

TEACHING BLESS ME, ULTIMA  
RELIGIONS

II. OTHER RELIGIOUS AND FOLKLORE BELIEFS

1. animism
2. folk healing
3. shamanism
4. totems
5. burying the placenta

III. MEXICAN BELIEFS AND FOLKLORE

1. La Llorona

The story of la llorona, the wailing woman of the river, is a common one in Mexican folklore and stories of the Southwest. It tells of a beautiful woman who, after bearing three children, discovers that her lover has not been faithful to her. In her shock and pain, the woman kills her children so that her lover will not be able to take them away from her. Her destiny, then, is to roam the countryside at night, crying for her children. Her crime is an unforgivable one, and she will never be allowed any peace. She seeks to draw men's souls to her with her voice, similar to the legends of the Sirens in Greek mythology. People fear her yet are mesmerized by the sound of her wailing and crying.

2. The Virgin of Guadalupe

In 1531, legend has it that a Christian Indian was walking near an Aztec shrine and heard music. He encountered a woman speaking in Nahuatl, an Aztec language. She told him to visit the palace of the archbishop of Mexico at Tlatelolco and tell him that the Virgin Mary wanted a shrine there. After she appeared to people a second time, the shrine was finally built.

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IV. FISH MYTHOLOGY

Fish mythology is a widespread group of stories that comment on their beauty, grace, vibrancy, and life-giving spirit.

1. Christian references

The drawing of a fish is a common Christian sign; it represents the Greek "Ichthus," a word formed by the first letters of "Iesous Christos Theou Huios Sotor"--Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior. Fish live in water, as Christians live by their baptisms.

2. Egyptian references

Some Egyptians believed that a fish swallowed part of Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, when his evil brother Set hacked his body to pieces.

3. Greek, Roman, Hindu and Buddhist references

In Greek myth, the fish was sacred to Aphrodite, goddess of love, and Poseidon, god of the sea. When people worshipped Adonis, they offered a fish to the dead. In Roman myth the fish was sacrificed to Ishtar, Adapa, Ea, and Thammus. In Hindu mythology the fish was one of the avatars (physical forms) of Vishnu. In Buddhism, a fish symbolizes the footprint of the Buddha to show freedom from worldly desires and material wants.

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V. BIBLICAL TERMS

1. The story of Esau and Jacob, and of Jacob's stealing his brother's birthright by taking the father's blessing, may be one you wish to discuss with your students. The title of the novel refers to blessings, and it has been helpful to talk about the concept in general.
2. Anaya refers to "the land of milk and honey" (Exodus 3:8.)
3. In the 8th dream sequence where Tony witnesses the destruction of the world, you may want to have students read part of the Book of Revelation, especially chapters 4-22 (John's vision).

VI. WITCHES

You may wish to review folklore about witches before or during the novel. The following are common beliefs:

1. They sell their souls to the devil.
2. They practice the Black Mass with various sacrifices.
3. They create evil potions made with living things.
4. They perform black (evil) magic to hurt others.
5. They can change their shapes and become different animals.
6. They cannot walk past a cross because its power is too strong.
7. They cannot tolerate hearing the names "Christ" and "Mary" because of their power.
8. They can be killed with a bullet marked with the sign of the cross.

TEACHING BLESS ME, ULTIMA  
 FAMILY CHART  
 MAREZ/LUNA

Answer the following questions about each side of Tony's family and record your answers in the chart below:

1. Where does each family come from?
2. What is the meaning of each family's name?
3. Who were their ancestors?
4. What is each family's temperament?
5. How does each family make a living?
6. How religious is each family?
7. How closely do the relatives get along?
8. How would you characterize the men of each family?
9. What does each family want for Tony's future?

MAREZ

LUNA

1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.