



# Pieces of White Shell

*Terry Tempest Williams*

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## **Pieces of White Shell** Terry Tempest Williams

This unusual book is an introduction to Navajo culture by a storyteller. Steeped in the lore of the Navajo reservation, where she worked as a teacher, the author came to see Navajo legend and ritual as touchstones for evaluating her own experience. She presents them here as a means for all people to locate their own history, traditions, and sense of how to live well.

"To know the oral tradition of Native American people is to feel the sensitivity and sensuality of language in its clearest motion and light, and this Williams has achieved in her appreciation of that tradition."--Simon Ortiz

"*Pieces of White Shell* is vibrant--full of risk, gentleness, wonder, and humility."--Barry Lopez

"This book is both informative and enormously evocative. Exposition and description are powerfully reinforced by recurrent passages in the mode of poetry and drama."--Brewster Ghiselin

## **Pieces of White Shell Details**

Date : Published May 1st 1987 by University of New Mexico Press (first published 1984)

ISBN : 9780826309693

Author : Terry Tempest Williams

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Environment, Nature, Autobiography, Memoir, Academic, Read For School, Writing, Essays

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## **From Reader Review Pieces of White Shell for online ebook**

### **Eliza says**

Wonderful navajo stories all woven around items in a small pouch worn around one's neck....food for thought!

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### **Josephine Ensign says**

This book is now one of my favorites of all books by Terry Tempest Williams, along with Refuge and When Women Were Birds. What I love about this book: the sparse yet generous prose juxtaposed with gorgeous line drawings.

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### **Lia says**

Wonderfully beautiful. Vignettes like artifacts like spirits. This book is a votive shrine.

"I remember standing in front of a Fremont bracelet. It was a circle of prairie falcon talons laced together with rawhide. There was an aura I cannot explain. I wondered about the individual who had worn it, for what occasion it had been made. For a brief moment, I entered sacred time. Perhaps this is the performance of an artifact.

Sacred time. We cannot always live there. But if we know it exists, we can begin to experience the soul of the land. From here stories will spill forth."

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### **Marilee says**

Reminded me of living in Mexican hat.

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### **Janet Wilcox says**

The first time I read this, 20 some years ago, I hadn't had time nor opportunity to get the feel of the land and people in SE Utah, as I was so busy being a mom. Now with many decades of life experiences among the Navajo and reservation, I found I could finally identify with her experiences and enjoy this book. So many of the places I've been to now. It makes a difference. Terry is a wonderful reader and story teller. Stories from this book are included in an audio version.

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## **Monica Spencer says**

Insightful look at the Diné culture from an outsider's perspective. However, this read more as "Diné Culture 101" than a series of personal essays. I would have liked to have read more on how she personally related to and was impacted by living and working on the reservation.

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## **Annette says**

Explores the experiences of the author teaching on the Navajo reservation. Describes how her growing appreciation for the culture of the Native American people helped her understand her own heritage and people.

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## **Colleen Mertens says**

This was an interesting memoir. The author's descriptions of her home and life teaching were interesting and vivid. I loved her stories and the way she blended the myths with real life. This was an interesting read and I enjoyed it very much.

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## **Laura (booksnob) says**

Terry Tempest Williams is a fierce environmentalist and is doing her best to educate readers about the connection between the people, the animals and the land. *Pieces of a White Shell* delves into Terry's life as a teacher on the Navajo reservation in Utah and makes connections between Navajo culture, legend and history and Terry's own life and spiritual culture as a Mormon.

"I offer you a sampling of the Navajo voice, of my own voice and the voice of the land that moves us. We are told a story and then we tell our own. Each of us harbors a homeland. The stories that are rooted there push themselves up like native grasses and crack the sidewalk." pg. 8

*Pieces of a White Shell* begins with Terry working as a collector as she shakes her pouch open on her desk, she wonders what stories the items she has collected tell. Each item she collected is the name of the chapter and shapes the stories you find there. Rocks, Sands, Seed, Turquoise, Obsidian, Coral, *Pieces of a White Shell*, Yucca, Feathers, Coyote Foe, Bone, Deerskin, Wool, the Storyteller and Corn Pollen.

