Things Fall Apart
by Chinua Achebe

Study Guide

Name: _______________________________
I. Achebe and His Times

Chinua Achebe, full name Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, was born in Nigeria. His father was a teacher in a missionary school; Achebe was raised as a Protestant. As a youth, Achebe attended the Government College of Umualia and the University College of Ibadan. While in college, Achebe reclaimed his cultural name and no longer used his christened name, Albert, after Prince Albert of England. While in school, Achebe studied English, history, and theology.

Achebe began writing in the 1950s; much of his work centers on the political and social problems that face his nation, particularly during the time of unrest that came when Britain influenced the government and religion of Nigeria. His writing explores the ramifications of Colonialism. Achebe went on to found a publishing company with a fellow Nigerian writer. He since has published many other novels, short stories, and essays.

II. About the Book

*Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, was Achebe’s first novel. With it, Achebe established that he is one of the foremost Nigerian writers and has managed to incorporate his African heritage into English-language novels. Achebe’s literature draws on African oral tradition as well as societal traditions to create a text that is accepted not only for its reflection of the human condition, but also its ability to reflect African culture.

*Things Fall Apart* follows Okonkwo, a powerful leader in a traditional Ibo tribe in the village of Umuofia. The story takes place in a traditional village in the 1880s before European missionaries and other outsiders have arrived. The clan is traditional in its practice of religion, sacrifice, the supernatural, and relationships among the tribal community. Driven by the memory of his lazy and unsuccessful father, Okonkwo spends his life using his strength and power to earn the respect of his fellow tribesmen. However, the novel depicts the changes that can occur when a tribal leader is banished from the community, despite the respect that he has earned from his tribesmen, and outsiders attempt to alter cultural traditions.

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria received its independence from British colonial rule. Achebe wrote this novel two years before this event. His goal was to illustrate for non-African audiences what Nigeria was like before colonization.

Originally written in English and published in 1958, *Things Fall Apart* was one of the first novels by an African author to garner worldwide acclaim. Though mostly fictional, Nigerian author Chinua Achebe claims that the book documents Africa’s spiritual history – the civilized and rich life the Igbo lived before the arrival of Europeans and the ruinous social and cultural consequences that the arrival of European missionaries brought. Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* as a sharp criticism of imperialism, or the European colonization of countries outside of the European continent (especially Africa and the Americas). The novel also critiques Joseph Conrad’s famous novel, *Heart of Darkness*, which documented the African natives from an imperialist’s (or white colonizer’s) point of view.

III. Why should you care?

One of the most fascinating parts of *Things Fall Apart* comes from watching the main character, Okonkwo's ongoing battle against being like his father. Okonkwo doesn’t respect anything about his father, which is a bit extreme. Most people, though, do see qualities in their parents that scare them. For example, the kid with the alcoholic dad who decides never to touch a drink, or the one that has a hideously penny-pinching mom
who grows up vowing to never shop at a discount store or use coupons while grocery shopping.

It’s common for people to fear being like their parents, and overcompensate by behaving in the completely opposite way. Okonkwo, however, is an example of what happens to a person who concerns himself more with avoiding his father's traits than with living his own, independent life.

**IV. Key Facts**

**TYPE OF WORK** · Novel

**GENRE** · Postcolonial critique; tragedy

**TIME AND PLACE WRITTEN** · 1959, Nigeria

**DATE OF FIRST PUBLICATION** · 1959

**NARRATOR** · The narrator is anonymous but shows sympathy for the various residents of Umuofia.

**POINT OF VIEW** · The narration is in the third person, by an omniscient figure who focuses on Okonkwo but switches from character to character to detail the thoughts and motives of various individuals.

**TENSE** · Past

**SETTING (TIME)** · 1890s

**SETTING (PLACE)** · Lower Nigerian villages, Iguedo and Mbanta in particular

**MAJOR CONFLICT** · On one level, the conflict is between the traditional society of Umuofia and the new customs brought by the whites, which are in turn adopted by many of the villagers. Okonkwo also struggles to be as different from his deceased father as possible. He believes his father to have been weak, effeminate, lazy, ignominious, and poor. Consequently, Okonkwo strives to be strong, masculine, industrious, respected, and wealthy.

**V. Who they are:**

**The Umuofia and Mbanta villages of the Igbo tribe in Nigeria, around 1900**

The setting in Nigeria around the turn of the 19th century is extremely important; it allows Okonkwo’s life to straddle the pre- and post-European imperial era. Because Okonkwo experiences both periods, we the reader have a window into the dramatic changes that occurred in Igbo culture and society as a result of imperialism. For example, we see two different manners in which crimes of murdering a clansman are treated.

We also see two different examples of courts and justice. In the traditional Igbo system of justice, villagers bring their complaints to a group of nine elders dressed as masked gods, and the group jointly and publicly settles disputes. However, when the white men arrive, they set up their own court which settles disputes in favor of the highest bidder and isn’t above secretly ambushing respected clansmen who come to court to have a civilized discussion.

The physical setting of forest the forest villages are extremely important. The Umuofia clan has an elaborate religious system largely based on their natural environment. Surrounded by dense, dark woods, the forest is both respected and feared as a chief god, the Evil Forest. The earth goddess is also revered and feared; as
farmers, the Umuofia rely completely on the produce of the land and are subject to drought and flooding. The earth goddess is seen as in control of the weather and productivity of the land, so much of the clan’s social structure is set around not displeasing the earth goddess. Fear of offending the earth goddess motivates the punishment for many crimes. Achebe’s descriptions of the isolation of the Umuofia people and their complete dependence on their natural setting make their culture and practices understandable to a Western audience.

VI. The Culture

IBO (IGBO)

Location: Nigeria, Africa, is composed of basically three different ethnic groups: the Yorubas, the Hausas, and the Ibos. The Ibos live in Iboland. In pre-colonial Nigeria, there were many spellings of the name Igbo. Achebe uses the archaic spelling, Ibo, instead of the contemporary spelling, Igbo. Later, we will examine why he does this.

It comes as no surprise that the stifling heat of central Africa would dictate the type of clothing worn by any native peoples. The Ibos wear little or nothing until they reach puberty. At this time, the men usually wear loose-fitting cotton shirts and a loincloth, while the women wrap different pieces of cloth around themselves and also wrap some cloth around their head. The men often carry machetes, useful for clearing overgrown paths and offering protection for wild animals.

Language: The language of the Ibos is very interesting. It is derived from a group of languages commonly found in West Africa, the Kwa languages. It is based a lot on pitch, vocal inflections, and context when defining the meaning of a word. A single word can have numerous meanings depending on these factors. Idioms and proverbs play an important role in the Ibo language. Someone who does not use them in speech is considered a novice at speaking the language.

Daily Life: Village life for the Ibo people is like many other villages in Africa, but still unique in an Ibo way. Ibos live in villages that have anywhere from a few hundred to a few thousand people comprised of numerous extended families. A very interesting thing about these villages is that there is no single ruler or king that controls the population. Decisions are made by including almost everyone in the village. There are established institutions such as a council of elders (a group based on age), a council of chiefs, women’s associations, and secret societies. The Ibos simultaneously emphasize individual actions and community living.

