

# Bless Me, Ultima

by Rudolfo Anaya

## Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### Uno

Nearly seven years old, Antonio, known as Tony, recalls the summer of 1944 when Ultima, a wise folk healer, comes to his home in Guadalupe, near Tucumcari, New Mexico. While his brothers—Léon, Eugenio, and Andrés—are gone to war, Tony shares the attic with his sisters, Deborah and Theresa. He hears his parents discussing Ultima, who lives alone, aged and unprotected. Gabriel, Tony's father, is a hard-drinking, disgruntled highway crewman who blames his wife, María, for making the family leave the prairie and settle in farm country. They decide to take in "la Grande," even though local superstitions link her with witchcraft. Before Tony enters first grade, Ultima arrives and immediately bonds with the boy, whom she delivered. He is fascinated by her owl, which seems to bear blessing.

### Dos

Ultima helps María and listens to Gabriel's ambition to move to California. On Saturday night, Chávez summons him to help a posse locate Lupito, a war-crazed rifleman who shot the sheriff, Chávez's brother. Tony slips down to the river and finds the timid, dazed murderer crouching on the bank. Narciso tries to talk to Lupito, who fires at the spotlights. After a barrage wounds Lupito, he asks Tony for blessing, then crumples and dies. Tony grieves that he could not offer him salvation. He finds Ultima's owl watching over him.

### Tres

On Sunday morning, Tony ponders God's punishment of Lupito, who died unforgiven. María prepares the family for six o'clock mass and communion. As Ultima and Tony follow, they hear whispers of "sorcerer" and "witch." Tony joins the rowdy boys from Los Jaros, who hold a spitting contest beside the church. Horse eggs Tony into a fight; Tony tosses Horse into the dust to establish *machismo*.

### Cuatro

In autumn, Tony helps Ultima dig healing roots and herbs. She realizes that the turbulent Márez forces compete with the more serene Luna side of his nature. Juan Luna, his uncle, sends for help with the harvest. Tony has a nightmare blending his mother's wish that he be a priest with a fearful vision of the Virgin in mourning for him. Ultima soothes him so he can sleep.

### Cinco

Uncle Pedro escorts the family ten miles to El Puerto, home of the Lunas. The reunion with Grandfather Prudencio and uncle Juan pleases María. There is mourning for Lupito and concern for the three Márez brothers; then the harvest lightens

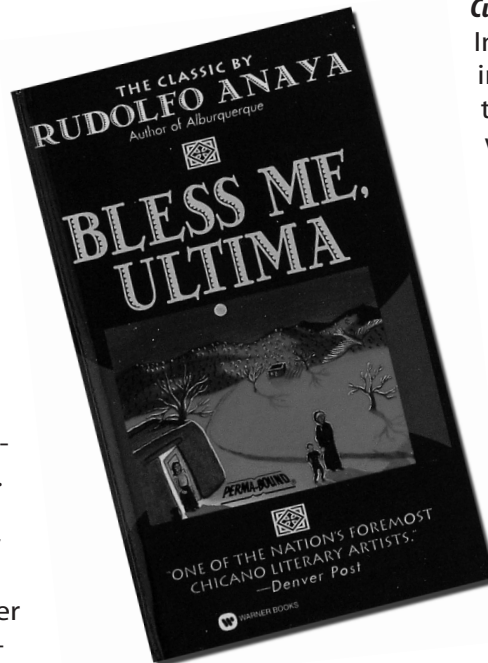
their mood. Uncle Juan asks that Tony spend a summer with them after his confirmation.

### Seis

Tony feels queasy on the first day of school. His father wants to move west. María reminds him that the Lunas were the area's first Mexican settlers. She encourages Tony to become a priest and kneels with the family as Ultima blesses them.

### Siete

The end of World War II uplifts the family. Far into the night, they pray for Tony's brothers, who are traveling from the Pacific to San Diego. After fearful dreams, Tony welcomes them. Gabriel asks for news of California. They admire Tony for excelling in his studies.



**Ocho**

The brothers waste their pay at the Eight Ball Pool Hall and ignore Gabriel's pleas that the family move to California. Befuddled by wartime experience, the brothers run up debts and dream of cars, women, liquor, and travel. Tony weeps that war has changed them.

**Nueve**

Tony chafes that the brothers ridicule his innocence and refuses to join them at the brothel. The trio refuse work on the highway crew. María blames the Márez blood for stirring talk of leaving home. León and Eugene depart; Andrew takes a job at Allen's Food Market and plans to finish high school. On the last day of Tony's first year, Miss Maestas promotes him to third grade. On the way home, Samuel relates the myth told by Jasón's Indian about a special race of people changed into carp who can make humans immortal. The golden carp is "lord of all the waters of the valley." The myth challenges Tony's belief in the trinity. Samuel promises that Cico will introduce him to the golden carp.

**Diez**

Samuel moves from town to herd sheep. Tony misses his brothers. Pedro begs Ultima to free Uncle Lucas from a curse. Pedro blames Tenorio's three daughters for punishing Lucas for observing a witches' dance. A week later, Lucas began weakening. Ultima insists that Tony accompany her. Local farmers fear her. She confronts Tenorio and blames his daughters for cursing Lucas. At the house, she treats Lucas and assures Tony that good is stronger than evil.

The cure takes three days. By forcing Lucas to sweat, Ultima removes the death spirit. She makes three dolls out of clay and wax and sticks them with pins. As his uncle languishes, Tony mimics his struggle between good and evil. Lucas begins to improve. Prudencio declares that he can never repay Ultima. She asks that some day they save her from danger.

**Once**

Cico invites Tony to see the golden carp. As they pass through Narciso's garden, Tony eats a carrot. Horse heckles Tony and forces him to perform magic. Tony vomits up the carrot. He sees the golden carp. Samuel explains that it swims upstream to

the Hidden Lakes where mermaids sing. Cico believes that water encircles the town, which sits on a hidden lake. Tony repeats the story to Ultima. She is unable to verify or refute the myth. He dreams of the struggle between Christian beliefs and paganism. Ultima declares that both are part of a "great cycle that binds us all."

**Doce**

Gabriel drinks more heavily from thwarted ambition. Ultima worries that Tenorio may endanger Tony. She gives him a pouch of herbs to wear about his neck. Narciso warns Ultima that Tenorio's youngest daughter has died and that the embittered father leads a witchhunt. When vigilantes arrive, Gabriel demands that Tenorio face Ultima. The crowd yells, "Give us the witch!" Narciso shames them for concealing their faces and following a fool. Tenorio vows revenge. Narciso suggests a test—pinning a cross to the door to see whether Ultima can pass through. Before she succeeds, her owl rips out Tenorio's eye. As the men depart, Tony notices that the cross lies broken on the ground.

**Trece**

The family packs for the trip to El Puerto. Tony accuses his uncle of avoiding Ultima during the witchhunt. Pedro admits to cowardice. The priest refuses to bury Tenorio's daughter in the churchyard. The next day, Tenorio's family passes through town. A rotten odor exudes from the casket, which is woven from cottonwood. After the harvest, the Márez family returns to Guadalupe. The Lunas invite Tony to spend a summer.

**Catorce**

At school, the boys tease Tony about the witch at his house. He fights Ernie. The taunts stop. That Christmas, the children prepare for a play, but most stay home because of a blizzard. Tony sets out against the storm; Ultima warns that there is evil in the wind. Along the way, Tony learns from Samuel that Tenorio and Narciso fought at the Longhorn Saloon. Tenorio cursed Ultima, Narciso, and the citizens of Las Pasturas. The nativity pageant progresses despite rowdiness.

The blizzard grows more dangerous as Tony heads home. Near the saloon, he witnesses a fight between Narciso and Tenorio. Narciso sets out to get Andrew, but refuses to go for help or to call the sheriff. When Tenorio shoots Narciso, he realizes

that Tony has witnessed the ambush. Tony hears Narciso's confession. Ultima strips off Tony's frozen clothes and wraps him in blankets. In delirium, he babbles about the killing. A nightmare whirls scenes of wicked people destroying his family. Only the golden carp survives.

