

***Bless Me, Ultima* by Rudolfo Anaya (Published by Warner Books, Inc.)**

Approved for use in Honors Communication Arts I

Summary

Bless Me, Ultima is the story of Antonio Marez, beginning when he is six years old. In the opening of the novel, Ultima joins his family. The plot deals with Antonio's coming of age. Along his ordeal he has Ultima to guide him through his tough and inquisitive times. She helps him on his quest, understanding him, teaching him, guiding him, and giving him courage to face his own ordeals. Tony faces growing up under his mother, a Luna, and his father, a Marez. The Luna heritage is one of farming and priesthood, and Tony's mother dreams of him some day being a priest since there has not been one in the family for quite some time. Marez, like la Mar (the sea) from which the name comes, is ever-changing and turbulent. His father's family members were vaqueros who traveled upon the llano and did not like to settle down. His father dreams of Tony joining him in heading west into California. Antonio is torn between these two forces guiding him. The story deals with his questioning of religion, of life, and of his heritage. With Ultima giving him guidance, he faces all the forces in his life to create himself, a mesh of everything he has dealt with. (<http://www.ed.psu.edu/k-12/ultima/>).

Connection to the Curriculum

Bless Me, Ultima is the story of a young boy's coming-of-age within a cultural tapestry that includes Spanish, Mexican, and Native American influences, and in which many of the major cultural forces conflict with one another. The young boy, Antonio Márez, must navigate a number of conflicts—between farmers and cowboys, Spanish and indigenous peoples, and English-speaking and Spanish-speaking peoples—that collectively structured the cultural life in rural New Mexico during the 1940s. The novel ties in with freshman-level concepts of the search for identity, the influence of culture on identity, and the search for moral independence. Many characters in the book are limited by their cultural prejudices and never learn to look beyond their own assumptions. Instead, Ultima encourages Antonio to embrace all of the cultural influences in his life to become a better person. She also encourages him to draw from the various conflicting sets of ideals that define his outlook. Learning the importance of tolerance marks Antonio's personal growth. The recurring presence of various family relationships—uncles, siblings, and parents—provides a subtle commentary on the nature of identity and ultimately underscores the book's main theme of moral independence. In the end, Antonio must learn to make his own choices, drawing from the wisdom and experience of his family, but not being limited by their wishes and perspectives. Additionally, the reading of the novel provides students with the opportunity to explore differing language dialects across cultures and introduces students to aspects of magical realism.

Standards

Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

Reading: 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

Literature: 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text

Writing: 3- The students write effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)

Reading:

1.2.1- The student adjusts reading rate to support comprehension when reading and interpreting narrative texts.

1.3.5- The student identifies, interprets, and analyzes the use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, personification, idioms, imagery, and symbolism.

1.4.9- The student uses prior knowledge, content, and text type features to make, revise, and confirm predictions.

1.4.12- The student analyzes and evaluates how authors use text structures to help achieve their purposes.

1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style and use of literary devices work together to achieve his or her purpose.

Literature:

2.1.4- The student analyzes the themes, tone, and author's point of view across a variety of works and genres using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.

2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices in a text.

2.2.6- The student recognizes ways that literature from different cultures presents similar themes differently across genres.

2.2.7- The student compares and contrasts works of literature that deal with similar topics and problems.

Writing:

3.10- The student writes a cohesive piece with a clear introduction, well-developed ideas, and an insightful conclusion.

3.4.11- The student uses transitions to connect ideas within and between paragraphs.

3.4.12- The student uses a sequence that is logical and effective within each paragraph as well as within the entire written piece.

A Note on the Text: (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

During Antonio's coming of age journey, readers will encounter violence (such as witnessing a murder, voodoo, and fighting), profanity (including limited use of the "f" word), and sexual references (Antonio's brothers visiting a brothel). These situations are part of the maturation of Antonio as a character. As this book explores a specific culture, some of Antonio's religious explorations include non-traditional beliefs such as mysticism and magical realism.

AP Connections

This novel offers opportunity for students to examine a text structure that includes dream sequences and the imbedding of another language providing additional challenge for good readers.

Additional Unit Design Connections

Coming soon