



# Things Fall Apart

by Chinua Achebe

## Teacher's Guide

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## Synopsis

### PART 1

#### Chapter 1

A sturdy, belligerent Ibo tribesman, Okonkwo at age eighteen beats the wrestler Amalinze and demonstrates his manhood to nine local villages. Lacking patience or compassion for less successful men, Okonkwo intends to succeed in the village of Umuofia. His ne'er-do-well, cowardly father Unoka left him no patrimony and set a bad example by adopting a mournful face. During the harvest, he loafed, played his flute, and enjoyed free food and fellowship. His shameless failure contrasts the success of his friend Okoye, the third most important man in the land. At his father's death ten years earlier, Okonkwo is shamed by unpaid debt. In contrast, Okonkwo fends for himself and honors tradition.

#### Chapter 2

Ogbuefi Ezeugo reports that the Mbaino have killed Ogbuefi Udo's wife, who shopped in their market. The Umuofian assembly offers a choice of reprisals: either war or a youth and a virgin in compensation. As the village emissary, Okonkwo returns two days later with a maiden and a 15-year-old boy, Ikemefuna. Village elders award the girl to Ogbuefi Udo and leaves the boy with Okonkwo's family for three years. Ikemefuna does not suspect that his father was one of the murderers of the Umuofian woman.

#### Chapter 3

Okonkwo knows that the oracle Agbala accused Unoka of laziness. When he died of swelling, villagers left him unburied in the Evil Forest. To compensate, Okonkwo borrows 800 seed yams from

Nwakibie and share-crops with a family friend at Isiuzo while supporting his mother and sisters. The first year, drought kills his crop; in the second planting, downpours spoil his seed. Okonkwo refuses to be beaten.

#### Chapter 4

In a council meeting, he humiliates Osugo. When the village elder reprimands Okonkwo for arrogance, he apologizes. Ikemefuna twice tries to escape, but Nwoye's mother encourages him to persevere. After three weeks, he becomes Nwoye's surrogate brother. Okonkwo allows Ikemefuna to accompany him and call him father. In the Week of Peace during Ikemefuna's first month in Umuofia, Okonkwo beats his wife Ojiugo. At dusk, the priest Ezeani fines him. Okonkwo repents inwardly, but appears disrespectful of clan gods. That week, he allows Ikemefuna and Nwoye to help prepare seed yams, then deliberately belittles them.

#### Chapter 5

At the harvest feast, villagers thank the goddess Ani for a good yield. Okonkwo displays his wealth by inviting his in-laws to the feast. He picks a fight with Ekwefi, his second wife. She ridicules his hunting skills; he shoots at her, but does no harm. The second week, Okonkwo talks with Ezinma, his favorite, about the wrestling match.

#### Chapter 6

The match showcases the skill of Maduka, son of Obierika. Ekwefi discloses to the priestess Chielo a fear that Ezinma will die.

#### Chapter 7

For three years, Okonkwo is pleased that Ikemefuna brings out the best in Nwoye. Ogbuefi Ezeudu reports that Ikemefuna must be executed



and advises Okonkwo to take no part. Two days later, the men dress in ceremonial garb to escort Ikemefuna to Mbaino. Someone strikes him with a machete; Okonkwo finishes the execution. Nwoye suspects that his father was the killer.

### Chapter 8

For two days, Okonkwo grieves and wishes that Ezinma had been a son. Okonkwo challenges Obierika for refusing to join the execution party. Obierika accuses Okonkwo of displeasing the earth goddess. Ofoedu announces the death of Ogbuefi Ndulue of Ire village. The news causes the death of his wife, Ozoemena. Obierika mentions a new concern—white people.

### Chapter 9

Okonkwo continues to grieve. The next day, Ezinma, Edwefi's only living child, sickens. Okonkwo holds her over a steaming pot. Her fever breaks; she falls asleep.

### Chapter 10

At a noontime meeting, the *egwugwu*—obviously Okonkwo in disguise—judges a case of wife abuse. The husband, Uzowulu, must beg her to return. The second case involves land.

### Chapter 11

Late at night, Chielo summons Ezinma. Against the priestess' orders, Ekwefi follows toward the farthest village of the clan. The priestess wishes ill luck on her for disobeying. At the sacred caves, the priestess carries Ezinma through a small entrance hole.

### Chapter 12

The next morning, Ezinma sleeps late. Okonkwo conceals that he kept watch over her.

### Chapter 13

The next morning, Ezeudu dies. At the funeral, Okonkwo discharges his gun, which kills the man's sixteen-year-old son. Okonkwo flees; villagers burn his home, slay his animals, and destroy the barn and compound wall. He accepts a seven-year exile to Mbanta, his mother's village.

## PART 2

### Chapter 14

Uncle Uchendu accepts Okonkwo in Mbanta. To Okonkwo's fears that he will never become a clan lord, Uchendu urges him to accept adversity as a natural part of life.

### Chapter 15

In the second year, Obierika reports that white visitors have slain the Abame. Obierika reports on guns, alcohol, and slavery and leaves cowries for Okonkwo.

### Chapter 16

Two years later, Obierika tells of missionaries who convert Umuofians to Christianity, including Nwoye, who is puzzled by the new religion. The missionaries declare that Ibo gods are powerless idols.

### Chapter 17

The rulers of Mbanta offer the missionaries land in the Evil Forest, where smallpox and leprosy victims are buried. Villagers are puzzled that the whites survive. Mr. Kiaga, the group's interpreter, announces their church in Mbanta and headquarters in Umuofia. Uchendu intervenes when Okonkwo attempts to choke his weakling son. Nwoye leaves and never returns.

### Chapter 18

Whites permeate the Ibo with a school and church, government agencies, and a trading post, eroding traditions by admitting outcasts. One outcast kills the sacred python. Okonkwo considers the Umuofians cowards for allowing dishonor. Eighteen months after the missionaries arrive, they celebrate Holy Week. Mr. Kiaga tries to settle local animosity against Okoli for killing the sacred python. Okoli falls ill and dies, leaving the clan no reason for harming Christians.

### Chapter 19

As Okonkwo's last harvest in Mbanta approaches, he longs to return home and sends money for Obierika to build two huts on the old compound. An elder warns of Christianity's menace.

## PART 3

### Chapter 20

At the end of a seven-year exile, Okonkwo builds a bigger barn and huts for two new wives. He does not understand why the Ibo allow the Christian court and prison system. Obierika replies that the change has advanced too far to be stopped.

### Chapter 21

The minister, Mr. Brown, builds a school and hospital. Nwoye, now called Isaac, attends a teacher

training college in Umuru. Okonkwo sadly takes stock of lapsed tribal traditions.

**Chapter 22**

Mr. Brown's replacement, James Smith, wants to halt the killing of twin infants, accept outcasts, eradicate polytheism, and punish village arsonists and murderers. Enoch commits blasphemy by unmasking an egwugwu in public. The tribe fears imminent death. Ajofia calls for the burning of the church.

**Chapter 23**

Two years after the church burns, the District commissioner confers with village elders. Twelve of his officials handcuff Okonkwo and five village spokesmen. For three days, the six refuse food and receive no water or toilet privileges.

**Chapter 24**

Beaten and humiliated after their heads are shaved, under penalty of hanging, the six go free after villagers pay two hundred bags of cowries in fines, plus fifty bags in bribes for the corrupt messenger. Ezinma comforts her father. Okonkwo castigates Egonwanne for "womanish wisdom" in allowing white settlers to destroy traditions, but fails to stir rebellion. Angry and frustrated, he beheads a messenger. Five others escape.

**Chapter 25**

The District Commissioner investigates. The party locates Okonkwo's body dangling from a tree. Tradition forbids that they touch or bury a hanged clansman. Obierika defends the suicide. The District Commissioner silences him and considers a single paragraph summary for his chronicle entitled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

**Timeline**

- ca. 500 B.C. The Nok culture flourishes in the northern highlands of Nigeria.
- ca. 1000 Yoruba dominate Oyo kingdom in southern Nigeria.
- ca. 1300 Kingdom of Kanem-Bornu dominates northern Nigeria and the Saheel.
- 1483 Portuguese establish trading posts in Nigeria.
- 1796 Mungo Park discovers that the Niger River flows eastward.

