

flight by sherman alexie skaven

Flight by Sherman Alexie is a powerful and thought-provoking novel that delves into themes of identity, belonging, trauma, and redemption. The story follows the life of a young Native American boy named Zits, who grapples with his troubled past and a sense of disconnection from both his heritage and the society around him. Through a unique narrative structure, Alexie explores the complexities of modern Native American life, the impact of historical trauma, and the quest for self-acceptance. In this article, we will examine the key themes, characters, and stylistic elements of "Flight," while also considering its significance in contemporary literature.

Overview of the Novel

"Flight" is a novel that combines elements of magical realism with a deeply rooted exploration of cultural identity. Published in 2007, it is a poignant reflection on the struggles faced by Native American youth in contemporary America. The protagonist, Zits, is a biracial boy who feels lost in a world that often marginalizes him. His journey of self-discovery is marked by a series of surreal experiences that allow him to traverse time and space, connecting him with the experiences of his ancestors and other Native Americans throughout history.

Plot Summary

The narrative begins with Zits, a troubled fifteen-year-old who has been shuffled around foster homes and has faced abuse and neglect. He feels alienated from both his Native American heritage and mainstream society. After a violent encounter, he finds himself spiraling into a world of rage and self-destructive behavior.

As the story unfolds, Zits is suddenly transported into the bodies of various individuals throughout history. Each of these experiences offers him insight into the struggles and resilience of Native Americans. Through these time-traveling episodes, Zits witnesses pivotal moments in history, such as the brutalities of colonization, the pain of loss in the modern era, and the search for identity.

Ultimately, Zits's journey becomes one of healing. By confronting the past and understanding the interconnectedness of his own life with the lives of others, he begins to reconcile his identity and find a sense of belonging.

Key Themes

"Flight" addresses several critical themes that resonate throughout the narrative:

Identity and Belonging

At the heart of Zits's journey is his struggle for identity. As a biracial boy with a complicated family history, he feels disconnected from both his Native American roots and the mainstream culture. Alexie poignantly captures this feeling of alienation, illustrating how societal expectations and stereotypes can impact one's sense of self.

- Cultural Displacement: Zits's experiences highlight the disconnection many Native Americans feel in contemporary society. His journey illustrates the struggles of reconciling a complex heritage.
- The Search for Self: Through the various lives Zits inhabits, he learns about resilience, strength, and the importance of community in shaping identity.

Historical Trauma

A significant aspect of "Flight" is its exploration of historical trauma faced by Native Americans. Through Zits's time-traveling experiences, readers are confronted with the harsh realities of colonization, violence, and cultural erasure.

- Intergenerational Trauma: The novel illustrates how the pain of the past continues to resonate in the lives of contemporary Native Americans, impacting their mental health and sense of identity.
- Resilience and Healing: Despite the trauma, the story also emphasizes the strength and resilience of Native communities, showcasing the importance of storytelling and connection to history in the healing process.

Violence and Redemption

Violence is a recurring motif in "Flight," both in Zits's personal life and throughout the historical contexts he encounters. However, the novel also explores the possibility of redemption and healing through understanding and compassion.

- Cycle of Violence: Zits's initial reaction to his pain is to lash out violently. However, his experiences teach him about the destructive nature of this cycle and the importance of finding healthier outlets for his anger.

- Forgiveness and Growth: By understanding the struggles of others, Zits learns to forgive himself and find a path toward personal growth and redemption.

Character Analysis

The characters in "Flight" are deeply layered and serve to embody the themes of the novel.

Zits

Zits, the protagonist, is a complex character whose journey is central to the narrative. His experiences of abandonment and neglect have led to a profound sense of anger and confusion. However, as he travels through time, he begins to understand the depth of his own emotions and the importance of connection.

