

Bless me, ultima : development of tony's character through advice from

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As children grow older, their minds are filled with many questions. A large portion of these questions are difficult, complicated, and often times unanswerable. Children are left to struggle with them throughout life. They look for answers to these questions anywhere possible, and often they turn to the guidance that adults provide. Adults can provide a foundation from which children can grow, but they can provide only a certain amount of advice to help children deal with life's basic issues; the rest is left for the child to find for themselves. Such is the case in the final chapter of *Bless Me, Ultima*, a novel by Rudolfo Anaya. In this chapter Tony, the main character, receives important insight and very wise advice from his elders. The story shadows Tony as he seeks understanding to his many questions, we follow his spiritual awakening, and follow his search for identity throughout his childhood. Already he has learned much. He has started school, been initiated into the Catholic church through catechism, and has learned much about many of the local native beliefs. But he has also learned of death, hatred, curses, cures, and most importantly he has learned of the supernatural forces behind it all. As children grow, they must develop strength, both a physical strength and an inner strength. An undeveloped child may not have the ability to deal with the challenges that life may throw at them. This strength is gained through experience, knowledge, and the many things that you learn day to day in the process of growing older. In *Bless Me, Ultima*, Ultima reminds Tony of the importance of strength again and again, reinforcing its importance in his mind. On one of these occasions, Ultima tells Tony that " life is filled with sadness when a boy grows to be a man. But as you grow into manhood you must not despair of life, but gather

strength to sustain you." From this Tony learns that it is possible to gain this strength, which is vital in the process of growing older, from all situations, even situations that are possibly thought of as " bad". Ultima is telling Tony that in order to get the most from every situation, you must seize the many things that can be learned from it, instead of looking at it passively. You grow and gain strength with all experiences that you go through. This is evident when Ultima tells Tony " You are growing, and growth is change. Accept the change, make it a part of your strength" and " take life's experiences and build strength from them, not weakness." You cannot learn anything just by simply being told; you must experience things firsthand in order to gain the most from them. How else could you know the taste of chocolate without actually taking a bite of it and feeling it melt in your mouth? Though Tony learned many things from Ultima about strength, he turned to his father, Gabriel, when dealing with questions about his own identity. Tony was having difficulties deciding which side of the family and which way of life to follow, Luna or Marez. Though sometimes it is easy to choose one way or the other, at times it is best in fact not to choose, but rather to develop a new third way, combining the two choices. Tony is told of this third choice many times. For example, Gabriel told his son that " every generation , every man is a part of his past. He cannot escape it, but he may reform the old materials, make something new." From this advice, Tony concludes that " maybe I do not have to be just Marez, or Luna, perhaps I can be both." This is a turning point in the way of Tony's thinking. Rather than being torn between which side of the family fate would lead him, he could blend the two. This revelation led him to a new way of thinking and

eased him of the worries that he had been struggling with for so long. Along the same lines, Tony also concludes that " if the old religion could no longer answer the questions of the children, then perhaps it was time to change it." This solved his dilemma about which religion to follow - the ways of the Catholic church, which he sometimes doubted, or the local native beliefs of the Golden Carp. Bless Me, Ultima follows Tony on his journey to find an understanding of the world. He sought understanding of good and evil, of the Luna and Marez, and of the Golden Carp and Catholicism. One question that he asked his father was why God does not give understanding, and Gabriel's response was that " understanding does not come that easy... Understanding comes with life, as a man grows he sees life and death, he is happy and sad, he works, plays, meets people-sometimes it takes a lifetime to acquire understanding, because in the end understanding simply means having sympathy for people." From this Tony learns that in order to fully understand something, you must be able to feel what it is, have compassion for it, and to share emotion with it. Tony seeks to understand what constitutes good and evil, and asks his father why there is evil in the world. Gabriel responded with " I think most of the things we call evil are not evil at all, it is just that we don't understand those things and so we call them evil. And we fear evil only because we do not understand it." This demonstrates the importance of understanding, for without understanding you cannot be fully informed and therefore you may make false accusations or form false opinions. This is evident in the story when Tenorio believed that Ultima and her magic were of evil doing, when in reality they were only for the better. It was his lack of understanding that led him to believe that Ultima was bad, for if he were

fully informed of her ways and her intentions, he would think the opposite. Yet another thing that Tony learns from his elders is what comprises magic and Ultima's cures. Tony learns that it is Ultima's complete sympathy for others that is the key to healing powers: " Ultima has sympathy for people, and it is so complete that with it she can touch their souls and cure them." It is through her complete sympathy that she can reach out and feel the pain that someone is feeling, and partake in it. Tony feels this for the first time when Ultima used him to help cure Uncle Lucas. Through his sympathy for Uncle Lucas, Tony was able to literally take on part of his Uncle's pains and help rid the sick man of the curse. Tony's father also tells him that " no greater magic can exist... but in the end magic is magic, and one does not explain it so easily. That is why it is magic." From this Tony begins to understand the difference between Ultima's earthly remedies and the unexplainable, more mystical curses and cures. Magic is magic; it is called magic because it is unexplainable and because it is mysterious. If we knew how magic worked then it wouldn't be called magic. Which is yet another thing that Tony learns: some things are meant not to be understood and not meant to be learned. Tony was able to gather advice and wisdom with the help of many of the adults in his life. He was able to reach a peace of mind from which he ended his struggles, and he was even able to obtain a better understanding of those unanswerable questions. From this new frame of mind he was able to walk away from Ultima's deathbed with courage and acceptance. Many of his questions were solved and his struggle between Luna and Marez and good and evil ended. We should all be so lucky.