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Lesson Three

FOCUS: Narrative and Point of View

The narrator tells the story with a specific perspective informed by his or her beliefs and experiences. The narrator can be a major or minor character within the novel. The narrator weaves her or his point of view, including ignorance and bias, into the telling of the tale. A first-person narrator participates in the events of the novel using “I.” A distanced narrator (often not a character) does not participate in the events of the story and uses third person (he, she, they) to narrate the story. The distanced narrator can be omniscient, able to read the minds of all characters within the novel. Ultimately, the type of narrator determines the point of view from which the story is told.

Bless Me, Ultima is narrated by Antonio from the first-person point of view. We see and experience all the novel’s events through Antonio’s eyes. Antonio is very young when the story opens, only six years old. His point of view remains limited because he does not fully understand much about the world, especially why people act as they do. Antonio’s narration is at times observant and at times perplexed about what he sees and hears. He narrates the novel in English and Spanish, moving between the two languages while discovering his multicultural identity. He learns about the spirituality of Catholicism from his mother, and the spirituality of nature from Ultima. He inherits the dream of freedom from his father and brothers. His point of view and narration move among these influences, which sometimes conflict.

Discussion Activities

As he tells the story, how does Antonio make sense of the conflicts he encounters? Does he seem to prefer the world and viewpoint of his mother and her brothers, his father and the *vaqueros*, Ultima, or some other influence? What about each of these points of view appeals to Antonio, makes him feel curious, excited, or secure? Which of these influences seems dominant in his eyes? What things in particular are confusing from Antonio’s point of view, either for him or for the reader?

Writing Exercise

Write a paragraph that compares and contrasts Antonio’s life inside the house, with his mother and Ultima, with the life he lives outside the house, first introduced on the riverbank in Chapter *Dos*, and later at his uncle’s. How, if at all, do these two worlds overlap or intersect?

Homework

Read Chapters *Seis*, *Siete*, *Ocho*, and *Nueve*. Ask the students to think about the role of religion in their lives, or in the lives of people to whom they are close. How do God and morality shape Antonio? How does our sense of God and belief in what is right and wrong shape who we are?