# The Man to Send Rainclouds Study Guide

## The Man to Send Rainclouds by Leslie Marmon Silko

BOOKRAGS

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# Introduction

Written in 1967 and published two years later in the *New Mexico Quarterly,* "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" established Silko as a brilliant new Native American writer. The story brought her wide recognition as well as a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.

The story is based on an incident Silko had heard about in her hometown of Laguna, New Mexico: an old man had been found dead in a sheep camp and had been given a traditional Indian burial. The local Catholic priest resented the fact that he had not been called in to officiate at the service. Silko's story explores the Indians' blending of Catholic rituals with traditional Indian rituals during a funeral ceremony. The tension of maintaining traditional Pueblo practices and the co-opting of outside influences—in this case, the Catholic church—is a recurring interest of Silko's and appears in several of her stories.

As a story about Native Americans, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" describes the quality of contemporary Laguna Pueblo life. The story is admired for Silko's masterful portrayal of the Indians' quiet acceptance of death and for its highly controlled narrative.

# Author Biography

Silko is one of the major authors to emerge from the Native American literary renaissance of the 1970s. Born in 1948 in Albuquerque, New Mexico, she grew up on the nearby Laguna Pueblo Reservation, where she was raised within a family of mixed Indian, Mexican, and white descent. Life on the reservation was a daily balancing act of Pueblo and Christian ways. Storytelling, or story-sharing, was an important part of Pueblo culture, and Silko grew up listening to stories of the Indians' struggles and their survival as a people. The stories lived on in her memory, and in later years she drew heavily upon her heritage in her writings.

She majored in English at the University of New Mexico because, as she put it, "I loved to read and write about what I'd read." Silko graduated *magna cum laude* in 1969, the same year she published "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." This short story would launch her career as a writer. She attended law school for a short time, but, disillusioned with the legal system, she left school after three semesters, having decided to seek justice for her people through the power of her imagination and stories. Since that time she has established herself as an important chronicler of American Indian life, though she hesitates to call herself a representative of the Pueblo, as she is but "one human being and one Laguna woman."

Silko's other works include the verse collection *Laguna Woman* (1974), the novels *Ceremony* (1977), *Storyteller* (1981), and *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), the autobiography *Sacred Water* (1993), and the essay collection *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996). Also, in 1985 her letters to and from James Wright were published as *The Delicacy and Strength of Lace*. She has also written film scripts and given numerous interviews which provide insights into her works.

Silko has garnered much critical acclaim and numerous awards and grants for her fiction and poetry, including a Discovery grant for her short story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" in 1969, a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts and a poetry award from *Chicago Review* in 1974, and the Pushcart Prize for poetry in 1977. In 1981 she was awarded a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation grant.

# Plot Summary

"The Man to Send Rain Clouds" is set on an Indian reservation in the American Southwest, with its wide mesas (plateaus) and arroyos (ravines). As the story opens, Leon and his brother-in-law, Ken, find an old man, Teofilo, dead under a cottonwood tree. They ritually paint his face and take his body, wrapped in a red blanket, to their home for a traditional Pueblo funeral ceremony. (The Pueblo people paint the faces of the dead so that they will be recognized in the next world. They also scatter corn and sprinkle water to provide food and water for the spirit on its journey to the other world. To the Pueblo, death is not the end of existence, but part of a cycle in which the spirit of the deceased returns to its source and then helps the community of the living by returning with rain clouds for the nourishment of the earth.)

On their way home, Leon and Ken encounter Father Paul, a young Catholic priest who expresses his sorrow that the old man had died alone. Teofilo's funeral is performed in the traditional Native American way until Leon's wife suggests to her husband that he should ask the priest to sprinkle holy water on the grave. At first, Father Paul refuses to use the holy water as part of an Indian burial ceremony. After reconsideration the priest, still confused about his role the ceremony, changes his mind and sprinkles the grave with the holy water:

The priest approached the grave slowly. . . . He looked at the red blanket, not sure that Teofilo was so small, wondering if it wasn't some perverse Indian trick— something they did in March to ensure a good harvest— wondering if maybe old Teofilo was actually at the sheep camp corralling the sheep for the night. But there he was, facing into a cold dry wind and squinting at the last sunlight, ready to bury a red wool blanket while the faces of his parishioners were in shadow with the last warmth of the sun on their backs.His fingers were stiff, and it took him a long time to twist the lid off the holy water. Drops of water fell on the red blanket and soaked into dark icy spots. (Excerpt from "The Man to Send Rain Clouds")

Here the story ends, for now Leon is "happy about the sprinkling of the holy water; now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure."

# Summary

"The Man to Send Rain Clouds" is a short story about the death of an old man on a Pueblo Indian reservation and the issues that arise from conflicting spiritual traditions and Christian traditions.

As the story opens, the dead body of an old man has been found under a cottonwood tree on an Indian reservation. The sheep that had been under the old man's care are grazing in scattered locations up and down an arroyo (ravine). Two men, Leon and his brother-in-law Ken, have discovered the body, which has apparently been lying under the tree for at least a day. Leon and Ken herd the sheep back to the camp and return by truck to the body.

Ken has brought a red blanket in which to wrap the body, but, before this is done, Leon ties a small grey feather in the old man's white hair. Ken gives Leon some paint and for the old man's face. Leon paints a streak of white across the man's forehead, blue across the cheekbones, yellow under the nose, and green across the chin. When he is finished painting, Leon steps back and smiles at the face of this dead man, who is his grandfather. Leon asks the old man to send some rain clouds.

Leon and Ken wrap the body in the red blanket and place it in the pickup truck before heading back to the Pueblo village. As the truck approaches the village, Leon recognizes the approaching car of Father Paul, the local parish priest. The priest motions for Leon to stop and asks Leon if old Teofilo has been found. Leon replies that he and Ken have just come from the old sheep camp, and everything is fine now.

The priest warns that at Teofilo's age, the old man should not be allowed to wander by himself in the remote area anymore. Leon affirms that this will not happen again. The priest asks Leon and Ken if they will be attending mass on Sunday, encouraging them to bring Teofilo as he drives away.

