stories. The structure of his book is the reason I have referred to it as a short story composite rather than a short story collection.

4.2 Alexie's use of humour - Humour in Native American Literature

Humour has always been a central part of Native American culture, it is embedded in their belief systems as rituals and ceremonies they perform. The Diné (Navajo) even have a tradition called "First Laugh celebration", this ceremony consists of a feast and a give-away and is arranged to celebrate and honor a child's first laughter (Gruber 8). They often use humour to describe and express the differences between Euro-Americans and Natives, as well as use a lot of puns. The Natives' use and appreciation of humour definitely contests the

stereotypical "stoic Indian" who is so often characterized in Western literature and movies. The character Tonto is a great example of this, as Alexie has said himself: "Tonto is the one who started it all. He was the first really mainstream, pop culture Indian figure, the monosyllabic stoic Indian stereotype" (qtd. in Hoffman 5).

Gruber discusses the use of figures such as the trickster who are also meant to convey humour, satire, and irony to Native American literature in *Humor in Contemporary Native North American Literature*. Characters such as "ritual clowns" and "sacred fools" are apparent in Native American culture and function as a ridicule to established customs and upholders of tradition (Gruber 8). Gruber also states that a lot of Native American literature, contemporary or not, "may still evoke laughter at White expense, or serve as an intercultural mediator" (9).

Native Americans even used humour to "[...] teach by not teaching; they make us see by stumbling around" (Beck and Walters 1977, 307 qtd. in Gruber 9). One of the reasons why the stories in *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* is such an excellent educational tool is because it does "teach by not teaching", because humour can "teach by not teaching". A basic human principle is to seek what is pleasant and withdraw from what is unpleasant, and if learning can be made pleasurable as well as educational one has achieved something great. So, to work with a narrative and movie (*Smoke Signals*) that involves a lot of humorous events and dialogue is certainly advantageous. Furthermore, there is something specific about the use of humour in Native American literature, according to Gruber; "[...] the specific forms of humor and goals of that usage to Native writers seems to introduce something particular about humor in Native American literature" (Gruber 36) which is also important to teach the students.

As Alexie himself states in the short story *Imagining the Reservation* "Survival = Anger x Imagination" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 150). Both Silko and Allen concur, "[...] that humor is indispensable to Native cultural survival and that it constitutes a principal means to cope with life" (Gruber 10). Alexie has purposely used humour as a tool, not just to cope, himself, but to give other Native Americans a means of coping and dealing with what has happened as well as a path to the future. His use of humour in his literature is a tool as sharp as a knife and as effective as a gunshot to the head.

The use of humour in a historical aspect of Native American narratives is not only apparent and most interesting, but highly applicable to teaching. Richard Wagamese, an Ojibway poet wrote about humour in the Native American tradition: "[...] when people are laughing they're really listening hard to what you're saying. Guess the old people figured that was the best way to pass on learning. Once you stop to remember what it was you were laughing at you remember the whole story, and that's how the teachings were passed on" (qtd. in Gruber 10). By this and other examples from Natives, Gruber as well as I, are able to come to the conclusion that Native writers as well as teachers of English "rely on this mediating and

didactic capacity of humor, on its transcendence of the purely rational, to renegotiate images of Nativeness that are located in the readers' imaginations" (Gruber 10).

Even though a lot of the theorists talk about humour as a coping mechanism for what has happened to the Native American people since the start of the colonial period, and even though it might seem like this is what Alexie wants to accomplish with his use of humour in his writing, humour in Native American literature is a lot more than just a response to Euro-American actions against Natives. Humour is a part of their longstanding traditions, it is apparent in their ceremonies, rituals and traditions which then makes it evident in their literature as well. Rather, as Gruber argues, humour in Native American literature "[...] may be considered an intercultural instrument of mediation" (10). What Alexie accomplishes with his use of humour in *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* is a reversal of the negative stereotypes, an opening to a discussion about Nativeness, and some suggestions to the question of what an "urban Indian" is.

However, there is a warning to be heeded; the use of humour in Native American literature, which Thomas King stresses in *The Truth About Stories*, leaves Native American narratives potentially exposed to be considered only entertainment. The fear is that all the other elements that their literature is composed of and the messages that they want to get across disappears in a wave of laughter. The questions Thomas King discusses in his chapter *Let Me Entertain You* should be taken very seriously, as he asks "who is being entertainment?" and most importantly for whom (89). Native writers have used humour to re-present cultural stereotypes and by doing this they have started to break down the stereotypes created by Euro-Americans, colonizers and such that has lived on for so many centuries (Ryan qtd. in Gruber 11). The re-presentation and use of humour has contributed to the deconstruction of stereotypes, furthered cross-cultural understanding and intracultural bonding. King has concluded with something similar to Alexie's saying that; "[...] maybe entertainment isn't so bad. Maybe it's what you're left with when the only defense you have is a good story. Maybe entertainment is the story of survival" (89).

4.3 Analysis of Because my Father Always Said he Was the only Indian Who Saw Jimi Hendrix play 'The Star-Spangled Banner' at Woodstock¹⁴

This analysis will focus on characterization because the thesis concerns itself with how Native Americans are portrayed in literature and movies. In the short story composite; *The*

¹⁴ Hereafter, I refer to this short story as *"Because my Father..."* because of its lengthy title.

Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven, Alexie is ironizing how people see the world in absolutes and create dichotomies. He uses irony to break down these absolutes, logical fallacies and the fact that people tend to jump to conclusions and assumptions concerning the "others" they meet in everyday life. These kinds of generalizations and fallacies are what have furthered and developed the stereotyping that is apparent in today's society. In the short story composite, as well as in the movie, Alexie uses humour to deconstruct stereotypes and show a more nuanced way of being Native American and how their story is a story of survival.

"*Because my Father...*" is told by a first person narrator whom in this case is Victor, a character we have met in previous short stories in "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*". In "*Because my Father..*" there is no action at the time of the narration, one is only related some anecdotes from his and his father's life. In this short story the reader gets to know the familial bonds in Victor's family, the relationship between Victor's mother and father, Victor's relationship to his father, and Victor's father's relationship with alcohol. The scene that is especially in focus is the one where Victor's father went to see Jimi Hendrix play at the Woodstock festival and scenes from that time period. "*Because my Father...*" is related non-chronologically, and it has an episodic structure as well, seeing that we are related different anecdotes from Victor's life. Alexie, by using this writing technique, mimics memory, which is triggered by free association and not remembered in a chronological order. "*Because my Father...*" also sets the stage for *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona* as that story as well as this one revolves mostly around Victor and his father Arnold's relationship.

The story that is told is set both in the late 1960s to early 1970s as well as in present tense which is the 1990s, this because the story switches between present and past tense. The time period that is in the flashbacks is the 1960s to early 1970s which is often referred to as the "Swinging Sixties", a time period where there was a huge counterculture. It was called the counterculture because of its revolutionary ideas about social norms, the young population wanted more individual freedom concerning clothing, music, sexuality, drugs, formalities and schooling. In that time period there were also huge demonstrations against the Vietnam War which lasted from 1955 to 1975. The young population taking part in this counterculture were often called hippies and clung to the catchphrase "Make love, not war" (*Encyclopedia of the Sixties: A Decade of Culture and Counterculture*). This is relevant to the opening scene of "*Because my Father...*" where Victor's father, whose name is Arnold Joseph (we learn it in another short story from the short story composite) is participating in a demonstration against the Vietnam War. Victor, the narrator, tells us that his father was "dressed in bell-bottoms and flowered shirt, his hair in braids, with red peace symbols splashed across his face like war paint" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 24-25), which is extremely ironic in various ways.

Firstly, as the narrator points out; "During the sixties, my father was the perfect

hippie, since all the hippies were trying to be Indians. Because of that, how could anyone recognize that my father was trying to make a social statement?" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 24). The irony here is that Arnold Joseph, a Native American, has dressed in clothes that seem like traditional Native American clothing, with the longstanding Native tradition of having braided his hair, he looks just like the hippies because that was the style at the time. Secondly, Arnold had "red peace symbols splashed across his face *like war paint*" (own emphasis added *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 25), referring to the Native American tradition of warriors painting their faces before going into battle. Arnold's style is not recognized as Native either, because most of the hippies have painted symbols such as peace symbols or flowers on their faces as well. The outfit described is meant to serve as irony as well as a hyperbole in the sense that Arnold almost looks "too Native".

Further on in the story Victor relates that his father attacked a National guard private and was photographed with a rifle above his head right before doing so. Because of this we can question whether or not the narrator is hinting at, ironically, the fact that Arnold might not be so peaceful, like the hippies at the protest, but rather a warrior. The picture ends up having a wide circulation with different titles that went along with it, all of them implying different reasons for Arnold's behavior. This serves as a brilliant allegory for the power of the media, how the media corrupts reality in its own interest, and how the media has done this an uncountable number of times to Native Americans. The narrator tells the reader that not only did a lot of newspapers use the photograph, but the photographer won a Pulitzer Prize for the picture. Victor tells us "The editors capitalized on my father's Native American identity with other headlines like ONE WARRIOR AGAINST WAR and PEACEFUL GATHERING TURNS INTO NATIVE UPRISING" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 25). The event means the mass media took advantage of the fact that Arnold was Native American and played on that to portray Native Americans negatively while also furthering the stereotypical image of a Native American as a warrior. The word "warrior" itself might invoke a reader to think about Native Americans' roles and stereotypes such as the "stoic warrior".

At this point, it is necessary to briefly and concisely relate the importance of contemplating the practice and action of speaking for others. Linda Alcoff has written extensively on this topic in her essay; *The Problem of Speaking for Others* (1991). She states the importance of being aware of one's own writing; who one is addressing when writing, the position¹⁵ one is writing from, and the audience who receives it, because of the effect it has on one's writing. She discusses that every time you speak about anyone but yourself, you are indeed speaking for others and also states that by speaking about others you are implicitly

¹⁵ With position Alcoff is referring to the person's position in society. Whether it is in terms of class mobility, gender, ethnicity, race, age, economic situation, political or geographical situation.

speaking for others as well. According to Alcoff, it is a common practice to believe that one is privileged to speak for others as long as those others are in a less fortunate circumstance than yourself. Although she advises not to take this stand, she is also aware of the importance of speaking up for those who do not have the ability to do so themselves, therefore completely forfeiting this practice is also undesirable. The basic problem of speaking for others revolves around the fact that:

In both the practice of speaking for as well as the practice of speaking about others, I am engaging in the act of representing the other's needs, goals, situation, and in fact, *who they are*. I am representing them *as* such and such, or in post-structuralist terms, I am participating in the construction of their subject-positions (Alcoff 9).

The discussion I have just presented is relevant to the entirety of writing, involving mine, my students' as well as Sherman Alexie's. The solution suggested in her essay, is one I have tried to keep in mind in my own writing and one others should try to keep in mind as well. Instead of just speaking for or about others, one should try to "speak to" and "speak with" others, this results in a discourse instead of a monologue, in which; "the intellectual neither abnegates his or her discursive role nor presumes an authenticity of the oppressed but still allows for the possibility that the oppressed will produce a 'countersentence' that can then suggest a new historical narrative" (Alcoff 23). This is in all instances preferential to speaking for or about others, thereby withstanding from creating the subject one "speaks".

The problem of speaking for others is extremely important to consider when teaching literature since we risk reinforcing clichés and stereotyping if we do not have this in mind. It is important to reflect on how we can move past making assumptions about other people and thereby furthering stereotypes and "Othering"¹⁶. A solution then, can be that one is willing to listen, to speak with, or to speak to instead of speaking for and about, or that one finds a respectful way of speaking for others. This is something Alexie recognizes in his writing, it is apparent in "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" that he, too, sees moving beyond stereotypes as important, but complicated work.

Arnold is arrested for the assault on the National Guard private and charged with attempted murder, but he is "lucky" and the sentence is reduced to assault with a deadly weapon. The narrator tells us that "It was a high-profile case" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 25) which meant that "my father was used as an example" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 25). The narrative makes you wonder what kind of example he was used as. Firstly, it can refer to an example of "yet another blood-thirsty savage", a reinforcement of the stereotype. Secondly, it could be seen as an example of the government's power over Native

¹⁶ See footnote 2 on Spivak in Chapter 2.

Americans/minorities mirroring their status as a colonized people or thirdly an example of the consequences to those who try to defy or rebel against this authority. When Arnold gets out of jail he hitchhikes to Woodstock to see Jimi Hendrix perform "The Star-Spangled Banner", to which Arnold responded: "After all the shit I'd been through, [...] I figured Jimi must have known I was there in the crowd to play something like that. It was exactly how I felt" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 26). "The Star-Spangled Banner", America's national anthem, was played as an instrumental version by Hendrix at the 1969 Woodstock festival, which means that there were no lyrics it was only a melody played really loud. There has been a discussion around Hendrix's motivation to play the national anthem the way he did, and a lot of people found it to resemble the sounds of bombing and rockets glaring, reminding people of the sounds of war, making his performance itself a protest against the Vietnam War (Contreras). The song being a political act of resistance is probably what Arnold meant when he made the statement about being able to relate to what Jimi was playing. Arnold is in this sense a reversal of a "blood-thirsty savage" and an "Indian warrior" because in this situation he promotes peace.

