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Lesson Ten

FOCUS: What Makes a Book Great?

Great stories articulate and explore the mysteries of our daily lives in the larger context of the human struggle. The writer's voice, style, and use of language inform the plot, characters, and themes. By creating opportunities to learn, imagine, and reflect, a great novel is a work of art that affects many generations of readers, changes lives, challenges assumptions, and breaks new ground.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to make a list of the characteristics of a great book. Put these on the board. What elevates a novel to greatness? Then ask them to discuss, within groups, other books they know that include some of the same characteristics. Do any of these books remind them of *Bless Me, Ultima*?

A great writer can be the voice of a generation. What kind of voice does Anaya create through Antonio? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of children and adolescents? What does this voice tell us about the concerns and dreams of immigrants and first-generation Americans?

Divide the class into groups and have each one choose the most important theme of the novel. Have a spokesperson from each explain the group's decision. Write these themes on the board. Do all the groups agree?

Writing Exercise

Select one or two things that have changed between the beginning and end of the novel. For example, students could choose a character, a conflict, or our understanding of a particular theme. Have them write a paragraph that discusses how and why this has changed over time, and then discuss what they think the significance of this change might be for Antonio and for the reader.

Homework

Students should work on their essays. See the essay topics in the next section. For additional questions, see the Reader's Guide "Discussion Questions." Turn in outlines and/or rough drafts for the next class.