Deceptively Difficult Questions:
a reading guide to help you discover Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Ceremony*

As you respond to the questions for each section, keep in mind that they have been engineered for discovery, exploration, and analysis. The only source you’re allowed is your brain. You’ll be rewarded in points for smart answers, insightful answers, as well as those that take risks. If you can do all three, I’ll put a sticker on this packet to show the world how innovative your thinking was in the spring of 2012, back before you became famous. I refuse to give you guidelines, limitations, or requirements, as those things are not in keeping with the experience of reading this novel. I’ll simply say: Answer the question.

Section One (12/14*)
“The people and the animals were thirsty. They were starving.”

What’s wrong with Tayo?

Section Two (37/41)
“Hey, whose turn to buy?”

Talk about environments, and how they factor into Tayo’s mental/physical/emotional state.
Section Three (58/63)
“But he wasn’t sure any more what to believe or whom he could trust. He wasn’t sure.”

What do the poem-stories have to do with the other things going on in the novel?

Section Four (75/82)
“He sat on the straight-back chair beside her and looked over at the big cottonwood that grew next to the porch, its branches sweeping and wide, hiding a portion of the northeast sky.”

Why does Tayo’s bi-racial heritage and, specifically, the circumstances of his conception and upbringing, matter?

Section Five (82/89)
“The story was all that counted. If she had a better one about them, then it didn’t matter what they said.”

Who is the Night Swan? (To herself? To Josiah? To Tayo? [This question also requires reading some of the next section.]
Section Six (106/116)
“He looked back at the bridge, and he made a wish. The same wish Rocky made that night in San Diego: a safe return.”

Analyze the description of Gallup.

Section Seven (120/130)
“It is a matter of transitions, you see; the changing, the becoming must be cared for closely. You would do as much for the seedlings as they become plants in the field.”

Betonie: comment on his philosophy and methods.

Section Eight (142/153)
“The effects of the witchery, of the evil thing in his surroundings began to turn away. It had gone a great distance. It had gone below the North.”

What is the witchery, where did it originate, and what is it capable of?
Section Nine (163/176)
“Your mother, the earth is crying for you. Come home, children, come home.”

Why put the story of Sun Man and Kaup’a’ta the Gambler right here?

Section Ten (186/201)
“It was a lot of trouble just for an Indian; maybe it would be too much trouble, and they would let him go.”

If Betonie is right, the journey to reclaim the cattle is all part of the ceremony. To what extent does/can/should Tayo trust this?

Section Eleven (206/217)
“How was going ‘up the line,’ to walk, hitchhike, and maybe ride in Leroy’s truck, up Highway 66 to Dixie Tavern, San Fidel, Cerritos, all the way to Gallup and back again, with stops in between—Bibo, the Y—until the money ran out.”

Where is Tayo at this point in his journey? (Not a literal question)
Is he edging more toward failure or healing?
Section Twelve (225/243)
“He slipped the screwdriver into his hip pocket and started running.”

Tell me about Ts’eh… aka “her.”
Who is she, really? Why is she so important?

Section Thirteen (End)