

# Literature of the United States of America: *The Making of Americans*

“We can't build our lives on their dreams.” - Eugene Márez

“I wonder which life I will choose?” -Antonio Márez

(-Rudolfo Anaya, *Bless Me, Ultima*)



## Essential understandings:

The idea of what it means to be “American” is constantly evolving in place and time. The literature of the United States reflects such an evolution. This course will explore American identity--or, *identities*. We will read novels, short stories, poems, and other writings that express the ways things like place, culture, race, class, and gender shape one’s sense of belong in America. By thinking critically about U.S. literature, we will be able to:

(a) better understand how the values that one inherits from their culture shapes one’s own life; (b) become conscious of how assimilation can help or hurt someone’s sense of belonging; (c) examine the roots of our own biases in dealing with one another; and (d) empathize with members of American society who have been excluded or discriminated against--or whom we simply do not understand well--because of their differences.

## overview

An author uses literary techniques to **show** (and not tell) a story. **Close reading** of a text, with a specific focus on **literary techniques** (how the story is told), can help us uncover an author’s purpose for writing a text. Authors may have many hopes for their writing: to foster empathy and understanding, to teach readers specific lessons, to express some experience (personal or communal), or to propel social

change. Thus **close reading** a text reveals layers of the world we might not see in our everyday reality such as hidden relationships, difficult conflicts, beauty that is unique or uncommon, and new ways of thinking about the world and acting in it. Using **close reading** will help us analyze how art can affect society, and how society influences art. We will practice the following skills:

## READING

- Apply information from one text to another
- Analyze the setting and style of a text
- Analyze and synthesize information from multiple sources
- Annotate a text at different levels of significance (Using Notice/Note templates)

## WRITING

- Practice the foundational skills of summary, paraphrase, quotation, and textual commentary
- Draft and revise a personal essay that vividly narrates an experience and shows thoughtful self-analysis
- Construct a multiple-paragraph essay that demonstrates analysis of evidence and synthesis of their ideas
- Develop their own voice as a writer by mastering the elements of academic writing (grammar/mechanics, tone, concision, clarity, flow)

## SPEAKING

- Present for group work and Socratic seminars. Students will become confident speakers and effective leaders.

## guiding question I: How does a writer's style shape their message?

### lessons

- Icebreaker / Respect Agreement
- Summary, Paraphrase, Commentary
- Concrete imagery
- Connecting the particular to the general (synthesis)
- Magical Realism & Anaya's Style
- Apprentice Sentences
- Vocabulary
- Grammar/Mechanics

**group work****Due September 27 or September 28**

In assigned groups, students must choose and complete one of the following:

1. Create a comic or other visual representation of the novel. Must be more than one image / more than one page. Write a paragraph summarizing the novel and explaining how the visual representation relates to or interprets the text.
2. Identify and research the attraction of New Mexico to various artists, including Anaya, D.H. Lawrence, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Prepare posters that present their lives and works in the context of their time in New Mexico, and have students create paintings or stories that imitate the style of these artists or writers. Hold a sidewalk art fair and invite the SOHS community.
3. Identify some of the representations of Mexican-Americans today, both in the national media and in your community. Each member of the group will select one of these representations and prepare a short speech discussing the explicit and implicit messages about Mexican-Americans conveyed by this reference. You give your presentation and lead a discussion for the class about contemporary attitudes toward Latinos in local and national culture.
4. Reread the myth of the Golden Carp that Samuel tells Antonio in Chapter *Nueve*, and the prophecy that Cico tells Antonio in Chapter *Once*. The power of the myth and Antonio's vision of the Golden Carp force him to question his faith in the singular God of Catholicism. Write your own myth about an event of breathtaking beauty. Focus on your skills of descriptive writing to make your reader believe that this phenomenon could really be divine. What is the backstory that explains this beautiful event? Does the story address any issues of sin, justice, fear, punishment, or redemption? Share the myths with a senior group or a local book club.
5. Identify symbols in the text and create a modern soundtrack for the story. Explain how the symbols can be interpreted, and interpret how your song comments on those symbols (1 paragraph per song). Minimum 7 songs.
6. Research some of the herbs and plants mentioned in the novel, both as features of the New Mexican landscape and as elements of traditional

healing methods. If possible, introduce a local healer or shaman to the class and invite that person to give a talk about contemporary natural healers.

