

The author and his work

Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe is possibly the best known and most influential writer of fiction to have emerged from Africa. His novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was published in 1958. It has been translated into forty-five languages and is still read all over the world. In this work, Achebe recreates the late nineteenth-century world of an Igbo tribe (known in English as the Ibo), with its rich heritage of customs and beliefs, and examines the impact of the first white missionaries on the indigenous people of north-eastern Nigeria



Achebe lives and works in the USA, and is still passionately interested in African politics. He has written a number of novels, of which *Things Fall Apart* is considered his masterpiece. He has received numerous awards and honorary doctorates. He has also published short stories and essays, and his volume of poetry, *Beware Soul Brother*, won the Commonwealth Poetry Prize in 1987. His greatest legacy is the way in which he has revealed the complexity of traditional African culture to modern African people and to his non-African readers around the world. In November 2006, Achebe was recognised for his achievements in the business and culture section of the *Time* magazine edition *60 Years of Heroes*.

The Ibo in the late nineteenth century

Our knowledge of the world of the Ibo at this point in history gradually increases as the story unfolds. This understanding enables us to appreciate the main theme: the impact on the lives of the Ibo caused by the arrival of Christian missionaries and the subsequent establishment of British authority in Nigeria.

The tribe consists of a group of nine villages that are each inhabited by a clan and linked by ties of blood. Village life is governed by the rituals and traditions developed over many generations, with slight variations from clan to clan. The Ibo regard people from other parts of Nigeria as foreigners, and sometimes go to war against these tribes.

This is a patriarchal society where men practise polygamy (marry more than one wife), and women have little status. Okonkwo, for example, regularly beats his wives, sometimes for the most trivial

reasons. Men live with their families in compounds called *obis*. Crops are stored in barns within the walls of the compounds.

Women are responsible for domestic chores such as cooking and taking care of the young children.

Time is measured by the Ibo in periods of four days known as market weeks, and it follows the rhythms of the seasons. The people live a simple life as subsistence farmers, growing yams, coco-yams, beans and cassava, and drinking palm-wine. Their currency is the cowrie shell. They use utensils from the earth, such as gourds for storing and drinking palm-wine, and pottery vessels for fetching and storing water.

Attitude towards the gods

Chukwu is the creator of the world and the most powerful god, but the tribe also worships many lesser gods. The gods are feared and they are described in the novel as *evil and capricious*. They inhabit the natural and supernatural worlds and must be appeased. They sometimes demand acts of violence such as the death of Ikemefuna.

The *chi*

This is the concept of one's personal god. Okonkwo worships his personal god with offerings of kola nut, food and palm-wine. Although the clan acknowledges that a good *chi* is helpful, they still believe that a person is responsible for creating his or her own success. Humility is valued, but a successful person is respected for his or her achievements. For example, even though Okonkwo is arrogant, the clan still respects him for his achievements. By contrast, the Oracle tells Unoka that his misfortunes are due to laziness and not to a bad *chi*.

The importance of the ancestors

The religious festivals and the rituals practised by the Ibo have their origins deep in the past and reflect the continuity of life over many generations. The ancestors of the clan are revered, as they provide this close link between past and present. They are called upon to administer justice during disputes between tribe members. During sacred ceremonies, masked tribesmen, known as *egwugwu*, represent the spirits of the nine sons of the clan's first father.

The Oracle

In Umuofia, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves (also called Agbala), interprets messages from the ancestors. These are communicated to the tribe through the priestess Chielo. The Oracle and the *egwugwu* take the place of a chief, but men within the clan can earn various clan titles to enhance their status. This is Onkonkwo's aim, which is destroyed by his exile and the subsequent changes that take place in Umuofia while he is away.

Gods and festivals linked to nature

- The gods of the Ibo are linked to the natural world. Events, such as birth, marriage, death, planting and the harvest, are celebrated through complex rituals.
- The Feast of Ani: Ani is the earth goddess who must not be offended, or she may blight the harvest. The week between harvesting and planting is sacred to her and is known as the Peace of Ani. Ezeani is the priest of Ani.
- The Feast of the New Yam: This is a celebration of plenty and is also sacred to Ani. Wealthy clansmen invite their relatives to celebrate this important occasion with them. The great wrestling match is traditionally held on the second day of the feast.
- The sacred python: This is the physical manifestation of the god of water, and so a python may not be harmed or killed.
- Taboos
- Things and people who are seen as unnatural, such as twins, the bodies of suicides, or those suffering from the swelling disease, are cast out of the tribe into the Evil Forest.
- The killing of a clan member is forbidden and is punishable by death. However, an accidental killing - called a *female crime* (a lesser crime) - leads to the exile of the perpetrator for a certain number of years.
- Association with the outcasts (those dedicated to a certain god) is taboo.

