

Things Fall Apart Book Notes

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

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Author/Context

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, Nigeria. The son of missionary teachers Isaiah Okafo and Janet Achebe, the writer was raised as a Christian. Achebe was educated at the Church Mission Society and then Government College in Umuahia before he attended Ibadan University where he received his BA in English literary studies in 1953. His first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was published in 1958.

In an essay written in 1972, Charles R. Larson says, "*Things Fall Apart* has come to be regarded as more than simply a classic; it is now seen as the archetypal African novel. The situation which the novel itself describes - the coming of the white man and the initial disintegration of traditional African society as a consequence of that--is typical of the breakdown all African societies have experienced at one time or another as a result of their exposure to the West.

Achebe married in 1961 and is the father of four children. He came to the United States in the early 1970s as a visiting professor at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst and then the University of Connecticut, as well as lecturing at the University of California, Los Angeles and other schools across the nation. In 1976 he returned to Nigeria to teach at the University of Nigeria-Nsukka.

Achebe is credited with building the foundation for African literature. His writing style molds the English language to the rhythm and lyrical quality of the Nigerian language his characters speak. This style, and the incorporation of the proverbs and idioms of African culture, combine to mark his stories as uniquely African.

Achebe sees his role as a writer as one of social responsibility. In his book of essays, *Morning yet on Creation Day*, Achebe explains his belief that "art is, and always was, at the service of man. Our ancestors created their myths and legends and told their stories for a human purpose." Therefore, Achebe believes that all good stories should have a purpose and that is what he has tried to emulate in his works.

In addition to *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe has also written several other novels - *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1988). He has also published several books of poetry including *Beware, Soul-Brother, and other Poems* (1972) and *Christmas in Biafra, and Other Poems* (1973). His collections of essays are *Morning Yet on Creation Day* (1975), *The Trouble with Nigeria* (1984), and *Hopes and Impediments* (1988).

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Plot Summary

Although his father was a lazy man who earned no titles in the Ibo tribe, Okonkwo is a great man in his home of Umuofia, a group of nine villages in Nigeria. Okonkwo despised his father and does everything he can to be nothing like the man. As a young man, Okonkwo began building his social status by defeating a great wrestler, propelling him into society's eye. He is hard working and shows no weakness - emotional or otherwise - to anyone. Although brusque with his family and his neighbors, he is wealthy, courageous, and powerful among his village. He is a leader of his village, and this place in society is what he has striven for his entire life.

Because of his great esteem in the village, Okonkwo is selected by the elders to be the guardian of Ikemefuna, a boy taken prisoner by the tribe as a peace settlement between two villages. Ikemefuna is to stay with Okonkwo until the Oracle instructs the elders on what to do with the boy. For three years the boy lives with Okonkwo's family and they grow fond of him, he even considers Okonkwo his father. Then the elders decide that the boy must be killed, and the oldest man in the village warns Okonkwo to have nothing to do with the murder because it would be like killing his own child. Rather than seem weak and feminine to the other men of the tribe, Okonkwo helps to kill the boy despite the warning from the old man.

Shortly after Ikemefuna's death, things begin to go wrong for Okonkwo and when he accidentally kills someone at a funeral ceremony, he and his family are sent into exile for seven years to appease the gods he has offended with the murder. While Okonkwo is away in exile, white men begin coming to Umuofia and they peaceably introduce their religion. As the number of converts increases, the foothold of the white people grows beyond their religion and a new government is introduced.

Okonkwo returns to his village after his exile to find it a changed place because of the presence of white men. He and other tribal leaders try to reclaim their hold on their native land by destroying a local Christian church that has insulted their gods and religion. In return, the leader of the white government takes them prisoner and holds them for ransom for a short while, further humiliating and insulting the native leaders. The people of Umuofia finally gather for what could be a great uprising, and when some messengers of the white government try to stop their meeting, Okonkwo kills one of them. He realizes with despair that the people of Umuofia are not going to fight to protect themselves because they let the other messengers escape and so all is lost for the Ibo tribe.

When the local leader of the white government comes to Okonkwo's house to take him to court, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself, ruining his great reputation.



