



AP[®] English Literature 1999 Sample Student Responses

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Ceremony is Leslie Marmon Silko's coming-of-age novel of ~~and~~ a Native American man who must confront his ethnic heritage in order to mature and discover purpose in life. Tayo, the main character must deal with two conflicting obligations and influences. His first is to his Native American heritage, as his ^{obligation} family members urge him to keep the ceremonies alive. He is also obligated to protect himself from friends' haunting memories, and authorities. The conflict between these obligations in Tayo's life are eventually resolved by his ability to integrate past and present, illuminating the theme that it is necessary to draw on one's past to resolve the problems of today. Silko illustrates this meaning through the character of Ts'eh and her actions through the integration of myths, stories, songs, and poems into the novel, and by emphasizing the Native American ~~idea~~ view of time as circular in nature.

Tayo's character is best described as conflicted. He must cope with flashbacks and nightmares from the Vietnam War, and is hospitalized for his mental problems. For a time he turns to alcohol as a release from his problems, and Silko uses this experience as an opportunity to represent the problems ~~on~~ an Indian Reservation, especially alcoholism.

With help from Josiah and Medicine Men, Tayo begins to learn more about his ethnic heritage and begins to feel the obligation to participate in the Laguna Pueblo Ceremonies. However, Tayo is hesitant to commit himself to the influences of the past, and often escapes by drinking and picking up women with his friends. These experiences develop into his other obligation, to protect himself from friends who turned against him. The only influence that Tayo does commit to is Ts'eh, the woman he met after being beaten by white ranch hands. He spends a summer with her, living in a cave and learning important traditions from her. She teaches him about gathering herbs & flowers for ceremonies, as well as explaining cliff drawings to him. But she represents more than his obligation to learn about his heritage, because she keeps him safe from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as well as his enemies. Ts'eh allows Tayo to reach a compromise among the conflicting influences in his life, as she helps him develop as an individual, while still keeping his ethnic heritage in a prominent place in his life. This relates to the novel's meaning as a whole because under Ts'eh guidance, Tayo deals with conflicting issues while maturing throughout the story.

Silko's use of myths and stories interspersed with traditional discourse illustrates the combination of past and present. These myths are important in the ceremonies Tayo performs, fulfilling obligations to his heritage. But they also function as allegories of the action in the novel. When Emo diev, Tayo's grandmother remarks that although the names change, the stories stay the same. In this way, the use of myths, stories and songs represents Tayo's obligation to the past, but also show that the present (or traditional discourse) can co-exist with the past (myths).

The conclusion of Ceremony includes references to Los Alamos, the atomic bomb, and uranium. Silko uses these references to illustrate the Native American idea of time as circular because the atomic bomb represents continuing destruction. Through varying time schemes, Silko reveals that the events in Tayo's life are circular, as he must return to the past before he can go on. The use of circular time throughout the novel integrates the past & present influences on Tayo and his ability to connect past & present to solve conflicts.

Tayo is pulled by different people to fulfill obligations to his heritage and to himself throughout ceremony. In the end, Tayo resolves these conflicting influences by using the lessons of his past to ~~become~~ mature and develop into a happy, healthy, and unthreatened man.

In many plays or novels there is a character whose mind is pulled in conflicting directions by ~~two~~ compelling desires, obligations, or influences. This is the case in Toni Morrison's novel Beloved. Paul D, the love of the novel's protagonist Sethe's, life is torn between ^{his} ^{need to suppress} past experiences ~~that~~ which he keeps tucked away in "the tobacco tin lodged in his heart," and his new found desire to unburden himself, and start a new life with his love, Sethe.

Paul D had spent many years on the Sweet Home plantation in Kentucky as a slave to a brutal master called Schoolteacher. Paul D had longed to feel like a man, instead of a caged up animal. He often longed to be like a rooster named Mister who was a part of life on the plantation. To Paul D, "Mister, he looked so free," ~~the~~ irony that Paul D had to look to an animal ~~as~~ ^{as} ^a model ^{of freedom,} and the fact that he wanted to be his own man, soon lead him away from Sweet Home - where he had watched most of his friends and family die right before his eyes. Paul D had spent years in a prison camp in Georgia, and it wasn't until he had escaped, that he had found himself a free man.

He was now a wanderer. No place to call home, no one to love, no one to love him - all he had was his manhood - and

the pain that life had dealt him had been stored away "in the black hole where his heart should have been". Paul D's tobacco tin signified his suppressed emotion, his lack of stability, his weakened spirit, and his fragile sense of manhood. His tin had rusted shut and he did not want to have to reveal its contents to anyone.

