

## Rhythm and Music in Poetry, Part II

By: Elizabeth Brown

**Education Level:** Junior High (also Upper level Elementary, High School)

**Genre:** Poetry

**Time frame:** One class period

**Objective:** To think about the music of poetry and write with music in mind.

**Prior knowledge and skills:** None, although ideally, this lesson would follow Rhythm and Music in Poetry, Part I

**Required materials:** A copy of *The House Made of Dawn*, The Navajo Night Chant (excerpt)—copied for the students or displayed on a projector, worksheet

**Literary model:** N. Scott Momaday, *The House Made of Dawn*, excerpts from The Navajo Night Chant. Depending on the age of the students, these excerpts could be longer or shorter. There are many available online—I'll include the short excerpt I used at the end of this lesson.

I credit Luci Tapahonso for the prompt that inspired this lesson. Without her, this lesson would not exist. Luci illuminated the similarities between the rhythms of N. Scott Momaday's *The House Made of Dawn* and the Navajo Night Chant in a class I took with her several years ago through the Institute for American Indian Arts.

### Sequence of activities:

#### 20 minutes

Mention Luci Tapahonso, First Poet Laureate of the Navajo Nation and credit her with the inspiration for this lesson. I also like to share this quote from Luci: "Poetry is a way to honor what you long for."

Read the first paragraph of the preface of *The House Made of Dawn*. Continue reading a few sentences more, where the main character, Abel, is introduced. Then skip to the end of the novel and read the last few sentences. Ask students what they think about what they just heard. Note the rhythmic nature of the prose. Mention the framing of the novel with The Navajo Night Chant.

Hand out or project The Navajo Night Chant. Mention the history and cultural significance of the chant. Ask if several students could volunteer to read. One student could read a section, followed by another student, and so on. Then, facilitate a discussion. What did you notice? Are the rhythms in the chant similar to those in *The House Made of Dawn*?

**20 minutes**

Encourage the students to try writing in these rhythms.

Hand out worksheet (copied below). Students can use them or not, as long as they are inspired to write rhythmically. They are meant to be a jumping-off place, leading to a poem all the student's own.

**10 minutes**

Ask if any students want to share their poems with the class.

**Excerpt from The Navajo Night Chant:**

In the house made of dawn,  
In the house made of evening twilight,  
In the house made of dark cloud,

In the house made of rain and mist, of pollen, of grasshoppers,  
Where the dark mist curtains the doorway,  
The path to which is on the rainbow,  
Where the zig-zag lightning stands high on top, Oh Father God!

With your moccasins of dark cloud, come to us,  
With your mind enveloped in dark cloud, come to us,  
With the dark thunder above you, come to us soaring....

My feet, restore for me.  
My limbs, restore, my body restore,  
My mind, restore,  
My voice, restore for me....

Thus you accomplish your tasks....

In beauty I walk.  
With beauty before me, I walk.  
With beauty behind me, I walk.  
With beauty above and about me, I walk.  
It is finished in beauty.  
It is finished in beauty.

**Worksheet**

“There was a house made of dawn. It was made of pollen and of rain, and the land was very old and everlasting. There were many colors on the hills, and the plain was bright with different-colored clays and sands. Red and blue and spotted horses grazed in the plain, and there was a dark wilderness on the mountains beyond.” –N. Scott Momaday, “The House Made of Dawn”

Using your own words, write in the rhythm of the opening of Momaday’s “The House Made of Dawn”:

There was a \_\_\_\_\_ made of \_\_\_\_\_.

It was made of \_\_\_\_\_ and of \_\_\_\_\_,

And the \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

There were many \_\_\_\_\_

And the \_\_\_\_\_ was \_\_\_\_\_

with \_\_\_\_\_.

Add more if you like (you can work on the back)