

Aims:

- To study the novel in detail and appreciate its plot, characterisation and themes.
- To understand the historical, social and cultural context of the novel.

Characters in the novel

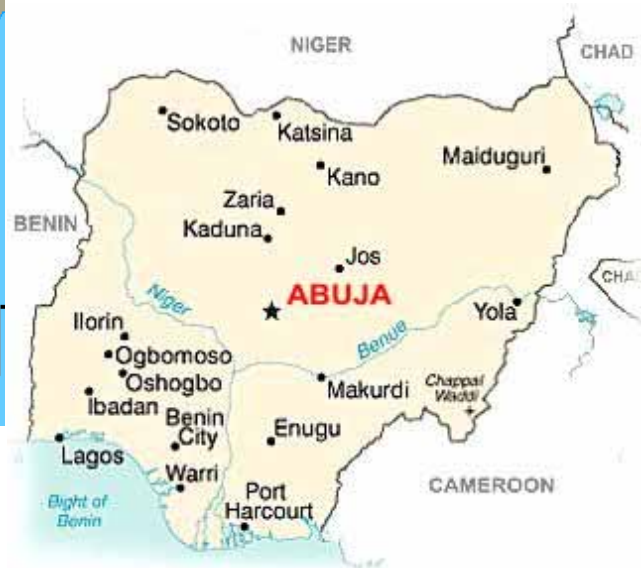
- ❑ **Okonkwo (Oh--kawn--kwoh):** The central character of *Things Fall Apart*, a leader of the African Igbo (or Ibo in English) community of Umuofia (Oo--moo--oh--fee--ah), known as a fierce warrior as well as a successful farmer, although he is a man still in his thirties. He has three wives and several children who live in their homes in his village compound. He is determined to overcome the stigma left by his father's laziness and wastefulness.
- ❑ **Unoka (Ooh--no--kah):** Okonkwo's father, known for his weakness and lack of responsibility.
- ❑ **Nwoye (Nuh--woh--yeh):** Okonkwo's oldest son, age twelve at the book's beginning. By nature, he is a sensitive young man. He later joins the missionaries and is rejected by his father.
- ❑ **Ikemefuna (Ee--keh--meh--foo.nah):** A boy of fourteen when he is given to Umuofia by a neighboring village to avoid war, he is a clever, resourceful young man. He is killed when the Oracle decides it.
- ❑ **Ekwefi (Eh--kweh--fee):** Okonkwo's second wife, mother of Ezinma, her only living child.
- ❑ **Ezinma (Eh--zeen--mah):** Daughter of Ekwefi and Okonkwo; Ekwefi's only surviving child. She is believed to be an ogbanje, or changeling child. She is Okonkwo's favourite and he wishes that she was a boy.
- ❑ **Ojiubo (Oh--jee--ooh--boh):** Okonkwo's third wife and Mother of several of Okonkwo's children.
- ❑ **Obierika (Oh--bee--air--ee--kah):** Okonkwo's best friend in Umuofia. He often represents the voice of reason. He is the father of Maduka (son) and Ekuwke (daughter).
- ❑ **Chielo (Chee--eh--loh):** A village widow who is also the priestess of Agbala.
- ❑ **Agbala (Ahg--bah--lah):** The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, she influences all aspects of Umuofian life (based on the real Oracle at Awka who controlled Igbo life for centuries).
- ❑ **Uchendu (Ooh--chen--du):** Okonkwo's uncle who welcomes him to his mother's homeland of Mbanta when he has been exiled from Umuofia. He teaches Okonkwo to face the future without self-pity.
- ❑ **Mr. Brown:** The first white Christian missionary in Umuofia and Mbanta, an understanding and accommodating man, he is inclined to listen to the Igbo.
- ❑ **Mr. Kiaga (Kee--ah--gah):** The native interpreter for the missionaries, he is a teacher and a leader of the new church in Mbanta.
- ❑ **The Reverend James Smith:** A strict, stereotypical white Christian missionary, he takes over the church after Mr. Brown's departure.
- ❑ **The District Commissioner:** A stern, stereotypical white colonial administrator of Umuofia, he follows regulations to the letter and has little knowledge or understanding of the people for whom he tries to administer a new government.

THE SETTING

The novel is set in Nigeria towards the end of the Nineteenth century, in the period just before the arrival of the white man. It centres on the tribe of people known as the Ibo.



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THE STYLE OF THE NOVEL

Achebe has written this novel in order to show us what life was like in Nigeria in a specific historical period. He uses a number of techniques in order to make the writing authentic and you will need to comment on the effect of these when you are writing about the novel.

