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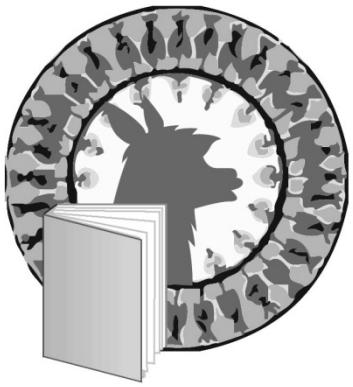


I. Preface to the Novel Resource

As you may have realized, *Bless Me, Ultima* is not technically Latin American literature. It was written in English by an American writer and concerns life in the American state of New Mexico. Furthermore, it is classified as a Chicano novel, which places it in a unique cultural context. However, *Bless Me, Ultima* deals with many motifs and themes that are common to the literature of Latin America, including questions of heritage, cultural identity, and the coexistence of cultures. The novel also takes place on a landscape marked by Latin American history, specifically Spanish colonization and the settlement of Mexico.[1]

A novel as complex as *Bless Me, Ultima* can seem intimidating to analyze. It is the type of fiction that one is tempted to enjoy but not delve into deeply. After all, it is full of contradictions, ambiguities, and multiple points of view. It is also embedded in a very specific historical and cultural background that includes at least three different heritages. The key to analyzing a novel like *Bless Me, Ultima*—and enjoying it—is realizing that there are no right answers to the questions the novel asks. The issues Anaya asks us to consider are so multifaceted that different readers are expected to have varying reactions to and opinions about them. This point is true of any work of literature, whether as complex as *Bless Me, Ultima* or not. Your opinion is valid as long as you can back it up with examples from the text. This resource will help you find your own opinions and gather the evidence to support them.

Before we begin, let us consider the different facets of the novel that we will be exploring. First, we will consider *Bless Me, Ultima* in several different contexts. These include Rudolfo Anaya's life and career, the multicultural history of New Mexico, the Chicano movement in which Anaya took part, and the genres of *Bildungsroman* and magical realism. As we contemplate each context, we should ask ourselves how it influences the narrative. For example, we can ask, "How might Anaya's advocacy of Chicano education have affected his portrayal of Antonio's education?" or "What facets of Native American culture do the novel's spiritual motifs and themes include?"

After its context, we will consider the book's structure and also delve into some review of the plot. Here we can start to become investigators, combing the book for messages that Anaya has encoded in the text. The plot summary is intended not just as a 'cheat sheet' for the story's events, but also as a tool for finding connections between them. You can choose to read the plot summary in different ways; forwards and backwards, scanning the dreams only, or comparing the end of each chapter with the beginning of the next. You may be surprised at what richness you can find using simple approaches like these.

Next stop: a stage and some actors to play upon it.[2] We will examine *Bless Me, Ultima's* setting and the characters that live out their lives there. Settings are important in the novel particularly because Anaya,

[1] USAD Resource Guide, p. 4.

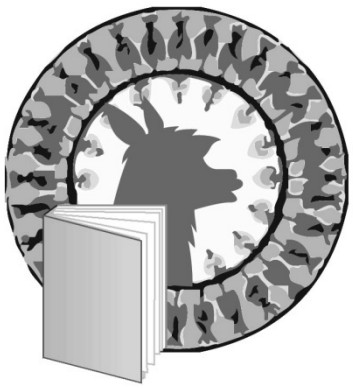
[2] I'm referencing Hamlet, the Great Dane. In the silly play, *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare, Abridged,* he is called "Omelet, the Danish."— Tania

in keeping with the tradition of magical realism, imbues them with symbolism. There are quite a few characters in *Bless Me, Ultima,* which can make a reader gloss over the minor characters' importance. However, remember that Anaya chose to create each character and keep him or her in the plot after many revisions. This means that each character has significance, even if it is minor. Jasón Chávez never even appears, but he acts as a foil for Antonio and thus sheds light upon the reason Antonio's revelations tend to happen in dreams.

This resource's last two sections will take context, structure, plot, setting, characters, and themes, and examine them in various combinations. By examining the novel's major themes and narrative strategies, we can discover how features of the text relate; for example, we can ask, "What might the various dichotomies and the symbolism of the number three have in common?" or "How does Ultima's owl connect to the motif of Catholicism?"

Bless Me, Ultima began in manuscript form as "a boy's adventure novel" and, in many senses, it still is. Analyzing a novel is a sort of adventure in itself, one that takes us through the narrative's maze of possible meanings and even, one could claim, Anaya's mind. I hope you are ready for quite an escapade: Bon voyage!

Tania Asnes



II. Life and Career of Rudolfo Anaya

Does the author matter? Literary critics have been asking themselves this question for decades, with a wide range of responses. Some critics believe that an author's identity is totally irrelevant when analyzing a book, a belief popularized by a mid-20th century movement called The New Criticism. Others, called Historical Critics, view the author's identity as critical to a book's meaning. Rudolfo Anaya has stated in interviews and prefaces that *Bless Me, Ultima* is based on his own childhood in New Mexico. Therefore, it is safe to assume that Anaya's background is relevant to our understanding of the novel.

Objectives

By the time you complete this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions.

- When and where did Anaya grow up?
- Where does *Bless Me, Ultima* fit into Anaya's career as a whole?
- What is Anaya's place in the Chicano literary tradition?

Introduction

If you have the Grand Central Publishing version of *Bless Me, Ultima*, as I do, you have already caught a glimpse of the praise that the novel has received over the years. From coast to coast, from small Mexican-American (**Chicano**[3]) journals to mainstream newspapers, critics have hailed *Bless Me, Ultima* as a classic coming-of-age story and a Chicano cultural masterpiece. "Probably the best-known and most-respected contemporary Chicano fiction," the edition's cover boasts in a quote from *The New York Times.*[4]

If you read the preface to the book, written by Anaya himself, you also know that *Bless Me, Ultima* was Anaya's very first novel, written in lieu of instruction in creative writing (though with the advantage of a higher education). It is fascinating to discover how someone like you or me managed to become 'the grandfather of Chicano literature,' even without training in his field.[5/6] Where did he begin? What inspired him? In this section, you will find the answers to these types of questions and hopefully gain a new perspective on *Bless Me, Ultima.*

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[3] The term "Chicano" can refer to both Mexican-American people and culture in general and also to the activist spirit of El Movimiento, the movement for Mexican-American recognition and rights that took place during the 1960s and 1970s.