**Quince**

During Tony's recovery from pneumonia, a coroner's jury rules the killing accidental or a suicide. Tony anticipates springtime, his first communion, and a summer with the Lunas. The police return his brothers, who wrecked their car on ice. Gabriel regrets that his sons care nothing for family unity. The next day, León, Eugene, and Andrew depart for Santa Fe.

**Dieciséis**

Tony and Cico discuss telling the golden carp of Narciso's murder. Tony ponders the injustice of Narciso's death. Tony meets Tenorio, who curses him and blames Ultima for a second daughter's terminal illness. Tony hurries to tell Ultima and finds her unafraid.

**Diecisiete**

In March, the children near the end of catechism, which Florence rejects. His heresy alarms Tony. Father Byrnes terrifies them with the immensity of eternity. Outside, Florence remains unrepentant.

**Dieciocho**

To relieve Tony's worry about Florence's soul, Samuel proposes introducing him to the golden carp. The children complete the rituals of Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. The gang forces Tony to hear Horse's confession for spying on the girls' bathroom. Florence insists that God has sinned against him. Tony refuses him penance.

**Diecinueve**

The gang mocks their first communion. Tony muses on good and evil and the mystery of the golden carp. At the end of the service, he feels empty.

**Veinte**

Télléz begs Ultima to exorcise a demon that throws stones at his house. Ultima blames the curse on the hanging of three Comanches, whose souls were left to wander. She places bundles on a platform and warns Télléz to avoid Tenorio.

**Veintiuno**

Tony and Cico intend to reveal the carp to Florence, who dives into the spillway. When his body surfaces, he appears to have hit his head and gotten tangled in barbed wire. Tony weeps and hurries from the river.

**Veintidós**

Tony dreams of Tenorio killing Ultima. To ease his terror, she blesses him before the journey to the Luna farm. Still confused about God and the golden carp, he asks his father about religion and evil. Gabriel explains that understanding comes with life. Tony realizes that both good and bad strengthen him. During the harvest at El Puerto, a letter from María summons Tony to school. Juan alerts them that Tenorio's daughter has died and that her body lies in the saloon. Pedro vows to keep Tenorio from harming Ultima. Tony hides in the underbrush from Tenorio. He disappears in the darkness as Tony races to Ultima. She orders the owl to attack Tenorio, who shoots it. While he aims at Tony, Pedro kills Tenorio.

Tony realizes that the owl is Ultima's soul. When he hurries to her bed, she instructs him on burning the herbs after she dies. He promises to bury the owl at the forked juniper tree. She blesses him with goodness, strength, and beauty and promises to be with him in the owls' song. After he buries the owl, he realizes that he has completed his obligation to Ultima.

**Timeline**

- ca. 18,000 BC** Nomadic Indians settle in the Sandia Mountains.
- ca. AD 30** Pueblo Indians develop an agrarian culture.
- 1540** Francisco Vásquez de Coronado arrives at Háwikuh pueblo.
- 1580-1599** Spanish exploration continues.
- 1598** Juan de Oñate founds a permanent Hispanic settlement.
- 1609** The King of Spain establishes a province.
- 1821** William Becknell leads an expedition to Santa Fe.
- 1846** American troops seize New Mexico.
- 1878** The railroad comes to New Mexico.
- 1886** American cavalry capture Geronimo's band.

<b>1912</b>	New Mexico becomes the 47th state.
<b>Dec. 7, 1941</b>	Japanese attack Pearl Harbor, Hawaii. León, Eugenio, and Andrés join the military.
<b>summer 1944</b>	Ultima comes to Tony's home.
<b>one Saturday night</b>	Lupito shoots the sheriff at the bus depot cafe. After a posse shoots Lupito, Tony blesses him before he dies.
<b>Sunday morning</b>	On the way to church, Tony hears whispers of "sorcerer" and "witch."
<b>July 16, 1945</b>	The first atomic bomb is tested at White Sands near Alamogordo, New Mexico.
<b>August 6</b>	A B-29 drops an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan.
<b>August 9</b>	A second bomb destroys Nagasaki, causing Japan to surrender to the United States.
<b>Sept. 2</b>	Japan surrenders formally in Tokyo Bay aboard the <i>USS Missouri</i> .
<b>autumn</b>	Tony helps Ultima dig healing roots and herbs. Uncle Juan asks that Tony spend a summer with the Lunas. His brothers return home.
<b>fall</b>	Tony skips second grade and enters third grade.
<b>winter 1945-46</b>	Tony witnesses the ambush and murder of Narciso.
<b>March 1946</b>	Tony takes first communion.
<b>late summer</b>	Tony hides in the underbrush from Tenorio. Ultima dies.

## Author Sketch

A multitalented bicultural author, Rudolfo Alfonso Anaya draws on humanistic themes from oral tradition. He is a skillful storyteller who excels in myth, short and long fiction, scripting, drama, children's literature, and criticism. Born in Pastura near Santa Rosa, New Mexico, October 30, 1937, he is the grandson of a poor farmer and fifth of the seven children of Rafaelita Mares Anaya and Martín Anaya, a stockman. Anaya struggled with city life after the family's move to Albuquerque and suffered a long convalescence after he broke his neck in a diving accident. He completed his



education at Browning Business School and the University of New Mexico, from which he holds a B. A. and M. A. in English. In 1972, he added a third degree in guidance and counseling. During this period of intense scrutiny of ethnic roots, he also sparred with traditional Catholicism.

In 1974, after he took an associate professorship in English, Chicano literature, and creative writing at the University of New Mexico, Anaya began to develop a uniquely Mexican-American style. He has traveled Mexico, Costa Rica, Panama, Puerto Rico, the Caribbean, Europe, and China and continues to live on a mesa west of Albuquerque. Into retirement, his successful Chicano fiction and criticism make him a much-sought lecturer, reader, and speaker at writers' workshops in the United States and Mexico.

## Critic's Corner

*Bless Me, Ultima*, a novel hailed for its skill in extended metaphor and mystical dream sequences, heads a trilogy of Chicano bildungsroman. Completed with the addition of *Heart of Aztlán* and *Tortuga*, the work delineates the conflicting cultural expectations that confuse, enlighten, and illuminate the main character. On the strength of this series, Anaya has earned the label of godfather of the Chicano literary movement. His first novel won him a Premio Quinto Sol award as well as citations from the University of New Mexico Mesa Chicana, the City of Los Angeles, and New Mexico Governor's Public Service commission. He also received the PEN-West Fiction Award for Albuquerque and fellowships from the National Chicano Council on Higher Education, Kellogg Foundation, and National Endowment for the Arts.

More recently, Anaya has risen to the heights of American literary success. He has won a Before Columbus American Book Award, New Mexico Governor's Award for Excellence and Achievement in Literature, Delta Kappa Gamma award, honorary doctorates from Marycrest College and the University of Albuquerque, Corporation for Public Broadcasting award, citation from the Hispanic Caucus of Teachers of English, and Medal of Friendship from the Mexican Consulate. His correspondence and manuscripts reside at Albuquerque's Zimmerman Museum.

## Other Works by Rudolfo Anaya

*Heart of Aztlán* (1976)  
*Tortuga* (1979)  
*A Ceremony of Brotherhood, 1680-1980* (1980)  
*Cuentos: Tales from the Hispanic Southwest* (1980)  
*Cuentos Chicanos* (editor) (1980)  
*Tales from the Silence of the Llano* (1982)  
*Rosa Linda* (play) (1982)  
*The Legend of La Llorona* (1984)  
*The Adventures of Juan Chacaspatas* (1985)  
*A Chicano in China* (1986)  
*The Farolitos of Christmas* (1987)  
*Lord of the Dawn: The Legend of Quetzalcoatl* (1987)  
*Voices: An Anthology of Nuevo Mexicano Writers* (1987)  
*The Season of La Llorona* (play) (1987)  
*The Farolitos at Christmas* (play) (1987)  
*Who Killed Don José* (play) (1987)  
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*Cuentos Chicanos* (editor) (1989)  
*Blue Mesa Review* (editor) (1991)  
*Aztlan: Essays on the Chicano Homeland* (1991)  
*Albuquerque* (1992)  
*Zia Summer* (1995)  
*Jalamanta: A Message From the Desert* (1995)  
*Rio Grande Fall* (1996)  
*Maya's Children* (1997)  
*Farolitos for Abuelo* (1998)  
*Shaman Winter* (1998)  
*My Land Sings: Stories from the Rio Grande* (1999)  
*Elegy on the Death of Cesar Chavez: A Poem* (2000)  
*Roadrunner's Dance* (2000)  
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## General Objectives

