

# BookRags Student Essay

## Ceremony

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## Ceremony Essay

The ceremonies performed in Ceremony tell a story of how Indian culture is changing. The influence of white culture and behavior has played a big part in Native American ceremonies. Native Americans have had to create new ceremonies, and change how to perform them to adapt to this new factor in their life. The Indians are scared for the destruction of their culture and people as a result.

After returning home from the war, Tayo experiences post-traumatic stress disorder. His grandmother believes white medicine is not working, and he needs a medicine man named Ku'oosh. Ku'oosh tells Tayo of how the world is fragile and intricate. Ku'oosh prepares Tayo by telling him a story of the ancient rituals for cleansing after you have killed someone in battle. It explains the ceremony and warns him he will be haunted without it. Then he brought out a bundle of dry green stalks and a bag of cornmeal, and set the tea in Tayo's lap. But, Ku'oosh warns him, "There are some things we can't cure like we used to, not since the white people came. I'm afraid of what will happen to all of us if you and the others don't get well." (p. 38). He believes white man's society has influenced the effectiveness of ceremonies. He's scared of what the future will hold for his people.

Ku'oosh knew of another medicine man, Betonie, who could help Tayo with his problem. Ku'oosh realizes that Betonie's familiarity with the white world may allow him to cure those affected by it. During the ceremony, Betonie sat in the center of a sand painting on the ground. He and his helper painted a picture in the sand and chanted prayers of Tayo as they cut his scalp. They guided him through a series of hoops, and laid him down to rest. Betonie tells Tayo that ceremonies have had to gradually change because of a changing world involving white people. "Witchcraft wants us to believe all evil resides with white people. They want us to separate ourselves from white people, to be ignorant and helpless as we watch our own destruction." (p. 132). Some believe witches invented white men. Because of this, whites hold a destructive power over Native Americans. Betonie decides to work out a ceremony that will stop their destructive power. Then he tells Tayo stories of his grandfather, Descheeny, and the creation of a new ceremony to stop the destruction the whites have caused.

In order for Tayo to complete his last ceremony, he ironically had to use an ore rock, streaked with yellow uranium. Uranium is used to make the atomic bomb. There's an Indian story that predicts a nuclear war will be the human event to end mankind. "They will take this world from ocean to ocean. They will turn on each other. They will destroy each other...they will find the rocks with veins of green and yellow and black. They will lay the final pattern with these rocks. They will lay it across the world and explode everything." (p. 137). Tayo found himself in an abandoned uranium mine. This is symbolic for the idea that white men think they possess the land, take what they want, and do not perform any ceremonies. Tayo realizes that this is the last part of his ceremony, the one where he incorporates an element of white culture, the mine. All he has to do is to spend the night there and the ceremony will be complete. "He cried relief at finally seeing the pattern, the way all the stories fit together-the old stories, the war stories, their stories-to become the story that was still being told." (p.246). The ceremony was a process of many ceremonies that intertwined to become one story.

Tayo watched as Emo, Pinkie and Leroy arrived, made a bonfire and beat the car; part of the ceremony of destruction. They pulled Harley from the trunk and punished him for letting Tayo go. They tortured him to death. "Witchery would be at work all night so that the people would see only the losses-the land and the lives lost-since the whites came; so they would be fooled into blaming only the whites." (p. 249).The final ceremony was performed in the kiva by the elders. Tayo tells the elders the story of his ceremony. Then they sing and chant that he has seen A'moo'oooh, and that they will be blessed again. They perform a ceremony on Tayo, so that at last, "Every evil which entangled him was cut to pieces." (p. 258). It was the ultimate cleansing ceremony.

Ceremonies were the key into making Tayo understand himself and the world he lives in. In order to complete the ceremony, he must also accept that a certain element of loss is a part of life. The Indians have suffered a great deal of loss and attribute this to whites. Although whites have been a huge influence in Native American culture, they don't deserve all the blame. These ceremonies help the Indians deal with and heal the pain felt by the past.