- 1827 Richard L. Lander locates the delta of the Niger River at the Oil Rivers.
- 1837-1901 Victoria is queen of Great Britain.
- 1851 British take control of Lagos.
- 1861 Northern Nigeria becomes a British colony.
- 1884 The British proclaim the Oil Rivers Protectorate.
- 1887 Louis Gustave Binger explores the upper Niger.
- 1906 Protectorate of Southern Nigeria is established.
- 1914 Northern and Southern Nigeria are merged into one colony.
- 1922 The Office du Niger produces cotton, rice, and farm crops along the Niger River by scientific methods.
- 1954 Nigerian Federation is organized.
- 1960 Nigeria achieves independence from Britain.
- 1963 Nigeria becomes a republic.
- 1964-65 Political and ethnic disputes lead to violence and rioting.
- 1966 January: An Ibo coup overthrows the central government. Political leaders are assassinated.  
July: General Yakubu Gowon seizes power.
- 1967 Biafra, an Ibo-dominated area, is declared independent of Nigeria.
- 1967-70 Nigerian Civil War leaves over a million dead as central government crushes Biafran secession attempt.
- 1975 Gowon is overthrown.
- 1979 Nigeria returns to civilian rule.
- 1983 Nigerian military seizes power.
- 1995 Nigerian government receives international condemnation after it executes political opponents, including Nobel Prize winning author Ken Saro-Wina.
- 1999 General Obasanjo elected President; poll observer Jimmy Carter suggests fraud.
- 2000 Muslim-Christian violence outbreak follows introduction of Sharia (Islamic Law)
- 2003 Obasanjo re-elected.

## Author Sketch

Albert Chinualumogu “Chinua” Achebe is a professional broadcaster, novelist, folklorist, and activist in African causes. He was born on November 16, 1930, the fifth of the six children of Christian parents, Janet N. Iloegbunam



Achebe and Isaiah Okafo, a teacher for the Church Missionary Society, in Ogidi, Nigeria. Achebe's great uncle welcomed Western missionaries to the Niger delta, yet remained faithful to the Ibo gods. When Achebe began to study English at the age of eight, he was expected to prefer Bible reading to Ibo traditions. Of his mixed background he notes, “It does help if you have the kind of temperament I have, which tries to recover something from our past. So you have one foot in the past—my father's tradition—and also one in the present—where you try to interpret the past for the present.”

Graduated from a British high school in Umuahia in 1947, Achebe was confused by the syncretism of local lore and Western expectations. He was especially moved by Joyce Cary's perplexing novel *Mister Johnson*. He countered unflattering portraits of the Ibo with his own picture of tribal mores. Before completing a B. A. in literature from Government College and University College in 1953, he published short fiction in the *University Herald* under Chinua, a shortened form of his given name. In 1954, Achebe began a literary career as producer for the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation and controller of the Eastern region. His creation of Okonkwo, tragic hero of *Things Fall Apart* (1958), illustrates a fear that the Ibo who reject Western traditions are doomed to failure. In 1961, the year Achebe married Christie Chinwe Okoli, he moved to Ikoyi, Lagos, to direct the Voice of Nigeria.

After civil war broke out in 1967, Achebe went underground in Lagos for a month, then rejoined his family in the east. While defending the new nation of Biafra, he wrote columns, children's literature, and fiction to account for Nigeria's identity crisis and the cynical opportunism of invaders. By the end of the 1960s, Achebe had joined Christopher Okigbo in Enugu to establish Citadel

Press, which Achebe later chaired. Dismayed at the Ibo secession movement's demise, he traveled to sympathetic foreign nations to solicit humanitarian aid for Biafra. During the struggle to rescue fellow Nigerians, he refused to write novels, which he considered too insubstantial to express political views on human rights.

In 1970, Achebe, who was an adviser to Heinemann Educational Books, accepted a fellowship at the University of Nigeria and the director's position at Nwamife Publishing in Enugu. The next year, to boost black African publications, he founded *Okike: A Nigerian Journal of New Writing*. A visiting professor of English at the University of Massachusetts from 1972 to 1975 and at the University of Connecticut until 1976, Achebe returned to teach at the University of Nigeria. At the age of 54, he entered a new phase of fiction writing with *Anthills of the Savannah*. He took up his old post at the University of Massachusetts and made public appearances, which brought over twenty honorary degrees. He taught at New York's City College in 1989 and at Dartmouth and Stanford before settling in 1991 at Bard College, where he recovered from partial paralysis from a car accident. A member of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters, Achebe has also served as a member of the Lagos Film Society.

## Critic's Corner

The first and most successful of Achebe's internationally influential pro-African canon, *Things Fall Apart*, initiates a trilogy that encompasses Nigeria's rapid westernization. Stressing the interference of Christianity and British colonizers in tribal affairs and traditions, the novel accounts for the collapse of a stable, long-lived society. The ill-fated protagonist, Okonkwo, whom Achebe identifies as a brash, impulsive African everyman, follows village laws and accommodates change and setbacks with as much aplomb as he can muster. Unfortunately for him and his family, he is not capable of controlling his fiercely competitive ambition and conservatism, which destroy him.

Nurtured on Nigerian folktales, Achebe has edited short works of African tales and, in 1962, founded the Heinemann's “African Writers” series. Perhaps his greatest vote of thanks came in 1986 from his home village, when elders elected him town hall president. He has impacted western culture as the



first black African writer to succeed in both worlds and the strongest international literary voice for the Ibo.

A prolific editor and writer of novels, juvenile fiction, and short stories, Achebe, the touchstone for native Nigerian literature, has won the the Nigerian National Trophy, a Rockefeller travel fellowship, and a UNESCO travel fellowship. Most recently he has received a Jock Campbell-New Statesman award; honorary doctorates from the University of Prince Edward Island, the University of Massachusetts, the University of Sterling, Dartmouth College, the University of Southampton, and the University of Ife; the Commonwealth Poetry Prize; a Neil Gunn fellowship; and the Lotus Award for Afro-Asian Writers.

## Other Works by Chinua Achebe

*No Longer at Ease* (1960)  
*The Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories* (1962)  
*Arrow of God* (1964)  
*A Man of the People* (1966)  
*Chike and the River* (1966)  
*Beware Soul Brother and Other Poems* (1971)  
*How the Leopard Got His Claws* (1972) (with John Iroaganuchi)  
*Girls at War and Other Stories* (1973)  
*Christmas in Biafra and Other Poems* (1973)  
*Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975)  
*The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984)  
*Anthills of the Savannah* (1987)  
*Hopes and Impediments: Selected Essays* (1990)  
*Heinemann Book of Contemporary African Short Stories* (editor, 1992)

## Related Reading

Avi, *The True Confessions of Charlotte Doyle*  
 Karel Capek, *R. U. R.*  
 Joyce Cary, *Mister Johnson*  
 Bryce Courtney, *The Power of One*  
 Isak Dinesen, *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*  
 Paula Fox, *Slave Dancer*  
 William Golding, *Lord of the Flies*  
 Esther Hautzig, *The Endless Steppe*  
 Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston and James Houston, *Farewell to Manzanar*  
 Barbara Kingsolver, *The Poisonwood Bible* and *The Bean Trees*  
 Theodora Kroeber, *Ishi*  
 Jack London, *Call of the Wild*  
 Lois Lowry, *The Giver*  
 Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*

Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman*  
 Alan Paton, *Cry the Beloved Country*  
 Gary Paulsen, *Nightjohn* and *Hatchet*  
 Ayn Rand, *Anthem* and *The Fountainhead*  
 Margaret Walker, *Jubilee*  
 Yoko Kawashima Watkins, *So Far from the Bamboo Grove*  
 Elie Wiesel, *Night*  
 William Butler Yeats, "The Second Coming"  
 Evgeny Zamyatin, *We*

