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Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author artfully builds a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and inform character development. The timing of events, from beginning, to middle, to end, can make a novel predictable or riveting. A plot, propelled by a crisis, will reach a climax, and close with a resolution (sometimes called *dénouement*). Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy time while telling the story. A successful author will keep a reader entranced by clever pacing built within the tale, sometimes confounding a simple plot by telling stories within stories.

The plot of *Bless Me, Ultima* unfolds episodically and the tension builds as the reader wonders how Tenorio's attempts to avenge the death of his daughter will play out. Many events in the novel have a dramatic impact on Antonio. His initiation into the often cruel world of adults is marked by his furtive observation of Lupito's murder, his first day of school, and his discovery of Andrew at Rosie's house. By contrast, his summers with Ultima and on his uncles' farm form a rhythm of peace and happiness that counterbalances the discovery of awful truths. Antonio's spiritual development is profoundly affected by the appearance of the golden carp, Ultima's cure of his uncle, his first communion, and Narciso's request that Antonio hear his confession as he dies.

Discussion Activities

Ask students to consider the events of the three chapters they just read. The death of Narciso affects Antonio profoundly, and the tension increases with this murder. Then the brothers return but leave quickly, this time taking Andrew with them. Antonio has been looking forward to his first communion, but the ceremony leaves him feeling disappointed. Invite the class to discuss this series of events. What has changed after the murder of Narciso? Do we feel the novel building to a climax at this point? How does the class imagine that these conflicts and disappointments will be resolved in the end?

Writing Exercise

A few events occur more than once. Examples of these patterns include Antonio's dreams, Ultima's healing rituals, Antonio's direct encounters with death, and the arrival and departure of summer. Select one of these repeating events and write a paragraph that compares and contrasts two or three instances.

Homework

Read *Dieciocho*, *Diecinueve*, and *Veinte*. Why might the boys insist that Antonio play the priest?