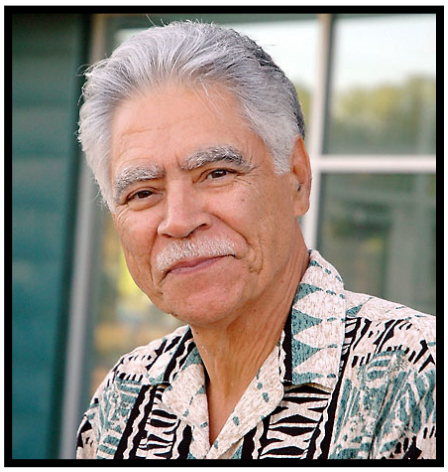
[4] Irony alert: while discussing his selective consumption of mainstream mass media in a 1982 interview, Anaya stated that he does not buy *The New York Times.*

[5] I tried the whole "formal training" thing, enrolling in a workshop led by two authors, Pat Murphy and Karen Fowler. Pat Murphy wrote coming-of-age tales about werewolves. Karen had a thing for Jane Austen. – Daniel

[6] Would a coming-of-age tale about a werewolf be called a *Fullmoonsroman?* – Tania

As you read about Anaya's life and career, keep the contents and characters of *Bless Me, Ultima* in mind. Ask yourself how Anaya's experiences might have influenced his narrative, whether intentionally or not.

Childhood and Education[7]


Rudolfo Anaya

Rudolfo Anaya was born on October 30, 1937, in **Pastura**, New Mexico, the fourth of seven children. Pastura is a small village located on the plains of New Mexico, known in *Bless Me Ultima* as the *llano*. Anaya, like his character Antonio, is a Mexican-American, the son of a vaquero and a devout Catholic from a farming background. His parents, Rafaelita Mares and Martín Anaya, met in a town called **Puerto de Luna**. When Anaya was a baby, his family left Pastura for **Santa Rosa**, a town along the Pecos River. Even though Anaya lacks distinct memories of life in Pastura, he has claimed that the lonely and mystical spirit of the *llano* became embedded in his subconscious. Names from his childhood, such as Mares, Pastura, and Puerto de Luna, as well as the geography of Santa Rosa, made their way into the narrative (Guadalupe is based closely on Santa Rosa).[8] As readers, we can detect Anaya's deep connection to and respect for the land where he was raised.

Anaya drew on his childhood in Santa Rosa for the novel's Mexican-American cultural background. His long-held love of ***cuentos*****,** stories that form the Mexican tradition of storytelling, influenced his narrative style. They also make an appearance in the plot, when Antonio listens to *cuentos* around the fire in El Puerto.[9] Anaya's knowledge of native customs, which he has called "cultural borrowings from the **Pueblo Indian** way of life," informed *Bless Me, Ultima*'s indigenous motifs (x). However, Anaya is quick to explain *that Bless Me, Ultima* is not an exercise in explaining the complexities of New Mexican culture or of Mexican-American identity; rather it is its own world, assembled from a multitude of influences. His writing is autobiographical, but it is not meant to be accurate.

Like Antonio, Anaya spoke Spanish at home and did not learn English until first grade, when he began attending school. Anaya's enthusiasm for learning allowed him to achieve bilingualism and do well in school, but many of his Spanish-speaking classmates did not fare as well. It was also in the Santa Rosa school system that Anaya became aware for the first time of prejudice against Spanish-speaking people like him. Motivated by the socioeconomic changes of the post-war years, Anaya's family relocated to Albuquerque when he was fifteen. Because he was accustomed to village life, Anaya struggled to adapt to the big-city lifestyle. Despite this challenge, Anaya recalls his adolescence as typical.

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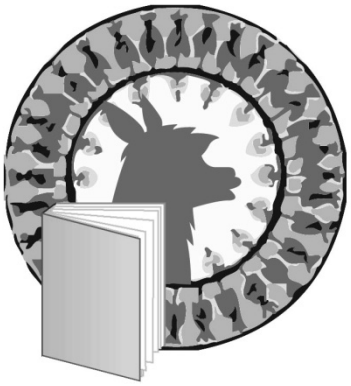
[7] "To me all writing is biographical. It comes out of experience, it comes out of things you have felt, that you have seen, that you have been involved in; people that you have met, that you have bumped into on this bare stage of life or that you have heard about in stories. And all that became the material for *Bless Me, Ultima." – Rudolfo Anaya* (From the 1979 interview entitled, *Myth and the Writer: A Conversation with Rudolfo Anaya* by David Johnson and David Apocada, as reprinted in *Conversations with Rudolfo Anaya*)

[8] Santa Rosa is in the County of Guadalupe, a fact that may have influenced how Anaya named for the novel's fictional town.

[9] Anaya includes his love of cuentos in *Bless Me, Ultima,* when Antonio sits around a fire in El Puerto and listens to them.



IV. Plot and Structure

"Next time learn the whole song." You probably know by now (assuming you've read the novel) that this quote is not from *Bless Me, Ultima,* but it does apply to our analysis. Allow me to explain. There once was an aspiring singer who auditioned for a very famous director. Singers are usually asked to sing 16 bars of a song at an audition. The singer had prepared twice that number—32 bars. She sang 16 bars and, to her surprise, the director asked her to sing 16 more. She did. To her total disbelief, he then asked her to finish the song. The singer sheepishly admitted that she had learned only 32 bars. The director looked her in the eye and—before dismissing her—said, "Next time learn the whole song."

Although the director was impressed with the singer's talent, he could tell she did not have a full grasp of the song. How could she, having reviewed only part of it? When we analyze a novel such as *Bless Me, Ultima,* we must have a firm grasp on the plot from beginning to end. Knowing the plot well gives us a sound basis for interpretation. In order to improve our understanding of *Bless Me, Ultima,* let us review the story's events as well as its structure. We may discover significance that we missed the first time around.

Objectives

By the time you complete this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions.

- What are the major plot points in *Bless Me, Ultima?*
- What type of structure does Anaya use?
- What effect do Antonio's dreams have on the novel's structure?

Introduction

The choice to write a story in **chronological** order may seem like no choice at all. After all, that is how our lives proceed.[26] *Bless Me, Ultima* also proceeds chronologically, from Ultima's arrival to her death. However, many novels do use complex or non-traditional plot structures. A plot may proceed backwards in time. It may proceed chronologically, but from several different characters' viewpoints. It may be arranged in scattered fragments.[27]

[26] That is, unless we have a time machine. I don't have one. You do? Can I have a ride? – Tania

[27] For example, in many of Jodi Picault's novels, there are two parallel chronologies, one in the "present" and the other in the past. This allows the action to begin immediately, with critical exposition filling in the backstory as needed later on. – Daniel

In truth, arranging a plot chronologically is as much a choice as these other options. With so many possibilities in front of him, Anaya must have had good reasons to choose a chronological structure for *Bless Me, Ultima*. What might have been some of these reasons?[28]

- *Bless Me, Ultima* is a *Bildungsroman,* a coming-of-age story. It focuses on Antonio's journey from boyhood into adulthood. By following the passage of time, the plot also follows Antonio's symbolic passage into the adult world. Even though the narrator is an adult Antonio looking back on and also haunted somewhat by his past, the character Antonio is a child, focused on the future and without much of a past to consider.
- A chronological plot structure allows the reader to experience Antonio's daily life on a mundane, and therefore intimate, level. By living day-by-day with Antonio, we experience the revelatory as well as the ordinary, such as his interactions with the other boys. Things are generally revealed to us as slowly, or quickly, as they are to him.
- The structure reinforces Ultima's lesson of being sensitized to life's small and quiet joys and revelations.

