American Life in Poetry
Joy Harjo’s ode to family, to ancestry, and to the woman’s body, truly makes sense if we understand that for Harjo, there is no line separating the natural world and her human body—that for her the evolutionary impulse is one of the imagination: “I was a thought, a dream, a fish, a wing.” In “Granddaughters,” she celebrates the body and the dynamic force of nature.

Granddaughters

By Joy Harjo

I was a thought, a dream, a fish, a wing
And then a human being
When I emerged from my mother’s river
On my father’s boat of potent fever
I carried a sack of dreams from a starlit dwelling
To be opened when I begin bleeding
There’s a red dress, deerskin moccasins
The taste of berries made of promises
While the memories shift in their skins
At every moon, to do their ripening