The impact of the Scramble for Africa on the Ibo

During the nineteenth century, Africa was made more accessible to non-Africans by travelling explorers, traders and missionaries. Britain, Belgium, Italy, France, Germany and Portugal then embarked on a race to build colonial empires in Africa, often with disastrous effects on the indigenous tribes.

Europeans believed their values to be superior to those of Africans. They considered the values of the indigenous cultures of Africa to be savage and irrelevant, and attempted to superimpose their own European values on these cultures.

SUMMARY OF THE PLOT

Structure of the novel

Each chapter consists of a series of episodes, which are frequently relate in flashbacks. Dialogue intersperses these episodes, along with proverbs and fables that enshrine the lore of the clan.

Part	Important plot developments
One	This deals with Okonkwo's life in Umuofia during the three years when Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo's family. The rituals and rhythms of the life of the clan are established. Part One ends with the exile of Okonkwo and his family.
Two	During Okonkwo's seven years of exile in his mother's village of Mbanta, much of the focus remains on Umuofia. Obierika, Okonkwo's best friend who visits him from time to time, becomes the narrator of what is happening in Umuofia. He describes the arrival of the missionaries, an event that brings about many changes within the clan, including the conversion of Nwoye to Christianity. Part Two ends on an ominous note, as the clan elders see the new religion as a threat to the future of the clan.

Three	<p>Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, where he finally understands that his way of life has disappeared forever. Matters between white authority and the traditional clansmen come to a head, leading to the destruction of the church and the arrest, imprisonment and assault of the clan leaders. The novel reaches its tragic climax when Okonkwo takes a stand and kills one of the court messengers. He is not supported by the clan and, in despair, he hangs himself. The novel ends with a cynical insight into the narrow mindset of the District Commissioner. He symbolises the ignorance and arrogance of so many of the colonialists who destroyed the indigenous cultures of Africa.</p>
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Part One: Chapters 1-13

Chapter 1

Okonkwo, the major character, is in the prime of life. He has three wives and eleven children, and has won fame as a great wrestler, warrior and wealthy farmer throughout the nine villages of his region. Okonkwo is bitterly ashamed of his father, Unoka (a lazy, thriftless man who had died ten years earlier, deeply in debt), and has always been determined to prove himself as a man. He achieves this, as he is later chosen by the tribe to look after Ikemefuna, a hostage from a neighbouring village.

Chapter 2

A woman from Umuofia. Ezeugo, has been murdered by villagers from Mbaino. Okonkwo leads a deputation to the village with an ultimatum: there will be war unless a young man and a virgin are sent to Umuofia as compensation. The virgin is given to Ogbuefi Udo in place of his murdered wife, and the bewildered young man, Ikemefuna, is given to Okonkwo to look after while his fate is decided.

Okonkwo is a harsh, inflexible man, respected and feared by his wives and children. He is very disappointed in his first son. Nwoye, believing him to be too much like Okonkwo's despised dead father. Nwoye's mother, Ekwefi, is told to look after Ikemefuna.

Chapter 3

Okonkwo is a self-made man who was given no help by his father, sometime before his death. Unoka had consulted Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, about his poor harvest. He was told that his laziness was the cause of his misfortune. He later contracted a swelling disease and was left to die in the Evil Forest. By contrast. Okonkwo, in order to improve his situation, had become a sharecropper for a wealthy neighbour. Okonkwo's indomitable will is his driving force and it has enabled him to survive great hardships.

Chapter 4

Despite Okonkwo's harsh nature, he becomes fond of the hostage boy. Ikemefuna. He is pleased when Nwoye becomes close to Ikemefuna, hoping that his son will improve. Okonkwo breaks the Peace of Ani, the earth goddess, by beating his youngest wife. Ojiugo. As an act of repentance, he is commanded by the priest to take a she-goat, a hen, a length of cloth and a hundred cowries to the shrine of Ani.

Chapter 5

During the Feast of the New Yam to celebrate the harvest. Okonkwo is frustrated by the lengthy preparations and picks a quarrel with Ekwefi. When she defends herself, he becomes enraged and beats her. His irrational decision to go hunting with a rusty, old rifle almost ends in tragedy when he fires the

weapon at Ekwefi. Fortunately, she is unharmed. This incident foreshadows the tragedy with the rifle in Chapter 13.

