

Draft

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

*a unit designed for use with 9th and 10 graders
in English and English as a Second Language classes*

High School Literacy Project
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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| Overview of Novel and Author | 1 |
| Prereading Activities | |
| Mapping | 2 |
| Tea Party | 3-6 |
| Reading Activities | 7 |
| Reading Strategies | 8 |
| Focus: Character Mapping | 8 |
| Preparing for the CIM Reading Work Sample - | 9 |
| Focus: Figurative Language - a lesson | 9-10 |
| Reading/Literature Performance Assessment - | |
| the CIM reading work sample | 11-17 |
| Resources: | |
| Character List | 18-21 |
| Point-of View and Setting | 22 |
| Conflicts | 23 |
| Themes | 24 |
| Symbols | 25 |
| Background Information - author, concepts | 26-31 |
| Writing Activities | 32 |
| Focus: Poetry - The Importance of Place | 33-37 |
| Lesson and models | |
| Focus: Narrative - Childhood Remembered | 38-50 |
| Lesson and models | |
| Focus: Poetry - Function of Dreams | 51-55 |
| Lesson and models | |
| Focus: Narrative - Rites of Passage | 56-61 |
| Lesson and Models | |
| CIM Narrative Work Sample and/or Final Write Criteria Sheet | 62-63 |
| Other writing Ideas for Novel | 64 |
| Focus: Narrative - Family | 65 |
| Speaking Activities: | |
| Focus: Informative Speech | 66 |
| List of research topics | 67 |
| Other resources | |
| Sample unit time line | 73-74 |
| Art projects | 68 |
| Storyboard Activity - Interpreting Text | 69-71 |
| Bibliography | 72 |

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Overview:

Bless Me, Ultima tells the story of a young boy's loss of innocence, self-discovery, and struggle to find enduring values.

When Antonio (Tony) Marez is six-years-old, his parents send for an old woman, Ultima, to stay with their family in a small village in New Mexico. She is a curandera, a person who heals using herbs and magic. Throughout the novel, Ultima shares her wisdom with and inspires Tony. However, he is torn between the natures and dreams of his parents and his desire to be a good Catholic versus his growing interest in native spiritual beliefs.

In part a coming of age novel, Bless Me, Ultima includes wonderful storytelling and rich, poetic prose.

About the Author:

Born Oct. 30, 1937, Rudolfo Anaya is the fifth child in a family of seven children. He began his life in the small village of Pastura, New Mexico. As a small boy his family moved to the eastern plains of Santa Rosa, New Mexico. His mother's ancestors had been farmers and his father was a vaquero or cowboy.

A special force in Anaya's life was his grandmother, La Grande. Anaya has said that some people felt she was a curandera. In Spanish culture a curandera is someone who has power over the human soul or is, in lay terms, a folk healer.

Anaya and his brothers and sisters were raised in a devout Catholic home. At home he was spoken to in Spanish but educated in English. In 1952, he and his family moved to Albuquerque, settling in the Barelitas barrio (neighborhood). He graduated from high school in 1956, dropped out of business school, received his degree, and accepted a teaching position in a small town. The novel Bless Me, Ultima took seven years to write.

Prereading Activities

BLESS ME ULTIMA

PRE-READING ACTIVITY: LOCATION

Rodolfo Anaya's autobiographical novel takes place in New Mexico, where the author was born and grew up. Integral to the growth of the protagonist and to his identity are the three landscapes: the "llano", the New Mexican high plain with Las Pasturas, his father's home; Guadalupe, the nearby town, with his school and church; and El Puerto, home of the Lunas, his mother's farming family. The reader's engagement in the novel can be facilitated by activities to bring these landscapes alive and personal.

Activity One

Make a large map of New Mexico to put up on the wall. Identify the locations in the novel. Make a handout of New Mexico to go into students' Reading Response Journal. As students read the novel, they can put Stickies on the map with their responses to scenes or events that are striking and/or important to understanding. They can also put up drawings, pictures or objects that have meaning to them in context with the story and the geographical locations.

Activity Two

Have students make a collage to show the landscapes they believe fit into the world of Anaya's novel. Pictures could come from "National Geographic", "Sunset" or other magazines. Because the time setting for the novel is the 1940's, black and white photos or magazine pictures that give the mood of the time would be effective. Objects can also be used.

As culminating activity, students can give an Impromptu Speech in a "Walk-Around", in which each student explains his/her collage.

Activity Three

The film "What Now, Miguel", although older, is about a Latino family of sheepherders in New Mexico during the time of World War II. The young boy, Miguel, also watches his brother go off to war. The movie gives a good picture of the New Mexican "llano". It is slow, but a good visual.

Activity Four

As a writing project, students could write formal letters to the Tourism Department of New Mexico and/or the U.S. Forestry and Parks Dept. for brochures and information about New Mexico.

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by Rudolfo Anaya

Prereading Strategy: Tea Party

This is a variation of the Historical Tea Party described in the San Francisco School District Reading and Writing Strategies p. 19. Students draw one of six character cards. The teacher should photocopy the roles below and attach to colored card stock - a different color for each character. After students read their card, they should complete questions 2 - 3 on the following handout. After taking part in the tea party, they will complete items 4 and 5 on the handout.

Character Cards for guests at Tea Party:

Antonio: I am only six years old and I don't know what my destiny is. My parents have conflicting dreams for me. One wants me to grow up and fulfill the dream of having another priest in the family. I am to live a settled life like my Luna, farmer uncles. The other parent says this is ridiculous and wants me to pursue the vaquero life of freedom like my Marez ancestors.

I miss my brothers who are fighting in the war and am frightened about going to school where I will have to learn English. Also the young boys in Guadalupe sometimes bully and tease me.

Deborah: I am closest to Theresa and we spend many hours playing dolls and giggling together in the attic. I like going to school and try to make my parents proud of my good manners. I am very pleased that Ultima has come to live with us as I don't have to do as much housework as I used to. Now she helps sweep out the rooms and prepare the meals.

I don't talk much with my brother as he is much younger than I am. Also I resent my mother's constant attention to him. She always talks about how he will become a priest, so I will probably be expected to watch out for him at school just as I watch out for Theresa who is younger than I too. Mama never talks about my future but I suppose I will grow up to be just like her- a wife and mother.

Gabriel (Father): "Marez men were conquistadors, men as restless as the seas they sailed and as free as the land they conquered." They have always lived on the llano and were proud to be vaqueros (cowboys). All of this talk of farming and the church is not good for a boy child. I am eager for my older sons to come home from the war so we can leave this place. Sons should follow their father's dreams - perhaps move to California to start a new life. Perhaps Tony will fulfill his mother's dreams. My older sons will bring honor to the blood of Marez.

Bless Me, Ultima by Rudolfo Anaya

Prereading Strategy: Tea Party

Maria (Mama): At last, after all these years, a Luna priest, a man of learning will come to this valley. What greater honor could a family have. I pray to the Blessed Virgin that the blood of the Lunas is strong in my youngest boy and that he does not follow his wild Marez side. I will light a candle to the Virgin this very night and make my daughters and their father pray with me. A family must do what is right.

That is why I have insisted that Gabriel bring Ultima to us. It is not right for the old to live by themselves. Besides she helped me with Antonio's birth. "She is a woman of learning. She has worked hard for all the people of the village. Oh, I would never have survived those hard years if it had not been for her - so show her respect. We are honored that she comes to live with us."

La Grande (Ultima): My owl will watch over the child and keep him from harm. He has gone to the river to see about poor, crazy Lupito. If only a child could keep its innocence. But I delivered this child and there is a special bond between us. I know Antonio's destiny.

I am a curandera, a woman who heals with herbs and magic. Many people fear my power and may see it as evil. But I only work for good. I take Antonio to the hills and I show him where to find the wild herbs and roots that I use in my medicine. The plants have spirits and it is important to talk with the plants and tell them why we have pulled them from the earth. I am happy in the hills and I know the boy is too. I will try to help him find the true path of his life.

Tenorio Trementina: I have always lived in El Puerto de las Lunas. I run my bar and my barbershop. The people have always feared me and call me evil. They fear my daughters too and call them witches. Even the priest fears me. He has always ignored what we do. And if anyone displeases us there are ways to make them suffer.

Now, that evil witch has cursed my daughters and I will have my revenge. The punishment for witchcraft is death. Ultima should not have meddled with us. She should have showed fear as the other people in the valley do. For her meddling, she deserves to die just as my first daughter did. I will accept nothing less. And the grandchild of the witch should suffer as well.

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Name _____ Per. _____ Date _____

Tea Party

1. Read your role.
2. Imagine that you are this character. Write down key points about yourself that others need to know. **WRITE AS IF YOU ARE THE CHARACTER.**

3. Write some questions or thoughts you have about your character after reading the description.

O-V-E-R

4. Either during or after the party, write notes about the other characters you meet at the tea party.

5. After meeting the characters, what questions do you have about the book? Characters? Can you make any predictions?

Reading Activities

BLESS ME ULTIMA
STRATEGIES FOR CHARACTERS

The characters in Bless Me, Ultima are complex and symbolic with many attributes. Visual representations and graphic organizers are tools to understand relationships, character attributes and responses to events or other characters.

I. Character Silhouette/Mapping

Have students lie on butcher paper to trace the outline for each character in the novel. Put the life-size figures up around the room. As the class and individuals read the novel, information, characteristics, symbols, actions or reader reaction can be noted on Stickies placed on the appropriate character. Through the unit, the figures can be revisited, revised and used as reference points for discussion and writing.

II. T-Diagram

Bless Me, Ultima portrays the good vs. evil theme surrounding Antonio. The two strongest personifications of these two forces are Ultima, the "curandera", and Tenorio, the barber and saloon owner. Using a T-Bar diagram, compare the two. (See Resource Tool G, p. 46, "Reading and Literature Performance Assessment packet")

III. Venn Diagram

Antonio is embraced by two loving women, Ultima and his mother. Using the Venn Diagram, compare the two women, showing their individual, different characteristics, roles and relationships in the left-and right-hand circles and their similarities in the interior circle. Compare and contrast the two using your notes.

IV. Character Webbing

V. Hot Seat

VI. Character Graphing

VII. Point of View

VIII. Graphic Listing of Characters and their Symbolism

BLESS ME ULTIMA

READING LESSON

Grade 10/ Reading/ Literature Performance Assessment

Reading Critically: Text Analysis

The purpose of this exercise is to identify the author's literary elements and devices and their contributions to the author's purpose. In this passage, Antonio has witnessed his older brothers' permanent departure from their home, family and traditions. He ponders the events in his life and questions his beliefs, withdrawing from his circle of friends.

As you read, take some time to make notes in the right-hand column of any thoughts, questions, or emotions you might have. Let your dialogue notes show your understanding of the underline passages in this excerpt from the book.

(pp. 187-188)

Sometimes, after school let out in the afternoon, I went alone to church and kneeled and prayed very hard. I asked God to answer my questions, but the only sound was always the whistling of the wind filling the empty space. I turned more and more to praying before the altar of the Virgin, because when I talked to Her I felt as if she listened, like my mother listened. I would look very hard at the red altar candles burning before her feet then I would bow my head and close my eyes and imagine that I saw Her turn to God and tell Him exactly what I had asked.

.....

It was during one of these moods of thought that I met Tenorio one afternoon on my way home from school. The blowing wind was full of choking dust and so I walked up the path with head tucked down. I did not see Tenorio until he shouted into the howling wind. He was standing under the juniper tree at the exact spot where he had murdered Narciso. I was so startled and frightened that I jumped like a wounded rabbit, but he made no move to catch me. He wore a long, black coat and as was his custom, his wide-brimmed hat pulled low. His blind eye was a dark blue pit and the other glared yellow in the dust. He laughed and howled as he looked down at me and I thought he was drunk.

" Maldito!" he cursed me. "Desgraciado!"

" Jesus, Maria Y Jose!" I found the courage to shout back, and I crossed my thumb over my first finger and held it up to ward off his Evil, for I truly thought he was the reincarnation of the devil.

" Cabroncito! Do you think you can scare me with that? Do you think I am a witch like you grandmother? Bruja! May coyotes

disturb her grave---the grave I will send her to," he added. His vicious face twisted with hate. I felt my lefts tremble. He took a step towards me and stopped. "My daughter is dying," he moaned, and the wind snapped at his pitiful, animal cry. "My second daughter is dying, and it is because of the witch Ultima. She put the curse on my first daughter, and now she murders the second---but I will find a way," he threatened me with his closed fist, "I will find a way to get to her and destroy her!"

1. What is this passage about? Remember, the author's style has much to do with how we experience this passage. Figurative language, dialogue, and imagery set the mood. Let your dialogue notes show your understanding of the underlined passages.
2. When you have written your dialogue notes, raise your hand and let the teacher initial them.
3. How did the author cause you to feel about the character, the situation and the theme? The author chose specific literary elements on purpose. Which literary elements or devices does Rodolfo Anaya use to tell his story? How do they help to make the passage effective? Discuss your thoughts using specific examples.

4. What do you find out about the narrator in this passage? How does the author reveal the character to you?
5. How does the author create a "mood"? How does the mood contribute to the story's impact?
6. What does the author do to create suspense, to make you want to read on to find out what happens?
7. The author uses Spanish to express emotions and to make the dialogue authentic or real. When is the Spanish used? If you don't understand Spanish, can you still understand what is happening? Discuss with some examples.

