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Lesson Seven

FOCUS: Character Development

Novels trace the development of characters who encounter a series of challenges. Most characters contain a complex balance of virtues and vices. Internal and external forces require characters to question themselves, overcome fears, or reconsider dreams. The protagonist may undergo profound change. A close study of character development maps, in each character, the evolution of motivation, personality, and belief. The tension between a character's strengths and weaknesses keeps the reader guessing about what might happen next and the protagonist's eventual success or failure.

Bless Me, Ultima begins with Antonio wondering what he will become, after he dreams about his birth and the fight over his future. The hopes that others have for him send him rushing out of the house: "I felt a cool sweat on my forehead and I knew I had to run, I had to clear my mind of the dream. . . . The white sun and the fresh air cleansed me" (pp. 9–10). We, too, wonder what will become of Antonio as we read the novel, and the plot of this book is the story of his character's evolution.



Discussion Activities

Chapter *Catorce* highlights Antonio's place among various men in the novel. Discuss how his relationship to these three characters changes in this chapter:

Andrew

Has Andrew become an antagonist for Antonio at this point? How does Andrew fail Antonio, or stand in his way, at a moment of crisis?

Narciso

How does our perception of Narciso change in this chapter? How does his death affect Antonio? What kind of hero has Narciso become?

Tenorio

Tenorio has become a much more prominent antagonist in the novel. Why is he so driven by his vow of revenge? What causes him to suffer? Are there any parallels between Tenorio's and Antonio's grief, or do they suffer for different reasons?



Writing Exercise

Return to Ultima's earlier assertion that "the ways of men are strange, and hard to learn." Ask students to write a paragraph that looks back at this question from the end of Chapter *Catorce*. What has Antonio learned since the beginning of the novel? Are any of the ways of men becoming less confusing to him? Are any becoming more confusing?



Homework

Read Chapters *Quince*, *Dieciséis*, and *Diecisiete* (pp. 177–202). Review the essay on Catholicism as supplemental reading to the narration of Antonio's first Communion. Ask students to consider the significance of this ceremony for Antonio.