1. To define bilingualism
2. To describe the forces that shape a personality
3. To characterize violence and its effects on witnesses and survivors
4. To acknowledge the importance of achievement, autonomy, and self-esteem
5. To outline behaviors and expectations within a closed Hispanic community
6. To recount themes and events that describe childhood
7. To define the type of superstition that promotes a witch hunt
8. To cite examples of religious devotion and piety
9. To contrast characters in their responses to despair, isolation, longing, change, peer pressure, tradition, piety, and insecurity

## Specific Objectives

1. To account for Tony's dreams
2. To characterize the interplay between vigilantes and vengeance-seekers
3. To describe the post-war trauma that afflicts Lupito and Tony's brothers
4. To contrast Tony with his older brothers in terms of filial obedience
5. To note the contrast between the lives of farmers and residents of the llano
6. To analyze the blizzard scene in which Tony tries to aid Narciso
7. To account for the powers of Ultima's owl

8. To contrast the behavior and philosophy of believers and non-believers
9. To debate the significance of the Christmas play
10. To account for Ultima's powers of healing and second sight
11. To discuss how Tenorio, Téllez, and their families suffer the effects of evil
12. To list ways in which Tony learns to cope with advancing maturity
13. To contrast Gabriel and María as parents
14. To describe the importance of catechism, confession, and first communion
15. To evaluate the effect of the deaths of Lupito, Tenorio's daughters, Narciso, the owl, and Ultima

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Rudolfo Anaya's writing, present the following terms and applications:

**climax:** the height of an action, a crisis or turning point from which all behaviors or attitudes are permanently altered and nothing can ever be what it once was. For Tony, anticipation of first communion engulfs his mind at age six. The heresy of other boys disgusts him. However, after he completes catechism and becomes a full member of the church, there is a spiritual and emotional letdown. He realizes that he must accommodate such non-religious parts of life as superstition, character flaws, and community tensions along with spiritual and religious ideals.

**motif:** a pattern or predictable arrangement of elements to express an abstract theme in a story, as found in Ultima's solid support and compassion. At each difficult moment in Tony's life, he finds that "la Grande" not only knows what he is experiencing, even in nightmares, but accepts and affirms him for his inherent goodness. Her tenderness contrasts his mother's focus on piety and her adult sons' transgressions. At Ultima's death, Tony suffers a major separation from security.

**novel:** an extended work of prose fiction that is carefully controlled and features a varied cast of characters, clearly defined setting, an historical or social milieu, sustained action, a complicated plot, and usually one or more subplots. The elements in

the definition of novel suit *Bless Me, Ultima*, a psychological study of a young child departing the certainties of idealism for a full understanding of good and evil in everyday life. His tortured dreams and observations of violence at home and in the community replicate some of the author's coming-of-age conflicts. Thus, Anaya energizes a fictional story with first-person memories and encounters.

## The Importance of Setting

The settings in *Bless Me, Ultima* tie the Márez family to an agrarian past. In the past, they have charted their household's success and development in terms of rich harvests and prosperity. In the present, they contend with urbanism and community. Just as Tony surrenders the securities of childhood, their difficulties grow out of the coming separation from the land. Gabriel disdains his highway job and nurtures dreams of good land in California. Similarly, his sons return from war with a new focus on pleasure and adventure. Their loss of agrarian values suggests a difficult post-war adjustment that troubles Tony and brings shame to their mother.

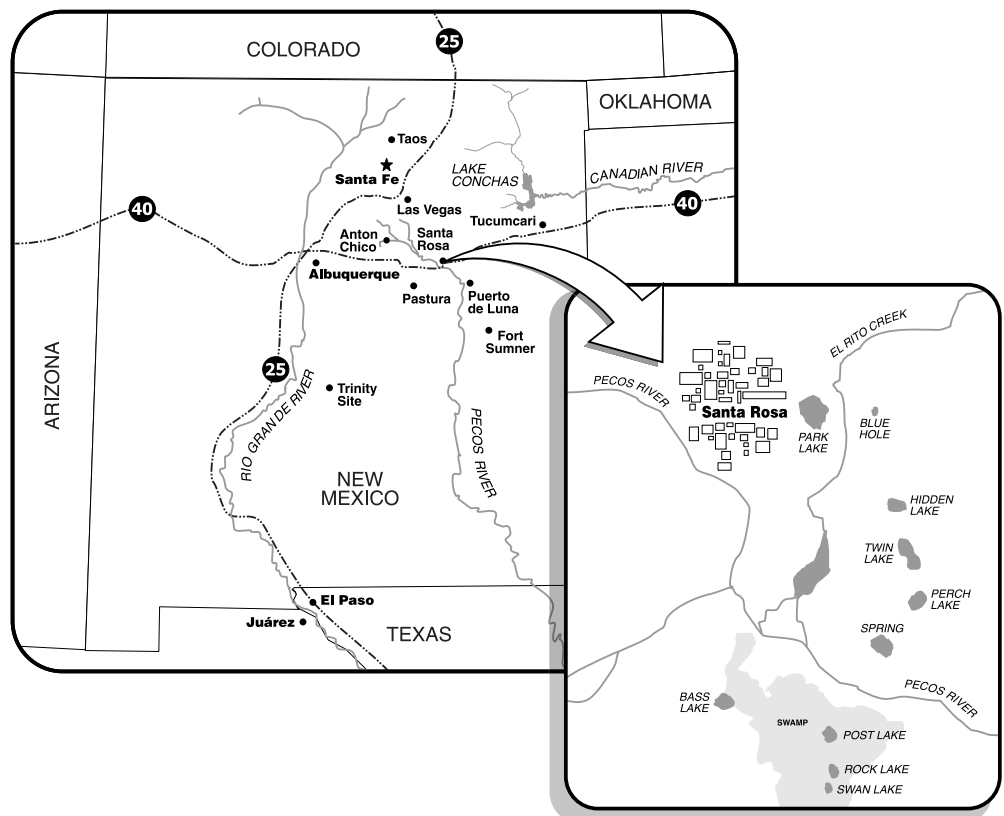
The llano opens the novel with its visceral vibration, which Tony describes as "the hum of the turning earth." His love of Ultima comes from a blend of the "magical time of childhood" and her application of powerful spells and herbs to combat human evil. In his dreams, he relives his father's milieu, the land of the llaneros, who burst into the birthing scene and rub soil from his forehead, which Grandfather Luna placed there to commit Tony to the life of a farmer and keeper of custom and tradition. The constant tug at his loyalties derives from this primal scene of conflicting family values.

At the novel's end, it is the earth that receives Tony as he runs from Tenorio and intercedes in the villain's last effort to annihilate Ultima. In the blessing scene, Ultima accepts death as inevitable, prepares to return to earth, and urges Tony to do likewise. With her hand on his forehead, she commits him to "the evenings when the wind is gentle and the owls sing in the hills." He considers how the long vendetta with Tenorio will end in justice and realizes that the customary laying out and burial of Ultima will merely satisfy custom. Her real interment comes from his obedience to her command that he bury the owl near the forked juniper, a symbol of the divergent paths that have marked the end of his innocence.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Fiction

- Isabel Allende, *The House of the Spirits*
- Harriett Arnow, *The Dollmaker*
- Pearl S. Buck, *The Good Earth*
- Margaret Craven, *I Heard the Owl Call My Name*
- Michael Dorris, *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*
- Laura Esquivel, *Like Water for Chocolate*



Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*  
Victor Martinez, *Parrot in the Oven: Mi Vida*  
Sylvia Lopez-Medina, *Cantora*  
N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*  
Toni Morrison, *The Bluest Eye*  
Scott O'Dell, *Streams to the River, River to the Sea*  
Amy Tan, *The Kitchen God's Wife*  
Sabine R. Ulibarri, *Tierra Amarilla: Stories of New Mexico*  
Jose Antonio Villasenor, *Pocho*  
Victor Villasenor, *Macho!, Burro Genius and Rain of Gold*  
James Vance Walker, *Walkabout*

