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Lesson Five

FOCUS: Figurative Language

Writers often use non-literal language to invite readers to visualize events, view internal conflicts, glimpse social themes, or grasp abstract concepts like beauty, truth, or goodness. An author uses figurative or non-literal language to stretch our imaginations, challenging us to decode the references and meanings bound within images, similes, metaphors, and symbols. Such devices require a reader to participate actively in the novel, as the reader begins to (implicitly or explicitly) interpret non-literal elements of the tale.

Sometimes Anaya describes nature as beautiful and benevolent, while at other times it is frightening and dangerous. This language can reflect a character's mood, or foreshadow events.

Anaya especially favors personification, which occurs when a writer attributes a human characteristic to a concept or object:

“[Ultima] taught me to listen to the mystery of the groaning earth and to feel complete in the fulfillment of its time. My soul grew under her careful guidance . . . I had been afraid of the awful presence of the river, which was the soul of the river” (p. 15).

Here is a vivid image from Antonio's dream in Chapter *Nueve*:

“I cried into the bleak landscape in which I found myself. And in the swirling smoke a flash of lightning struck and out of the thunder a dark figure stepped forth” (p. 71).

Anaya also uses similes throughout his novel:

“A man's destiny must unfold itself like a flower, with only the sun and the earth and water making it blossom” (p. 223).



Discussion Activities

What does “groaning earth” convey? How might a *curandera* view our relationship to the land? Why would Anaya choose to portray the world with human traits?



Writing Exercise

Ask students to search the chapters they have read for vivid images. Have them write a paragraph using personification, simile, and metaphor to describe one of those images. Ask them to read their paragraphs aloud. Are there recurring examples of figurative language? What deeper meaning does this repetition suggest?



Homework

Read *Once, Doce, and Trece*. Why does Antonio's dream at the end of Chapter *Once* bring him peace?