The fact that the American National Anthem "The Star-Spangled Banner" is a part of this short story is more than ironic. The song itself has only been America's national anthem since 1931 and was written as a poem by Francis Scott Key after the War of 1812 between Great Britain and the United States where Fort McHenry was attacked (Smithsonian "The Star-Spangled Banner"). Later a melody from Great Britain was added to the poem and so it became a song (Smithsonian "The Star-Spangled Banner : The Melody"). What I feel, and what has been heavily discussed, is the problem with using this song as a national anthem is that it might only appeal to Euro-Americans. It has been pointed out that the writer was a slave owner, and that the president who decided it was to be the national anthem was known to many as a racist (Garcia; Gelb). Additionally, it is doubtful that many people singing the national anthem are aware of this connection.

Concerning Native Americans as a minority, the problem of this song is in the last stanza where the lyrics read:

Blest with vict'ry and peace, may the heav'n rescued land / Praise the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation! / Then conquer we must when our cause it is just / And this be our motto - 'In God is our trust.' / And the star-spangled banner in triumph shall wave / O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave (Smithsonian "The Lyrics").

The lyrics state that the conquering of the Native Americans (and the British) was a just act which they celebrate by flying the "'Star-Spangled banner' in *triumph* over the land of the free and the home of the brave". The lyrics and their implicit opinions and ideas do not correspond to Native Americans' cultural and political ideas. The song implies that everyone is Christian

or believes in God, and although a certain amount of Native Americans converted to Christianity and/or Catholicism a lot of them did not. Others merged the two belief systems, all of these elements are something the song does not reflect. Secondly, seeing that they were forced to live on reservations from the 1980s it certainly has not always been "the land of the *free*"¹⁷. The implications in line one where America is called the "heav'n rescued land" stating that the land needed to be rescued in the first place, and secondly, that it was "heaven-rescued" and not conquered and forcibly taken are also far from any truth.

Jimi Hendrix's version of "The Star-Spangled Banner" had the same effect on Victor as to many others at Woodstock. The narrator tells us that his father played his Jimi Hendrix tape "Over and over, the house filled with the rockets' red glare and the bombs bursting in air" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 26) which in fact is a case of intertextuality seeing that this is a line in the song itself; "And the rockets's red glare, the bombs bursting in air" (Smithsonian "The Lyrics"). As the narrator tells us more about his father and the relationship he developed towards this song and Jimi Hendrix we can see an emergence of a ritualistic pattern in his behavior. The ritualism is also hinted at by the author's choice of words in the story: "Jimi Hendrix and my father became drinking buddies [...] Here's how the *ceremony* worked:" (own emphasis added "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 26).

Native American spirituality involves the performance of rituals as well as ceremonies. In *Traditional Native Culture and Resilience* it is stated that: "A strong ceremonial practice was interwoven into the cycle of seasons" (HeavyRunner), and that "Ceremonies marked important times in our people's lives, such as children's naming ceremonies or puberty rites" (HeavyRunner). This is similar to Western traditions of child christening, baptism, confirmation, and so on. These types of rituals are commonly performed to honor or celebrate a person or an event. In Native American's traditions it is also common for such ceremonies to be meant to have a healing effect. Whether or not the ceremony or ritual includes dancing, feasts, costumes, or other paraphernalia it is considered sacred in both Native American as well as Western tradition. This has implications for the importance of Victor relating to the reader his father's actions as ceremonial or ritualistic.

Victor lists a number of acts which together form the ceremony performed by him, his father and "Jimi". This is one of the ways in which Alexie creates a confluence of the old tribal rituals, the ceremony and the new and more contemporary life that some Native Americans lead. Here there is still a ceremony being performed, a ritual taking place, only it is Victor's dad listening to Jimi Hendrix's song while weeping at the kitchen table with Victor lying at his father's feet. At the same time and in some ways, the ritualism is also a mockery

¹⁷ Seeing that both Native Americans and African Americans are involved in a long history of being enslaved by the Euro-Americans, "the land of the *free*" has lacked appeal to a lot of citizens of the U.S.

of Arnold. By Alexie choosing to present his awful drinking habits as a ritualistic ceremony, something that is supposed to be sacred, to honor traditions, celebrate moments, and ask for important things such as a good harvest or a mild winter, he is ridiculing how important drinking has become to Arnold. He exaggerates Arnold's behavior as a "drunkard" to the point where it is a hyperbole of irony.

On the other hand, the ritual represents, to Victor at least, an important time in his life where he had the chance to bond with his father. In this way, it is a ritual performed to honor and cherish their father-son relationship. Victor explains how his father acts and it is by his representation of the story, by his storytelling, that we get to know about his parents and their relationship to each other and to alcohol. Although this does not seem like any kind of idyllic father-son bonding it is still a positive and meaningful memory for Victor because he felt safe and loved when his father's body odor "covered him like a blanket" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 26). Additionally, Victor tells us that: "The days after, my father would feel so guilty that he would tell me stories as a means of apology" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 26). Victor loves hearing his father tell stories, and so this is another aspect of the ritual which provides positive associations for Victor, this is also how Victor learns about his parents' past.

In *"Because my Father..."* it is very apparent that Alexie is trying to portray a stereotypical drunk Indian or the amount of alcohol abuse that is evident in some Native American societies, since we are narrated a number of scenes related to alcohol use/abuse. However, Alexie is, also, in the business of pushing the "drunk Indian" stereotype towards absurdity. Firstly, the scene where Victor tells the reader about his father's ceremony involving alcohol and the Jimi Hendrix tape. Secondly, his mother told him about how they would go to parties and get drunk, and then leave to "go home and make love" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 27). Her relationship to this event does not seem healthy to me, as she says that: "[...] there must have been a hundred times he passed out on top of me. We'd be right in the middle of it, he'd say *I love you*, his eyes would roll backwards, and then out went his lights. It sounds strange, I know, but those were good times" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 27). Both these scenes are tragic, but nonetheless funny because they are hyperboles of stereotypes of Indians. These kinds of rituals they perform worships and honors their family bonds, the bonds they have with the community, and their relationships to themselves.

The scene that takes place when Victor and Arnold drive through a blizzard is trying to portray some Native Americans' relationship to the US and war. It starts out with a complaint by Victor about his generation of Native Americans not having had the opportunity to fight any "real war" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 28) while "The first Indians had Custer to fight. My great-grandfather had World War I, and my grandfather had World War II, you had Vietnam. All I have is video games" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 28). Firstly, we are

introduced to an extremely known figure in Native American as well as American history, namely George Armstrong Custer, a General who lived during the mid to late 1800s. He is one of the most controversial figures in American history, being presented as both a terrible war lord whose favorite pastime was to kill Native Americans and as a war hero devoted, dedicated and a martyr for his country. Custer died in one of the most controversial battles of Native American history, namely the Battle of the Little Bighorn (or Battle of the Greasy Grass)¹⁸ which was fought between Custer's 7th cavalry and the Sioux and Cheyenne Indians. Jennings expresses a view shared by many Native peoples in *Founders of America*, where she describes this event in an unfavorable manner in regards to Custer's character:

Custer was killed while on the way to perpetrate another in the series of his own massacres already on record, that he was bullheadedly disregarding warnings and defying orders, that the Indians who wiped out his troop did so in defense of their families, and that if the roles had been reversed the defenders would have been eulogized as heroes (377).

Furthermore, the fact that Victor says that all he has done is play video games is a reflection on modern society, and the differences that has emerged since the development of electronics. This is something that students most likely will be able to relate to, and a difference that the Native American peoples might see clearer than Westernized peoples seeing that they had not developed as much in comparison in terms of technological advancements. A contributing factor is also the focus on ecology in the Native American lifestyle. Additionally, many of the Native American societies did value warrior attributes and feats in war were often celebrated. The irony here is that Victor's father demonstrated against war while his son is willingly playing war in a video game. What is odd about this is the fact that Victor portrays this as something negative while it should be something positive in the sense that one should feel lucky to live in an age without warfare or not having to participate in war. An opinion that Arnold shares, but additionally he asks Victor: "[...] why the hell would you want to fight a war for this country? It's been trying to kill Indians since the very beginning" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 29) which reflects some Native Americans understandable lack of patriotism to the US. An important note is that other Native peoples are quite patriotic and that the level of patriotism in the Euro-American majority is also varied.

Later in the story we meet an instance of generational difference between Arnold and Victor. Arnold cherished the moment when he saw Jimi Hendrix play "The Star-Spangled Banner" so much that he listened to the song for ages afterwards, creating the ritual mentioned earlier. While Victor admits that even though he dreams Jimi Hendrix and his father at

¹⁸ Also commonly known as "Custer's Last Stand".

Woodstock in the rain, he cannot imagine: "[...] what it meant to my father to be the only Indian who saw Jimi Hendrix play at Woodstock" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 31). Arnold had always been very insistent on the fact that he was the only Native American person there, to which even Victor says: "Most likely there were hundreds but my father thought he was the only one" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 31). The narrator's reflections on what counts as true and Arnold's reflection on what counts as true does not seem to be literal facts, but rather the idea of something or the personal and individual memory of an event. In the short story composite there are several instances where memory is presented in this manner; "Somehow my father's memories of my mother grew more beautiful as their relationship grew more hostile" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 27), and where Victor describes three different recollections of the scene where Arnold left (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 34).

Arnold seems to love music and it is through him that the reader is introduced to a more nuanced or modern way of being Native American. Even though he is in some ways a stereotypical "drunk Indian" there are several ways where the confluence of the Native American culture and the Euro-American culture are apparent in the characterization of Arnold. An example might be Arnold's somewhat scolding speech to Victor where he says that Victor's generation does not know anything about romance or music; "You all have been spoiled by those drums. Hell son, even an Indian needs a piano or guitar or saxophone now and again" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 30). Arnold's comment about the drums is a reference to Native American culture where the use of drums was the most common instrument in musical arrangements. Here Arnold is re-presenting Native American music saying that a convergence of Euro-American instruments and musical traditions along with Native American traditions are necessary and valuable.

4.3.1 Character analyses

4.3.1.1 Jimi Hendrix

There are several important elements surrounding the character Jimi Hendrix in the story, first of all he is a real person that lived from 1942 to 1970 and was an American guitarist, singer and songwriter. In the short story he is at Woodstock when Victor's father is and he is performing his version of "The Star-Spangled Banner". Throughout the story Jimi Hendrix and his version of this song is mentioned a considerable amount of times, to such an extent and in such a way that he and his song are personified in the story. The real Jimi Hendrix almost does not exist in the story, the personified version and the song however are

ever-present. The first mention of him is when Victor relates that "Jimi Hendrix and my father became drinking buddies. Jimi Hendrix waited for my father to come home after a long night of drinking" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 26). In this sense, the narrator is not talking about the real Jimi Hendrix since we can assume that he is not friends with Victor's father or that he sat at their house waiting for him either. The personification of J. Hendrix means that Arnold has created some kind of personal "Jimi Hendrix" that he has developed a strong connection to after he saw the real Hendrix perform at the Woodstock festival. In this case, the narrator is also referencing the song when he says "Jimi Hendrix" which is apparent in the section where the narrator explains the ceremony that his father developed.

This personification is furthered throughout the whole short story. Firstly, "Jimi" is, implicitly, the one who saves them from a car-crash or driving off of the road. "Jimi" is, in this context, the catalyst who enables Victor and his father to communicate with each other and how Victor is able to connect with Arnold. Secondly, the song is often a catalyst that forces and reinforces Arnold and Victor's relationship. Lastly, "Jimi" and his music is such a strong presence in the story that Arlene and Arnold's fights often start because of "Jimi" and it allegedly ends their marriage. The fact that Arnold calls "Jimi" his hero is furthered by the narrator equating Jimi with Jesus Christ, who is known as the savior in Christianity. The narrator's reference to Jesus Christ is a symbol of Christianity and syncretism in relation to Native American history and culture and it shows the kind of double-consciousness DuBois talks about.

The assimilation period in Native history as well as first contact with Europeans both led to a lot of Native Americans either converting to Christianity or other religions or implementing elements of these religions within their own belief system. Syncretism was and is widespread amongst Native Americans, a fact which some do not condone while others respect the choice (Pena). This indirect way of portraying syncretism in Native American culture is typical of Alexie's use of subtle implications towards historical incidents seeing as he does it as subtly in other stories concerning similar topics¹⁹.

Personification is a term from Western literary tradition involving ascribing human traits such as acting, thinking and feeling to an inhuman object or similar (Wheeler). From a Native American perspective one can see the similarities between this kind of personification and their belief in spirits, spirit beings and through the difference in belief systems. Where they ascribe objects human characteristics Western culture would consider these objects inhuman, an example of such would be a plant. Therefore, in a Native American perspective one can say that Jimi Hendrix and his music, as a presence in the story, acts as a spirit or a

¹⁹ In the short story composite there are several remarks on historical events, examples of these are found in the short stories; *Crazy Horse Dreams*, especially in *The Trial of Thomas Builds-the-Fire*, and *Indian Education* concerns itself with the assimilation process initiated by the U.S government.

spirit being rather than an instance of personification. What this presence or spirit represents in the story in regards to the character Arnold can be American popular culture.