Reading/Literature Performance Assessment - Grades 9 and 10

Responding to Novels

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In Chapter Vientidos (22) in Bless Me, Ultima, Tenorio finally comes to the Marez farm to revenge himself on Ultima. As you reread and review the last few pages of the chapter, Take some time to make notes in the right-hand column of any thoughts, questions, or emotions you might have. (All written notes will help me score your paper by showing me how you think when you read.)

Notes

I entered Ultima's room softly. Only a candle burned in the room, and by its light I saw Ultima lying on the bed. I placed the owl by her side and knelt at the side of the bed.

"The owl is dead—" was all I could say. I wanted to tell her that I had tried to come in time, but I could not speak.

"Not dead," she smiled weakly, "but winging its way to a new place, a new time—just as I am ready to fly—"

"You cannot die," I cried. But in the dim, flickering light I saw the ashen pallor of death on her face.

"When I was a child," she whispered, "I was taught my life's work by a wise old man, a good man. He gave me the owl and he said that the owl was my spirit, my bond to the time and harmony of the universe—"

Her voice was very weak, her eyes already glazed with death.

"My work was to do good," she continued, "I was to heal the sick and show them the path of goodness. But I was not to interfere with the destiny of any man. Those who wallow in evil and brujaería cannot understand this. They create a disharmony that in the end reaches out and destroys life— With the passing away of Tenorio and myself the meddling will be done with, harmony will be reconstituted. That is good. Bear him no ill will— I accept my death because I accepted to work for life—"

"Ultima—" I wanted to cry out, don't die, Ultima. I wanted to rip death away from her and the owl.

"Shhh," she whispered, and her touch calmed me. "We have been good friends, Antonio, do not let my passing diminish that. Now I must ask you to do me a favor. Tomorrow you must clean out my room. At sunrise you must gather my medicines and my herbs and you must take them somewhere along the river and burn everything—"

"Sí," I promised.

"Now, take the owl, go west into the hills until you find a forked juniper tree, there bury the owl. Go quickly—"

"Grande," my mother called outside.

I dropped to my knees.

"Bless me, Ultima—"

Her hand touched my forehead and her last words were, "I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio. Always have the strength to live. Love life, and if despair enters your heart, look for me in the evenings when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills. I shall be with you—"

I gathered up the owl and slipped out of the room without looking back. I rushed past my worried mother who cried after me then ran to tend Ultima. I ran into the darkness of the quiet hills. I walked for a long time in the moonlight, and when I found a forked juniper tree I dropped to my knees and with my hands I carved out a hole big enough to hold the owl. I placed the owl in the grave and I put a large stone over it so the coyotes would not dig it out, then I covered the hole with the earth of the llano. When I stood up I felt warm tears on my cheeks.

Around me the moonlight glittered on the pebbles of the llano, and in the night sky a million stars sparkled. Across the river I could see the twinkling lights of the town. In a week I would be returning to school, and as always I would be running up the goat path and crossing the bridge to go to church. Sometime in the future I would have to build my own dream out of those things that were so much a part of my childhood.

I heard the sound of a siren somewhere near the bridge and I knew my father and my uncle were returning with the sheriff. The dead Tenorio who had meddled with the fate of Narciso and Ultima would be carted away from our hills. I did not think that my uncle Pedro would be punished for killing such a man. He had saved my life, and perhaps if we had come earlier we would have saved Ultima. But it was better not to think that way. Ultima said to take life's experiences and build strength from them, not weakness.

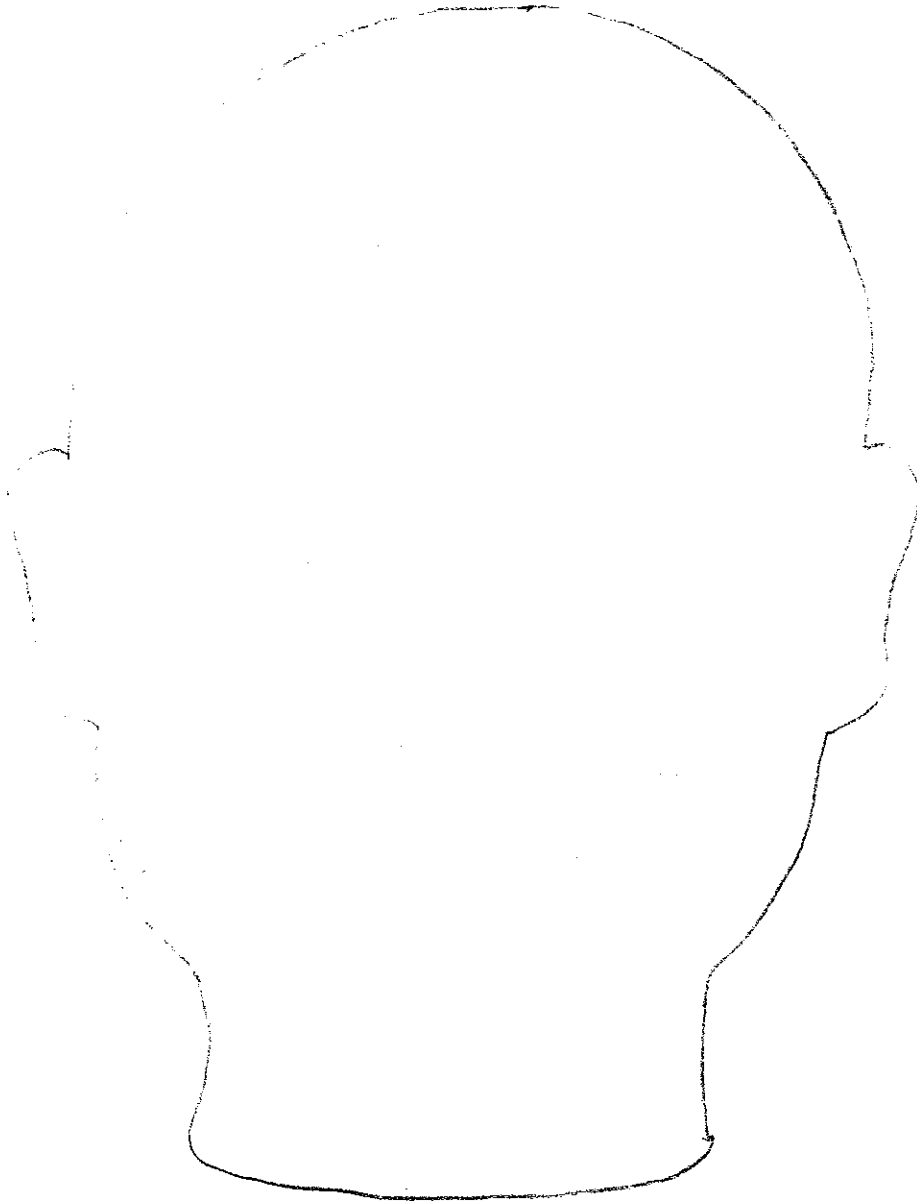
Tomorrow the women who came to mourn Ultima's death would help my mother dress her in black, and my father would make her a fine pine coffin. The mourners would bring food and drink, and at night there would be a long velorio, the time of her wake. In two days we would cele-

brate the mass of the dead, and after mass we would take her body to the cemetery in Las Pasturas for burial. But all that would only be the ceremony that was prescribed by custom. Ultima was really buried here. Tonight.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

[illegible]

3. "The graphic below represents the mind of Antonio. Draw pictures, symbols, or images of what he is thinking and feeling. Show how Antonio viewed the events in this selection by a series of pictures, symbols, images, phrases, or words (or all of these." In the space provided below, explain your drawing.



4. Tell about a movie, book, or actual event with a theme similar to one of the themes in Bless Me, Ultima. Explain how they are similar or related.

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no handwriting or other markings on the paper.

5. How effectively did Rudolfo Anaya use word choice and writing style to increase the impact of the selection? Were there any specific passages that particularly appealed to you or that your found weak?

[illegible]

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This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There is no text or other markings on the paper.

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Characters:

Antonio Marez y Luna Narrator, 7 at beginning of novel (son of Gabriel Marez and Maria Luna), born in Las Pasturas, New Mexico; story involves his loss of innocence and coming of age; covers years from about 7 to nine years of age and death of his spiritual mentor, Ultima

Family:

Gabriel Marez a vaquero of the llano (plain) New Mexico, Texas - father of Antonio, dreams that his sons will follow him to California, irreligious, restless, from Las Pasturas

Maria Luna daughter of farmers, dreams that son Antonio will become a priest, mother of Antonio

Deborah Marez y Luna sister of Antonio

Theresa Marez y Luna sister of Antonio

Leon Marez y Luna oldest brother, in WW II, leaves farm for work in Las Vegas

Andrew Marez y Luna second brother, also in war and Tony's favorite brother, stays in Guadalupe and works, discovered by Tony at Rosie's, refuses to heed Narciso's warning about Tenorio, leaves farm and goes with brothers when they return for a visit

Eugene Marez y Luna youngest bother, leader, urges that they leave home for life in a bigger city such as Las Vegas

Ultima beloved by Maria because she delivered her last son, a curandera (healing woman who works only for good), able to save people from witchcraft, revered by hated by many people because of her power, her spirit/soul is an owl, from Las Pasturas

Pedro Luna uncle - widowed farmer from El Puerto de las Lunas, Tony's favorite uncle

Juan Luna uncle from El Puerto de las Lunas

Lucas Luna uncle from El Puerto de las Lunas - saved by Ultima from Trementina witchcraft

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Characters:

Family:

Mateo Luna uncle from El Puerto de las Lunas - tells story of how a witch is to be buried (p. 139)

Prudencio Grandfather Luna - in El Puerto de las Lunas

Adults in Guadalupe:

Benito Campos vaquero friend of Gabriel

Father Byrnes Priest of Guadalupe, catechism teacher of Tony

Narciso old friends of Gabriel's from las Pasturas, town drunk, argues for mercy for Lupito, has a magic garden, saves Ultima from Tenorio, ambushed by Tenorio who gets away with murder

Jason's Indian lives in cave, only Indian who still lives in town, only talks to Jason

Chavez murdered sheriff of Guadalupe

Chavez brother of sheriff, wants revenge for his murder

Lupito made crazy by WW II, become demented and kills Sheriff Chavez, gunned down in river by townspeople in front of Antonio: Tony feels river has been polluted with his blood.

Fio' fat old man with a beautiful wife

Virgil state policemen

Rosie madam of house of prostitution (gray stucco) in Guadalupe

Miss Maestas sympathetic to Chicano kids, Tony's first teacher

Miss Violet Tony's second teacher (3rd grade), organizes school play

Bless Me, Ultima

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Characters:

Children in Guadalupe:

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| Jason | friend of Tony, only person an old Indian will talk with |
| Ernie | town kid, wants to be the center of interest |
| Horse | bully from Los Jaros, plays virgin Mary in school pagent |
| Bones | also from Los Jaros (poor section where kids can't read), hides in rafters during play and falls on Horse |
| Samuel | town kid, says Vitamin Kid his his brother, fisherman |
| Vitamin Kid | fastest kid, wins all races until he discovers girls |
| Florence | orphan from Los Jaros (sisters are whores), refuses to believe in God, drowns in pond, says he is without sin |
| Abel | town kid from Los Jaros, urinates during school play |
| Lloyd | always says "You could be sued for that" |
| Roque | bully - beats up other kids |
| Red | boy who takes Tony to Miss Maestas - sympathetic teacher (Tony's first) at school, narrator in Christmas pagent |
| George | from Delia - one of Tony's first friends at school because they are both different in language and culture |
| Willy | from Delia - one of Tony's first friends at school - also different in language and culture, beats up Roque and earns admiration of town kids for Tony who is his friend. |
| Cico: | shows Antonio the Golden Carp |
| Rita, Agnes, Ida, June | girls in Tony's catechism class |

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Characters:

Adults in El Puerto de las Lunas:

Tenorio Trementina runs a bar in town, also a barber, has three daughters who are witches, evil man, the antagonist of novel, seeks revenge on Ultima, violent man who murders Narciso, attempts to run down Tony, kills Ultima's owl. Killed by Luna uncle Pedro

Trementina daughters three brujas (witches) who curse Lucas and later Tellez family

Manuelito tells Lucas that his cows ran into an evil marshy place where witches dance, led to Lucas being cursed, comes with Tenorio to kill Ultima

Blas Montano, Cruz Sedillo accompany Tenorio when he accuses Ultima of witchcraft Tellez and Dorotea Tellez farmers cursed by Comanche ghosts, Ultima cleanses farm of ghosts

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Point-of-view:

First person, Antonio Marez.

Antonio can tell the story effectively since, as a child, he sometimes sneaks disobeys the grown-ups and is witness to events which otherwise we would not learn about.