There is a great deal of preparation and excitement for the great wrestling match to be held between the neighbouring villages. As the drums build up during the afternoon, we meet other members of Okonkwo's family: Nwoye's sister, Obiageli, who has broken her waterpot, and Nkechi, daughter of his third wife.

Chapter 6

A great crowd has gathered to watch the wrestling match. Ekwefi and Chielo, priestess of Agbala, discuss Ezinma, Ekwefi's daughter. At first the crowd is entertained by the drums and then by a contest between young boys of fifteen or sixteen. In the main event, the two young men are evenly matched, but eventually, Okafo defeats Ikezue to become the hero of the crowd.

Chapter 7

After three years, Ikemefuna has become closely integrated into Okonkwo's family. It is thus a shock when the Oracle decrees that Ikemefuna should be killed. Ogbuefi Ezeudu, the oldest and most respected man in the clan, advises Okonkwo to have nothing to do with the killing as the boy regards Okonkwo as a father. Ikemefuna is told that he will be returning home, but is taken beyond the village by a group of men from Umuofia. When the first blow is struck, Ikemefuna cries out to Okonkwo for help but Okonkwo, fearing that he will be thought weak, strikes him down with his machete. Nwoye is devastated by the death of his great friend.

Chapter 8

Okonkwo is ashamed of his grief over Ikemefuna's death. He is disappointed in Nwoye and wishes that his daughter, Ezinma, had been a boy. Later, Okonkwo attends the negotiations of the bride-price for Obierika's daughter, Akueke.

Chapter 9

Okonkwo's favourite daughter, Ezinma, almost dies from a violent fever (probably malaria). Ekwefi is devastated by Ezinma's illness, as her previous nine children had died. Ezinma is believed to be an *ogbanje*, or child who dies and then re-enters the mother's womb, only to die once again in a continuing cycle. However, Ezinma has broken the cycle by destroying her *iyi-uwe*, the stone which bound her to the spirit

world. Okonkwo treats Ezinma with traditional medicine and she recovers.

Chapter 10

A trial is held in the village to determine the fate of Mgbafo who has left her abusive husband, Uzowulu, and returned to the home of her brothers. The *egwugwu* (tribesmen representing the ancestral spirits), hear the case and settle the dispute by ordering the man to beg his wife to return to him, and to agree not to beat her in the future.

Chapter 11

One night, while Ekwefi and Ezinma are telling stories, Chielo, in her role as the priestess of Agbala, rushes in and takes Ezinma away carrying her on her back. Ekwefi follows Chielo on a long journey through the darkness and eventually, she sees them enter the caves of the Oracle. Okonkwo is also at the cave mouth and he and Ekwefi, his favourite wife, wait together.

Chapter 12

The community gathers at Obierika's compound to celebrate his daughter's *Uri*, when her suitor's family brings fifty pots of palm-wine to his home. Okonkwo is exhausted as he had made four trips to the shrine the previous night searching for Ezinma. The praise-singer pays tribute to the great men of the community and Okonkwo is acknowledged as *the greatest wrestler and warrior alive*. The bride then leaves to spend seven market weeks (twenty-eight days) with her suitor's family.

Chapter 13

During the funeral of Ezeudu, a great man in the community, Okonkwo's gun accidentally explodes, killing the dead man's sixteen-year-old son. This is regarded as a 'female' crime because it was an accident, but tribal law requires Okonkwo to leave Umuofia with his family and to return to his mother's clan at Mbanta for seven years. The men of Umuofia then destroy his compound, his animals and his stores of food. Obierika is troubled by Okonkwo's suffering, but can find no answer to his questions.

Part Two: Chapters 14-19

Chapter 14

Although Okonkwo and his family are welcomed to Mbanta, and he is given land for an *obi* and for farming, he is in despair. Uchendu chastises him, reminding him that his motherland is his refuge and that many people suffer more greatly than he does.

Chapter 15

Obierika visits Okonkwo in the second year of his exile and describes the arrival of a white man on an *iron horse* (a bicycle) in the region. The Oracle ordered the white man's death and also prophesied the arrival of more white men who would bring trouble to the Ibo people. In retaliation for the murder, the village of Abame is destroyed. Obierika also brings Okonkwo two bags of cowrie shells from the sale of Okonkwos yams and seed-yams.

Chapter 16

During Obierika's second visit to Okonkwo, the events of the past two years are told. The missionaries have arrived in the villages of Umuofia and Mbanta. They have made many converts to Christianity, in Iu in Nwoye, who has been disowned by his father.