### Nonfiction

Harold Augenbraum and Ilan Stevens, eds., *Growing Up Latino: Memories and Stories*  
Frank De Varona, *Latino Literacy: The Complete Guide to Our Hispanic History and Culture*  
Stephen Feinstein, *The 1940s: From World War II to Jackie Robinson*  
Nicholas Kanellos, *Thirty Million Strong: Reclaiming the Hispanic Image in American Culture*  
Ana Tiffany Lopez, *Growing Up Chicana/o*  
Richard Rodriguez, *Hunger for Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*  
Mary Ellen Snodgrass, *Historical Encyclopedia of Nursing*  
David K. Wright, *Multicultural Portrait of World War II*

### CD-ROM

*American Journey: The Hispanic-American Experience* (Primary Source Media)

### Video

*And Now Miguel* (Walt Disney)  
*Latino Influence on the United States* (TMW)  
*Self-Esteem for Latino Students* (TMW)  
*I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* (LIVE Home Video)  
*Mexican Americans* (Chelsea House)  
*The Milagro Beanfield War*

## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Rudolfo Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- family
- religion
- war
- superstition
- survival
- conflict
- dreams
- ideals
- healing
- loss
- acceptance
- coming to knowledge

### Motifs

- rebelling against failed ambition
- asserting self-control over fear and doubt
- saying farewell to a beloved mentor
- establishing lines of communication between cultures and belief systems
- righting old wrongs and protecting the vulnerable

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Chapter and page numbers are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. I was to see the rebellion of my brothers against my father; and many times late at night I was to see Ultima returning from the llano where she gathered the herbs that can be harvested only in the light of the full moon by the careful hands of a curandera. (Uno, pp. 1-2)  
*(Ultima is a skilled midwife and herbalist capable of conferring blessing and protection, applying folk remedies, or counteracting evil spells of a witch. To carry on her work, she selects and harvests powerful natural substances, which she transforms into medicines.)*



2. My father had been a vaquero all his life, a calling as ancient as the coming of the Spaniard to Nuevo Méjico. (Uno, p. 2)  
*(Gabriel is a cowboy or mounted herder who has tended cattle on the plains and driven them to market. Unlike the more settled farmers on his wife's side of the family, he is familiar with the wild, adventurous life associated with the stockman.)*
3. Some weekends the llaneros would come into town for supplies and old amigos like Bonney or Campos or the Gonzales brothers would come by to visit. (Uno, p. 3)  
*(Unlike the Lunas, Tony's father is a plainsman or pioneer, a forthright settler who inhabited the open lands of the American Southwest. When he receives visitors, his "eyes lit up as they drank and talked of the old days and told the old stories.")*
4. We circled homeward. On the way back we found some manzanilla. (Cuatro, p. 42)  
*(Ultima values a heath or chamomile common to the Southwest. She brews it into tea for treating colic, nausea, and intestinal complaint and selects it as an appropriate treatment for Leon.)*
5. "I have a bowl of fresh atole waiting for you," she grinned. (Diez, p. 102)  
*(While terrorizing the old man with her hellish cures, Ultima serves her grandson a hot cereal broth or porridge made from coarsely ground corn flavored with honey or peppers.)*
6. At first we could see only the flaring light of the piñón torches. (Doce, p. 129)  
*(When the witch hunters come for Ultima, they bear torches of a pine wood common to the Rocky Mountains. The plant is essential to desert life as a fatty wood and provides a valuable nut, thickener, ointment, and oils for salves.)*
7. Good Friday was forlorn, heavy and dreary with the death of God's son and the accompanying sense of utter hopelessness. (Dieciocho, p. 207)  
*(Lent combines varied emotional highs and lows. At the mournful commemoration of Christ's crucifixion at Golgotha, which follows Palm Sunday and Maundy Thursday, Tony anticipates Easter Sunday, Christianity's major holiday of feasting and rejoicing.)*
8. As I walked I gathered ripe mesquite pods and chewed them for the sweet juice. (Vientidós, p. 253)  
*(On his flight from Tenorio, Tony samples fruit of the mesquite, a prickly shrub of the pea family common to the deserts of the*

*Southwest. The plant is useful for attracting honeybees and providing forage, seeds, berries, ointment, dye, and glue. Its flour can be made into cereal, dessert, dumplings, thickener, and beer.)*

9. "—Espíritu de mi alma!" I heard Ultima's command ring in the still night air, and a swirling of wings engulfed Tenorio. (Vientidós, p. 258)  
*(In her last act against lurking evil, Ultima calls out to the "spirit of my soul," her owl, which can counter evil by flying quickly to the source and attacking with talons and beak.)*
10. "Now, take the owl, go west into the hills until you find a forked juniper tree, there bury the owl. Go quickly—" (Vientidós, p. 260)  
*(In her final command to Tony, Ultima sends him to bury the owl at a symbolic evergreen shrub. The juniper is valuable for its aromatic oil and blue or gray-green berries, which native Americans used for diuretics, palliatives for indigestion, green dye, beads, and cooking spice. It is significant that the owl returns to earth beneath so life-giving a plant.)*

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the novel.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. How does Gabriel come to live in Guadalupe?  
*(In the opening chapter, Tony, the central intelligence, occupies a small upstairs room near his sisters' bed chamber and can easily eavesdrop on his parents' conversations. He knows that his father, a proud vaquero, allowed his wife to sway him toward town life and schooling for the children. With great reluctance, Gabriel sold his herd and gave his horse to his cowboy friend, Benito Campos, who let the horse run free on the prairie. The disapproving vaqueros turned aside from the terrible image of Gabriel's desertion to a life of village constraint. Like a death among their friends, an unidentified spirit "walked the earth." Obviously, they think of Gabriel as a form of death in life.*

*Arrival in town distances Gabriel from his ideals and his "compadres," whom he saw less and less. Doggedly, he works for the highway department and drinks at the Longhorn Saloon, but never becomes one of the town crowd. When the vaquero buddies return to town on Saturdays for supplies, they visit Gabriel and delight him with their old stories. At their departure, he remains at home "to drink alone in the long night" and attend mass the next day with a hangover.)*

2. Describe Ultima's role in family life.  
*(Ultima arrives at Tony's house by default—because she has no family on the prairie. Gabriel honors her as one who "served the people all her life, and now the people are scattered, driven like tumbleweeds by the winds of war." María, who has profited from Ultima's skillful birthing techniques, agrees that "It is not right that la Grande be alone in her old age." Gabriel agrees that the old woman has been willing to help others in distress and that he has "already sent word with Campos that Ultima is to come and live with us.")*

*Ironically, Ultima is wrinkled, but neither pathetic nor needy. After the formal welcome, she looks into Tony's eyes with the "eyes of young child." Her vigor and enthusiasm for life inspire and uplift him during a difficult period of maturity. Through her vision, he sees "for the first time the wild beauty of our hills and the magic of the green river." From his first glimpse of his grandmother, he knows "she held the secret of my destiny.")*

3. What does Tony need from Ultima?  
*(The times are confusing to Tony. He tries to comply with his mother's pious wish that he be a priest, but he knows that his father devalues Catholicism and that tension reigns in the house because of his father's discontent in town. When the three brothers return home from the Pacific war, they are undisciplined and lustful for urban pleasures. Their rebellion unsettles the household even further. Ultima helps to restore Tony's contentment with the earth and to balance his understanding of God, nature, and the supernatural.)*

*Daily, Tony helps Ultima gather plants. He walks the river banks and llano with her searching for herbs and roots to place in their gunny sack and return home to dry for medicines. She teaches him plant and flower names and the identity of trees, bushes, birds, and animals. More important, he learns "a beauty in the time of day and in the time of night, and that there was peace in the river and in the hills." While the family wrestles with disparate hopes and dreams, he is able to "to feel complete in the fulfillment of . . . time.")*

4. What does Tony learn from his first encounter with violent death?  
*(Lupito's murder of the sheriff creates a village demand for mob violence as recompense. As the posse searches the river bank for Lupito, Tony finds him crouching in the reeds by the river, the novel's sustained image of transcendent peace and eternity. The timelessness of the scene is disarming to Tony, who realizes that the crazed war veteran fires his pistol to draw the others' answering shots and end his misery.)*