At Leon's house, Louise, Leon's wife, is waiting with a friend, Teresa. The women have prepared lunch, and they listen to Leon's story of finding Teofilo. Apparently, Teofilo had sat down under the cottonwood tree to rest, though he died soon after. Leon realizes that Louise has laid out a new flannel shirt and pair of Levis in which Teofilo's body will be dressed. Leon and Ken carry the red blanket-wrapped body into the house, and Teofilo is prepared for burial in the new clothes.

Leon, Ken, Louise and Teresa eat their lunch of beans, hot bread and coffee. Ken prepares to leave to make arrangements with the gravediggers, who should be able to have the burial site prepared since only the top layer of soil is frozen even though it is very cold. Neighbors begin to arrive bearing food and sympathy as news of Teofilo's death begins to spread in the village.

Later that day, after the funeral, Louise mentions to Leon that perhaps they should ask Father Paul to sprinkle holy water on Teofilo so that he won't be thirsty. Leon stares at

his grandfather's body and thinks about this for a few minutes. He then leaves to see if the priest is available.

Ken drops Leon off at the priest's house and continues on to the cemetery where others are waiting for the burial. Father Paul is happy to see Leon and offers him a chair, but Leon declines the seat, saying that he has come only to ask for holy water to be brought to the cemetery.

The priest understands now that Teofilo is dead and asks why he had not been notified so that he could have performed the Last Rites. Leon protests that the ritual is not necessary, but the priest contends that for a Christian burial the Last Rites are indeed necessary.

Leon tells Father Paul that everything is fine; the family just wants Teofilo to have ample water. The priest cannot provide the holy water without the Last Rites and a funeral mass. Leon has no response and begins to leave. Father Paul leaves the room and returns with his overcoat prepared to accompany Leon to Teofilo's grave.

As Leon and Father Paul descend the hill to the cemetery, the sun is almost set over the mesa, and the priest wonders how the gravediggers were able to break the frozen ground. Father Paul surveys the small group of people gathered at the gravesite standing among the tumbleweeds.

Father Paul focuses on the red blanket and thinks the size is too small to be Teofilo's body and wonders for a moment if the people are playing some sort of Indian prank on him. The priest cannot help but wonder if this is just a ritual to ensure a good harvest and that Teofilo is at the sheep camp herding the flock in for the night.

Reality shakes the priest back to the situation at hand and he glances at the parishioners gathered in the waning light. The cold makes Father Paul's hands stiffen and removing the lid from the jar of holy water is difficult. Soon, though, the priest has access to the water and sprinkles the grave where the moisture disappears immediately into the sandy soil.

Father Paul shakes the jar over the grave until the water is gone and the sight reminds the priest of something, although it is not quite clear what it is. The same wind that blows the priest's robe now blows the pollen and corn meal which had also been spread over the grave. Teofilo's body is lowered into the ground as the sun disappears.

Father Paul notes the lights of the cars on the highway and walks back up the hill toward his house. Leon watches the priest leave and then turns to study the snow-covered mountains in the distance. Leon is pleased that the service is over and that the priest sprinkled the holy water which will allow the old man to send big rain clouds.

# Analysis

The author sets the story on a Pueblo Indian Reservation very much like the one on which she was raised so her intimate knowledge of the landscape and the scenery make for spare but poignant descriptions. The pictures he author paints with imagery are almost as real as if she had provided a painting of the big cottonwood tree and the Blue Mountains still in snow.

There is a calm resolve in the writing style which shadows the stoic grace of the people who accept death as an important part of life. The characters are not overwrought or hysterical at Teofilo's death but merely tend to the old man's body with love and with traditions that will see his spirit into the next life.

The Indian culture believes that it is important to provide the dead body with corn and water for the spirit's nourishment on its journey to the next life. The face of the dead person is also painted so that the person may be recognized on the other side. The significance of the title alludes to the belief that dead souls are tied in with rain clouds and the ability to provide water for a bountiful harvest.

There is the theme of conflict, however, when Louise suggests that holy water, not just drinking water, be sprinkled on Teofilo's grave. At the time the story was written there was a push to convert Native Americans to Christianity, and Father Paul's presence on the Pueblo is both welcome and feared. Louise's willingness to accept the Catholic rituals signifies a move to accept some of the Christian teachings without abandoning the native traditions.

There is still some skepticism on the part of the Native Americans as well as Father Paul, who at first thinks that the body wrapped in the red blanket is too small to be Teofilo and must be some sort of cruel joke being played on him. Father Paul entertains the idea that Teofilo is tending the sheep back at the corral and that the Indians will all have a good laugh at the priest's expense later on.

The reality of the situation sinks in as the priest cooperates in spite of the fact that his wish for a full Catholic funeral service has been denied. Father Paul realizes that this small concession from Leon to ask for holy water to be sprinkled on Teofilo is at least one step toward reaching the people of the pueblo with the religious teachings and doctrines he is so eager to share.

Ironically Father Paul uses the Catholic holy water to participate in an Indian burial ritual, so he is making concessions as well which may go a long way in opening the lines of communication which is an important step to his long-term objective. In the end, Teofilo is buried with rituals of both cultures and religious beliefs symbolizing a merging of belief systems and the possibility for differing cultures to co-exist.

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# Characters

## Grandfather

*See* Teofilo

## Ken

Ken is the brother-in-law of Leon and a minor character in the story. Like old Teofilo and Leon, he also believes in following Indian ways, and he helps his brother-in-law any way he can.

## Leon

Leon is Teofilo's grandson. He manages to integrate American Indian ways and Christian ways; he is a Christian who still respects his roots and cultural heritage. He smiles as he paints his dead grandfather's face according to the Native American custom and believes that the old man's spirit will bring rain. He is a man of few words and has a calm, strong sense of dignity. After finding Teofilo's body, Leon does not talk about it. At home, Leon informs his family of Teofilo's death with few words. The fact that he is able to persuade the priest to sprinkle holy water at the grave site with a few well-chosen words—without argument—reveal his character.

## Louise

Louise is Leon's wife. Efficient and capable, she plans Teofilo's funeral and suggests to Leon that it would be appropriate to use holy water to symbolically quench the thirst of the old man. Although her part is minor, it is her suggestion that triggers the culture clash in the story.

