

# Flight Patterns Sherman Alexie

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## Sherman Alexie's Flight Patterns

In *Flight Patterns*, Alexie uses fiction elements such as characters, plot, and tone to communicate the idea that due to racism Americans often misjudge others, rather than basing their judgments on character. The main character, William, is a healthy, ritualistic Spokane Indian living in Seattle, Washington who knows a wide variety of American trivia. He has a loving wife and daughter along with a good sense of humor. He is a businessman that loves his job, but hates to leave his family, travels often but has a fear of flying, and is always a victim of prejudice, yet is guilty of doing so to others.

Alexie places an emphasis on William's interest in American culture to show his want to be an American. William knows American trivia because he felt it important to know in order to feel like a true American. Fekadu is the taxi driver who picks William up from his house to take him to the airport. At first glance, William judges him to be "a black man with a violent history" because of a long scar on Fekadu's neck. However, as the ride continues William learns that Fekadu studied physics at Oxford and became a jet-fighter pilot in Ethiopia until one day he fled the country without telling anyone his plans, including his family.

He was courageous for leaving, yet a coward for leaving, as well. William and Fekadu are able to relate with one another because they have both faced similar problems dealing with pain, hope, fear, family, and race. William hates to leave his family to go on business trips and his family hates when he leaves. It pains William to do so because he is always afraid something bad might happen to them while he is gone. Fekadu feels the same pain and fear for having to leave his family behind when he fled Ethiopia. Alexie uses William and Fekadu as voices for non-white people living in America and the everyday trials they experience.

He brings attention to the prejudice and discrimination they face from white Americans. When William first meets Fekadu he catches himself judging Fekadu based on his race. It is a natural instinct for Americans to do so. According to Fekadu, "The contradictions are the story, yes?" All throughout *Flight Patterns*, there are contradictions in everything. These contradictions add to the tone; they add irony, humor, and mockery. After 9/11, William would look around at the airports and on the planes for "suspicious brown guys", yet other people would look at him and mistake him for one.

He would, also, look around for "big white guys" for protection; however, he would never invite them to his home. Another example of irony is added to the story when William tells Fekadu of a time when a man yelled at him to go back to his own country, mistaking him for a foreigner rather than an Indian. William laughed and yelled back, "You first!" This is an example of William's sense of humor and ability to recognize irony. It is, also, an example of how some Am

**Flight Patterns Sherman Alexie** is a captivating short story that encapsulates the complexities of identity, culture, and the human experience through the lens of contemporary Native American life. Sherman Alexie, an acclaimed author and poet, masterfully weaves narratives that explore the intersections of tradition and modernity, often reflecting his own experiences as a member of the Spokane Indian Tribe. In "Flight Patterns," Alexie delves into themes of displacement, familial connection, and the search for belonging, making it a poignant and thought-provoking read.

## Overview of "Flight Patterns"

"Flight Patterns" is part of Sherman Alexie's collection titled "The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven," published in 1993. This collection features interconnected stories that detail the lives of Native Americans living in urban settings, particularly in Seattle. The stories are enriched with a blend of humor, heartbreak, and insight, showcasing the struggles and triumphs of individuals navigating their dual identities.

# Plot Summary

The narrative of "Flight Patterns" revolves around a Native American man named William, who works as a successful travel agent. William's life is a juxtaposition of the grounded realities of his heritage and the soaring aspirations represented by his profession. The story begins with William's routine as he prepares for a day of work, but it quickly evolves into a deeper exploration of his internal struggles and relationships.

Key plot points include:

1. **William's Daily Life:** The story opens with William at the airport, where he is surrounded by the hustle and bustle of travelers. This chaotic environment serves as a backdrop for his reflections on identity and belonging.
2. **Family Dynamics:** William's relationship with his wife and children is central to the narrative. His interactions reveal the tension between his professional life and his responsibilities as a father and husband.
3. **Cultural Reflection:** Throughout the story, William grapples with his identity as a Native American man in a predominantly white society. This inner conflict is highlighted through his thoughts and experiences, which resonate with many Indigenous individuals facing similar dilemmas.

# Thematic Exploration

Sherman Alexie's "Flight Patterns" touches on several significant themes that resonate deeply with readers. Understanding these themes can enhance the reading experience and provide a richer context for the story.

## 1. Identity and Displacement

One of the central themes in "Flight Patterns" is the exploration of identity and the feeling of displacement. William struggles to reconcile his Native American heritage with the demands of modern life. He often feels caught between two worlds: the traditional values of his culture and the expectations of contemporary society.

- **Cultural Heritage:** William's connection to his Indigenous roots is a source of pride, but it also brings about feelings of isolation and confusion in a world that often marginalizes Native experiences.