In addition he also relates his dreams which lend an insight into his emotional

Settings:

Where:

Las Pasturas, New Mexico

on the llano (plain) represents vaquero life, birthplace of Antonio, beloved countryside of Gabriel, visited by Antonio in dreams, Ultima has been living on llano prior to being brought to Guadalupe by Marez family

Guadalupe, New Mexico

small city where Antonio gets religious instruction and goes to school, Marez family lives across bridge from town right at edge of llano

El Puerto de las Lunas, N.M.

valley where Luna's farm and Tenorio lives, Antonio goes there to witness Ultima's cures and to farm with Luna uncles

When:

1943 or 44 to 1946 or 1947 - during and after World War II

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Some conflicts in the novel:

farmer vs. vaquero

farming vs. free, nomadic life

tradition vs. change, self-determination

Catholicism vs. native beliefs

religious belief vs. agnosticism or atheism

good vs. evil

mother's dreams vs. father's dreams

Antonio's internal conflicts - Catholic/native beliefs, Priest/Farmer

mother vs. father

father vs. sons

older vs. younger brothers

Trementinas vs. village of El Puerto de las Lunas

priest vs. Trementinas

Trementinas vs. Ultima

rich vs. poor (Los Jaros)

childhood freedom vs. adult cares

different cultures vs. mainstream cultures (see Tony's lunch, and his writing his
name in English and the laughter they draw from town
(Anglo) children)

witch vs. community

Human resource exploitation vs. wilderness (see environmental damage p. 191-92,
references to atomic bomb)

earth vs. wind

Holy water vs. salt water

Carp vs. climate change (Carp fight for life not to be trapped when floods subside)

Bless Me, Ultima

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Some of the themes in the novel:

Good is always stronger than evil.

Dreams are important and can influence our lives, See dream sequences p. 5-6 (birth of Antonio), p. 25-26 (parents dreams for son), p. 45 (Virgin in Mourning), p. 61 (blessing of the brothers), p. 70-71 - (Tony's innocence), p. 119 (Golden Carp), p. 172-176 (Vision of injustice after Narciso's murder), p. 235 (freeing the brothers), p. 243-44 (death of beliefs).

One can not judge another person - p. 33

Growing up involves numerous rites of passage. (The first day of school, leaving home, loss of innocence, experiencing war, violence, murder, injustice)

Each person must choose the spiritual path which is right for him or her. (p. 80-81 - Golden Carp vs. Catholicism)

Traditional cultures assign different roles and different dreams to men and women.

Both forgiveness and judgment are natural to the human condition.

Becoming an adult means accept change and accepting reality (p. 248-249)

Life is unfair. (Death is final - Florence's death)

Man has inescapable ties to earth and must live in harmony with it.

Man's freedom is tied to the expanse of earth (p. 228) In wilderness lies the salvation of man. (Thoreau, Muir)

Have the strength to live and love life. Ultima's final blessing. Take life's experiences and build strength from them not weaknesses. - p. 261.

Mystery is always present in our lives. (Vitamin Kid, Ultima's power, Jason's Indian)

Bless Me, Ultima

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Some symbols in the novel:

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| owl | Ultima's soul, wisdom, goodness; can also be a bruja's evil familiar |
| umbilical cord/blood | one's past (history) and destiny |
| river | divides town and plain, water of life |
| water cycle | unification of all life |
| sun, wind | llano (plain), freedom, nomadic life |
| moon | valley, farming, settled life |
| presence of river (p.41) | soul of the river (Native spiritual belief) |
| poles of Tony's life | mother - dream father - rebellion Ultima - wisdom |
| bridge | link between town and llano - Tony sings to bridge |
| carp (Golden) | beauty in life, human tie to all of creation |
| blindness (Tenorio) | inability to learn, change, see beauty |
| coyotes | evil (shape of Trementina brujas) |
| Florence | the golden child (orphan, sinless - like the carp - drowned) |
| earth | mother |
| Marez | sea, ocean |
| Luna | moon, farming, dream, regulated life |
| Ultima | last, ultimate, goodness, love |
| llano | freedom, wildness, dream, nomadic life, adventure |
| Virgin of Guadalupe | mercy, forgiveness, understanding, protection |
| God | judgment, unforgiving, "too much like a man." (p. 138) |
| Cross | power of God, protection |
| angels | dead children (maybe lost children) |
| World War II | destruction (of family, dreams, personal identity, sanity youth, innocence, traditional lifestyle, religious belief, hope) |
| Tenorio | evil, hatred |
| Nature | mirror or physical manifestation of emotional state |
| Garden | Nature's bounty, beauty, mystery |

Rudolfo A. Anaya

by Rosie Garcia and Brenda Holmes

Rudolfo Anaya was born October 30, 1937, to Rafaelita Mares and Martin Anaya. He is the fifth offspring in a family of seven children. Rudolfo began his life in a small village of Pastura, New Mexico. When he was a small boy his family moved on towards the eastern plains of Santa Rosa, New Mexico. His mother's lineage comes from Llano (farmers) and his father is a vaquero (cowboy).

Thoughts of his childhood reflect the special times with his La Grande (grandmother). In *Focus On Criticism* he stated, "some say she was a curandera, a woman who knew how to use her power and herbs to cure sickness" (361). In the Spanish culture a curandera is someone who has power of the human soul or, in lay terms, a folk healer.

Rudolfo and his siblings were raised in a devout Catholic home. At home he was spoken to in Spanish and therefore became bilingual. In 1952, when he was fifteen years of age, his family moved to Albuquerque, settling in the Barelitas barrio (neighborhood) at 433 Pacific. Graduating High School in 1956, and later dropping out of business school, he received his degree and accepted a teaching position in a small town.

The novel *Bless Me, Ultima* took seven years to write. The novel was first published by *El Grito* (a Chicano magazine). In 1972, Rudolfo Anaya was awarded the prestigious Premio Quinto Sol Award.

His second novel, *Heart of Aztlan* explores the relationship of communal youths entering adulthood and moving to the cities. The summer of 1974, he accepted a position at the University of New Mexico in the English Department. That same year he served on the board of Coordinating Council of Literary Magazines. During this time he was working on *Tortuga*, his third novel. The novel *Tortuga* is about individuals who are in total despair and reach back to look at their faith to survive. Rudolfo found inner wisdom in this area by reflecting back on past trials and tribulations of adolescence.

Rudolfo is the extraordinary novelist of *Jalamanta*, *Albuquerque*, *The Anaya Reader*, and *Zia Summer* just to mention a few. He has written several journals, theses, and commentaries. He has been awarded the PEN Center West Award for Fiction for his novel *Albuquerque*.

Curanderismo

To Curanderismo II. Ana Castillo

The fascination many readers have with *Bless Me, Ultima* is based around beliefs in curanderismo (folk medicine) and witchcraft. Witchcraft in the Southwest differs from that in other parts of the United States. Primarily the belief in both curanderismo and witchcraft is greatly influenced by Catholicism and the ancient religion of the Native Americans of this part of the country.

The belief in witchcraft is still prevalent today even though believers hide their beliefs concerning the supernatural. These people know that outsiders often view the subject as unworthy of consideration. None the less, supernaturalism concerning curanderismo and witchcraft is a large part of the intriguing history of the natives and Hispanics of the Southwest.

Throughout the Hispanic communities, especially in small towns or the barrios (neighborhood) in larger cities, there exists a strong belief in a system of folk medicine known as curanderismo. This includes the belief in the use of herbal medicine and curative practices. It is believed that people with knowledge in these areas can cure certain illnesses and even psychological problems. According to <http://web.nmsu.edu/~tomlynch/swlit.anaya.html>

Mark Simmons these people are known as "curanderas (female) or curanderos (male)." They also have the power to cure illnesses that may be magical in origin. Most illnesses of this nature are believed to have been induced by witches using black magic. Illnesses induced by witches are done for many reasons such as envy, jealousy, and revenge. The most commonly known hexes are the mal ojo (evil eye), susto (fright), and the mal puesto (bewitchment).

The mal ojo is believed to be induced by a person not touching, but staring at his/her victim. Most vulnerable are children and babies. It is believed to cause the child to get violently ill with headache, nausea, and fever. This can be cured by a curandera using an egg. The egg is used in both diagnosing and in curing the condition. One method for curing the mal ojo is to rub the patient with an egg so that its white purity will draw the evil power from the body. The egg white is then emptied into a bowl and set beside the sleeping child. An eye will soon appear in the bowl and the patient will be healed.

The susto occurs when a person has a traumatic or frightening experience; for example, in *Bless Me, Ultima* Tony experiences this affliction when he is witness to a murder. The symptoms can be both physical and emotional and include insomnia, weight loss, headaches, depression, and anxiety. There can be other more severe symptoms which can cause the victim to become catatonic. These symptoms show that the soul of the victim has left the body and needs to be retrieved. As seen in *Bless Me, Ultima*, the curandera can bring the soul back by performing cleansing rituals over the victim.

The mal puesto hex or bewitchment involves more serious afflictions and usually requires the use of black magic by the curandera to cure the victim. A mal puesto is usually done for malicious purposes such as envy, jealousy, or revenge. A person will experience a variety of misfortunes; for example: the loss of a job, loss of a spouse, or being in an accident. The mal puesto is written about in *Bless Me, Ultima* when Uncle Lucas was hexed by the Trementina sisters. The sisters used his hair to cast the spell. It took a curandera to counteract the work of the witches.

Only a curandera can diagnosis a mal puesto. Only she can cure the victim, often with the use of black magic, prayers, herbal medicine, and their faith that God has given them special graces.

The strong beliefs in the supernatural is attributed to the pagan religious practices and the integration of beliefs that were instilled by the Conquistadors in their quest to convert the natives to Catholicism. Because of the conquest by the Spaniards and their settlement in South and Central America, there were intermarriages between the natives and Spaniards. This created the race referred to as the mestizos or, in the U.S., Chicanos. Their beliefs and religious practices have survived through the generations. However, the belief in folk illnesses and curanderismo does not usually deter anyone, whether Hispanic or Native American, to seek conventional health care.

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Student Comments on Rudolfo Anaya

"I found Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* very interesting. I also found that I could relate much more to this story and to its characters than I could to the previous books that we have read and discussed. Everything the author describes about young Tony was familiar. He could have been any one of us as young children growing up in a traditional Hispanic family at that time and in this part of the country.

Most Hispanic children first learned Spanish and did not speak English until they started school. I was not fluent in English until the third or fourth grade. It was not uncommon for children to fall behind in school because of this. Many children were also kept at home if their parents thought it was more important for children to help their parents than it was for them to get an education. Tony was lucky to have a mother that valued education.

Most Hispanic children have known someone like Ultima. Whether a grandmother, aunt, or some other wise person, male or female, that everyone went to for advice and guidance. In my case it was my Godmother of confirmation. For my husband it was his grandmother whom he always referred to as "Mama Grande." I can also relate to Tony's request to be blest. As children we always heard the words, "God bless you and be good in school," as we ran out the door every morning.

I also identify with Tony's upbringing concerning religion and all the questions that he needed answers to regarding his faith. Like Tony we were always told that we must not give evil the power to defeat us. As far as witchcraft was concerned, I was taught that if I believed that someone had the power to harm me, then I would be empowering that person to do so.

This story of Tony and his family is a true depiction of how strongly some people believed in the power of witchcraft in our Hispanic culture. So much so that there are some people who swear to have experienced events that could never be explained. I believe that anyone sees and believes what they want to.

Like young Tony, many Hispanic children have experienced fear and confusion that comes from being taught about God and His goodness, then being told about La Llorona, the Evil Eye, and about witchcraft. I know that these stories are a big part of what we pass down to our children. When retelling these stories, I make sure they are entertaining rather than scary to children." --Rosie Garcia

"Ultima was such a mystery in herself. I really enjoyed reading about the witchcraft and things of that nature, but I haven't quite convinced myself that those things are really possible."
--Erin Dodson

"The book captures the reader with the battle between the church and the local witchcraft. The main character, Ultima and her owl, are always fighting the evil spirits. Ultima seems like a gentle, loving soul who looks after the people she loves with her herbs and incantations. The reader soon realizes that Ultima is not above some witchery of her own to counteract evil, but at a very high price." --Beth Kaime

"I thoroughly enjoyed this book. This is the third time I have read this book and I still think it is wonderful. Rudolfo Anaya writes about the Southwest from the Southwest for the Southwest. His work includes lots of English-Spanish mixing of the words, which I believe is very native to the people of the Southwest. One not familiar with the Spanish words that are constantly thrown into the book would be able to follow the story with a little help from a Spanish-English dictionary. His work includes classic stories of the Southwest like the Curanderas, witches, dancing balls of fire, the legend of the owl, and so forth. Anaya does an excellent job of portraying the Hispanic culture of the Southwest. The Southwest is rich in folktales of ghosts, spirits, witches, etc. Being Hispanic and growing up in the Southwest, I am biased to this book, but it is also an excellent piece of work. His story is rich in humor, suspense, sadness, and happiness. He tells a good story with lots of familiar places and settings to those who live in the Southwest." --Stephanie Casias

For more information on Rudolfo Anaya, check out these sites:

[Writing the Southwest: Rudolfo Anaya](#)

[Back to Southwestern Literature Homepage](#)

Southwestern Literature / tomlynch@nmsu.edu / January 1998

Medical Humanities Literature Arts & Medicine



Anaya, Rudolfo Bless Me, Ultima

Medium Literature

Genre Novel (249 pp.)

Keywords Aging, Alternative Medicine, Children, Death and Dying, Disease and Health, Empathy, Human Worth, Latina/Latino Experience, Love, Nature, Prayer as Medicine, Religion

Summary In this lyrical tale, Ultima, an old curandera or healer, comes to live with the family of a young New Mexican boy who learns from her about the healing powers of the natural environment and the human spirit. Antonio's family respects her wisdom and legendary power, though some in the community believe she is a witch. Antonio finds himself drawn to her and under her tutelage develops an awareness of the primal energies of earth and sky that affect human lives and fate.

