

Approved for use in Native American Literature

Summary of the Work:

During a kachina ceremony at the Tano pueblo, the antics of a dancing koshare fill the air with tension. Moments later, the clown is found bludgeoned to death, in the same manner a reservation schoolteacher was killed only days before. Officer Jim Chee and Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn believe that answers lie in the sacred clown's final cryptic message to the Tano people. But to decipher it, the two Navajo policemen may have to delve into closely guarded tribal secrets — on a sinister trail of blood that links a runaway, a holy artifact, corrupt Indian traders, and a pair of dead bodies.

Rationale:

Sacred Clowns explores the various conflicts between Navajo and white culture. Also like some of his earlier novels, the book highlights conflicts among various Indian cultures, exploring how people's cultural backgrounds form their views of the world.

One of the major themes concerns the different ways that whites and Navajos view justice. White culture draws on the Judeo-Christian tradition that views justice as fitting the punishment to the crime. The literary precedents for *Sacred Clowns* are American realism, the detective novel, and the American local color tradition. Hillerman continues his realistic portrayal of Chee and Leaphorn as they solve the two murders.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Booklist starred
Kliatt
Kirkus Review
Publishers Weekly
New York Times

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Edgar Award
- Grand Master Awards

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 710
- Readability Level: 7.1

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2006

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Sacred Clowns is high interest look at the Pueblo and Navajo culture of the southwest which presents a good contrast to the plains tribes of Montana.

Connection to the Curriculum:

The literary precedents for *Sacred Clowns* are American realism, the detective novel, and the American local color tradition. It also presents a southwestern Indian culture to contrast with plains cultures to accentuate the diversity among tribes.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

Native American Literature