The Ibos are profoundly religious. These polytheistic people worship many gods. They believe that there are three levels of divine beings: the highest level is the supreme god, or “Chukwu.” Underneath Chukwu are lesser gods, called “Umuagbara”, and under these are the “Ndi Ichie,” the spirits of dead people. The Ibos also believe in reincarnation. They see death as a transient phase between life and the spirit world. When someone dies, he or she starts a new life in the spirit world. After a time in the spirit world, a dead person would be reborn as a new person and the cycle would continue on. Each village has priests and priestesses who help in all spiritual matters, conducting ceremonies and rituals. And since the Ibos believe that everything in life is controlled by higher powers, there are also diviners in a village that attempt to predict the future.

There is a negative side to the Ibo culture, however. Since the British invaded and settled Iboland in the beginning of the 16th century, things have changed drastically, mostly to the disadvantage of women.
Today, women are considered second-class citizens, and subservient to men, and sometimes treated as slaves. Women are also forced to study certain “womanly” subjects in school.

We will explore more on the Ibo culture through the following website: http://www.igboguide.org/

VII. Character List and Pronunciation Guide

**Okonkwo** (Oh-kawn-kwoh) The central character of *Things Fall Apart*. A young leader of the African Igbo community of Umuofia (Oo-moo-oh-fee-ah), he is known as a fierce warrior as well as a successful farmer. 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. He is innately a sensitive young man.

**Ikemefuna** (Ee-keh-meh-foo-nah) A boy of fourteen who is given to Umuofia by a neighboring village to avoid war. He is a clever, resourceful young man.

**Ekwefi** (Eh-kweh-fee) Okonkwo's second wife; the mother of Ezinma, her only living child.

**Ezinma** (Eh-zeen-mah) Daughter of Ekwefi and Okonkwo; Ekwefi's only surviving child.

**Ojiubo** (Oh-jee-ooh-boh) Okonkwo's third wife; the mother of several of Okonkwo's children.

**Obierika** (Oh-bee-air-ee-kah) Okonkwo's best friend, who often represents the voice of reason. He is the father of Maduka (son) and Ekueke (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, who influences all aspects of Umuofian life. She is based on the real Oracle at Awka, who controlled Igbo life for centuries.

**Mr. Brown** The first white Christian missionary in Umuofia and Mbanta. An understanding and accommodating man, he is inclined to listen to the Igbos.

**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 possesses little knowledge or understanding of the people for whom he tries to administer a new government.
VIII. The Main Allusion in the Opening Epigraph

Epigraphs are like little appetizers to the great entrée of a story. They illuminate important aspects of the story, and they get us headed in the right direction. The epigraph in Things Fall Apart is the first four lines of the poem “The Second Coming,” which is easily one of the most famous and frequently quoted poems in all of Western (and apparently Nigerian) literature. Yeats’s poem was first published in 1920, a year after the end of World War I, “the Great War,” in which millions of Europeans died. While many people at the time just wanted to get on with their lives, Yeats thought that European society had pretty much broken down, and the poem is a terrifying prediction of future violence. Unfortunately, the rise of Hitler and fascism in the 1930s proved him largely correct, and many have found the poem disturbingly prophetic in light of the later wars of the twentieth century.

By using lines from “The Second Coming” as the introduction to his book, Achebe points out parallels between a time of chaos in European history and the upheaval caused by the European colonization of Africa. In a way, Achebe uses the language of the colonizer (literally and figuratively) to enlighten them on the point of view of the colonized.

The Second Coming
Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming!
Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

– William Butler Yeats, January 1919

Chapter by Chapter Glossary and Questions:

Chapter One Glossary:

gyre a circular or spiral motion; a revolution. The word appears in the book's opening quotation from a W.B. Yeats poem, "The Second Coming."

Okonkwo The name implies male pride and stubbornness.

Umuofia The community name, which means children of the forest and a land undisturbed by European influences.

harmattan a dry, dusty wind that blows from the Sahara in northern Africa toward the Atlantic, especially from November to March.

Unoka Okonkwo's father's name; its translation, home is supreme, implies a tendency to stay home and loaf instead of achieve fame and heroism.

cowries shells of the cowrie, a kind of mollusk related to snails and found in warm seas; especially the shells of the money cowrie, formerly used as currency in parts of Africa and southern Asia.

egwugwu leaders of the clan who wear masks during certain rituals and speak on behalf of the spirits; the term can be either singular or plural.

markets Igbo weeks are four days long, and the market day is on the first of day each week; therefore, three or four markets is a period of twelve to sixteen days.
Kites are birds of prey with long, pointed wings and, usually, a forked tail; they prey especially on insects, reptiles, and small mammals.

Okoye is an everyman name comparable to John Doe in English. Okoye represents all the people to whom Unoka owes money.

Kola nut is the seed of the cola, an African tree. The seed contains caffeine and yields an extract; it represents vitality and is used as a courteous, welcoming snack, often with alligator pepper.

Alligator pepper is a small brown fruit of an African shrub, whose hot seeds are like black pepper; also called offe. The seeds may be ground and blended with kola nut in the ritual welcome of visitors.

Chalk is a material that represents peace. The Umuofians use chalk to signify personal honors and status by marking the floor and the toe or face, according to the level of honorific title they have taken. For example, Okoye marks his toe to indicate his first title.

Mbaino is this community name means *four settlements*.

Ekwe is a drum.

Udu is a clay pot.

Ogene is a gong.

Idemili title is this title, named after the river god Idemili, is the third-level title of honor in Umuofia.

**Chapter One Questions:**

*Note how Achebe immediately establishes his perspective from inside Umuofia (which is Ibo for "people of the forest") in the first sentence. The wider world consists of the group of nine related villages which comprise Umuofia and certain other villages like Mbaino.*

1. Reread the first sentence of the novel. What purposes does this sentence serve?

2. Why was Okonkwo famous? Use evidence from the text to answer this question.
3. Explain the rhetorical strategies used in the first two paragraphs.

4. Explain the use of figurative devices in the following line: “Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water” (3).

5. Explain the imagery in the following line: “That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo’s fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan” (3).

6. What is the rhetorical effect used in the following line: “The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath” (3). What effect does it create?
7. Describe Unoka

8. Why is Okonkwo ashamed of his father, Unoka?

9. How is Okonkwo able to rise to such fame when his father was such a shame in the eyes of the community?

10. What insights does Achebe provide about Okonkwo’s character and motivation in life?
Kola is a stimulant, comparable to very strong tea or coffee, which is served on most social occasions in this culture. It is also one ingredient after which Coca Cola is named. Note how the ritual for sharing kola is described without being explained.

11. What is the meaning of the proverb “He who brings kola brings life” (5)? What is the role of this proverb in the text? Specifically, what does the practice of sharing palm-wine and kola nuts, emphasize about the Igbo people?

12. The people of Umuofia speak a complex language full of proverbs and literary and rhetorical devices. Achebe’s translation of the Igbo language into English retains the cadences, rhythms, and speech patterns of the language. How does this complex language compare to the stereotypes present regarding tribal Africans?