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*Contemporary Literary Criticism. Volume 51*. Detroit: Gale, 1989.  
*Current Biography*. Bronx, N. Y.: H. W. Wilson, 1992.  
 Gikandi, Simon. *Reading Chinua Achebe: Language and Ideology in Fiction*. Portsmouth, N. H.: Heinemann, 1991.  
 "Influences on Achebe," <<http://collaboratory.nunet.net/goals2000/eddy/Achebe/Influences.html>>.  
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 Iyasere, Solomon O. *Understanding Things Fall Apart: Selected Essays and Criticisms*. Whitston Publications, 1998.  
 Kambaji, Christophe Tshikala. *Chinua Achebe*. New York: Vantage Press, 1994.  
 Lindfors, Bernth, ed. *Chinua Achebe*. Oxford: Univ. Press of Mississippi, 1997.  
 Moses, Knolly, "A Dialogue with Chinua Achebe," *Emerge*, December 1992, pp. 11-13.  
 Ogbaa, Kalu. *Gods, Oracles & Divination: Folkways in Chinua Achebe's Novels*. Trenton, N. J.: Africa World, 1992.  
 ————. *Understanding Things Fall Apart*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1999.  
 Ohaeto, Ezenwa. *Chinua Achebe: A Biography*. Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1997.  
 Petersen, Kirsten, et al., eds. *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration*. Portsmouth, N. H.: Heinemann, 1992.  
 Royal, Pat, "Review of *Things Fall Apart*," *School Library Journal*, December 1992, p. 46.  
 Rutherford, A., and K. H. Peterson, eds. *Chinua Achebe: A Celebration. Studies in African Literature*. Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1991.  
 Simola, Raisa. *World Views in Chinua Achebe's Works*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1995.  
*Something About the Author*. Vols. 38 and 40. Detroit: Gale, 1985.  
 Streitfeld, David, "Book Report: Things Come Together," *Washington Post Book World*, June 28, 1998, p. 15.

Winkler, Karen J., "An African Writer at a Crossroads," *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Jan. 12, 1994, pp. A9-A12.

### General Objectives

1. To particularize the setting of the story
2. To debate the differences between two clashing cultures
3. To define the point of view
4. To discuss the theme of thwarted ambition
5. To contrast the roles of male and female characters
6. To analyze the importance of agriculture to village life
7. To characterize the significance of tribalism
8. To establish the author's purpose
9. To examine the Ibo lifestyle from the white point of view
10. To account for the ironic conclusion

### Specific Objectives

1. To describe marriage and funeral traditions
2. To explain the function and significance of Chielo's in Umuofia
3. To analyze the type of people who first convert to Christianity
4. To account for Okonkwo's urge to lead a clan
5. To discuss the relationship between Ezinma and her parents
6. To explain the effect of Ikemefuna's execution
7. To note the importance of the friendship between Okonkwo and Obierika
8. To narrate a ritual killing
9. To cite examples of Okonkwo's wrong-headedness
10. To question the future of Umuofia as an Ibo village

### Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Chinua Achebe's novel, present the following terms and applications:

**Conflict:** the external physical struggle or internal emotional tension between opposing characters or forces in a dramatic action, as demonstrated by Okonkwo's testy relationship with his wife, son, daughter, friends, outsiders, and elders and by the tribe's dismay at the coming of Christianity to the

Ibo. Achebe parallels both the external and internal clashes by relating Okonkwo's personal difficulties to the conflict in Nigeria as a whole. By seeing how he denigrates his son and fumes at the white concept of trial, prison, and execution, it is obvious why he commits suicide when his rigid, unshakable values no longer fit society's workings.

**Fable:** a brief, elementary moral story in verse or prose in which the characters are usually animals or a blend of human and animal demonstrating human foibles, for example, Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*, Antoine St. Exupery's *The Little Prince*, Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus Stories*, Caribbean stories of Anansi the spider, and the medieval *Reynard the Fox*. Like Uncle Remus' illustrative tales, Achebe inserts a didactic story by Ekwefi in Chapter 11 that features tortoise, tortoise's wife, and parrot. The individual animal voices reflect human foibles, such as tortoise's conniving, the bird's curiosity, and the wife's helpfulness. The conclusion characterizes this fable as a *pourquoi* story, which explains why the tortoise's shell looks like a puzzle made up of separate pieces.

**Irony:** an implied discrepancy between what is said or done and what is meant, as displayed by the last paragraph. The cost of human struggle for Okonkwo and his neighbors and family reduces tidily into a paragraph in *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. The words "pacification" and "primitive" lessen the humanity of the Ibo, whose loss of lifestyle and tradition becomes but a footnote to arrogant white outsiders like the District Commissioner. To heighten the contrast between the disparate parties, the author assigns no name to the commissioner, who is a faceless bureaucrat with no compassion for the people he has suppressed and devalued.

### Cross-Curricular Sources

For more information about Africa, yams, cowries, bullying, Anansi fables, black history, and other subjects and issues deriving from the novel, consult these sources:

*African History*, Addison-Wesley  
*Africa: A Lonely Planet Shoestring Guide*, Lonely Planet  
"Anansi and the Wisdom Tree," *World & I*, February 1995, pp. 272-273.

*Anansi Does the Impossible*, Athenaeum  
*Black History Month Resource Book*, Gale Research

Also, consult these web sites:

"Money Cowrie,"

<http://museum.nhm.uga.edu/GSC/jpgs/5cowries.htm>

"Motherland Nigeria,"

<http://www.motherlandnigeria.com/>

## The Importance of Setting

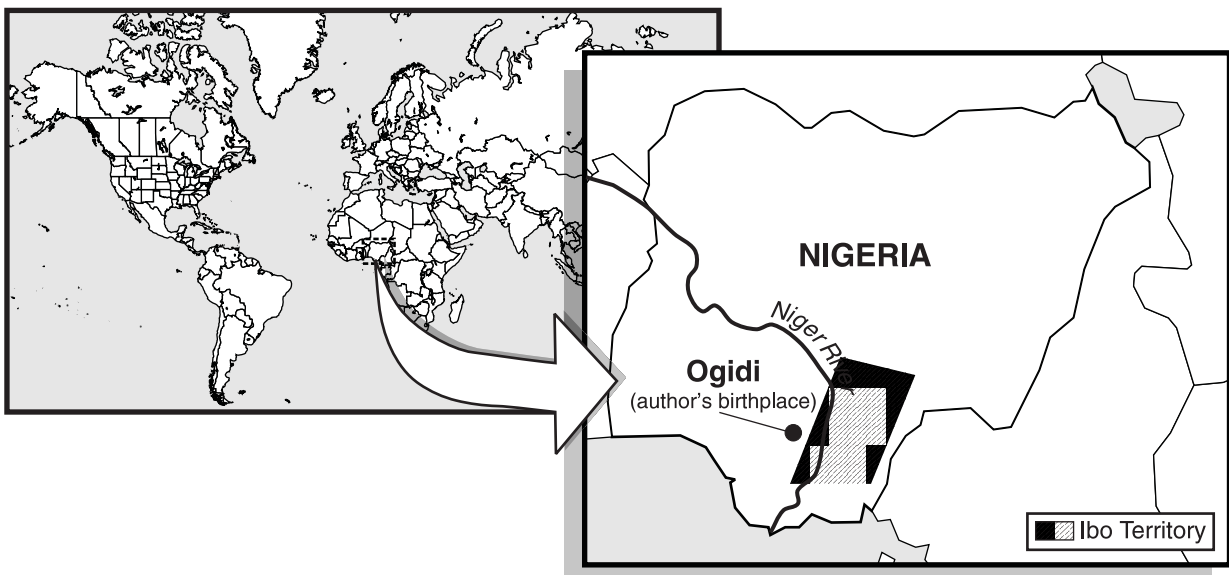
The milieu of *Things Fall Apart* demonstrates a close correspondence between nature and survival. In the opening chapter, Achebe establishes vicissitudes in tribal existence as a function of the harmattan wind, which brings out kites and causes children to sing songs of welcome. To establish status, villagers rate themselves in terms of how many yams they harvest for their barns and how many kola nuts and how much palm wine they can offer guests. For a wedding feast, the Ibo offer up natural gifts—goats, fowl, and native plants to make foo-foo, pottage, egusi soup, and palm wine.

On the negative side, nature permeates most of the villagers' troubles. When Okonkwo scolds his wife, he complains that she kills a tree to provide banana leaves for the feast. After Okoli slays the sacred python, no one is surprised when the perpetrator falls ill and dies. Such retribution is inherent in the natural surroundings, which exact a harsh retribution for disobedience. When the Ibo offer land to the white missionaries, they shuck off

the burial plot that holds the bodies of smallpox and leprosy victims. The Evil Forest carries symbolic importance as a repository for calamities and human distress. In another example, Okonkwo and Ekwefi venture down the path to the priestess's cave, daring the dangers inherent in nature and darkness to watch over their beloved Ezinma.

