

Essay on ceremony

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



You can destroy years of cultural identity and ancestral forms by getting rid of significant ceremonies within certain groups of people. The modern world might even pose a threat to ceremonial life of those from Pueblo descent. The book entitled *Ceremony*, written by Leslie Silko follows the life of Tayo and the challenges he faced as someone of mixed ethnicity. Ceremonies, rituals and storytelling are important for Silko, and this shows through her writing. She describes that Native American culture is passed down through generations by a communal process of storytelling. Silko's concern and deep feelings about the preservation of her culture is seen through the trials faced by Tayo, the main character of *Ceremony*. The novel has a resounding theme, which is religion. Religion, as well as maintaining tradition, is seen to play an important role in the culture of Pueblos as the glue that holds them as a race.

The novel shows three of the most significant and important figures in Pueblo mythology. These are namely Thought Woman, Corn Mother and Sun Father. The novel is patterned in the way Native Americans would tell their stories. Storytelling, for Pueblos, is more than just entertainment. This goes in deeper than passing on historical beliefs through the generations. For Pueblos, these stories are part of ceremonies and religious acts, they base their ritual lives on their myths and legends. Native American culture is mostly oral, as everything is passed down through stories. These stories need to be remembered, so they have a rhythmic characteristic to them; they are almost sung and have a lot of repetition. The novel showed different forms of storytelling, mostly though poems. These poems vary from first person to third person. This symbolizes the relationship of people with the

deities and spirits around them. This creates a sense of togetherness among people in the community. Stories have powers; they can heal and cure cultures or individual people. Religion in stories is seen through passed on beliefs and rituals. Stories with morals allow people to see the mistakes of their ancestors, so that they might not make the same mistakes. The function of religion in storytelling is to remind people of where they came from; to reinforce cultural identity. Silko used a combination of poetry and prose in her novel to infuse both communal storytelling patterns of Native Americans and narrative tradition of the Western culture. This is another way of blending the two cultures, rather than clashing them.

Tayo, the main character of the story represents the confluence between Pueblos and the white western culture. This is seen in his mixed ancestry as a direct link. However, if you go in deeper, you will notice that even his experiences embodies both cultures. These experiences carry him off to different stages in his life, and all are significant points. He is from the United States Army which represents his Caucasian background. He is strong, capable, with good intent. He is then found in the Philippines where the confusions start. This is a trying point in his life and where he was scarred the most. These wounds were seen as more emotional, rather than physical. He ends up in a Veteran's Hospital, then back to the reservation. Cultural mixing is seen in his travels and experience. His green eyes show that the world is changing, and sometimes even cultures cannot remain the same. This change is seen as confusion for most cultures, and Tayo is the bridge that can link the older generations of Native Americans to the younger ones. Even though he was brought up in a white-run school, he still stuck to Native

American beliefs and traditions. This was what he learned from his family, even though he was constantly told that he was different. Auntie, Tayo's guardian in the story, represents those Native Americans, or anyone from any culture, who believes that interracial relationships should not happen. This is from the perspective of those who really just follow dictated tradition and do not understand why it is meant to be followed.

World War II shook everyone's life at the time it took place. It definitely did interrupt Tayo's, as it did most people in his generation. Tayo is seen to come of age while on the battlefield. He sees and experiences things that are not meant for young eyes. He was hurt and traumatized. Mostly, his eyes were opened up to how badly Native Americans were treated. However, his feelings remained more sad than angry. There was no interest found in him to glorify his role in the army. Tayo, along with Emo resorted to drinking their sorrows away. This was to help them cope with the dreadful feelings war had instilled in them. The pattern of drinking made Tayo sicker because this brought out evil within. Instead of sharing stories about the great deities and other myths their people so fondly passed on, Indian veterans only saw the world as wicked and dark. The witchery of the modern world was the only thing on their minds. This can be related to the story about the Corn Mother and the evil magician; it is how the people can lose their identity. The Corn Mother is given sacrifices and offerings because she provides for the people, giving them life and natural resources. However, when an evil magician came to the community, he offered tricks and magic that promised to give the people the same thing Corn Mother did. They were seduced by his lies and forgot to give Corn Mother her due offerings. Thus, she withheld from

them rain clouds that helped plants grow and young animals. This is much how was polluted the minds of Indian veterans and how alcohol clouded Tayo's judgment, which drew him away from his identity.

Tayo wanted to belong somewhere. He craved for acceptance within his family as well as his community. He had deep feelings about the power of traditions and ceremonies. This is what pushed him to take up the offer given to him by Betonie. The offer was to complete a ceremony which he believed can cure himself as well as his people. The character of Betonie is meant to be a bridge between the Pueblo community and the mystical world. He would spend his time communication with spirits and he had access to stories that not a lot of people knew about. His character seemed so magical and wise. He was seen to be connected with little details of the Native American society, yet he attended a school that was predominantly white. Betonie had a very deep understanding of the world. His senses seemed to be very connected to everything around him. Though he was in the brink of a cultural clash, much like Tayo, he had a lot of tolerance for it. He was a vehicle for Tayo to connect to his roots, playing the role of a wise teacher.

The novel Ceremony shows that the contact or clash between cultures can be very destructive. It shows the largely devastating effects it had on the Native Americans. However, the novel aims to show that the culture still persists through ways that even change cannot destroy. Tayo represents the clash of cultures, though in the end he does not abandon his Native American traditions, no matter how harsh his experiences might have been. Whites were shown to be poison for the Native American tradition. They

encouraged the abandonment of farming, bringing pollution and white collar jobs, yet depriving the Native Americans of positions with good pay.

Additionally, the little money they did make were spent on alcoholism in bars which were introduced by the whites. This showed how destructive the clash of cultures were on the Native Americans. The influence of the whites hit them hard and they slowly started to steer away from their culture and traditions.

The preservation of tradition was an important theme in Ceremony. This was something that would save the Pueblo community. Forgetting their culture and traditions would bring on threats of drought and will only lead to disaster. Medicine men acted as gatekeepers who stored artifacts of culture and tradition. Before attempting to heal wounds, the culture must learn about contemporary times. Traditional healing ceremonies had no place in the modern world because of the different illnesses present. Tradition must be reinvented, but not forgotten. There is also danger in simply adhering to tradition, without understanding their intent. Ku'oosh could not help Tayo because his ways were too old. His medicine and healing could not penetrate through the change modern culture has brought on. They would only work in a world where nothing had been disturbed, and whites were not in the picture. Even Betonie states that because the world is every-changing, tradition has to reflect its pattern. This, however, does not mean that the tradition itself has been compromised. The function of religion in the novel ceremony is to hold the Pueblo community together and to remind them of their cultural identity.