

The theme within the rain clouds essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

“ The Man to Send Rain Clouds” is a beautifully written short story by Leslie Marmon Silko. Set in a modern 21st century time frame, this story is about a Native American family’s grandfather passing away and how the family gives him a proper, cultural funeral despite all of the modern traditions/challenges that present them along the way. There are a couple themes that are displayed as the story is told.

The first theme that is the most prominent and apparent in this story shown is respect. This theme is displayed throughout the entire story. The characters in the story Ken, Leon, Louise and Teresa clearly have respect for Teofilo not just because he is their grandfather, because he is an elder. In Native American culture, elders are considered the wisest and most respected in their tribes.

Ken and Leon show their respect by painting Teofilo’s face “ Across the brown wrinkled forehead he drew a streak of white and along the high cheekbones he drew a strip of blue paint... Then Leon painted with the yellow under the old man’s broad nose, and finally when he painted green across the chin, he smiled” (Silko 403) and tying a feather in his hair “ Leon took a piece of string out of his pocket and tied a small grey feather in the old man’s long white hair. ” (Silko 403) These are traditions that are performed for a proper Native American burial ceremony, something that the narrator makes several references to.

Another way respect is shown is the relationship between Father Paul and the Native Americans. The story illustrates the Father Paul’s struggle to create a mutual respect with the Native Americans on the reservation. The

Native Americans and the Father Paul experience a culture clash when it comes to death and traditions involving these two subjects. The conversation between Father Paul and Leon discussing the holy water for Teofilo's funeral show the cultural struggle each individual is experiencing.

Father Paul upholds his Christian values when discussing the issue of holy water " You know I can't do that, Leon. There should have been the Last Rites and a funeral Mass at the very least. " (Silko 405) And Leon upholds his cultural values " It wasn't necessary, Father... we just want him to have plenty of water. " (Silko 405) But, they learn to adjust and choose to respect each other's cultures and which is part in making a community with mutual respect.

Also the scattering of corn meal by Ken " He paused and watched Ken throw pinches of corn meal and pollen into the wind that fluttered the small grey feather" (Silko 403) and sprinkling water by the Father Paul " He sprinkled the grave and the water disappeared almost before it touched the dim, cold sand" (Silko 406) are both symbols. They represent food and water provided for the spirit on its journey to the other world, which is a sign of respect for the dead. That brings us to the next theme that is present in the story Death. " He had been dead for a day or more," (Silko 403) is directly referring to Teofilo's body.

This theme sustains throughout the story as the setting moves along to the funeral. To many Native American tribes, death is not the end of existence, but part of a cycle in which the human spirit returns to its source and then helps the tribe by returning with rain clouds and guidance. After Teofilo's

death, Louise is the one who sprinkles corn meal on his grave (Corn meal is sprinkled twice on Teofilo throughout the story.)“ Her hands were still dusty from the corn meal that she had sprinkled around the old man.” (Silko 404)

This is a common way of blessing in Indian prayer. The holy water sprinkled by the Father Paul symbolizes cleansing, blessing in the Catholic Church, but in this story it’s used because Louise doesn’t want Teofilo to be thirsty after his death “ About the priest sprinkling holy water for Grandpa. So he won’t be thirsty,” (Silko 405) and Leon wants him to bring plenty of rain clouds “ and he was happy about the sprinkling of the holy water; now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure.” (Silko 406)

A third theme present is culture, particularly the Native Americans and their way of life as they adjust to the newer modern ways of living. The themes of death and respect together are the structure behind the theme of culture. Culture plays a vital role in family life and traditions are passed down from one generation to the next. The influences from factors outside one’s culture generally affect the standard traditions and produce challenges as time moves on.

The original and basic idea of the belief remains the same, although as time moves on, more ideas have been added to the cultural belief. The situation with the Native Americans here is pretty apparent. With a constant influence of Catholic beliefs present in the Native American people’s society, Leon and his family still display their identity through their actions that are observed throughout the story. Silko does an excellent job presenting these themes of respect and death to the audience in a brilliant manner.

Death and culture are the more obvious theme with the blatant display of the Teofilo being found dead in the sheep camp, the funeral taking place and all the acts done to prepare for the funeral. Respect is the more underlying theme. The uses of traditions in the text highlight the respect among both the Native Americans and Father Paul. That can be missed without general knowledge about Native Americans however, when Father Paul decided to grant Leon's request, the respect between the two is more evident. This story is a great piece of literature to express a powerful story containing a powerful theme in the message.