In Chapter 3, the significance of agriculture to the Ibo economy elevates the yam in importance. When a terrible planting year costs Okonkwo his 800 seed yams, he blames late rains, blazing sun, and scorched greenery. When he studies his fate, he makes the most of frail tendrils by ringing them with sisal leaves as a shade from the sun. By the end of eight weeks of drought, he admits that nature has defeated his hopes for wealth. The stunted harvest of rotting yams becomes a funereal ritual, causing farmers to weep and one victim to hang himself on a tree branch.

The foreshadowing of a hanging prepares the way for Okonkwo's despair and death. In the final paragraphs, when Obierika and the Commissioner locate Okonkwo's corpse hanging from a tree, Obierika explains to the white gathering the Ibo loathing for humans who kill themselves in this fashion. The Commissioner, brusque and burdened by his task, fails to study the meaning of the mode of death, which the Ibo interpret as a violation of nature itself. In the commissioner's final analysis, the event was merely "interesting reading" rather than a tragedy.



## Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* should include these aspects:

### Themes

- discontent
- ambition
- conservatism
- superstition
- vengeance
- power
- rebellion
- violence
- punishment
- self-knowledge
- coercion
- despair
- suicide

### Motifs

- coping with change and loss of traditions
- managing an extended family and compound
- interpreting religious and political struggle
- taking responsibility for actions
- grieving the loss of a son

## Meaning Study

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. Unoka went into an inner room and soon returned with a small wooden disc containing a kola nut, some alligator pepper and a lump of white chalk.  
"I have kola," he announced when he sat down, and passed the disc over to his guest. "Thank you. He who brings kola brings life."  
(Chap. 1, p. 5-6)  
(A standard refreshment at Ibo gatherings in Umuofia, the bitter kola or cola nut, which is derived from trees belonging to the chocolate family, is chewed for its caffeine. The seed, which serves as a heart stimulus, contains from two to five meaty segments.)

2. Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten. (Chap. 1, p. 7)  
(The Ibo comprise one of the largest ethnic populations of Nigeria. Comprised of 200 separate cultural communities in the southeastern portion of the country, they rely on kinship, fraternal societies, and client associations as methods of social cohesion. The Ibo are densely populated and pursue both subsistence and commercial farming.)
3. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. (Chap. 2, p. 13)  
(Quoted from stanza 56 of Alfred Lord Tennyson's In Memoriam, the line "red in tooth and claw" refers to the predatory nature of jungle beasts and of the permeating sense of danger in the jungle. Chinua Achebe uses the fear of nature to heighten the contrast with Okonkwo's fear of failure, which he had conceived in childhood from hearing playmates refer to his father as *agbala*, a woman. As a result, "Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved.")
4. On the third day he asked his second wife, Ekwefi, to roast plantains for him. (Chap. 8, p. 63)  
(A tropical herb native to India, plantain, a common thick-skinned yellow banana, grows in bunches and is cultivated in tropical countries, but it is usually eaten only after thorough cooking. The sweet meat is sliced, rolled in nut meats or spiced coating, and fried in butter or palm oil. It serves as a side dish for meats or sometimes as a sweetened desert fruit.)
5. "I must go home to tap my palm trees for the afternoon," he said. (Chap. 8, p. 69)  
(Palm trees produce a variety of usable products and foodstuffs. The sap, which is removed from the core of the tree through a tap bored high enough not to deplete the natural juices necessary for the growth and nurturance of the plant, produces an aromatic drink called toddy, jaggery, arrack, or vinegar, which can be drunk straight from the tree or fermented. Jaggery is a thickly sweet syrup resembling liquefied brown sugar. Arrack comes from fermented mash and resembles rum.)
6. It is like Dimaragana, who would not lend his knife for cutting up dogmeat because the dog was taboo to him, but offered to use his teeth. (Chap. 8, p. 69)  
(Taboo or tabu is a ban or religious prohibition against an act. It



carries an immediate penalty, which can extend to automatic execution of perpetrator and family and burning of their personal goods. Taboo usually affects the touching, eating, discussing, or seeing a proscribed object or act, such as watching the new moon over the left shoulder or touching a holy person.

Breach of the law often results in a serious threat to tribal welfare, such as sickness or danger from an enemy or hostile deity. Contamination from a taboo act sometimes requires complicated purification rites, some of which cause great pain, expense, and even danger to life and property. One of the most common taboos in all cultures is the incest taboo, which prohibits sexual relations between closely related people. Even though it seems primitive and grounded in ignorance, a system of taboos helps preserve a cultural system through its closely worked pattern of values and norms.)

7. He was a leper, and the polite name for leprosy was "the white skin." (Chap. 8, p. 74) But they have cast you out like lepers (Chap. 18, p. 157)  
(As illustrated by the tribal use of a euphemism to denote a disfiguring and miserable disease, leprosy or Hansen's disease has engendered fear and dread in generations of people. Transmitted by a bacillus and occurring in tropical and subtropical areas of the world, the disease multiplies in skin, producing nodules and lesions that deform facial structures as well as extremities. Large colonies of lepers populate Africa and Asia. Treatment depends on the use of sulfa drugs, which were introduced in the early 1940s by Dr. Guy Henry Faget in a leprosarium in Carville, Louisiana.)
8. He had just sent Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, who was now called Isaac, to the new training college for teachers in Umuru. (Chap. 21, p. 182)  
(Nwoye adopts a biblical name to complete his transformation from pagan tribal worshiper to Christian. Isaac, son of Abraham, was born to his parents late in their marriage. Isaac's name, meaning laughter in Hebrew, refers to his father's reaction to the news that Sarah would bear a son in her old age.  
  
Jehovah, the Hebrew deity, tested Abraham's faith by requiring him to sacrifice Isaac, but Jehovah stopped the execution at the crucial moment and supplied a ram in Isaac's place. From Isaac's union with Rebekah came twin sons, Esau and Jacob, who parted as enemies after Jacob robbed Esau of his father's birthright. In the land of his uncle Laban, Jacob, renamed Israel, fathered the twelve tribes of Israel.)
9. That must not happen in the dominion of our queen, the most powerful ruler in the world. (Chap. 23, p. 194)  
(The reference to Queen Victoria helps establish the time span of

this novel. Because of the mention of the iron horse or automobile, the author makes clear that this story is set late in Victoria's reign, which encompassed over 63 years—from 1837 to 1901. A stickler for duty and patriotism at any cost, Victoria was a strong imperialist and took seriously her obligations to subjugated nations.)

10. He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. (Chap. 25, p. 191)  
(The country of Nigeria, composed of a heterogeneous population speaking English, Hausa, Ibo, and Yoruba, contains three major religious groups— Islam, Christianity, and tribal worship. Inhabited by agricultural workers for 25 centuries, the Ibo population fought hardest the dissolution of village political systems. With the arrival of colonizing groups, the slave trade became a major enricher of white settlers. The British began their dominion in 1861, gradually increasing their sphere of control until they conquered Iboland in 1906.)

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. Describe Okonkwo.  
(At the age of 18, Okonkwo, son of ne'er-do-well Unoka, earns a reputation for prowess in wrestling after throwing Amalinze the Cat. Okonkwo is an impatient, obdurate man—tall, muscular, bushy browed, and wide of nose. He breathes heavily, has a springy walk, and tends to look severe, particularly toward his wives and eight children. A dangerous man with his fists, he is frustrated by a slight stammer. Unlike his stoop-shouldered, bedraggled father, Okonkwo exults in the strictures of his clan, following the taboos and laws to the letter, even when he must suffer penalty and exile. In war, Okonkwo excels, bringing home human heads, from which he drinks his palm-wine. At home, he beats his wives and tyrannizes his children.  
  
A brusque, blunt-spoken man, Okonkwo takes pride in many achievements and strives to succeed to a post as clan dignitary. Before Nwoye accepts the Christian faith, his father is also proud of him, although Okonkwo indicates that Ezinma, even though she is female, would make a worthier son. Okonkwo lets his fiery temper get out of control over small matters, such as a delayed dinner, but Ezinma handles him well by understanding his needs and acceding to his wishes. His other six children are less important to him.)