He goes with her to gather herbs and to visit the sick and comes to understand a connection between healing powers and knowledge of nature. Though he never receives a rational explanation of how Ultima foresees events, cures illnesses, blesses or curses, or why and when she chooses not to intervene, he learns that the knowledge healing requires is threefold: knowledge of the patient, the healing substance, and one's own limitations. He learns that healing requires making oneself vulnerable to sickness and to the spiritual as well as physical needs of the sick.

Commentary The story raises once again the complicated relationship between medicine and belief, and teaches that belief must not be dismissed as superstition and that medicine cannot be practiced without involving belief systems. Lyrical, sensuous, and reflective, it challenges readers to recognize that there is a mystical dimension to medicine.

The power of Ultima's medicine might be described as a tough love, perfected over years of close observation of both wild and human nature. Ultima's close attention to people tells her what they are capable of receiving, what will help them, and what might overwhelm them. Her relationship with Antonio shows her as a teacher as well as a healer, and leads readers to consider the relationship between the two roles. For her the distinction between spiritual and practical knowledge dissolves and the contemplative life comes to seem also the most practical and effective.

Publisher TQS (Berkeley)

Edition 1972

Annotated by McEntyre, Marilyn Chandler

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Medical Humanities Literature Arts & Medicine



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Rudolfo A. Anaya

A Critical Companion

By Margarite Fernandez Olmos

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1

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** Description **

Rudolfo A. Anaya's seven novels can all be viewed in terms of the Chicano literary tradition though their rich texts have earned Anaya a place of respect in mainstream modern American literature. Olmos guides the reader through Anaya's literary world with clear signposts, illuminating the mythical, cultural, and linguistic complexities of his astounding stories. From his coming of age masterpiece *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972) to his most recent work *Jalamanta* (1996) Anaya's writing with its rich spiritual symbolism is brought down to earth and made accessible to the student reader by Olmos insightful analyses. This work devotes a chapter to each novel, enabling Olmos to guide the reader through each, showing both the patterns and variations of literary devices in Anaya's works, while offering interesting alternative interpretations of Anaya's writing.

Olmos presents a well-researched chapter on the life of Rudolfo Anaya, familiarizing readers with his Hispanic cultural background which figures so prominently in his writing. A chapter on Anaya and the Chicano literary tradition deepens the reader's understanding and appreciation of the writer's tremendous contributions. Olmos then devotes a full chapter to each of the novels, *Bless Me, Ultima*, *Heart of Aztlán*, *Tortuga*, and *Albuquerque*; his detective novels, *Zia Summer* and *Rio Grande Fall*; and his modern-day parable *Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert*. Student readers and researchers will find the bibliography which includes reviews, criticisms, and other secondary sources to be very helpful.

** Contents **

- Series Foreword by Kathleen Gregory Klein
- The Life of Rudolfo A. Anaya
- Rudolfo Anaya and the Chicano Literary Tradition
- *Bless Me, Ultima* (1972)
- *Heart of Aztlán* (1976)
- *Tortuga* (1979)
- *Albuquerque* (1992)
- *Zia Summer* (1995)
- *Rio Grande Fall* (1996)
- *Jalamanta: A Message from the Desert* (1997)
- Bibliography
- Index

** Author **

Margarite Fernandez Olmos is Professor of Modern Languages and Literatures at Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, where she teaches courses in Spanish and Latin American Studies. She has coedited numerous volumes including *The Latino Reader: An American Literary Tradition from 1542 To The Present* (1997) and *Remaking A Lost Harmony: Short Stories From The Hispanic Caribbean* (1995) for which she was coeditor and translator, and has written a wealth of articles for both Spanish and English language journals.

Writing Activities

Note to teachers :

All writing activities which arise from the novel study of Bless Me, Ultima should be embedded in the curriculum and arise from the specific themes of the novel. For a further look at the themes found in this novel, please refer to the ~~appendix~~. *reading activities resources*

Writing activities for the theme of the importance of place used with the novel, Bless Me, Ultima.

The setting of the plains and a small town in New Mexico is significant to many of the themes found in this novel. Student discussions focusing on the importance of Antonio's birthplace, as well as his parents', will help students uncover central conflicts in the story. Suggested prompts for the theme of place in the novel include:

- Brainstorm as many places named in the novel as you can find.
- His parents seem to want different goals for Antonio. What do his parents' birthplaces have to do with this conflict?
- Where are favorite places for Antonio?
- Where are his feared places?
- Using a t- chart show both the positives and negatives of one of the following places in the novel:

the bridge

school

the hills of the Ilano

the sea

the river

the Church with the Virgin of Guadalupe as the patron saint

Writing activities for the theme of the importance of place used with the poems of place.

- Use any one of the poems and copy it. Substitute key words or phrases to personalize it for your own life.
- Copy "Running's" last line, "Thinking of happiness, I think of that" and write it as your first line. List places (or list only one, but in this

case describe it more carefully) which fit this line to create a list poem. Use the first line also as your last line.

- Using "A Pretty Woman" think of a beautiful place you like. Using the poem as a guide write one sentence to compare your place to a person. After you have written it as a sentence, rewrite it cut up and rearranged as a poem stanza.
- Using Hughes's poem about rivers, copy the format. Substitute rivers for a place which describes you.
- Using "Nora" write the last line as a first line for a poem. Next, describe the special place where you like to be alone.
- Collect your poems in a booklet. For the cover illustrate one of the images from one of your poems. Use either an abstract or a realistic design.

Theme of importance of place

Running •

by Richard Wilbur

1933

(North Caldwell, New Jersey)

What were we playing? Was it prisoner's base
I ran with whacking keds
Down the cart-road past Richard's place,
And where it dropped beside the tractor-sheds

Leapt out into the air above a blurred
Terrain, through jolted light,
Took two hard lopes, and at the third
Spanked off a hummock-side exactly right,

And made the turn, and with delighted strain
Sprinted across the flat
By the bull-pen, and up the lane.
Thinking of happiness, I think of that.

•Literature and Life, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979, p. 545.

A Pretty Woman •

by Simon J. Ortiz

We came to the edge
of the mesa
and looked below.

We could see
the shallow wash
snaking down
from the cut
between two mesas,

all the way from Black Mountain;

and the cottonwoods
from that distance
looked like a string of turquoise,

and the land was a pretty woman
smiling at us
looking at her.

• Adventures in Appreciation, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985, p. 311

The Negro Speaks of Rivers •

by Langston Hughes

I've known rivers:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow
of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.

I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln went
down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy bosom turn
all golden in the sunset.

I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.,

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

• The Top 500 Poems, Columbia University Press, 1992, p. 1021

The clouds pass •

by Richard Garcia

The clouds pass in a blue sky
Too white to be true

Before winter sets in
The trees are spending all their money

I lie in gold
Above a green valley
Gold falls on my chest
I am a rich man.

••Literature and Life, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979, p. 174

Nora •
by Gwendolyn Brooks

I was not sleeping when Brother said
'Good-bye!' and laughed and teased my head;
And went, like rockets, out of the door,
As he had done most days before.

But it was fun to curl between
The white warm sheets, and not be seen,

And stay, a minute more, alone,
Keeping myself for my very own.

•Literature and Life, Scott, Foresman and Co., 1979, p. 177

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Writing Activity: Childhood Memories

In this novel, Rudolfo Anaya, realistically recreates the world of childhood. Antonio Marez interacts with his peers, the children of Guadalupe, both on the streets and in the classrooms and on the playground at school. In Chapter Tres (3) pages 35 - 38 (Warner Books), the young boys of the neighborhood brag about their adventures, use bad language in order to seem more grown up, bully and insult one another, engage in spitting contests, wrestle, try to outdo one another, urinate against the church wall. As the novel's narrator says, "They all gathered around me and asked me where I lived and about school. They were good friends, even though they sometimes said bad words, and that day I became part of their gang. Later in Chapter Catorce (14), the school students stage a disastrous school play (pages 151-158), an event which may be similar to school productions in which our students may have taken part.

1. You might want to read one of these selections again editing language as necessary. Then distribute all or some of the models included on the following pages - Gary Soto's "The School Play"; James Masao Mitsui's "When Father Came Home For Lunch" and Toni Morrison's selection from The Bluest Eye.
2. After each model discuss some of the elements which make it effective: Soto's use of believable, well-developed characters, humor, dialogue, and satisfying resolution, and attention getting introduction; Mitsui's appeal to the five senses; Morrison's dialogue, use of language, appeal to the senses, realistic characters.
3. Ask students to brainstorm some of their most memorable childhood events (playing hide and seek each night with neighbor kids, getting measles the night before their birthday party, playing dolls each day with a best friend, collecting garter snakes from a vacant lot).
4. After brainstorming, hand out an assignment sheet for a Childhood Remembered narrative which asks students to focus on inclusion of dialogue and specific detail, use of language which appeals to the five senses, and creation of believable characters. (See student assignment sheet on next page.

Assignment Sheet - Childhood Remembered

(Rough Draft due _____)

Bless Me, Ultima is, in part, a coming of age novel. Antonio Marez is on the brink of the transition from childhood to young manhood. He wonders constantly what his destiny may be, worries over sin and goodness, and struggles to make his family proud. However, he still engages in childish play with neighborhood boys - bragging about adventures, using bad language, bullying and insulting each other, engaging in spitting and burping contests, and wrestling each other.

ASSIGNMENT: Look over the brainstorm list of memorable childhood experiences which you made. Select one from your childhood (when you were between the ages of five and twelve). Write a rough draft essay in which you focus on an event or series of events which happened in one or perhaps two days. Include a description of the persons involved. Narrate some of the memorable adventures or activities which took place. Include some dialogue (the more the better). Let the reader hear your voices. Try to include as much specific detail as possible. Try to appeal to the five senses. Also, think about how you might begin this paper to grab the reader's interest.

You will be meeting with peers to share and evaluate these drafts on

from Local News, Gary Soto
Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich
1993

THE SCHOOL PLAY

IN THE SCHOOL PLAY at the end of his sixth-grade year, all Robert Suarez had to remember to say was, "Nothing's wrong, I can see," to a pioneer woman, who was really Belinda Lopez. Belinda was one of the toughest girls since the beginning of the world. She was known to slap boys and grind their faces into the grass until they bit into chunks of wormy earth. More than once Robert had witnessed Belinda staring down the janitor's pit bull, a dog that licked his frothing chops but didn't dare mess with her.

The class rehearsed the play for three weeks, at first without costumes. Early one morning Mrs. Bunnin wobbled into the classroom carrying a large cardboard box. She wiped her brow and said, "Thanks for the help, Robert."

Robert was at his desk etching a ballpoint tattoo—

The School Play

D-U-D-E—on the mountaintops of his knuckles. He looked up and stared at his teacher. "Oh, did you need some help?" he asked.

She rolled her eyes at him and told him to stop writing on his skin. "You'll look like a criminal," she scolded.

Robert stuffed his hands into his pockets as he rose from his seat. "What's in the box?" he asked.

She popped open the Scotch-taped top and brought out skirts, hats, snowshoes, scarves, and vests. She tossed Robert a red beard, which he held up to his face thinking it made him look handsome.

"I like it," Robert said. He sneezed and ran one hand across his moist nose.

His classmates looked at Robert in awe. "That's bad," Alfredo said. "What do I get?"

Mrs. Bunnin threw him a wrinkled shirt. Alfredo raised it to his chest and said, "My dad could wear this. Can I give it to him after the play is done?"

Mrs. Bunnin turned away in silence.

Most of the actors didn't have speaking parts. They were given cut-out crepe-paper snowflakes to pin to their shirts or crepe-paper leaves to wear.

During the blizzard scene in which Robert delivered his line, Belinda asked, "Is there something wrong with your eyes?" Robert looked at the "audience," which for rehearsal was all the things that filled the classroom: empty chairs, a dented world globe that had been dropped by almost everyone, one limp flag, one wastebasket, and a picture of George Washington, whose eyes seemed to follow you around the room when you got up to sharpen

your pencil. Robert answered, "Nothing's wrong. I can see."

Mrs. Bunnin, biting on the end of her pencil, said, "Louder, both of you."

Belinda stepped forward, her nostrils flaring so that the shadows on her nose quivered, and said louder, "Sucka, is there something wrong with your eyeballs?"

"Nothing's wrong. I can see."

"Louder! Make sure the audience can hear you," Mrs. Bunnin directed. She tapped her pencil hard against the desk. "Robert, I'm not going to tell you again to quit fooling with the beard."

"It's itchy."

"We can't do anything about that. Actors need props. You're an actor. Now try again."

Robert and Belinda stood center stage as they waited for Mrs. Bunnin to call "Action!" When she did Belinda approached Robert slowly. "Sucka face, is there anything wrong with your mug?" Belinda asked. Her eyes were flecked with anger. For a moment Robert saw his head grinding into the playground grass.

"Nothing's wrong. I can see."

Robert giggled behind his red beard. Belinda popped her gum and smirked. She stood with her hands on her hips.

"What? What did you say?" Mrs. Bunnin asked, pulling off her glasses. "Are you chewing gum, Belinda?"

"No, Mrs. Bunnin," Belinda lied. "I just forgot my lines."

The play, *The Last Stand*, was about the Donner party,

with the action taking place just before the starving members of the expedition started eating each other. Everyone who scored twelve or more out of fifteen on the spelling tests got to say at least one line. Everyone else had to stand around and be trees or snowflakes.