13. Although not indicated in this chapter, the events of Things Fall Apart take place in the late 1800s and early 1900s, just before and during the early days of the British Empire's expansion in Nigeria. The novel depicts details about life in an African culture much different from Western culture. In this chapter, what does Achebe reveal about aspects of Igbo culture?
14. Familiar with Western literature and its’ traditional forms, Achebe structures *Things Fall Apart* in the tradition of a Greek tragedy, with the story centered around Okonkwo, the tragic hero. Aristotle defined the *tragic hero* as a character who is superior and noble, one who demonstrates great courage and perseverance but is undone because of a tragic personal flaw in his character.

In this first chapter, how does Achebe set up Okonkwo as a man with the key qualities of a tragic hero? Hint - what could be his tragic personal flaw?

15. Why is Okonkwo chosen to care for Ikemefuna?

**The Gist:**

Getting the gist of what you are reading means getting the biggest ideas, the most important pieces of information. According to the new Common Core Curriculum, it is crucial for students to understand the biggest ideas of the text and be able to summarize those ideas in their own words.

Getting the gist allows you to summarize a text because you have pulled out the most important pieces of information and then you can retell the information through the biggest ideas.

To find the GIST:

Step 1 - Read the article or section of text.
Step 2 - Answer the 5 Ws and H – Who, What, When, Where, Why, and How – regarding that section of the text
Step 3 – using the answers to the 5 Ws and H, write a summary of what you read.
Chapter Two Glossary:

**Ogbuefi** a person with a high title, as in Ogbuefi Ezeugo (the orator) and Ogbuefi Udo (the man whose wife was killed in Mbaino).

**Ezeugo** the name for a person of high religious significance, such as an Igbo priest.

**Udo** peace.

**About ten thousand men** The nine villages of Umuofia unlikely have as many as ten thousand men. This saying probably means every man of the community — an example of *hyperbole*, an exaggeration not intended to be taken literally.

**Umuofia kwenu** a shout of approval and greeting that means *United Umuofia!*

**Agadi-nwayi** an old woman.

**Oracle** the place where, or medium by which, the deities are consulted; here, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves.

**A just war** Societies throughout history have rationalized certain wars as justified for religious or cultural reasons. For example, in the fifth century, St. Augustine of the early Christian church wrote extensively about the just war; the Crusades of the late Middle Ages were initiated as holy wars; and today’s Muslim word *jihad* means holy war.

**Emissary** a person or agent sent on a specific mission.

**Ndichie** elders.

**Obi** a hut within a compound.
compound an enclosed space with a building or group of buildings within it.

**Chapter Two Questions:**

*Note - In Chapter 2, the reader begins to see beliefs and practices of the Igbo tradition that are particularly significant in the story — for example, the wide division between masculine and feminine actions and responsibilities. Respect and success are based on only manly activities and accomplishments; taking care of children and hens, on the other hand, are womanly activities.

1. Why does war not frighten Okonkwo?

2. What does Okonkwo bring home after fighting in a war and how does Okonkwo display his fierce and warlike nature at important occasions in the village?

3. The Ibo people present characteristics of being superstitious. What effect does night have on the people? What do they fear? How do they deal with their fears?

4. What is the cause and nature of the conflict with Mbaino, hence the need for a village meeting?
5. Why would the people of Umuofia be beaten in the war with Mbaino if they disobeyed the Oracles of the Hills and Caves?

6. Okonkwo is chosen to represent Umuofia and travels to Mbaino to offer them an ultimatum – make a sacrifice to atone for the murder of the Umuofian woman or go to war with them. Not surprisingly, Mbaino agrees to the terms. As such, they sacrifice a female virgin and they give up a young boy of their tribe as well – Ikemefuna. Why is Ikemefuna selected by the people of Mbaino to serve as a peace sacrifice for Umuofia?

7. What is the fate of the virgin girl from Mbaino and Ikemefuna?

8. Okonkwo is very strong and rarely feels tired. From his experiences with his father, Okonkwo hates not only idleness but also gentleness. How is this shown in Chapter 2?
9. In what ways is Okonkwo presented as unusual for his culture?

10. What is Okonkwo’s attitude towards women?

11. Why does Okonkwo dislike his son Nwoye so much?

12. How do you think Achebe wants us to view Okonkwo’s character and behavior? You may take into account in your answer what we have learned about Okonkwo in Chapter One.

13. Describe Okonkwo’s compound:
14. In this polygamous culture each household is enclosed in a compound. Each wife lives in a hut with her children, and the husband visits each wife in turn, though he has his own hut as well. Children are often cared for more or less communally. What do you think the advantages and disadvantages of this form of social structure are?

15. At the end of the chapter, the narrative switches to Ikemefuna’s point of view. Okonkwo hands the boy over to his first wife and orders her to take care of him. What is Ikemefuna feeling as he settles into the village of Umuofia?

**What is the GIST of Chapter 2?**
Chapter Three Glossary:

Agbala, the Oracle the prophet of the Igbo. Achebe bases the Agbala Oracle (the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves) on the Awka Oracle that was destroyed by the British. Chielo was the priestess who spoke to Unoka on behalf of the god Agbala.

Ani the earth goddess who owns all land.

chi a significant cultural concept and belief meaning one's personal deity; also one's destiny or fate.

Nna-ayi translated as our father; a greeting of respect.

sharecropping working land for a share of the crop, especially as a tenant farmer. Here, Okonkwo works as a sharecropper to obtain seed-yams.

coco-yam the edible, spherical-shaped tuber of the taro plant grown in the tropics and eaten like potatoes or ground into flour, cooked to a paste, or fermented for beer. Here, the round coco-yam (a woman's crop) is a different tuber than the elongated-shaped yam (a man's crop).

cassava any of several plants (genus Manihot and especially M. esculenta) of the spurge family grown in the tropics for their fleshy, edible rootsticks that produce a nutritious starch. Here, the plant also provides valuable leaves for livestock feed as well as tubers, which are prepared like coco-yams.

Chapter Three Questions:

* NOTE - Notice that Achebe's first name, Chinua, begins with chi. Achebe explained the usage of chi in the following excerpt:

“When we talk about chi, we're talking about the individual spirit, and so you find the word in all kinds of combinations. Chinwe, which is my wife's name, means chi owns me; mine is Chinua, which is a shortened form of an expression that means may a chi fight for me. My son is named Chidi, which means chi is there. So it's [in] almost [all my family members' names] in one form or the other. Our youngest girl asked me why she didn't have chi in her name. She thought it was some kind of discrimination, so she took the name Chioma, which means good chi.”

1. The priestess of Agbala is introduced at the beginning of this chapter. She is a very significant figure in this book. What effect does her status have on your judgment of the roles played by women in the culture?
2. Why do you think Achebe gives prominence at this early point in the story to Okonkwo’s failures?

