

BLESS ME, ULTIMA

Lexile 570L

Bless Me, Ultima is a **novel** by Rudolfo Anaya. A novel is a book with a long, made-up story. This novel was **published**, or printed, in 1972. It tells the story of Antonio Márez. He is a Mexican-American boy who wants to become a priest someday. He makes friends with Ultima, a healer, when she comes to live with his family in New Mexico. She is unusual, or different. She thinks she can heal people using special plants and magic. *Bless Me, Ultima* is one of the most popular novels by a Mexican-American writer. In 2013, people made a movie based on this novel.

Main Ideas

Bless Me, Ultima takes place in New Mexico during the 1940s. The main **characters**, or people in the story, are Chicano, or Mexican-American. They follow many Chicano **traditions**. Traditions are special ways of thinking and acting from long ago.

The most important character in this story is a boy named Antonio Márez. Antonio is just starting school. His mother wants him to become a **priest**. A priest is the leader of a Catholic church. The Catholic **religion** is very important to Antonio. A religion is a way of thinking about life and death.

Antonio's family has some problems. His parents have different beliefs. They disagree about how and where their family should live. Antonio has three older brothers in the armed forces. They are away from home, fighting in World War II.

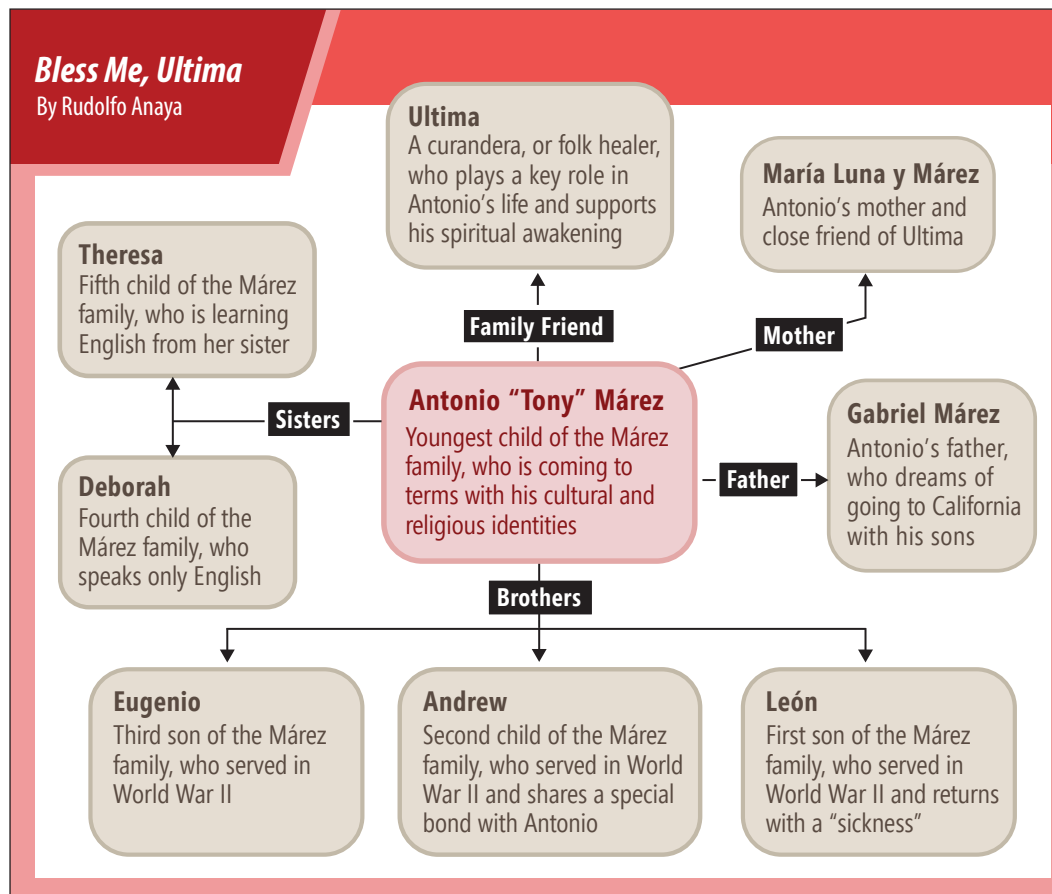
An unusual woman comes to live with Antonio's family. Her name is Ultima. She is a *curadera*, or a healer. She tries to help sick or hurt people. She uses special plants and unusual actions to try to cure them. Many people think she has magical powers. But some people worry that she is a witch.