Mrs. Bunnin wanted the play to be a success. She couldn't risk having kids with bad memories on stage. The nonspeaking trees and snowflakes hummed to create the effects of snow flurries and blistering wind. They produced hail by clacking their teeth.

Robert's mother was proud of him because he was living up to the legend of Robert DeNiro, for whom he was named. During dinner he said, "Nothing's wrong. I can see," when his brother asked him to pass the dish towel, their communal napkin. His sister said, "It's your turn to do dishes," and he said, "Nothing's wrong. I can see." His dog, Queenie, begged him for more than water and a Milkbone. He touched his dog's own hairy beard and said, "Nothing's wrong. I can see."

One warm spring night Robert lay in the backyard counting shooting stars. He was up to three when David, a friend who was really more his brother's friend, hopped the fence and asked, "What's the matter with you?"

"Nothing's wrong. I can see," Robert answered. He sat up, feeling good because the line came naturally, without much thought. He leaned back on his elbow and asked David what he wanted to be when he grew up.

"I don't know yet," David said, plucking at the grass. "Maybe a fighter pilot. What do you want to be?"

"I want to guard the president. I could wrestle the

assassins and be on television. But I'd pin those dudes, and people would say, 'That's him, our hero.' " David plucked at a blade of grass and frowned.

Robert thought of telling David that he really wanted to be someone with a super-great memory who could recall facts that most people thought were unimportant. He didn't know if there was such a job, but he thought it would be great to sit at home by the telephone waiting for scientists to call him and ask hard questions.

The three weeks of rehearsal passed quickly. The day before the play, Robert felt happy as he walked home from school with no homework. As he turned onto his street, he found a dollar floating over the currents of wind.

"A buck," he screamed to himself. He snapped it up and looked for others. But he didn't find any more. It was his lucky day, though. At recess he had hit a fluke home run on a bunt—a fluke because the catcher had kicked the ball, another player had thrown it into center field, and the pitcher wasn't looking when Robert slowed down at third, then burst home with dust flying behind him.

That night was his sister's turn to do the dishes. They had eaten enchiladas with "the works," so she slaved away in suds up to her elbows. Robert bathed in Mr. Bubble, the suds peaked high like the Donner Pass. He thought about how full he was and how those poor people had had nothing to eat but snow. I can live on nothing, he thought, and whistled like wind through a mountain pass, flattening the Mr. Bubble suds with his palm.

The next day after lunch he was ready for the play, red beard in hand, his one line trembling on his lips. Classes were herded into the auditorium. As the actors dressed and argued about stepping on each other's feet, Robert stood near a cardboard barrel full of toys, whispering over and over to himself: "Nothing's wrong. I can see." He was hot, itchy, and confused. When he tied on the beard, he sneezed. He said louder: "Nothing's wrong. I can see," but the words seemed to get caught in the beard. "Nothing, no, no. I can see great," he said louder, then under his breath because the words seemed wrong. "Nothing's wrong, can't you see?" "Nothing's wrong. I can see you." Worried, he approached Belinda and asked, if she remembered his line. Balling her hand into a fist, Belinda warned, "Sucka, I'm gonna bury your ugly face in the ground if you mess up."

"I won't," Robert said as he walked away. He bit a fingernail and looked into the barrel of toys. A clown's mask stared back at him. He prayed that his line would come back to him. He would hate to disappoint his teacher and didn't like the thought of his face being rubbed into spiky grass.

The curtain parted slightly and the principal stepped out, smiling, onto the stage. She said some words about pioneer history and then, stern-faced, warned the people in the audience not to scrape their chairs on the freshly waxed floor. The principal then introduced Mrs. Bunnin, who told the audience about how they had rehearsed for weeks.

Meanwhile the class stood quietly in place behind the

curtain. They were ready. Belinda had swallowed her gum because she knew this was for real. The snowflakes clumped together and began howling.

Robert retied his beard. Belinda, smoothing her skirt, looked at him and said, "If you know what's good for you, you better do it right." Robert felt nervous when the curtain parted, and his classmates—the snow, wind, and hail—broke into song.

Alfonso stepped forward with his narrative about a blot on American history that would live on forever. He looked at the audience, lost for a minute. But he continued, saying that if the Donner party could come back, hungry from not eating for over a hundred years, they would be sorry for what they had done.

The play began with some boys in snowshoes shuffling around the stage, muttering that the blizzard would cut them off from civilization. They looked up, held out their hands, and said in unison, "Snow." One stepped center stage and said, "I wish I had never left the prairie." Another said, "California is just over there." He pointed, and some of the first-graders looked in the direction of the piano.

"What are we going to do?" one kid asked, pretending to brush snow off his vest.

"I'm getting pretty hungry," another said, rubbing her stomach.

The audience seemed to be following the play. A ribbon of sweat ran down Robert's face. When it was time for his scene he staggered to center stage and dropped

to the floor, just as Mrs. Bunnin had directed, just as he had seen Robert DeNiro do in that movie about a boxer. Belinda, bending over him with an "Oh, my," yanked him up so hard that something clicked in his elbow. She boomed: "Is there anything wrong with your eyes?"

Robert rubbed his elbow, then his eyes, and said, "I can see nothing wrong. Wrong is nothing, I can see."

"How are we going to get through?" Belinda boomed, wringing her hands together in front of her schoolmates in the audience, some of whom had their mouths taped shut because they were known talkers. "My husband needs a doctor." The drama advanced through snow, wind, and hail that sounded like chattering teeth.

Belinda turned to Robert and muttered, "You mess up. You're gonna hate life."

But Robert thought he'd done OK. At least, he reasoned to himself, I got the words right. Just not in the right order.

After finishing his scene he joined the snowflakes and trees, chattering his teeth the loudest. He bayed like a hound to suggest the howling wind and snapped his fingers furiously in a snow flurry. He trembled from the cold.

The play ended with Alfonso saying again that if they were to come back to life, the members of the Donner party would be sorry for having eaten each other. "It's just not right," he argued. "You gotta suck it up in bad times."

Robert remembered how one day his sister had locked him in the closet and he didn't eat or drink for five hours.

When he got out, he hit his sister, but not so hard it left a bruise. Then he ate three sandwiches and felt a whole lot better. Robert figured that Alfonso was right.

The cast paraded up the aisle through the audience. Belinda pinched Robert hard, but only once because she was thinking that it could have been worse. As he passed a smiling and relieved Mrs. Bunnin, she patted Robert's shoulder and said, "Almost perfect."

Robert was happy. He'd made it through without passing out from fear. Now the first- and second-graders were looking at him and clapping. He was sure everyone wondered who the actor was behind that smooth voice and red, red beard.

THE RAIDERS JACKET

LORENA ROCHA PARTIED the curtain in her living room and looked out onto the wet street. The rain was still coming down but with less windblown fury. A shaft of sunlight even appeared, poking through the elm tree at the curb. Lorena smiled and then stopped. The sunlight faltered and disappeared as a cloud once again blocked the sun.

Earlier that Saturday morning it had been coming down, as her father said at breakfast, "*como gatos y perros*." If it didn't stop raining soon it would ruin her day. She wanted her mother to drive her to the mall at Fashion Fair, but her mother didn't like to drive in rain—and for a good reason: driving in the rain, she had once gotten into an accident that ripped a mailbox from its cemented bolts.

Lorena and her best friend since first grade, Guada-

From Multicultural Voices
Scott Foresman 1995

When Father Came Home for Lunch

JAMES MASAO MITSUI

I listen to my parents' language,
watch my father eat his separate meal,
the railroad motor car
cooling off & waiting
on the siding by the section house.
He sits with his back to the burning
woodstove in a captain's chair,
and eats the family left-overs,
a bowl of rice balanced in his hand,
chopsticks flicking
around to the bowls & dishes
arranged in front of him.

Mother adds fried onions, an egg
and potatoes to his main bowl.
He adds catsup, shoyu
and mixes it with the white radish,
egg plant and cold chicken.
He works around to the mustard caked bowl
before each mouth of rice,
sauce hanging from his moustache.
Hot coffee, heavy with sugar & cream,
steams from a china mug.
Half-an-hour of noisy manners
and he's gone, back to work
in oily bib overalls.
I can still smell sweat
soaking his long-sleeved workshirt.

RESPONDING

1. **Personal Response** What part in these poems appeal to you?
2. **Literary Analysis** Explain what you agree with the *speaker* in "Nik" and "Remembrances." Can a drag be a drag?
3. **Multicultural Connection** Find poems to a specific culture and explain how the differences enhance or detract from the experience. Explain.

LANGUAGE WORKSHOP

Images The *images* in "When Father Came Home for Lunch" and "Flash Cards" are of the senses. Under the headings *Hearing*, and *Smell*, list as many as you can find.

WRITER'S PORTFOLIO

Assume that the speaker in "When Father Came Home for Lunch" is Giovanni himself. Write a narrative about the details from her poem and how she never understood it.

ABOUT TONI MORRISON

Toni Morrison was awarded the 1993 Nobel Prize for literature—the first African American woman to be so honored. Beginning with *The Bluest Eye* in 1970, she has published a steady stream of award-winning novels, including *Sula*, *Song of Solomon*, *Tar Baby*, *Beloved*, and *Jazz*. Born in Lorain, Ohio, Morrison graduated from Howard and Cornell Universities. From 1955 to 1964, she was a college teacher; from 1965 to the early '80s when she returned to teaching, she acted as an editor for a major publishing company. Although she has also written drama, essays, and reviews, Morrison is known primarily for her novels—all of which are revered for their poetic use of language, mythic vision, and fresh view of African American life.



from: Multi-Cultural Voices
Scott Foresman, 1995

From The Bluest Eye

MY DADDY'S FACE is a study. Winter moves into it and presides there. His eyes become a cliff of snow threatening to avalanche; his eyebrows bend like black limbs of leafless trees. His skin takes on the pale, cheerless yellow of winter sun; for a jaw he has the edges of a snowbound field dotted with stubble; his high forehead is the frozen sweep of the Erie, hiding currents of gelid thoughts that eddy in darkness. Wolf killer turned hawk fighter, he worked night and day to keep one from the door and the other from under the windowsills. A Vulcan guarding the flames, he gives us instructions about which doors to keep closed or opened for proper distribution of heat, lays kindling by, discusses qualities of coal, and teaches us how to rake, feed, and bank the fire. And he will not unrazor his lips until spring.

Winter tightened our heads with a band of cold and melted our eyes. We put pepper in the feet of our stockings, Vaseline on our faces, and stared through dark icebox mornings at four stewed prunes, slippery lumps of oatmeal, and cocoa with a roof of skin.

Culture Notes

*
Erie lake Erie, one of the five Great Lakes, p. 347

Vulcan ancient Roman god of fire and metal working, p. 347

But mostly we waited for spring, when there could be gardens.

By the time this winter had stiffened itself into a hateful knot that nothing could loosen, something did loosen it, or rather someone. A someone who splintered the knot into silver threads that tangled us, netted us, made us long for the dull chafe of the previous boredom.

This disrupter of seasons was a new girl in school named Maureen Peal. A high-yellow dream child with long brown hair braided into two lynch ropes that hung down her back. She was rich, at least by our standards, as rich as the richest of the white girls, swaddled in comfort and care. The quality of her clothes threatened to derange Frieda and me. Patent-leather shoes with buckles, a cheaper version of which we got only at Easter and which had disintegrated by the end of May. Fluffy sweaters the color of lemon drops tucked into the skirts with pleats so orderly they astounded us. Brightly colored knee socks with white borders, a brown velvet coat trimmed in white rabbit fur, and a matching muff. There was a hint of spring in her aloe green eyes, something summery in her complexion, and a rich autumn ripeness in her walk.

SHE ENCHANTED the entire school. When teachers called on her, they smiled encouragingly. Black boys didn't trip her in the halls, white boys didn't stone her, white girls didn't suck their teeth when she was assigned to be their work partners; black girls stepped aside when she wanted to use the sink in the girls' toilet, and their eyes genuflected under sliding lids. She never had to search for anybody to eat with in the cafeteria—they flocked to the table of her choice, where she opened fastidious lunches, shaming our jelly-stained bread with egg-salad sandwiches cut into four dainty squares, pink-frosted cupcakes, stocks of celery and carrots, proud, dark apples. She even bought and liked white milk.

Frieda and I were bemused, irritated, and fascinated by her. We looked hard for flaws to restore our equilibrium, but had to be content at first with uglying up her name, changing Maureen Peal to Meringue Pie. Later a minor epiphany was ours when we discovered that she had a dog tooth—a charming one to be sure—but a dog tooth nonetheless. And when we found out that she had been born with six fingers on each hand and that there was a little bump where each extra one had been removed, we smiled. They were small triumphs, but we took what we could get—snickering behind her back and calling her Six-finger-dog-tooth-meringue-pie. But we had to do it alone, for none of the other girls would cooperate with our hostility. They adored her.

WHEN SHE WAS ASSIGNED a locker next to mine, I could indulge my jealousy four times a day. My sister and I both suspected that we were secretly prepared to be her friend, if she would let us, but I knew it would be a dangerous friendship, for when my eye traced the white border patterns of those Kelly-green knee socks, and felt the pull and slack of my brown stockings, I wanted to kick her. And when I thought of the unearned haughtiness in her eyes, I plotted accidental slammings of locker doors on her hand.