3. Why is Unoka, who dies of swelling in the stomach, abandoned and left to die in the Evil Forest?

4. Why is Nwakibie considered a successful man in Igbo society?

5. Explain why Okonkwo went to Nwakibie when he was young:

6. How is the separation between the man's world and the woman's world in Umuofian culture emphasized in this chapter?
7. “With a father like Unoka, Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men had. He neither inherited a barn nor a title, nor even a young wife. But in spite of these disadvantages, he had begun even in his father’s lifetime to lay the foundations of a prosperous future. It was slow and painful. But he threw himself into it like one possessed. And indeed he was possessed by the fear of his father’s contemptible life and shameful death” (18). What does this passage reveal about Okonkwo’s drive in life? Explain

8. What is "the worst year in living memory" and how does Okonkwo react to it (23)?

9. Chapter 3 also illustrates several traditional ideas and truths that shape day-to-day Igbo life. These principles are often expressed through indirect language and symbols in the following proverbs:

- "A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing" (20)
- "The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said that he would praise himself if no one else did" (21).
- "[Because] men have learned to shoot without missing, [Eneke the bird] has learned to fly without perching" (22).
- "You can tell a ripe corn by its look" (22).

What do these traditional expressions demonstrate about the Ibo people? Hint – look at when they speak these proverbs and the point the person is trying to make through the proverbs.
10. An especially significant concept introduced in this chapter is the belief in personal *chi*. At its simplest level, *chi* parallels the Western concept of soul, although *chi* is a more complex idea. Explain the Igbo belief in the concept of *chi*.

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### What is the GIST of Chapter 3?

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**Chapter Four Glossary**

*Osugo* The name means a low-ranked person.

*Week of Peace* In Umofia, a sacred week in which violence is prohibited.

*nza* a small but aggressive bird.

*nso-ani* a sin against the earth goddess, Ani.

*Amadiora* the god of thunder and lightning.
*Note - Whereas the first few chapters highlight the complexity and originality of the Igbo language, in the next few chapters Achebe points out another aspect of Igbo culture that colonialist Europe tended to ignore: the existence of subcultures within a given African population. Each clan has its own stories, and Ikemefuna is an exciting addition to Umuofia because he brings with him new and unfamiliar folk tales. With the introduction of Ikemefuna, Achebe is able to remind us that the story we are reading is not about Africa but rather about one specific culture within Africa. He thus combats the European tendency to see all Africans as one and the same.

1. An old man refers to Okonkwo saying, “Looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast” (26). What does he mean? Give evidence of how this is meant to be a disparaging remark about Okonkwo:

2. How did Ikemefuna react to living with Okonkwo's family?

3. How is Ikemefuna affecting Okonkwo and the rest of his family?

4. How does Okonkwo demonstrate his fondness for Ikemefuna?
5. How does Okonkwo break the sacred Week of Peace? Why does he do this?

6. What are Okonkwo's virtues? What are his faults?

7. How does Okonkwo treat Ikemefuna and Nwoye when they help him collect the seed yams? Why does he treat them in this manner?

8. What occurs between Ikemefuna and Nwoye during the resting time between planting and harvesting?
9. Two more examples of traditional wisdom are used when talking about Okonkwo:

- "Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble" (26).
- "When a man says yes, his chi says yes also" (27)

Explain the meaning of these proverbs and how they relate to Okonkwo:
Chapter Five Glossary

calabash the dried, hollow shell of a gourd, used as a bowl, cup, and so on.

yam foo-foo pounded and mashed yam pulp.

cam wood a dye from a West African redwood tree that is used by women to redden their skins before decorating themselves with other patterns for special occasions.

bride-price in some cultures, money and property given to a prospective bride's family by the prospective groom and his family.

Ezinma Ekwefi and Okonkwo's daughter; meaning true beauty. She is also called Nma and Ezigbo, which mean the good one (child).

ilo the village gathering place and playing field; an area for large celebrations and special events.

making inyanga flaunting or showing off.

Chapter Five Questions:

1. What is Ani’s relationship with the ancestors? Why do the Ibo’s offer new yams to Ani?

2. Who is responsible for the major preparations for the Feast of the New Yam? What does this tell the reader about Ibo culture?

3. Describe the New Yam Festival.
4. Why does Okonkwo become angry before the New Yam Festival? Was his anger directed in the right place? Why or why not?

5. For what reason does Achebe repeat the word “beautiful” when describing the way the women decorate their bodies and cut their children’s hair into patterns?

6. What is Ekwefi’s favorite part of the festival? Why?

7. Near the end of the preparations, Okonkwo’s suppressed anger and resentment about the feast explodes – how does this explosion manifest itself? What does this explosion reveal about the traditional Igbo culture?
8. Briefly summarize the story of Ekwefi:

9. Ekwefi has one daughter, a ten-year-old girl named Ezinma. She is a strange child who always speaks her mind, asks lots of questions, and even calls her mother by her first name. How does Okonkwo feel about Ezinma? Use evidence from the text to answer this question.

10. The amount of detail included about the Feast of the New Yam, just before the annual harvest, underscores how closely the life of the community relates to the production of its food. The description of household preparations for the festival reveals significant issues about Igbo culture. Name two issues revealed:
Chapter Six: Glossary

**silk-cotton tree** any of several large, tropical, trees (genera *Bombax* and *Ceiba*) of the bombax family that have capsular fruits with silky hairs around the seeds. Here, the tree is revered because it contains spirits of good children as yet unborn.

**palm fronds** leaves of a palm tree. Here, they are tied together in clusters for "beating the ground" or the legs and feet of the pushing crowd.

**Chielo** the name of the current priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves.

*NOTE* - This chapter introduces a much-discussed aspect of Ibo belief. As in most pre-modern cultures, the majority of children died in early childhood. If a series of such deaths took place in a family it was believed that the same wicked spirit was being born and dying over and over again, spitefully grieving its parents. They tended to be apprehensive about new children until they seemed to be likely to survive, thus proving themselves not to be feared ogbanje.

Chapter Six Questions:

1. Why do the young boys of 15 and 16 wrestle first?
2. The spectacle of the wrestling matches illustrates what values of the Ibo culture?

3. As the wrestling continues, Ekwefi speaks with Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. The two women are good friends, and Chielo inquires about Ezinma, whom she calls “my daughter” (48). They conclude that Ezinma seems to have “come to stay” (48). Why is this said?

4. “Okafo was swept off his feet by his supporters and carried home should high. They sang his praise and the young women clapped their hands” (50). Why do they sing about his accomplishments?

5. Explain the advantages and disadvantages of the social structure portrayed in *Things Fall Apart*. For example, the culture is *polygamous*; the husband, wives, and children live in their own compound; children are cared for communally.
**Chapter Seven Glossary**

**eneke-nti-oba** a bird that flies endlessly.

**entrails** the inner organs of humans or animals; specifically, the intestines; viscera; guts.

**tie-tie** a vine used like a rope; from Pidgin English *to tie*.

**harbingers** persons or things that come before to announce or give an indication of what follows; heralds.

**pestle** a tool, usually club-shaped, used to pound or grind substances in a mortar, or very hard bowl.

**ozo** a class of men holding an ozo title; it also refers to the ritual which accompanies the granting of a title to a person.

**Eze elina, elina** a favorite song of Ikemefuna's about how Danda the ant holds court and how the sand dances forever; it was introduced as a story at the end of Chapter 4.