4.3.1.2 Identity

The aforementioned relationship between "Jimi", Jimi's music and Victor's father is so strong that it is transmitted over to his son. Victor develops a connection to and reverence for Jimi; "It's amazing to realize I was alive, breathing and wetting my bed, when Jimi was alive and breaking guitars" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 31). Victor fills the void created by his father's absence by listening to music. This is another way that "music has powerful medicine" (Alexie "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 28), and a way that the presence of "Jimi" follows Victor even though his father has left. However, Victor likes to listen to a blues musician named Robert Johnson as well as Jimi Hendrix. Johnson is how Victor says he understood what his father felt, "[...] even if he [Johnson] was black at the beginning of the twentieth [century]" ("*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" 35). Robert Johnson and Jimi Hendrix are both elementary in Victor and Arnold's creation of self. They help them through the struggle to find their own identity at a time when it is difficult for them to do so. Both seem to have trouble with either accepting, rejecting or infusing the Native American culture and tradition with the Euro-American culture and tradition.

It is important to remember that this is definitely not a question only Native Americans ask themselves, it is a question that has been asked from time immemorial. This is further explored by Lynd in her book *On Shame and the Search for Identity*; "In every age men ask in some form the questions: Who am I? Where do I belong? [...]" (13), meaning that this type of "search for oneself" is just as apparent in Western culture as it is in Native American or any other culture. The topic of creating one's own identity and struggling to choose and learn who one really is could easily be relatable to students at upper secondary school, seeing that this is a typical period of life where this type of "identity crisis" or search for one's own identity will occur.

Lynd discusses another problem or question concerning one's own identity, which is relatable to the Native American characters in Alexie's book, students and people in general; "This search for identity, [...] is a social as well as an individual problem. The kind of answer one gives to the question Who am I? depends in part upon how one answers the question What is this society - and this world - in which I live?" (14-15). Alexie's characters' struggle to decide who they are, is, in this sense, also an allegory for the Native communities' struggle to ascertain what they are in a world so different from their ancestors' world. The struggle relates to the problems discussed in Chapter 2.3 about community, the feeling and

interconnections of community and the growing lack of this feeling in contemporary Native American societies. The identity struggles which questions individual identity, as well as a split in the individual identity are the basis for Du Bois' discussion of "the double-consciousness".

Seeing that all of the characters in these two short stories are hyperboles of Native American stereotypes created by Euro-Americans, one could easily state that they are all suffering from internalized colonization. By internalized colonization, I mean that they have taken on the characteristics of the stereotypic portrayals of different types of being Native. By doing so, they have themselves started to believe that they have all the traits the Euro-Americans ascribed to them when creating the stereotypes. Internalized colonization can be linked to DuBois' double-consciousness in the sense that what a person experiencing internalized colonization might feel is what DuBois described as: "[...] always looking at oneself through the eyes of others [...]" (8).

DuBois suggests, as a solution to the problem of a double-consciousness, "[...] to merge his double self into a better and truer self" (9) in which neither his African nor his American identity or consciousnesses are lost, but rather for the two to exist in one self²⁰. Alexie also suggests this in "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*", that the Native and the American cultures and traditions apparent in the characters as well as in the society/community the characters live in, can both exist at the same time or rather exist as one community or self. We can see in these characters both a defiance to and an incorporation of Euro-American/mainstream American culture, values and ideals.

There is a notable significance to Alexie choosing to use the two musicians Jimi Hendrix and Robert Johnson as two important, but non-existent characters in the story. Both Hendrix and Johnson are black artists at a time in the US when African Americans did not have a lot of privilege. They, too, were from a minority that had a troubling relationship to the US. They might have felt and had to deal with a lot of the same issues Native Americans went through. Jim Hendrix, was at that time, according to Hafen in *Rock and Roll, Redskins, and Blues in Sherman Alexie's Work*, "[...] a rock and roll subversive icon colliding with national icon at a legendary gathering of mostly indistinguishable nonconformists in the chaos of the late 1960s" (72). In this sense, Arnold worshipping Hendrix can be seen as an act of resistance towards Americanism or assimilation of Native Americans into Euro-American and mainstream culture. Victor's worship of Robert Johnson, additionally to Jimi Hendrix, can be interpreted in the same manner.

But on the other hand, Arnold's focus and addiction to the spirit and music of Jimi

²⁰ Even though DuBois refers to African Americans in his text it can also be relatable to Native Americans seeing that they too are a minority in the Euro-American society in the U.S.

Hendrix, a guitar or guitar playing, his motorcycle, and beer, can be seen to represent the American popular culture. Few things that Arnold does are distinctly native or portray him as a Native American except from being an exaggerated drunk. Other than the fact that the narrator makes a lot of comparisons between what "white people" do and what "Indians" do. Arnold does not have any special characteristics that portray him as a Native American except for his exterior appearance. Additionally, what would these characteristics be? At the same time as the protests against the Vietnam War were, the American Indian Movement (AIM) started. AIM is a group that champions the rights of Native Americans, what is interesting about this is that Arnold does not involve himself in AIM, but rather protests the Vietnam War. Arnold's actions furthers the idea that Arnold is not interested in bettering the situation of Native Americans, but rather leans towards identifying with the majority of Americans. Therefore, the title and Arnold's insistence on being the "only Indian who saw Jimi Hendrix play 'The Star-Spangled Banner'" is quite ironic in itself.

Although, it is important to note that Arnold seems bitter over Native American history and seems to feel oppressed by a colonial power. These feelings are expressed in his statement: "[...] Why the hell would you want to fight a war for this country? It's been trying to kill Indians since the very beginning" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 29). Consequently, the title can also be a symbol for the fact that his father actually felt like he was alone or lonesome. The narrator tells us that: "[...] maybe he wasn't the only Indian there. Most likely, there were hundreds but my father thought he was the only one," (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 31) and Arlene says that: "[...] Your father likes being alone more than he likes being with other people. Even me and you" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 34) which would suggest that he is what you call a "loner".

4.3.1.3 Memory versus Reality

As mentioned in the beginning of this analysis "*Because my Father...*" is related non-chronologically, with an episodic structure. Alexie, by using this writing technique, mimics memory, which is triggered by free association and not remembered in a chronological order. This is very different from the narrative order in *Pocahontas*, which is related chronologically and in concord with the usual Hollywood/Disney movie structure. This way the style of narration itself also reflects what Arnold and Victor relate to the reader about memory and reality. Arnold says: "What's real? I ain't interested in what's real. I'm interested in how things should be" (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...* 33), to which Victor explains that: "My father's mind always worked that way. If you don't like the things you remember, then all you have to do is change the memories. Instead of remembering the bad things, remember what happened

immediately before. That's what I learned from my father" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 33-34). Arnold and Victor seem to have a want to only remember the good and forget the bad. Arnold's memories also seem to increase the goodness of his relationships with time and by remembering them, as mentioned earlier in this chapter concerning Arnold's memories of Arlene. To only want to remember what is good and forget the bad is normal and easily relatable to students and other non-Native readers, but this also has a profound effect on the narrative that we are given. How actions, conversations and memories are related as well as what is related, is dependent upon the stories' and the storytellers' idea of time. Nonetheless, this works both ways, the stories' and the storytellers' idea of time has an equal effect on how and what is narrated.

At one point in the story we are told that Arnold's, Victor's and Arlene's perception of Arnold leaving the family are different, this supports the fact that we all create our own reality and that memory serves "its master" i.e. the person who holds the memory. What this means is that reality is, at the least, subjective, and that memory is more related to creativity or imagination than reality. The purpose of the story or writer for portraying memory and reality in this way is, firstly, because that is how it is mostly perceived in general. Secondly, because that makes reality alterable. Alexie is flipping, deconstructing, and defusing the stereotypic portrayals of Native Americans that have existed as their reality for so long, he is remembering the past so that Natives do not see only defeat and monstrosities, but also their long history of *survival*.

There are several instances of intertextuality in *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."*. Some of these instances are apparent in the two short stories I am discussing in this thesis other instances of intertextuality run throughout the short story composite or occur between Alexie's long list of works. An example of intertextuality between the two stories discussed in this thesis is found in *"Because my Father..."* when Victor talks about good and bad memories and how they are equal to: "Plus and Minus. Add and subtract. It comes out just about even" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 31). The previous quote is connected to *"This is What it Means..."* by the scene after Victor has searched his father's trailer he also: "[...] searched his mind for memories of his father, found the good ones, found a few bad ones, added it all up, and smiled" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 69).

Additionally, several of the same themes, and political and historical statements are made throughout *"This is What it Means..."* that are also made in *"Because my Father..."*. When Victor and his father talk about war and "dying for your country" is an example of this, the scene is referenced to earlier in this chapter, but there is also a mention with the same kind of implicit meaning in *"This is What it Means..."*: Thomas is talking about his dead father: "My father, he died on Okinawa in World War II, died fighting for this country, which had

tried to kill him for years" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 73). These are just several other instances of intertextuality in the short story composite. The effect that the use of intertextuality, and the repetitive use of the same characters in the different stories, has is that it creates a sense of time as cyclical. The idea of time as cyclical and its relevance to Native American culture is further described in Chapter 2.3. This type of storytelling re-inscribes Native American traditions.

4.3.1.4 Arlene

Arlene, Victor's mother leans towards a traditional Native American lifestyle and culture. Arnold tells us that she was "[...] the best traditional dancer in the world" (*"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 33) and Victor narrates that: "She was a champion traditional dancer when she was younger" (33). Additionally, when Arnold has left the family Arlene starts dancing again. The symbolism in her choosing to start dancing again is that Arnold is not influencing her anymore and that she is able to reclaim her own identity, and what she seems to want is follow a more Native American lifestyle.

Arnold tells Victor about when he met Arlene, the description of Arlene that Arnold gives is truly Native American in its own sense. He portrays Arlene as a beautiful woman and most importantly he relates her beauty to nature; "I figured she was the kind of woman who could make buffalo walk on up to her and give up their lives. She wouldn't have needed to hunt. Every time we went walking, birds would follow us around. Hell, tumbleweeds would follow us around" (27). I see it as unlikely that a Euro-American would ever have explained a beautiful woman in this way. There are often instances where women's beauty are related or compared to the beauty of nature, in both Euro-American literary traditions and Native American traditions, but the specific use of the buffalo makes this portrayal different from a Euro-American one. And there are several other instances of this type of portrayal of Native American women throughout the short story composite²¹.

Furthermore, when Arnold is hurt in a motorcycle accident Arlene sits by his bedside at the hospital and sings "[...] Indian tunes under her breath" (33), which implies that Arnold needs some part of Native American culture to survive. Also, that Native American culture has a healing effect on him and that Arlene represents that influx. Although one might say that these two examples are a result of the Native American influences apparent in the short story composite, this is another one of Alexie's hyperboles. In the instance of Arlene it is the "Indian Princess" or the portrayal of Native American women as naturally beautiful, in touch or almost at one with nature, with great healing powers and almost to the degree of being

²¹ For other examples see *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* pages 40 and 202.

otherworldly that is exaggerated and played on by Alexie.

This is the stereotype that is portrayed in *Pocahontas*. Arnold's description of Arlene is not a stark contrast to how one could describe Pocahontas, seeing that she is portrayed as being "at one with nature" and is regularly followed by animals. The portrayal of Arlene's healing skills are also similar to how Pocahontas puts Willow's bark on Smith's chest after he is wounded. Alexie, by his exaggerations is able to deconstruct, mock and ridicule the stereotype created by Euro-Americans (and portrayed in *Pocahontas*) to a point where it is no longer valid.

4.3.1.5 Victor

Victor, is set between these two somewhat distinct identities of Arnold and Arlene, but he represents the confluence of these two identities, it is his story that is the story of survival in "*Because my Father...*". He seems to be aware of this himself as he states that: "I was born a goofy reservation mixed drink [...]" (27). Victor, as the narrator, is the one who portrays the differences between Native American and Euro-American life and culture. He sees the differences and the similarities but seems to have inherited some of his father's bitterness towards Euro-Americans as well. An example of this is when the narrator says; "When an Indian marriage starts to fall apart, it's even more destructive and painful than usual" (32). Here the wording is quite interesting as well, the fact that he compares an "Indian marriage" to the "usual", which in my interpretation is a reference to a Euro-American marriage, means that he thinks of Native Americans as something unusual which is easily linked to Spivak's idea of the "Other".

Furthermore, the narrator also mentions assimilation and compares how "white" fathers leave their children to how "Indians" do it; "On a reservation, Indian men who abandon their children are treated worse than white fathers who do the same thing" (34), he even explains why it is this way: "It's because white men have been doing that forever and Indian men have just learned how" (34). He further blames this difference on assimilation (34), ironically implying that "white men" are the ones who have taught Native Americans to do so. Another aspect of this is that it seems from the narrator's statement that Native Americans are subject to higher expectations than Euro-Americans, because they are being judged by another larger group, concurring with DuBois' idea of the double consciousness presented earlier. Victor mentions assimilation like it is of little importance, but in reality it has a lot of historical implications and definitely negative associations from a Native American perspective. Alexie's use of these subtle references shows that "*The Lone-Ranger*

and Tonto..." carries the weight of Native American as well as colonial history²².

All of these characterizations portray different ways of being Native American and different Native American identities. It also portrays Native Americans' struggle as a minority, but also a general struggle in the search for an identity, for history and tradition. The strong influences of Euro-American culture to the reservation and from those who leave the reservation is shown through the character of Arnold. While Victor seems skeptical towards Euro-Americans and Arlene embraces a more traditional Native American lifestyle. As a result, "*Because my Father...*" teaches survival, Alexie is in the business of re-membering the past so as to bridge the gap created by what they have lost, which reconnects time to aspect, past and present.