## Father Paul

Father Paul is a young Catholic priest struggling to lead a parish on an Indian reservation. He has affection and respect for his parishioners, as seen in his concern for old Teofilo. He also understands that the spirit of the law is more important than the letter of the law. Although he is troubled by the persistence of Indian customs in his parish, he learns to adapt to them. When Leon asks him to use holy water at Teofilo's burial service, he at first refuses, but he later sprinkles the water on the grave.

# Teofilo

Teofilo is "the man to send rain clouds," the old man who is found dead under the big cottonwood tree. Teofilo is perhaps the most important character in the story, since the plot concerns the conflict that arises after his death between American Indian ways and Christian ways. A Native American living on a reservation in New Mexico, he was fiercely independent. He adhered to both the new and old ways: he wore mainstream American clothing, but also wore his white hair long in the traditional Indian manner and still believed in the old ways. He made new moccasins for the ceremonial dances in the summer and was not keen on going to church. Teofilo was old and well respected, as evidenced by the affection shown him by Leon and his family.

# Themes

## Creativity

In her short story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," Silko perceives creativity as a source of strength for Native Americans, a theme that recurs in her later works. In particular, Leon's strength lies in his ability to creatively combine Indian rituals with Catholic rituals. He does not strictly follow the Indian ways, but adds a new element by asking the Catholic priest to sprinkle holy water on Teofilo's grave. Throughout the story, Silko emphasizes that the strength of Pueblo traditions lies in their ability to incorporate alien elements into their own way of life.

## Custom and Tradition

Silko's story is concerned with the strength of the customs and traditions of the Native Americans, and how to resolve a conflict between Native American customs and Christian customs. Leon asks the Catholic priest to participate in the community's Indian rites. Father Paul refuses at first, but later decides to sprinkle holy water on the grave, honoring the Native American belief that the spirit must have plenty of water in its journey to the other world. The story reveals how clashes over differences in customs and tradition can be avoided through a combination of customs.

## Death

Related to the theme of custom and tradition in "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" is the theme of death, which is presented from a Native American perspective. Death is not an end, but part of a cycle wherein the spirit departs to return in time with rainstorms. As he finishes painting the dead face of Teofilo, Leon is not sad; instead he smiles and offers the conventional Pueblo prayer asking the dead man to send rain clouds.

## Individual versus Community

Another theme in "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" is the struggle of the individual versus community. As the priest of a Native American parish, Father Paul must oversee the Catholics in his region. Yet after the old man dies, Leon does not inform the priest, though the rest of his parishioners have been informed. Father Paul is the last person to join his parishioners in the graveyard, and as he empties a jar of holy water on Teofilo's grave he, in a small way, joins the Native American community.

## Appearances and Reality

"The Man to Send Rain Clouds" addresses the theme of appearances versus reality through the character of Father Paul. At one point excited and full of plans for his Native American parish, Father Paul finds the reality of working in an Indian parish very different from what he had expected. When Leon asks the priest to participate in the burial ceremony, Father Paul looks with tired, unseeing eyes at the "glossy missionary magazine . . . full of lepers and pagans" and refuses, but after a moment's reflection he decides to go with Leon.

## Culture Clash

In "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," Leon and Father Paul belong to different cultures, and there is the moment of confrontation when, at Teofilo's burial service, Father Paul asks, "Why didn't you tell me he [Teofilo] was dead? I could have brought the Last Rites anyway." Leon replies, "It wasn't necessary, Father." The conflict is resolved with Father Paul agreeing to participate in an Indian ritual. Although it is not strictly a Christian burial, the dead man receives the blessings of both traditional and Christian cultures.

# Style

## Point of View

The story is told through an objective, thirdperson narrative, and unfolds in a rigidly objective tone. There is no hint of the narrator's personal voice as each character is presented. With the exception of the graveyard scene that concludes the story, the narrator does not explain the character's thoughts, but presents only the action of the story.

## Setting

The story is set on the Laguna Indian Reservation in New Mexico. The landscape of the story with its arroyos and mesas is an integral part of the story. Silko captures the landscape very effectively in her narrative. For instance, "The big cottonwood tree stood apart from a small grove of winterbare cottonweeds which grew in the wide, sandy arroyo. . . . Leon waited under the tree while Ken drove the truck through the deep sand to the edge of the arroyo. . . . But high and northwest the blue mountains were still in snow. . . . It was getting colder, and the wind pushed gray dust down the narrow pueblo road. The sun was approaching the long mesa where it disappeared during the winter."

## Allusions

The title "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" alludes to the Pueblo belief that the dead are associated with rain clouds. The narrator makes several references to the Indian burial ceremony and the history of the Pueblo people. The story's title is taken from a traditional prayer in which the Indians pray for the spirit of the deceased to send rain clouds so crops will grow and the community will not starve. To the Pueblo, 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 community by returning with rain clouds. The Pueblo paint the face of the deceased so that he will be recognized in the next world. They also scatter corn and sprinkle water to provide food and water for the spirit on its journey to the other world. The reference to the Catholic church's "twin bells from the King of Spain" is important as it points to the history of the Pueblo's initial encounter with Christianity. In 1598, when the Pueblo swore allegiance to the king of Spain, Catholic missionaries arrived to convert Native Americans to Catholicism. Although Christianity was forced on them, the Indians continued to observe their traditional religious practices.

## Humor

In this story, Silko uses humor as a doubleedged tool. The encounter between the young priest, who is denied the opportunity to perform Catholic rites, and Leon, who insists that such rites are not necessary, is humorous. The exchange also provokes an

awareness of intercultural conflict. One illustration of this is the following passage: "The priest approached the grave slowly. . . . He looked at the red blanket, not sure that Teofilo was so small, wondering if it wasn't some perverse Indian trick— something they did in March to ensure a good harvest—wondering if maybe old Teofilo was actually at the sheep camp corralling the sheep for the night. But there he was, facing into a cold dry wind and squinting at the last sunlight, ready to bury a red wool blanket while the faces of his parishioners were in shadow with the last warmth of the sun on their backs."