*A hard worker from his first abysmal year as a farmer, Okonkwo enjoys the daily toil of yam culture, forcing his laggard son to the fields to cultivate their main source of income. He demonstrates his prosperity to fellow clansmen in the size of his red-earth compound, which contains separate huts for each of the three wives as well as a goat shed and chicken hut. In the shrine or medicine house, Okonkwo reveres a personal god and ancestral spirits.*

*Near the end of the novel, Okonkwo has survived difficult times. The fall of his fortune after he accidentally kills a teenaged boy forces him into exile, but he emerges strong and as ambitious as ever—and with two new wives and hopes for the admittance of his sons to society. Driven to bolster lagging tribal traditions, Okonkwo faces the District Commissioner as a member of the tribal embassy. He grudgingly undergoes imprisonment, yet maintains his pride by refusing food. The most daunting experience to challenge him, however, is the realization that he cannot turn the tide of change. Caught in its grasp, he beheads a court messenger in anger and is forced to commit suicide to escape hanging.)*

2. Describe Okonkwo's role in Ikemefuna's death.

*(Doomed from his arrival in Umuofia, Ikemefuna lives with Okonkwo's family, recovers from homesickness, and learns to enjoy his role as foster son and brother to Nwoye. At the end of three years, however, Okonkwo is startled to hear Ezeudu warn, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." According to the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Ikemefuna is condemned to death.*

*The next day, elders from the nine villages of Umuofia assemble to deliver the death sentence. Okonkwo lies to the boy and says that the entourage will escort him home. But Ikemefuna is not deceived. Uneasy about the low-toned discussions of the elders, he perceives that he is not to see his family again.*

*Dressed in goatskins and armed with machetes, the delegation sets out as though "going to a big clan meeting or to pay a visit to a neighboring village." A silence hushes Okonkwo's compound. The men at first feign jollity, but at the edge of Umuofia, they grow silent. Okonkwo withdraws to the rear of the march as the time approaches for the execution. The executioner strikes from behind, but Ikemefuna is able to cry out, "My father, they have killed me!" Okonkwo, to prove his manliness, strikes the boy with his machete.)*

3. Describe Ezinma's journey to the shrine of Agbala.

*(While telling stories of Tortoise to her family, Ezinma and her mother hear the sonorous voice of Chielo, the priestess of Agbala. Okonkwo tries to intervene in the priestess' ritual by*

*explaining that Ezinma is recovering from a serious illness, but Chielo refuses to be put off. She announces that Agbala wants to see Ezinma, whom she calls "my daughter," at the hill shrine. Ekwefi tries to still Ezinma's crying with a piece of dried fish from the kitchen stores.*

*With Ezinma on her back, the old priestess intones a mournful, repetitive chant and walks forth into the darkness. Ekwefi, fearful for her only surviving child, follows, ignoring Chielo's warnings to turn homeward. Doubling back, Chielo takes a round-about path to the caves, chanting the whole way to her god. In the emerging moonlight, Ekwefi sees Chielo with Ezinma on her back disappearing "through a hole hardly big enough to pass a hen."*

*Perched on a rock ledge, Ekwefi waits outside, listening to the priestess's voice from the cave mouth. She starts at the approach of an armed man before realizing that it is Okonkwo. Near dawn, they both await the return of their daughter. The priestess, ignoring Ezinma's parents, returns the child to the compound, placing Ezinma on her bed and leaving without a word.)*

4. Explain the village delegation's response to the District Commissioner.

*(After the burning of the church, five days pass before the District Commissioner summons six of Umuofia's leaders for a conference at his headquarters. At Okonkwo's urging, the men arrive armed with machetes. They disarm themselves before beginning discussions. The District Commissioner interrupts the first speaker and summons twelve men, ostensibly to hear the "story of how Enoch murdered an egwugwu." Suddenly, the Commissioner's men overpower the six Ibo delegates, handcuff them, and lead them to the guardroom.*

*The six natives remain "sullen and silent" to the Commissioner's demand for a penalty of two hundred bags of cowries. The chief messenger shaves the men's heads, but they continue to offer no resistance. They reject food and receive no water and no toilet privileges. On the third day, they break their silence and discuss the humiliation they are undergoing. A messenger overhears talk of murder and beats the men over the head with a stick, instilling hatred in Okonkwo. Rumors spread that the men will be hanged the next day. Villagers raise the ransom; with painful stripes on his back, Okonkwo and the five others return, speaking to no one.)*

5. Describe the scene in which Okonkwo beheads the messenger.

*(The day after Okonkwo and the other delegates are released from jail, villagers assemble for a conference. Okonkwo, in preparation, brings out his war dress and plots vengeance on the whites who have humiliated and dishonored him. He ponders better times, when his tribe did not shrink from war, and blames Egonwanne for "womanish wisdom."*

*At sunrise, the marketplace fills. Okonkwo stands with Obierika and warms to the size of the gathering. Okika speaks of the price of war, yet urges his fellow clansmen to fight the menace that has resulted in the unmasking of an egwugwu and the humiliation of the village delegation. Five court messengers arrive with orders to halt the meeting. Impulsively, Okonkwo draws his machete and beheads the messenger near him in two quick blows. He realizes in an instant that the others do not support his action because they allow the other messengers to escape. Wiping his weapon on the sand, he walks away.)*

**Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)**

6. Describe the place of women in Umuofia. *(Okonkwo's wives, like the other women, are bartered brides, given in marriage at the whim of fathers and other family males when they are little more than children by American standards. The women have no choice in the allotment of their lives. They bear children, cook meals, share family responsibility with the other wives in their compound, and work together to provide cassava and other vegetables for the table, turning them into foo-foo and nourishing soups.*

*Wives appear to have no say in the running of their own lives. They endure the beatings that fall their way, tend their children, observe village taboo, and accept their fate. Still there are two notable exceptions. Ekwefi, who is at first unable to marry Okonkwo because of his poverty, runs away from her husband Anene and gives herself to Okonkwo, who accepts her immediately as a wife. A more autocratic woman among the natives is Chielo, priestess of Agbala, who speaks and moves about as the spirit moves her. Yet these two examples are slim evidence of independence, which is a long way from the grasp of Ibo women.)*

7. Discuss the tradition of the elderly wise man. *(Okonkwo, like other Ibo, follows tradition and listens to the advice of elderly wise men. During the negotiation of his loan from Nwakibie, two wise elders and their sons attend the discussion. After the interval of courtesy passes in which the men share a kola nut and alligator pepper and drink palm-wine, Okonkwo puts his request in simple words: "I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mothers' breasts. If you give me some yam seeds I shall not fail you." Nwakibie compliments the younger man on his ambition and industry and gives him more than he expects—800 yams.*

*In a later scene, Okonkwo returns to his motherland to face exile. His uncle Uchendu calls a family meeting and remarks, "I am an old man and you are all children. I know more about the world than any of you." With patient unfolding, Uchendu reminds Okonkwo that the mother is supreme and that Okonkwo's return to his ancestral mother requires a more cheerful outlook than Okonkwo bears on his face. Uchendu concludes that he, too, has*

*suffered bad fortune, including the loss of 22 of his children. Good fortune, as his song indicates, is guaranteed to no one.)*

8. Contrast the three generations of Okonkwo's family.

*(The son of a wastrel, Okonkwo begins his adult life with an inheritance of debt and shame. He remembers Unoka as a luckless man who lives improvidently and dies unmourned, the victim of swelling who is left to rot in the Evil Forest. Unlike his pathetic father, Okonkwo takes a different path, choosing ambition and courage instead of apathy and dishonor. Okonkwo instills masculine pride in his sons by telling stories of violence and warlike prowess. Yet, it is obvious that words alone cannot inspire the same values in Nwoye, who seems womanish in his desire to shirk the yam field.*

*Okonkwo realizes that he has Ikemefuna to thank for inspiring some pride and diligence into his shiftless twelve-year-old son. Yet, to avoid a display of effeminacy, Okonkwo withholds praise and secretly admires the improvement in Nwoye. After Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo reaps where he has sown, for Nwoye turns from his father's ruthlessness and, to his father's dismay, finds an answer to his searching in Christianity. Not only abandoning tribal ways, Nwoye also gives up his name and adopts the Old Testament name of Isaac.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. Explain why the theme of change is central to the novel.