7. Research a different tradition of “folk cures” and collect objects as a class “exhibit” (minimum of 4 healing objects). Your group must write a paragraph about each object, comparing and contrasting the object’s qualities and effects with those used by Última. All curative objects must be appropriate to school (nothing unsanitary, illegal, inappropriate, etc.).
8. Create a video of one or more scenes from *Bless Me, Ultima* that captures its magical realist elements. Your group will present the video to the class, and then submit a written analysis of your artistic decisions about how you represented this style in a visual medium such as film.
9. Propose your own creative project based on the novel. This must be approved by Mr. Neilson.

### individual work

- **Due September 4 or September 6: Literary Review:** Students will use the summary/paraphrase/commentary templates covered in class to complete a 1-2 page response that 1) *summarizes* the book they read for summer reading, 2) *paraphrases* the main ideas or lessons of the book, 3) offers your agreement or disagreement with the author (or both), and 4) explains with *why* this book should or should not be worth the reader’s time.
- **SAT and ACT test preparation** (Google classroom). These count toward students’ participation grade.
- **Template Practice & Apprentice Sentences** (Class notebook)
- **Due September 13 and September 14; October 4 and October 5; and October 25 and October 26:**

**Class notebook:** Students will keep a daily notebook that contains: 1) A summary of the day’s lesson/terms, vocabulary words and definitions, and any material covered together in class or with Ms. Deb, 2) Annotations (using Notice/Note signposts) on their readings of the novel as well as other in class readings. 3) all reading response questions (such as comprehension guides and inference questions), journaling, free responses, and any in-class writing not assigned in google classroom.

### assessment

- **September 10 or 11:**

## Socratic Seminar I on “Magical Realism” in *Bless Me, Ultima*

### readings

- **Chapter 1-11:** Rudolfo Anaya. *Bless Me, Ultima*
- *They Say / I Say* - short passages about academic style
- In-class readings connected to *Bless Me, Ultima* and “magical realism”

### essay rubric

**Silver Oak High School**  
11th & 12th Grade Writing Rubric

Criteria	Exceeds Mastery (4/A-Range)	Mastery (3/B-Range)	Approaching Mastery (3/C-Range)	No Credit (1-2/D-F Range)
<b>Thesis, Claim &amp; Controlling Idea</b>	States clear, strong thesis that focuses the writing	States thesis that is maintained throughout writing	States partially developed thesis that is inconsistently maintained	Lacks a thesis or controlling idea to focus the writing
<b>Organization &amp; Structure</b>	-Introduction clearly states and explains the main topic and previews the structure of the paper  -Transitions are varied and show smooth, logical connections  -Conclusion reinforces and expands upon claims made in thesis	-Introduction states and maintains the main topic of the paper  -Transitions show how ideas are connected  -Conclusion restates the thesis	-Introduction states the main topic but does not provide adequate thesis  -Inconsistent transitions  -Conclusion does not tie in completely with thesis	-No clear introduction of main topic or thesis  -Transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent  -Conclusion is lacking or unclear  -Missing one or more intro, body or conclusion
<b>Supporting Evidence &amp; Reasoning</b>	Reasoning is tied to the thesis and fully elaborated throughout the essay with logical examples, details & evidence cited in MLA Format	Reasoning is logical and consistently well-developed with examples, details & evidence (not in correct MLA format)	Reasoning lacks connection to thesis, sufficient examples, details or evidence (not in correct MLA format)	Reasoning and evidence is vague or non-existent (not in correct MLA format)

<b>Mechanics</b>	The writer uses sophisticated sentence structure, which includes proper grammar, punctuation & spelling & conforms to MLA Format	The writer uses adequate sentence structure, which includes attention to grammar, punctuation & spelling and does not conform to MLA format	The writer is inconsistent with sentence structure, grammar, punctuation & spelling and does not conform to MLA format	The writer does not use proper sentence structure, grammar, punctuation & spelling and does not conform to MLA format
<b>Totals</b>	<b><i>/25</i></b>	<b><i>/25</i></b>	<b><i>/25</i></b>	<b><i>/25</i></b>
<b>Style &amp; Tone Commentary</b>				<b>Overall</b>