In this short story we are presented to Alexie's world, which is, according to Lincoln in *Speak Like Singing*, "[...] the post-holocaustal present, dirty with reality, and an insurgent chip-on-the-shoulder blues" (283)²³. Alexie's short stories work as revisionist history "from an insurgent Indian perspective" (Lincoln 284), he reverses dichotomies, deconstructs tribal heroism, and re-members, re-imagines Native American history. His use of humour as a rhetorical tool is exceptional in the sense that it "[...] exorcize[s] hurt through anger, ridicule[s] ignorance through parody and sarcasm, satirizes wrong by debunking faux heroes, from Columbus's accident, to Cortés's plunder, to Custer's folly, the 3 C's of the West" (Lincoln 283). His "Red humour" and use of satire reveals racism, apathy, ignorance, and injustice (Lincoln 278). All of these elements make "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" a great work to use in teaching, because it can be used to teach both literary terms, genres and styles as well as American history and cultural issues.

4.4 Analysis of *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*²⁴

"*This is What it Means...*" is a furthering of "*Because my Father...*" seeing that the story is about Victor and includes Arnold and Arlene as well. Therefore, this analysis will build on the characterizations described and discussed in the previous chapter, keeping in mind that there is a substantial time gap between "*Because my Father...*" and "*This is What it*

²² The mentioning of a historical event in a subtle manner was earlier discussed in Chapter 4.3.1.1 and referred to in footnote 17.

²³ A longer discussion might have concerned itself with the discussion on how some people talk about and refer to events in Native American history as a holocaust, genocide and other similar terms. The use of these terms on Native American history is a controversial discussion with varying opinions on whether or not it is right. The scholars who feel that the use of these terms are appropriate state that some events in Native history are just as severe as the events termed holocaust in reference to the second World War. Those who are opposed focus on the differences they feel are too grave to legitimize the use of these terms on Native history.

²⁴ Hereafter, I refer to this short story as "*This is What it Means...*" because of its lengthy title.

Means...". The reader is not informed as to the age of Victor or to the year the story is set in, but we understand that Victor has aged significantly being in, maybe, his early to mid 20s. "*This is What it Means...*" is written using the same episodic structure and anecdotal references, mostly in the same way as "*Because my Father...*"²⁵. However, significant changes have been made; Alexie has changed the point of view from Victor as the first person narrator to him being the focus of a third person narrator. There is also a lot more dialogue and action in the plot than in "*This is What it Means...*".

4.4.1 Narrative Perspective

In the beginning, the narrator focuses on portraying the poverty on the reservation, stating that: "Victor didn't have money. Who does have money on a reservation, except the cigarette and fireworks salespeople?" (59). The narrator also tells us that: "Victor's mother was just as poor as he was [...]" (59-60). This is a portrayal of how contemporary Native Americans struggle with low incomes, unemployment and living in poverty.

Victor needs money to claim his father's remains and his inheritance, so he calls the Tribal Council for help. The Tribal Council are elected tribal members who maintain the government-to-government relationships, but their foremost concern is to "respond to the needs and issues of tribal membership" (cdatribe-nsn.gov). We learn that the government (i.e. the Tribal Council) is, financially, not doing any better than the tribal members; "Now, Victor,' the council said. 'You know we're having a difficult time financially'" (60). The Council, according to Victor, is supposed to have funds set aside for "stuff like this" (60), to which they reply; "[...] we do have some money available for the proper return of tribal members' bodies. But I don't think we have enough to bring your father all the way back from Phoenix" (60). The narrator depicts the poverty on the reservation through Victor's dealings with the Tribal Council and his problems with attaining enough money to return his father's remains and claim his inheritance. The portrayal is also a political comment on the BIA that have reduced them to powerlessness and treats the Natives like children. The conversation between Victor and the council is mockingly mimicking that of a child asking for his weekly allowance.

Victor's dealings with the Tribal Council ends with him accepting their offer and: "So he signed the proper papers [...]" (61). "Signing the proper papers" is an allegory for the many treaties, government agreements and land sales that has happened in Native American history. In these instances Native Americans often signed papers they did not know the full meaning of. In other cases, they did not have a choice, as the American government threatened them to

²⁵ See the beginning of Chapter 4.3 for further information.

do so. Sometimes the land was sold at a price that was a lot lower than what the land was worth, other times deeds to sacred tribal lands was signed by unwilling Natives that were threatened by severe consequences if they did not. The sacred lands that were sold meant more to the Natives than any sum of money, as is further explained in Chapter 2.3. These dealings, similar to the one Victor has with the Tribal Council, portray the injustice and loss of things pertaining to cultural identity that Native Americans have experienced. In *"This is What it Means..."* Victor is cheated by the Tribal Council which leaves him unable to collect his father's remains, something that is of importance to him.

When Victor is at the Trading Post to collect the money he got from the Tribal Council he meets Thomas Builds-the-Fire. Thomas offers Victor his condolences and Victor asks him: "How did you know about it?" (61), to which Thomas answers: "I heard it on the wind. I heard it from the birds. I felt it in the sunlight. Also, your mother was just in here crying" (61). Thomas' answer is a ridiculing of the stereotype "Eco-Indian" or "Ecological Indian". The stereotype was created because of the mindset that pre-contact Natives were living in harmony with nature, and that they were the ones to look to for a true ecological lifestyle. It also served in the dichotomy of the Euro-Americans as those who ruined, spoiled and depleted nature, while Native Americans were the ones who worshipped, cared for and nurtured nature. Television advertisements during the 1970s that featured "Iron Eyes Cody shedding a glycerin tear while looking at a polluted stream" (Nichols 79) was a part of creating and furthering that stereotype. Since none of this rings especially true, as Krech explains and discusses in his book *The Ecological Indian - Myth and History*, it is simply one of those stereotypes that has survived because it was broadcasted to such an extent through mass media. Alexie flips the stereotype here, he ridicules and mocks it by Thomas adding: "Also, your mother was just in here crying" (61).

When Thomas and Victor are travelling to Phoenix by airplane they meet a Euro-American gymnast named Cathy. The woman is described as "flexible" (65) and the narrator relates that: "She was a mental gymnast, too" (66) when Thomas asks her about this "Victor closed his eyes in embarrassment" (66). During their conversation Cathy tells the boys that the government had "[...] screwed the 1980 Olympic team by boycotting" (67) to which Thomas replies: "Sounds like you all got a lot in common with Indians" (67). At least two interpretations can come from the men's meeting with Cathy. Firstly, Alexie is implying that the US government is egotistical and self-serving whether it is dealing with Native Americans or athletes. Secondly, Cathy's physical and mental flexibility is meant to be seen as a contrast to Victor's mental rigidity and inflexibility. His rigidity is portrayed when he feels embarrassed because Thomas is speaking with Cathy, who is, not just a woman, but also a

Euro-American. Victor's reactions clearly show that he is not comfortable with the situation and thinks Thomas is making a fool of himself.

4.4.2 Phoenix

One way to read "*This is What it Means...*" is as an allegory for rebirth and regeneration. Phoenix is not just the location of Victor's father's ashes, but a symbol for being reborn. The Phoenix, as a character, seems to stem from the Benu bird in Egyptian mythology, but has then been brought into Classical and Early Christian literature. Alexie's choice to incorporate such a non-Native symbol in the narrative is interesting. His use of the Phoenix, as a symbol, is his way of fusing Native American literary traditions with Western literary traditions. The story of the Phoenix is a myth in which the Phoenix bird, by dying, is able to renew itself. The myth says that when the Phoenix knew it was going to die, it would start to build a nest made out of aromatics. Thereafter, it would lay down in its nest and the sun would shine so bright that it caught fire and the Phoenix would burn. From its ashes a new Phoenix would be reborn (Pinch; Van den Broek). A Phoenix rising from the ashes is a common metaphor in Western literary tradition, and there too symbolizes rebirth.

In "*This is What it Means...*", the Phoenix is Victor's father who died and had to be cremated because he: "[...] had lain in that trailer for a week in hundred-degree temperatures before anyone found him" (68). In the example there is even a reference to heat, which is stated as a cause to why he had to be cremated - turned into ashes, which relates to the burning of the Phoenix. Alexie has added a humorous detail to the whole ordeal by stating that; "Victor's father, his ashes, fit in one wooden box with enough left over to fill a cardboard box" (71), with just the comment from Thomas that: "He always was a big man" (71). Now, what one would think was only a humorous element is actually a very symbolic gesture. The fact that Arnold's remains had to be divided into two boxes symbolizes his part Native American and part majority American identity. It also reflects a literal use of the saying "to put people into boxes", meaning to categorize people, often by traits such as race or sexuality, when in fact nothing is as simple as that. When Thomas and Victor have gotten Arnold's ashes into the pickup; "They set him down carefully behind the seats, put a cowboy hat on the wooden box and a Dodgers Cap on the cardboard box" (71). The gesture is a furthering of the symbolization of the two boxes, the cowboy hat symbolizes Native American culture while the Dodgers cap symbolizes the mainstream culture in America.

4.4.3 The Vision Quest/Journey

The narrator tells us several stories from Victor and Thomas' shared childhood, this starts when Victor meets Thomas at the Trading Post. These stories are meant to help Victor in his search for identity. Victor is in this story going through what Native Americans call a vision quest, as mentioned in Chapter 2.3. Traditionally, a vision quest consists of and is based on the belief that "one is to walk his own path in the spirit/dream world to help uncover his path in this life" (*Native American Culture* 14). In this story, it is an actual journey that functions as a traditional vision quest would, it helps Victor to know what his place is in the world.

In Western traditions the journey/vision quest might be thought of as a "coming-of-age" story. During the stories that Thomas relates to him, he re-members and gets to know more about himself, his childhood and his father as well as his people - the Native Americans. By Thomas's storytelling Victor has to face the grief, misery and pain that he has avoided for so many years. When he goes to Phoenix, Arizona to reclaim his father's remains and his inheritance as well as the pickup truck he also reclaims his father in a metaphorical sense. The type of journey here related to Native American culture in terms of a vision quest is also apparent in Western traditions as the same type of journey to "find oneself".

4.4.3.1 Thomas Builds-the-Fire

Thomas Builds-the-Fire, the new main character that is introduced in "*This is What it Means...*", is a childhood friend of Victor's and a storyteller. He is described by the narrator as "[...] a storyteller that nobody wanted to listen to" (61). Thomas represents tradition, an upholder of the Native American culture, and his character works somewhat like a shaman in the story. An example of how Thomas represents tradition is when Victor is contemplating asking him for help; "Victor felt a sudden need for tradition" (62) i.e. a need for Thomas. Thomas is elemental in Victor's identity/vision quest and his role as a storyteller and a shaman enables him to play a crucial part in the journey. Thomas says he has a lot of dreams and sometimes visions where he is told stories, these and actual events are the kinds of stories Thomas tells.

According to Kuiper; "Shamanism is a system of beliefs and practices designed to facilitate communication with the spirit world" (*Native American Culture* 14). She explains that "A shaman, then, can be seen as a sort of priest or practitioner through whom various spirits let themselves be known to humans" (Kuiper 14). In this case it is Arnold's spirit who lets itself be known to Thomas. He also facilitates the communication between Victor and Arnold's spirit by telling Victor stories about his dad. For example, in one of the stories Thomas says that: "Your dad was my vision. *Take care of each other* is what my dreams were

saying. *Take care of each other*" (69).

The fact that Thomas is the one to lend Victor the money and go on the journey with him is a symbol for Thomas as the shaman who brings the spirit home. Even his name; Builds-the-Fire, is part of the symbolism. In symbolical terms Thomas is the one who kindles and gathers the wood so that a fire may arise for the Phoenix to be able to burn and rise renewed, he literally builds the fire that is needed for rebirth. While Thomas' stories seem to others as: "[...] the same damn stories over and over again" (62) they are in fact stories of survival in an attempt to cure the endemic cultural despair that is going around on the reservation. Thomas even seems to have transcended the poverty and alcohol problems that everyone else on the reservation has struggled with. Reinforcing this idea is the flashback where Thomas "flies", the narrator relates that Thomas was: "[...] suspended above all other Indian boys who were too smart or too scared to jump" (70). In many ways, the narrator portrays Thomas as sacred.

One line in *"This is What it Means..."* refers to the title of the short story composite (*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*), namely; "[...] Victor and Thomas got into a fistfight" (65). In this instance, Thomas is Tonto and Victor can be seen as the Lone-Ranger. The word "fistfight" is not commonly used much, so it is likely that it is placed there on purpose by the author. Following this interpretation Thomas is still the traditional Native who knows the ways of his people, like Tonto, an underappreciated but much needed helper who is often laughed at. And Victor/The Lone-Ranger is dependent upon Thomas/Tonto even though neither the audience nor Victor wants to admit it.

