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Discussion Questions: ***Bless Me, Ultima*** by Rudolfo Anaya

National Endowment for the Arts The Big Read

1. *Bless Me, Ultima* is a coming-of-age story that chronicles several rites of passage for Antonio. Which aspects of his development are universal, and which are particular to his Hispanic Catholic culture?
2. Why does the Márez family ask Ultima to live with them? Why does she think Antonio is special? Despite the conflicts between his parents and the skepticism of their neighbors, why is the family's view of Ultima the one thing upon which they can agree?
3. The novel's action begins near the close of World War II, before Antonio's three soldier-brothers return safely home to New Mexico. How important is the war to the story?
4. What makes Antonio's first day of school so difficult?
5. How does Antonio's perception of Ultima differ from the opinions of those in his town?
6. What do Antonio's dreams reveal about him? How do they change as he matures?
7. The humor in the novel usually comes from moments when the boys are playing or fighting together. What significance is there to the Christmas play, in which Horse plays the Virgin Mary and Antonio plays a shepherd?
8. Often the boys' games lead to violence that parallels the adult world. What happens when they force Antonio to become their priest?
9. How does the legend of the Golden Carp resemble the New Testament story of Jesus Christ, or the Mexican story of the Virgin of Guadalupe?
10. What happens when Antonio finally takes his long-awaited first Communion?
11. Antonio witnesses the deaths of several adults and one of his childhood friends. How does the latter death, especially, affect his sense of the world?
12. At the end of the novel, a radical thought comes to eight-year-old Antonio: Is a new religion possible? What do you think is the answer to his question?

13. How would you answer Antonio's final question: "What dream would form to guide my life as a man?" Does he choose the life of a farmer, vaquero, priest, or something else?
14. In your experience, does the novel reinforce or revise stereotypes of Hispanic culture?