**twins** two born at the same birth. Here, according to Igbo custom, twins are considered evil and must be placed in earthenware pots and left to die in the forest.

*NOTE* - Most traditional cultures have considered twins magical or cursed. Twins are in fact unusually common among the Ibo, and some subgroups value them highly. However, the people of Umuofia do not.
Chapter Seven Questions:

1. Why would Nwoye pretend to be annoyed and grumble about women?

2. How does Okonkwo feel when he hears Nwoye grumbling about women?

3. Even though Nwoye knows it is right to be masculine, he still prefers the stories that his mother tells. Why?

4. Why are the people of Umuofia so excited about the locusts?

5. What values does Okonkwo associate with manliness? How does Nwoye relate to these values?
6. Why is Okonkwo asked not to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna?

7. Why does Okonkwo participate in the slaughter in spite of an elder's advice not to become involved in the sacrifice?

8. Why do you suppose they have decided to kill the boy now, after three years living in the village?

9. How does Nwoye react to the sacrifice of Ikemefuna?
10. How does Achebe create the feeling that Ikemefuna’s death is an inevitable part of things? Consider in your answer the arrival of the locusts, the part played in the death by tribal beliefs, Okonkwo’s character, and the way this part of the story is told.

11. For the first time in the novel, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, emerges as a major character who, in contrast to his father, questions the long-standing customs of the clan. Which two occasions begin to show the boy's conflicting emotions?

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**Chapter Eight Glossary**

- **plantain** a hybrid banana plant that is widely cultivated in the Western Hemisphere.
- **taboo** any social prohibition or restriction that results from convention or tradition.
- **uli** a liquid made from seeds that make the skin pucker; used for temporary tattoo-like decorations.
jigida strings of hundreds of tiny beads worn snugly around the waist.

And these white men, they say, have no toes The white men's toes are hidden because they are wearing shoes.

leprosy a progressive infectious disease caused by a bacterium that attacks the skin, flesh, nerves, and so on; it is characterized by nodules, ulcers, white scaly scabs, deformities, and the eventual loss of sensation, and is apparently communicated only after long and close contact.

Chapter Eight Questions:

1. Explain Okonkwo’s reaction to Ikemefuna’s death

2. Why is there a growing separation of Okonkwo from his family members and peers in the village? Give evidence from the text that shows this separation.

3. Why does Obierika disapprove of Okonkwo’s role in killing Ikemefuna? What does this show/prove about the character of Obierika?

4. Why would Okonkwo have been happier if Ezinma had been a boy?
5. In what ways is Okonkwo’s thinking challenged by Obierika in this chapter? How does he respond?

6. What do both Okonkwo and Obierika agree about manliness; in particular, what is considered manly behavior between a husband and wife?

7. Explain the marriage negotiations for Obierka’s daughter.

8. How is the notion of white men first introduced into the story? What sorts of attitudes are associated with white men in this passage?
9. Bride-price is the converse of dowry. Common in many African cultures, it involves the bridegroom's family paying substantial wealth in cash or goods for the privilege of marrying a young woman. Do you think such a custom would tend to make women more valuable than a dowry system where the woman's family must offer the gifts to the bridegroom's family? How do you think such a system would affect the women themselves?

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**Chapter Nine Glossary**

**iba** fever, probably related to malaria.

**ogbanje** a child possessed by an evil spirit that leaves the child's body upon death only to enter into the mother's womb to be reborn again within the next child's body.

**iyi-uwa** a special stone linking an ogbanje child and the spirit world; The ogbanje is protected as long as the stone is not discovered and destroyed.
Chapter Nine Questions

1. Why does Ekwefi prize her daughter Ezinma so highly?

2. Give two examples proving that the relationship between Ezinma and Ekwefi was a companionship of equals.

3. Why did Ekwefi stay with her people during her third pregnancy?

4. How was Ekwefi’s despair reflected in the names she gave her children?
5. Why is Ezinma thought to be an ogbanje?

6. Why did the medicine man drag the corpse of the dead ogbanje child into the Evil Forest?

7. Describe what happens when Ezinma digs up her iyi-uwu – what was this digging up supposed to accomplish?

8. Just when Okonkwo's guilt over killing Ikemefuna seems to lessen, his rarely displayed devotion to his family is again tested. How so? How does Okonkwo react? Explain.
What is the GIST of Chapter 9?

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Chapter Ten Glossary

**Aru oyim de de de dei!** egwugwu language translated as *greetings to the physical body of a friend*. The egwugwu speak in a formal language that is difficult for the Umuofians to understand. Each of the nine egwugwu represents a village of the Umuofian community. Together, the egwugwu form a tribunal to judge disputes.

**Evil Forest** the name of the leader of the egwugwu; also the name of the forest where taboo objects and people are abandoned.

**I am Dry-meat-that fills-the-mouth / I am Fire-that-burns-without-faggots** two phrases suggesting that Evil Forest is all-powerful. Faggots are bundles of sticks for burning.

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Chapter 10 Questions

1. Who are the *egwugwu* and what role do they play within the Igbo culture?
2. What do the wives of Okonkwo notice about the second egwugwu?

3. Briefly summarize the case of Uzowulu that the egwugwu are hearing.

4. How does the case brought before the egwugwu parallel Okonkwo’s life?

5. What is the law of Umuofia concerning the bride-price of a woman who runs away from her husband?

6. How does egwugwu keep order when the crowd roars with laughter during the trial?
7. What role do Uzowulu’s neighbors play in the trial?

8. What is the ruling of the Evil Forest and egwugwu? Why did they rule in this way?

9. How effective is the tribe’s system of justice as illustrated here? What is significant, as far as the story is concerned, about the fact that Okonkwo is one of the egwugwu?

10. Explain the irony of the trial in this chapter. Is justice served in the egwugwu’s judgment?
11. Why do you think the people of Umuofia maintain the belief that the *egwugwu* are gods when they are clearly masked humans?

12. The subject of the dispute, domestic violence, is a familiar one today, but the way in which the community views Uzowulu beating his wife is not. How so?

13. How are problems, like the case of Uzowulu, affected by the fact that whole families are involved in marriage, unlike in American culture where a man and woman may wed quite independently of their families and even against their families' wishes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each system?

14. Read the following lines:

“It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders.”

What does this excerpt suggest about the role of women? What is significant about the placement of this passage relative to what has come immediately before, and what will come immediately after?
Chapter Eleven Glossary

**snuff** a preparation of powdered tobacco that is inhaled by sniffing, is chewed, or is rubbed on the gums.

**saltpeter** potassium nitrate; used in the preparation of snuff (also in gunpowder and fireworks).

**Agbala do-o-o-o! . . . Ezinmao-o-o-o** Chielo, the priestess, takes on the voice of the divine Agbala to ask for Ezinma to come to her.

**Tufia-a!** This sound represents spitting and cursing simultaneously.

Chapter Eleven Questions

1. The oral tradition of storytelling in Igbo culture is a means for teaching history and customs, for passing on legends and beliefs, and for explaining the natural as well as the supernatural worlds. The tradition is particularly well-illustrated in the long story about Tortoise and his shell. How so? Explain
2. Why has Chielo come for Ezinma? How do Okonkwo and Ekwe fi react?