*In a surprising turn of events, Lupito runs to Tony and begs blessing as a second volley wounds him mortally. Terrified by the clawing, crawling quarry, Tony is too transfixed to comply. When the villagers rush to the corpse, the boy embraces him, praying and questioning the destination of a soul that died without holy salvation. He demands, "Oh why did my mother dream for me to be a priest!" The comforting cry of the owl stops his fearful thoughts and returns him to his grandmother.)*

5. How does Ultima bridge the gulf that separates sanctity from superstition?  
*(From her arrival, Ultima serves as Tony's guide as he navigates between idealism and reality. As he returns from the river and his first sight of violent death, he realizes that Ultima knew what would happen to Lupito. Like any mother, she administers a warm herbal drink and applies potions to cuts on his face and feet while Tony plies her with questions. She is unable to assure him that Lupito is not damned. Rather, she reminds him of the facts—that "the war-sickness was not taken out of him, he did not know what he was doing.")*

*Tony's reply points to a significant symbol—the bridge on which the posse stood and on which his father tried to restore order and lawfulness. It parallels the bridge that the curandera establishes between human events and supernatural cures and spells. Likewise, the bridge serves Tony as he learns to survive among hostile boys at school and to greet his catechism and first communion. Thus, late childhood becomes a similar bridge between holiness and getting along in an imperfect world.)*

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)**

6. Why is El Puerto important to Tony?  
*(The Luna relatives recognize that Tony has never experienced the reassuring farm life that his mother knew in childhood. They insist that he spend a summer learning the rhythms of agrarian customs and values. He acquires an appreciation of the signs of the moon and the soft nightly glow that "lighted a way for the solitary man standing in his field, listening to the plants sleep, listening to the resting earth.")*

*In time, the nightmares subside. Tony grows "strong with the work and good food" and learns from kinsmen "who were as dark and quiet as the earth of the valley." His awareness of agrarian values gives him a choice, but "I did not yet know if I could follow in their footsteps and till the earth forever." His Uncle Pedro agrees with María that "a man of learning can go far in this world, he can be anything." He adds, "We are pleased with your work, Antonio, all of your uncles are pleased. It has been good for us to have one of María's sons work with us." The affirmation and hospitality do much good for Tony's troubled spirit.)*

7. How does the confrontation between Tenorio and Ultima order events in the story?

*(From the beginning, Tony has examined the conflict between good and evil. His experiences with Lupito, Narciso, and Florence's deaths terrify him and overwhelm his innocence. As he runs for miles, he watches the moon rise over bottom land. He describes his surroundings as a moral impasse: "What seemed solid earth by the light of the moon was a marshy quagmire." Pulled into waist-deep quicksand, he squirms loose from the enveloping shroud of darkness.)*

*The final stalking scene places the boy in a fearful flight from vengeful hooves. Overhead, the owl's cry returns his sense of purpose. As he screams out to Ultima that Tenorio is at large, a shot kills the owl seconds before Uncle Pedro shoots Tenorio. The death of the owl is a terrible loss of security. In a recap of events, he recalls that it had been there when Ultima cured his uncle and when his brothers returned from the war. In her final act of love, Ultima dispatches the owl to die in Tony's place.)*

8. Why is redemption the concluding theme?
- (Anaya compacts into the final paragraphs Tony's redemption from evil. As Ultima realizes the danger, she sends the owl to save the boy from Tenorio's rifle. Unlike the idealized image of Christ the savior, the event coalesces his understanding of reality. The shot that kills the bird "shattered my childhood into a thousand fragments that long ago stopped falling and are now dusty relics gathered in distant memories." Looking back on a fearful few seconds, Tony realizes that Ultima gladly sacrificed "mi alma" for her grandson.)*

*The loss is important to Tony's questions about the difference between holy stories and superstitions. Ultima cannot tell him in words the interconnectedness of both in a single human life. Instead, she demonstrates the cost of trading one for the other. To preserve the sanctity of his life, she sends out her owl for one last and fateful task. But it is Uncle Pedro who pays a realistic price of killing a deranged stalker to save the boy. And it is Uncle Pedro who must face the sheriff.*

*As Tony searches out the old woman, he finds her readying herself for death. He kneels before her as though she were a saint or priest and mourns the loss of the owl. As though explaining the immortality of the spirit, she smiles, "Not dead . . . but winging its way to a new place, a new time—just as I am ready to fly." The exchange of old for young saddens him. She reminds him that her good works are finite—that she was not to interfere with human destiny, but to do good works while she lived." She implies that the time is right for Tony to begin his own life of good works.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. How do multiple deaths and danger change Tony?

*(Like all children, Tony leaves the sheltering, nurturing oblivion of childhood to live in the real world. The crises that force him to witness suffering and death require explanation. Ultima's role as mentor enables him to transcend the awful pain of living and to see human struggle as part of its beauty. But the lessons require work as well as understanding.)*

*Without murmur, Tony obeys Ultima. He buries the owl under a large stone to protect it from digging coyotes, a symbol of the elements that have reviled and hunted Ultima from the day of her arrival. He allows himself the fleeting regret that Pedro had not shot Tenorio before the owl's death, but decides, "it was better not to think that way." Enriched by Ultima's wisdom, he concludes that he should "take life's experiences and build strength from them, not weakness.")*

10. Explain how the novel is both psychological and autobiographical.
- (Set in New Mexico and dedicated "Con Honor Para Mis Padres" or "In Honor of My Parents," Anaya navigates childhood's terrain in a difficult blend of English and Spanish thoughts and actions. As he did in his own passage from child to man, his introspective narrator captures the essence of themes, local color, and the bicultural life on the rim of the llano or prairie. The twenty chapters, numbered in Spanish, move the six-year-old central intelligence from dependency on the civilizing force of his mother to the harsh and, at times, violent community where he must attend school and receive catechism. To round out Tony as a main character, Anaya draws on memories and family data to flesh out the story, thus producing vivid scenes that appear to come from experience rather than imagination.)*

**Questions 11-13 (Creative Level)**

11. Compose the text of a television documentary on Latino families who arrived in the Southwest and built their lives as farmers and herders.
12. Suggest a memorial to honor Ultima as mentor, healer, and midwife.
13. Read John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. Contrast the isolation of the main characters with that of Tony and Ultima.

## Across the Curriculum

### Art

1. Create a bulletin board or posters contrasting these settings: El Puerto, juniper tree where Narciso dies, Rosie's brothel, confessional, Tony's first classroom, Ultima's room, Blue Lake, bus depot cafe, Jasón's house, Indian's cave, scene of Lupito's death, bridge outside town, Grandfather's house, Main Street in Las Pasturas, Christmas play, Eight Ball Pool Hall, Uncle Lucas' room, Narciso's garden, search for herbs, Hidden Lakes, Guadalupe, Téllez's house and the burial platforms, spillway, rabbit cages, and Tony's attic room.
2. Design an advertisement for the Eight Ball Pool Hall or bus depot cafes, a religious symbol on the confessional, a list of confirmands for the Easter service or returning war veterans, a poster urging young men to volunteer for military service or announcing the nativity play, a topographical map of Hidden Lake or the llano, a list of characters in the Christmas play, a headstone for Lupito or Tenorio's daughter, a welcome sign for Las Pasturas, a placard naming the river and its tributaries, a chart comparing the Hispanic population of the United States to other racial groups, a travel brochure for Santa Fe, an illustrated guide to natural healing, an artistic view of an owl or the work of a curandera, or a newspaper headline describing the return of soldiers from San Diego.

### Cinema

1. Draw settings for a movie version of *Bless Me, Ultima*. Show the area over which the vigilantes chase Lupito, confrontation between Gabriel and the witchhunters, Tony's loving interment of the owl, the fight between Narciso and Tenorio, Tony eating a carrot from Narciso's garden, Tony walking home in the blizzard and recovering from pneumonia, and completion of the harvest on Prudencio's farm.
2. View coming-of-age dilemmas in films such as *A Tree Grows in Brooklyn* and *Souder*. Discuss how social pressures help young people clarify values, beliefs, and ambitions.

3. Determine how a film director would describe setting, atmosphere, mood, tone, theme, and characters for the scenes in which Tony learns something new and significant, such as Narciso's request for absolution, the appearance of the golden carp, Lupito's delusions, Florence's drowning, the fight with Horse, and the rush to save Ultima from Tenorio's vengeance. Name current actors who would play the parts.