Major Characters

Okonkwo: Known as a courageous and wealthy man throughout his tribe, Okonkwo is a severe man who often resorts to violence to make his points understood. He hated his father, Unoka, because he was a lazy debtor. Okonkwo made it a point in his life to set himself apart from his father by being well known and wealthy as well as becoming a great warrior in the tribal conflicts of Umuofia and the surrounding villages.

Unoka: Okonkwo's father, he was a notorious slacker and debtor who preferred playing his flute to working and piled up large debts among his neighbors before his death. Unoka was a source of embarrassment for his son because of his laziness, and so Okonkwo made something of himself in reaction to his hate for his father.

Ikemefuna: A boy of a neighboring village who was chosen as a sacrifice to avoid warfare with Umuofia. Ikemefuna was left in Okonkwo's care for three years and became a part of the family. Okonkwo was very fond of the boy, and Ikemefuna took to calling Okonkwo his father. When the elders of Umuofia decided to kill Ikemefuna, Ogbuefi Ezeudu warned Okonkwo to have no part of it because the boy considered him a father.

Nwoye: Okonkwo's oldest son, child of Okonkwo's eldest wife, he was growing into a lazy boy despite his father's constant nagging and beating. Nwoye was twelve when Okonkwo came back from Mbaino with Ikemefuna and the boys grew close so when Okonkwo was among the men who killed Ikemefuna, Nwoye was pushed further away from his father. Such an act was impossible for Nwoye to understand, as was abandoning twins in the Evil Forest. Because of these questions concerning the fundamentals of their religion, Nwoye was easily converted to Christianity when the missionaries came to Mbanta. His conversion was the final separation from his father.

Obierika: Okonkwo's friend who takes care of his home for him while he's in exile and brings word of the first violent encounters of the Ibo with the white men who came to colonize the area.

Mr. Kiaga: An Ibo convert to Christianity who acts as a missionary and translator for the first six missionaries who come to Mbanta while Okonkwo and his family are in exile there. He builds a church in the Evil Forest, the land that the village elders gave him, and his church prospers despite the skepticism of the prominent men of Mbanta.

Mr. Brown: A missionary in Okonkwo's native village who tries to make the relationship between the Christians and the villagers as stable as possible despite the fanaticism of some of his converts. Mr. Brown is respected by many of the men of the tribe as well as some great spiritual leaders and he had weekly discussions with one medicine man in particular in which they discuss their respective religions, each trying to convert the other. Mr. Brown builds a small school and a hospital in the village. Eventually, because of his begging, the villagers began to send their children to school to learn to read and



write so that they can have a chance to rule their own land instead of having strangers of a different race and culture running their village as the District Commissioner does.

Mr. Smith: Mr. Smith replaces Mr. Brown as the leader of the Umuofia church and encourages the fanatics to act out against the pagan tribe. He believes that such pagans have to be destroyed. Under his tutelage, a great conflict between the Okonkwo's village and the church arises.

District Commissioner: A white man sent to rule over Umuofia, he and his court messengers are corrupt officials who abuse the natives. He judges cases although he knows nothing of the people, their culture, or their customs. He is another fixture of colonization that the people of Umuofia are subjected to. He makes his court messengers trick Okonkwo and other tribe leaders into coming to the D.C. headquarters so that he can imprison them and extract a ransom from their village because they burned the Christian church. When the Commissioner comes to take Okonkwo away for the murder of a court messenger, he finds that Okonkwo has killed himself. The Commissioner is moved only to think of the peculiarities of the natives and how such interesting stories will fill the book he is writing on colonization.

Minor Characters

Amaline the Cat: A wrestler from a village near Okonkwo's home of Umuofia who was undefeated for seven years. He was called the cat because his back never touched the ground. But Okonkwo beat him, and in defeating Amaline, Okonkwo made a name for himself throughout the villages.

Nwakibie: A prosperous villager with three barns, nine wives, thirty children, and all but the greatest title in the clan. As a young man, Okonkwo went to Nwakibie to ask for seed yams so that he could begin his crops. Nwakibie had refused many young men's requests for seed yams, but he agreed to help Okonkwo because he knew that this son of a shiftless man would prosper through his determination.