4. Why does Ezinma cry when Chielo calls her “my daughter” (102)?

5. Why does Ekwe fi follow Ezinma and Chielo?

6. How does Okonkwo display behavior uncharacteristic of him in this chapter?
7. What does the incident involving the priestess of Agbala reflect about the values of the culture?

8. Of one of the goddesses, it is said: "It was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the market...Chielo was not a woman that night" (106-107). What do you make of this culture where people can be both themselves and also assume other personas? Can you think of any parallels in your own world/culture?

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**Chapter Twelve Glossary**

**umunna** the extended family and kinsmen.

**a great medicine** a supernatural power or magic that may take the shape of a person. In the Umuike market, the medicine assumes the shape of an old woman with a beckoning, magical fan.

**yam pottage** a watery gruel made of yams.
1. At the beginning of Chapter 12, though, the narrator focuses on Okonkwo’s internal state and we see his true feelings rather than his apparent ones. How so? Explain

2. Notice the traditional attitudes of all small villagers toward large marketplaces like Umuike. Describe the *uri* ritual:

3. How is the importance of family emphasized in the *uri* ceremony?

4. Why does Ekwefi join the betrothal feast later than the other wives? What does this show us about her?

5. The members of Obierika’s extended family sit in a half-moon. When his in-laws arrive, they complete the circle. What is the significance of the seating arrangement?
6. The exchange of words before a wedding seems to have ritual significance. The words Obierika says have the weight of promises which, by vocalizing them, he hopes to make come true. What does the “Ee-e-e!” response of the crowd represent (117)?

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**Chapter Thirteen Glossary**

**Go-di-di-go-di-go. Di-go-go-di-go** the sound of drumbeats on the *ekwe*, or drums.

**esoteric** intended for or understood by only a chosen few, as an inner group of disciples or initiates (said of ideas, literature, and so).

**raffia** 1) a palm tree of Madagascar, with large, pinnate leaves. 2) fiber from its leaves, used as string or woven into baskets, hats, and so on.

**Mbanta** The name means small town and is where Okonkwo's mother comes from, his motherland, beyond the borders of Mbaino (Ikemefuna's original home).
Chapter Thirteen Questions

1. What is the significance of the drums in communication among the villages of Umuofia? Why are they esoteric?

2. Why does Okonkwo shiver when he remembers Ezeudu?

3. How do the men express their anguish at Ezeudu’s death?

4. What does the one-handed spirit mean when he asks Ezeudu to come again the way he came before?

5. Describe the farewell dance
6. In the literary tradition of the tragic hero, Okonkwo's undoing continues in this chapter. How so? Explain

7. Why do Okonkwo and his family leave their homestead?

8. Okonkwo has killed people before this. What makes this incident so serious, though it would be treated as a mere accident under our law?

9. How does Obierika feel about the situation with Okonkwo? Explain how Obierika's response to the exile signals a questioning of community traditions.

10. What foreshadowing is present at the end of Part I?
11. “Exile is strangely compelling to think about but terrible to experience. It is the unhealable rift forced between a human being and a native place, between the self and its true home: it’s essential sadness can never be surmounted’ yet it can become ‘a potent, even enriching experience” (Edward Said).

Discuss Okonkwo’s exile. Consider how the exile could be both positive and negative for him and how it relates to the author’s overall purpose in the work. How do you think Okonkwo will handle the exile (relate to quote)? How about his family?

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twenty and ten years Igbo counting may not have a unique number for thirty, which is thus counted as twenty and ten. Similarly, in French, seventy is counted as sixty-ten, and eighty is four twenties.

It is female ochu. Crimes are divided into male and female types. Okonkwo's accidental killing of Ezuedu's son is considered manslaughter and therefore a female crime.

the nuts of the water of heaven hailstones.

isa-ifi the ceremony in which the bride is judged to have been faithful to her groom.

umuada daughters who have married outside the clan.

Chapter Fourteen Questions

1. Why does Okonkwo seek refuge in his motherland?

2. Okonkwo begins his exile deeply discouraged and unmotivated. Making things worse (in his mind), he has been exiled to the woman's side of his family. He thus feels that this transition is an extraordinary challenge to his manliness. What does his uncle remind him about in regards to female qualities?
3. “Is it right you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead” (134). What is Uchendu saying here to Okonkwo? Explain

4. How does Okonkwo start his yam farm in Mbanta?

5. How does Okonkwo feel about the elders’ belief that if a man says “yes,” his chi will also affirm him?

6. Explain the isa-ifí ceremony.

7. How does Uchendu establish his authority when he addresses Okonkwo?
8. Compare and contrast Umuofia and Mbanta. How do their similarities and differences add to an understanding of the Igbo culture?

9. Why was the name “Nneka,” or “Mother is Supreme,” a common name among the Igbo people?

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**Chapter Fifteen Glossary**

**albino** a person whose skin, hair, and eyes lack normal coloration because of genetic factors: albinos have a white skin, whitish hair, and pink eyes.

**Eke day, Afo day** The Igbo week has four days: Eke, Oye, Afo, and Nkwo.
iron horse the bicycle that the white man was riding when he apparently got lost.

Chapter Fifteen Questions

1. Why does Uchendu say that Obierika’s generation stays at home and even a man’s motherland is strange to him?

2. What did the fearless men of Abame do when they met the white man?

3. Why did the Oracle say the white men were like locusts?

4. Why did the white man seem to speak through his nose?
5. Why did the white men wait for the market day to slaughter Abame?

6. How does the story of the destruction of Abame summarize the experience of colonization?

7. Throughout *Things Fall Apart*, Igbo customs and social institutions emphasize the wisdom of seeking a peaceful solution to conflict before a violent solution. Uchendu voices this social value when he states that the killing of the first white man was foolish, for the villagers of Abame did not even know what the man’s intentions were. How does Okonkwo’s beliefs about Abame clash with Igbo values?
8. What sorts of stories had Okonkwo heard about white men before?

9. During Okonkwo's exile, Obierika proves to be his friend. How do Obierika's actions show true friendship?

10. ‘There is no story that is not true,’ says Uchendu (141). What do you think he means? Illustrate your answer by referencing some of the stories told so far in the novel (including the account of the locust invasion).

11. How does Achebe conclude the chapter? Why is this significant?
Chapter Sixteen Glossary:

efulefu worthless men in the eyes of the community.

evangelism a preaching of, or zealous effort to spread, the gospel.

Jesu Kristi Jesus Christ.

callow young and inexperienced; immature.

Chapter Sixteen Questions:

1. How much time has passed before Obierika visit Mbanta again?

2. How do the leaders of Umuofia feel about the new religion?
3. What does Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, mean when she calls the converts “the excrement of the clan” (143)?

4. Why doesn’t Okonkwo want to speak to Obierika about Nwoye?

5. Why do you think Nwoye has become a Christian?

6. What about the new religion appeals to Nwoye?

7. What is the first act of the missionaries which evokes a positive response in some of the Igbo?
8. How is Christianity depicted? Why does Achebe focus on the Trinity?