Simple sentences

Achebe uses a simple style of writing in most of the novel, because he wants to tell the story in the way that it might be told by a member of the Ibo tribe. The beginning of the novel shows this clearly.

Imagery

Achebe uses many similes and metaphors to bring the narrative to life and he uses the sorts of comparisons that relate to the Ibo experience, for example:

'Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush fire in the harmattan.'

(Simile in chapter 1)

'Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.'

(Metaphor in Chapter 1)

'He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season.'

(Simile in Chapter 7)

Proverbs

These wise sayings are very important as they are used to comment on human behaviour and they show the importance of oral communication within the community. Achebe uses them throughout the book to reflect this and they are drawn from Ibo experience or religious beliefs, for example:

'The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them.'

'A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.'

Folk Tales

These are another important feature of Achebe's novel, they are important because they relate to the events of the novel and they show us the values of the society. Examples are:

- ❑ The Mosquito and the Ear (Chapter 9)
- ❑ The Tortoise and the birds (Chapter 11)

RELIGION

The religious beliefs of the Ibo people are very different from Christian beliefs. In summary they believe in :

- ❑ The Supreme God or deity (Chukwu) who is most powerful and controls fertility and creation. He is represented by many other minor gods and sacrifices are made through them.
- ❑ Personal Gods (Chi) which are believed to be in control of the person's destiny.
- ❑ Ancestors, these are often represented by masked men (egwugwu) at social gatherings and are greatly respected and worshipped. There is constant interaction between the worlds of the living and the dead.

Things Fall Apart Reading Log Part One

Chapter 1 - introduces us to the main character, Okonkwo and sets the scene for the rest of the novel.

Glossary - see back of book for definitions of most Ibo words

Harmattan - a powerful wind which hits Nigeria from November to March

Egwugwu - a masked man who acts in role as one of the ancestors from the village

1. What do you learn about Okonkwo's character and achievements in this chapter?
2. What do you learn about his father, Unoka? How has Okonkwo been affected by his father's character?
3. What are your first impressions of the African society that is described in the novel?
Comment on:
 - Village life
 - Work
 - Entertainment

Chapter 2 - introduces us to the character of Ikemefuna who comes to the village as a result of tribal conflict.

1. What is Okonkwo woken by at the beginning of the chapter?
2. Briefly explain the crisis that has occurred between Umuofia and the neighbouring village of Mbaino.
3. How is this crisis resolved?
4. We learn on Page 12 that Okonkwo's 'whole life was dominated by fear.' What is he afraid of?
5. What do we find out about Okonkwo's family in this chapter?

Chapter 3 - provides further background into Unoka's failure and Okonkwo's success. We are also introduced to the Ibo religion.

Glossary **Oracle** - a prophecy which is revealed through a priestess at the shrine of a god

1. Why did Unoka go to visit the Oracle of Agbala ?
2. What message did he receive? Why is this important to our understanding of Okonkwo's character?
3. What do you learn about Okonkwo's early years as a farmer?

Chapter 4 - describes Ikemefuna's role in the family and Okonkwo as a father and husband.

1. What is Okonkwo's attitude towards men who are less successful than him?
2. What do you learn about Ikemefuna's role within Okonkwo's family?
3. What crime does Okonkwo commit during the Week of Peace?
4. Why is the Week of Peace an important custom in the community?
5. What punishment does Okonkwo receive for his actions?

Chapter 5 - describes the Feast of the New Yam and the preparations for the wrestling match.

Chapter 6 - describes the Wrestling Match which is an important social event in the village.

Chapter 7 - describes the arrival of the locusts in the village and Ikemefuna's sacrifice on the instruction of the gods.

1. How long has Ikemefuna lived with Okonkwo's family and what influence has his presence had upon them?
2. What warning does Ezeudu give to Okonkwo on page 50?
3. **Extract essay:** Find the passage which begins 'The next day on page 51 to 'He was afraid of being thought weak' on page 54.

How does the writer create tension and convey sympathy for Ikemefuna in this passage from the novel? Comment on:

- The preparations for the journey
- The way that the beginning of the journey is described
- The way that Ikemefuna's feelings are presented to the reader
- The way that his death is described in the final paragraph

Use quotations to support your points and see additional writing frame for help in structuring your answer

4. What do you think of Okonkwo's actions in this chapter?
5. What effect does Ikemefuna's death have on Nwoye? (Note this will be important in Part Three of the novel.)

Chapter 8 - shows the aftermath of Ikemefuna's death and introduces Obierika.

1. How does Okonkwo react to Ikemefuna's death?
2. What does Obierika feel about the part that Okonkwo played in the murder? What might this suggest about his character?
3. What do you learn about the customs involved in preparing for a wedding in this chapter?