*(Because the coming of a new philosophy is the cause of Okonkwo's undoing, the theme of change holds the key to the novel's significance. An understanding of the result of social upheaval on native tribesmen explains why Okonkwo is a tragic figure. Unable to adapt to change, he fights back the only way he knows how. A belligerent, bullying man in smaller domestic imbroglios, he cannot combat the weakness that is rendering fellow tribesmen powerless. Without thought of retribution, Okonkwo commits murder, manfully accepting his fate and walking home to hang himself behind his compound.*

*The seeds of Okonkwo's destruction are sown long before the resolution of the plot. He is driven by manly anger to beat his youngest wife for plaiting her hair when she should have been cooking his supper. With no thought to the Week of Peace, he violates a tribal taboo. Still, he redeems himself somewhat by accepting from Ezeani the penalty—"one she-goat, one hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries." Other instances of harsh words and outbursts of temper indicate that Okonkwo confronts adversity by muscular strength and bluster rather than by reason. His unfortunate demise seems inevitable. Whereas weaker tribesmen move quickly toward the new philosophy, the rigidly inflexible form of Okonkwo is doomed to break at the first strong buffet.)*



10. What is Chinua Achebe's attitude toward the changes in Ibo lifestyle?

*(To his credit, the author is able to see both sides of the argument. He demonstrates regard for his ancestral traditions and shores up the reader's admiration for native people with glimpses of happy family life, village loyalty, and illustrative stories that transform beast fables into oral education. By stressing the positive attributes of the Ibo, Achebe appeals to reader empathy, especially after missionaries arrive and begin overthrowing native beliefs one by one. Obviously, the missionary will survive life in the Evil Forest. Enoch is not going to suffer harm from unmasking the egwugwu. No one who violates taboo will endure the vengeance of Agbala because Agbala is a pagan deity.*

*Ironically, Achebe points out that the Oracle, another pagan factor, predicts at the outset that white society will override Ibo custom. There is no suspense. The clan willingly abandons traditional customs in favor of the missionary. Unlike the wrestling match that begins the novel, this match of adversaries is weighted too far in favor of men like Mr. Brown and James Smith. Okonkwo and people like him are destined to lose when European values and technology are pitted against jungle fighters armed only with machetes, superstition, and ignorance.)*

**Questions 11 and 12 (Creative Level)**

11. Compose an animal fable similar to those in the novel. If you need further examples, read Rudyard Kipling's *Just-so Stories*, *Aesop's Fables*, Beatrix Potter's *Peter Rabbit*, or Joel Chandler Harris' *Uncle Remus Stories*.
12. On a bulletin board, compose parallel timelines describing the colonization of Kenya, the Union of South Africa, or Zaire. Annotate each entry with information about changes in tribal structure and traditions, particularly as they affect education, religion, or social cohesion.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art**

1. Using desk-top publishing or other artistic media, design a road sign indicating the Christian school or trading post, a letterhead and business card for the District Commissioner or interpreter Kiaga, a placard or banner honoring the winner of the wrestling match or the new bridegroom, an annotated poster on African fable or folk tale, pamphlets about the uses of the palm or yam, an announcement or television news

item about unrest and tribal warfare on Africa's west coast, a headstone for Ikemefuna or Okonkwo, a schematic drawing of a family compound or ritual death, advertisements for literacy classes or protective amulets, or a schedule of events at the Christian church, including baptism and Holy Week celebrations.

2. Sketch the first flag of Nigeria. Contrast it with flags of Benin, Zaire, Sudan, Egypt, Morocco, Liberia, and Zimbabwe.

**Cinema**

1. View several realistic films and television series on Africa's racial problems, including *Mr. Johnson*, *Zulu*, *Out of Africa*, *Born Free*, *Come Back Africa*, *Daughters of the Dust*, *The Power of One*, and *Sarafina!* Discuss with a small group the weak points of tyranny, dictatorship, socialism, communism, and democracy.

**Economics**

1. Determine the cost of planting yams. Contrast the labor-intensive cultivation of root crops with the production of corn, soy beans, wheat, rice, dal, quinoa, and oats.
2. Illustrate on flash cards elements of the tribal economy, particularly loans, gifts to family and in-laws, bribes, and monetary compensation.
3. Compose an oral report on the use of the cowrie as a monetary unit. Contrast its importance with that of wampum and otekoa strings to east coast American Indians and dentalia shells to California tribes.
4. Explain the function of a bride price. Contrast the Ibo system of betrothal with that of plains Indians, who valued women in the number of horses a suitor could pledge.

**Education**

1. Write a brief address explaining why Nwoye prefers a career in teaching to farming. Discuss Okonkwo's destructive rigidity in forcing his son to follow the family lifestyle.
2. Brainstorm ways of introducing the Ibo to Western customs without violating their traditions. Outline a five-year plan of Olympic



training of athletes, workshops, exchange programs, videos, seminars, and computer training on the internet.

**Geography**

1. Create a mural or web site that introduces the Niger Delta. Describe the lush greenery, water courses, grassland, hills, and coast of traditional Ibo country. List predominant food plants and animals.
2. Sketch an oversized map of the Gold Coast and the Bight of Benin. Note differences in topography, natural resources, and metropolitan growth since each nation has gained independence.

**History and Social Studies**

1. Characterize the qualities of leadership that have helped black Africa rid itself of colonialism.
2. Re-create by time line, webbing, flow chart, mural, or web site the emergence of modern Nigeria. Note the coming of electricity, electronic communication, schools, Western medicine, highways, banking, and world trade.
3. Compose an annotated time line of the colonial period in Africa.

**Language Arts**

1. Compose individual posters explaining the significant words and phrases from the novel, such as calabash, drinking horn, and cassava.
2. Characterize in separate paragraphs the difference between leading, bullying, and coercing. Contrast the methods of Okonkwo, village elders, the District Commissioner, Mr. Brown, Obierika, Chielo, Ezinma, Uchendu, Mr. Kiaga, James Smith, and Ekwefi.
3. Read aloud fables about Anansi the spider. Determine how Anansi's bumbling methods of learning from trial and error reflect Okonkwo's stubbornness and errors in judgment.
4. Consider how the novel would alter if told from the point of view of Ezinma, Ikemefuna, Nwoye, James Smith, the interpreter, Chielo, or

Uncle Uchendu. List facts that would drop from importance or rise in value, such as a bad agricultural year or a priestess' curse.

5. Characterize the writing of other Nigerians, including Timothy Aluko, Elechi Amadi, John Pepper Clark, Cyprian Ekwensi, Onuora Nzekwu, Gabriel Okara, Christopher Okigbo, Ben Okri, Wole Soyinka, and Amos Tutuola.
6. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, and stories about ambition, coercion, loss, and survival.
7. Using examples from *Things Fall Apart*, define out-cast. Contrast the Ibo concept of unacceptable people like Unoka and suicides with such American pejoratives as wino, bag lady, youth gang, skinhead, lunatic fringe, hippie, and derelict.
8. Draw a character web representing the interconnectedness between tribe members, Ofoedu, Ezinma, Ojiugo, Ekwefi, Okonkwo's family, Uncle Uchendu, Ikemefuna, Mbanta villagers, clan lord, Unoka, missionaries, messengers, interpreter, and the District Commissioner. Propose a limited character web for Okonkwo's family. Determine what decisions and behaviors derive from the family's needs and ambitions and which are imposed from the tribe and outside world.
9. List ways that Okonkwo's downfall compares with other literary characters who are victims of change, such as Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*.

**Law**

1. Launch an Internet web site inviting readers to explain the concept of compensation for murder. Explain why a maiden and youth replace one murdered woman. Offer reasons why Ikemefuna fails to guess his fate.
2. Outline methods of protecting wives from spousal abuse and children from neglect. Note the role of gossip, family scolding, and assembly disapproval on Okonkwo's self-esteem.
3. Summarize the change in personal freedoms under tribal law and Christian law. Speculate on Nwoye's contentment at school, far away

from his father's disappointment in the boy's weakness and laziness.