Summary

When the story begins, Antonio is six years old and worried about starting school. He does not want to leave his mother. He is worried about other things, too. His mother wants him to one day become a priest. But his father wants him to become a *vaquero*, or cowboy.

Antonio feels better when Ultima comes to live with his family. He and Ultima share some happy times. They become close friends. Ultima has a pet owl, which seems to have magical powers.

Antonio faces many problems and troubling events. He sees a mob kill a man. This man fought in a war. Antonio's family cannot agree on whether to stay on their farm or move away.



Brief description of the main characters from the novel *Bless Me, Ultima*.

Antonio's brothers return home. They tease him and cause trouble in town. Antonio begins having strange and scary dreams. One dream is about a river witch. In another dream, he and Ultima die and the world ends.

Antonio goes to school to learn to be a priest. But he has many problems there, too. Some of the other boys tease him because he is Chicano. Some Chicano boys tell Antonio a story about a magical fish. They believe this fish is a god. Antonio knows the story does not agree with Catholic ideas. This upsets him. But he worries the story may be true.

Ultima tries to help people in the town. One man, Lucas, believes he has been put under a spell by witches. Ultima tries to heal him with a strange **ritual**. A ritual is a series of actions. Antonio watches and helps. Ultima seems to help Lucas. At last, Lucas feels better.

The people in town believe three women are witches. These women are sisters. Their father is Tenorio Trementina. When one of the sisters dies, Tenorio blames Ultima. He tries to find Ultima, but fights and kills another man instead.

Antonio keeps going to his classes. At last, he attends **communion**. Communion is a Catholic ritual. Antonio expects to hear God talking to him, but he does not. He loses faith in the Catholic religion. He thinks Ultima may be doing more good in the world than religion.

Another of Tenorio's daughters dies. Tenorio believes Ultima is at fault. He kills Ultima's owl. Then another man kills Tenorio. Antonio tells Ultima what happened. But she knows it is time for her to die, too. She is old and believes she has helped many people. She thinks her work is done.

By the end of the story, Antonio has seen good and evil. He has learned that he must find a balance between these powers. This way, he can become a part of the world and help others.

Importance

The characters in *Bless Me, Ultima* learn about good and evil. They learn about different religions, or ideas about faith. They also struggle with problems while growing up.

Many readers have enjoyed *Bless Me, Ultima*. It is one of the most popular Chicano novels. Rudolfo Anaya has been honored for his work. In 2013, *Bless Me, Ultima* was made into a movie.

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Books

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■ By Mark Dziak

Mark Dziak is a writer of fiction and nonfiction who has produced educational testing and reference materials since 2004.

COMPREHENSION TEST

Multiple-Choice Questions

1. What is a *curadera*?

- A. an old woman
 - B. a magical animal
 - C. a god
 - D. a healer
-

2. Why does Tenorio kill the owl?

- A. He fears his daughters are witches.
 - B. He blames Ultima for his problems.
 - C. He thinks animals are magical.
 - D. He wants Antonio to leave the town.
-

3. Where does Antonio expect to hear God?

- A. at communion
 - B. at Lucas' healing
 - C. in his dreams
 - D. in Ultima's home
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Fill-in-the-Blank Questions

4. Antonio and Ultima are important _____ in the book.

5. Someone in charge of a Catholic church is called a _____.

6. _____ is a way of thinking about life and death.

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