Though the novel has a chronological structure, it is not restricted solely to Antonio's daily reality. Because our narrator is the adult Antonio, he knows far more than the child Antonio. Occasionally, he gives us the benefit of his knowledge. For example, in the beginning of the first chapter Antonio describes the vantage point in his small attic room. He explains, "From there I was to see the terrified face of Chávez when he brought the terrible news of the murder of the sheriff; I was to see the rebellion of my brothers against my father…"

Another example is when Ultima first arrives and Antonio whiffs her trademark scent of herbs for the first time. He recalls, "Many years later, long after Ultima was gone and I had grown to be a man, I would awaken sometimes at night and think I caught a scent of her fragrance in the cool-night breeze." In the book's final chapter, the narrator alludes to the "final tragedy" of Ultima's death before we see it carried out. These glimpses into the future permit us a deeper appreciation of seemingly insignificant things, such as a child's attic perch.

"Let me begin at the beginning."

On the first page, Antonio explains that the start of the story is not the beginning of his own life. Rather, it is the beginning of his spiritual transformation, which came with Ultima's arrival.

Antonio's dreams (denoted by this symbol below:) also expand our view of his reality. They allow us to time-travel; they let us transcend the story's order to see the past and the possible future. Anaya uses Antonio's dreams as a **narrative strategy** to broaden our view of the story.

By giving us access to dreams as well as reality, Anaya adds another dimension to the plot; while it is chronological, it also goes beyond chronology into a sort of cosmic space. As we will see in the Narrative Strategies section, Antonio's dreams allow us to see beyond his age and appreciate his child self as someone with a deep understanding of life, even a sage.

[28] Anaya has said that the novel's structure "grew organically" out of the themes with which he was experimenting and was not a conscious choice for him. In other words, what significance the structure has is a byproduct of the book's central ideas. It also means the book can be sold at Whole Foods.

Debate it!

Resolved: That a fragmented structure would better suit *Bless Me, Ultima* than a chronological structure. Take stands, craft arguments and practice presenting with your team.

Bless Me, Ultima begins with Ultima's arrival and ends with her death. One can say these two events bookend the plot. The story is not a complete chronicle of Antonio's life, like an autobiography or a memoir; rather it is the record of his passage into adulthood and his spiritual enlightenment.[29]

One major and climactic event in the book is Antonio's much-awaited first communion. Through chronology, Anaya lets us believe—along with Antonio—that first communion will give Antonio's life a sense of completeness. Instead, communion disappoints Antonio. It is not the answer to his questions, but the catalyst for new ones as well as a new journey. The end of the book is therefore the beginning of this new adventure. On her deathbed, Ultima reassures Antonio that she is not dying but passing into a new life. Similarly, the ending of *Bless Me, Ultima* is also a beginning. Antonio embarks on a new developmental journey just as we run out of pages to read.

Plot Summary: Story in a Hurry . . .

Because of the novel's chronological structure, its summary resembles a timeline. However, we should not let this restrain us; we read the story in order, but we do not need to analyze it this way. I encourage you to approach this plot summary with this in mind. After reading through the summary of each chapter, relate it to the chapters above and see how the story has progressed. What connections do you see?

Uno (1)

- This chapter takes place during the summer when **Antonio** is nearly seven years old.
- **Ultima**'s arrival marks the beginning of a new life for Antonio. She opens his eyes to the wondrous natural world around him.
- Antonio lies in bed and hears his parents discussing Ultima. They call her "la Grande," the Great One, out of respect.
- Ultima[30] is a *curandera,* a healer, who has long served Antonio's father's community of cattle ranchers. World War II has torn the community apart and Ultima is living alone. Ultima had helped Antonio's mother, **María,** and delivered her sons. They decide to invite her to live with them.
- Antonio is nervous about Ultima's arrival because curanderas are often misunderstood to be witches. He repeats a Hail Mary as he falls asleep.

⁂ We enter Antonio's dream. He travels to Las Pasturas, his father's old village on the *llano*, to witness his own birth. As he watches, Antonio cannot see the faces of the mother or the baby, but he sees an old woman in black who tends to them. Antonio's maternal uncles, of the Luna family, declare the baby to be a farmer like them. Then Antonio's paternal uncles, of the Márez

[29] My uncle once asked me, while we were droving in a truck through Southern Chile, if I could identify the moment when I became an adult. Before I could answer, a pigeon flew into our windshield and became no longer alive. – Daniel

[30] Today at the gym, I noticed the brand of the paper towel dispenser in the locker room is called Ultima. To my disappointment, it didn't have any magical powers. – Tania (In Georgia, I once came across a laundry detergent called Barf. Maybe it did have magical powers, and this is what kept it on the market. – Daniel)

Preface to the Art Resource

If you want to get to know a nation, there are many ways to go about it. You can read up on its history, study its geography, and follow its current events. You can learn its customs, appreciate its values, and prepare its traditional dishes. You can soak up its literature, its philosophies, and its politics. You might even journey there yourself to see the sights, smell the smells, taste the food, and talk to the citizens.

All this will help. But if you are also willing to go time traveling, you can take on its art history.

Studying the art history of a particular nation is like traveling from one era to another in a comfortable seat as you watch the changing scenes go by. Instead of an in-flight movie, a slide show of images depicts notable works of art and architecture—and hints at the people and the eras that produced them. In addition to providing ginger ale and pretzels[1], a flight attendant guides you with info and insights. The pilot points out the can't-be-missed attractions as you cruise through time—and they're not just visible from one side of the plane.

Imagine buying the ticket at the departures window. You might feel the same kind of apprehension as you do right now, setting out to survey thirty centuries of art; after all, the task seems monumental. With a region as old and as complex as Mexico, learning about art is not just a study of artists and titles. It is a study of ancient and recent cultures, territories and borders, conquest and acculturation, religions and revolutions. The very identity of this part of the world has been remade several times in its long history, and the visual art available for our viewing documents both the passage of time and the lives of its people.