At the end of the story, even though Thomas and Victor have come home to the reservation and the audience might expect them to be the best of friends, Thomas tells Victor that he knows things are not going to change between them, because Victor's friends would make fun of him for it. The narrator tells us that: "Victor was ashamed of himself" (74) and asks "Whatever happened to the tribal ties, the sense of community?" (74), its importance is further explained in Chapter 2.3 under the heading "community". The narrator goes on to say that: "The only real thing he [Victor] shared with anybody was a bottle and broken dreams" (74), these are realizations that Victor comes to when the journey is near its end. He also recognizes that he owes Thomas something for what he has done for him and decides to give him half of his father's remains. The giving of the ashes is an affirmation of the importance of the tribal ties, as well as the friendship between Thomas and Victor. Thomas replies by smiling and telling a story: "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. [...] He will rise, Victor, he will rise" (74).

The reference to the river and the salmon here are pertinent in the sense that for Coeur

D'Alene/Spokane Natives the river and salmon were sacred, seeing that they had depended on the salmon for sustenance. The Natives performed rituals such as the first salmon ceremony which celebrated the arrival of the salmon run (*Native American Culture* 85). Kuiper explains the ritual; "The first fish caught was ritually sliced, small pieces of it were distributed among the people and eaten, and the carcass was returned to the water accompanied by prayers and thanks" (Kuiper 85). The ritual was performed to ensure that the salmon would return the next year. However, when the Euro-Americans came, fisheries harvested too much salmon, they started placer mining in the areas, and this stopped the salmon from being able to breed which depleted the salmon stock (Kuiper 87). Therefore, for Thomas and Victor to imagine Arnold's spirit returning as a leaping salmon, is very symbolic and it attests to the importance of Arnold.

However, Victor's father is not the only one who will rise in the metaphorical sense; "Victor and Thomas made it back to the reservation just as the sun was rising" (73) here the sun is a pun for the son who is rising from his father's ashes. Furthermore, both Thomas and Victor; "[...] shook dust from their bodies" (73), here the dust represents the ashes and that they/he has been reborn. Victor has overcome and dealt with his past and is now ready for the future. In this sense, his name is well chosen by Alexie seeing that the name's etymological origin stems from the Latin word "victor" which means "a conqueror", other references to the name are victory and being victorious which refers to Victor's successful transformation at the end of the journey.

Concerning the character Thomas at the end of the story and the end of the quest or journey, he too has made a transformation and is, also, a Phoenix in the allegorical sense that Victor is. This can be supported by the flashback related to us about the incident when Thomas; "[...] jumped off the roof of the tribal school and flapped his arms like a crazy eagle" (70) which goes on to say that: "Everybody has dreams about flying. Thomas flew. One of his dreams came true for just a second, just enough to make it real" (70-71). This reference to flying is symbolical for the flight of the Phoenix, but Thomas fell to the ground and "He broke his arm in two places" (70). An incident that the other children make a chant out of; "He broke his wing, he broke his wing, he broke his wing" (70). Considering this, Thomas' consistent exposure to bullying and the fact that nobody on the reservation wants to listen to his stories would suggest that he too needs healing.

Additionally, Victor's thoughts and opinions on Thomas change in the story. When they are on the plane Victor is impressed that Thomas has a nice conversation with the gymnast. Throughout the story Thomas proves his loyalty to Victor and Victor seems to start to relish some of the memories they have together. Victor's changed perception of Thomas results in a change in Thomas's own perception of self. This further implies that we, as non-

Natives can change as well and that we can change our perception, and that our changed perception can lead to a change in other's perception of self. Furthermore, throughout "*This is What it Means...*" Thomas has also been through a journey, when they return home he too "wipes off the dust". In the beginning of the story we get to know that Thomas's storytelling is: "[...] like being a dentist in a town where everybody has false teeth" (61). Thomas is a traditional storyteller in a culture that does not want to listen anymore, but in the final scene between Thomas and Victor this has changed. Thomas asks Victor for a favor; "Just one time when I'm telling a story somewhere, why don't you stop and listen?" (75) to which Victor replies: "Just once" (75), after this Thomas retreats to his house; "[...] closed the door behind him, and heard a new story come to him in the silence afterwards" (75).

In my opinion, Victor agreeing to listen to Thomas' stories, even though he says "just once", is a symbol that shows the people will listen to Thomas now. Thomas has been reborn and is now able to tell *new* stories instead of "[...] the same damn stories over and over again" (62). Since Thomas, Victor and the spirit of Arnold has been regenerated throughout the story, and they are the main Native American characters, one can say that they represent the entire Native American peoples and that this story has led the people through a journey of rebirth and regeneration. As a result, the "This" in the title of the story refers to the journey or vision quest that Thomas and Victor go through.

By using both the classical myth about the Phoenix rising from the ashes from Western literary tradition and the characterization of Thomas as a shaman and storyteller from a Native American tradition Alexie has created a confluence. He has created a fusion between the two cultures that is essential to the story. It is apparent throughout the story that Alexie has chosen to portray the duality in both identity and culture of contemporary Native Americans. His focus on the differences and new aspects of life for Native Americans as well as his use of literary techniques and traditions from both Euro-American and Native American traditions are evident in his writing and works as a healing process; a mediation of the struggle to come to terms with and find a contemporary Native American identity, culture and history.

This book is as much a political, historical, and cultural demonstration as it is a literary piece. This is in concordance with Lincoln stating that: "Survival draws the bottom line, the undercutting humors of irony, parody, caricature, and satire targeting the enemy's ignorance, raising a tribal outcry, [...]" (Lincoln 277). Alexie is the leader of a Native American counterculture countering the fallacies of its own culture, its imposed culture, and its history as well as Euro-Americans'. He is not afraid of breaking taboos, or making fun of what should not be made fun of; He is the true trickster, such as in the old trickster tales.

4.5 Analysis of *Smoke Signals*

What I wish to answer, discuss and investigate in this chapter is firstly, the question of what makes *Smoke Signals* a Native American movie, and if it furthers Native American traditions concerning movies and storytelling. Then I will move on to briefly analyzing the movie, this will contain mostly an analysis of the visuals, since this is the main difference between the movie and the book *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven* which it is based upon. Lastly, I will discuss the differences between the movie and the book taking a comparative view.

4.5.1 *Smoke Signals* as a Native American movie

The question of what a Native American movie is, carries the same problems that have been discussed in regards to Native American literature. The critics and researchers discuss whether or not it has to be written by a Native American (that is part of a federally recognized tribe), whether or not the literary work has to be about Native Americans, whether or not it has to reflect the values, ideas and beliefs of Native Americans and such. Can *Pocahontas* (1995) be seen as a Native American movie? The point that I am trying to make, is that there is no correct answer, there are only opinions. But there is consensus on some matters, for example the condition that it has to be written by a Native American and that it has to be written about Native Americans.

What is special about Native American *movies* is that there is an added question about whether or not the actors, at least the actors playing Native Americans, have to be Native American themselves. This came up for discussion in the context of Western movies using or not using real Native Americans to play Native Americans, where they also were expected to speak their own language. Many Natives participated in such movies, but did not stick to the script at all when delivering their lines in Native American. Of course, the directors and other Euro-Americans on the set did not know about this at the time. This was considered a form of resistance towards the colonial power the "white people" on the set represented. In *Pocahontas* (1995) the voice of Pocahontas is Irene Bedard's and the voice and character of Chief Powhatan is based on Russell Means, does this make *Pocahontas* a Native American movie?

In *Smoke Signals - A Screenplay*, Alexie has chosen to remind the reader that *Smoke Signals* "[...] is the first feature film written, directed, and co-produced by Indians to ever receive a major distribution deal" (*Screenplay* xi). He also gives thanks to the Native Americans that have been involved in creating movies before him, stating that his movie

would not have been possible without their efforts. There has been made a lot of documentaries by and about Native Americans in the past, but as Alexie points out, his "is the first feature film" (*Screenplay* xi) by and about Native Americans.

That themes, ideas and motifs can be conveyed in a variety of manners is well accepted and the existence of a multitude of genres supports this. But what makes a movie such a great tool for mediating Native American ideas, motifs and beliefs is Native Americans' oral tradition of storytelling. A movie is as much an oral performance as it is a written performance, and it is the oral aspect and the acting involved that sets the movie apart as a genre as especially appropriate in a Native American literary and historical perspective. Furthermore, it is Alexie's opinion that: "[...] screenplays are more like poetry than like fiction" (*Screenplay* x), he further explains this by stating that: "Screenplays rely on imagery to carry the narrative, rather than the other way around" (*Screenplay* x). This is another reason to why I am going to focus on the visuals the viewer²⁶ is presented with.

Smoke Signals reached such a wide audience, that it is still used in a lot of different contexts (especially teaching), and it was received with awe both by Natives and non-Natives alike. In the book *Smoke Signals: Native Cinema Rising*, editors Shorter and Lewis concur by stating that *Smoke Signals* is a "[...] genuine breakthrough in terms of perception (and reception)" (Hearne xiii). The editors discuss how and why the movie appeals to both a Native audience as well as a non-Native audience. Most importantly, they relate how viewers from different backgrounds found the movie: "[...] very different from the extremes of romanticism, stereotype, or outright demonization that had distorted mass media in the United States throughout the twentieth century" (Hearne xiv).

4.5.2 Analysis of *Smoke Signals*

The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven does not include a lot of physical descriptions of the characters in the stories. It rarely specifies what they are wearing or describe the characters physical features to any extent. This is why the movie adds another dimension to the book, the audience is allowed further descriptions and visualizations of the characters. The visual representation that we attain from the movie either further reinforces the character analyses that are discussed above or they expand these analyses to include other aspects as well. This analysis will also rely on the characterizations made in the previous parts of Chapter 4 seeing that Arnold, Arlene, Thomas and Victor are all part of the movie. However, there is one character that is not a part of "*This is What it Means...*" nor "*Because*

²⁶ A person watching the movie, in the same manner that one refers to someone who reads the book as the reader.

my Father..." who is a central part of the movie, namely Suzy Song.

Firstly, I will comment on the story line and plot of the movie compared to the short story composite. The movie's storyline is mostly centered around the roundtrip from Spokane to Phoenix, as in *"This is What it Means..."*. However, it also includes elements from a lot of different short stories from *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."*, some scenes are very altered others are identical. The short stories that are incorporated into the movie are: *"This is What it Means..."*, *"Because my Father..."*, the character Suzy Song exists in *Jesus Christ's Half-Brother is Alive and Well on the Spokane Indian Reservation*. Other, smaller dialogues and characters are incorporated from the other short stories. I will focus on a continued character analysis of Thomas and Victor which shows differences from the movie and the book. The additional character Suzy Song is mainly the reason for this difference and her character is analyzed in this section as well. Lastly, I will discuss Arnold's character and his role as a father as a trope on the US as a "father" to the Native American peoples.

4.5.2.1 Character analyses

4.5.2.1.1 Thomas and Victor

The characters Thomas and Victor are portrayed differently in the movie than what they are in the book. This might be because I have interpreted these characters differently in the book than what I feel is portrayed in the movie, but it also has something to do with the addition of the character Suzy Song (I will explain this further on a later point in the chapter). Firstly, I will discuss the characters Thomas and Victor and their relationship in the movie. Thomas Builds-the-Fire is firstly introduced in the movie as the voice-over narrator of the scene of the burning house, meaning that we are immediately introduced to Thomas as a storyteller. Then we are related how he looks: "[...] a short, slight Indian man with very traditional braids. He wears a three-piece suit and tennis shoes" (Alexie *Screenplay* 14), he is also described as wearing "[...] thick glasses" (Alexie *Screenplay* 7) and being "[...] very much an Indian nerd" (Alexie *Screenplay* 7). During the movie's many flashbacks to Victor and Thomas as children we see that Thomas has always been wearing a three-piece suit and that both Thomas and Victor seem to always wear too large clothes that seem like hand-me-downs. Victor, in contrast to Thomas, is described as "[...] a very handsome and confident boy" (Alexie *Screenplay* 7) with : "[...] long, black, unbraided hair" (Alexie *Screenplay* 15).

In the short story composite compared to the movie it seemed to me that Thomas was more confident in himself, that he seemed sure of who he was, and that he was not afraid of being different. Victor, on the other hand, seemed more insecure and lost, but in the screenplay they are described as the opposite of my perception from the book. From what I

perceive from the movie, and how I interpret its portrayals of Victor and Thomas, they both seem to suffer from instances of internalized colonization. As discussed in Chapter 2, internalized colonization is when a group that has been "Othered" inherits the majority's mindset about them. This mindset is most often not a positive self-image, but rather a very negative one, and it is based upon the stereotypical representations created by the majority society. This is also related to the problem of experiencing a "double-consciousness".

In this case, Victor and Thomas are realizations of two different stereotypes. Thomas mostly resembles the "Eco-Indian", the Shaman, storyteller and the ultra traditional Native American. While Victor is portrayed as the stoic warrior, and a "blood-thirsty savage" in a modern sense, seeing that he is a bully. During the movie the two men see that both these types of being Native American does not work for either of them, and they start to realize how they have come across these stereotypes and inherited the traits ascribed to them. The conversation that the two of them have when they are travelling to Phoenix by bus supports this analysis. Victor asks Thomas: "[...] Why can't you have a normal conversation?" (61), stating that: "You're always trying to sound like some damn medicine man or something. I mean, how many times have you seen *Dances with Wolves*?" (61). Thomas is embarrassed by the question and it is brought to light that Thomas seems to have learnt how to be "Indian" from movies such as *Dances with Wolves* (1990). Victor follows up with: "[...] Man. Do you think that shit is real? God. Don't you even know how to be a real Indian?" (61), the conversation goes on with Thomas admitting that he is unsure if he knows how to be a real "Indian" and Victor tells him that he is going to teach him how. It is the beginning of the vision quest/journey for identity.