Ekwefi: Okonkwo's second wife, she was the village beauty in her younger days. She is passionate about wrestling, and when she saw Okonkwo defeat Amaline the Cat, he won her heart. Ekwefi had to marry another because Okonkwo could not afford her bride price, but a few years after her marriage, she ran away from her husband to live with Okonkwo. She bore ten children, but of those ten, only Ezinma lived. The villagers believed that Ekwefi's misfortune with children was caused by an ogbanje -- a cruel child that died and re-entered the woman's womb over and over again.

Ezinma: The daughter of Okonkwo and Ekwefi, Ezinma understands her father better than her other siblings. She seems to be his favorite, and he often wishes to himself that she had been born a boy because he believes that she would have been prosperous. Ezinma is the only living child of Ekwefi although the woman bore ten children. Because of Ekwefi's misfortunes, she is frightened any time Ezinma is ill because she expects the child to die as all her other children have.



Chielo: The priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. Chielo is a normal woman just like the other women of the village when the spirit of Agbala does not possess her. She and Ekwefi are friends, and Chielo is especially fond of Ezinma.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu: One of the oldest men in Umuofia, he came to warn Okonkwo to have no part in Ikemefuna's death because the boy considered him a father. Okonkwo went against Ezeudu's advice because he was afraid of being thought weak.

Uchende: Okonkwo's uncle on his mother's side who is an elder of Mbanta where Okonkwo and his family stay in exile for seven years. Uchende encourages Okonkwo to snap out of his depression when he first arrives in exile and then acts as a voice of reason throughout Okonkwo's time in Mbanta.

Enoch: A religious zealot hungry for conflict who unmasked a sacred egwugwu at a public ceremony and enraged Okonkwo's village. Mr. Smith protected Enoch from the tribe's wrath, but the egwugwu burned the church as punishment for Enoch's insurrection.



Objects/Places

Umuofia: The name of the village where Okonkwo and his family live. It is one of a cluster of nine villages, the farthest being Mbaino.

Kola nut: A ritual refreshment for hosts and guests.

Cowries: Shells used for currency.

Agbala: The Oracle of the Hills and Caves. The shrine to Agbala was a cave that worshippers entered through a round hole in the side of a hill. Inside the cave, the priestess of Agbala proclaimed the will of the god there to those who sought the god.

Ogbanje: An ogbanje is a wicked child who is born and then dies only to re-enter its mother's womb over and over again. The medicine men believed that the only way to rid a woman of an ogbanje was to mutilate the dead child and then bury it in the Evil Forest.

Evil Forest: The Evil Forest is located across the stream from the village where anything that was not condoned by the religion of Umuofia was sent, including men who killed themselves, ogbanje, and twins.

iyi-uwa: The stone that connects the ogbanje with the spirit world. Destroying this stone will ensure that the child will live.

egwugwu: Men who disguise themselves as the ancestral spirits of the village and judge disputes among the villages. There are nine egwugwu, one for each of the nine villages started by the sons of the father of the clan long ago.

Abame: A village destroyed by white men because they killed one white man. The villagers were ambushed and slaughtered in their marketplace as punishment for their crime against the white men. Okonkwo thinks of this story in most of his encounters with the white men and vows not to be caught off-guard as the people of Abame were.

Chi: A personal god that determines a man's fate and guides his fortune, almost an embodiment of luck.



Quotes

Quote 1: "agbala" Chapter 2, Pg. 11

Quote 2: "ha[d] a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails *alone*." Chapter 3, Pg. 21

Quote 3: "But he was not the man to go about telling his neighbors that he was in error. And so people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His enemies said that his good fortune had gone to his head." Chapter 4, pg. 26

Quote 4: "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man." Chapter 7, Pg. 45

Quote 5: "'When did you become a shivering old woman,' Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.'" Chapter 8, Pg. 56

Quote 6: "After such treatment it would think twice before coming again, unless it was one of the stubborn ones who returned, carrying the stamp of their mutilation - a missing finger or perhaps a dark line where the medicine man's razor had cut them." Chapter 9, Pg. 69

Quote 7: "'Beware Okonkwo!' she warned. 'Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!'" Chapter 11, Pg. 89

Quote 8: "if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." Chapter 13, Pg. 111

Quote 9: "It was like beginning life anew without the vigor and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age." Chapter 14, Pg. 113

Quote 10: "'iron horse'" Chapter 15, Pg. 120

Quote 11: "'We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true.'" Chapter 15, Pg. 122

Quote 12: "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash." Chapter 17, Pg. 134

Quote 13: "'The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.'" Chapter 20, pg. 152



Quote 14: "Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: 'Why did he do it?'" Chapter 24, Pg. 176



Topic Tracking: Colonization

Chapter 15

Colonization 1: The first signs of colonization come to Abame when the first white man appears. The elders of the village consulted the Oracle and were told that the white man would soon be followed by others like him and that he would destroy their way of life, so they killed him. Not long after that, other white men massacred the people of the village because they killed the first white man who came to their village.

