



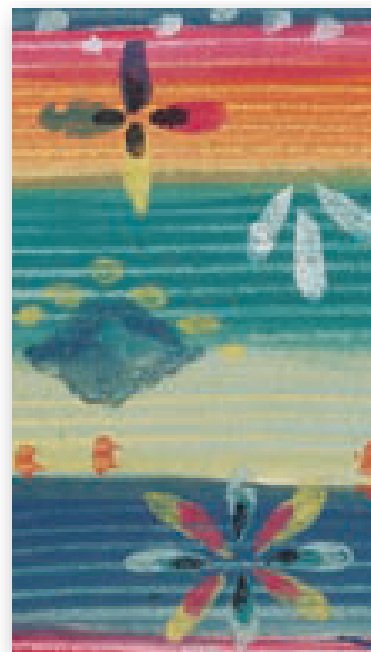
Tewa Dancers of the North perform the Eagle Dance at the Eight Northern Indian Pueblos Arts & Crafts Show in San Juan Pueblo, New Mexico. Native Americans consider the eagle the connecting link between heaven and earth.

Reader's Context If you could describe yourself only in terms of an art form, such as a painting, a sculpture, or a musical work, which would you choose? Why?

Cultural Context The Tewa are a Pueblo people of the southwestern United States who live in multilevel, multi-unit adobe structures that are often built into the hard desert mesas. Like other Pueblo peoples, the Tewa have a vital interdependence with the natural world and often perform rituals and ceremonies related to nature, especially to bring much-needed rain.

“Song of the Sky Loom” is a traditional tribal song that uses the language of weaving to reflect on the natural world on which the Tewa depend. This song also describes the role of the earth and the sky as the weavers, or creators, of the natural world.

The Tewa are known as accomplished artisans who create intricately decorated pottery and elaborate baskets in addition to richly woven fabrics. They passed on the art of weaving to the Navajo, another southwestern tribe, who today are renowned weavers of rugs and blankets.



Song *of the* Sky Loom

- ▲ O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky,
Your children are we, and with tired backs
We bring you the gifts you love.
Then weave for us a garment of brightness;
5 May the warp¹ be the white light of morning,
May the weft² be the red light of evening,
May the fringes be the falling rain,
May the border be the standing rainbow.
Thus weave for us a garment of brightness,
10 That we may walk fittingly where birds sing,
That we may walk fittingly where grass is green,
O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky. ❖

1. **warp.** Threads in a loom that run lengthwise

2. **weft.** Horizontal threads in a loom. The weft crosses the warp to make a woven fabric.

gar • ment (gär' mant) *n.*, any article of clothing



Literature Connection

The writing of **Leslie Marmon Silko** (b. 1948) reflects themes from her Native American heritage, including the relationship between humans and nature and the tensions of living within different cultures. In her poem "**Prayer to the Pacific**," Silko celebrates nature and tells a myth that explains Native American migration to America. A poet, novelist, and short story writer, Silko grew up on the Laguna Pueblo Reservation in New Mexico. She attended Bureau of Indian Affairs elementary schools, a Catholic high school, and the University of New Mexico. After leaving law school to work on her writing, Silko published her first story in 1969; "Prayer to the Pacific" was published in 1974 in *Laguna Woman*, a collection of poetry.

Prayer to the Pacific

by Leslie Marmon Silko

- I traveled to the ocean
distant
from my southwest land of sandrock
to the moving blue water
5 Big as the myth of origin.
- Pale
pale water in the yellow-white light of
sun floating west
to China
10 where ocean herself was born.
Clouds that blow across the sand are wet.
- Squat in the wet sand and speak to the Ocean:
I return to you turquoise the red coral you sent us,
sister spirit of Earth.
15 Four round stones in my pocket I carry back the ocean
to suck and to taste.

Thirty thousand years ago
Indians came riding across the ocean
carried by giant sea turtles.

20 Waves were high that day
great sea turtles waded slowly out
from the gray sundown sea.

Grandfather Turtle rolled in the sand four times
and disappeared
25 swimming into the sun.

And so from that time
immemorial,¹
as the old people say,
rain clouds drift from the west
30 gift from the ocean.

Green leaves in the wind
Wet earth on my feet
swallowing raindrops
clear from China. ❖

1. **immemorial.** Extending or existing since beyond the reach of memory

Review Questions

1. What does the speaker take from the ocean? Explain why the speaker intends "to suck and to taste" the stones.
2. Describe how Native Americans arrived in this land. What evidence demonstrates the speaker's understanding of and feelings toward her culture?
3. Where does the speaker live? How does the speaker appreciate nature: intellectually or physically? Give evidence to support your answer.