Chapter 9 - the description of Ezinma's illness and details of her background.

Glossary

Ogbanje - a changeling child who is constantly reborn.

Iyi-uwa - a stone which connects a changeling to the spirit world. If it is destroyed, the child will live.

1. Why is Ekwefi so worried when she discovers that Ezinma is suffering from a fever?
2. What does the story of Ezinma tell us about the customs and beliefs of this society?

Chapter 10 - describes the gathering of the elders and egwugwu to resolve a dispute between husband and wife.

1. What does this chapter show about:
 - The system of justice in this community?
 - The roles of men and women?

Chapter 11 - describes Ekwefi's storytelling and Ezinma's visit to Agbala.

1. What is the message or moral of the creation story about the Tortoise and the birds? What is Ekwefi's purpose in telling the story?
2. How is the storytelling interrupted?
3. Read from page 91 to the end of the chapter. How does the writer create a sense of mystery in this description of Ekwefi's journey to Agbala's cave?
4. What different side of Okonkwo's character do we see in this chapter?

Chapter 12 - describes the wedding feast for the marriage of Obierika's daughter.

Chapter 13 - describes the funeral gathering for Ezeudu and Okonkwo's disgrace.

1. What rituals and customs are involved in Ezeudu's funeral?
2. What crime does Okonkwo commit during the proceedings?
3. What punishment does he receive? Why is this necessary according to the beliefs of the tribe?

Activities on Part One

1. A guide to Ibo village life

Working in a group, prepare display materials on one of these areas:

- Farming
- Food
- Marriage
- Religion
- Roles of men and women/ hierarchy
- Ceremonies and social gatherings/ rituals and customs

You will need to find relevant information from the novel and may do extra research using the resource centre / library or the internet.

Use this as a basis for a group presentation for speaking and listening assessment.

2. Okonkwo character essay:

At the beginning of the novel we are told that Okonkwo's 'fame rested on solid personal achievements' yet by the end of Part One he has been banished from his community.

What do you see as Okonkwo's strengths and weaknesses and how do you explain his change in fortune?

Things Fall Apart Reading Log Part Two

Chapter 14 – The beginning of Okonkwo's exile in Mbanta. He is helped by his mother's kinsmen to build a new farm. His uncle, Uchendu has an important role in the chapter.

1. What progress does Okonkwo make towards establishing his new farm in this chapter?
2. Comment on the following quotations. What do they show about Okonkwo and the way that his character has changed?:
 - 'It was like beginning life anew without the vigour and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age.'
 - 'He had been cast out of his clan like a fish on to a dry, sandy beach, panting. Clearly his personal god or chi was not made for great things.'
3. What do you learn about the rituals involved in a wedding ceremony of confession in this chapter? (See pages 115 – 116)
4. What lesson does Uchendu try to teach Okonkwo when he calls the family together? What do we learn about Uchendu's character from what he says?

Chapter 15 – In his second year of exile, Okonkwo is visited by Obierika and he tells the story of what he heard has happened in the neighbouring clan of Abame. This is the first time that we see the influence of the white man in the community.

1. Complete the main events in the 'strange and terrible' story as it is recalled by Obierika:
 - A white man arrived in the clan on bicycle (iron horse)
 - The elders in the clan asked their Oracle for advice about what to do
 - The Oracle warned that the man would cause the destruction of the clan
2. What lesson does Uchendu try to teach his family, using the folk tale of Mother Kite?
3. How does Obierika prove himself to be a good friend to Okonkwo in this chapter?

Chapter 16 – Two years later, Obierika visits Okonkwo for a second time. He brings news of the white missionaries.

1. What has happened in Umuofia since Okonkwo's departure from the community?
2. What has caused Obierika to make the visit to Okonkwo at this particular time?
3. What is the effect of the arrival of the missionaries in Mbanta?
4. Comment on the following quotations. What do they suggest about the white man's attitude towards the Ibo religion?:

- 'Evil men and all the heathen who in their blindness bowed to wood and stone were thrown into a fire that burned like palm-oil.'
 - 'All the gods you have named are not gods at all. They are gods of deceit who tell you to kill your fellows and destroy innocent children.'
 - 'Your gods are not alive and cannot do you any harm ... they are pieces of wood and stone.'
5. How does Okonkwo react to the news about the white man's God and his son 'Jesu Kristi'?
 6. How does Nwoye, Okonkwo's son react to the news?
 7. What attracts Nwoye to the new religion and how does this fit with what you have already learned about Nwoye's character since the death of Ikemefuna in Chapter 7?
 8. How do you think this will affect Okonkwo's character and his relationship with his son?

