

8

Lesson Eight

FOCUS: The Plot Unfolds

The author crafts a plot structure to create expectations, increase suspense, and develop characters. The pacing of events can make a novel either predictable or riveting. Foreshadowing and flashbacks allow the author to defy the constraints of time. Sometimes an author can confound a simple plot by telling stories within stories. In a conventional work of fiction, the peak of the story's conflict—the climax—is followed by the resolution, or denouement, in which the effects of that climactic action are presented.

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 the 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 curing 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 in the novel 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. Have students select one of these repeating events and write a paragraph that compares and contrasts two or three instances.

Homework

Read Chapters *Dieciocho*, *Diecinueve*, and *Veinte* (pp. 203–235). Why might the boys insist that Antonio play the priest?