## Irony

Irony is a literary device used to convey meaning to a phrase quite different than—in fact, often the direct opposite of—the literal one. Irony can be verbal or situational. Silko demonstrates a skillful use of irony in the story, notably in her depiction of the young priest, an authority figure who wants the Indians to follow Catholic ways but, in the end, himself uses holy water as part of a traditional Indian ceremony, participating in a non-Christian ceremony.

## Description

Skillful use of adjectives and attention to detail are the hallmarks of Silko's descriptions. For instance, in "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" she uses such expressions as "wide, sandy arroyo," "low, crumbling wall," "brown, wrinkled forehead" and "He squinted up at the sun and unzipped his jacket" to enhance the beauty of her narrative.

## Dialogue

Silko employs an interesting mixture of narration and dialogue. The dialogues between Leon and Father Paul, and between Leon and Louise, present the characters to the readers directly. Readers are able to draw their own conclusions as to the characters' respective natures and motivations.

# Historical Context

Silko wrote the story "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" in 1967 for a creative writing class, basing it upon a real-life incident in Laguna, New Mexico. In the late 1960s there was an interest in indigenous cultures in America. Many Indians moved off the reservations and into mainstream American culture, becoming more visible as a result. Peter Farb's *Man's Rise to Civilization* (1968) generated interest in Native Americans, while Scott Momaday, a Native American, won the 1969 Pulitzer Prize for fiction with his novel *House Made of Dawn*. Silko asserts, "It was a kind of renaissance, I suppose. . . . It is difficult to pinpoint why but, perhaps, in the 1960s, around the time when Momaday's books got published, there was this new interest, maybe it was not new, but people became more aware of indigenous cultures. It was an opening up worldwide." Native Americans were suddenly publishing books and Silko was one of the first published Pueblo women writers.

The story reflects life on the Laguna Indian Reservation in the 1960s. For more than 12,000 years the Pueblo had lived in the region and traditional religious beliefs permeated every aspect of life. Even when Christianity was introduced, it was incorporated into older Pueblo rites. Scholar A. LaVonne Ruoff maintains: "Silko emphasizes that these Pueblo Indians have not abandoned their old ways for Catholicism; instead, they have taken one part of Catholic ritual compatible with their beliefs and made it an essential part of their ceremony." The essence of the story lies in the "instance of cultural clash with the feelings and ideas involved."

The rituals in the story underscore the Pueblo concept of death. According to Per Seyersted, for the Indians, "man is a minute part of an immense natural cycle, and his death has nothing threatening in it because, after a life which contained both the good and the bad he goes back to where he came from, and in line with the communal thinking, it is hoped that his spirit will help the group he leaves behind by returning with the rain clouds."

# Critical Overview

Michael Loudon maintains that "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" "testifies to the essential role of storytelling in Pueblo identity, giving the people access to the mythic and historic past and relating a continuing wisdom." In Silko's novel *Ceremony,* one character notes, "At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. . . ." A. LaVonne Ruoff sees this theme as central to "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." Per Seyersted views the story as an example of Silko's ability to perceive life from a dual perspective: as a Pueblo and as a mixed-blood person who can perceive Laguna from the outside. Some critics believe that this story may become one of the classics of American literature.

# Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
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# Critical Essay #1

*Paul is a doctoral candidate in English literature at the University of Hyderabad and currently is a Fulbright Visiting Researcher in South Asia Regional Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. She has published literary criticism* American Literature Today *and the* Indian Journal of American Studies.*In the following essay, she offers a general introduction to "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," including an overview of the story's reception by critics*.

Her work widely anthologized, Leslie Marmon Silko is considered the preeminent Native American woman novelist, a legend in her achievements in the field of Native American literature. Her writings are included in the syllabus of various American literature courses in high schools and colleges. Raised on the Indian reservation in Laguna, New Mexico, she incorporates into her writing the stories, myths, and legends she heard as she grew up. Of Pueblo, Mexican, and white descent, she was both an insider and outsider in Laguna, and this makes her an interesting chronicler of stories about modern-day life on the reservation. In an interview she has stated: "Oral literatures of the indigenous populations worldwide contain (these) kind of valuable insights. . . . You can look at the old stories that were told among the tribal people here in a north country and see that within them is the same kind of valuable lessons about human behavior and that we need them still." In the Pueblo community, all education is achieved in a verbal, narrative form, and when Silko began writing at the University of Mexico, stories came naturally to her. She has said, "[The] professor would say, now you write your poetry or write a story; write the way you know, they always tell us. All I knew was my growing up at Laguna, recalling some other stories that I had been told as a child."

It was at the University of New Mexico that she wrote her first story, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," which won her a Discovery grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities. The story is based on an incident she had heard of in Laguna, that an old man had been found dead in a sheep camp and had been given a traditional Indian burial, and that the local Catholic priest had resented the fact that he had not been called in. Having based her first work of short fiction on this incident, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" brought Silko recognition and established her as a promising Native American author.

Silko claims that Pueblo narratives are lean and spare because so much of what constitute the stories is shared knowledge. Although the larger audience for "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" has no shared knowledge of the landscape or rituals, Silko still chooses to use the lean narrative mode, as the themes are universal and can be understood by any audience. But an understanding of the Pueblo burial customs gives an added dimension to an understanding of the story. In Pueblo culture, it is believed that neglect of tribal rituals can result in death and sickness, because the ghost returns without blessings, having been unable to enter the other world. To avoid this unhappy prospect, a prayer feather is attached to the hair of the deceased, and his face is painted so that the he will be recognized in the next world. These tasks are ordinarily performed by the village Shaman (religious priest), while corn meal is offered to the

wind and water is sprinkled on the grave so that the spirit has nourishment on its journey to the other world. The ceremony concludes with the prayer, "Send us rain clouds." Familiarization with the landscape inhabited by the Pueblo Indians further enhances the reader's understanding of "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," for as Silko has written elsewhere, the landscape sits in the center of Pueblo belief and identity.