### Drama and Speech

1. Write several conversations that are only implied, such as María's talks with her older sons, Andrew's conversations with Rosie, Jasón's visit to the Indian in the cave, Chavez's role in organizing a hunting party for Lupito, Miss Maestas' praise of Tony's letters, discussions of Ultima's role in ending Lucas' illness, Samuel and Cico's interest in Florence, the inquest concerning Narciso's death, Ultima's communion with the owl, the hanging of three Comanches, and Gabriel's dreams of California.
2. Compose a short segment of dialogue in which you become a peripheral character in the novel. Consider taking the role of returning soldier, patron of Rosie's brothel, Tony's sister, pool room employee, school teacher, student, police officer, priest, sheriff, rescue team, farmer, Indian, witch hunter, or villager.
3. Join a group in pantomiming scenes in which Ultima's interaction inspires love, fear, thanks, or blessing. What does great age add to her stature? Why does she instruct Tony to destroy her herbs after her death? Why is she unafraid of death?

### Education

1. Describe in a short speech the difficulties in learning English as a second language. Cite examples of confusion, especially the attempt to comprehend the difference between myth and orthodox religion.
2. Role-play the part of the teacher in putting on the Christmas play. Emphasize the need to improvise to make up for absent students and to drown out the cry of the wind during the blizzard. Discuss her style of disciplining unruly participants.

**Geography**

1. Using historical maps, explain why these terms belong in the novel: Moors, Aztecas, Mayas, Comanches, Comancheros, Conquistadores, war of the Japanese and the Germans, migrants, Tucumcari, San Diego, Las Vegas, Albuquerque, Denver, Frisco, Santa Fe, Guadalupe, and New Mexico.

**History and Social Studies**

1. Contrast the behaviors of male and female citizens in Hispanic communities, for example, treatment of children of either sex, household chores, host-guest relationships, mealtime, and times of danger, such as the murder of the sheriff and the arrival of the witch hunters.
2. Describe in a short speech the dissolution of family unity. Explain why Gabriel's sons reject his plan to resettle in California and why María looks to Tony to fulfill her dreams. Contrast life in Las Pasturas with harvest visits to El Puerto. Explain what Tony gains during these trying times from his close association with Ultima.
3. Explain briefly how researchers study folk culture. Why would a sociologist examine Hispanic housing, cars, gender, roles, entertainment, education, cooking, family relationships, clothing, work, religious holidays, school, superstition, and folklore in order to gain a fuller impression of the Hispanic mindset?
4. Study the history of New Mexico. What factors facilitated the assimilation of Hispanic settlers, particularly sheep ranching, farming, Catholic missionaries, nearness to Mexico, and availability of land? Contrast the state's settlement with that of Arizona, Texas, Florida, and California. Why do these areas continue to draw Latino immigrants?
5. Explain briefly the role of a posse in halting lawless behavior. List qualifications for service on a posse.
6. Create graphs illustrating current census figures concerning the racial makeup of the United States and of Hispanics in particular.

Highlight a map with graphs and data indicating what parts of the nation are the most ethnically and racially diverse. Contrast life span, incidence of disease, educational aspirations, and quality of life for Hispanics.

**Language Arts**

1. Describe a minor character, for instance, Father Byrnes. Note what this character adds to the themes of aspirations, belief, the triumph of good over evil, community unrest, family unity, and fulfillment.
2. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness of characters at local institutions, particularly school, church, and main street. Why does Andrew depart from home to reconnect with work and sleazy entertainment? Why do Tony's brothers eventually move to Santa Fe?
3. Read aloud other authors' descriptions of ethnic community life, such as Maya Angelou's *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* or Michael Dorris' *Yellow Raft in Blue Water*.
4. Read aloud from Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*. Compare the motif of mentor and young disciple with a similar pattern in Anaya's *Bless Me, Ultima*. What do the two children learn from older role models? What qualities do the young characters bring to the story?
5. Using a Spanish dictionary, make a pronouncing glossary of these terms: *atole, tortilla, chicos, empanaditas, chiles, ristras, molino, bizcochitos, jefe, policía, Rio del Norte, manzanilla, la yerba del manso, el Rita, Las Pasturas, El Puerto, mesas, Valle de los Luna, arroyo, Llano Estacado, pastura, llorona, compadres, llaneros, vaqueros, caballeros, cabroncitos, rancheros, tejanos, ricos, amigos, puta, la muerte, el hombre volador, curandera, médica, bruja, Méjica, hijo, tío, mujer, abuelo, la Grande, muchacho, adobe, sala, grotto, corridos, sala, pesadilla, maldito, el encanto, El Diablo, chapas, cuentos, del Padre, del Hijo, y el Espiritu Santo, yerba, la misa de gallo, Padre nuestro que estás en los cielos, Madre de Dios, La Virgen de Guadalupe, Jesús, María, y José, San Cristóbal, maíz, and sangre.*
6. Make posters or chalkboard definitions of these terms: channel catfish, yellow-bellies, nightjars, blue corn, juniper, yucca, mesquite,

prickly pears, tamarisk, grafting, piñon, broom corn, cottonwood, alfalfa, bosque, rift, coroner, balls of fire, dust devils, bad blood, sulfur, exorcise, Black Mass, Black Book, scapula, evil eye, fiend, zombie, Prince of Death, waiting for the world to end, shroud, horned moon, cloven hooves, gunny sack, half-nelson, drunk tank, quagmire, the bomb, mermaid, inquisitor, barrage, eight ball, incense, milk and honey, tie-wire, halfers, piles, colic, dysentery, convulsions, rheumatism, spasms, diphtheria, pneumonia, war-sickness, afterbirth, purge, and polio.

7. Compose an extended definition of ethnicity. Determine the areas of culture that give Hispanic-Americans an identity, for instance, language, food, dress, religion, and family structure. In what respects would the Márez family differ from white settlers, native Americans, or Asian immigrants? How do these unique characteristics strengthen an ethnic community?
8. Compose a first person account of life on a farm. Describe the feeling you get from tending rabbits, collecting eggs, stoking a fire, harvesting vegetables and fruit, fishing, feeding animals, and searching for herbs.
9. Write a theme in which you explain why contrasting family expectations confuse a young child like Tony. Suggest ways that he can find his own path by reading, cultivating well-bred friends, visiting El Puerto, studying harder in school, talking with Father Byrnes and Gabriel, and deciding for himself the value of a strong religious faith.
10. Draw a family tree connecting the Lunas and the Márez branch.

#### Music

1. Listen to recordings of Hispanic music in a variety of moods, such as the piano works of Manuel De Falla and the guitar solos of Hector Villa Lobos. Locate tunes that fit different events, especially Tony's assistance at the bedside of Uncle Lucas, burial of Tenorio's daughter, arrival of Ultima to Tony's house, shooting of the owl, Tenorio's pursuit of Tony, the brothers' return from war, and Tony's first communion.

#### Psychology and Mental Health

1. Explain in a theme how the author characterizes Tony's moments of self-doubt, fear, self-evaluation, distrust, grief, confusion, determination, confession, defiance, curiosity, disobedience, courage, religious ecstasy, drudgery, and insecurity. Explain how dreams release pent-up tensions.
2. Apply three Greek terms to the book: *philos* or belonging to or acceptance by a group or family, *eros* or passion, and *agape* or unconditional love and acceptance. Discuss how failure to achieve any of these three states produces tension and disappointment in human relationships, as demonstrated by Tony's belonging to the group from Los Jaros, María's love of her family, family compassion for La Grande, treatment of Uncle Lucas, burial of Tenorio's daughter, Andrew's visits to girls at Rosie's brothel, María's prayers that her sons will return safely from war, and Ultima's understanding of Tony's distress at seeing too much violence.
3. Organize a discussion of dreams. What elements do Tony's dreams mix, such as local events, family struggles, supernatural events, and religion? Why does Ultima comfort him after a difficult nightmare? What do the dreams foretell about his ambitions and hopes?

#### Religion

1. Make an oral report on the importance of faith in Las Pasturas. Comment on aspects of Catholicism that affect the Márez family, especially confession, prayer, family devotion, the rosary, saints, Garden of Eden, fasting, catechism, interment in consecrated ground, the sign of the cross, belief in an afterlife, and first communion.

