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Bless Me, Ultima
Rudolfo Anaya

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Response Journal

To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Pre-reading

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

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

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

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

Friend: No, what's it about?

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

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

Response Journal

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

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

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

Glossary

Clobberneper – monster

Daubet – believe

Jamze – hill

Moukular – scary

Sargenblary – decrepit

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

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

Catorce

44. By now, we've gotten to know Tony's friends pretty well. Of all of Tony's friends, whom do you think you could befriend? Write a paragraph in which you explain which friend of Tony's you would like to also be your friend. Be sure to include reasons why you think the two of you could get along.
45. Ultima is a remarkable woman. She is a kind woman, a healer, but she will also never back down when she is challenged. Make a list of all the good qualities that Ultima has. Then, choose five (5) that you consider Ultima's very best qualities and write a poem about Ultima, using those five things to describe her.
46. During the holiday play, Bones climbs up into the rafters over the stage and refuses to come down, even when his teacher threatens to send him to the principal's office. Bones is not afraid of the principal. In fact, "he (has been) spanked (by the principal) so many times that it didn't mean anything anymore." This happens quite a lot with people who continually break school rules: they are punished so much that the types of punishment that the school gives, like detention or suspension, don't mean anything. Imagine that you are a school principal and think up a new way to discipline students who break the rules. Create a form of punishment that is fair, but will also have an impact on the student. Write a section for the Rules and Regulations section of your agenda book, explaining this new rule and what will happen if the rule is broken.
47. In Antonio's dream in this chapter, Andrew "said that he would not enter (the brothel) until Antonio had lost (his) innocence." Antonio is shocked, then, when he follows Narciso to the brothel and sees Andrew standing in the doorway there. Antonio begins to wonder where, along the way, he lost his innocence. After all, he "had seen Lupito murdered...had seen Ultima's cure...had seen the men come to hang (Ultima...and) had seen the...golden carp." When, then, did he lose his innocence? Write a short section for a study guide for this book, explaining when, in the past, Antonio lost his innocence.

Veintidos

58. Antonio has now seen three people die, two of them friends, and he is still just a small boy. He feels like he has nothing left in the world. Write a script for a conversation between yourself and Tony where you are offering Tony some comfort for his trauma. Here is a good way to start:

Tony: So many people I care about are gone. What can I do? Why should I suffer like this?

You: Don't be so upset. You see...

59. Tony says that "Ultima tried to teach (him) that the tragic consequences of life can be overcome by the magical strength that resides in the human heart." Write a short paragraph, explaining what Tony means by this statement.
60. As Antonio buries Ultima's owl, he hears the siren of the sheriff's car approaching his house. Police officers are required to write reports every day to describe what happened on a particular call and the actions they took on the call. As the town sheriff, write a police report that details what happened at the Marez house on the night that both Tenorio and Ultima died. Here's a good way to begin:

Official Police Report

Officer Presiding: Sheriff Jones

Date: August 31

Time: 20:00 hours

Description of incident: I arrived on the scene at...