Chapter 16

Colonization 2: The white men send in missionaries to instill a religion that encourages peace as the beginning stages of colonization. If they can change the fundamental beliefs of the tribe, then they can control the natives more easily.

Chapter 17

Colonization 3: Already the introduction of a foreign element, in this case religion, begins to tear the structural fabric of the Ibo society. This new religion introduces the separation of Okonkwo and his son in a society that is based on the strength of the family unit. The division begins.

Chapter 18

Colonization 4: The people of Mbanta do not fear the religion of the white men because it has yet to interfere with their lives. What they don't realize is that the idea of colonization is to quietly gain a foothold in the country and then move in and take over when the country has been destabilized enough to be ruled by outside forces. With religion acting as the foothold, it makes it easier for a foreign government to take over because most religions advocate peace and control a great part of people's lives.

Colonization 5: The presence of this new and foreign religion begins to grow and eventually it makes it difficult for the tribe to maintain order in its own community. What started out as something small and separated from the village and its rule has grown into a source of conflict. Christian disregard for the customs and religion of the tribe creates an atmosphere of lawlessness within the village. By ostracizing the Christians, the rulers of Mbanta are trying to regain some of their power to lead their people and protect their way of life.

Chapter 20

Colonization 6: Obierika and Okonkwo take note of how the white man came to their land peacefully and quietly at first but are now taking over by imposing their government and their rules onto Ibo society. The missionaries came and created division within the most basic element of Ibo society, their religion. From that point of separation,



introducing a government to rule the divided people was easy because they could not stand together to protect their way of life.

Chapter 21

Colonization 7: Because the white men brought trade into Umuofia, not everyone in the village was united against them since the white men had provided a new way for the villagers to profit. With this opportunity, they were willing to accept the confines of the white man's rule because they weren't willing to sacrifice the new trading community to fight for their independence.

Chapter 23

Colonization 8: The District Commissioner tricked the tribal leaders of Okonkwo's village (Okonkwo among them) to come to his headquarters and then he imprisoned them for burning the Christian church. He demands that a fine (ransom) of two hundred cowries be paid for their return, and then he entrusts their care to his corrupt court messengers. The messengers not only beat the men and starve them, but also raise the price of the ransom so that they can receive a cut of the money for themselves.

Chapter 24

Colonization 9: Just when Umuofia seemed ready to lash out against colonization, the court messengers step in to break them up. Rather than follow their orders, Okonkwo kills the head messenger, but he sees that his people will not rise up against their oppressors because they let the other messengers, the henchmen of the white government, escape.

Chapter 25

Colonization 10: Colonization finally drives Okonkwo to take his own life because the oppression is too great for his divided tribe to overcome. Okonkwo can't take living under the rule of foreign men who don't speak his language or know his customs. So, rather than bear the yoke of colonization, he hangs himself.



Topic Tracking: Religion

Chapter 1

Religion 1: The ritual of the kola nut is one of hospitality among the Ibo. The nut is passed between host and guest, each insisting that the other should be the one to crack the nut, but the host eventually does the honors. They say that he who offers the kola brings life, and that is one of the predominant rituals of the story. They do this to please their gods and ancestors.

Chapter 2

Religion 2: Okonkwo goes to negotiate a settlement with Mbaino because that is the ritualistic first act before one tribe declares war on another. The gods demand atonement for sins against members of the clan, and the offending village offers the traditional compensation -- a native boy and a virgin to be used in whatever way the gods see fit.

Chapter 3

Religion 3: Consulting Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, is a ritualistic part of the Ibo religion. Whenever villagers have questions about the source of their misfortune or the future, they consult the oracle and learn the answer through its priestess. Agbala's words do not go unheeded.