#### Science

1. Characterize in a theme the difference between a real owl and Ultima's pet. What is a "witch's familiar"? Why are owls emblematic of wisdom? Why does Tenorio target the owl for death? Why does Ultima anticipate returning to life in another form? At what dramatic moments does the owl suddenly appear? What is the connection between Tony's misadventures and Ultima's guardianship?

## Student Involvement Activities

1. Compose a short speech in which you explain Ultima's ability to help Tony discover his individual strengths and to clarify his beliefs. Why does she prefer to see him alone? Of what significance is her role in Tony's birth? What does she teach him about healing? Why does she summon him to her deathbed?
2. Explain to a small group the forces that impinge on Tony as he faces manhood. Discuss his response to the boys from Los Jaros, Miss Maestas, Narciso, Cico, the golden carp, the priest, the Vitamin Kid, his brothers, his parents, school, local killings, visits with his Grandfather Prudencio, seeing his brother at Rosie's, and learning from Ultima.
3. Lead a debate about the confusion that arises from the study of orthodox religion and awareness of local superstition, myth, and legend. Why does Tony feel compromised by the golden carp? What feelings overcome Tony by the river? What does he share with Cico? How does he deal with his mother's dreams of his entering the priesthood? Why does his brothers' behavior dismay him?
4. Describe aloud the change that takes place in Tony as he matures. Note how he takes risks, dreams, questions authority, explores the unknown, trusts Ultima, and evaluates puzzling and terrifying experiences, particularly the deaths of Lupito, Narciso, Florence, Ultima, and the owl. Predict how his adulthood will differ from that of his brothers and sisters.
5. Create a list of images from the novel that appeal to the five senses, such as "It was hard to say the rosary because you had to kneel for as long as the prayers lasted, but I did not mind because while my mother prayed I fastened my eyes on the statue of the Virgin until I thought that I was looking at a real person, the mother of God, the last relief of all sinners."
6. Study the background elements of the story, particularly Hispanic communities, Catholicism's blend with local folklore, bilin-

gualism, the end of World War II, the testing of the atomic bomb at White Sands, and the difference between the farm and the llano.

7. Discuss your response toward Gabriel. What relationship does he encourage with all of his children? Why do the girls seem incidental to the story? How does he relate to his wife and her obsession with religion? How could he improve his relationship with Tony?
8. Discuss with a group the symbolism of Ultima's name. What does it mean in Latin? Connect other names to historical or religious meanings, for instance, Florence, Uncle Pedro, Uncle Juan, Grandfather Prudencio, Rosie, Samuel, Andrew, Narciso, Jáson, Miss Maestas, and Tenorio.
9. Draw a book jacket or poster stressing a colorful scene from the novel, such as looking for the golden carp, harvesting grain with Uncle Pedro, practicing the Christmas play, repairing the windmill, working on a road crew, running across the bridge, following the river in search of a killer, confronting witch hunters, receiving a blessing, saying a rosary, and burying Ultima's owl.

## Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of parent-child understanding arising from years of difficulties and confusion about family customs.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate how Tony is both obedient son and rebel.
3. Compose a scene in which Tony's brothers return home for Ultima's funeral.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each.

## Vocabulary

Fill in each blank in the sentences that follow with an appropriate synonym for the underlined word from the list below. Place your answer in the blank provided. You will have answers left over when you finish:

adobe	evaporated	horde	quizzically	subside
<i>atole</i>	excommunication	impending	relented	tamarisk
cadavers	familiar	irrevocable	remedy	udders
<i>curanderas</i>	font	purge	<i>sala</i>	wily
endure	glistened	quagmire	slake	yearned

1. And I, who wanted to last \_\_\_\_\_ to please my mother, was next.
2. The entire village was witness to the damning \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I could see in their eyes that they were very worried, and I tried to tell them that I was not sick, that I simply had to tell my story to cleanse \_\_\_\_\_ the fever.
4. It was a simple mud \_\_\_\_\_ ranch house, squatting low to the good earth, its tin roof shielding it from the hot sun.
5. It is the sweet water of the moon, my mother crooned softly, it is the water the Church chooses to make holy and place in its container \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Lay your blankets there and make yourself a bed while I fix us some cereal \_\_\_\_\_.
7. The dishes were quickly done then we gathered in the room \_\_\_\_\_ where my mother kept her altar.
8. I glanced up and saw the screaming mob \_\_\_\_\_ of first graders rushing down the aisle to sit in the front rows.
9. I sought more answers, but she was gone, vanished \_\_\_\_\_ into a loud noise.
10. The water would recede \_\_\_\_\_ very fast and in places the water would be so low that, as the carp swam back upstream, the backs of the fish would raise a furrow in the water.
11. She only smiled. It was as if she knew the story and found nothing fantastic or menacing \_\_\_\_\_ in it.
12. Tenorio has told the men who would listen to him that he found la Grande's stringed bag, you know the kind the healers \_\_\_\_\_ wear around their neck, under the bed of his dead daughter!
13. I longed \_\_\_\_\_ for my mother, and at the same time I understood that she had sent me to this place where I was an outcast.
14. They knew that it was within the power of the father to curse his sons, and ay! a curse laid on a disobedient son or daughter was permanent \_\_\_\_\_.
15. The setting sun shone \_\_\_\_\_ on the brown waters of the river and turned them to bronze.
16. Once I ran into a flat piece of bottom land, and what seemed solid earth by the light of the moon was a marshy swamp \_\_\_\_\_.
17. When she was done she cooled the cure \_\_\_\_\_, then with my help we lifted my uncle and forced the mixture down his throat
18. On the whitened shores of the lake the bodies \_\_\_\_\_ of sinners rotted
19. Without the sun there would be no waters fromed to ease \_\_\_\_\_ the dark earth's thirst.
20. But one fine god who truly loved the people argued against it, and the other gods were so moved by his love that they softened \_\_\_\_\_ from killing the people.



## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Sentence Completion (30 points)

Supply a term to complete each of the following statements. Choose your answers from the list that follows. Place them in the blanks provided at left.

blood	first grade	herbs	llano	Santa Fe
cross	girls' bathroom	Japanese	murder	shepherd
drowning	Good Friday	Joseph	platform	<i>vaquero</i>
first communion	grotto	juniper	Rosie	Vigil

- After Ash Wednesday and \_\_\_\_\_, worshippers look forward to Easter Sunday.
- Lupito dies on the riverbank after warning of \_\_\_\_\_ soldiers.
- Horse confesses to making a spy hole in the wall of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- Against their father's wishes, the three Márez brothers leave home and travel to \_\_\_\_\_.
- Beneath the forked \_\_\_\_\_, Tony buries the owl and places a stone on top of it to keep out coyotes.
- Tony is disappointed that he receives no vision of God at his \_\_\_\_\_.
- From the \_\_\_\_\_ swims a golden carp, which entices Tony by its beauty.
- Tony flees the scene of Florence's \_\_\_\_\_, which could have been prevented if the boys had obeyed warnings.
- As the witch hunters look on, Ultima passes through the door, but the \_\_\_\_\_ falls to the ground.
- Gabriel ridicules farmers and longs to return to the \_\_\_\_\_ with other llaneros.
- Placing the bundles on the \_\_\_\_\_, Ultima rids Téllez's home of demons.
- Ultima asks Tony to destroy her \_\_\_\_\_ and bury the owl after she dies.
- Tony plays the role of \_\_\_\_\_ in Miss Violet's Christmas play.
- Samuel indicates that vengeance results from a thickening of \_\_\_\_\_, which must be spilled.
- \_\_\_\_\_ brings the three brothers home after their car slips on ice and burns.