The movie also mentions other movies - one of them being *The Last of the Mohicans* (1992) along with *Dances With Wolves* (1990), or as Hearne puts it: "Smoke Signals speaks back to two films of the 1990s [...] that had a major impact on the industry" (xxi). These movies portray Native Americans in binary oppositions, Natives are either portrayed as "good Indians" and by this portrayal romanticized but at the same time vanishing, such as the Mohicans in *The Last of the Mohicans*. Alternatively, they are portrayed as "bad Indians" and deemed "blood-thirsty savages" (Hearne xxi-xxii). The way in which *Smoke Signals* speaks back to these movies are by not portraying Native American culture or trying to represent Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Indians' life. Rather, it is a political and historical re-imagining and re-remembering of Native American culture and history. In addition, it is a deconstruction, and an invalidation of the stereotypes and binary oppositions created by such movies as *Dances with Wolves* and *The Last of the Mohicans* are.

There are other important instances of intertextuality in the movie. When Victor and Thomas have been in the car crash and Victor runs for help he ends up in the hospital with

bandages on the soles of his feet. This is a reference to what the story *All I wanted to do was Dance* talks about; "You know how to tell the difference between a real Indian and a fake Indian? 'How?' 'The real Indian got blisters on his feet. The fake Indian got blisters on his ass'" (Alexie *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* 91). Mockingly implying that Victor is now a "real Indian".

In the movie as well as the book Alexie has stretched these stereotypes so far that they seem absurd and exaggerated and that is why the end of scene 59 and scene 61 (Alexie *Screenplay* 61-63) are so hilarious. Victor starts the lesson on "how to be Indian" by saying that Tomas has to: "[...] quit grinning like an idiot" (Alexie *Screenplay* 61) because "[...] Indians ain't supposed to smile like that. Get stoic" (*Screenplay* 61). After several failed attempts by Thomas to "get stoic", Victor explains that: "You got to look mean or people won't respect you. White people will run all over you if you don't look mean. You got to look like a warrior. You got to look like you just got home from killing a buffalo" (*Screenplay* 62). To which Thomas immediately rebuts, because Spokane/Coeur d'Alene Natives have never hunted buffalo, their people were fishermen. The scene mocks and discredits Victor's version of "how to be an Indian".

A further invalidation of Victor's notion of an "Indian" happens when Thomas and Victor get back on the bus and two Euro-American men (described as "cowboys" (*Screenplay* 64)) have taken their seats. Victor and Thomas try to get their seats back, but the two men will not give up the seats and answer, mockingly: "[...] why don't you and Super Indian there find yourself someplace else to have a powwow, okay?" (*Screenplay* 65). During the conversation with the two Euro-Americans both Victor and Thomas try to look as stoic and warrior-like as possible. After they have lost their seats and sat down somewhere else Thomas comments that: "[...] I guess your warrior look doesn't work every time" (*Screenplay* 65). The discussion and questions concerning identity are furthered during Victor and Thomas' drive home to Spokane where Thomas confronts Victor about his life.

By the end of the movie, both Victor and Thomas have learnt a great deal from each other and from having to cooperate with each other. They have realized that neither of them really know how to be Native and that community, friendship and family are important. As Arlene suggested during her and Victor's conversation about fry bread, before the two men went on the roundtrip to Phoenix; one needs to learn from each other, to listen to each other and seek help from others:

You know, people always tell me I make the best fry bread in the world. Maybe it's true. But I don't make it by myself, you know? I got the recipe from your grandmother, who got it from her grandmother. And I listen to people when they eat my bread, too (29).

With the blooming relationship between Thomas and Victor we see a merging of their distinctively different Native attributes as well as the realization that none of them know how to be "Indian". As Hearne writes, the two: "[...] young protagonists become conscious of the dissonance between media images and their own experiences," (xxv) during the movie and that it is more important to be yourself, and a good person than to focus on being distinctly Native or "Native" as described by "Others". This is not an entirely Native American matter, seeing that non-Natives can relate to this as well and it might be especially important in today's society which is so focused on the individual. Again, it reminds us that we too can shift our clichéd perceptions of other cultures.

4.5.2.1.2 Suzy Song

Alexie has stated that they wanted to make Suzy's character magical and mysterious (*Screenplay* 166-67). The reason for this can be because she has taken over a lot of Thomas's role as shaman, as a guide to Arnold's soul and as a mediator between Victor and Arnold. Instead of Thomas helping Victor during the scenes where they go through the trailer and assemble Arnold's ashes, Thomas is asleep on Suzy's couch. While Suzy tells Thomas about Arnold's time at Phoenix and about how he always meant to come home. She even carries Arnold's biggest secret, the fact that he was responsible for the house fire we see at the beginning of the movie and that that was the reason he ran away (not a part of the short story composite). At the end of the movie, Suzy sets fire to Arnold's trailer at the same time that Victor is able to ignite the pickup. This scene is described by Alexie, stating that: "Suzy is a powerful and mysterious Indian woman who literally and symbolically 'frees' Arnold from his Arizona grave by burning his trailer down" (*Screenplay* 167). The burning of the trailer also creates a lot of smoke which is a reference to the title *Smoke Signals*, by burning the trailer Suzy sends smoke signals across boundaries.

In some ways one can see pieces of the "Indian Princess" stereotype in the character of Suzy as well. She has healing power, as she replaces Thomas in the scenes concerning emptying Arnold's trailer she is instead the one who "heals" Victor. In her trailer we see that she has collected and dried a lot of sage which she later uses to burn Arnold's trailer, another act of purification and healing. Additionally, she is a very beautiful Native woman with long black sleek hair not unlike Pocahontas. The fact that she is the voice actress in *Pocahontas* for the voice of Pocahontas further supports this interpretation, it can almost be seen as an act of intertextuality.

4.5.2.1.3 Arnold

We are introduced to Arnold Joseph early in the movie as he leaps to try and save Thomas Builds-the-Fire when he is thrown out of the window of the burning house. He is a heavy man with long black hair wearing ordinary clothes; jeans, a grey shirt and a jeans-jacket. He is described in *Smoke Signals - A Screenplay* as "[...] a large Coeur d'Alene Indian man in his thirties" (1). After the fire has burned down the entire house, we see Arlene, Grandmother Builds-the-Fire and Arnold standing on the lawn. Grandmother and Arlene are holding baby Thomas and baby Victor in their arms while Grandma Builds-the-Fire thanks Arnold for saving Thomas' life. Arnold answers her by stating that: "It was nothing. I didn't even think about it... I just... [...] I didn't mean to" (*Screenplay* 6-7), which is a foreshadowing, or a hint that Arnold was the one who set the house fire in the first place.

One of the difference in representation between "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*" and the movie when it comes to Arnold is the fact that he represents fatherhood in the movie. This difference is furthered by the fact that he can be seen as a metaphor for the US, as nationhood and how a nation is like a father to its people. Or, rather, as Hearne states, that he is: "[...] a figure colonized by the United States" (80). The metaphor is created by the house fire that happens on the 4th of July (America's National Independence day), a day usually celebrated with fireworks. In the movie the fireworks are what starts the house fire, I concur on what Hearne says about the incident as it: "[...] materializes U.S. nationhood as an invasive power that consumes and destroys Native families" (79). However, it is also a portrayal of the complex relationship Arnold has to the United States, described in more detail earlier in the thesis, and its: "[...] master narratives of national history (for which fireworks are a visual symbol) [that] encompasses both resistance and patriotism" (80).

The movie ends with Thomas reciting part of a poem by Dick Lourie named "Forgiving our Fathers" (*Hanging Loose Press*) and asking the important but unanswerable questions: "How do we forgive our fathers?" (*Screenplay* 147) and "[...] If we forgive our fathers, what is left?" (*Screenplay* 149) which relates to both Arnold as a father to Victor and Arnold as a metaphor for the US as a father-nation. In the movie the viewer is bound to feel a lot more sympathy towards Arnold than in the two short stories, the path to forgiveness is therefore laid out for the viewer. This means that the movie builds empathy rather than "othering" others for their differences. In scene 151 most will interpret Victor's actions as Victor forgiving Arnold, as Thomas has done, but what still remains unanswered is the question of "what is left?" (*Screenplay* 149).

The main focus of incorporating the movie into the thesis was to show how and why it can be used as an alternative to teaching the short stories. A lot of the same ideas and motifs

are expressed, as well as a lot of the historical and political issues are dealt with. The movie works in some of the same ways that the short story composite does, but it has some added benefits as well. The visual representations adds another dimension to the stereotypes that are exaggerated and deconstructed in the short story composite.

Smoke Signals can show the students how important it is for everyone to feel like they have their own voice, the means to speak their opinion, the means to represent themselves and not just be represented by others (such as discussed concerning "the problem of speaking for others"), and last but not least - to be respected and sovereign. The short story composite also does this, but in the cultural area of feature movies Native Americans have been far less represented (in the right manner) than in literature. A discussion that has revolved around *Smoke Signals* is one of cultural sovereignty. According to Singer, in *Hollywood's Indian: The Portrayal of the Native American in Film (2011)*; "What really matters to us is that we be able to tell our own stories in whatever medium we choose" (qtd. in Cobb 207). What is so special about *Smoke Signals* is that it challenges, ridicules and ironizes popular culture and the belief of the popular culture by creating popular culture (Cobb 207).

5. Didactics: Multicultural Teaching

In this chapter I will present and discuss teaching Alexie's short story composite, his movie *Smoke Signals* and the legend and movie *Pocahontas*. I have chosen to give a general perspective on teaching these literary works instead of a more specific one because I feel it will give the reader a better insight into teaching about Indigenous peoples and Native Americans than a specific example would. Another reason why I chose to do so is because every class is different and every teacher has a different style of teaching. To accommodate for this and still provide insight into teaching Alexie, *Pocahontas* and the theme of Indigenous peoples and Native Americans, I chose a general perspective. My aim is to show that Native American and Indigenous literature is readily available, fits all language levels, and can deal with a variety of themes and genres.

I will present different perspectives and considerations to teaching Alexie and *Pocahontas* and provide examples of how to do so. The general perspective I aim to provide consists of six different aspects of teaching. However, all of these perspectives and aspects of teaching overlap and are connected to one another. Firstly, I will look at teaching short stories, because Alexie's work has been classified as short stories, and because it is a very

appropriate genre for teaching purposes. Secondly, I will discuss and exemplify teaching from a multicultural perspective. In my opinion, teaching from this perspective is well embedded in the governing documents for teaching in Norway. Thereafter, I will discuss and show why teaching Alexie's short story composite is very rewarding even though it involves teaching some controversial themes. Fourthly, by showing and discussing the use of humour in teaching and teaching humour I want to inspire teachers to do so. Also, because Alexie's narrative technique is full of humour that needs some interpretation to be able to appreciate, I see it as a necessity in company to teaching his short story composite. Next to last I will look into "the danger of a single story", an important consideration to take when teaching any topic. Lastly, I will briefly discuss teaching movies, especially and exemplified by *Pocahontas* and *Smoke Signals*, and the rewards of doing so.

5.1 Teaching Short Stories

In my opinion short stories are a great resource for teachers, because they vary in length, complexity, and difficulty in vocabulary as well as theme. Also, because the amount of curriculum one has to cover as a teacher is a lot, teaching short stories will provide the students with positive reading experiences and several reading experiences seeing that there would be time to read several short stories but not as many novels. However, this does not mean that I do not promote working with longer narratives, they are an important part of the English subject as well. Nonetheless, I concur with Williams' statement that: "Short stories can offer less competent or more reluctant readers a complete and successful reading experience which matches their capabilities and stamina" (184). For the more experienced students at a higher skill level one can always use longer narratives, or long short stories, if knowledge about genre is supposed to be a part of the learning outcome. The differentiation that is made possible from teaching a short story composite is in accordance with section 1-3 of the Education Act: "Education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil [...]" (6(Adichie)).

In Sherman Alexie's *The Lone-Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven*, the length, complexity, vocabulary and difficulty level in regards to the different short stories vary, this makes it an excellent narrative to teach. The narratives are very practical in relation to having a class with a varying specter of abilities in English. The differences between the short stories makes it easier to individualize learning, and for the literature to be easily suitable for students at an elementary level of knowledge, as well as students at advanced levels. Because the literature is appropriate for all levels, most students will be able to attain a sense of achievement that might stimulate them to want to read further (Williams 179-81). In

Literature for the English classroom - Theory into Practice (2013), Gweno Williams talks about "using series to stimulate independent reading" (179) and how a collection of short stories, such as "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..*" or many other of Alexie's works (such as *Ten Little Indians*), is very appropriate in teaching. The teacher's role would be to categorize the short stories in regards to length and skill level so that the students can choose which of them they want to work with. This is in concordance with the Education Act's statement that "They [students] shall have joint responsibility and the right to participate" (5).