4. Recap the creation of the United Nations. List organizations that aid developing nations, particularly UNICEF and WHO.

**Music**

1. Study the words to "N'Kosi sikelel'i Afrika," the national anthem of South Africa. Determine why it is popular among people who want to preserve pride and tradition.

**Psychology**

1. Make contrasting chalkboard definitions of bullying, competitiveness, guilt, treachery, coercion, compensation, and suicide. Explain how the terms define the conflicting values and actions of major characters.
2. Determine what factors cause Okonkwo to wrestle, beat his wife, belittle his son, shoot an innocent boy, murder his foster son, boast, build a bigger barn and huts for new wives, drink from a skull, and sulk.
3. List causes and symptoms of strain on Okonkwo. Suggest some short-term countermeasures to frustration and stress, such as sleep, outdoor exercise, games and sports, singing, family activities, travel, and changes in daily routine.
4. Compose a short speech in which you describe how violence, paranoia, guilt, proselytizing, change, and loss have altered the tribe's life, compromised the nation's history and pride, and lessened chances of survival.

**Religion**

1. Make flash cards illustrating these concepts: convert, adherent, Isaac, idolatrous, Holy Trinity, snake priest, desecrate, abomination, oracle, atone, evangelism, zeal, emanation, prophet of Baal, egwugwu, sacrament, seeds sown on rocky soil, heathen, the Lord's table, holy war, and wheat and tares.
2. Examine the events of Holy Week and isolate rituals that would disgust or shock the Ibo, such as references to bread and wine as flesh and blood of Christ and veneration of a degraded, mutilated savior.

**Science and Health**

1. List the dangers of bullying, vengeance, and coercion. Explain why Okonkwo earns a bad reputation for his unbridled pride, bad temper, and acts of attention-getting and violence. Account for the importance of one man's emotional decline on the welfare of the whole tribe.
2. Compose a textbook or encyclopedia entry on spiritual healing. Discuss elements of Ezinma's rapid cure after a night at the priestess's cave.
3. Describe suicide by hanging. Consider why Okonkwo chooses this quick method of ending his despair and shame.
4. Discuss how health contributes to the isolation of outcasts. Surmise why the Ibo bury smallpox and leprosy victims in a plot apart from other burials. Comment on their fear of twins.

**Student Involvement Activities**

1. Draw a large topographical map of Africa. Indicate the location of various tribes and language groups. Note racial and religious mix as well as colonization by European nations, especially the British. Emphasize the area populated by the Ibo. Where possible, include census figures to bolster your research. For easy reference, consult the Lonely Planet guide to Africa.
2. Make a wall chart summarizing the traditions and social institutions of the Ibo. Comment on the connection between religion and marriage customs as well as religion, parenthood, and health care. Explain how a male villager rises in status. Show how the tribe governed itself internally before outside intervention altered the system.
3. Compose an additional chapter explaining how Ezinma copes with her brother's departure and father's suicide. Add information about her upcoming marriage and the establishment of her own family. Summarize what she will tell her children about their grandfather.

4. Write a report on the spread of British colonies during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Explain the phrase, "The sun never sets on the British Empire." Comment on Queen Victoria's role as Empress.
5. Organize a debate in which you decide whether Okonkwo is a hero, villain, or everyman. Begin with clear definitions and establish how he fits each one. Cite lines from the novel to substantiate your beliefs.
6. Make a list of twenty similes, which are liberally sprinkled throughout the text, e. g. "There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders." Comment on the information each poetic figure adds to the meaning of the passage in which it appears.
7. Read a segment of George Orwell's autobiographical work *Burma Days*, particularly his famous chapter "Shooting an Elephant." Report to the class your findings concerning the evils of colonialism from the point of view of a foreign police officer who wants to look good in front of natives.
8. Reread descriptive passages, then sketch the layout of the village of Umuofia. Show at least one compound in detail. Note paths that lead to the Evil Forest, stream, gardens, playgrounds, trading post, and other essential segments of the area.
9. Compose a suitable epitaph for Okonkwo. Stress his ideals and strengths, particularly his desire to rise above his father's weaknesses. Make a similar epitaph for Ikemefuna and the slain messenger.
10. Read segments of Isak Dinesen's *Out of Africa* and *Shadows on the Grass*. Compare her descriptions of the beauty of Kenya with Chinua Achebe's comments on Nigeria. Include both flora and fauna in your comparison.

## Alternate Assessment

1. List examples of teamwork, fear, insecurity, intimidation, loyalty, victory, torment, and guilt among villagers.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate why Christianity has a great impact on the Ibo.
3. Compose a scene in which Nwoye honors his father's grave.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each, including Nwoye's laziness, the commissioner's arrogance, Okonkwo's ambition, Chielo's threats, Ezinma's waywardness, Ikemefuna's naivete, Unoka's worthlessness, and Ekwefi's disloyalty to her first husband.
5. Account for the author's emphasis on rigid social customs.

## Vocabulary

In each sentence below, replace the underlined word with the exact word used by the author from the list that follows. Notice that you will have words left over when you finish.

abomination	distant	imperious	peace	talon
begot	effeminate	impudent	persevered	tormentor
clamoring	elude	infuriating	possessed	ultimatum
coiffure	emanation	minimized	received	void
combed	emissary	mounted	stark	voluble
consequence	enormity	murmur	succulent	warmed
contemptible	entrails	negated	superfluous	wizen
derision	espied	orator	suppressed	zeal

1. To fill the Lord's holy temple with an idolatrous crowd begging \_\_\_\_\_ for signs was a folly of everlasting effect \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Palm trees swayed as the wind arranged \_\_\_\_\_ their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic hairstyles \_\_\_\_\_.
3. And so heavily did it rain on Vulture that he did not return to deliver his message but flew to a faraway \_\_\_\_\_ land, from where he had seen \_\_\_\_\_ a fire.
4. In that way she will escape \_\_\_\_\_ her wicked enemy \_\_\_\_\_ and break its evil cycle of birth and death.
5. Tortoise was very happy and talkative \_\_\_\_\_ as he flew among the birds, and he was soon chosen as the man to speak for the party because he was a great speaker \_\_\_\_\_.
6. And so excitement grew \_\_\_\_\_ in the village as the seventh week approached since the immodest \_\_\_\_\_ missionaries built their church in the Evil Forest.
7. "Hold your calm \_\_\_\_\_!" screamed the priestess, her voice terrible as it echoed through the dark emptiness \_\_\_\_\_.
8. And indeed he was concerned \_\_\_\_\_ by the fear of his father's pitiable \_\_\_\_\_ life and shameful death.
9. He threw his head down and gnashed his teeth, and allowed a sound \_\_\_\_\_ of arrested \_\_\_\_\_ anger to sweep the crowd.
10. And so when Okonkwo of Umuofia arrived at Mbaino as the proud and domineering \_\_\_\_\_ representative \_\_\_\_\_ of war, he was treated with great honor and respect.
11. He heated \_\_\_\_\_ himself in the fire and ate the internal organs \_\_\_\_\_.
12. One of the most irritating \_\_\_\_\_ habits of these people was their love of needless \_\_\_\_\_ words.
13. But the missionaries persisted \_\_\_\_\_, and in the end they were greeted \_\_\_\_\_ by the rulers of Mbanta.
14. Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood out in its obvious \_\_\_\_\_ size \_\_\_\_\_.
15. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of womanly \_\_\_\_\_ men clucking like old hens was the very depth of evil \_\_\_\_\_.



## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Identification (30 points)

Name the character who is described in each phrase below. Select your answer from the list that follows. You will have answers left over when you finish.

Agbala	District Commissioner	Ikemefuna	Obierika	the Oracle
Akunna	Ekwefi	James Smith	Ojiugo	Queen Victoria
Anene	Ezeudu	Kotma	Okonkwo	Unoka
Chielo	Ezinma	Mr. Brown		

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. writes *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. enjoys friendship with Nwoye after getting over intense homesickness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. is famous for his wrestling ability.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. cannot be buried by his clansmen because of village taboo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. runs away from her husband Anene to be with Okonkwo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. beheads a messenger with one stroke of the machete.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. breaks a four-week visit to future in-laws.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. brings Okonkwo news of his village.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. serves as a court messenger.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. helps the medicine man locate her iyi-uwa.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. carries Ezinma on her shoulder to a shrine.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. lived a lazy, improvident life and died in debt.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. forbids Umuofia to engage in war.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. dies of swelling and is left to rot in the Evil Forest.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. is Okonkwo's youngest wife, who is beaten during the Week of Peace.