Chapter 4

Religion 4: Okonkwo is so carried away in his anger at his youngest wife that he forgets the ritual of the Week of Peace and breaks the rules of kindness and gentleness that all the villagers are supposed to exhibit to one another during that week before planting begins. Because he broke one of the sacred laws of their religion, Okonkwo is forced to make a sacrifice to the earth goddess in repentance. This is another ritual of the religion of the Ibo tribe.

Chapter 6

Religion 5: Although women are viewed as the property of first their fathers and then their husbands, they can be assigned very important roles in the religion of the tribe. Chielo is the priestess of the powerful god, Agbala, although she was an ordinary woman of the village.

Chapter 7

Religion 6: Nwoye remembers passing the Evil Forest on his way home from the fields when he overheard an infant's cry from the woods. That's when he realized that twins actually were left in the forest to die because their religion declared twins bad luck for the parents.



Chapter 8

Religion 7: Obierika warns Okonkwo that the earth god destroys entire families for sins like the one Okonkwo committed when he killed Ikemefuna because the boy had become part of Okonkwo's family.

Chapter 9

Religion 8: The religion dictates that a woman who bears child after child only to see them die is besieged by the spirit of an evil child who will re-enter its mother's womb only to be born and then die again. The cycle can only be broken if the child's iyi-uwa, the stone that links it to the spirit world, is found and destroyed. Sometimes medicine men would try to discourage the child from returning by mutilating the dead body and burying it in the Evil Forest, but occasionally, the children were known to return with the scars of that mutilation at their birth.

Chapter 13

Religion 9: Okonkwo was forced to leave his home and have his property destroyed because he accidentally killed a boy. Obierika didn't understand why such means were necessary for an unintended offense, but their religion did not answer his questions. He was only certain that if they did not send Okonkwo away to appease the earth goddess, all the tribe would suffer for the sin.

Chapter 16

Religion 10: Missionaries came to Umuofia and began converting the Ibo tribe members. They preached that the religion of the tribe was only superstition and that they were in error to worship the earth goddess and the god of the sky because there was only one, true God. Many of the people of Umuofia did not believe the missionaries and considered them mad, but Nwoye found solace in the beliefs that they offered, and so he joined them. The elders of the villages and the leaders of the clan were saddened by the derision of those who converted, but they believed that the white man's religion would fade away in time.

Chapter 22

Religion 11: For a while, Christianity and the tribal religion were able to co-exist in relative peace, but the actions of a zealot brought them into conflict. Enoch was trying to start a religious war by so degrading the tribe's religion that they had no other choice but to fight. It didn't work that time, however.



Topic Tracking: Status

Chapter 1

Status 1: Okonkwo became an important part of his village early in his life when he defeated Amaline the Cat in a wrestling match. His victory made him a celebrity among the nine villages of Umuofia because Amaline had been undefeated for seven years. At this point, Okonkwo began on the path to high social status among his village, which was his goal throughout his life.

Status 2: Okonkwo hated his father because he was a lazy debtor. Unoka could never afford to purchase a title for himself or to have more than one wife, and so he was looked down upon by his neighbors and his own son because his primary joy was in music and merry-making rather than work, wealth, and warfare.

Status 3: The elders of Okonkwo's village held him in high esteem. Because of his place in society, they entrusted him with the life of a boy sacrificed to them by the people of a neighboring village as a peace offer.

Chapter 2

Status 4: Because of his great wealth, courage, and social esteem, Okonkwo was chosen by his village to act as an ambassador of war and meet with another village to work out the terms for settlement when a woman from Okonkwo's village was killed by people from the neighboring village. While Okonkwo was in the village of the offenders he was treated with great respect because of his social status.

Status 5: When Okonkwo learned that the word for a man without a title in Ibo is the same word that means "woman," he was crushed because to him that meant that his father (who had no title) was basically a woman. That's when Okonkwo became obsessed with social status and because of that obsession, he would do anything to protect his image as a strong man in his village.

Chapter 3

Status 6: Okonkwo began his pursuit of wealth and status early on by going to a wealthy villager and asking for support. Nwakibie loaned Okonkwo enough seed yams to begin a productive crop. Starting out as a sharecropper was not the ideal situation because that meant he only got one-third of the crop he slaved over. But that was the only option Okonkwo had because of his father's poverty.