As locker friends, however, we got to know each other a little, and I was even able to hold a sensible conversation with her without visualizing her fall off a cliff, or giggling my way into what I thought was a clever insult.

One day, while I waited at the locker for Frieda, she joined me.

"Hi."

"Hi."

"Waiting for your sister?"

"Uh-huh."

"Which way do you go home?"

"Down Twenty-first Street to Broadway."

"Why don't you go down Twenty-second Street?"

"Cause I live on Twenty-first Street."

"Oh. I can walk that way, I guess. Partly, anyway."

"Free country."

Frieda came toward us, her brown stockings straining at the knees because she had tucked the toe under to hide a hole in the foot.

"Maureen's gonna walk part way with us."

Frieda and I exchanged glances, her eyes begging my restraint, mine promising nothing.

It was a false spring day, which, like Maureen, had pierced the shell of a deadening winter. There were puddles, mud, and an inviting warmth that deluded us. The kind of day on which we draped our coats over our heads, left our galoshes in school, and came down with croup the following day. We always responded to the slightest change in weather, the most minute shifts in time of day. Long before seeds were stirring, Frieda and I were scruffing and poking at the earth, swallowing air, drinking rain....

AS WE EMERGED from the school with Maureen, we began to moul immediately. We put our head scarves in our coat pockets, and our coats on our heads. I was wondering how to maneuver Maureen's fur muff into a gutter when a commotion in the playground distracted us. A group of boys was circling and holding at bay a victim, Pecola Breedlove.

Bay Boy, Woodrow Cain, Buddy Wilson, Junie Bug—like a necklace of semiprecious stones they surrounded her. Heady with the smell of their own musk, thrilled by the easy power of a majority, they gaily harassed her.

"Black e mo. Black e mo. Yaddadsleepsnekked. Black e mo black e mo ya dadd sleeps nekked. Black e mo...."

They had extemporized a verse made up of two insults about matters over which the victim had no control: the color of her skin and speculations on the sleeping habits of an adult, wildly fitting in its incoherence. That they themselves were black, or that their own father had similarly

relaxed habits was irrelevant. It was their contempt for their own blackness that gave the first insult its teeth. They seemed to have taken all of their smoothly cultivated ignorance, their exquisitely learned self-hatred, their elaborately designed hopelessness and sucked it all up into a fiery cone of scorn that had burned for ages in the hollows of their minds—cooled—and spilled over lips of outrage, consuming whatever was in its path. They danced a macabre ballet around the victim, whom, for their own sake, they were prepared to sacrifice to the flaming pit.

Black e mo Black e mo Ya daddy sleeps nekked.

Stch ta ta stch ta ta

stach ta ta ta ta ta

Pecola edged around the circle crying. She had dropped her notebook, and covered her eyes with her hands.

WE WATCHED, afraid they might notice us and turn their energies our way. Then Frieda, with set lips and Mama's eyes, snatched her coat from her head and threw it on the ground. She ran toward them and brought her books down on Woodrow Cain's head. The circle broke. Woodrow Cain grabbed his head.

"Hey, girl!"

"You cut that out, you hear?" I had never heard Frieda's voice so loud and clear.

Maybe because Frieda was taller than he was, maybe because he saw her eyes, maybe because he had lost interest in the game, or maybe because he had a crush on Frieda, in any case Woodrow looked frightened just long enough to give her more courage.

"Leave her 'lone, or I'm gone tell everybody what you did!"

Woodrow did not answer; he just walled his eyes.

Bay Boy piped up, "Go on, gal! Ain't nobody bothering you."

"You shut up, Bullet Head." I had found my tongue.

"Who you calling Bullet Head?"

"I'm calling you Bullet Head, Bullet Head."

Frieda took Pecola's hand. "Come on."

"You want a fat lip?" Bay Boy drew back his fist at me.

"Yeah. Gimme one of yours."

"You gone get one."

Maureen appeared at my elbow, and the boys seemed reluctant to continue under her springtime eyes so wide with interest. They buckled in confusion, not willing to beat up three girls under her watchful gaze. So they listened to a budding male instinct that told them to pretend we were unworthy of their attention.

"Come on, man."

"Yeah. Come on. We ain't got time to fool with them."

Grumbling a few disinterested epithets, they moved away.

I picked up Pecola's notebook and Frieda's coat, and the four of us left the playground.

"Old Bullet Head, he's always picking on girls."

Frieda agreed with me. "Miss Forrester said he was incorrigible."

"Really?" I didn't know what that meant, but it had enough of a doom sound in it to be true of Bay Boy.

W

HILE FRIEDA and I clucked on about the near fight, Maureen, suddenly animated, put her velvet-sleeved arm through Pecola's and began to behave as though they were the closest of friends.

"I just moved here. My name is Maureen Peel. What's yours?"

"Pecola."

"Pecola? Wasn't that the name of the girl in *Imitation of Life*?"

"I don't know. What is that?"

"The picture show, you know. Where this mulatto girl hates her mother 'cause she is black and ugly but then cries at the funeral. It was real sad. Everybody cries in it. Claudette Colbert too."

"Oh." Pecola's voice was no more than a sigh.

"Anyway, her name was Pecola too. She was so pretty. When it comes back, I'm going to see it again. My mother has seen it four times."

Frieda and I walked behind them, surprised at Maureen's friendliness to Pecola, but pleased. Maybe she wasn't so bad, after all. Frieda had put her coat back on her head, and the two of us, so draped, trotted along enjoying the warm breeze and Frieda's heroics.

"You're in my gym class, aren't you?" Maureen asked Pecola.

"Yes."

"Miss Erkmeister's legs sure are bow. I bet she thinks they're cute. How come she gets to wear real shorts, and we have to wear those old bloomers? I want to die every time I put them on."

Pecola smiled but did not look at Maureen.

"Hey." Maureen stopped short.

"There's an Isaley's. Want some ice cream? I have money."

She unzipped, a hidden pocket in her muff and pulled out a multifolded dollar bill. I forgave her those knee socks.

"My uncle sued Isaley's," Maureen said to the three of us. "He sued the Isaley's in Akron. They said he was disorderly and that that was why they wouldn't serve him, but a friend of his, a policeman, came in and beared the witness, so the suit went through."

"What's a suit?"

"It's when you can beat them up if you want to and won't anybody do nothing. Our family does it all the time. We believe in suits."

At the entrance to Isaley's Maureen turned to Frieda and me, asking, "You all going to buy some ice cream?"

We looked at each other. "No," Frieda said.

Maureen disappeared into the store with Pecola. Frieda looked placidly down the street; I opened my mouth, but quickly closed it. It was extremely portentous.

Culture Notes

* **incorrigible** mispronunciation of incorrigible, meaning "too bad to change," p. 352

Claudette Colbert actress of the 1940s, p. 352

bow: bowed; curved or bent, p. 353

bear[ed] [bore] the witness testified on someone's behalf, p. 353

that the world not know that I fully expected Maureen to buy us some ice cream, that for the past 120 seconds I had been selecting the flavor, that I had begun to like Maureen, and that neither of us had a penny.

We supposed Maureen was being nice to Pecola because of the boys, and were embarrassed to be caught—even by each other—thinking that she would treat us, or that we deserved it as much as Pecola did.

RESPONDING

1. **Personal Response** In this story, a new girl in school creates quite a stir. Describe your own reactions to a new student or your own experience as a new student.
2. **Literary Analysis** Find examples of *figurative language* in the first paragraph and explain them. Try describing the narrator's daddy using literal language. What does Morrison's description add?
3. **Multicultural Connection** How do the various characters in this selection respond to shades of "blackness"? Why?

LANGUAGE WORKSHOP

Dash As a means of punctuation, a *dash* is stronger than a comma, more relaxed than parentheses, and less formal than a colon. The dash can signal an explanation or set off an interruption. What purpose does the dash serve in the following passage from the selection: "...we discovered that she had a dog tooth—a charming one to be sure—but a dog tooth nonetheless"? Find three other passages in which Morrison uses a dash. Try substituting a colon, comma, or parentheses, and see if you like the results as well.

WRITER'S PORTFOLIO

Both Maureen and Pecola are victims of name-calling by contemporaries. Draw up three short lists of recommendations (addresses to students, teachers, and administrators) designed to reduce or eliminate the use of name-calling in your school. Combine your efforts with those of other class members, present a master list to your administrator, and volunteer to help implement the recommendations.

Writing activities for the theme of dreams used with the novel, Bless Me, Ultima.

External movement and change is a repeating theme in this story. Likewise, central to the story is internal change in the central character, Antonio. His changes are reviewed in his dreams. Suggested prompts for students' increased awareness of the significance of dreams in this novel include:

- Brainstorm the events Antonio dreams.
- Dreams are written in italic font. What other patterns can you find about the dream sequences?
- When do these dreams seem to occur?
- Are the dreams a positive or negative force?
- If the dreams were left out, how would the plot be affected?
- Can you identify with Antonio's dreams? If so, name the ways.
- During this novel study, try to write down your own dreams. It is helpful if you do this as soon as you awake in the morning. When you are finished recording, try to find three patterns in your dreams.

Writing activities for the theme of dreams used with the poems:

- Use "Dreams" and copy the first two lines of each stanza. Next, rewrite the last two lines of each stanza to fit your experience.
- Write the first line of Silverstein's poem. Write it as the first line for three more stanzas. Complete the poem using your own dream or create one.
- Create a haiku about dreams using this technique: write one sentence about a poem. Secondly, cut it up to fit three lines. Rearrange the syllables so they fit 5 for line 1, 7 for line 2 and 5 for line 3.

- Look at the last poem by Giovanni. In it she shows a conversation and a meeting with an acquaintance. She describes two levels of communication: one is what is said, the other what is thought. Try a poem. Print what is said and write in cursive for what is thought.

POETRY FOR THEMES FOUND IN *BLESS ME, ULTIMA*

Theme of dreams

Dreams •

by Langston Hughes

Hold fast to dreams
For if dreams die
Life is a broken-winged bird
That cannot fly.

Hold fast to dreams
For when dreams go
Life is a barren field
Frozen with snow.

Adventures in Appreciation, Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1985, p. 315

Crazy Dream •

by Shel Silverstein

Last night I had a crazy dream
That I was teachin' school.
My teachers had turned into kids,
And I laid down the rules.

I gave 'em a hundred hist'ry books
To memorize each night,
And made 'em read 'em on their heads
Without turnin' on the light.

I sent 'em on a field trip
To the outskirts of Mongolia
And gave 'em an overnight assignment
To grow a twenty-foot purple magnolia

I asked 'em how many awful grades
Can cause how many tears?
And if they got one answer wrong,
I just hung 'em up by their ears.

And when they talked or laughed in class,
I pinched 'em 'til they cried
Louder and louder--'til I woke up
Feelin' very satisfied.

- Falling Up, Silverstein, Shel, Harper Collins, 1996, p. 168

Three Haiku•

Cuckoo, did you cry
To frighten away
My mother
Watching in my dream?
--Kikaku

Wandering, dreaming,
In fever
Dreaming that dreams
Forever wander
--Basho

Cool green grass...
One dream all heroes
Find to be true
On forgotten tombs
--Basho

- Haiku Harvest, Japanese Haiku, series IV, Peter Pauper Press, 1962, p.22,23,

Revelation•

by William Stafford

When I came back to earth, it was my bike
threw me. I woke to day not real day--
some of the sunlight came like bottles piled
in a window frame. People were pictures with labels,
"Doctor," "intern," "aide." I remember a cookie
big as the sun that lasted as long as a glass of milk.

Some day your world won't last all day. You'll blink;
you'll fall to earth; and where the ocean was
will be that color here was before you came:
your head and what you hit will sound the same.

- A Glass Face in the Rain, William Stafford, Harper & Row, 1982, p. 62

A Poem for Ed and Archie•

by Nikki Giovanni

I dreamed of you last night
standing near the Drugstore on the St. -Germain-des-Pres
You popped out of the pastry shop
wiping some exotic creme from your lips
showing off your new cigarette holder
"Got one yet?"
and your smile lit up the city of lights
Southern men cannot be generalized about
I know you all as liars and lynchers
I have accepted the myth that though you may wear a suit
beneath it the blood runs hot
and your hair so similiar to those whom Darwin said were
all our ancestors mats against your heaving chest
it's unpatriotic not to smoke tobacco
we both agreed at least in North Carolina
and poor Ed who will some day be a great man
just sat there confused

without the laughter what is the purpose
my ancestors once worked for yours
involuntarily
and I laugh because it is only what happened
not nearly the truth

I've seen Paris and you've seen me
and last night in my dream
we both smiled

- cotton candy on a rainy day, Nikki Giovanni, Quill, New York, 1980, p. 70.

