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Lesson One

FOCUS: Biography

The author's life can inform and expand the reader's understanding of a novel. One practice of examining a literary work, biographical criticism, looks through the lens of an author's experience. In this lesson, explore the author's life to more fully understand the novel.

Rudolfo Anaya was raised on the edge of the New Mexican plains, surrounded by gullies and hills, mesquite and juniper trees. He spent summers playing along the river and the rest of the year studying at a school in town. Anaya grew up with his sisters. Three older brothers fought overseas in World War II. His father worked on ranches as a cowboy or *vaquero* while his mother stayed home to raise the family. They moved to the barrios of Albuquerque when Anaya was a teenager. Here, he began to explore the pueblos and understand his Native American roots.

Growing up as a Mexican-American in the 1940s and 1950s, Anaya reflects the multicultural and spiritual heritage of New Mexico. He says:

We believe the region is a spiritual corridor; the earth nurtures us, and our deities can be invoked for the good of the community. Here, Native Americans have been saying prayers and keeping the world in balance for thousands of years. It's difficult to make a living here, but beneath the daily struggle there exists a fulfilling spiritual sense. This is a sacred space for us. (Warner Books trade paperback, p. 285).



Discussion Activities

Listen to the CD and read Anaya's interview in the Reader's Guide (pp. 10-11). Have each student recall one interesting thing he or she heard on the CD or read in the interview, and then explain why that detail or statement captured his or her attention. Then have the class collaborate to create a biographical portrait of Anaya. What do we know about him? What kind of man is he? What are the most important events in his life? How might they have motivated him?



Writing Exercise

Have students view images of the New Mexican landscape such as the one in the Reader's Guide. Have students write a poem or a paragraph that captures and describes the emotional tone of this landscape. What kind of place does it appear to be? How does the viewer feel, looking at the photograph?



Homework

Read Chapters *Uno* and *Dos*. What do Antonio's dreams reveal about his personality, his fears and his desires?