### Part II: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |   |                  |
|---|------------------|
| _____ 1. shoots Tenorio before he can harm Tony.                                    | A. Tony          |
| _____ 2. takes pride in the Lunas, who were the first Mexicans to settle Guadalupe. | B. Uncle Pedro   |
| _____ 3. regrets giving up his family heritage and living like a farmer.            | C. Ultima        |
| _____ 4. is invited to spend the summer at El Puerto.                               | D. Horse         |
| _____ 5. communes with an owl, which often accompanies Tony.                        | E. Miss Violet   |
| _____ 6. leads witch hunters to the Márez home and demands custody of Ultima.       | F. María         |
| _____ 7. tries to impress on Catholic children the immensity of eternity.           | G. Narciso       |
| _____ 8. is impressed that Tony throws him into the dust.                           | H. Father Byrnes |
| _____ 9. tries to help Lupito by stopping the vigilantes.                           | I. Tenorio       |
| _____ 10. calls the actors to order.  | J. Gabriel       |

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. The three brothers waste their money at the Eight Ball Pool Hall.
- \_\_\_ 2. Tony fears that his father might be at Rosie's brothel.
- \_\_\_ 3. The shepherd who called to the mermaid heard her voice and leaped into the grotto of Blue Lake.
- \_\_\_ 4. All of the catechism class believes Father Byrnes when he tells them about El Diablo.
- \_\_\_ 5. Moving to California is Tony's dream, but Grandfather Prudencio prefers El Puerto.
- \_\_\_ 6. Narciso, the town drunk of Guadalupe, helped while Ultima delivered María's baby.
- \_\_\_ 7. Tony's mother scolds him for coming home late from school the last day of his first year.
- \_\_\_ 8. Outside the Longhorn Saloon, Tenorio ambushes Narciso and spits on his body in the snow.
- \_\_\_ 9. After the owl dies, Ultima realizes that she, too, is dying and blesses Tony at his request.
- \_\_\_ 10. The boys of Los Jaros make fun of Tony's lunch and cause him to hide behind the school.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Explain why María believes, "it is not right that la Grande be alone in her old age."
- 2. Describe the lure of the gold carp.
- 3. Discuss why Tony is confused by his first communion.
- 4. Explain the role of Catholicism in the Márez house.
- 5. Account for the returning brothers' wasted lives.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements.

1. Tony dreams that **(he skips second grade, he baits his hook with a human liver, Cico catches the gold carp, the shepherd disappears into the grotto).**
2. At the Márez house **(Narciso kisses Ultima's hand, the cross falls from the attic door, Tenorio stretches his daughter's body on the bar, witch hunters burn Ultima's herbs).**
3. On a snowy day, **(Gabriel spreads salt on the roads, María prays until Tony returns, Lupito shoots the sheriff at the bus depot cafe, Ultima warns of evil in the wind).**
4. One of Tony's jobs is **(cleaning fish, feeding rabbits, fixing the broken windmill, escorting his mother to mass).**
5. The Vitamin Kid **(races Tony across the bridge, ridicules Father Byrnes' catechism classes, plays a shepherd in the play, helps pull Florence from the spillway).**
6. On the first day of school, **(Tony pays respects to Miss Violet, María sends a message to Miss Maestas, Tony carries sandwiches made of white bread, the boys from Los Jaros hold a spitting contest).**
7. Gabriel drinks too much and **(visits Rosie's brothel with Andrew, follows Tenorio's wagon to the public excommunication, curses Las Pasturas, rejects Prudencio's offer of a harvest job).**
8. When the war ends, **(the brothers return home through San Diego, Ultima finds herself homeless, Uncle Lucas collapses from a curse, Uncle Pedro's wife becomes deaf and mute).**
9. While cooking dinner **(Ultima places a cross above the front door, María weeps, Narciso warns that Tenorio is approaching to shoot Ultima, Tony hears the owl singing the song of the river).**
10. Tenorio's daughters **(attend catechism class, drive their wagon through El Puerto, upset Téllez's family with witchcraft, celebrate a black mass).**

### Part II: Matching (20 points)

Match the following quotations with names of speakers from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |           |            |                |            |                |
|-----------|------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| A. Tony   | C. Gabriel | E. Miss Violet | G. Tenorio | I. Uncle Pedro |
| B. Ultima | D. María   | F. Eugenio     | H. Horse   | J. Cico        |

- \_\_\_ 1. I could not have survived without la Grande's help. Oh those were hard years—.
- \_\_\_ 2. We don't want to work on the highway!
- \_\_\_ 3. I spoke to the presence of the river and it allowed my brothers to cross with their carpenter tools to build our castle on the hill.
- \_\_\_ 4. It is we who misuse the earth and must pay for our sins—
- \_\_\_ 5. You have to choose, Tony . . . you have to choose between the god of the church, or the beauty that is here and now—
- \_\_\_ 6. I accept my death because I accepted to work for life—
- \_\_\_ 7. I have killed the owl with a bullet molded by the Prince of Death!
- \_\_\_ 8. May your evil deeds speed your soul to hell . . . and may God forgive me—
- \_\_\_ 9. That's why I'm going to let you get away with it.
- \_\_\_ 10. Please behave!

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Short Answer (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Whom does Jáson visit at the cave?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Whose deaths cause Téllez's family much anguish?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Where does Narciso go to find Andrew to send a warning to Ultima?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What does Tony throw up when he is menaced by stronger boys?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Who teaches catechism and hears confession?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Where do Tony, Deborah, and Theresa sleep?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What does Ultima keep on her bedroom shelf?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Who is inside the woven casket?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Where do the Márez brothers settle after leaving Guadalupe?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who comforts Tony after nightmares?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. Who shoots the sheriff in the bus depot cafe?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. What is supposed to stop a witch at the door?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Who confesses to Tony about spying on the girls' bathroom?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. What role does Horse play in the pageant?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. On what do local people blame their unpredictable weather?

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare the roles of Father Byrnes, Miss Maestas, and Ultima in preparing Tony for adulthood.
2. Discuss the importance of the Luna family harvest.
3. Explain why Tony is not harmed by bigger boys.
4. Contrast the beauty of the carp with the excitement of first communion.
5. Discuss Tony's role in blessing others.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |                    |                 |
|--------------------|-----------------|
| 1. endure          | 11. impending   |
| 2. excommunication | 12. curanderas  |
| 3. purge           | 13. yearned     |
| 4. adobe           | 14. irrevocable |
| 5. font            | 15. glistened   |
| 6. atole           | 16. quagmire    |
| 7. sala            | 17. remedy      |
| 8. horde           | 18. cadavers    |
| 9. evaporated      | 19. slake       |
| 10. subside        | 20. relented    |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Sentence Completion (30 points)

- |                    |              |
|--------------------|--------------|
| 1. Good Friday     | 9. cross     |
| 2. Japanese        | 10. llano    |
| 3. girls' bathroom | 11. platform |
| 4. Santa Fe        | 12. herbs    |
| 5. juniper         | 13. Joseph   |
| 6. first communion | 14. blood    |
| 7. grotto          | 15. Vigil    |
| 8. drowning        |              |

#### Part II: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. I  |
| 2. F | 7. H  |
| 3. J | 8. D  |
| 4. A | 9. G  |
| 5. C | 10. E |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. F |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Underlining (20 points)

- he baits his hook with a human liver
- Narciso kisses Ultima's hand
- Ultima warns of evil in the wind
- feeding rabbits
- paces Tony across the bridge
- María sends a message to Miss Maestas
- curses Las Pasturas
- the brothers return home through San Diego
- María weeps
- celebrate a black mass

#### Part II: Matching (20 points)

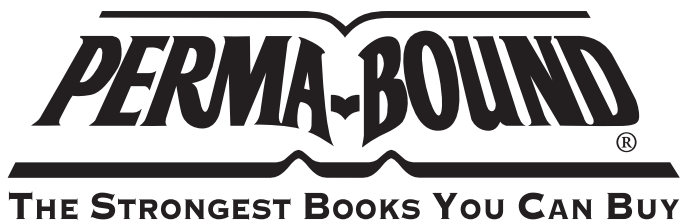
- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. B  |
| 2. F | 7. G  |
| 3. A | 8. I  |
| 4. C | 9. H  |
| 5. J | 10. E |

#### Part III: Short Answer (30 points)

- |                       |             |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1. an Indian          | 9. Santa Fe |
| 2. three Comanches    | 10. Ultima  |
| 3. Rosie's brothel    | 11. Lupito  |
| 4. carrot             | 12. cross   |
| 5. Father Byrnes      | 13. Horse   |
| 6. attic              | 14. Mary    |
| 7. three wax dolls    | 15. bomb    |
| 8. Tenorio's daughter |             |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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