Rites of passage narrative writing project for Bless Me, Ultima

Prewriting:

1. Rite of passage is a ritual or ceremony signifying an event in a person's life indicative of a transition from one stage to another, as from childhood to adulthood.
2. In student pairs or small groups, allow students time to name three occasions in the novel where Antonio, the main character, experiences a significant event or change which might fall in the definition of a rite of passage. Possible student suggestions:
 - Antonio's witness of Lupito's murder
 - His witness of Ultima's curing Lucas, his uncle
 - His witness of Narciso's murder
 - His knowledge of his brother's use of a whorehouse
 - His leaving home to attend first grade and learning to write
 - His viewing the golden carp
 - Ultima's death
3. Discuss small group viewpoints in a whole class setting.
4. Read together Richard Wright's short story "**Hunger**"
Have coop student groups brainstorm elements of the narrative.
Use worksheet handout attached.
5. Discuss viewpoints on "**Hunger**"
6. Read the poem, **after any sunset** by Mary Bruce, Purpose in Literature, Scott, Foresman & Co., 1979.

after any sunset
there is a glint
a certain afterglow
a rainbow show
of starflake snow
some dim glimmer
of sweet evening
shimmer
after sunset
the end of day
the end of love
the end of living

a soft celebration
of once holding
now that is passed.

Discuss what words, events, happening in students own lives could be substituted for the word sunset.

Possible ideas:

- death of a beloved pet (friend, relative, star, hero)
- moving from one school (house, city, country) to another
- changing a belief (learning about Santa, tooth fairy, Easter Bunny, prejudice, descrimination, power, kindness, wrong first impressions)
- relying on yourself more than an authority figure after_____.
- learning about regret: wishing you could do something differently now that you see the results of your actions.
- discovering a personal success in school (sports, a club, at a job, camp, with a musical instrument, at church ,in a friendship, attainment of a goal)
- that your own passage may be external or internal or both
- that your passage may have come after love or conflict

7. Using one of the above rites of passage (or their own ideas) as a suggestion, guide students to write their first draft of a rite of passage narrative. If students need further prompts, suggest the beginning paragraph start with a description of the setting for the learning experience (passage), middle paragraphs explain about what happened, while the ending might explain what was learned as a result of the rite of passage.
8. Include a criteria guide sheet.
____due date:
____dialogue included
____detailed descriptions (similes and metaphors)
____story line of beginning, middle and end
9. Peer editing by fellow students reading first drafts and writing the author five or more questions (no yes or no questions).
10. REMIND STUDENTS TO SAVE THIS ESSAY AFTER IT IS GRADED. STUDENTS MAY DECIDE TO REWRITE IT FOR PERFORMANCE QUALITY AND USE IT AS ONE OF THEIR THREE CIM ESSAYS FOR THE YEAR.

**WORKSHEET FOR "HUNGER" BY RICHARD WRIGHT TO
ACCOMPANY
RITES OF PASSAGE NARRATIVE ESSAY IN THE STUDY OF
BLESS ME, ULTIMA.**

Directions:

As a class or in paired groups, read the short story "Hunger". Small groups choose a recorder to complete the worksheet as the group brainstorms ideas.

1. Find three examples of dialogue which provides realism and characterization:

2. Write brief summary sentences for:
 - a. the beginning of the story

 - b. the middle

 - c. the end

3. Select three examples of vivid description which helps the reader to visualize the setting, characters or action. Similes, metaphors and personification may be included:

4. What change or lesson does the narrator make from this rite of passage?

5. Does the narrator lose anything as a result of this passage? If yes, name it.

"Go out there and dig a hole and bury that kitten!"

I stumbled out into the black night, sobbing, my legs wobbly from fear. Though I knew that I had killed the kitten, my mother's words had made it live again in my mind. What would that kitten do to me when I touched it? Would it claw at my eyes? As I groped toward the dead kitten, my mother lingered behind me, unseen in the dark, her disembodied voice egging me on.

"Mama, come and stand by me," I begged.

"You didn't stand by that kitten, so why should I stand by you?" she asked tauntingly from the menacing darkness.

"I can't touch it," I whimpered, feeling that the kitten was staring at me with reproachful eyes.

"Untie it!" she ordered.

Shuddering, I fumbled at the rope and the kitten dropped to the pavement with a thud that echoed in my mind for many days and nights. Then, obeying my mother's floating voice, I hunted for a spot of earth, dug a shallow hole, and buried the stiff kitten; as I handled its cold body my skin prickled. When I had completed the burial, I sighed and started back to the flat, but my mother caught hold of my hand and led me again to the kitten's grave.

"Shut your eyes and repeat after me," she said.

I closed my eyes tightly, my hand clinging to hers.

"Dear God, our Father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing..."

"Dear God, our Father, forgive me, for I knew not what I was doing," I repeated.

"And spare my poor life, even though I did not spare the life of the kitten..."

"And spare my poor life, even though I did not spare the life of the kitten," I repeated.

"And while I sleep tonight, do not snatch the breath of life from me..."

I opened my mouth but no words came. My mind was frozen with horror. I pictured myself gasping for breath and dying in my sleep. I broke away from my

mother and ran into the night, crying, shaking with dread.

"No," I sobbed.

My mother called to me many times, but I would not go to her.

"Well, I suppose you've learned your lesson," she said at last.

Contrite, I went to bed, hoping that I would never see another kitten.

Hunger stole upon me so slowly that at first I was not aware of what hunger really meant. Hunger had always been more or less at my elbow when I played, but now I began to wake up at night to find hunger standing at my bedside, staring at me gauntly. The hunger I had known before this had been no grim, hostile stranger; it had been a normal hunger that had made me beg constantly for bread, and when I ate a crust or two I was satisfied. But this new hunger baffled me, scared me, made me angry and insistent. Whenever I begged for food now my mother would pour me a cup of tea which would still the clamor in my stomach for a moment or two; but a little later I would feel hunger nudging my ribs, twisting my empty guts until they ached. I would grow dizzy and my vision would dim. I became less active in my play, and for the first time in my life I had to pause and think of what was happening to me.

"Mama, I'm hungry," I complained one afternoon.

"Jump up and catch a kungry," she said, trying to make me laugh and forget.

"What's a kungry?"

"It's what little boys eat when they get hungry," she said.

"What does it taste like?"

"I don't know."

"Then why do you tell me to catch one?"

"Because you said that you were hungry," she said, smiling.

I sensed that she was teasing me and it made me angry.

"But I'm hungry. I want to eat."

"You'll have to wait."

"But I want to eat now."

"But there's nothing to eat," she told me.

"Why?"

"Just because there's none," she explained.

"But I want to eat," I said, beginning to cry.

"You'll just have to wait," she said again.

"But why?"

"For God to send some food."

"When is He going to send it?"

"I don't know."

"But I'm hungry!"

She was ironing and she paused and looked at me with tears in her eyes.

"Where's your father?" she asked me.

I stared in bewilderment. Yes, it was true that my father had not come home to sleep for many days now and I could make as much noise as I wanted. Though I had not known why he was absent, I had been glad that he was not there to shout his restrictions at me. But it had never occurred to me that his absence would mean that there would be no food.

"I don't know," I said.

"Who brings food into the house?" my mother asked me.

"Papa," I said. "He always brought food."

"Well, your father isn't here now," she said.

"Where is he?"

"I don't know," she said.

"But I'm hungry," I whimpered, stomping my feet.

"You'll have to wait until I get a job and buy food," he said.

As the days slid past the image of my father became associated with my pangs of hunger, and whenever I felt hunger I thought of him with a deep biological bitterness.

My mother finally went to work as a cook and

left me and my brother alone in the flat each day with a loaf of bread and a pot of tea. When she returned at evening she would be tired and dispirited and would cry a lot. Sometimes, when she was in despair, she would call us to her and talk to us for hours, telling us that we now had no father, that our lives would be different from those of other children, that we must learn as soon as possible to take care of ourselves, to dress ourselves, to prepare our own food; that we must take upon ourselves the responsibility of the flat while she worked. Half frightened, we would promise solemnly. We did not understand what had happened between our father and our mother and the most that these long talks did to us was to make us feel a vague dread. Whenever we asked why father had left, she would tell us that we were too young to know.

One evening my mother told me that thereafter I would have to do the shopping for food. She took me to the corner store to show me the way. I was proud; I felt like a grownup. The next afternoon I looped the basket over my arm and went down the pavement toward the store. When I reached the corner, a gang of boys grabbed me, knocked me down, snatched the basket, took the money, and sent me running home in panic. That evening I told my mother what had happened, but she made no comment; she sat down at once, wrote another note, gave me more money, and sent me out to the grocery again. I crept down the steps and saw the same gang of boys playing down the street. I ran back into the house.

"What's the matter?" my mother asked.

"It's those same boys," I said. "They'll beat me."

"You've got to get over that," she said. "Now, go on."

"I'm scared," I said.

"Go on and don't pay any attention to them," she said.

I went out of the door and walked briskly down the sidewalk, praying that the gang would not molest me. But when I came abreast of them someone shouted.

"There he is!"

They came toward me and I broke into a wild run toward home. They overtook me and flung me to the pavement. I yelled, pleaded, kicked, but they wrenched the money out of my hand. They yanked me to my feet, gave me a few slaps, and sent me home sobbing. My mother met me at the door.

"They b-beat m-me," I gasped. "They t-t-took the m-money."

I started up the steps, seeking the shelter of the house.

"Don't you come in here," my mother warned me.

I froze in my tracks and stared at her.

"But they're coming after me," I said.

"You just stay right where you are," she said in a deadly tone. "I'm going to teach you this night to stand up and fight for yourself."

She went into the house and I waited, terrified, wondering what she was about. Presently she returned with more money and another note; she also had a long heavy stick.

"Take this money, this note, and this stick," she said. "Go to the store and buy those groceries. If those boys bother you, then fight."

I was baffled. My mother was telling me to fight, a thing that she had never done before.

"But I'm scared," I said.

"Don't you come into this house until you've gotten those groceries," she said.

"They'll beat me; they'll beat me," I said.

"Then stay in the streets; don't come back here!"

I ran up the steps and tried to force my way past her into the house. A stinging slap came on my jaw. I stood on the sidewalk, crying.

"Please, let me wait until tomorrow," I begged.

"No," she said. "Go now! If you come back into this house without those groceries, I'll whip you!"

She slammed the door and I heard the key turn in the lock. I shook with fright. I was alone upon the dark, hostile streets and gangs were after me. I had

the choice of being beaten at home or away from home. I clutched the stick, crying, trying to reason. If I were beaten at home, there was absolutely nothing that I could do about it; but if I were beaten in the streets, I had a chance to fight and defend myself. I walked slowly down the sidewalk, coming closer to the gang of boys, holding the stick tightly. I was so full of fear that I could scarcely breathe. I was almost upon them now.

"There he is again!" the cry went up.

They surrounded me quickly and began to grab for my hand.

"I'll kill you!" I threatened.

They closed in. In blind fear I let the stick fly, feeling it crack against a boy's skull. I swung again, laming another skull, then another. Realizing that they would retaliate if I let up for but a second, I fought to lay them low, to knock them cold, to kill them so that they could not strike back at me. I flayed with tears in my eyes, teeth clenched, stark fear making me throw every ounce of my strength behind each blow. I hit again and again, dropping the money and the grocery list. The boys scattered, yelling, nursing their heads, staring at me in utter disbelief. They had never seen such frenzy. I stood panting, egging them on, taunting them to come on and fight. When they refused, I ran after them and they tore out for their homes, screaming. The parents of the boys rushed into the streets and threatened me, and for the first time in my life I shouted at grownups, telling them that I would give them the same if they bothered me. I finally found my grocery list and the money and went to the store. On my way back I kept my stick poised for instant use, but there was not a single boy in sight. That night I won the right to the streets of Memphis.

Of a summer morning, when my mother had gone to work, I would follow a crowd of black children—abandoned for the day by their working parents—to the bottom of a sloping hill whose top held a long row of ramshackle, wooden outdoor privies whose opened

What I've Learned So Far

Narrative Essay Criteria Sheet

FOR CIM WORK SAMPLE AND/OR FINAL DRAFT ASSESSMENT

Assignment: Using one of the narrative rough drafts you have generated for this unit, revise and submit a narrative essay in which the clear purpose is to tell a story, summarize or record events, or create a story based on experience. In this essay you will work on including realistic sounding dialogue.

ATTACH THIS SHEET TO YOUR ESSAY. MAKE SURE YOU CHECK FOR EACH OF THE FOLLOWING:

CRITERIA:

____ 1. Easily identifiable purpose: Stated or implied. Write it in the space below.

____ 2. Introduction: What kind of introduction did you use?
Question
Quotation
Beginning in the middle of the action (a high point in the action)
A line of dialogue

____ 3. Organizational plan:

A. Did paper have a developed beginning which captured reader's attention?

B. Did paper have clear sequencing?

What is the topic of each of your body paragraphs? (Exclude dialogue sections.)

Paragraph 2:

Paragraph 3:

Paragraph 4:

Paragraph 5:

Additional paragraphs on back of this paper:

C. Did the paper have a satisfactory sense of resolution or closing?

D. Did the essay include dialogue? If so, list at least three examples.

_____ 3. Organizational plan: continued

E. Did the details that you included fit where they were placed?

F. Did your paper include transitions?

First, later, next, that afternoon, etc.

However, When, in addition, etc.

Repetition of words or phrases

_____ 4. Word Choice and Sentence Fluency

Active verbs

Metaphoric language

Sentence variety

_____ 5. Grammar, Punctuation, Spelling checked and corrected

Did you punctuate and paragraph dialogue correctly?