A character in Silko's later novel, *Ceremony,* says, "At one time, the ceremonies as they had been performed were enough for the way the world was then. But after the white people came, elements in this world began to shift; and it became necessary to create new ceremonies. I have made changes in the rituals. The people mistrust this greatly, but only this growth keeps the ceremonies strong. . . ." Scholar A. LaVonne Ruoff sees this theme as central to "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." Leon's strength lies in his creative combination of traditional Indian rituals with Catholic ritual. He does not strictly follow the Indian ways but adds a new element by asking the Catholic priest to sprinkle holy water at Teofilo's burial service, at his wife Louise's suggestion. Through this story, Silko emphasizes that the continuing strength of Pueblo traditions lies in the ability of the people to incorporate alien elements for their own purposes. Leon continues to follow the Pueblo rites and persuades the Father Paul to participate in them, as well. Per Seyersted sees the story as an example of Silko's dual vision as both a Pueblo and as a mixed-blood person who has the ability and freedom to see Laguna from the outside. Linda Danielson sees the sense of community in the story as central to understanding it, and views it in terms of Father Paul's entry into the community through the flexibility and power of Indian ritual, which assures the continuance of life.

In addition to these themes, the story also treats an indigenous community's encounters with Christianity. I use the word "indigenous" in the sense that Silko defines it in an interview. She says, "When I say indigenous people I mean people that are connected to the land for, let's say, a thousand or two thousands years." She further adds that one can see similarities in some of the struggles of indigenous peoples in Africa, in the Americas, and in Asia. This is exemplified in the part of the story in which Father Paul is depicted as bewildered by the incorporation of Catholic ritual in an Indian ceremony. Although the reservation Indians are Catholic, they retain pagan rituals and customs. In author Robin White's works one addresses a similar theme in her works about the American missionary experience in India. In White's novel *House of Many Rooms,* a missionary is at first bewildered by his reception by Christianized natives who use Hindu rituals. He refuses to accept the native Christian priest's hospitality, as his own Western notion of Christianity is offended. Later he ends up being a good friend of the native priest and becomes part of the Christian community in India. Further parallels can be drawn between the history of Christianity in other indigenous cultures, in other literary and historical works.

The theme of death and time is also central to "The Man to Send Rain Clouds." Death is not an end or a frightening experience, but a fact of life to the Pueblo. The spirit returns to its source and returns bringing rain clouds to the community, staving off drought. A LaVonne Ruoff has written that the dead "are associated with cloud beings (storm clouds or Shiwana in Keres) who bring rain and who live in the six or four regions of the universe." Death is also, of course, associated with the notion of time. Silko has said

that, for the Indian people, time is round, and not a linear string. Time in its historical dimension is unimportant as it is an endlessly repeating cycle in which man is but a minute part of the cycle. Because of these notions of time and death, Leon can accept old Teofilo's death in a calm, serene manner with the traditional prayer asking his spirit to send rain cloud. This is contrasted in the story with traditional Catholic thinking, which in Seyersted's words, "looks at (death) as one sinful mortal's final, critical meeting with his Maker, in which it is hoped that the blessing symbolized by the holy water will help.": Hence, for Father Paul, the sprinkling of holy water has a much different significance than Leon's belief that it will simply quench the spirit's thirst on its way to the other world.

Apart from its thematic concerns and its cultural context, Silko's short story stands out as a technically masterful story. Skillful use of adjectives and attention to detail are the hallmarks of Silko's descriptions. For instance, she writes of a "wide, sandy arroyo," "low, crumbling wall," a "brown, wrinkled forehead" to enhance the beauty of the narrative. The skillful mixture of narration and dialogue also maintains the reader's interest. The dialogues between Leon and Father Paul, and between Leon and Louise, present the characters to the readers directly, thus enabling readers to draw their own conclusions as to the characters respective natures and motivations.

With this said, and because of the high accomplishment of the story itself, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," a narrative of Pueblo life, deserves to be recognized as a classic Native American short story within the canon of American literature.

**Source:** Angelina Paul, "Overview of 'The Man to Send Rain Clouds,'" for *Short Stories for Students,* The Gale Group, 2000.

# Critical Essay #2

*Danielson teaches English at Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon. In the following excerpt, she offers a feminist interpretation of Silko's "The Man to Send Rain Clouds."*

Over the last twenty years, the general development of scholarship about women's lives and art parallels an unprecedented flowering of creative writing by American Indian women. But in view of these parallel developments, American Indian women have shown little interest in the feminist movement, and conversely mainstream feminist scholarship has paid strikingly little attention to the writing of American Indian women.

Leslie Silko's *Storyteller* (1981), a product of this literary florescence, has remained virtually undiscussed as a whole by critics of any stamp. With its emphasis on women tradition bearers, female deities, and its woman author's personal perspective, *Storyteller* seems to ask for a feminist critical treatment. . . .

Particularly applicable to Silko's *Storyteller* are feminist critical strategies to reclaim as legitimate literary subjects, women's experience and female mythic power. Sandra M. Gilbert sees this strategy as a matter of *re-vision,* seeing anew: "When I say we must redo our history, therefore, I mean we must review, reimagine, rethink, rewrite, revise, and reinterpret the events and documents that constitute it." [*Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory,* edited by Elaine Showalter, 1985].

Silko's *Storyteller* represents just such a revision of the world from her vantage point as a Laguna Indian woman. In fact, understanding her re-vision and reinterpretation of personal and tribal memory leads us past the easy impulse to call *Storyteller* a collage, a family album, or pastiche, on into a conception of its unity and significance as a literary work. In seeing anew, Silko expresses a deeply unified view of the world, reclaiming as central to her craft the tribe, the significance of ordinary women's and men's lives, and the set of values arising from the female power of the primary Keresan deities. . . .

Silko presents a highly personal view of tribal ways and at the same time a tribal slant on her personal memories, richly fed by the foremothers and forefathers whose words inspire *Storyteller*. Through the book she reclaims both personal and tribal traditions about men and women, animals and holy people, community and creativity. . . .

"The Man to Send Rain Clouds" returns to themes of creativity and community. In accordance with Keres tradition, Old Teofilo, even in death, is still a valued member of the community, for the people are looking to him to send them big thunderclouds. There is seriousness and ceremony, but no sorrow at his death. He is not lost, just redefined within the community as a Kat'sina spirit associated with the cloud beings who bring rain.