Chapter 17

The missionaries build their church in the Evil Forest at Mbanta. They do not die as expected, but begin to win converts. Nwoye eventually finds the courage to join the church, but his secret is revealed when Okonkwo's cousin, Amikwu, sees him among the Christians and tells Okonkwo. After a bitter confrontation with his father, Nwoye leaves Mbanta and returns to Umuofia to join the mission school.

Chapter 18

Conflict develops between the clan and the Christian priest Kiaga when he admits outcasts to the Christian church. The matter comes to a head when it is rumoured that Okoli, one of the outcasts, has killed a python (pythons are sacred to the watergod). Okonkwo wants to use violence to expel the Christians, but the clan ostracises the converts instead. However, when Okoli dies, the clansmen believe that their gods are still powerful.

Chapter 19

Okonkwo's exile is drawing to an end. He asks Obierika to build two huts in which he and his family can live while Okonkwo builds a new compound. Ekwefi prepares a lavish feast for Okonkwo's mother's kinsmen. Part Two ends on an ominous note when one of the elders, in his farewell speech to Okonkwo, expresses his concern for the younger generation and for the future of the clan. He says that they have embraced an *abominable religion*, which is destroying the traditions of the clan.

Part Three: Chapters 20-25

Chapter 20

On his return home, Okonkwo hopes to redeem his former status by marrying his daughters to important men and by initiating two of his sons into the ozo society for men of rank. However, Umuofia is much changed, with many prominent converts to Christianity. The village is now under the authority of a district commissioner, assisted by court messengers (called *kotma*), who are strangers to Umuofia. The people are now imprisoned for following their ancient customs and some, such as Aneto, have been hanged. Okonkwo cannot understand why the white men have not been expelled. Obierika explains that so many of the clansmen have converted to the new religion, and support the government, that the clan is now divided and is powerless to resist.

Chapter 21

Okonkwo's return is barely noticed under the new circumstances. The people of Umuofia are adjusting to the new dispensation and enjoying their increased wealth from trade in palm-wine and kernel. This is largely due to the influence of the missionary, Mr Brown. He is a moderate man who tries not to clash with the clan, preferring to persuade them to send their children to his school and to build a hospital. Under him, *religion and education [go] hand in hand*. Many clansmen become educated and take up jobs as clerks and teachers, such as Nwoye, and some go into neighbouring villages to spread the new faith. Shortly after Okonkwo's return, Mr Brown is forced by ill health to leave Umuofia.

Chapter 22

Mr Brown is succeeded by the Reverend James Smith, a narrow-minded man determined to eradicate the traditions of the tribe. The convert Enoch, son of the snake-priest, causes open conflict when he unmasks an *egwugwu* during a sacred ceremony. The *egwugwu* destroy Enoch's compound. When they attack the church, Reverend Smith is joined by Okeke, his interpreter, and this initially saves him from the angry men. Ajofia, the most powerful *egwugwu* and head of the nine ancestors of the clan, pacifies the other *egwugwu*. Reverend Smith is left unharmed, but the church is destroyed.

Chapter 23

Okonkwo believes that the clan has taken a stand and he is reassured. However, Reverend Smith complains to the District Commissioner, who requests a meeting with six of the leaders of Umuofia. By a clever ruse, he has them overpowered and handcuffed. He imposes a fine of two hundred bags of cowries, but insists that the leaders of Umuofia are treated with respect during their captivity. His orders are disregarded by the head messenger who shaves the heads of the prisoners, and starves and assaults them. Messengers arrive in Umuofia and demand immediate payment of 250 bags of cowries, or the prisoners will be hanged. The men of Umuofia agree to this, unaware that

fifty bags will go into the pockets of the corrupt court messengers.

Chapter 24

Okonkwo and the other leaders are deeply humiliated by their treatment and return home in silence. The next morning, at a meeting to decide on a course of action, Okika urges the clan to *root out* [the] evil of the white man, even if this causes the deaths of some of their own clansmen. Before a decision can be taken, messengers from the court arrive to stop the meeting and Okonkwo beheads one of the messengers. Instead of

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Umuofia
them to
escape.

Okonkwo finally understands that he is on his own and that Umuofia will never go to war against the white man.

Chapter 25

The District Commissioner arrives to arrest Okonkwo. Obierika and a small group of men take the District Commissioner to a tree from which Okonkwo has hanged himself even though, under tribal lore, it is *an abomination for a man to take his own life*. For this reason, Okonkwo's body cannot be touched by men of his own clan, but must be buried by strangers.