## guiding question 2: How does one's culture and ancestry shape one's identity?

### lessons

- “Quotation Sandwiches” - How to cite and analyze evidence
- Setting: New Mexico & the Southwest US
- Text connections: Text to Self, Text to Text, Text to World
- Historical connection: Chicano movement and Anaya's context
- Thesis practice: Identifying the conflict using “Who / Wants / But / So”
- Understanding Rubrics
- Writing Workshops

### group work (II)

#### Due October 26:

In your assigned groups, students must choose one different project by the end of the quarter:

1. Create a comic or other visual representation of the novel. Must be more than one image / more than one page. Write a paragraph summarizing the novel and explaining how the visual representation relates to or interprets the text.
2. Identify and research the attraction of New Mexico to various artists, including Anaya, D.H. Lawrence, and Georgia O'Keeffe. Prepare posters that present their lives and works in the context of their time in New Mexico, and have students create paintings or stories that imitate the style of these artists or writers. Hold a sidewalk art fair and invite the community.
3. Identify some of the representations of Mexican-Americans today, both in the national media and in your community. Each member of the group will select one of these representations and prepare a short speech discussing the explicit and implicit messages about Mexican-Americans conveyed by this reference. You give your presentation and lead a discussion for the class about contemporary attitudes toward Latinos in local and national culture.
4. Reread the myth of the Golden Carp that Samuel tells Antonio in Chapter *Nueve*, and the prophecy that Cico tells Antonio in Chapter *Once*. The power of the myth and Antonio's vision of the Golden Carp force him to question his faith in the singular God of Catholicism. Write your own myth about an event of breathtaking beauty. Focus on your

skills of descriptive writing to make your reader believe that this phenomenon could really be divine. What is the backstory that explains this beautiful event? Does the story address any issues of sin, justice, fear, punishment, or redemption? Share the myths with a senior group or a local book club.

5. Identify symbols in the text and create a modern soundtrack for the story. Explain how the symbols can be interpreted, and interpret how your song comments on those symbols. Minimum 7 songs.
6. Research some of the herbs and plants mentioned in the novel, both as features of the New Mexican landscape and as elements of traditional healing methods. Students can present their findings as a poster session, open to the community. If possible, introduce a local healer or shaman to the class and invite that person to give a talk at the poster session about contemporary natural healers.
7. Research a different tradition of “folk cures” and collect objects as a class “exhibit” (minimum of 4 healing objects). Your group must write a paragraph about each object, comparing and contrasting the object’s qualities and effects with those used by Última. All curative objects must be appropriate to school (nothing unsanitary, illegal, inappropriate, etc.).
8. Create a video of one or more scenes from *Bless Me, Ultima* that captures its magical realist elements. Your group will present the video to the class, and then submit a written analysis of your artistic decisions about how you represented this style in a visual medium such as film.

### individual work

- **Your Diamond’s “Facets”** : An artistic brainstorm
- **September 24 and September 25: “Roots and Branches” Essay:** Students will write a personal reflection about what grounds them and how that shapes what they want to achieve/who they want to become. It will a) use concrete imagery and b) connect personal examples/anecdotes to larger issues in the world.
- **Quotation Sandwiches practice**
- **Outline of Literary Analysis Essay #1**
- **Vocabulary**
- **SAT Prep**

### assessment

- **Socratic Seminar II:** Spiritual themes of Anaya’s book



- **Due October 25 or October 26:** *Bless Me, Última*: Literary Analysis Essay #1.

### readings

- **Chapter 12-22:** *Bless Me, Última*, by Rudolfo Anaya.

**rubric**

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<b>Organization &amp; Structure</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Introduction clearly states and explains the main topic and previews the structure of the paper</li> <li>-Transitions are varied and show smooth, logical connections</li> <li>-Conclusion reinforces and expands upon claims made in thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Introduction states and maintains the main topic of the paper</li> <li>-Transitions show how ideas are connected</li> <li>-Conclusion restates the thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Introduction states the main topic but does not provide adequate thesis</li> <li>-Inconsistent transitions</li> <li>-Conclusion does not tie in completely with thesis</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-No clear introduction of main topic or thesis</li> <li>-Transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent</li> <li>-Conclusion is lacking or unclear</li> <li>-Missing one or more intro, body or conclusion</li> </ul>
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