TEXT TEXT CONNECTION

Make a list of the natural elements in this poem, and compare them to those from "Song of the Sky Loom." What elements do the two works have in common? What elements have a revered position in each culture? Why? Consider the landscape in the area where each tribe lived.

TEXT ^{TO} TEXT CONNECTION

Natural elements in "Prayer to the Pacific" include blue water, yellow-white sunlight, blowing clouds, red coral, sea turtles, drifting rain clouds, green leaves in the wind, wet earth, and raindrops. Natural images in "Song of the Sky Loom" include white light of morning, red light of evening, falling rain, rainbow, singing of birds, and green grass. Natural elements the two works have in common include bright sky, rain, and the green of leaves and grass. In the Tewa culture, revered elements emphasized in the poem include Earth the Mother and Father the Sky, colors of the sky, birds' songs, and greenness of Earth. Revered elements stressed in Silko's work include age-old sea migration from China and the wind carrying ocean water to nourish "sandrock."

1. Which of the following is *not* something the speakers ask of Mother Earth and Father Sky in the "Song of the Sky Loom"?

- A. They ask for their crops of beans, corn, potatoes, and wild turnips to thrive.
- B. They ask for the white light of morning and the red light of evening.
- C. They ask for rain to fall and rainbows to form.
- D. They ask for a garment of brightness to be woven.
- E. The speakers ask for all these things.

2. Suppose the poet were to add another line before the last line of "Song of the Sky Loom." Which of the following would best fit with "a garment of brightness," "where birds sing" and "where grass is green" and the structure of the preceding two lines (lines 10 and 11)?

- A. We will go quietly into the bright light
- B. Let us live in a land where rain gently falls
- C. That we may walk fittingly where the sun shines
- D. O let us stride into the brightness of the day
- E. That we may walk fittingly while war rages

- 3.** What does it likely mean to “walk fittingly” on the earth?
- A.** to live in harmony with nature
 - B.** to wear shoes that fit
 - C.** to be proud and rule wisely
 - D.** to go where food is most abundant
 - E.** None of the above
- 4.** What seems the best reason for the physical appearance of “Prayer to the Pacific,” with the widely varying line lengths and unusual spacing?
- A.** It fits the rhythm, or meter, of the poem.
 - B.** It is typical of poems written during this time period.
 - C.** It is meant to resemble the waves of the ocean.
 - D.** It makes some lines less important than others in meaning.
 - E.** The poet wants the text to seem like a poem, even though it has no poetic elements.
- 5.** In line 13 of “Prayer to the Pacific”—“I return to you”—the poet is addressing
- A.** Earth.
 - B.** herself.
 - C.** the reader.
 - D.** the ocean.
 - E.** the turquoise.

6. Why might the speaker in "Prayer to the Pacific" want to "carry back the ocean"?

- A.** There is not enough water in her land.
- B.** She wants to connect with her origins.
- C.** She wants a souvenir for her family and friends.
- D.** It is proof of the existence of the ocean.
- E.** The saltwater will flavor her traditional dishes.

7. What is the significance of the "gifts" in the two poems?

- A.** By giving gifts, the receivers expect something in return.
- B.** The gift giving marks the anniversary of an important event in each culture.
- C.** The givers have too much; they give gifts to avoid wasting what they have.
- D.** The gifts show gratitude to or blessings from the ancestors.
- E.** All of the above

- 8. Constructed Response:** Identify the features of “Prayer to the Pacific” that make it a prayer. Compare and contrast this poem with “Song of the Sky Loom” or another prayer you know.

- 9. Constructed Response:** Analyze the images of nature in these two poems. How are the two poems similar to other early Native American literature? How are they unique in their representations of nature? Use examples from the poems to support your answers.

1. A
2. C. Model how to evaluate possible responses to this question by saying, "Lines 10 and 11 of the poem both start with 'That we may,' so answers A, B, and E do not fit the pattern. Answer E talks about war, but the rest of the poem is about nature, brightness, and harmony. Answer C is the best answer."
3. A
4. C
5. D
6. B
7. D
8. The features of "Prayer to the Pacific" that make it a prayer include showing reverence for the ocean, using rhythmic language, acknowledging ancestors, and creating a sense of calm. In comparison, "Song of the Sky Loom" is a more traditional prayer; it directly asks a divine entity for something.
9. The poems are similar to other Native American literature from this unit in that they refer to anthropomorphized elements of nature, such as Mother the Earth, Father the Sky, and Grandfather Turtle. "Prayer to the Pacific" differs from other Native American literature from this unit in its use of first-person narration and idea of living far away from one's origins.