In the final lines of the novel, the complete lack of understanding that the District Commissioner has for the people he has subdued is made clear: he will include the story of Okonkwo as a paragraph in a book he is writing, called *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.



LOOKING AT CHARACTER
Okonkwo's family

Name	Description
Okonkwo	<p>The main character; an heroic figure in the tribe Deeply ashamed of his father and therefore determined to succeed Fiercely traditional; is one of the <i>egwugwu</i> Aims to achieve all the titles as a senior man in his clan A man of action; proud and often arrogant; harsh, inflexible and impatient Uncompromising, unforgiving and intolerant of others; hot-tempered and often irrational Bitterly opposed to the missionaries and the British officials Respected and feared by his wives and children; loves</p>
Unoka	<p>Okonkwo's father Charming, sociable, lazy and hedonistic (or pleasure-loving) Prefers music and drinking to working in his fields Has no titles</p>

	Extravaaant and therefore, in debt
Nwoye's mother	Okonkwo's first and senior wife, who has many children Obiageli is her daughter Looks after Ikemefuna
Ekwefi	Okonkwo's second wife and his favourite Marriage to Okonkwo is a love-match, as she left her first husband to live with him Mother of Ezinma, Okonkwo's favourite child
Ojiugo	Okonkwos third wife

Name	Description
Nwoye	Okonkwo's eldest son Sensitive and thoughtful Afraid of his father Loves Ikemefuna as a brother Becomes a Christian
Ezinma	Okonkwo and Ekwefi's daughter Okonkwo's favourite child - he wishes she were a y Close to and deeply loved by her mother Devoted to her father An <i>ogbanje</i> who finds her <i>iyi-uwa</i> , thus breaking the cycle of recurring birth and death A favourite of Chielo

Other characters

Name	Description
Ikeme	Like a son to Okorrkwo

funa	A good friend of Nwoye More manly than Nwoye Trusts Okonkwo, but is killed by him
Obieri	Okonkwo's close friend, who sometimes his actions He is a thinker who also criticises some of of the clan When Okonkwo goes into exile, he gives to slavecroppers to preserve some of his for his return Is the link between Okonkwo and Umuofia A moderate man who believes in
Chielo	Ekwefi's friend Loves Ezinma as a daughter Is also the priestess of Ahabala (the Oracle the Caves) Takes on a completely different persona as the priestess of the Oracle
The Umuof	In Part One, the clan is sometimes treated character to emphasise its unity

Questions

Chapter 1

Find examples of diction (or word choice) from paragraphs one and three that establish Okonkwo's character for the reader.

Achebe uses figurative language in a specific way in the novel.

2.1 Comment on the effect of the simile telling us that Okonkwo was as *slippery as a fish in water*.

2.2 The simile *like a bush-fire in the harmattan* is another comparison drawn from nature. Why has Achebe used this type of comparison in his writing?

What is the effect of the many simple and compound sentences used?

Unoka uses a proverb to justify his behaviour when he explains why he spends his money on palm-wine.

4.1 Quote the proverb and explain it in your own words.

4.2 What does this proverb reveal about Unoka's character?

4.3 How did Unoka's clan regard this attitude when he was young, in contrast to when he was an older man?

Quote from the novel to show how Okonkwo felt about his father.
What is the only consolation that Okonkwo feels as Unoka's son?

Theme

Which themes are illustrated in Unoka's song to the kite (a bird that is similar to a hawk)?
Read from, *One day a neighbour. to Okoye rolled his goatskin and departed.* Comment on what is revealed about the Ibo traditional way of life in this passage.
How does Achebe introduce a feeling of foreboding at the end of the chapter and what is the purpose of this technique?

Chapter 2

Explain in detail why the members of the clan fear the dark.

In your own words, explain the proverb *When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk.*
What do the details of Okonkwo's exploits in battle tell us about the value system of the tribe? Give examples to support your point of view.

Why do the people of Mbaino choose to give up two hostages, instead of going to war with Umuofia?

Explain the role of the Oracle in war.

What does the adjective *imperious* tell us about Okonkwo's character?

Write a paragraph in which you discuss how the theme of fear is revealed in Okonkwo's character.

What is the effect of Okonkwo's harshness on the character of Nwoye?

Chapter 3

Theme

Fill in the blank spaces in the statements below to revise your knowledge of the traditional way of life of the clan.

The people consult the __ when they are troubled or need advice.