9. Why do the Igbo people laugh at the interpreter even though he is speaking Igbo?

10. Why are the people excited by what the missionary says?

11. Examine Okonkwo’s attempts, as the story develops, to understand both himself and what is happening around him. Has he made any progress in either of those attempts?
Chapter Seventeen Glossary:

fetish any object believed by some person or group to have magical power.

impudent shamelessly bold or disrespectful; saucy; insolent.

Chapter Seventeen Questions:

1. Describe the Evil Forest.

2. Why is the Evil Forest chosen as the site for the missionary’s church? What surprises the tribal leaders when the church is built on this land?
3. Why does Nneka convert to Christianity?

4. Why do some converts suspend their new faith until after the seventh market week?

5. Where does the white missionary go when he leaves Mbanta?

6. What mutual misunderstandings are evident in this chapter between the missionaries and the people of the village?

7. How does the granting to the missionaries of a plot in the Evil Forest backfire as time goes on?
8. How does Nwoye’s conversion affect Okonkwo?

9. Why are men like Okonkwo threatened by the church? Explain

10. What understanding of the situation does Okonkwo come to by the end of the chapter?

11. Okonkwo rejects his father's way and is, in turn, rejected by Nwoye. Do you feel this pattern evolves inevitably through the nature of the father/son relationship? Or is there something more being here than mere generational conflict?
Chapter Eighteen Glossary:

osu a class of people in Igbo culture considered outcasts, not fit to associate with free-born members of the clan.

caste rigid class distinction based on birth, wealth, and so on, operating as a social system or principle.

heathen anyone not a Jew, Christian, or Muslim; especially, a member of a tribe, nation, etc. worshiping many gods.

python a very large, nonvenomous snake of Asia, Africa, and Australia, that squeezes its prey to death.

defecates excretes waste matter from the bowels.

ostracize to banish, bar, exclude, etc. from a group through rejection by general consent of the members.

Chapter Eighteen Questions:

1. Why do the villagers think the Evil Forest is a good home for the Christians?
2. Why would an Igbo who killed a Christian have to flee from the clan?

3. The outcaste *osu* are introduced in this chapter. Why do you suppose Achebe has not mentioned them earlier?

4. Why are the Igbo Christians upset about admitting the *osu*?

5. How does Mr. Kiaga react to the *osu*?

6. Why are some of the *osu* afraid to shave off their long hair?
7. How does Mr. Kiaga reason with the *osu* about shaving their dirty hair?

8. The *osu* soon become the most zealous members of the church. To the clan’s disbelief, one boasts that he killed the sacred royal python. Even with this terrible act against one of their most sacred creatures, the clan does not punish the church. Why not?

9. What does the “proclamation of exclusion” keep the Christians away from in Mbanta (159)?

10. Why is Okonkwo disgusted with the way the Christians were handled in this chapter?
11. What do we learn from this chapter about how people of differing beliefs become hostile towards each other? Note the parts played not only by the voices of extremism, but also by those of moderation.

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**Chapter Nineteen Glossary:**

- **wherewithal** that with which something can be done; necessary means.

- **egusi** melon seeds prepared for a soup.

- **I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle.** One must act according to one's fortune and circumstances; spittle is one's spit.

- **umunna** the extended family, the clan.
Chapter Nineteen Questions:

1. Why does Okonkwo regret his exile so bitterly even though he prospers in his motherland?

2. What is the significance of the names Okonkwo gives the children who were born during his seven years in exile?

3. Why doesn’t Obierika build Okonkwo’s obi or the walls of his compound in Umuofia?

4. Why can’t Okonkwo return to Umuofia before the rains stop?
5. How does Okonkwo express his gratitude for kindness over the years of exile?

6. What does the final speaker say is the main threat posed by Christianity?

7. Explain how this chapter is both a statement of faith and an expression of fear. How does Achebe lead us to be concerned for Okonkwo, as well as for the tribe?

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PART III

Chapter Twenty Glossary:

anklet of his titles When a man achieves a title, he wears a special anklet to indicate his title. He may wear more than one anklet to indicate more titles.

sacrament of Holy Communion the most sacred ritual of participating Christians.

court messengers the native Africans hired by the British to carry out their law enforcement activities; also called kotma. Kotma is a Pidgin English word derived from the words court and messenger.

Chapter Twenty Questions:

1. How does Okonkwo compensate for the seven years he considers wasted? How does he show his concern regarding his status in the tribe?

2. What is the significance of the saying “The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another” (171)?

3. How is Okonkwo able to grow yams in Umuofia when he is actually located in Mbanta?
4. How does Okonkwo want his sons to be raised?

5. Why does Okonkwo regret that Ezinma is a girl?

6. What is the sacrament of Holy Communion called in Igbo?

7. What clashes in values are created by the functioning of the British courts?

8. The missionaries have brought British colonial government with them. Missionaries were often viewed as agents of imperialism. There is a saying common to Native Americans and Africans alike which goes like this: "Before the white man came, we had the land and they had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and they have the land." How true is this statement for the village of Umuofia?
9. At the end of Chapter Twenty, Obierika tells Okonkwo, "He [the white man] has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" (176). Explain the significance of this statement.

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Chapter Twenty-One Glossary:

the **new dispensation** the new system; the new organization of society under British influence.

**kernels** the inner, softer part of a nut, fruit pit, etc. Here, found in the fleshy remains of the palm nut after its husk is crushed for palm-oil. The kernels can be processed by machine for the extraction of very fine oil.

**Ikenga** a carved wooden figure kept by every man in his shrine to symbolize the strength of a man's right hand.

**Chukwu** the leading god in the Igbo hierarchy of gods.

**the D.C.** the District Commissioner.

**singlets** men's undershirts, especially the sleeveless kind.
Chapter Twenty-One Questions:

1. Why do some of the villagers—even those who are not converts to Christianity—welcome the British?

2. What arguments does Akunna use to convince Mr. Brown that lesser gods act as messengers to Chukwu?

3. Describe Enoch. How do his actions show disdain for Igbo traditions?

4. Describe Mr. Brown. How is his portrayal different from the Igbo characters? Compare and contrast him with other white colonists.
5. Why does Mr. Brown disapprove of Enoch’s behavior?

6. What is Mr. Brown’s attitude toward the traditional Igbo religion?

7. Akunna explains that the Igbo know Chukwu as the great creator god because many children are named Chukwuka. What does the name mean?

8. Why does Mr. Brown visit Okonkwo?

9. What is Nwoye’s new Christian name? What is the significance of this name?
10. How does Okonkwo respond to Mr. Brown’s visit?

11. How does education advance Christianity among the Igbo people?

| What is the GIST of Chapter 21? |

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**Chapter Twenty-Two Glossary:**

**about sheep and goats / about wheat and tares** Two frequently quoted teachings of Jesus relate to the need for separating the good from the bad. In one, he refers to separating the sheep from the goats (Matthew 25:32); in the other, separating the wheat from the tares, or weeds (Matthew 13:30). Mr. Smith was obviously much concerned about dividing the community between the good (the Christian converts) and the bad (the traditional Igbo believers). Not coincidentally, his suspension of a convert is also based on a quotation from Matthew (9:17).