Chapter 17 – the missionaries begin to establish themselves within Mbanta.

1. Why do the clan decide to grant the request of the missionaries and give them some land on which to build a church? Where is it to be built and what is the significance of its location?
2. What do the clan expect to happen to them?
3. How does the white man's power increase as a result of their decision?
4. What is Mr Kiaga's role in the community?
5. What sort of people become converts to the new faith and why?
6. Look closely at pages 133 – 135. Comment on what this section of the novel shows about:
 - Okonkwo's behaviour towards Nwoye
 - The reasons behind Nwoye's conversion to Christianity
 - The effects of Nwoye's actions upon Okonkwo.

Chapter 18 – The church in Mbanta becomes a powerful organisation.

1. What evidence is there that the missionaries are no longer respecting the views of the clan?
2. What role do 'outcasts' play in the church community?
3. What action do the clan decide to take when they hear that a member of the church has killed the sacred python? What does Okonkwo feel about their decision?
4. What happens at the end of the chapter to temporarily ease the conflict between the clan and the Christian community?

Chapter 19 – Okonkwo's final harvest in Mbanta. He holds a huge feast to thank his mother's kinsmen for their hospitality.

1. What does Okonkwo feel about his seven years in exile?
 2. How does he prepare for his return to Umuofia?
 3. What is the message of the speech which is delivered by one of the oldest members of the clan at the feast? Why do you think this will be important for the events that are to follow?
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Activities on Part Two:

1. Make a flow chart or time-line of key events to chart the growth of the white man's influence on the community.
 - How successful has the white man been at converting the African community to Christianity at this point in the novel?
 - How do you account for their success?
2. Prediction exercise:

In the next part of the novel, Okonkwo returns to his homeland of Umuofia. How do you think things will have changed upon his return?

Things Fall Apart : Essay on extract from Chapter 7

How does the writer create tension and convey sympathy for Ikemefuna in this extract from the novel?

Introduction -

In this extract from Chapter 7, which describes the death of Ikemefuna, Achebe has used a number of techniques to create tension and make the reader feel sympathy for his situation.

Part One - Preparations for the journey

- The description of the men's clothing and actions
- How Achebe hints at the tragedy to follow

Part Two - The beginning of the journey

- The mood of the men as they set off
- The contrast between the silence and the noises from the village
- The sense of urgency which develops

Part Three - Ikemefuna's feelings

- His feelings about Okonkwo
- The use of questions to show his thoughts
- His fears about his family
- How these things help to create sympathy for his situation

Part Four - His death

- The way Ikemefuna's fear is described
- The way that Okonkwo's actions are described
- The effect of Ikemefuna's last words on the reader

Conclusion -

Sum up the way this extract from the novel affects you as a reader.

Remember to use embedded quotations and Point- Evidence - Explain e.g:

The reference to the 'deathly silence [which] descended on Okonkwo's compound' is one way that Achebe hints at Ikemefuna's death. This gives the reader a sense of foreboding about the events that are to follow.

Analysing Okonkwo's character

Match the quotations to the characteristics on the chart.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Hardworking• Physically strong• Well known throughout the clan• Pleased with his daughter• Concerned about Ezinma's illness• A warrior 'He was a man of action, a man of war... he could stand the look of blood.'• Determined	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impatient• Violent• Intolerant of others• Dissatisfied with his son• Careless and impetuous (acts without thinking)• Afraid to show his feelings• Won't admit to being wrong• Afraid of weakness

Quotations about Okonkwo's character

'The man who had contradicted him had no titles...Okonkwo knew how to kill a man's spirit.'

'His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness... it was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father.'

'He was a man of action, a man of war... he could stand the look of blood.'

'He had no patience with unsuccessful men.'

'Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush fire in the harmattan.'

'Inwardly he was repentant. But he was not the man to go about telling his neighbours that he was in error.'

'Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger.'

'Okonkwo was not the man to stop beating somebody half-way through, not even for fear of a goddess.'

'If I had a son like him I should be happy. I am worried about Nwoye.'

'Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart ... the crime had been inadvertent.'

'Okonkwo returned from the bush carrying on his left shoulder a large bundle of grasses and leaves, roots and barks of medicinal trees and shrubs.'

'If Ezinma had been a boy I would have been happier. She has the right spirit.'

'He was still young but he had won fame as the greatest wrestler in the nine villages.'

'At a very early age when he was striving desperately to build a barn through share-cropping, Okonkwo was also fending for his father's house.'

'In spite of these disadvantages, he had begun to lay the foundations of a prosperous future... he threw himself into it like a man possessed.'