Chapter 4

Status 7: Okonkwo disrupted the Week of Peace by beating his wife. For violating the sacred holiday, he was forced to pay a penalty. Although Okonkwo knew that he was in error and regretted his act against the gods, he did not show his regret to the villagers



because he did not want to appear weak. But his pride made his neighbors believe that he no longer revered the gods and that his success had gone to his head.

Chapter 7

Status 8: Although one of the oldest tribe members warned Okonkwo against having a hand in Ikemefuna's death, Okonkwo struck the final blow that killed the boy because he was afraid that the other men in his tribe would think he was weak if he did not.

Chapter 10

Status 9: Okonkwo held a position of very high esteem as the egwugwu for his village. These men who dressed as ancestral spirits and took part in the funerals of great men as well as presided over judicial matters for Umuofia were part of a secret society. Playing this role for his village was a sign of his high social status and Okonkwo took great pride in it although he could not brag about it because his role was supposed to be a secret.

Chapter 19

Status 10: Okonkwo regretted his exile primarily because it stunted his social growth. If he had been in his village for the previous seven years he would have gained other titles and his younger sons could have begun buying their own titles. Although he prospered in Mbanta, his progress there meant nothing because it did not increase his stature in his native village.

Chapter 21

Status 11: Okonkwo is disgusted by the white men's presence in his home village not only because of the way that it destroys the unity of the clan, but also because it distracted the villagers of his home from celebrating his return. Because of all the changes in Umuofia, no one noticed that he and his family came home, which showed that his social status had diminished.

Chapter 25

Status 12: In the end, Okonkwo's status among his tribe counted for very little because his own despair over the colonization of his native land led him to kill himself. Suicide was a great sin against the Earth. Because he took his own life, Okonkwo, a great leader of Umuofia, had to be buried by strangers without even the ceremonial rites that a man of his status deserved. All of his work and perseverance amounted to nothing because he had been broken by colonization.



Chapter 1

Okonkwo is a well-known man among Umuofia, the collective name of his village and the other nine surrounding villages. Okonkwo's fame came more than twenty years ago when he defeated Amaline the Cat in a wrestling match. Amaline had been undefeated for seven years before Okonkwo beat him, and that's how Okonkwo's fame spread. Okonkwo is a severe-looking man who talks with a stammer, so that when he gets angry, he's better understood by his fists than his words.

Topic Tracking: Status 1

Unoka, Okonkwo's father, died ten years ago and left his enormous debts to his neighbors unpaid. Okonkwo hated his father because the man was lazy and a coward. He enjoyed playing his flute and having a good time with his neighbors. He never bought himself a title, as prominent, respectable men of the village were expected to, and he could never afford more than one wife, either. Once Okoye, one of Unoka's creditors, came to visit. Unoka brought out a kola nut for his guest and after some polite conversation about who should break the nut, Unoka finally did the honors with prayers to his ancestors for life, health, and protection from enemies. Meanwhile, Okoye used a piece of chalk he'd brought with him to paint his toe and draw a few lines on the floor in a ritualistic fashion. After they had eaten the kola, Okoye spoke for a long time using ancient proverbs to come to his point as was customary in the Ibo culture. He had come to claim payment of the two hundred cowries that Unoka owed him from two years prior so that he could fund the feast for acquiring his new title of Idemili, which was the third highest title in the land. Hearing Okoye's request, Unoka burst into laughter and pointed toward a wall of his mud house that was covered in chalk markings aligned in columns. It was a record of Unoka's debts and they were numerous. Unoka insisted that he would pay Okoye, but not until he'd paid his larger debts first.

Topic Tracking: Religion 1

Topic Tracking: Status 2

When Unoka died, his debts were unpaid, but the Ibo people didn't hold that against Okonkwo, who seemed destined for a greater life than his father's because he'd already started making a name for himself. Okonkwo was revered as one of the greatest men of his time because although he was young, he'd already taken two titles, acquired three wives, owned two barns full of yams, and shown great skill in two inter-tribal wars. His prestige presented him with the duty of looking after Ikemefuna, a boy from a neighboring village who had been sacrificed to Umuofia to avoid warfare and bloodshed.