**prophets of Baal** Mr. Smith is comparing the pagan worship of the warrior god Baal, mentioned in the Old Testament (I Kings 18) to the Igbo religion. The Israelites saw the worship of Baal as a rival to their worship of God, causing the prophet Elijah to challenge the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel.
**bull-roarer** a noisemaker made from a length of string or rawhide threaded through an object of wood, stone, pottery, or bone; a ritual device that makes a loud humming noise when swung rapidly overhead.

**ogwu** medicine, magic.

**desecrated** to have taken away the sacredness of; treat as not sacred; profane.

**The body of the white man, I salute you.** The egwugwu speak indirectly, using a formal language of immortal spirits.

**guttural** loosely, produced in the throat; harsh, rasping, and so on.

**Chapter Twenty-Two Questions:**

1. Describe Rev. Smith:

2. In Umuofia they say “as a man danced so the drums were beaten for him” (185). How does this saying relate to Reverend Smith?

3. Why is Reverend Smith filled with wrath when he hears that a woman in the congregation allows her husband to mutilate her dead child?
4. Why do the villagers call Enoch “The outsider who wept louder than the bereaved” (185)?

5. What is the greatest crime a man can commit in Umuofia?

6. What does unmasking an egwugwu kill?

7. Why is Enoch disappointed to be hidden in the parsonage?

8. Explain the Ibo’s immediate reaction to the unmasking and the language they use:
9. Explain Rev. Smith/Missionaries immediate reaction to the unmasking and the language they use:

10. What conclusions can be reached regarding the different reactions of the Ibo and Rev. Smith/Missionaries to the unmasking?

11. What is an example of Achebe implying that strict adherence to scripture and dogma produces religious fanaticism?

12. Explain how the reference to the Mother of Spirits is another foreshadowing of the decline of the Umuofians? Think about what her wailing and crying signals.
13. How does the black and white thinking of Reverend Smith contribute to Umuofia's downfall?

14. What would have prevented Umuofia's downfall?

15. Throughout the book Achebe gives his characters names with hidden meanings; for example, Okonkwo's name implies male pride and stubbornness. When Achebe adds British characters, he gives two of them common and unremarkable British names, Brown and Smith. What statement is Achebe trying to make on the choice of names, or lack thereof?

What is the GIST of Chapter 22?
Chapter Twenty-Three Glossary:

palaver a conference or discussion, as originally between African natives and European explorers or traders.

da great queen Queen Victoria, reigning head of the British Empire for sixty-four years (1837-1901).

Who is the chief among you? The kotma (court messenger) guards see by the anklets that all six leaders own titles and joke that they must not be worth much.

Chapter Twenty-Three Questions:

1. How does the District Commissioner coax the Igbo leaders to meet with him?

2. Why aren’t the leaders of Umuofia suspicious when the District Commissioner invites them to the courthouse?

3. What pretense does the District Commissioner use to bring his 12 men into the talks with the Igbo leaders?

4. What code of law does the District Commissioner use to judge the six Igbo leaders?
5. Briefly summarize the terms of the six tribal leaders release

6. The District Commissioner tells his men to treat the leaders of Umuofia with respect. Describe how the court messengers humiliate the leaders.

7. How do the prisoners react to their imprisonment? Explain

8. What does the District Commissioner say is the motive of the British in colonizing the Africans?

9. Explain how the British took an oppressive yet naive approach to ensure colonial justice.
10. Explain how the District Commissioner's statements and personal actions are ironic in light of what is actually taking place.

11. Knowing that the British are aware of the brutality and corruption of their court messengers, why do they choose to ignore it?

| What is the GIST of Chapter 23? |

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**Chapter Twenty-Four Glossary:**

**a war of blame** In Chapter 2, the villagers state that a "fight of blame" (which Okonkwo expects the peacemakers to label this fight against the strangers) would never be sanctioned by their Oracle, which approves only a "just war." Therefore, what Okonkwo is considering may go beyond even the clan's traditions — a fight for which they may not have full justification from their gods.

**creepers** plants whose stems put out tendrils or rootlets by which they can creep along a surface as they grow.
Chapter Twenty-Four Questions:

1. Why are the women and children afraid to welcome the leaders home?

2. What are the long stripes on Okonkwo’s back?

3. Why does Okonkwo have trouble sleeping that night?

4. Why does Okonkwo refer to the war with Isike saying, “Those were days when men were men” (200)?

5. What does Okonkwo mean when he says he would show Egonwanne his back and his head if he talks about a war of blame?

6. Why does Okonkwo grind his teeth?
7. Why did Okonkwo kill a court messenger?

8. Explain what Okonkwo is feeling when the rest of the tribe does nothing?

9. How is Okonkwo “falling apart?”

10. Once again Okonkwo uses his machete rashly, bringing disaster on his head. But he could be viewed as a defiant hero defending his people's way of life. What do you think of his act?

What is the GIST of Chapter 24?
Chapter Twenty-Five Glossary:

*superfluous* being more than is needed, useful, or wanted; surplus; excessive.

*monkey tricks* possibly a racial slur directed at the natives.

*resolute* having or showing a fixed, firm purpose; determined; resolved; unwavering.

*abomination* anything hateful and disgusting.

*Yes, sah* *Yes sir*; the form may be Pidgin English and illustrates how the native-born court messengers submitted to the orders of their white bosses — at least on the surface.

Chapter Twenty-Five Questions:

1. Is Okonkwo’s suicide entirely unexpected?

2. Why does Obierika send for strangers from another village?

3. Why does Obierika ask the commissioner to bury Okonkwo’s body?
4. Why is suicide such an abomination among the Igbo?

5. Why is Obierika so angry at the District Commissioner?

6. Why does the District Commissioner think he is bringing civilization to the Igbo people?

7. How does the District Commissioner trivialize the great tragedy of Okonkwo?

8. Why does Okonkwo hang himself? Is it a cowardly act or brave? Weak or noble?
9. Explain the ironies in this chapter.

10. The District Commissioner is going to title his work *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Niger* (209). What do you interpret from this to be his perception of Okonkwo and the people of Umuofia?
Final Questions:

1. Is Okonkwo destined for tragedy or did his choices (made of his own free will) lead him to his tragic end?

2. Why do you think Achebe often used untranslated Igbo words? What kind of tone was he trying to evoke?

3. What is the role of women in the novel?
4. How does the killing of Ikemefuna foreshadow the fall of Okonkwo?

5. Who was Achebe’s intended audience? Who did he write *Things Fall Apart* for? What was he trying to communicate his audience?

6. While the traditional figure of Okonkwo can in no doubt be seen as the central figure in the tale, Achebe chooses to relate his story in the third person rather than the first person narrative style. What benefits does he reap by adopting this approach?
7. The novel begins in Umuofia and ends in Umuofia. Why is the physical setting of the forest so important to understanding the culture of the Ibo? Explain

"Religious tolerance is not religious indifference. Tolerance means to value the right of another person to hold beliefs that you know are absolutely wrong" (Anon)

Works Cited


