

Reflections:

A Student Response Journal for...

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

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ISBN: 978-1-58049-895-1

Item No. 204992

Pre-reading

1. The author of this book, Rudolfo Anaya, dedicates *Bless Me, Ultima* to his parents. If you wrote a book, to whom would you dedicate it? Write a short paragraph that could be used as the dedication for your autobiography, a book that tells the story of your life. Make sure your paragraph includes the reason why you are dedicating your book to that person.
2. This book's author is one of the best known Mexican-American writers of his time. Some people who have studied his work even say that his cultural heritage greatly affects the types of things he writes.

What do you know about your own cultural heritage? In a well-developed paragraph, describe your cultural heritage and how you think it affects your life. For example, do you observe certain holidays? Do you wear special clothes or eat foods that may be different from those of people in other cultures? Do not limit your paragraph to these questions only.

3. You've just been assigned *Bless Me, Ultima* to read for class. Write a discussion between yourself and a friend, explaining, without having read the book, what you think the book may be about. You may choose to begin like this

You: Yeah, my teacher just gave me this book to read. It's called *Bless Me, Ultima*. Have you read it?

Friend: No, what's it about?

You: I don't really know, but I think...

4. As you read *Bless Me, Ultima*, keep a list of all the words you don't recognize. As you finish each chapter, look up the definitions of those words and write them in your reading journal.

Response Journal

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5. The person who is telling us this story, the narrator, says that his mother cannot recognize the beauty of the place where her family lives. When a real estate agent is selling a house or a piece of land, she may create a brochure to advertise the beauty of the area where the house or land is located. Write the text for a real estate brochure for the place where you live, describing in great detail the great things about it.
6. The narrator tells a story about how, when his parents were married, his mother made his father move from the country into town. Write a short, two-paragraph position paper that answers this question: Is it better to live in the city or in the country? Be sure to use lots of examples to back up your opinion.
7. Ultima is said to have otherworldly healing powers. She uses her powers to help people, but even so, she is often misunderstood and thought to be evil instead of being someone who gets rid of evil.

All of us have probably had a time when something we said or did was misinterpreted to the point that it changed people's opinions of us. Write a letter to someone who misunderstood something you did or said. In your letter, explain to him what you really meant to do or say. A good way to begin may be:

September 15th

Dear Joshua,

I know I must have seemed insensitive when I told you...

8. The narrator explains one of his dreams to us, but he doesn't know what the dream means. Write a short comparison and contrast essay in which you compare a dream you recently had with the narrator's dream in the book.

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9. One of the people in the narrator's dream says that the newborn baby would honor the family if he grew up to be a priest. Of all the professions there are now, which one do you consider to be the most honorable? What, in your opinion, is the best, most prestigious or most important job to have? Write a section for a handout for graduating high school seniors, explaining the best job to pursue. Your handout should mention the profession and also explain why that job is the most honorable and the best.
10. The narrator's mother refers to Ultima as "la Grande." The mother does this "out of respect" for Ultima.

Respect is something we all want to have. Everyone would like to be treated fairly and with some type of dignity. Respect, though, is something that must be earned. Write a section for a self-help book, listing the top five things a person can do to gain respect from others. For each of the five things you list, also write a brief explanation of that entry. Here is an example:

To gain another's respect, you must do these five things:

1. Respect yourself – Don't let others push you around or treat you badly. Stand up for yourself and...

Response Journal

11. Some of the words in this book are in Spanish. For example, Ultima is a curandera, which is a Spanish word for a woman who knows how to cure illnesses. You may or may not have studied Spanish, but even if you don't know any foreign language, you can probably figure out the general meaning of the Spanish words in *Bless Me, Ultima*.

It's interesting that even when we are not familiar with a particular language, we can figure out the basic meaning of some of the language's words just by comparing them to words in our own language. What would happen if you created your own language? Write a paragraph that uses five (5) terms from a language that you made up. Then, write a glossary of those terms. Here is an example:

The house was dark and moukular. It stood way up on a jamze far above the trees. I thought to myself as I walked up the unmarked dirt path, "I can't daubet that anyone lives here anymore." Dim lights shone from within the sargenblary old building, and I thought I could detect the slight movement of a curtain. Could someone be watching me? Could the legend be true? Was there really a clobberneper at Blake House?

Glossary

Clobberneper – monster

Daubet – believe

Jamze – hill

Moukular – scary

Sargenblary – decrepit

12. The narrator tells us that "it was the custom to provide for the old." Many people think that the way society treats elderly people today is disgraceful. These people think that the families of elderly people are too quick to send them to nursing homes where the elderly person doesn't know anyone. Other people believe though, that old people are better cared for in nursing homes than they would be in their own homes. After all, they argue, in a nursing home, an elderly person has access to 24-hour medical care and he can also socialize with, dine with, and get to know other elderly people there.

Write a two-paragraph letter to the editor of your local newspaper, arguing your viewpoint about whether older people should live with their families or live in nursing facilities.

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13. We now know the narrator's name; he is Antonio. Antonio's mother is happy when Ultima comes to live with her family. Antonio's mother has apparently been lonely and now, with Ultima there, she has someone to talk to. Everybody feels a little lonely now and then. Write a short section for a self-help website, describing the top three (3) things people can do to fight loneliness. Make sure to explain what it is about each action that makes a person feel less lonely.
14. Antonio's father sometimes cries when he thinks about his three sons who have gone off to war. Write a letter to Antonio's father, telling him that it's O.K. to cry, even though he is a man. You may begin like this:

October 28th

Dear Mr. Marez,

I understand that three of your sons have gone off to war. I know...

15. Through Ultima, Antonio begins to find peace in his relationship with nature. What brings you peace? Write a short paragraph, explaining what you do to find peace. Do you meditate or pray? Do you play a sport or a musical instrument? What relaxes you and calms you when you're upset?
16. When Lupito kills the sheriff and then runs away, it is obviously big news in the area. Antonio's father and some of his neighbors form a posse to find Lupito. Using information given in the book, write a television news report that tells the story of the sheriff's murder. Here's a good way to begin:

Newsperson: This just in – shocking local news...the sheriff was found dead today...