By working with different short stories the students can share their experiences of the narratives, compare themes, setting, plot (and structure), characters (and development), point of view, figurative language, tone/style/mood, and meanings with each other. This can be done even if they have read the same short story to see how the students have interpreted and perceived it differently. Following this approach, Williams has coined the term "[...] the multi-text classroom" (184) which means that students are: "[...] reading complementary texts together" (184). Working with a "multi-text classroom" allows for more individual based learning and teaching and it "[...] allows tactfully for different reading and learning abilities and preferences, without infringing learner dignity" (184). The comparative discussion can lead students to learn from each other as well as create meaningful peer-to-peer cooperation.

Furthermore, Williams as well as I want to stress how impressionable these students are to peer opinions (186). If the students start recommending short stories or books to each other this might spark a want to read further, and may have a greater impact than if you, as a teacher, suggest a book/short story. Arranging a "book club" or as Williams has called it a "Reading Festival" (186), where students research books and short stories and recommend them to each other, can help further their lust to read. When teaching about Indigenous peoples you can compile a list of novels, short stories, plays, movies, articles, journals and albums that are authored by and are about Indigenous peoples and arrange them by skill level. Thereafter, the students can research the narratives from the list, promote a literary piece of their own choosing followed by a decision on which narrative to investigate. This will allow students to: "encounter[ing] a *diversity* of texts, where the concept of text is used in the broadest sense of the word" (own emphasis added LK06 "English Subject Curriculum : Eng1-03" 2).

5.2 Teaching from a Global and Multicultural Perspective

What teaching from a global and multicultural perspective aims to do, is develop the ability of the students to understand, respect and show tolerance for other cultures. This involves a deeper understanding free of stereotypes and prejudice. In *Multicultural Education*

- *Issues and Perspectives*, Banks and McGee Banks define one of the aims of a multicultural education as: "Teaching about the cultural practices of other people without stereotyping or misinterpreting them and teaching about one's own cultural practices without invidiously characterizing the practices of other people [...]" (43). Banks talks about the tendency to "essentialize" culture, by essentialize he means: "assuming that all persons in a given social category are culturally similar and focusing on the unitary cultures of various Others without reflecting on our own cultures and their diversity" (43), the result being that: "[...] we open a Pandora's box of opportunity for negative attribution" (43) and the creation of stereotypes. Therefore, we as teachers must work against this kind of essentializing. One way to do this is to talk about the students' previous knowledge of Indigenous peoples or Native Americans to see if the students hold prejudices and have the tendency to essentialize.

It is important to work with the development of a multicultural perspective among both teachers and students. The Core Curriculum relates that students need to develop a multicultural and global perspective, and that this entails "[...] to meet other cultures openly in order to find pleasure in the diversity of human expression and to learn from contrast" (40). This perspective also involves: "A meeting between diverse cultures and traditions" (LK06 "The Core Curriculum" 9) and the Core Curriculum states that this "[...] can generate new impulses as well as stimulate critical reflections" (9). Teaching from this perspective will then involve creating awareness around our own values and actions so that we are able to see how this affects how we interpret Indigenous literature. Most importantly, I agree with Mahon in stating that: "Teaching with a multicultural and global perspective will encourage the development of a positive understanding and appreciation of the value and uniqueness of other cultures as well as one's own" (94). Teaching the movie *Smoke Signals* might open the students' eyes to how people from different cultures have different reference points (such as Custer), a different history, and therefore might communicate differently and be able to appreciate the uniqueness that offers.

In teaching about culture there are a lot of aspects to take into consideration, and it is important that teachers are aware of these and so promote an understanding of the diversity and changeability of cultures. For example, Banks and Banks discuss visible and invisible culture, or explicit and implicit culture, and how we tend to focus on the explicit cultural traits and treat them as static (43-44). These are factors that unequivocally lead to the creation and assertion of stereotypes. Explicit culture traits are such as Thomas Builds-the-Fire wearing his hair in braids, or portraying Chief Powhatan with a headpiece made of eagle feathers. Focusing on these traits leads to stereotyping, therefore teachers' focus should be "to emphasize the variability of culture within social groups and the continual presence of cultural change as well as cultural continuity over time (see Gutierrez & Rogoff, 2003)" (Gutierrez &

Rogoff qtd. in Banks 44). A way to achieve this duality in teaching can be to teach both pre-contact or earlier Native American (Indigenous peoples) literature alongside more contemporary literature. In this way, students are able to look for continuity as well as change. It might also help to talk to the students about changes in one's own culture to make them realize and see that their own culture is not static nor undifferentiated.

In a sense both *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."*/*Smoke Signals* and *Pocahontas* have the ability to show how ignorant it is to essentialize culture. Pocahontas is portrayed as different from many of the other members of her tribe, because she does not follow the rules of their society and is more open-minded towards Smith than the rest of the tribe are towards the Englishmen. The various characters we find in Alexie's short story composite all portray different ways of being Native American and inhabit individual, varying personalities. By using microhistory in this sense, and talking about and discussing these pieces of Native American literature, teachers can show students that stereotypes and essentialization does not portray reality and that in reality everyone is individual in their own sense. The concept of "the danger of a single story" is related to this, which I will discuss in Chapter 5.5.

Inhabiting a positive understanding and an appreciation of the value and uniqueness of other cultures as well as one's own are ideals that run throughout the Education Act, the Core Curriculum, the English Subject Curriculum and the Quality Framework. For example, the Quality Framework states that "The education shall promote cultural understanding and develop self-insight and identity, respect and tolerance" (3). Alexie's short stories often take up issues of identity, by using his work in teaching, students can learn about identity and develop self-insight as well as respect and tolerance for Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples. *Pocahontas* is also a story where the viewer can see her developing throughout the movie and making choices in regards to who she wants to be.

Teaching with a global and multicultural perspective is central in deconstructing, airing and working against stereotyping. It also allows teaching "[...] to inspire respect for facts and sound argument - and to train critical abilities to attack prevailing attitudes, contend with conventional wisdom and challenge existing arrangements" (LK06 "The Core Curriculum" 42). Teaching from a global and multicultural perspective also furthers the students to "[...] learn to think critically and act ethically [...]" (the Education Act 5). Teaching the students to think critically when watching clips from *Pocahontas* or reading Alexie's short story composite can be a good start to working on recognizing stereotypes, and misrepresentations as well as their own prejudices and the narrative's. Critically assessing and interpreting the stereotypes represented in *Pocahontas* such as "Indian Princess" and the exaggerated characters from *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* will force the students to see the fallacies of stereotyping and to attack prevailing attitudes of Native Americans. Thereafter,

you will be able to work on deconstructing the stereotypes and look at how Alexie does it in his short story composite.

The students we teach today are the future of Norway, therefore we must do our best to teach them the responsibilities it carries. This is reflected in the Core Curriculum's principal aims: "The purpose of upper secondary education is to develop the skills, understanding and responsibility that prepare pupils for life at work and in society, to provide a foundation for further education, and to assist them in their personal development" (2). We live in an increasingly multicultural society and the bonds we have with other countries are important for our own as well as the world's development. Therefore, it is important to teach students from a global and multicultural perspective so that they are able to develop the skills, understanding and responsibility that will prepare them for working life, further education and help them in their personal development in a globalized, multicultural society. In regards to this, Banks and Banks presents different levels of integrating multicultural content into the classroom. They suggest four levels differing in intensity: The contributions approach, the additive approach, the transformative approach, and action approach. All of these vary according to how invasive they are, from one-off events to changes in current curriculum (Banks 253). The social action approach stands out from the others in some ways, seeing that it is designed to actively involve students in working on decision making, problem solving, social criticism/change and collaboration projects on issues that relate to a global and multicultural perspective (Banks 245). Higgins points out that the students we teach today are tomorrow's world leaders, politicians, decision makers, and teachers, imparting that "[...] making them aware of these [multicultural and global] concepts is paramount if we are to address global issues such as poverty, health, education and discrimination, and prepare children for life in the 21st century" (Higgins qtd. in Mahon 95), which is something we definitely want to do as teachers.

It is important that teachers make students aware of the subjectivity of history by providing a global and multicultural perspective to the historical elements one is to teach in the English Subject. History is not an objective matter as some might think, somebody somewhere has decided what to tell, how it should be told and in what manner it should be told. Banks exemplifies this by stating that:

When teaching about the movement of the Europeans across North America, teachers should help students understand that different cultural, racial and ethnic groups often have varying and conflicting conceptions and points of view about the same historical events, concepts, issues and developments (241).

Further, Banks states that the less invasive approaches can be used as spring boards to move onto the more invasive approaches that are more intellectually challenging. This enables the

students to gradually move from a Eurocentric, mainstream-centric perspective to an increasingly global and multicultural perspective (Banks 248). It also allows a lot of room for teachers in regards to choosing literature and historical events that still compose a part of a global and multicultural perspective. Teaching about the arrival of Columbus can involve a number of different perspectives, for example: what did the Natives think when they saw Columbus' crew and boat for the first time? How did this meeting take place? Students can work on imagining the Natives' perspectives and using the archival material that is available.

It takes time and practice to develop a solid global and multicultural perspective that includes good moral and ethical values, and respect and understanding concerning one's own and other's culture. Mahon proposes several ways of teaching with a global and multicultural perspective, one of these being establishing contact and working on international or multicultural activities with a class from a different part of the world (94). This can also be a part of a multi-subject project seeing as the communication will have to be in English, while it is possible for the content to deal with competency aims in other subjects as well. In relation to English as a subject collaborating with the subject of history, social sciences or Arts and Crafts could be useful ways of either looking at historical events from a global and multicultural perspective or learn about Indigenous art. Mahon stresses that multicultural work cannot be a "one-off event" (95), it is not enough to only focus on teaching a multicultural perspective by doing one project a year, it has to be ingrained as part of the competency aims as well as the ethos of the whole school, meaning - something you work with and teach regularly (95).

Starting with the story of the Pocahontas legend and then working towards Alexie's movie or short story composite can be one way of first, recognizing, then, challenging stereotypes, followed by presenting a range of narratives that complement and qualify each other. Lastly, the teacher can ask the students if they relate to any of the characters in the stories so that the students can see that there are lots of similarities as well as differences between them and Native Americans as well as make connections to the Sami peoples in Norway. All of the ideas and suggestions provided is meant to inspire and help teachers teach American/Native American history, and about Native Americans and other Indigenous peoples, their culture and literature from a global and multicultural perspective.

5.3 Teaching controversial topics and humour when teaching Alexie

Teaching Sherman Alexie's short story composite entails bringing up and dealing with a lot of controversial as well as sensitive topics, but it does not mean that he should be exempt from the curriculum, rather it testifies to the opposite. Examples of such topics can be

alcoholism, the US government, US history, suicide, poverty, and stereotyping. RosaMaria Chacon discusses how teaching Sherman Alexie can be complicated in *Big Vibrators, Bums, and Big Explosions: Danger and Reward in Teaching Sherman Alexie* (2013). What she presents as dangerous about teaching Alexie is that he deals with a lot of difficult and abrasive topics in his work, and that some critics have slaughtered him for being a (Chacon 40) "polemicist". Nevertheless, she concludes with stating that teaching Alexie can and should be done because of Alexie's own mediating effect. She, as well as S. Bingham, A. Hernandez and I defend teaching Sherman Alexie's controversial narratives because "[...] humor should be used to teach the controversial elements of sociology, such as 'race, inequality, class and gender relations'" (Bingham and Hernandez qtd. in Chacon 54). This because: "[...] 'comedians like sociologists . . . deconstruct, unmask, and debunk status quo social expectations, organizations, rules and people; reorder and reverse the audience's perspective; . . . challenge hypocrisy; . . . [and] point out the fluidity of social life [...]" (Davis qtd. in Chacon 54). Alexie, by his use of humour mediates and helps the reader get through the difficult and controversial topics that he deals with in his short story composite.

Therefore, a part of teaching these narratives and the controversial issues they raise should involve teaching humour. As Nilsen and Nilsen state: "Humor is a communication tool that can be used either for building or tearing apart" (39), as is the case of Alexie's work where he uses humour to tear apart stereotypes and prejudice against Native Americans. For the students to be able to fully appreciate and understand Alexie's short stories then, teaching them about humour is important. Nilsen and Nilsen's statement that: "For every incidence of hurt feelings, there's a counterbalancing story of humor serving as a social lubricant that brings people together by providing comfort and joy" (39) can bring comfort and reassurance for teachers that are worried about teaching the controversial issues that Alexie deals with, .

5.3.1 Teaching Humour

The humour that is used in Alexie's short story composite is mostly subtle humour such as puns, sarcasm, irony, and hyperboles. This can make it difficult for students to realize that it is a lot more humorous than what they first thought. In my first reading I laughed a lot, but when I sat down to analyze the work I struggled to explain why it was funny. I was stranded with the question: "why did I laugh?" I imagine a lot of the students might get stranded at the same question and that is why it is so important to teach students about humour in literature. The knowledge will not only help them analyze and fully appreciate Alexie's work, but other literary works as well as it will help them reach new levels of appreciation. Furthermore, as Nilsen and Nilsen present in *The Straw Man Meets his Match:*

Six arguments for studying humor in English classes; "The fact that everyday life is so full of humor makes it all the more important that we bring humor into our classrooms [...]" (34).

