

HRS 151
Study Guide for
Ceremony

GENERAL NOTE: the novel is composed not of chapters but of fifty-three long indents at the beginnings of paragraphs that suggest distinct though unnumbered sections. Interspersed with these sections at irregular intervals are poem-like stories, marked by lines centered on the page. Rather than summarizing the plot according to this multitude of sections, this study guide outlines characters, plot, and the different threads of stories woven throughout the book.

Characters:

Laguna Pueblo Natives

Grandma ==> "Auntie" – Robert ==> Rocky
(the stable part of the family, though Rockie dies during WWII)
==> Laura – [unknown Mexican] ==> Tayo
(the outcaste of the family, regularly away at night sleeping with men)
==> Josiah (dies while Tayo & Rockie are away at war)
(no offspring, though he courts the "Night Swan," a mysterious Mexican)

"Old Ku'oosh:" a traditional Laguna medicine man who sends Tayo to Betonie

Tayo's war buddies: Harley & Leroy (mostly friendly towards Tayo)
Pinkie & Emo (generally hostile toward Tayo)

Natives of Other Tribes

Betonie: the Navajo medicine man who, with his mute assistant Shush, conducts the Ceremony that is the heart of the novel.

Ts'eh: the mysterious young woman who, along with her brother, a hunter, helps Tayo corral his uncle's cattle; she appears also later in the novel to help him evade his enemies.

Threads of Stories, Prayers & Plot

Stories & Prayers
(centered on each page)

Though Woman, the power of stories &
"Sunrise" prayer (p.1-4)

Reed Woman goes "down below" after
being neglected by Corn Woman (p.13-14)

the Scalp Society (p.37-38)

Prose Sections
(first line indented half way across the page)

Tayo, **out on a desert ranch**, remembers the death of his cousin Rocky in the rain-drenched jungles of Japan during WWII, from which he recently returned. (p.5-12)

Tayo cursed the rain in Japan; now there has been a drought for six years. (p.14)

Harley comes by & they **go off to find a bar**; Tayo remembers a mental hospital & meeting Old Ku'oosh after coming home. (p.14-37)

People learn tricks from Pa'caya'nyi the Ck'o'yo medicine man & neglect their corn altars; Nau'ts'ity'i takes away the plants & rainclouds. (p.46-49, 53-54)

WWII "heroes" (p.57-59)

Hummingbird & Fly go "down below" to bring Mother Nau'ts'ity'i back (p. 71-72, 82, 105-6--> cont'd on p.113, 151, 180)

- abducted by a bear (Shush's story, p.128-30)
- the origin of Witchery (p.132-38);
- the young man captured by Coyote (p.139-41, 153)--> prototype for Tayo's ceremony (resolved only on p.258).
- script for Tayo's ceremony (p.142-44)

the Sun goes to find his children the rainclouds, who have been captured by Kaup'a'ta the Ck'o'yo magician in his house in the Zuni mountains (p.170-76)

traditional prayers:
Ka't'sina singing to Sunrise (p.182)
hunter's prayer (p.206)

Arrowboy catches sight of a Ck'o'yo witchman changing into a wolf (p.247)

Hummingbird & Fly bring Mother Nau'ts'ity'i back to earth (p. 255-56);
song to Amoo'ooh (p.257)

the "Whirling darkness" of witchery dying out & Sunrise prayer (p.260-62)

Tayo remembers going drinking with Emo, Harley & other veterans, more about Rocky's death, & Josiah's advice during another drought when Tayo was younger. (p.38-46)

Tayo & Harley **reach the bar**; Tayo remembers the time he almost killed Emo there (p.49-63).
He recalls enlisting in the Army with Rocky, & all the differences between them. (p. 64-71, 73)

Before the war, Josiah obtained a sturdy breed of cattle to survive the drought. He often visited his girlfriend, the "Night Swan," who used to live nearby the bar where Tayo drinks. (p.74-93)

Still at the bar, Tayo recalls the end of the drought before the war, after he offered prayers at the spring Josiah had told him about, and also his visit to see "Night Swan." He goes to see the deserted room where she once lived & where he met her. (p.93-105)

Tayo still feels haunted by his memories. Robert **takes him to see Betonie**, who explains the origin of the "witchery" that plagues Tayo. He performs a ceremony for him. Later, Betonie tells the story of his lineage, & how the ceremonies have to change to stay alive. He explains to Tayo that his ceremony isn't over yet. (p.107-52)

Tayo **meets Harley & Leroy** and begins to drink again, but then remembers Betonie's words. (p.153-69)

Tayo **tracks down and corrals** Josiah's lost **herd of cattle**, with the help of the stars, Ts'eh, snow, a mountain lion, and an unnamed hunter. (p.169-213)

Tayo brings the cattle back and **goes out to the desert ranch again**, where he finds Ts'eh again; she warns him that Emo and the others are after him. (p.214-35)

Fleeing, Tayo wanders onto the **uranium mines at Cebolleta**; hidden, he witnesses Emo & Pinky torturing Harley to death, but resists the impulse to get involved & so completes his ceremony. (p. 235-54)

Tayo is **welcomed back home** by Old Ku'oosh. Pinkie dies in a rifle accident; Emo goes off to CA. (p. 256-60)

"The lack of easily identifiable section divisions in the story is a physical, formal (in form) reflection of the themes of interconnection between all things, repetition, and of the unclear lines between dream, myth, memory, and reality. As Silko refuses to conform to the standard presentation of a novel, in chapter form, she refuses to make her story conform exactly to traditional American standards. Similarly, as she seamlessly combines [prose](#) and poetry, she ignores standard generic (of genre) divisions. *Ceremony* is not only a story about Native Americans, it is a [Native American](#) story"

—Keja Valens, plot summary of the novel for *SparkNotes*
(<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit>)