When the land is exhausted, good farmers make new fields in --'

Men with the __ sickness are left to die in the

Men may inherit __ , __ and __ from their fathers.

Possessions are carried in

Palm-wine is drunk from a

The first wife is a higher __ than the other wives.

Men grow crops such as __ , but women grow __ , __ , and --'

Character

Okonkwo's first year as a sharecropper does not go well as the weather is the *worst ... in living memory.* How does this help to build his character?

What do Unoka's words of encouragement reveal about his character?

Why is Okonkwo unable to accept his father's words of love?

Chapters 5 and 6

Looking at the text

Refer to Chapter 5. Read from, *The Feast of the New Yam, to began to leave for their homes,* and then answer the following questions.

the significance of the lavish preparation of food for the Feast of the New Yam.

Why is Okonkwo unenthusiastic about this feast? Answer in your own words.

How, besides cooking, do the women make this feast a special occasion?

Why does Achebe mention that Ikemefuna finds the memories of his home becoming *remote and vague*?

Discuss Okonkwo's behaviour over the incident of the banana tree.

Even though she has been beaten, Ekwefi still comments disparagingly about Okonkwo as a hunter.

What does this reveal

about her character?

The firing of the rusty gun reveals an aspect of Okonkwo's character that we have seen earlier when he breaks the Peace of Ani. What does

it tell us about him?

The firing of the gun foreshadows another important event later in the novel. What is it and how does it affect Okonkwo's life?

Chapters 7 and 8

Looking at the text

Read from the start of Chapter 7 to the paragraph ending, *He calls you his father,* and then answer the following questions:

Identify and comment on the use of figurative language in this image *He grew rapidly like a yam-tendrill in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life.*

Explain in your own words how Okonkwo defines manhood

Why does Nwoye prefer his mother's stories to the violent tales told by his father?

Nwoye is frightened of disappointing his father, and so he pretends to share his views. How does this make us feel about their future relationship?

What role does Ikemefuna play in the relationship between father and son?

Discuss the response of the tribe to the coming of the locusts, and comment on the themes illustrated in this episode.

How does Achebe give added impact to the shock of the news of Ikemefuna's impending death?

Chapters 9, 10, and 11

Looking at the text in Chapter 9

Okonkwo knows that the wife banging on his door must be Ekwefi because of her *audacity*. What does this word mean and what does it tell us about their relationship?

What was the effect on Ekwefi of the loss of her children?

Why was the body of Onwumbiko so brutally mutilated and denied burial?

In your own words, explain the concept of the *iyi-uwa*.

Ezinma leads the crowd on a long and unnecessary journey to find her *iyi-uwe*, when all the time it is buried within Okonkwo's compound. What does this tell us about her character?

Looking at the text in Chapter 10

How do the *egwugwu* convince the clan that they are indeed the spirits of the nine ancestors?

What is the aim of tribal justice, as seen in the case of the runaway wife?

Looking at the text in Chapter 11

What characteristics of the tortoise are illustrated in the story of *Tortoise and the birds* that Ekwefi tells Ezinma?

Contrast the behaviour of Chielo, Ekwefi's friend, with Chielo, priestess of Agbala.

What is the impact of the image of Okonkwo and Ekwefi waiting together at the end of the chapter?

Chapter 12

How do the women of the clan cement their relationships on this special day?

How does Okonkwo confirm his superior status in his family as the women prepare to leave?

Explain Obierika's ambivalent attitude to the great market of Umuike.

Obierika's compound is compared to an *ant-hill*. What is the impact of this simile?

Why does Achebe include mention of the cow that has escaped into the fields?

Comment on the rules of expected conduct that bind the women in the clan.

How does Obierika honour Okonkwo in his speech to the in-laws?

Chapter 13

The peace of the early morning is shattered by the *ekwe*, or drums.

1.1 Why are the *ekwe* described as *talking*?

1.2 What is the symbolic impact of this violent noise?

1.3 How else does Achebe create a feeling of rising tension as the drums beat out their message?

1.4 Why does Okonkwo feel a sense of personal dread when the dead man is named?

In your own words, explain the implied threat in the words of the one-handed *egwugwu* over the corpse.

Read the paragraph beginning *The drums and the dancing began again*.

3.1 What is the impact of the simple sentence *All was silent*?

3.2 How may the accidental killing of this young man be seen as a kind of poetic justice for Okonkwo?

Comment on the penalty Okonkwo has to pay for this crime as an aspect of tribal justice, and contrast it with twenty-first-century views of justice.

Explain why this crime is regarded so seriously by the clan.