[A. La Vonne] Ruoff observes that the strength of Indian tradition for Silko is not in rigid adherence to old ways, but in creative incorporation of new elements [*MELUS,* 5, 4, Winter, 1978]. In "The Man to Send Rainclouds," modern Indian people not only create new ritual, but offer community to an outsider. The gift of water for the old man's spirit comes from the Catholic priest whom Leon induces to participate in the funeral, on Indian terms. But the priest remains an outsider, suspicious of "some perverse Indian trick—something they did in March to insure a good harvest". Nonetheless, his action brings him to the edge of the community: "He sprinkled the grave and the water disappeared almost before it touched the dim, cold sand; it reminded him of something—he tried to remember what it was, because he thought if he could remember he might understand this." The flexibility that can find needed ritual power and extend the hand of community to the outsider assures the continuance of life, like water and thunderclouds.

**Source:** Linda L. Danielson, "Storyteller: Grandmother Spider's Web," in *Journal of the Southwest,* Vol. 30, No. 3, Autumn, 1988, pp. 325-55.

# Critical Essay #3

*In the following excerpt, Seyersted provides a thematic overview of Silko's "The Man to Send Rain Clouds."*

In a sense [Leslie Marmon Silko] started to write in the fifth grade: "A teacher gave us a list of words to make sentences out of, and I just made it into a story automatically" (interview in Dexter Fisher, ed., *The Third Woman* . . .). But it was only at college in 1967 when she was forced to write a story in a creative writing course and found again that what was difficult for others came naturally to her, that she realized she was a writer. Back at Laguna she had just heard in headline form that an old man had been found dead at a sheep camp and had been given a traditional burial and that the priest had resented the fact that he was not called in. Unable to think of anything else, she decided to write about this incident and to try to imagine the scene and how the people had felt. The result was "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," which was quickly published in *New Mexico Quarterly* and also earned for her a "Discovery Grant."

In Rosen's 1974 anthology, Silko wrote about herself: "I am of mixed-breed ancestry, but what I know is Laguna. This place I am from is everything I am as a writer and human being." And she has also said (in *Laguna Woman*): "I suppose at the core of my writing is the attempt to identify what it is to be a half-breed or mixed blooded person; what it is to grow up neither white nor fully traditional Indian." It is as if she is saying that she is wholly a Laguna Pueblo and will write about the place where she grew up, but that at the same time she is a mixedblood and therefore has been given the ability and the freedom to see Laguna also from the outside. Her first story exemplifies this double vision.

When Ken and Leon in their pickup come looking for old Teofilo, they already have with them what is needed to perform the preliminaries for a traditional burial, such as painting his face. When they have completed these tasks, Leon smiles and says, "Send us rain clouds, Grandfather." Returning to the pueblo with the body under a tarpaulin, they meet Father Paul, who is led to believe that Teofilo is alive and well at camp. Later at home, the funeral is performed with clanspeople and old men with medicine bags attending. While the others go to the graveyard, Leon acts upon Louise's suggestion that he ask the priest to sprinkle "holy water for Grandpa. So he won't be thirsty." Father Paul protests that a Christian burial would require the Last Rites and a Mass, but in the end he reluctantly comes along, and when the besprinkled body is lowered, Leon is happy: "now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure."

Silko's interest in this story does not lie in the descriptions of the rituals themselves. She has said that while she has looked at anthropologists' reports on Laguna, she does not consult them. For one thing, she doubts that the informants (among whom were some of her own ancestors) always gave the scholars the true story, and more important, their reports are dead to her compared to the living reality of what she has heard and seen and felt herself. Also, she is an artist who wants to apply her imagination to the telling of

tales, and to her, the essence of this particular incident is the story of this instance of cultural clash with the feelings and ideas involved.

To be sure, she does want us to see that these are Laguna rituals and attitudes. For example, she gives us such local details as that Leon ties a gray feather in Teofilo's hair and that he paints the old man's face with stripes of certain colors. But she does not tell us what the medicine men do at the important event of the funeral in Teofilo's home. Thus we have to guess that some of the things they all do, such as Leon's application of paints, may be part of the task of making "him so that he may be recognized" in Shibapu, and that others, such as Louise's sprinkling of corn meal and her concern that her Grandpa shall not be thirsty, are intended to make sure that he has "water . . . and also food for his traveling provisions" (Boas, *Keresan Texts,* 1928; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1974 . . .).

What we have in the story are two different ideas of death, or rather, of our whole existence. The Indian, as Vine Deloria has reminded us, is wedded to place rather than time and to group rather than individual. On the one hand, as Ortiz has written, "Indian traditions exist in, and are primarily to be understood in relation to, space; they belong to the place where the people exist or originated," their existence being likened metaphorically to that of a plant. And he adds: "time in its linear, historical dimension . . . is unimportant" compared to "cyclical, rhythmic time, time viewed as a series of endlessly repeating cycles, on the model of the seasons or, again, plants" (*Indian Historian,* Winter 1977 . . .). And on the other hand, as already suggested, pueblo societies see the survival of the group as more important than the existence of the individual. That is, man is a minute part of an immense natural cycle, and his death has nothing threatening in it because, after a life which contained both the good and the bad that all Pueblos brought with them from Shibapu, he simply goes back to where he came from, and in line with the communal thinking, it is hoped that his spirit will help the group he leaves behind by returning with rain clouds. This is of course wholly alien to Catholic thinking, which sees death in terms of the individual rather than the group and which looks at it as one sinful mortal's final, critical meeting with his Maker, in which it is hoped that the blessing symbolized by the holy water will help.

It is part of the mastery of this short story that Silko only lightly suggests all this in her spare, highly controlled narrative, in which she hardly enters into the protagonists' minds. Furthermore, as an objective writer, she does not take sides, but gives a balanced, sensitive presentation of the characters. In her depiction of the Pueblos she makes us feel what David B. Espey has termed "the mood of peace and simplicity, the quiet assurance with which [they] react to death," accepting from Catholicism only what they can use; and in her sympathetic picture of the priest we sense both his good will and his bewilderment. In the one riddle she leaves us with—Father Paul is reminded of something, but does not know what, when the water immediately disappears into the sand—she seems to suggest that he is on the verge of understanding the impossibility of Christianizing this proud, independent, "foreign" people who look to Mt. Taylor, looming up behind the graveyard, as a holy shrine and who have decorated most of the walls of the church in which he works with signs of thunder, clouds, and rainbows. In the

quiet dignity of the telling of this moving tale, Silko makes it clear that she is an intelligent writer and a born storyteller.

