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Period A7
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AP Language

“Superman and Me” OPR

Sherman Alexie’s autobiographical essay, titled “The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me,” recounts an unspoken story about his childhood on the Spokane Indian Reservation in Wellpinit, Washington, and how he possessed a unique propensity for reading and writing, influenced by his father’s “creative energy” to read a variety of literature. His ethos is reflected as both subordinate and determined through modest self-reference in the third-person, the label “Indian” rather than the politically correct term “Native American,” his perception of ethnic stereotypes, and repetition of the word “read” fourteen times in the seventh paragraph. By infusing a blend of popular culture references and using ethos and pathos to evoke admiration and sympathy from his readers, Alexie highlights what it means to be a Native American prodigy in a state where both his native peers and “non-Indians” criticize his venerable actions taken to transcend stereotypes and become a role model of success for Native Americans everywhere. He exemplifies how education is most important tool in advancing one’s life and community from prejudices inculcated by historical burdens and shortcomings, to success and promoting a sense of leadership in underserved Native American reservations.

Compared to most Native Americans, Alexie was “lucky” to have considerate parents, who, while impoverished by “most standards” and middle-class by “reservation standards,” understood the importance of reading and writing, as revealed in the following statement, “My father, who is one of the few Indians who went to Catholic school on purpose, was an avid reader of westerns, spy thrillers, murder mysteries, gangster epics, basketball player biographies, and anything else he could find. He bought his books by the pound at Dutch’s Pawn Shop, Goodwill, Salvation Army, and Value Village. When he had extra money, he bought new novels at super-markets, convenience stores, and hospital gift shops” (Alexie, pg. 2). During Alexie’s age of curiosity, when he picked up the Superman comic book and described each component as a *three-dimensional* paragraph, such an analogy shed new light on his comparisons of the purposes of paragraphs in the previous paragraph. Alexie indicated, “A smart Indian is a dangerous person, widely feared and ridiculed by Indians and non-Indians alike” (Alexie, pg. 3). If plain text paragraphs were two-dimensional, symbols of confinement and order, equated with his surroundings and family, and comic book panels were three-dimensional, Alexie describes an epiphanic moment, as though he had learned to see color and light for the first time, similar to both *Brave New World* and *The Giver* in that the inquisitive protagonist obtains a ‘forbidden’ talent and a new perception of life that controverts established societal norms.

Finally, throughout Alexie’s essay, he repeats certain words to denote emphasis and explain his motivation to strive to ‘save’ his ‘life.’ For instance, in the seventh paragraph, he repeats the word “read” fourteen times, which serves to describe the arduous process of attaining literacy, considering the immense efforts required and obstacles he must overcome in order to join the group of Indians that “wrote poetry, short stories, and novels.” In the final paragraph, Alexie shifts from the past to the present, and in spite of his success of becoming a writer, even while inspiring young Native American students to read and write original works, to “save their lives,” Alexie identifies “the sullen and already defeated Indian kids who sit in the back rows and ignore me with theatrical precision. The pages of their notebooks are empty. They carry neither pencil nor pen. They stare out the window. They refuse and resist” (Alexie, pg. 4). When writing, Alexie reminds aspiring writers that not everyone will appreciate or accept their works, but they shouldn’t try to please everyone, only compose candidly and true to themselves.