Parts of this time trip can get a little bumpy, a bit complicated. The best travel experiences are probably equal parts preparation and unexpected surprises. On the next page, we will describe the road ahead in brief and in sequence, so that you can wrap your head around this year's art curriculum topics, and be prepared for the trip ahead. Hopefully, some fascinating surprises await your discovery, like a Mayan codex or an Aztec vessel hiding in the earth.

And at the end of the trip, after the images and the info have brimmed over in your brain, you can add this overview of Mexican art to your knowledge of the country's history and economy, and combine the mix with your study of music, literature, and science for a multidisciplinary perspective on Latin America. After your hard work, you and this region will seem like good acquaintances—or maybe even old amigos.

The Rule of Threes

One of the oldest tricks in the study skills textbook is to break your material into threes, because for some reason the brain tends to remember trios more easily than other groupings. There are all sorts of theories on the whys and wherefores of this mnemonic device. Certainly, it has always appealed to our

[1] Nowadays, the pretzels will probably cost you twenty pesos.—Daniel

internal mythological and archetypal story sense. Consider Goldilocks' bears, the Little Pigs and their building materials, the air of finality that comes with the third of most movie trilogies[2]. Beginning children's writers are taught to plot their picture books in a three-complications-before-the-turning-point structure. The rule of threes seems to be a tested and strong method for sorting information.

Grouping learned content gives you the chance to get your hands on it and begin to familiarize yourself with it. But with massive amounts of info—or info that covers many, many centuries, such as a survey of Mexican art—grouping also provides you with a way to tame the content into manageable portions. Otherwise you might find yourself floundering around in a vast, disorganized land of facts and interpretations.

The rule of threes grouping strategy works well for our purposes in this resource—namely, to discuss the chronology of Mexican art history and cover the assigned works. You can probably create a hundred good groupings to organize this info, but this introductory strategy might serve you well as both a jumping off point as well as a roadmap to the set-up of this guide.

Of the many important dates in Mexican art history, there are two that should leap off the timeline at you, dividing that timeline into three sections:

1521
1910

Those of you already studying the history of Mexico know the significance of these years. The end of the conquest by Spain of Mesoamerica in 1521 shook things up a bit among indigenous cultures, to say the least. And the Mexican Revolution that began in 1910 kicked off a thorough makeover of the country's social and political fabric.

For our purposes, these dates neatly divide the art history of Mexico into three parts:

Art History of Mexico	Mainly Represented By	Examples
Before 1521	indigenous cultures' artwork	ceramic figurines, pottery, pyramids, stelae, relief carvings
Between 1521 and 1910	religious iconography	paintings, sculpture
After 1910	the Muralist movement and the moderns	murals, paintings

We will break this resource guide, then, into three major parts based on these dates. The first part that covers the early centuries (before Mexico was Mexico) will be subdivided into sections on the major early cultures of Mesoamerica (the Olmecs through the Aztecs). The second section will cover the almost-400 year period of colonial rule and the heavy religious influence on art. The third section will overview the most notable art movement in recent Mexican history—the Muralist movement and its representative artists—and other more modern styles.

[2] Trilogies that become quarterts don't have the best track record. — Jar-Jar

Following an overview of the art of each of these time periods, we will detail the assigned works from that era. Get ready for tiny stone figurines, massive monuments to the dead, gothic religious iconography, and stylized political murals.

A final section of this resource will cover the independent research area for 2008-2009: the Palacio Nacional and Diego Rivera's massive mural on the History of Mexico.

Check Your Schema

Before we proceed with a quick overview of artists and titles, you might be curious about what your schema already contains regarding Mexican art. **Schema** can refer to the pattern or organization of your collective knowledge on a topic, stored in your brain and available for access when you need it. Perhaps you've studied art history in school, or maybe you got straight As in middle school World Civilizations, or it could be that you just recognize a name or two from hearing them around. Recognizing how plentiful—or empty—your schema is on a particular topic can be an excellent self-assessment before beginning as hefty a task as studying Mexican art history.

So here are ten questions to pre-assess what you might know already. Answers appear on the next page, and will be detailed throughout this resource guide.

1. The civilization that produced 25-ton stone heads of chiefs or deities was the
   a. Mayans b. Olmecs c. Toltecs d. Zapotecs e. Aztecs

2. The lengthy ceramic tradition—five hundred uninterrupted years—of the Classic period Gulf coast came from the region of
   a. Tenochtitlan b. Nayarit c. Jalisco d. Teotihuacan e. Remojadas

3. The ancient location of the architectural wonder known as the Pyramid of the Sun was
   a. Teotihuacan b. Tikal c. Tonala d. Tenochtitlan e. Michoacan

4. The ancient civilization that founded the city on the site of present-day Mexico City was the
   a. Mayas b. Toltecs c. Zapotecs d. Aztecs e. Olmecs

5. A casta painting involved the theme of
   a. gender b. religion c. race d. age e. morals

6. In the story of the appearance of the Virgin of Guadalupe, Mary creates her own image on a
   a. tilma (cloak) b. rebozo (shawl) c. dress d. shirt

7. The man credited as the first designer and builder of the Metropolitan Cathedral is
   a. Luis de Vega b. Miguel Cabrera c. Manuel Tolsa d. Jose de Alcibar e. Claudio de Arciniega

8. Jose Maria Velasco is best known for his loyalty to the painting genre of
   a. still-lifes b. portraits c. self-portraits d. landscapes e. historical scenes

9. In her paintings, Frida Kahlo frequently repeated the image of
   a. herself b. Diego Rivera c. her family d. sunsets e. volcanoes

10. Of the following artistic techniques, Rufino Tamayo is best known for his use of
    a. detail b. composition c. perspective d. realism e. color

II. Independence to the Revolution of 1910

Things were about to get very complicated in the Spanish colony. For starters, the criollos, a group that typically put up with the monarch's method of rule, were sick of being told what to do. They were ready to assert their growing power and take to the streets (literally) to kick out their colonizers. As ties to Spain grew thinner, New Spain looked for ways to rebel. The result: an independent Mexico—though settling on the details of the new Republic would take many years and nearly as many constitutions.

Objectives

By the time you complete this chapter, you should be able to answer the following questions.

- What were the founding principles of the Republic of Mexico?
- What were some of the domestic and foreign conflicts the new republic faced?
- Who were the major leaders in the period from independence to revolution, and what were their ideologies?

Introduction

Becoming a nation is no easy task. As you've likely witnessed throughout your own examination of the modern world, the founding of a nation typically comes with some struggle (either before or after the founding, or both!). For Mexico, this was no different. Cutting off ties to Spain meant that the new Republic needed to figure out what it represented. What was Mexico? Who were its people? What were its ideology and religious beliefs? All of this played a factor in the early drafting of the Constitution of 1824 and subsequent struggles between liberal and conservative voices in government and society. Furthermore, the legacy of the Spanish colonization left a scar on the fledgling republic—it was a legacy of foreign conquest, one the founders of the new nation hoped to leave behind.