- **Urban Life:** The urban setting of the story amplifies William's sense of displacement. While he has achieved professional success, he often feels disconnected from his cultural community, highlighting the challenges faced by many Native Americans living in urban environments.

## 2. Family and Relationships

Family dynamics play a crucial role in "Flight Patterns." William's relationships with his wife and children are depicted with nuance, revealing the complexities of love, responsibility, and communication.

- **Fatherhood:** William's role as a father is a significant aspect of his identity. His desire to provide for his family is juxtaposed with his longing for deeper connections, illustrating the challenges faced by many parents balancing work and family life.
- **Marital Struggles:** The story also touches on the strains within William's marriage. Communication barriers and emotional distance are explored, raising questions about how cultural differences can impact relationships.

## 3. The Search for Belonging

The theme of belonging is woven throughout "Flight Patterns." William's journey reflects the universal desire to find a place where one feels accepted and understood.

- **Community and Connection:** William's experiences highlight the importance of community in fostering a sense of belonging. As he navigates his daily life, he yearns for deeper connections with others who share his background and experiences.
- **Personal Growth:** The story ultimately suggests that the journey towards belonging is ongoing. William's reflections and interactions lead him to confront his own perceptions and biases, paving the way for personal growth and understanding.

## Writing Style and Literary Techniques

Sherman Alexie's writing style in "Flight Patterns" is characterized by its vivid imagery, humor, and poignant observations. His use of literary techniques enhances the emotional depth of the story.

### 1. Vivid Imagery

Alexie's descriptions of the airport environment and the characters' emotions create a rich tapestry that immerses readers in the narrative. His ability to paint a picture with words allows readers to visualize the chaos of travel and the intimate moments of reflection.

### 2. Humor and Irony

The incorporation of humor serves to lighten the weighty themes explored in the story. Alexie's use of irony often highlights the contradictions in William's life, making the narrative relatable and

engaging.

### **3. Symbolism**

Various symbols throughout "Flight Patterns" contribute to the story's deeper meanings. For instance, the airport itself symbolizes both opportunity and displacement, embodying the duality of William's experience.

## **Conclusion**

In "Flight Patterns," Sherman Alexie offers a compelling narrative that reflects the complexities of identity, family, and the search for belonging in contemporary society. Through the character of William, readers are invited to explore the nuances of Native American life in an urban setting, shedding light on the challenges and triumphs faced by individuals navigating their cultural heritage in a modern world.

By addressing universal themes and employing vivid storytelling techniques, Alexie crafts a narrative that resonates with a diverse audience. "Flight Patterns" serves as a reminder of the importance of understanding one's identity and the connections that bind us to our families and communities, making it a timeless exploration of the human experience.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

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

The main themes in 'Flight Patterns' include cultural identity, the complexity of family relationships, the impact of trauma, and the search for personal and cultural belonging.

### **How does Sherman Alexie use symbolism in 'Flight Patterns'?**

Alexie uses the concept of flight as a symbol for escape and freedom, reflecting the protagonist's desire to break away from his troubled past and the burdens of his heritage.

### **In 'Flight Patterns', what role does the setting play in the narrative?**

The setting, which shifts between urban environments and Native American reservations, highlights the contrast between modern life and traditional cultural values, influencing the protagonist's sense of identity.

### **What is the significance of the protagonist's profession in**

## **'Flight Patterns'?**

The protagonist's job as an airport security worker serves as a metaphor for his internal struggles, as he navigates the complexities of his identity and the societal expectations placed on him.

## **How does Alexie portray Native American identity in 'Flight Patterns'?**

Alexie portrays Native American identity as multifaceted, showcasing the challenges of living between two worlds and the deep-rooted cultural connections that persist despite modern struggles.

## **What lessons about family dynamics can be learned from 'Flight Patterns'?**

The story illustrates the complexities of family dynamics, emphasizing themes of forgiveness, understanding, and the importance of recognizing shared histories and experiences.

## **How does the narrative structure of 'Flight Patterns' enhance the story?**

The narrative structure interweaves past and present experiences, allowing readers to understand the protagonist's background and the events that shape his current life, creating a richer emotional landscape.

## **What impact does loss have on the characters in 'Flight Patterns'?**

Loss profoundly affects the characters, leading to feelings of grief, disconnection, and a search for meaning, ultimately shaping their interactions and personal growth throughout the story.

## **How does humor play a role in 'Flight Patterns'?**

Humor serves as a coping mechanism for the characters, providing relief from their struggles and highlighting the resilience of the human spirit in the face of adversity.

## **What message does Sherman Alexie convey about cultural heritage in 'Flight Patterns'?**

Alexie conveys that cultural heritage is both a source of pride and a challenge, illustrating how individuals navigate their identities while reconciling the past with the present.

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Explore the unique themes and insights in 'Flight Patterns' by Sherman Alexie. Discover how identity and culture shape the narrative. Learn more!

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