### Part II: Definitions (20 points)

Match each African term below with its English definition. Select your answer from the list at right. Place the letter of your answer in the blank at left.

- |                  |   |
|------------------|---|
| _____ 1. efulefu | A. living quarters of the head of the household |
| _____ 2. obi     | B. woman  |
| _____ 3. ilo     | C. worthless person                             |
| _____ 4. egwugwu | D. string of waist beads                        |
| _____ 5. ozo     | E. child who repeatedly dies and is reborn      |
| _____ 6. agbala  | F. village green                                |
| _____ 7. jigida  | G. fever  |
| _____ 8. nno     | H. rank   |
| _____ 9. ogbanje | I. welcome                                      |
| _____ 10. iba    | J. masquerader                                  |

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Identify the speaker of each quotation (A) and the person to whom it is addressed (B).

\_\_\_\_\_ 1A. Yes, Umuofia has decided to kill him. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has pronounced it.

\_\_\_\_\_ 1B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2A. You carve a piece of wood—like that one . . . and you call it a god. But it is still a piece of wood.

\_\_\_\_\_ 2B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3A. We have a court of law where we judge cases and administer justice as it is done in my own country under a great queen.

\_\_\_\_\_ 3B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4A. There are many good and prosperous people here, but I shall be happy if you marry in Umuofia when we return home.

\_\_\_\_\_ 4B.

\_\_\_\_\_ 5A. My father, they have killed me!

\_\_\_\_\_ 5B.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss Okonkwo's relationship with his wives and family.
2. Explain the penalty for killing a fellow clansman.
3. Analyze the title.
4. Characterize the life of one of Okonkwo's wives.
5. Discuss the concept of compensation for murder.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

Write the correct answer in the blank provided.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. What sacred animal is allowed to roam free in Umuofia?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What object serves as money in Umuofia?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What major food crop do native farmers grow?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. What food is broken and shared among visiting friends?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. What do tribesmen tap from trees?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. With what weapon do tribesmen usually arm themselves?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What do visitors carry with them to sit on?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What does the bride carry in her right hand?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. What do the natives call a white person?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. What do villagers tie to a tree after killing the first white visitor?

### Part II: Completion (30 points)

Complete each of the following statements with a word from the list below.

Abame	chief	evangelism	mother	priestess
ashes	Chielo	father	motherland	python
ban	compound	Ikemefuan	Nwoye	salt
buttocks	earth goddess	leprosy	Oracle	traitor
cam	England	machete	ozo	twin
cave mouth	egwugwu	mask	palm	woe

1. Obiageli called her " \_\_\_\_\_ " because she said that she disliked water.
2. The rainbow was called the \_\_\_\_\_ of the sky.
3. "I think it is good that our clan holds the \_\_\_\_\_ title in high esteem," said Okonkwo.
4. \_\_\_\_\_ wood was rubbed lightly into her skin, and all over her body were black patterns drawn with uli.
5. The \_\_\_\_\_, with Ezinma sleeping on her back, had crawled out of the shrine on her belly like a snake.
6. "That boy calls you \_\_\_\_\_," he had said. "Bear no hand in his death."
7. It was a crime against the \_\_\_\_\_ to kill a clansman, and a man who committed it must flee from the land.
8. And before the cock crowed Okonkwo and his family were fleeing to his \_\_\_\_\_.
9. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your \_\_\_\_\_ a heavy face and refuse to be comforted?
10. " \_\_\_\_\_ has been wiped out," said Obierika.
11. The elders consulted their \_\_\_\_\_ and it told them that the strange man would break their clan and spread destruction among them.
12. \_\_\_\_\_, the priestess of Agbala, called the converts the excrement of the clan, and the new faith was a mad dog that had come to eat it up.
13. It was one of those gay and rollicking tunes of \_\_\_\_\_ which had the power of plucking at silent and dusty chords in the heart of an Ibo man.
14. Instead of saying "myself" he always said "my \_\_\_\_\_."
15. Suppose when he died all his male children decided to follow \_\_\_\_\_'s steps and abandon their ancestors?

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark each of the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. In Umuofia, the birth of twins is considered a double blessing from Agbala.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. At the ceremony honoring Ezeudu, Okonkwo accidentally shoots Ezeudu's son.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When Nwoye returns from visiting the Christians, Okonkwo threatens to kill him.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. The District Commissioner invites six villagers to a conference, but then surprises them by arresting them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Because of their knowledge of Agbala, converts have no difficulty understanding the Holy Trinity.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Obierika charges the District Commissioner with bringing about the suicide of Okonkwo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. At one time, Ekwefi had been the village beauty.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. During his exile from Umuofia, Okonkwo earns even more money than before because of Obierika's wise investments.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. By village custom, Ndulue's funeral must be held before that of his wife.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Ogbanje can only be stopped by having the priestess dig up their sacred stones and rebury them in Agbala's shrine.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Discuss the status of women among the Ibo of Umuofia.
- 2. Explain why Okonkwo feels pushed to commit murder at the end of the novel.
- 3. Project how Nwoye will differ from his father in behavior and outlook.
- 4. Contrast Okonkwo's feelings for his children and foster son.
- 5. Predict other aspects of Ibo life that will conflict with Christianity.



## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. clamoring, consequence  | 9. murmur, suppressed        |
| 2. combed, coiffure        | 10. imperious, emissary      |
| 3. distant, espied         | 11. warmed, entrails         |
| 4. elude, tormentor        | 12. infuriating, superfluous |
| 5. voluble, orator         | 13. persevered, received     |
| 6. mounted, impudent       | 14. stark, enormity          |
| 7. peace, void             | 15. effeminate, abomination  |
| 8. possessed, contemptible |                              |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Identification (30 points)

- |                          |             |            |
|--------------------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. District Commissioner | 6. Okonkwo  | 11. Chielo |
| 2. Ikemefuna             | 7. Ezinma   | 12. Unoka  |
| 3. Okonkwo               | 8. Obierika | 13. Oracle |
| 4. Okonkwo               | 9. Kotma    | 14. Unoka  |
| 5. Ekwefi                | 10. Ezinma  | 15. Ojiugo |

#### Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- |                           |                   |
|---------------------------|-------------------|
| 1A. Ezeudu                | 1B. Okonkwo       |
| 2A. Mr. Brown             | 2B. Akunna        |
| 3A. District Commissioner | 3B. six villagers |
| 4A. Okonkwo               | 4B. Ezinma        |
| 5A. Ikemefuna             | 5B. Okonkwo       |

#### Part III: Definitions (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. B  |
| 2. A | 7. D  |
| 3. F | 8. I  |
| 4. J | 9. E  |
| 5. H | 10. G |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

- |              |                |
|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Python    | 6. machete     |
| 2. cowrie    | 7. goat skin   |
| 3. yam       | 8. rooster     |
| 4. kola nut  | 9. albino      |
| 5. palm wine | 10. iron horse |

#### Part II: Completion (30 points)

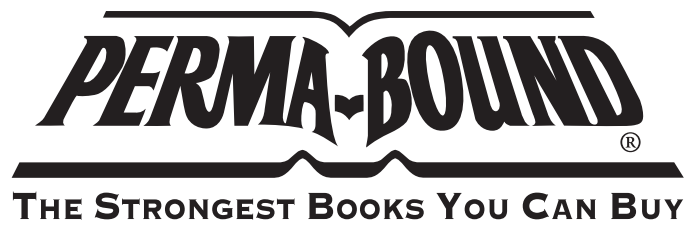
- |              |                  |                |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Salt      | 6. father        | 11. Oracle     |
| 2. python    | 7. earth goddess | 12. Chielo     |
| 3. ozo       | 8. motherland    | 13. evangelism |
| 4. cam       | 9. mother        | 14. buttocks   |
| 5. priestess | 10. Abame        | 15. Nwoye      |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. T | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. F  |
| 5. F | 10. F |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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