Unfortunately, that would not be the case. Throughout the 19th century, Mexico endured conflicts with both the United States and France. In the end, it would take a dictator (Porfirio Díaz) to kick out the last of the invaders in an attempt to bring Mexico's economy and society into a stable, prosperous time.

But even that wasn't enough for the spirited Mexican people. Order and progress, as per the old cientifico ways, lacked a crucial element that they craved: freedom. This included the freedom of speech, of press, and of religion. Mexico under the reign of Porfirio Díaz was not a Mexico of the people. The Revolution of 1910, its leaders hoped, would restore power to the nation's citizens.

Independent Research Topic: The Hidalgo and Morelos Revolts

The Hidalgo and Morelos revolts marked a shift in relations between New Spain and its colonizer. No longer would **criollos**[125] accept their position in society below that of their Spanish-born rulers. In studying the Hidalgo and Morelos revolts, it is important to recognize the importance of the political revolts in the context of post-Spanish Mexico and the legacy the revolts and their ideals left for Mexico's 19th and 20th century revolutionaries.

New Spain Tries to Grow Up, Leave Home

Educated criollos in Mexico understood the power of the popular revolution

Like any good teenager, by the beginning of the 19th century, New Spain began to test its boundaries. That meant pressing for independence from its colonizer, Spain. The citizens of New Spain were frustrated by wide disparities in wealth between the rich aristocratic elite (Spanish-born officers called **peninsulares**[126]) and commoners living in poverty. Furthermore, after news reached New Spain of the successful revolt of the English colonists to the north and of the French revolution, educated **criollos** grasped the power of popular revolution. Although slowly gaining access to high office, criollos were aware of their lower standing in society—and could now imagine obtaining a better lot through force of arms.

They also knew that Mexican society itself was changing. No longer was there a great disparity between new and old Mexico. Criollos were ever prouder of New Spain's unique attributes and achievements. Naturalists wrote about the diversity and expansiveness of its geography, environment and animal life. Boosted by positive reviews from foreign travelers, criollos in Mexico City knew their capital had grown just as impressive as famous Spanish cities, even the capital Madrid.

There were also ways in which Mexico had literally grown different from Spain. For one, language. The Castilian accent of Spanish conquistadors now incorporated many Indian words from local tribes. The food was obviously different, incorporating new local dietary customs and food indigenous to Mexico (think: rice and beans!).[127] Third, architects throughout New Spain began fusing both local design concepts and traditional Spanish architecture, creating structures still revered in modern-day Mexico. Even criollos took to wearing local clothing and abiding by Mexican customs.

Perhaps most importantly, criollos began to see themselves as holding an important, unique position in the society of New Spain. They called themselves ***americanos*** or ***mexicanos*** to set their own identity apart from that of the Spanish. This would prove useful in the Hidalgo and Morelos revolts.

Setting the Stage for Hidalgo and Morales: the Napoleonic Invasion of Spain

Napoleon. Chances are, when you think of Napoleon Bonaparte, you think of a squat man with a horse who conquered much of Europe. You're not too far off. First General and then Emperor of France, Napoleon invaded a wide swath of countries, including present-day Spain, Italy, Portugal, and (fatefully) even Russia.

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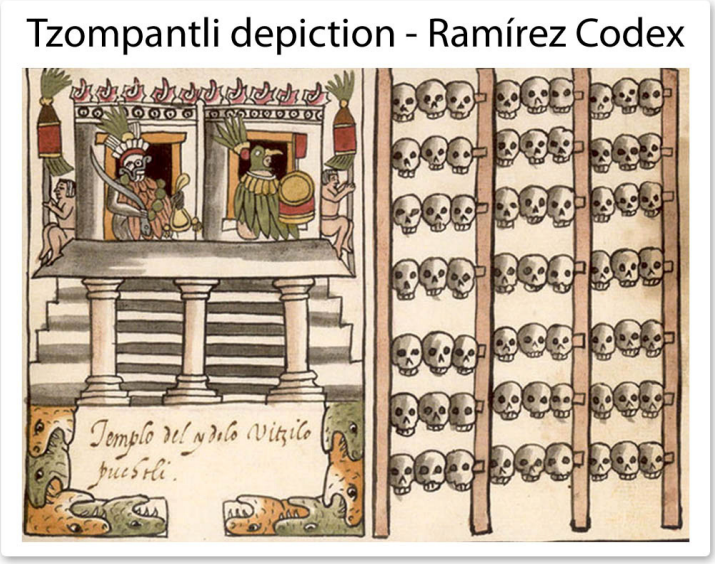
[125] Similar to the English term creole, criollos refers to people of pure Spanish descent born in the Americas. The term *limpieza de sangre*, literally "cleanliness of blood," was commonly used at the time to distinguish how Spanish someone was.

[126] Okay, it's a funny sounding word, but it makes sense—it describes those born on the Iberian Peninsula of Spain.

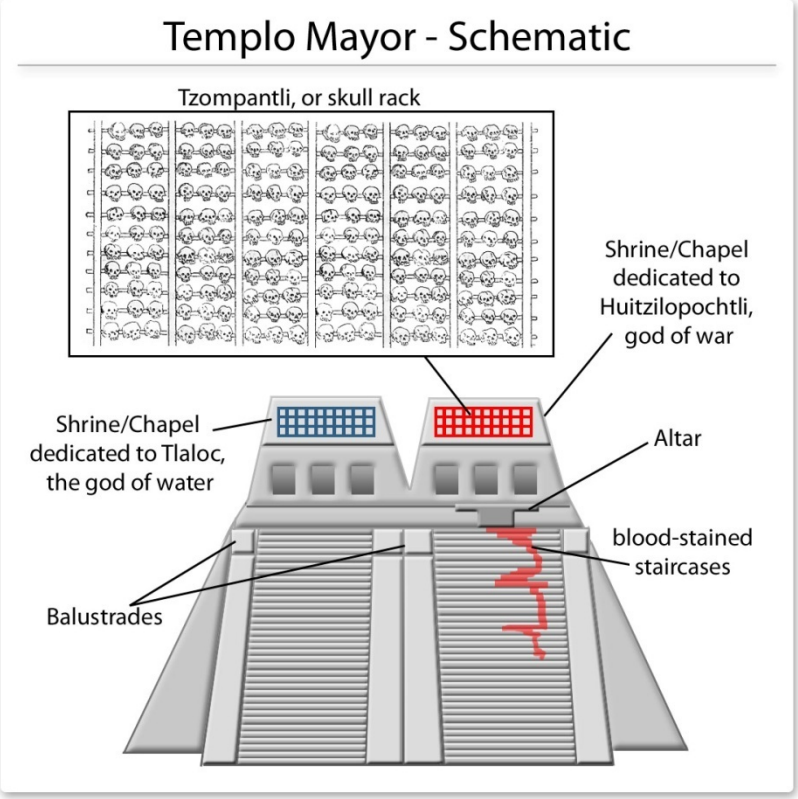
[127] If you've ever eaten Spanish *tapas*, you'll know they differ greatly from the fare at the local Mexican taco stand. – Kaitlin