To understand why and how Alexie's short story composite is funny the students need to come to a rich understanding of his work and this can be done by teaching them about humour in literature. Nilsen and Nilsen state that: "It takes skill and practice, along with a broad, cultural background of knowledge, to understand a full range of humor," (35) which is especially true for *"The Lone-Ranger and Tonto..."* seeing that it involves having knowledge of his and the characters cultural background. Knowledge students will attain by working on finding out why the short stories are humorous. Alexie makes us laugh at both horrible things such as a man's cancer, "Indians" , as well as "White people" and their "weird ways" forcing the students to reflect on their own culture and behavior. By understanding why they (hopefully) laugh at Alexie's short stories, they will be able to recognize the exaggerated stereotypes and the social criticism embedded in his work.

Motivating students to work on literary analyses is not always easy. When I had my practicum, we were going to have a full day of poetry analysis. I asked the students the day before what they already knew about poetry analysis to see what their previous knowledge about the subject was. At first the class was silent, then the only answer I got was "It's boring!". Now, I know that all students will not have this attitude towards literary analyses and the students I worked with did not have that attitude after we had worked with it. But motivating students is part of our job. Therefore, it is good to work with understanding humour because it can add to the students' motivation. Nilsen and Nilsen state that they : "[...] found that analyzing humor is a good way to entice students into other kinds of literary analysis," (36) because: "Humor is an obvious emotion, and students are genuinely interested in figuring out what causes them to laugh" (36).

Further supportive arguments for teaching humour is that it gives students practice in creative problem-solving, that it has a positive effect on the body; making the person who laughs more alert, which in turn might help the students retain information better. As quoted earlier from King, teaching the students about humour and Alexie's use of humour will ensure that they understand and appreciate the short story composite instead of just laughing about it without a deeper understanding of why. And last, but not least, because it is fun to work with humour.

5.4 The Danger of a Single Story

"The danger of a single story" is something we need to take into consideration as teachers. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, a Nigerian writer, held a speech in relation with

TEDGlobal (Technology, Entertainment and Design) in 2009. In her speech she talks about what she calls "The danger of a single story". The danger of a single story is, according to Adichie, that you are only presented with one perspective, one person's ideas and opinions, namely the storyteller's perspective, ideas and opinions. Adichie states that telling a single story might "show a people as one thing, as only one thing" (Adichie TED) and that if that is done "over and over again, [...] that is what they become" (Adichie TED) which can be related to the creation of stereotypes.

We need to make sure that students are left with more than one story, more than stereotypes, that they leave school with the knowledge that culture is as changeable as the sea and as individual as a fingerprint. In her talk, Adichie reveals that growing up in Nigeria, she read books that only portrayed "white and blue-eyed" (Adichie TED) people and that therefore she only wrote stories about "white and blue-eyed" people. To teach students only Alexie's *This is What it Means to Say Phoenix, Arizona*, even though it is a good example of Native American literature, is equivalent to only telling one story. It will not show the diversity of the Native American peoples. Just as teaching only *Pocahontas*, or Leslie Marmon Silko's *Tony's Story* (1974) (often found in textbooks) do not constitute a diversified picture of Native Americans. Teachers should therefore select a range of texts that deals with a variety of Native Americans and portray them as a diversified people so that students are able to see the individuals as well as the characteristics of their changing culture.

5.5 Teaching movies as narratives

What I will briefly discuss in this subchapter is the use of movies in teaching exemplified by *Smoke Signals* and *Pocahontas*. The English Subject Curriculum constitutes that students should be able to: "[...] discuss and elaborate on English language films and other forms of cultural expressions from different media" (LK06 "English Subject Curriculum : Eng1-03"). However, movies have sometimes been seen as a substitute for teachers who forgot to make a lesson plan and therefore have not been taken seriously into consideration as a tool for teaching. Today, movies are "allowed" into teaching in an increasing manner which the curriculum in English suggests. Stella Bruzzi, a professor of film and television studies, stated that: "[c]inema is not only entertainment; it's the art and cultural product of our time" (Bruzzi qtd. in Gordon 191). Everybody watches movies, the younger generations more than mine and even more than my parents' generation. To youths, analyzing a movie might be a lot more accessible than reading a book, this is something we have to take into consideration in our teaching. Visual media is everywhere and youths are exposed to it on a daily basis, this means that they are especially familiar with the art form. Furthermore, many students might

have encountered literature in the form of a movie adaptation rather than the written literature itself, such as *Smoke Signals* is an adaptation of "*The Lone-Ranger and Tonto...*".

Movies are attractive to students both because they offer a visual representation and because they are so familiar to them, but when teaching a movie it is important (as with anything else) to keep the agenda in mind. One of the many reasons to use movies in teaching is that movies; "[...] in the target language is an efficient and effective link to the target culture(s) in that it is highly visual; it is authentic in that it is made for the target culture audience; it is readily available; and it is attractive to students accustomed to a multimedia environment" (Sturm 246). In *Smoke Signals*, students get to experience authentic Native American accents, which involves parts of Native American languages as well. The characters in Alexie and Eyre's movie often use words such as *powwow* and have multiple cultural markers in their speech. The teacher should assign students with the task of identifying these markers, special vocabulary and what is different with their accent compared to a Euro-American accent.

I would recommend choosing clips from the movies that highlight the key elements that you want your students to understand after having worked with the movie, but if there is time, seeing the whole movie has its advantages as well. If one does not see the entire movie the students should be introduced to a short summary or description of the movie along with the clips. Alternatively, students can work with a movie in the same way they would have worked with what I referred to as a "multi-text classroom". This means that students go in groups and watch different clips of the movies, analyze them and then present and discuss with other groups or in plenary what they have found so that you are able to piece together what you have gained from the movie.

Movies are just as good sources of literature as other narrative forms such as poems and novels in teaching, and it has the advantage of also being apt for students with a low skill level. Firstly, as mentioned before, students are very familiar with movies as a medium. Secondly, the students can rely on images and subtitles (if used) to help them understand and interpret the movie. Thirdly, they are exposed to authentic language. Students at a higher skill level can choose to read Alexie's short stories, thereafter the students who have watched the movie or excerpts from it can go into a comparative discussion with them. *Smoke Signals* and "*This is What it Means...*" can be used for this purpose. Another example would be to compare excerpts from *Pocahontas* with the real John Smith's narrative or with *True Story of Pocahontas : The Other Side of History*.

In conclusion, there are a lot of possibilities when teaching from a global and multicultural perspective, to teach about Native Americans and Indigenous peoples in general, while simultaneously working with the student's self-insight using Alexie's narratives as well

as the movie *Pocahontas*. Teaching short stories and movies/movie excerpts are two examples of good ways to provide an individual-based learning environment that fits all students' skill levels. Furthermore, teaching about humour is an important part of language learning as well as imperative in teaching Alexie's literary works. Working with the students' ability to think critically about stereotyping will enable them to understand, respect and show tolerance for other cultures and gain cultural insight. As a teacher it is important to keep in mind "the danger of a single story" so that we do not further stereotypes and prejudice of cultural "Others".

6. Summary and Conclusion

Throughout the thesis we have seen that words carry meaning, associations and both positive and negative connotations. Therefore, I found it imperative to begin with discussing the terminology we use and the terminology I would use in the thesis. Additionally, it is an aspect one should have in mind and debate with one's students. The discussion revolving around "naming from the outside" is inextricably linked to Alcoff's concerns with "the problem of speaking for others". I have incorporated both Spivak's idea of the "Other" and connected this to DuBois' idea of a "double-consciousness", because these terms are instrumental in discussing stereotypes. In my research, I have concluded that negative portrayals of Native Americans are apparent in a lot of mainstream literature, *Pocahontas* being one excellent example. Furthermore, I conclude that to be able to unpack already existing stereotypes so that their fallacies might be thoroughly considered, one needs to attain knowledge and understanding about the peoples the stereotypes regard.

By presenting aspects of Native American culture and history, and analyzing *Pocahontas*, *Smoke Signals*, "*This is What it Means...*", and "*Because my Father...*" I have shown how and why stereotypical portrayals of Native Americans/Indigenous peoples/minorities are harmful to the vitality of these cultures. Alexie's narratives work as revisionist history; they deconstruct stereotypes and show how fallacies and misrepresentation of Natives are inappropriate, disrespectful and unwanted. Therefore, I have supplied the reader with examples and tools for analyzing and working with Alexie's narratives so that students can reach an understanding of Native Americans/Indigenous peoples as peoples with rich, vital and nuanced cultures and histories. I have shown that the governing documents for teaching in Norway support teaching from a global and multicultural perspective, also they promote respect, tolerance and insight into Indigenous peoples' lives.

My work has opened my eyes to the fact that Alcoff's concern is unavoidable in most

instances, there will always be a problem of speaking for others, which is why it should always be taken into consideration. The solution she suggests and that I have added to, however, makes writing about/for/to others possible to accomplish in a respectful manner. It was my aim to bring in more nuances to the stereotypic representations, to portray the Native American peoples and their culture as multilayered and flexible instead of flat and uniform and I feel that I have achieved this. It is apparent that historical misconceptions have hindered cross-cultural understanding many times in the past. This is a reason why it is so important to teach from a global and multicultural perspective, so that students are able to see history as subjective and become knowledgeable about the different perspectives from which one can see history.

One might presume that *Pocahontas* is a one dimensional and stereotypic movie, but by investigating the movie and discussing other scholars' analyses I have found that it is more multilayered than one would think. The character of Pocahontas shows depth, it teaches tolerance and respect for other cultures and to stand up for what you believe in. On the other hand, however much the movie portrays her as a strong female leader, it also portrays her as an "Indian Princess" which has further cemented the stereotype into popular imagination. The movie portrays the Englishmen as greedy, selfish, gold-diggers, but Smith and the rest of the crews' decision to make peace with the Powhatan people at the end of the movie shows that thinking of people in binary oppositions will give a false impression of reality. Nonetheless, the ending suggests peaceful, unproblematic relations between Natives and colonizers/settlers which is an irrefutable negative, Eurocentric and false portrayal of reality. It is my conclusion that moving from teaching *Pocahontas* which can be seen as fairly one dimensional, to teaching Alexie's narratives that are multidimensional, is recommended.

Identity, poverty, alcoholism, memory and history are themes that I discuss in my analyses of Alexie's narratives. I have showed how complex his short stories are, that they give a nuanced portrayal of Native Americans and that they teach survival by exorcising hurt through humour. In light of my discussion, I conclude with stating that Alexie's narratives, by the use of humour, work as revisionist history, re-members the past, fuses Native American and Western literary traditions, and airs the US history's "dirty laundry", so that new, multilayered and flexible Native American identities are a possibility. Alexie deconstructs stereotypes by the use of hyperboles, so that Native Americans can reconstruct their own identity and Nativeness. His fusion of Native and Euro-American literary traditions as well as his use of some universal themes (such as identity) make his writing comprehensible, and within reach for students at Upper Secondary School.

Chapter 5 shows how one can use the narratives I have analyzed in teaching, and provide the reader with options and insights into teaching these topics. The subchapters in

Chapter 5 are all interconnected aspects of teaching Indigenous literature. In teaching Indigenous literature, and especially about stereotypes and Alexie's narratives, one is bound to touch on controversial topics. At the same time, I have shown how humour acts as a mediating tool softening the controversial topics. In teaching Alexie's short stories, it is imperative for students to be able to recognize his use of humour. To be able to interpret humour in literature as an analytical tool is also valuable for students. It is my conclusion that in teaching Native American and Indigenous literature (as well as other topics) it is important to consider "the danger of a single story", because we want the students to be left with a nuanced perspective. Native American and Indigenous literature is available, appropriate for differentiated teaching and encompass a range of themes and genres, which is something I wanted to reassure the reader of. I have done this in my analyses, by shedding light on all the different themes that they address, and by discussing the Native American tradition of storytelling. Native American literature is expansive and exists in a variety of genres, by discussing the use of movies and short stories in teaching I have shown two, out of many genres, that are very appropriate for teaching purposes. These are all concerns a teacher has to contemplate in teaching literature.

In light of the governing documents for schools in Norway I have found that teaching from a global and multicultural perspective is advocated. Furthermore, I conclude that the narratives presented in the thesis, the methods and suggestions for teaching them and my analyses advocates teaching from a global and multicultural perspective that will provide the students with an opportunity to gain the necessary insight, respect and tolerance in regards to Indigenous peoples.

Postscript

Further reading suggestions include some works in the works cited list that are not extensively brought up in the thesis. For more on the history and legend of Pocahontas, see; aforementioned; *True Story of Pocahontas : The Other Side of History* (2007), and Francis Mossiker's *Pocahontas : The Life and the Legend* (1996). To further investigate the trickster figure, Vizenor's *Narrative Chance: Postmodern Discourse on Native American Indian Literatures* (1989) is a good source. Paul Later presents an interesting and important discussion on the American canon and canonization in *Redefining American Literary History* (1990) edited by Ruoff and Ward. A book that I find extremely helpful and rewarding in teaching is *The Native American Experience* (2008) by Jay Wertz. The book is excellent for classes with different learning abilities since it includes copies of original historical documents. In many ways, it feels like you are literally bringing history into the classroom and the students get to investigate "real" archival material. *The Native American Experience* is, therefore, particularly fitting for kinaesthetic learners. Lastly, a number of Alexie's, Momaday's, and Silko's works can be used in teaching Native American literature. Alexie has a long list of poems, short stories and novels that one can choose from, such as *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007). Silko also offers another aspect of Native American identity, being a Laguna Pueblo writer. Teaching excerpts from creation stories and other imprints of oral literature also provide valuable perspectives for students.

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