Topic Tracking: Status 3



Chapter 2

Okonkwo had just gone to bed when he heard the town crier announcing that all men should meet in the market in the morning. Okonkwo was sure that the men were being called because some sort of conflict with an enemy clan had arisen, but he was unafraid of war. He'd already collected five human heads from his forays in battle, and on special occasions, he drank wine from the first head he'd brought back from war.

The following morning ten thousand men from all the villages of Umuofia gathered in the market, and Ogbuefi Ezuego, a great orator of the tribe, told the men that a Umuofia woman had been killed when she went to the market in Mbaino. It was decided that before they declared war on the tribe, Okonkwo would go and attempt a settlement -- the exchange of one virgin and one boy from the Mbaino tribe -- before the feared Umuofia released its vengeance on the enemy tribe. Umuofia was revered by its enemies because of its prowess in warfare and magic, and so Okonkwo was treated respectfully when he traveled to Mbaino to arrange the settlement and bring back the human offerings. The virgin was given to the husband of the murdered woman and Ikemefuna, the boy, was sent to live with Okonkwo until the elders decided what to do with him.

Topic Tracking: Religion 2

Topic Tracking: Status 4

Okonkwo was not only feared and respected among the neighboring villages, but also in his home as well. His wives and children all feared him, and Okonkwo himself was driven by the fear of being a failure as his father was. As a child, Okonkwo had had been crushed when he learned from a playmate that his father was referred to as an "agbala" Part 1: Chapter 2, Pg. 11. This word in Ibo means woman, but is also the term for a man without a title. The shame of this pushed Okonkwo to hate everything that his father had loved, gentleness was one of those things and idleness was another. Because of this, Okonkwo treated his family roughly and pushed them to work as hard as he did. His oldest son, Nwoye, who was twelve when Okonkwo brought Ikemefuna from Mbaino, had often seen the back of his father's hand for his laziness and was growing into a sorrowful young man because of it. Ikemefuna was also sad and afraid because he had no idea what was going to happen to him. He'd been in his hut with his family and then suddenly a man talked with his father and then took him away as his mother wept. He didn't know where he was and he had no idea that his father had been partly responsible for the death of the Umuofian woman, and so Ikemefuna was left in the dark.

Topic Tracking: Status 5



Chapter 3

Unoka had gone to consult Agbala, the great Oracle of the Hills and Caves, to find out why his crops were always bad. The priestess told Unoka that his crop failure was not the result of the gods and his ancestors ignoring his sacrifices, but rather his own laziness in tending to the yams. Because Unoka was so lazy, Okonkwo knew early on that in order to be a prosperous man in his village, he would have to seek the help of someone besides his father. So he went to Nwakibie, a villager with three barns, nine wives, thirty children, and all but the highest title in the clan. After the kola nut and palm-wine ceremonies of hospitality and good will, Okonkwo asked Nwakibie for four hundred seed yams so that he could begin his crops. Although Nwakibie had refused to give such backing to many of the young men in the village, he gave Okonkwo eight hundred seed yams because he knew that Okonkwo would work hard to make a prosperous crop. Although share-cropping was a difficult way to get a start, Okonkwo had no choice, and to make matters worse, he had to share the third of the crop that he kept for himself with his parents and sisters because his father did not provide for them.

Topic Tracking: Religion 3

Topic Tracking: Status 6

The year of Okonkwo's first crop was a terrible year for agriculture. A severe drought killed the first four hundred yams that he had planted from his own stores of a small crop the previous year. After the drought ended, Okonkwo planted the eight hundred Nwakibie had given him as well as an extra four hundred seeds that he had gotten from a friend of Unoka. Then it rained. The rainy season was so heavy following the drought that it destroyed the second crop and the harvest was so poor that one man in the village hung himself. Okonkwo looked back on that time and decided that if he could live through such a thing when he was just beginning, then he could live through anything. His father, whose health was failing him in the year of the poor crop, had told Okonkwo that he "ha[d] a manly and a proud heart. A proud heart can survive general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride. It is more difficult and more bitter when a man fails *alone*." Part 1: Chapter 3, Pg. 21



Chapter 4

Ikemefuna was afraid when he first came to live with Okonkwo and his family, but after a while, he made a place for himself there. He and Nwoye grew close, and Okonkwo was proud of the way that Nwoye followed the older boy's example. Although Okonkwo could never show emotion because that would be a sign of weakness, he was fond of Ikemefuna and the boy began addressing Okonkwo as father.