Religion: Rituals, Gods, and Myths



As we have seen, Tenochtitlán's cityscape included many temples, the giant, pyramidal **Templo Mayor** foremost among them. It was located in the center of the city, inside a special walled compound called the Sacred Precinct. It is thought access to the Sacred Precinct, which contained as many as seventy other temples and shrines, was restricted to priests and nobles except on special occasions.[24]

The Templo Mayor comprised two smaller temples, one devoted to ***Huitzilopochtli***, god of war and patron of the Mexica, and the other devoted to ***Tlaloc***, god of rain and agriculture. Today, the two most famous features of the Templo Mayor are related to the human sacrifices that took place there: blood stained stairs and a **skull rack (*tzompantli*),** which was a type of display case for human skulls.



Human sacrifice seems exotic and barbaric to many people, but to the Aztecs it was an essential part of their **polytheistic** religion. According to Aztec **cosmology**, the gods had sacrificed themselves several times in the process of creating the world. Therefore, mankind owed the gods sacrifices in return. The blood debt to the gods was paid in two ways: **autosacrifice** and **human sacrifice**. Autosacrifice involved bleeding oneself from the ears or other body parts and it was a ritual most every Mexica performed. Priests performed it every night, so that their bodies became scarred and their ears and hair matted with dried blood. Because autosacrifice was nonfatal—a "symbolic death" and not an actual one—it was considered inferior to human sacrifice.

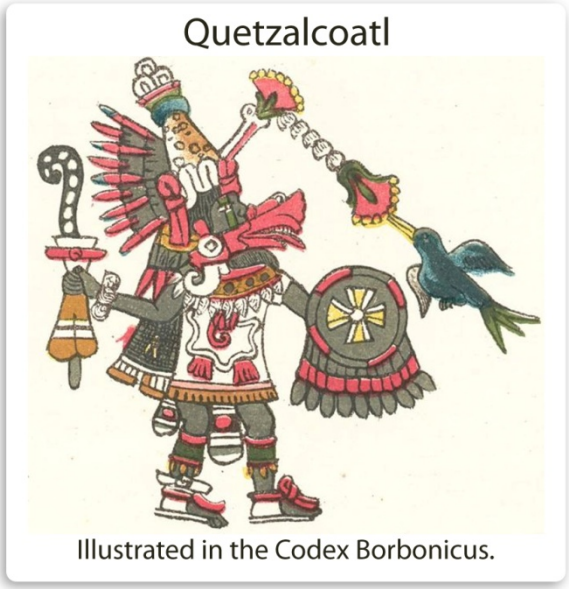
[24] I wonder if they had bouncers to keep out the rabble. – Tania

Human sacrifice in the form of the **heart sacrifice** is one of the most famous Aztec rituals in popular knowledge. Only the highest priests, called fire priests, could perform it. On the steps of a temple, a fire priest would cut open the chest of a captive and tear out his still-beating heart as an offering to the sun. Then the captive would be pushed down the stairs so that his blood stained them and his head would be cut off and placed on the skull rack. Sometimes, human sacrifice would be followed by a **ceremonial feast,** at which parts of the victim's body were eaten. Another post-sacrifice ritual, which was performed in honor of the fertility god, ***Xipe Totec,*** involved priests wearing the victim's flayed skin.

Contrary to the way it might sound, being sacrificed was considered a great honor.[25] Once chosen, the sacrificial victim became a "god impersonator"; a semi-incarnation of a certain deity. He was given a ceremonial bath, dressed to resemble a god and, in the last moments of his life, treated like that god. The "god treatment'" included ceremonial processions, special rituals, and being presented with luxuries such as food and women. The **cannibalistic** meal following the sacrifice was also meant to honor the victim, albeit postmortem.

According to historical accounts, Aztec-born sacrificial victims approached their fate with pride. This willingness to die for one's god is a testament to how essential human sacrifice was to Aztec life.[26] As archaeologist and author Michael E. Smith summarizes it: "Simply put, priests practiced sacrifice, and people put up with sacrifice, because they believed that it was necessary for the continued existence of the universe."[v] In addition, sacrifice was a tactic of intimidation, meant to keep Tenochtitlán's populace and its enemies in line.[27]

Religion was a central part of the Aztecs' lives, as one might imagine from the extent of their rituals. Like many indigenous peoples, they did not separate secular life from religious life; rather, they saw the natural and supernatural worlds as one.[vi] Aztec myth is highly complex and often contradictory, which corresponds to an equal level of complexity in the Aztec system of gods.

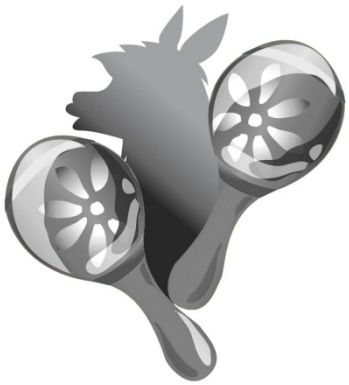


Illustrated in the Codex Borbonicus.

Aztec gods were unlike those of other polytheistic religions, because their forms and personalities were mutable. For example, ***Quetzalcoatl***, the feathered-serpent god of creation (and also one of the most important gods in indigenous Mesoamerica), sometimes took the form of the wind deity, ***Ehecatl***. This type of shape shifting and complex identity was common to all the Aztec gods.

If simplified in a Western mindset, the roster of Aztec gods comprises three categories: **Omnipotent Creator** gods, deities of **Agriculture and Fertility (maize, rain, earth)**, and gods of **War and Sacrifice**.

[25] Personally, I'd prefer something a bit less dramatic, like induction into the National Honor Society, wouldn't you? – Tania
[26] Although it's hard to imagine the fight-or-flight response wouldn't kick in at some point. I'm going to guess that's why the fire priests employed several lesser priests to hold down their captives. – Tania
[27] Public displays of bloodshed tend to do that. – Tania



II. Music of Mexico:
From the Conch Shell Trumpet to the Push-Button Accordion

What on Earth does a conch shell trumpet have in common with a push-button accordion? This is not an unreasonable question. After all, in modern times most of us consider the former a beach souvenir and the latter a tool of the wistful Italian street musician.[53] Like nearly all facets of Latin American culture, Mexican music is a product of a long, rich history and a confluence of cultures. How *do* we get from the conch shell trumpet to the push-button accordion? Read on to find out.