**Source:** Per Seyersted, in *Leslie Marmon Silko,* Boise State University, 1980, pp. 15-18.

# Critical Essay #4

*At the time that this piece was published, Ruoff was affiliated with the University of Illinois/Chicago Circle. In the following excerpt, she asserts that the story gives an example of the strength and adaptability of tribal traditions.*

For Leslie Marmon Silko (Laguna), the strength of tribal traditions is based not on Indians' rigid adherence to given ceremonies or customs but rather on their ability to adapt traditions to ever-changing circumstances by incorporating new elements. Although this theme is most fully developed in her recent novel *Ceremony* (1977), it is also present in her earlier short stories, "The Man to Send Rain Clouds," "Tony's Story," "from Humaweepi, Warrior Priest," and "Yellow Woman," included in the volume *The Man to Send Rainclouds: Contemporary Stories by American Indians* [edited by Kenneth Rosen, 1974].

The history of Silko's own Laguna Pueblo, influenced by many different cultures, provides insight into why she emphasizes change as a source of strength for tribal traditions. According to their origin legends, the Laguna tribe (in existence since at least 1300), came southward from the Mesa Verde region. Some versions indicate that after pausing at Zia, they were joined by the head of the Parrot clan, who decided to take his people southward with them. After wandering further, first southward from the lake at Laguna and then northward back to the lake, they settled Punyana, probably in the late 1300s. After founding Old Laguna (Kawaik) around 1400, they issued invitations to other pueblos to join them. Those which responded were the Parrot clan from Zia, the Sun clan from Hopi, the Road Runner and Badger clans from Zuni, and the Sun clan from Jemez. The tribe occupied the site of what is now called Laguna by the early 1500s. Additional immigration occurred during the 1690s, when the Lagunas were joined by Indians from the Rio Grande, probably fleeing both drought and the hostility of the Spanish after the Pueblo Rebellion in 1680 and the renewed uprising in 1696. These immigrants came chiefly from Zia, Cochiti, and Domingo, but a few came from Jemez, Zuni, and Hopi. Although some remained to join the Laguna tribe, others returned to their own pueblos when conditions improved. Over the years, a few Navajos intermarried with the tribe, bringing with them the Navajo Sun clan and kachina.

The Spanish first entered the area in 1540, when Francesco de Coronado led an expedition to Zuni and two years later passed through the present site of Laguna on his way back to Mexico. Antonio Espejo, who commanded an expedition to New Mexico in 1582, visited the area in 1583. Between the appointment of Juan de Onate as New Mexico's first governor in 1598 and the Pueblo Rebellion in 1680, there is little historical data on Laguna. Although the pueblo was not subjected to as many attacks from the Spanish as the Rio Grande pueblos, it was forced to surrender in 1692 after an attack by the troops of Governor Diego de Vargas.

Concerning the mixture of people who settled at Laguna, Parsons comments that "it is not surprising that Laguna was the first of the pueblos to Americanize, through intermarriage" [Elsie Clews Parsons, *Pueblo Indian Religion,* 1939]. Around 1860 and

1870, George H. Pradt [or Pratt] and two Marmon brothers (Walter and Robert) came to the pueblo, married Laguna women, and reared large families. Silko indicates that her great grandfather Robert and his brother had a government contract to set out the boundary markers for Laguna. Walter, appointed government teacher in 1871, married the daughter of the chief of the Kurena-Shikani medicine men. The chief's son later took his place. According to Parsons, this group led the Americanization faction which was opposed by the pueblo hierarchy. The conservatives removed their altars and sacred objects from Laguna and moved to Mesita; around 1880, part of this group resettled in Isleta. While Robert Marmon served as governor, the two kivas of Laguna were torn down by the progressives and what was left of the sacred objects was surrendered. There were no kachina dances for some time after the Great Split and the laying of the railroad on the edge of the village. When a demand arose later for the revival of the dances, Zuni influences were introduced into Laguna rituals. Parsons closes her description of Laguna with the comment that although the ceremonial disintegration was so marked when she first studied it (around 1920) that it presented an obscure picture of Keresan culture, it now (1939) offered "unrivaled opportunities to study American acculturation and the important role played by miscegenation." Silko herself comments on these changes in her description of the impact of mixed-blood families on Laguna clan systems and the varying attitudes toward these families in the stories of that pueblo:

People in the main part of the village were our clanspeople because the clan system was still maintained although not in the same form it would have been if we were full blood. . . . The way it changed was that there began to be stories about my greatgrandfather, positive stories about what he did with the Laguna scouts for the Apaches. But then after World War One it changed. Soon after that there came to be stories about these mixed blood people, halfbreeds. Not only Marmons but Gunns [John] and Pratts too. An identity was being made or evolved in the stories the Lagunas told about these people who had gone outside Laguna, but at the same time of the outsiders who had come in. Part of it was that the stories were always about the wild, roguish, crazy sorts of things they did [Lawrence Evers and Dennis Carr, *Sun Tracks,* III, Fall, 1976].

The continuing strength of Laguna traditions and the ability of her people to use alien traditions for their own purposes are strikingly portrayed in Silko's story "The Man to Send Rainclouds." The title alludes to the belief that the dead are associated with cloud beings (storm clouds or *shiwanna* in Keres) who bring rain and who live in the six or four regions of the universe (Parsons). The story deals with an Indian family's observance of Pueblo funeral rituals despite the local priest's attempts to cajole them into observing Catholic ones. Ironically, the young priest is trapped by the Indians into taking part in their ceremony. The importance of ritual in Pueblo Indian life is emphasized at the beginning of the story when Leon and Ken, after finding old Teofilo dead, immediately observe the first stages of the funeral rites. Neglect of burial or death ritual can result in death or sickness because the ghost returns (Parsons). Before wrapping the body in a blanket, the men tie a gray prayer feather to the old man's long white hair (a custom similar to that of the Zuni) and begin to paint his face with markings so that he will be recognized in the next world— tasks ordinarily performed by a shaman. The face

painting is interrupted by an offering of corn meal to the wind and is concluded with the prayer "send us rain clouds, Grandfather."

