

*Myths, Magic and Miracles of Bless Me, Ultima*  
English 10 Honors

Cultural and historical contexts give birth to the dilemmas and themes at the center of the novel. Studying these contexts and appreciating intricate details of the time and place help readers understand the motivations of the characters.

*Bless Me, Ultima* embraces myths from **New Mexican cultures**. The novel presents myths, magic, and miracles on many levels, drawn from **Spanish** and **Catholic** traditions, as well as from the **native peoples** who lived in New Mexico long before the conquistadors and Catholic priests arrived from Europe. The survival of these myths from various traditions testifies to **New Mexico's multicultural heritage** (identity), borne out of long struggles among disparate peoples who fought for centuries over land, religion, and sovereignty.

At the end of World War II, America modernized rapidly and the *vaquero* culture began to disappear. Mass production drew rural people away from farming to jobs in the cities. The G.I. Bill offered promise of social and geographic mobility by providing college education and housing to returning soldiers. Yet post-war America was also full of threats. The Cold War intensified between the United States and the Soviet Union, as a nuclear arms race escalated international tensions. New Mexico served as a testing and development site for these weapons, shrouded in mystery and secrecy. Like much of the rest of America, New Mexicans struggled to retain cultural traditions while meeting the demands of post-World War II society.

**Group Discussion Questions:**

1. What is a curandera, and what is her role in the pueblo communities of New Mexico? How does this approach to healing compare with your beliefs about illness and healing?
2. This question requires you to do a little digging. Research the history of New Mexico with your group.

Discuss the history of New Mexico as one of both **cultural conflict** and **cultural exchange**. Where do the religious beliefs of Catholic explorers and Native Americans overlap? Where do they diverge?

Record your research notes as well as your group's response to the above questions.