Introduction

In this section, we will examine the development of Mexican music from its indigenous roots to its modern-day manifestations. As you know, there is a great deal of history involved in understanding the evolution of music. If the arts, including music, are a mirror for society, then it is necessary to understand one to understand the other fully. Although the evolution of music occurs as a slow progression, our position in the here and now grants us a bird's-eye view.[54] We can scan the history of music in Mexico for connections; we can see the interconnectedness of customs, of rhythms, and of instruments. As you make your way through the history of Mexican music, play a little game on the subject of interconnectedness. Ask yourself: "What does a *villancico* have in common with a *corrido?*" or "Which instruments in a modern mariachi band would most fascinate an Aztec musician the most?" Not only will this help you better remember the facts, but you may surprise yourself with the correlations you find.

[53] a la *Lady and the Tramp*, the pasta scene. – Tania

[54] Or should I say, a cara cara's-eye view? (The cara cara is the National Bird of Mexico). See, trivia like that can come in handy for starting conversations at parties. For ending conversations, you can launch into a history of the Mexico City Cathedral from 1530 on. – Tania

Pre-Colombian: the Aztecs and the Mayas

Today it is acceptable for a musician to use her skills and creativity for personal exploration and expression. It is also acceptable for a listener to derive pure enjoyment from music. Attend a Justin Timberlake concert and you will find yourself amongst a throng of invigorated, singing, and gyrating people. If some Aztecs or Mayas were to observe this scene, they would assume that Justin Timberlake was either a priest or a god. They, like other native peoples of Latin America, did not conceive of music as a source of enjoyment; to them, it was inseparable from religious worship.

Instruments

Archaeological evidence suggests that the instruments used in indigenous Mexico changed little from the 8th century to the 16th century, when colonial rule began. What's more, instruments used by the various ethnic groups in ancient Mexico were remarkably similar, especially considering how distinct their customs and crafts were. For example, both the Aztecs and the Maya used a wooden slit drum, but to the first it was a *teponaztli* and to the second, a *tunkel.* For the sake of clarity, we will call the instruments by their Aztec (***Nahuatl***) names as we learn about them.

Ancient Mexican Instruments (Aztec names in *Nahuatl*)	
Instrument	**Type**
Idiophones	
teponaztli	wooden slit drum
omichicahuaztli	bone rasp
chicahuaztli	rattle/rain stick
áyotl	turtle shell rasp, played with a stag's antler
ayacachtli	rattle/shaker
tetzilácatl	*gong*
chililitli	copper cymbals
Aerophones	
tlapitzalli	clay, reed, or bone flute
tepuzquiquiztli[55] *or atecocoli*	trumpet / conch shell trumpet
chichtli	clay whistle
huilacapitztli	ocarina (ovular clay flute)
Membranophones	
(pan-, tlapan-) huéhuetl	cylindrical wooden and animal skin drum

Any musician worth her salt takes good care of her instrument, and there are certain "holy grail instruments" in modern-day culture that command musicians' reverence. However, even some people's willingness to spend millions of dollars on a Stradivarius violin cannot match the ancient Mexicans' veneration of their instruments; the *teponaztli* and the *huéhuetl* were considered to be **semi-deities** and were handled as such. Other instruments were thought to be embodiments of emotions. The ancient musicians of Mexico did not use any string instruments, although their warriors made use of the stringed bow and arrow in battle. Instead, they used **idiophones** (vibrating instruments), **aerophones** (instruments that cause the air to vibrate), and **membranophones** (instruments with a vibrating stretched membrane). Often, these instruments were covered in **elaborate carvings** that gave details such as when the instrument was to be used, how it should be used, and even which musician, exactly, should use it.

Among the idiophones used were the *teponaztli,* the *omichicahuaztli,* the *áyotl,* the *chicahuaztli,* and the *ayacachtli.* The ***teponaztli****,* treated as an **idol** as well as an instrument, was a type of **wooden slit drum** usually mounted on a stand. It resembled an elaborately carved hollow barrel with sealed ends. The musician would play it in the manner of a xylophone: an incision shaped like a sideways "H" was carved

[55] According to some sources, the *tepuzquiquiztli* is a conch shell trumpet. According to others, it is a metal trumpet while the *atecocoli* is a conch shell trumpet. Please be aware that USAD categorizes the *tepuzquiquiztli* as a trumpet and an *atecocoli* as a conch shell trumpet.

in the top, creating two keys that produced different pitches when struck with a rubber-tipped mallet.[xxvi] These pitches would be a major second, a minor or major third, or a perfect fourth or fifth apart. Colonial records suggest there may have been three-, four-, and five-keyed *teponaztli*s in addition to the common two-keyed variety.

Teponaztli

The ***omichicahuaztli*** was a notched **rasp** fashioned from **human or animal bone**. As the material used to make it suggests, it was played primarily at memorial ceremonies for the dead. A musician produced higher sounds by scratching the notches faster and lower sounds by scratching them slower. A similar method applied to the ***áyotl,*** a rasp fashioned from a **turtle shell**. A musician would scrape its notched back with a forked stag's antler. A relative of the *omichicahuaztli* was the ***chicahuaztli*** (devoid of the prefix "*omi*," meaning "bone"). It was a slender cylindrical **rattle** made from wood, which is similar to the instrument we know as a **rain stick.** The ***ayacachtli,*** a predecessor of the maraca, was a **gourd** filled with dry seeds or a hollow clay structure filled with stones. Adding to the texture of ancient Mexican music were a **gong** called ***tetzilácatl*** and **copper cymbals** called ***chililitli*** and noisemakers that were tied around the dancers' ankles.