The pressure on Pueblo Indians to practice Catholicism is introduced when Father Paul stops Leon and Ken on their way home to ask about Teofilo and to urge them all to come to church. Using the age-old Indian technique of telling the non-Indian only what they want him to know, Leon and Ken answer the priest's questions about the old man's welfare ambiguously enough to keep him from learning about Teofilo's death. Only after the Indian funeral rites are almost completed does the family feel the need for the priest's services—to provide plenty of holy water for the grave so that Teofilo's spirit will send plenty of rainfall. Corn meal has been sprinkled around the old man's body to provide food on the journey to the other world. Silko skillfully and humorously characterizes the conflict between the frustrated priest, who is denied the opportunity to provide the last rites and funeral mass, and Leon, who doggedly insists that these are not necessary: "It's O.K. Father, we just want him to have plenty of water." Despite his weary protests that he cannot do that without performing the proper Catholic rites, Father Paul finally gives in when Leon starts to leave. Realizing that he has been tricked into participating in their pagan rites and half suspecting that the whole thing may be just a spring fertility ceremony rather than a real funeral, he nevertheless sprinkles the grave with a whole jar of holy water. Leon feels good about the act which completes the ceremony and ensures that "now the old man could send them big thunderclouds for sure." Thus, Silko emphasizes that these Pueblo Indians have not abandoned their old ways for Catholicism; instead, they have taken one part of Catholic ritual compatible with their beliefs and made it an essential part of their own ceremony. . . .

In all four of these stories, Silko emphasizes the need to return to the rituals and oral traditions of the past in order to rediscover the basis for one's cultural identity. Only when this is done is one prepared to deal with the problems of the present. However, Silko advocates a return to the essence rather than to the precise form of these rituals and traditions, which must be adapted continually to meet new challenges. Through her own stories, Silko demonstrates that the Keres rituals and traditions have survived all attempts to eradicate them and that the seeds for the resurgence of their power lie in the memories and creativeness of her people.

**Source:** A. LaVonne Ruoff, "Ritual and Renewal: Keres Traditions in the Short Fiction of Leslie Silko," in *MELUS,* Vol. 5, No. 4, Winter, 1978, pp. 2-17.

# Adaptations

Although "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" has not been adapted to a multimedia version, the videotape *Running on the Edge of the Rainbow: Laguna Stories and Poems* (1979) offers readings from Silko's works and the author's commentary on Pueblo culture in Laguna, New Mexico.

# Topics for Further Study

Research the historical experiences of Native Americans by reading the introduction to Geary Hobson's anthology *The Remembered Earth*or portions of *Major Problems in American Indian History,* edited by Albert Hurtacto and Peter Iverson. Relate what you have learned to Leon's story.

Study "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" within a larger context, specifically the spread of Christianity among other nations and cultures. For example, compare Father Paul's experience on the Pueblo reservation with the missionary's experience in India in Robin White's novel *House of Many Rooms*.

Was Silko successful in creating the landscape of New Mexico in "The Man to Send Rain Clouds?" Discuss the importance of the story's geographical location and physical features and relate these features to the main themes of the story.

# Compare and Contrast

**1960s:** Minorities, such as African Americans, Native Americans, and the Gay community, organize and fight the established system to gain equal rights in the United States. Women also struggle to obtain equal opportunity under the law. In several instances, violence erupts between groups; a national debate rages over the implications of racial and sexual discrimination.

**1990s:** Affirmative action for many minority groups has been overturned in some parts of the country. Other legislation is under attack and congress refuses to pass a Federal hate crimes statute.

**1960s:** Native American voices emerge to tell the Native American experience. Writers such as Leslie Marmon Silko are published to critical and commercial acclaim and become an important part of the American literary scene.

**1990s:** Native American writers continue to offer insightful perspectives on American life. In many universities, the study of Native American literature and culture is an important part of the curriculum.

# What Do I Read Next?

*Storyteller* (1981) is a collection of Silko's short stories, anecdotes, historical and autobiographical notes, poems, and folk tales.

*Yellow Woman and the Beauty of the Spirit: Essays on Native American Life Today* (1996) is a collection of Silko's essays.

*The Pueblo Indians,* Joe S. Sando's 1976 book on the history of the Pueblo, enhances the reader's understanding of the Pueblo community.

*Redefining American Literary History* (1990), edited by A. LaVonne Brown Ruoff and Jerry W. Ward, Jr., provides a context for the study of Native American literature in the United States.

*House of Many Rooms,* Robin White's 1958 novel, chronicles the story of an American missionary in India. There Christians still follow Hindu customs, to the bewilderment of the missionary— who finally accepts their choices. This work provides an interesting thematic parallel to "The Man to Send Rain Clouds."

# Further Study

Danielson, Linda L. "Storyteller: Grandmother Spider's Web," in *Journal of the Southwest,* Vol. 30, No. 3, Autumn, 1988, pp. 325-55.

An interpretation of Silko's "The Man to Send Rainclouds," particularly with regard to themes of creativity and community, analyzed from a feminist perspective.

Ruoff, A. LaVonne. "Ritual and Renewal: Keres Traditions in the Short Fiction of Leslie Silko," in *MELUS,* Vol. 5, No. 4, Winter, 1978, pp. 2-17.

An analysis of the traditions at work in Silko's work, suggesting on pp. 2-5 that the story provides an example of the strength of tribal traditions through adaptability.

Seyersted, Per. *Leslie Marmon Silko,* Boise State University, 1980.

Addresses Silko's biography, and provides a brief history of the Pueblo people and an analysis of Silko's works, in particular a study of the theme of culture clash in "The Man to Send Rain Clouds" on pp. 15-18.

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**Introduction**

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

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The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from SSfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of SSfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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