Comment on the way in which Okonkwo's compound is destroyed.

Explain how Obierika's thoughts about some of the customs of the clan that he does not understand form a link between Part One and Part Two.

Chapters 14 and 15

CHAPTER 14

YEARS OF EXILE BEGIN

Setting and plot

Although Okonkwo's mother has been dead for thirty years, Okonkwo is still remembered in Mbanta, and he and his family are welcomed by his uncle, Uchendu. Okonkwo is given land for a compound, fields to farm, and 300 seed-yams to plant. Okonkwo has great difficulty accepting the loss of his hopes of becoming one of the lords of his clan. Uchendu chides him, reminding him that in times of sorrow, a man *finds refuge in his motherland*. He also reminds Okonkwo that he is not alone in suffering, as this is part of what it is to be human.

CHAPTER 15

OBIERIKA'S FIRST VISIT TO OKONKWO

Plot

Obierika has proved himself a good friend by selling okonkwos yams, and giving his seed-yams to sharecroppers. He brings two bags filled with cowries from the proceeds of these activities.

Obierika tells Okonkwo about the arrival in Abame of the white man who was *riding an iron horse*. The Oracle prophesied that this man would *break their clan and spread destruction among them*, and so he was killed and his bicycle tied to a tree. This provides the evidence of his death for the three whites who come to look for him. The consequence of this is the massacre of the Abame villagers by *three white men and a band of ordinary men like us*. Obierika is *greatly afraid* for the future.

The arrival of the white man in the village provokes different reactions.

.. The Oracle perceives a danger to the tribe. The traditional manner of dealing with a threatening person is to kill him or her. However, when this is done, it provokes retribution in the form of the massacre of the people of Abame.

.. Uchendu cannot comprehend the reality of this change and persists in his belief that the white men must be albinos.

~ Obierika now begins to believe the stories of white men who enslaved African people, and he is afraid that this is the start of something catastrophic.

~ Okonkwo believes that the men of Abame have allowed this to happen. He implies that if they had been armed, they would have defeated the white men and their helpers, and that this would have resolved the problem.

Question

Explain how Obierika's attitude to this episode is typical of his character.

Chapters 16, 17, & 18

Looking at the text in Chapter 16

During the two years between Obierika's visits to Okonkwo, there have been great changes. What are they?

Why are the traditional leaders of the clans, such as the priestess of Agbala and the men who hold titles, sceptical of the new faith?

Nwoye's sudden arrival in Umuofia follows his conversion.

3.1 What is it that *captivated* Nwoye and drew him to Christianity? 3.2 Give evidence from Part One of the novel that demonstrates this predisposition in Nwoye.

3.3 What are the immediate consequences of Nwoye's conversion?

How does Okonkwo react to his first encounters with the missionaries who come to Mbanta?

Contrast the way the Ibo respond to the words of the missionaries with the way they respond to the singing of the *gay and rollicking tunes of evangelism*.

Looking at the text in Chapter 18

What is the attitude of the missionaries to the religion of the Ibo?

What prevented the clan from killing those among them who converted to the new faith?

Explain in your own words why the issue of the admission of outcasts to the church is a good example of the theme of the clash of cultures.

Why would the killing of the sacred python be a logical consequence of the admission of the outcasts into the church?

How does the clan interpret the death of Okoli?

CHAPTER 19 Okonkwo's EXILE COMES TO AN END

Plot and theme

Okonkwo is glad that *the seven wasted years* are almost over, and prepares for his return to Umuofia by sending money to Obierika to build him a new compound. However, he has idealised Umuofia during his absence, and mistakenly believes that his own clan is strong enough to withstand the changes that have happened in Mbanta.

Ekwefi prepares a farewell feast. The chapter ends on an ominous note, as Uchendu

speaks of his fear for the you generation in these words:

You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors ... I fear for you: I fear for the clan.

Thus, *Things* are starting to *fall apart* as a result of the clash of cultures, which is eroding the various clans' sense of identity.



CHAPTER 20 Okonkwo's RETURN TO UMUOFIA

Plot and character

Looking at the text

Explain the following simile in the first paragraph of the chapter:

The clan was like a lizard ... grew another.

Explain how Okonkwo planned to resurrect himself as a leader in Umuofia.

What is the main difference between the church in Mbanta and the church in Umuofia?

Who are the *kotma*?

Why is it impossible for the clan to rid themselves of both the church and the government of white people?