Supporting Characters

- The Father: Zits's father embodies the struggle of many Native men who grapple with their roles in society and the legacy of trauma. His absence in Zits's life profoundly affects the boy's sense of identity.
- The Historical Figures: Throughout Zits's journey, he encounters various historical figures, each representing different facets of Native American life and the struggles they faced. These encounters provide Zits with critical insights into his own identity and the importance of community.

Stylistic Elements

Sherman Alexie employs a unique narrative style in "Flight" that enhances the emotional depth of the story.

Magical Realism

The use of magical realism allows for a fluid narrative that transcends time and space. This stylistic choice reflects the complexities of Zits's psyche and the interconnectedness of his experiences. The surreal nature of Zits's journey serves to highlight the often-unseen struggles of Native American identity.

Humor and Wit

Despite the heavy themes, Alexie infuses humor and wit throughout the narrative. Zits's sharp observations and biting commentary provide moments of levity that balance the darker elements of the story. This humor serves as a coping mechanism for both Zits and the reader, making the narrative more accessible.

Significance of "Flight" in Contemporary Literature

"Flight" holds a vital place in contemporary literature, particularly in its portrayal of Native American experiences. Alexie's work challenges stereotypes and invites readers to engage with the complexities of identity and history.

- Cultural Representation: The novel provides a nuanced portrayal of Native American life, moving beyond clichés and offering a more authentic representation of the struggles and triumphs of Indigenous peoples.
- Youth Perspective: By centering the narrative on a young protagonist, Alexie captures the unique challenges faced by Native American youth, making the story relatable to a broader audience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, "Flight" by Sherman Alexie is a profound exploration of identity, trauma, and redemption through the lens of a young Native American boy. The novel's unique narrative structure, rich themes, and complex characters combine to create a compelling story that resonates with readers. As Zits embarks on his journey of self-discovery, he ultimately finds a path toward healing and connection, making "Flight" a significant addition to contemporary literature that invites reflection on the ongoing impact of history on individual lives. Through this story, Alexie not only shines a light on the resilience of Native American communities but also offers a message of hope and the possibility of reconciliation with one's past.

Frequently Asked Questions

What are the main themes explored in 'Flight' by Sherman Alexie?

The main themes in 'Flight' include identity, trauma, the search for

belonging, and the impact of history on personal lives. The novel delves into the struggles of Native American identity and the effects of violence and loss.

How does Sherman Alexie use magical realism in 'Flight'?

Alexie incorporates elements of magical realism to enhance the narrative, allowing the protagonist to travel through time and experience different historical moments. This technique highlights the interconnectedness of personal and collective histories.

Who is the protagonist in 'Flight' and what is his journey about?

The protagonist of 'Flight' is a young Native American boy named Zits. His journey involves confronting his troubled past, grappling with his identity, and ultimately seeking redemption and understanding through a series of transformative experiences.

What role does the setting play in 'Flight'?

The setting of 'Flight' shifts between contemporary urban environments and historical events. This diverse backdrop emphasizes the contrasts between modern life and historical injustices faced by Native Americans, enriching the narrative's exploration of identity.

How does 'Flight' address the concept of violence?

'Flight' addresses violence as both a personal and historical phenomenon, examining how it shapes individual lives and communities. The novel illustrates the cycle of violence and its repercussions on the protagonist's psyche and relationships.

In what ways does humor play a role in 'Flight'?

Humor in 'Flight' serves as a coping mechanism for characters dealing with trauma and hardship. Sherman Alexie uses wit and irony to provide relief while also critiquing societal issues, making the narrative both poignant and accessible.

What is the significance of the title 'Flight'?

The title 'Flight' symbolizes escape, transformation, and the desire for freedom. It reflects the protagonist's journey as he seeks to rise above his circumstances and the historical burdens placed upon him, indicating both physical and emotional liberation.

How does Alexie portray Native American culture in 'Flight'?

Alexie portrays Native American culture in 'Flight' with depth and complexity, showcasing its resilience and struggles. He incorporates cultural references, traditions, and the contemporary realities of Native life, providing a rich context for the protagonist's experiences.

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