Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Bless Me, Ultima

Notes

There are many Spanish words and phrases in this novel. Sometimes, the meanings of these words can be inferred from the context, but this is not possible with all of them. In addition, the novel assumes the reader is familiar with some Mexican-American folklore, such as the idea that a man named Juan is believed to have special powers to catch witches. An optional activity might be for the teacher to have students research and report on some of these superstitions.

Bless Me, Ultima contains some infrequent profanity, statements calling Catholicism into question, and some strong sexual references.

Bless Me, Ultima

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the elements of the Mexican-American culture that are revealed through Antonio's family relationships; include respect for elders, family loyalty, and strong Catholic beliefs.

2. point out examples of Mexican-American folklore and how the ancient Indian beliefs remain as part of the rural Mexican-American culture. Consider their belief in prophetic dreams, the idea that a man's destiny is determined at birth, belief in witches and evil curses, and their belief in the golden carp.

3. relate the legend of la Llorona and discuss how the legend helps to stress the importance of avoiding sin.

4. provide details to support the following theme: There are consequences to be paid if anyone tampers with another person's destiny. Be sure to cite incidents from the story to show that witchcraft, revenge, and war interfere with destiny.

5. draw inferences about characters and events when their meanings are not explicitly stated.

6. identify the conflict Antonio feels regarding his Márez and Luna family heritages; point out how Antonio resolves this problem.

7. define vocabulary words from the story

8. point out the prophetic nature of Antonio's dreams and how they foreshadow incidents in the story.

9. discuss this story as a loss-of-innocence novel; consider the ways Antonio learns to separate from his mother, becomes sexually aware, obtains spiritual independence, and grows in strength of character.

10. comment on the following themes from the novel:

    • An education is necessary in the modern world.

    • It is important to gain strength from hardships rather than sinking into despair.

    • Part of growing up is learning to adapt to change and to recognize that each person must fashion his or her own destiny.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Briefly describe Ultima. Why does Antonio's family want Ultima to come and live with them?

2. Relate three of Antonio's dreams. In what ways do his dreams foreshadow incidents in the story?

3. Summarize the legend of the golden carp and the legend of la Llorona. What does each of these legends teach Antonio about the consequences of sin and the power of forgiveness?

4. What warning does Ultima give to the Luna family before she agrees to cure Lucas by removing the curse? Cite incidents from the story to show whether or not this warning comes true later on in the book.

5. Why is Antonio confused about his destiny? What does he hope God will reveal to him after he takes his first communion? Why is he disappointed?

6. Discuss whether or not this novel is a loss-of-innocence story. Consider the ways Antonio must separate from both his mother and his father, the lessons he learns from Ultima, and his early experiences with death.

7. Cite incidents from the story to support the following theme: It is important to gain strength from hardships rather than sinking into despair.

8. Why do you think Antonio believes that, "Perhaps the best god would be like a woman"?

9. In the story, how are witches identified, killed, and buried? Why are many people afraid of Ultima's owl?

10. State whether or not you believe Ultima is a witch. Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

11. One of the themes in this novel is the idea that accepting changes in life is part of growing up. Cite incidents from the story to support this theme.

12. What do the golden carp, black bass, river, Florence, and the livers of Antonio's brothers symbolize in this story?

5.   How does Antonio feel about his mother's wish that he become a priest?

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6.   What evidence is there that Ultima thinks Antonio is a special boy?

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7.   Why are Deborah and Theresa afraid of Ultima's owl? How does Antonio's dream about the owl help him to accept it as a good omen?

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<u>Cinco</u>

1.   Why are Antonio and his mother going to El Puerto? How far away is the farm?

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2.   Find a passage in this chapter that expresses how Antonio feels when he is at El Puerto.

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5.   Why does Narciso make his last confession to Antonio?

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6.   Cite incidents from Antonio's dream to support the following theme. Forgiveness is necessary for everyone, even sinners.

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7.   At this point in the story speculate on what path in life Antonio will choose. Will he be a farmer, vaquero, priest, or something else? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

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