Style

Achebe makes an allusion to Shakespeare's tragedy *Hamlet*, act 2, scene 2, line 201, when he uses the metaphor of *method in the overwhelming madness* of the new religion. The line from the play is, *Though this be madness, yet there's method in't*.

Character and theme

Mr Brown is a moderate and humble man, and so his mission steadily gains ground. But, the arrival of Reverend Smith is the catalyst that tips the balance and looses *anarchy upon the world* of Okonkwo.

Differences in character between Mr Brown and Reverend Smith

Mr Brown	Reverend Smith
Is a restrained man who understands that the Ibo need to be led the new faith	Is arrogant and rejects the possibility of compromise. He is a religious
Prevents his converts from flaarantly offending the traditional members clan. Understands that	Encourages zealots, such as Enoch, who commits the unforgivable unmasking one of the <i>egwugwu</i> .

understanding are a gradual	leads to the burning of the church nearly costs Reverend Smith his life
Is a humble not racist man wh in his attitudes, but treats the Ibo with respect. Gets to know important such as Akunna, aJIld engages in debate with him to try to his point of view. Akunna respects and presents him with a carved elephant tusk	Is racist in his attitude towards the tribe: sees <i>things as black and And black was evil</i> . Sees the Ibo sons of darkness and wages war against their customs
Is patient and bases his mission work on his growing understanding of people among whom he works	Is impatient and takes strong measures against those converts who do not measure up to his standard of faith
Encourages his flock to become educated and to work as the new administration. This helps reconcile the tribe to the white administration. Deals with his with the tribe in his own way, calling in the District Commissioner	Reinforces the worst aspects of the administration and calls on the Commissioner to avenge the loss the church. This leads to the arrest Okonkwo and other important and through this, to the tragic of the novel - the suicide of Okonkwo

CHAPTERS 23 & 24

OKONKWO'S IMPRISONMENT AND THE AFTERMATH

Plot and theme

looking at the text in Chapter 23

What is ironic about the sense of happiness that Okonkwo feels?

What is implied in the use of the word *sweet-tongued* to describe the messenger sent to Umuofia by the District Commissioner?

Contrast the behaviour of the leaders of Umuofia with the actions of the District Commissioner and his twelve men.

What is the thematic impact of the words *the dominion of our queen*, which the District Commissioner uses to describe the land of the Ibo?

The District Commissioner instructs the messengers to treat the leaders of Umuofia with respect, but they are humiliated and mistreated.

What comment does this make on the theme of colonial authority?

Comment on the issue of the fine levied on Umuofia.

Discuss the impact of the following simile: *Umuofia was like a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to run.*

looking at the text in Chapter 24

Contrast Okonkwo's attitude to the situation with that of Egonwanne.

What drastic course of action does Okika urge in his speech?

Style

Read the last three paragraphs of the chapter, noting the following aspects of style:

The short sentences give a sense of great drama to the action of Okonkwo killing the messenger. It is as if we are watching the episode in slow motion.

The same technique is used to show the reaction of the tribe to the killing. It is as if Okonkwo, too, absorbs each detail separately.

The simplicity of the style creates a tone of deep sincerity.

The final sentence of the chapter is poignant. Through understatement, it allows us to appreciate the depths of betrayal that Okonkwo feels.

CHAPTER 25 THE DEATH OF OKONKWO

Plot and theme

The final chapter of the novel is pervaded with a feeling of tragic inevitability as the District Commissioner's men arrive to arrest Okonkwo, but instead are taken to his hanging body. The last paragraph rings the death knell for the life of the tribe, and by extension, for all indigenous people in colonial Africa. We can imagine the type of book that the District Commissioner in his arrogance and ignorance will write.

Looking at the text

Read the whole chapter carefully, and then answer the following contextual questions:

Obierika's response that Okonkwo *is not here* is what we would expect of a member of the clan.

1.1 Discuss his words in the context of the culture and traditions of the tribe.

1.2 Explain how the response of the District Commissioner reflects the theme of the clash of cultures. Quote to Support your answer.

Discuss the tone and the implied attitude expressed by the following words: *The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs.*

Comment on the impact of the following examples of diction in the passage from, *It is against our custom, to cleanse the desecrated land: 3.1 offense*

3.2 desecrated

Obierika expresses the injustice of what has happened when he accuses the District Commissioner of driving Okonkwo to kill himself. Explain what he means in a short paragraph.

The District Commissioner believes that the story of Okonkwo's end will *make interesting reading*. What does this observation tell us about the District Commissioner's character?

Write a short paragraph explaining how the end of the novel reflects the theme of the book expressed in its title, *Things Fall Apart*.