Describe what you need to do to revise this essay:

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Writing Ideas:

Personal Narrative:

Childhood Remembered (burping contests, peeing contests, eating paste, scapegoating peers, school plays)

First Days (school, camp, church school, staying with extended family)

Rites of Passage - Realizing one can make decisions, leaving home

Memorable Events

Life Changing Events

Journey - actual or emotional or spiritual

Expository:

Responding to quotes:

"People, grown ups and kids - seem to want to hurt each other - and it's worse when they're in a group." - p. 111

"Perhaps that is why God could not forgive; He was too much like a man." p. 138

"A wise man listens to the voice of the earth, Antonio. He listens because the weather the winds bring will be his salvation or his destruction. (see p. 192)

"I bless you in the name of all that is good and strong and beautiful, Antonio,. Always have the strength to live. Love life... (p. 161)

Write up results of research

Poetry:

Personal Landscape (Place)
Dreams

Writing Project – “My Family”

~~Page 6~~

Rough Draft due _____

total points: 50

Write a short narrative (at least two pages) based on the theme of “my family.” You may write this story about your family using the first person point of view (“I”) or the third person point of view (“he/she”). Include family members as the main characters in your story – you may also include yourself as a main character. Your story can be real or made-up, but focus on one of the following scenarios:

- 1) A famous story about your family that has been passed down to you from your parents, grandparents or other relatives – in other words, a family legend
- 2) A story about a famous or infamous person in your family’s past or present
- 3) A story about a tradition or a special holiday that is celebrated by your family
- 4) A story about how your parents or other relatives met or how they got married – for example: an arranged marriage, an elopement, a unique romance, a forbidden love, etc.
- 5) An historical account of an event that has affected someone in your family – such as a Vietnam vet or other war survivor, a family member who has survived a natural disaster, a family member who suffered hardship immigrating to America, etc.
- 6) A story about a family reunion – describe the people, activities, food, customs, etc.
- 7) A story about how other people have become a part of your family, such as adopted children, foster children, homeless friends, etc.
- 8) A story about your relationship with a parent, guardian, sister, brother, or other relative – focus on a particular incident that shows the kind of relationship you share with them
- 9) A story about a non-traditional family -- this would be your extended family of friends and relatives, co-workers or teammates; focus on a particular incident that shows us what this family means to you
- 10) A story about you and your family traveling or on a vacation together– such as describing where you went, what you did together, what you learned about your family from this experience

Points will be given for the following:

- Is your topic focused/does your story fit one of the choices listed above?
- Is your story descriptive/detailed?
- Does the narrative include characters other than yourself?
- Do you use dialogue or emotion to make your ideas and your story interesting?

Speaking Activities

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Informative Speech

Have students choose one of the research topics from the list on the following page. They will have several weeks to research this topic either through use of the school library, community resources, or the Internet. The culmination of this research should be a speech before the class. Students should be encouraged to use technology to organize speeches (presentation software if available), produce visuals (art from internet, graphs, or original artwork (generated using graphics software), and/or complete research.

Criteria:

Students should relate results of their research to the novel, Bless Me, Ultima.

Speeches should be three to five minutes in length.

Purpose of the speech should be to inform rather than persuade or relate a story.

Students should produce a visual aid to be used with their presentation.

The speech has been rehearsed.

Students should be scored using the Statewide Speech Scoring Guide in the traits of content and ideas, organization, use of language, and delivery.

*You might also want to use this same activity to generate an expository essay which could be used as a CIM writing work sample.

Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

Some suggested research topics:

- Conquistadors - Coronado
- Spanish History in New Mexico, Arizona, Texas (Tejanos), California
- Land Grants
- Moors
- Aztecs, Mayas
- American attitudes to witches - Salem Witch Trials - 1692
- Herbal medicine - use of such herbs as oregano, osha, manzanilla, yerba del manso -
page 39 -40
- Holistic Medicine
- Curandera p. 4
- Catholicism - rituals, sacraments, priesthood
- Vaqueros
- Native/Indian Spiritual Beliefs (ie. golden carp, importance of amulets, possibility
of being cursed, earth speaking to a person)
- Customs:
 - Learn English only in school - speak Spanish in homes
 - Respect for and providing a home for old and sick
 - Children / parents are judged by manners
 - Belief in witchcraft and/or ghosts
 - a witch can't pass through a door guarded by a cross
 - a witch can't be buried in a casket of pine or cedar
 - La llorona - witch seeking blood of men and boys to drink
- Foods
- Holidays and festivals
- Storytelling/folk tales:
 - Father Byrnes (Eternity - p. 201-202)
 - Funerals for witches (p. 139)
 - Farming and the Moon (p. 249)
- World War II
 - Minorities in the military (segregated regiments) - Navajo
radio group, Tuskegee Airmen, Japanese regiments, etc.
 - Internment Camps - Japanese
 - Segregated neighborhoods - barrios
- Life in 1940's
 - Clothing styles - zoot suits
 - Music
 - Attitudes to women

Other Resources

ART RESOURCES

Visual Metaphor

1) Have each student choose a chapter in the novel that is powerful to him/her and take time to reread it. Then, pose some or all of the following questions:

- If this chapter were a color, what color might it be?
- If this chapter were a texture, what texture might it be?
- If this chapter were in rhythm, what rhythm would it be?
- If this chapter were a type of music, what type of music would it be?

(See: Peter Thacher / Kent Siebold)

Next, as students to paint images of the chapter with watercolors, keeping in mind their responses to the above questions. (This should be a non-threatening activity.) Finally, as students in groups to be "art critics", talking about what they see in each other's works of art.

- 2) Pick the five most important or striking scenes in the novel for you. Make a collage, drawing or painting to give a visual image. Explain why each is significant to you.
- 3) Construct a three-dimensional map of Antonio's world.
- 4) Draw a story map of the story line.

Storyboard Activity

Text: "Bless Me, Ultima" by Rudolfo Anaya

Directions:

1. Break into groups of 3-4 people. Each group is to complete a story board of one of the following scenes in the novel:

The Opening Scene of the film - Ultima's arrival? the hunt for Lupito - Chapter 1 or 2 (Uno and Dos)

Ultima's arrival in Guadalupe - Chap. 1 (Uno)

Antonio's dream after the killing of Lupito - Chap. 2 (Dos)

Antonio meets the neighborhood boys in town - Chap. 3 (Tres)

Ultima's confrontation with Tenorio about the curse on Uncle Lucas - Chap. 10 (Diez)

The cure of Uncle Lucas - Chap. 10 (Diez)

The murder of Narciso - Chap. 14 (Catorce)

The curse on the Tellez house - Chap. 20 (Viente)

Ultima's death - Chap. 22 (Vientidos)

2. No film exists for this text. Your task is to create a 12 frame storyboard for a scene in this novel. Keep it simple. Do not try to cover too much material.

3. Look back and read over the scene which you are going to choose to storyboard.

4. Create twelve shots for the section of the story which you have been assigned.

5. Complete a sketch in the box for each shot .

6. Prepare to share your sketches and explanations with the entire class.

7. Due _____

Costumes and Settings for Film: Bless Me, Ultima

You need to decide when and where your scene will take place and describe it briefly:
When:

Where:

What will your characters be wearing?

Character

Costume

What music, if any, will audience hear?

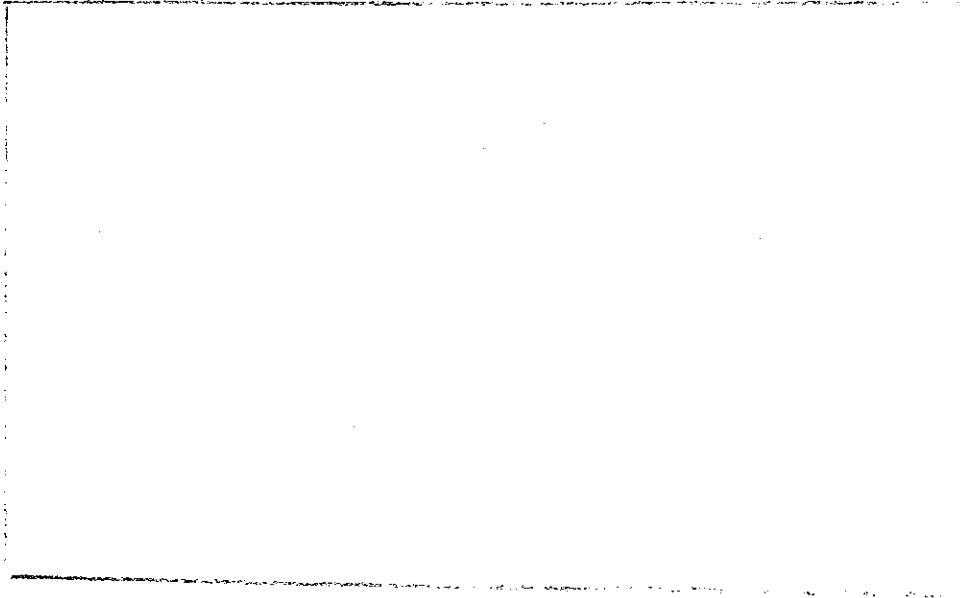
Name of music/song

Why did you choose it?

Storyboard

Title of Film _____

Shot #

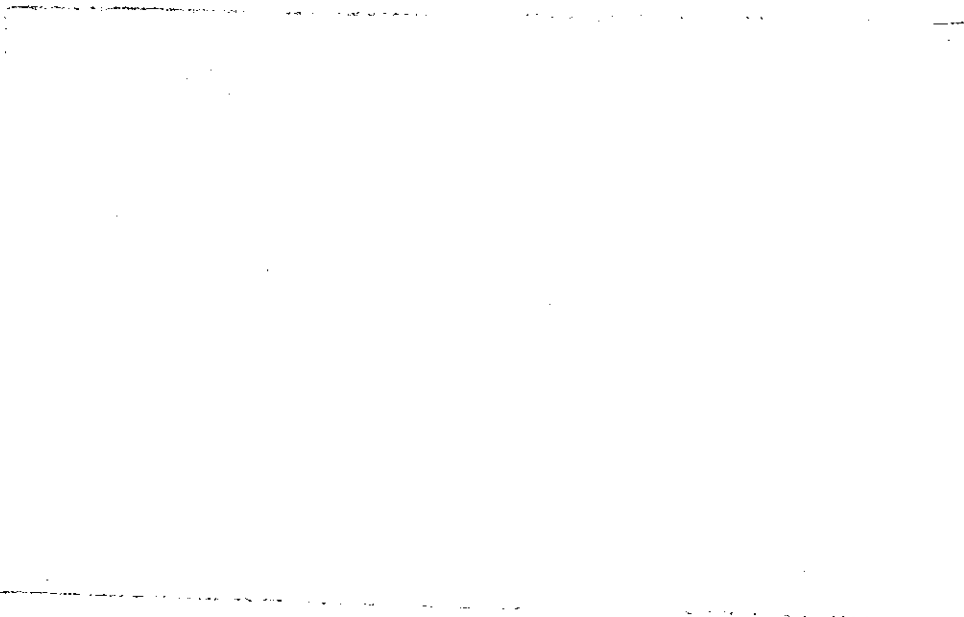


Dialogue:

Sound effects:

Music:

Shot #



Dialogue:

Sound effects:

Music:

Related Readings

Anastos, Philipo. Illegal: Seeking the American Dream

Cisneros, Sandra. Woman Hollering Creek and Other Stories; House on Mango Street

Hernandez, Irene. Across the Great River

Lewis, Oscar. Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family

Soto, Gary. Local News

Soto, Gary. Neighborhood Odes

Soto, Gary. Baseball in April

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--|--|---|--|---|---|
| | 1 Pre-Reading Mapping location | 2 Pre-Reading Mapping - location | 3 Tea Party Pre-Reading | 4 Reading Chapters 1 & 2 | 5 Reading Teacher's Volunteer Reading Aloud | Introductions and Assignment * Research for Speeches |
| | 6 Poetry of Place Read, discuss Write in Class Day 8 | 7 Reading Chapt. 3 Read & Discuss Assign: Chapters 4-8 | 8 Read- around - Poems. Narrative Introduction Childhood | 9 Narrative Discuss, Read, Share. Assignment Rough Draft | 10 Reading - Narrative Draft - Research | |

| SUNDAY | MONDAY | TUESDAY | WEDNESDAY | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | SATURDAY |
|--------|--|---|---|---|-------------------------|----------|
| | 11 Discuss Chapters 4-8 Assign Chapters 9-11 | 12 Character Mapping | 13 Research/ Reading Character Mapping + Sketches | 14 Share rough of Narrative Questions for Introduction & Peer Response | 15 Reading Research | |
| | 16 Discuss Chapters 9-11 Assign 12-14 | 17 Poetry Dreams Write in class | 18 Figurative Language Lesson Reading | 19 Share Poetry Reading | 20 Reading Research | |
| | 21 Discuss 12-14 (writing) 15-19 | 22 Reading critically Tanner/Venn Compare & Contrast Ultimus and Tanner | 23 Writing Prompt: Narrative - Rite of Passage Protagonist vs Antagonist | 24 Research Day Reading | 25 Reading/ Research | |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---------------------------------------|----|---|----|--|----|--------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------|
| 26 | Discuss 15-19 Assign 20- End | 27 | Research/ Compose Speech Lesson: Effective Speaking | 28 | Peer Share Rules of Passage Final Draft Assignment + Criteria sheet | 29 | Presentations | 30 | Reading |
| 31 | Discuss 20-End | 32 | Presentations | 33 | Disc: Final draft of narrative Last day of Presentations | 34 | Reading/ Literature Assessment | 35 | Reading/ Literature Assessment |