"To tell a story you must travel inward." pg. 129

Beautiful artwork accompanies and illustrates one aspect of each chapter. There are 13 stories or essays that meld together, told with simplicity and spirituality. *Pieces of White Shell* is a testament to the beauty and harmony of the land. It is full of the old, oral tradition stories of the Navajo people. If you love story and if you love mother earth, you will love this book.

What items do you find in nature and save in a special place? What stories do they tell?

I collect the feathers I found in my yard and the deer antlers left in spring. I hold rocks in my pockets and gaze at them as they reside on my dresser. We are all collectors of nature and stories.

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### **Greta says**

Meeting author, Terry Tempest Williams, in Seattle and again in Spokane, WA a few years ago influences my reading of her work in a positive way. She is sincere, charming and willing to travel just about anywhere on behalf of educating children about the natural world. She is also a great story teller.

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### **Ariane says**

I always wanted more from her in terms of scientific fact or explanations and a little less on the prose. But that's just me I suppose.

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### **Jane Wolfe says**

In this book, Terry Tempest Williams uses the essay form to weave Native American stories, flora and fauna of the southwest with her sense of spirituality. In doing so, she gently nudges the reader to consider their own stories. As always, Williams' essays are a joy to read.

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### **Chibineko says**

While I liked this book, I'll be honest that I might not have read it if it wasn't a school read.

When it comes to immersing herself into the Navajo culture, Williams does an excellent job and at times it's very hard to remember that she's a white Mormon woman rather than someone who was born and raised Navajo. I'm sure that people more familiar with the Navajo culture could see where she's not born as such, but for the average Jane looking in...

The only problem I really had with this book was that I was hoping to see more parallels and contrasts between Williams' Mormon upbringing and the Navajo life. We do see her comment on this briefly at times, but the book predominantly focuses on the Navajo culture and I just felt that this kept the book from having that little extra oomph to really sparkle for me.

Even minus that extra detail, Williams has a very fluid way of writing that makes it easy to get drawn into the book. It probably won't ever be a book that most people will pluck off the shelves at their local bookstores and read like some of the other non-fiction books out there, but it is something that I think all students of religion, culture, and anthropology should read.

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## **Lisa says**

Williams writes about her experiences on the Navajo Nation and with the people that she met while she worked on the Navajo Nation. She is poetic and she weaves in the stories that she heard while there. She tries very hard to understand the land and the people. Although it is a good book by Williams, Just remember that if you want true insight into the Navajo people and land, you should definitely read a book written by a Navajo author. :)

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## **Amber says**

I'm from Moab, Utah and my book club decided on this book and also Open Midnight by her husband Brooke Williams. I found the book very interesting. I thought I wouldn't like the context in regards to when Terry Tempest discusses Mormonism and Native American culture because of the contrasting nature of the two. I was thinking how in the world could one have anything to do with the other. How could someone be both! I guess even though they don't have much in common that doesn't detract from the fact a person can be made up of contrasting pieces. Why not?

I enjoyed the stories of the Native Americans and found myself wondering how across the board accurate were they? Do all Native Americans for the most part understand these basics and tales? I considered asking my ex mother in law who is a full blooded traditional Native American that lives on the reservation if she knew of any of these tales..... but I have yet to do so. I wanted to ask her if she has heard of monster slayer. I thought the love and respect that Terry showed through her novel for the children and the Native Culture, which she is so obviously very fond of, was enduring.

I liked the references that nature is female, hence Mother Nature and I agree whole heartedly.

Often times reading this story I got the impression that the Native Culture or at least how it's explained in the book is that they are a people of very superstitious beliefs.

I liked when the man was discussing the city and the infrastructure of a new building and the Native man responds how many sheep can it hold? The comment is valuable to me because it reminds me of this materialistic world we live in and when we have more "things" a.k.a junk in our lives it's not happiness, it's honestly exhausting.

I thought it might be awkward to read a novel on Native American Culture from the Perspective of a white woman but it wasn't in the least I found Terry Tempest to be genuine.

I do feel a certain feeling when calm and at peace with nature and I feel something special that cannot be described.

I liked when she asked her Native brother was he offended when the use of his Culture and stories were shared in order to preserve sacred lands by a white women or something along those lines, as I do not have the book in front of me. I remember the section from my memory and I liked that his reply was no that's what's it's intended to do.

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