Chicahuaztli

Áyotl

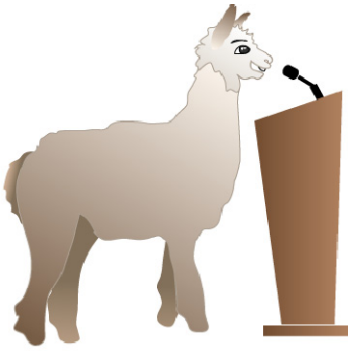
Ancient Mexican musicians used two main aerophones: the ***tlapitzalli*** and the *tepuzquiquiztli* or *atecocole.* The first was a flute with four holes, made of **clay, reed,** or bone, which produced at least five different notes. Researchers who have played ancient *tlapitzallis* have found that they produce intervals quite different from the Western equal temperament system. Rather, they produce "**'in-between' intervals …** Larger than a minor third but smaller than a major third."[xxvii] The ***tepuzquiquiztli*** (sometimes called an ***atecocoli***) was a trumpet made from a **conch shell**. A researcher who played one from the National Museum collection found it easy to produce the following notes: a, d', f#', a', and d."[xxviii]

Chililitli

Aztec musicians used another type of trumpet in addition to the *tlapitzalli,* a two-or-more-foot-long tubular clay or wooden instrument perhaps resembling the Australian aborigine didgeridoo. Additional aerophones used by the ancient Mexicans include a clay whistle called the ***chichtli,*** and an ocarina (ovular clay flute) called the ***huilacapitztli.***

Huéhuetl

The main ancient Mexican membranophone was the ***huéhuetl*** drum, considered a **semi-deity** like the *teponaztli*. Its base was fashioned from the wood of a type of cypress tree called the *ahuehuete* and its membrane from **jaguar skin** or deerskin. Its



Preface: Prompt and Circumstance

You're probably skeptical. How could a slim guide like this one really help you deliver better impromptus? Speaking off the cuff requires thinking on[1] your feet and reacting to new developments on a second-by-second basis. Would you ever get in the car with someone who learned how to drive from a book?[2]

Your skepticism is justified, but don't put this book away yet. True, reading it won't be enough. Succeeding will take practice. My hope, though, is that this guide can help you choose what and how to practice.

On winning teams, nearly everyone succeeds on the impromptu. It doesn't make sense that all nine students on every winning team would happen to have the knack for it. Those that have it should help those who don't; even if no one in a given group has it, practice and a systematic approach make success possible for these teams, year in and out.

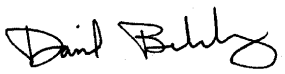
At many competitions, just learning how to finish your impromptu will be enough to put you in medal contention. Many students freeze up long before they reach the minimum ninety seconds.[3] You should be able to win big almost no matter what you say as long as you say it with confidence. And if you can say something that holds together, something different, that might just net you a medal.

Most importantly, though, try to have fun. This is easier said than done, of course, but more important here than anywhere else in the competition—except maybe the interview. All the advice in this resource and all the practice topics DemiDec publishes will contribute far less to your score than staying upbeat to the very last word.

So: when the moment comes, try to look confident. Speak clearly and end your sentences decisively. Say something interesting and important to you. Smile, whenever appropriate. We'll go over these and many other tips together in the coming pages, but you can probably guess that it all comes back to one thing.

Do it often. And make perfect.

Good luck,



Daniel Berdichevsky

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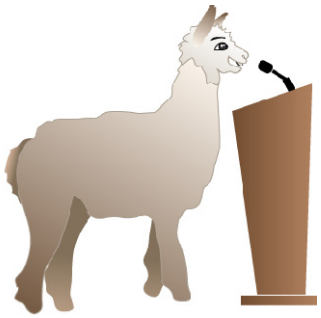
[1] But not with.

[2] In California, you do have to study a book and take a test on it before you can start learning to drive. I failed mine.

[3] That's not so long, really. Odds are good you've had a friend who could ramble at least that much while you put down your phone and ate a sandwich.



Tips and Techniques

Unlike your speeches, these guidelines are in no particular order. (Naturally, I would never admit that in an impromptu—you always want to sound like you have things under control.) They range from tips on how to practice with a pit of fire to advice on what to wear.

Choose Promptly

Part of the challenge is selecting the best topic from the three choices given to you at competition. Do so quickly. If it takes you forty seconds to decide, you'll only have twenty seconds for planning your speech.

Choose Differently

At least one topic will probably seem easy to do—for example, "What are three qualities you admire in a friend?" If you're just getting started as a speaker, don't hesitate to run with it. But if you're feeling confident enough, pick a topic less likely to have been done by other speakers. You'll come across as more original—and daring.

Make Good Use of your Prep Time

You won't have long to prepare. Focus on devising a clever introduction pointing at where you're going, a few specific examples, and a conclusion that does more than just summarize. Those are the two hardest parts to think up on the spot.

Discard the Card

Most competitions permit you to jot down notes on a small index card during your one minute. Use the card to outline your thoughts, but try not to depend on it while speaking. It will impress your judges—and liberate you more than you might think—if you put your card aside or tuck it away, then advance to the front of the room without it. That way you won't be tempted to glance down at it for reassurance.

If you're used to carrying a card, it may be difficult at first to stop—but consider: how much can you actually fit on the card anyway? Your best bet is to write down just a few keywords and then spend the rest of your minute thinking of how you'll actually say some of your most important points.

Or Keep the Card

If you do keep the card, try to write no more than three words or phrases on it, one for each of your main points. Anything more than this and you'll find yourself looking to it for more than it can possibly supply in the heat of the improvisational moment. It becomes a crutch, gives you something to fiddle with, and distracts you from making eye contact with your judges.

About the Author

Tania Asnes is a writer and actress based in New York City. She graduated from Barnard College in 2005 with a B.A. in English (Creative Writing), Summa Cum Laude. As a student, she was inducted into Phi Beta Kappa and into the National Slavic Honor Society, and was named a Harriman Institute at SIPA 2004-2005 Fellow. Tania's most treasured academic achievement was being a Barnard Centennial Scholar. Using the grant she received, Tania retraced her great grandfather's immigration path from Poland to the United States via Russia and China, which included a 6-day trip on the Trans-Siberian railroad. Upon her return, under the advisement of novelist Mary Gordon, Tania wrote a one-woman play based on her experiences, called Green Lights: Moments from Two Lives.

When not busy dodging alpacas (they tend to dart by her desk), Tania enjoys cooking, fashion, watching *Dexter,* and practicing Russian with her husband.

About the Editor

Daniel Berdichevsky founded DemiDec in 1994 following one earthquake, three victories, and two close encounters with law enforcement.

Today, Daniel directs the World Scholar's Cup, a new international academic competition for teams of three. Ten countries competed in 2008. Scholar's Cup has introduced Daniel to various new challenges, including aggressive umbrellas and explosive water boilers. He has learned how to rent buses, how to hire photographers, how to arrange flowers and caterers, and how to book hundreds of hotel rooms at a time. In other words, he is ready to become a wedding planner.

Daniel's literary heroes include Isaac Asimov, Stephen Donaldson and Joss Whedon. He is too fond of television shows with story arcs. His own fiction has been described as magic realist; for better or worse, so has his life.

To contact Daniel, email him at dan@demidec.com, or find him on Facebook.
To learn more about the World Scholar's Cup, check out www.scholarscup.org.