However, the strength of Paul D's ~~character~~ ^{character} was tested upon his being reunited with another former Sweet Home slave, Sethe. Paul D felt the lid of his tobacco tin slowly opening through the time that he had been with Sethe. His hard past didn't seem to matter to her, and hers to him either. She didn't care that the "longest he had ever stayed in one place was two years - with a weaver lady in Delaware." ~~For~~ For her he tried to ~~be~~ be a father for her reserved daughter Denver, and he even put up with their strange house guest, Beloved, whom Sethe ~~had~~ developed an incredible attachment to. Sethe felt that Paul D was the one for her - until ~~she~~ he left unexpectedly.

after his temptation got the better of him, and Beloved had "opened the contents of his tobacco tin and exposed his red, red heart".

Paul D separated himself for a while after finding out some horrifying news from Sethe's past. He felt that he could no longer trust her, that he didn't know who she really was; and that once again he was a lonely, and that once again he was a lonely, shattered man. It wasn't until a talk with an older and wiser man, Stamp Paid, that Paul D could look inside himself and face his two conflicting forces head on: his need to feel like a man, to keep his guard up for everyone, to save himself from pain; and his enduring love and the sense of commitment he felt towards Sethe.

Paul D eventually went back to Sethe's side in her time of need. He ultimately felt that he could be vulnerable enough to be loved, and strong enough to be the man that she needed. Paul D's inner struggle in Beloved, serves to illuminate the meaning of the novel as a whole. Through a difficult past, ~~that he~~ ~~escaped from~~ Paul D rose above his own expectations of himself, to

~~Ultimately~~ ~~we~~ find his own true identity, and
to conquer his fear of ~~showing~~ ^{showing} that
identity to others. He put love before
~~temptation~~ ^{temptation}, forgiveness above fear, and demonstrated
~~that~~ ~~out of~~ ~~the~~ Tonia Morrison's theme, that
out of darkness there comes hope.

Although in Nathaniel Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter Hester Prynne is the main character of the novel, Arthur Dimmesdale also functions as another primary character. If it were not for his presence, Hester Prynne would not be in such a predicament. Throughout the novel, the reader gains insight into the inner conflict occupying Dimmesdale's mind. He is constantly weighing his conscience up against his desires and in the end his conscience wins.

Dimmesdale, having been a minister and committed^{ed} adultery with Hester, feels a certain responsibility for his actions. For years he has deceived the people of the town into thinking he is a pure, innocent, blameless man, even though Hester has known the entire time. Having been elected a minister, he wants to maintain the respect and admiration that the ^{town's} people hold for him. He feels as if he turned back now, they would laugh in his face and deem him a traitor and hypocrite, which is why he has been deceitful all these years. His ^{innate} human nature to sin as he probably preaches about, has caused him to desire power and recognition even if it costs him self-respect. His ~~own~~ ^{own} nature wants him to forget the past and his past mistakes and look at what a bright future he has before him.

On the other hand, Dimmesdale wants to mend ~~those~~ his broken past and atone for his sins. No longer does he want to be burdened by the weight of his mistakes. He wants to be let free,

even if it costs him his reputation. ~~At~~ One ~~part~~ night Dimmesdale encounters Hester and Pearl at the scaffold.

Hester realizes the pain Dimmesdale is suffering from guilt as Dimmesdale attempts to apologize for all the misfortune he has caused her. He realizes here that he no longer wants to live in a world of deception. He wants to come clean of his crime, even if it will bring him to death. The reader begins to understand the consequences of sin.

In the end, the decision made by Dimmesdale to atone for his sin and confess to the townspeople does lead to his demise. On election day in front of hundreds, perhaps thousands of ^{town} people, Dimmesdale confesses his sin. The scaffold scene in which Hester and Dimmesdale meet

scaffold scene in which Hester and Dimmesdale meet foreshadows their inevitable death at the scaffold on election day.

Dimmesdale's inner conflict could only be resolved by confession and eventual death. The ^{inner} conflict of Dimmesdale

is perhaps the most important part of the entire novel.

Hester is not the main focus because she is already the one who has been deemed guilty. It is Dimmesdale Hawthorne is concerned about. Dimmesdale's experience proves to the reader that sin can have some very devastating consequences. This is perhaps the main theme of the novel, and it is clearly illustrated by the life of Dimmesdale.