Leslie Marmon Silko’s essay, “Language and Literature from a Pueblo Indian Perspective” discusses in detail the structure of storytelling in the Pueblo community and how such storytelling is essential to the way of life of the Pueblo people. In the essay she describes the complexity of their storytelling, a sort of unorthodox style if referenced by traditional Anglo tales told orally, which, ironically, to the naked eye may seem overly simplified, or choppy even. Without her guidance I may have been under the same false impression. But with her help, the guidance of her words as she lays out the structure and application of their practice, I learned much about the art of storytelling as a whole.

Storytelling is an art form, one that takes practice and discipline, and is learned through repetition. Silko describes Pueblo storytelling as a spider’s web with, “many little threads radiating from a center, crisscrossing each other.” The pueblo way of life is predicated on such stories, and just as a web’s string cannot be isolated from the others, these “stories” that each clan or family tells cannot be individually analyzed as a story, for every narrative is flowing, a piece to the web of life for its people. To listen to one tale alone would be unwise. They roll into each other, for everyday there are new obstacles life throws at you, therefore there are new lessons to be learned. And as Silko reveals to us through her essay, for every lesson there is a story to tell.

I think the way of the Pueblo people is fascinating. There are stories for everything—your family, your family’s family, your clan’s origin, even the history of people. Through these powerful stories children grow with a strong sense of identity and understanding of the history of their people. With time, traditions and histories fade, at least to some degree,
and no culture can or has escaped such fate. Yet, the Pueblo traditions of oral storytelling has still lived on, as late as the time of this essay’s publication. There is a sort of power in stories, one different from other forms of teaching. People respond to a good story, especially one told by someone they trust and love. It is the reason parables, fables and urban legends still exist today, in the boom of the information age where ten year olds can read about the refugee crisis in Syria and kindergarteners receive Apple Ipads on the first day of class. In the height of the internet and social media, time consumption at a clip the world has never seen before, storytelling, good storytelling, lives on in all of us.

Storytelling can outlive literature, can endure the lies of bias textbooks and writers. Silko talks about the invasion of Laguna Pueblo by both the Portuguese and the Spanish, and how through the art of storytelling, describing the past and understanding the past is likely to repeat itself, the Pueblo people were able to survive. How, even in the face of faulty books written for a geographical location thousands of miles north of Laguna, the storytelling taught the children the truths, or as close to that as they could. And through hundreds and thousands of years of practicing such storytelling the Pueblo people gained a rich historical literature of their own, just in the oral platform.

It is an essay people should read, for I found it very insightful and education, much to my surprise. As someone who very passionately aspires to be a writer, one of relative difference, it is a thought-provoking question to ask: which is more powerful, storytelling or literature? I suppose the answer to that question will differ from person to person and culture to culture, but at least for one people, the Americans of Laguna Pueblo, the answer is abundantly clear.