Ikemefuna had come to join Okonkwo's family at the end of the season of freedom that fell between harvest and planting. It is a ritual in Umuofia that the week before planting begins is called the Week of Peace and the year that Ikemefuna came to Umuofia, Okonkwo broke the peace. One day during that festive week Okonkwo's youngest wife went to plait her hair and forgot to return to Okonkwo's compound to fix her part of his afternoon meal. When she did return, he beat her severely and violated the sacred week. The priest of the earth goddess came to Okonkwo's home before nightfall to dole out the punishment for such a violation. When Okonkwo took the goat, hen, cloth, and cowries to the shrine of the earth god the following day, he was inwardly repentant for his error. "But he was not the man to go about telling his neighbors that he was in error. And so people said he had no respect for the gods of the clan. His enemies said that his good fortune had gone to his head." Part 1: Chapter 4, pg. 26

Topic Tracking: Status 7

Topic Tracking: Religion 4

After the Week of Peace, Okonkwo and his family prepared their fields and planted their yams. During the rainy season, Ikemefuna and Nwoye had sat around the fire with Okonkwo's other children and told stories. Until his death, Nwoye remembered this time in his life very well because of all the delightful things Ikemefuna taught him then.



Chapter 5

The New Yam Festival celebration immediately following the harvest brought the long-awaited wrestling that Umuofia so enjoyed. People of the village invited their in-laws and friends from other villages to come to the celebration and days of preparation went into the festivities. Before any of the harvested yams could be eaten, an offering had to be made to the ancestors and that was the kick-off of the celebration. Three days before the festival, Okonkwo had an outburst and beat Ekwefi, his second wife. When he was done abusing her, he decided to go hunting and called for his rusty, old gun that he had never used. The beaten woman made the mistake of muttering some comment about his inability to hunt well, and in a rage, he shot the gun at her, but missed and then walked out of the house.

The second day of the new year was when the wrestling took place, and Ekwefi was as excited about it this year as she had been in her youth when she was the village beauty. Okonkwo had won her heart when he defeated Amaline the Cat long ago. Although Ekwefi had been forced to marry another because Okonkwo was too poor to afford her bride price, she had run away from her husband a few years later to live with Okonkwo as his second wife. Ezinma was Ekwefi's only living child, and although Okonkwo was as brusque with her as he was with everyone, he was very fond of the young girl because she understood him. He often wished to himself that Ezinma had been born a boy.



Chapter 6

At the wrestling match where the entire village stood to watch, Ekwefi ran into Chielo, the priestess of Agbala. When she was not overcome with the spirit of Agbala, she was a woman just like any other, and she and Ekwefi were friends. Chielo had heard about how Okonkwo shot at Ekwefi and then she asked about Ezinma. Knowing Ekwefi's fear of losing her child, Chielo assured her that now that Ezinma was ten years old, she would most likely live.

Topic Tracking: Religion 5

They watched the wrestling matches for the rest of the day.



Chapter 7

Ikemefuna stayed with Okonkwo's family for three years and Okonkwo saw that Nwoye was turning into a tough young man under Ikemefuna's tutelage. He hoped that with Ikemefuna's influence, Nwoye would grow into a strong, capable man who could control his women and his children. Okonkwo believed that, "No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man." Part 1: Chapter 7, Pg. 45 Ikemefuna was not meant to teach Nwoye that, though, because that year Umuofia finally decided Ikemefuna's fate under the direction of Agbala. Ogbuefi Ezeudu, one of the oldest men in Umuofia, came to Okonkwo's home to warn him against having a hand in killing the boy because he called Okonkwo father.

The elders came to take Ikemefuna away and Okonkwo told the boy that he was going home. Ikemefuna was somewhat sad to leave the new family he had found, but he went along with Okonkwo and the elders. Once the group was outside Umuofia, one of the men raised his machete and struck Ikemefuna down. The boy, still living, ran toward Okonkwo saying, "My father, they have killed me!" Afraid of being thought weak, Okonkwo raised his own machete and finished the boy off.

Topic Tracking: Status 8

When Okonkwo returned home that night, Nwoye knew the Ikemefuna had been killed, and something inside him snapped. The feeling reminded him of the last harvest season when he and his family were returning from the fields with yams. Passing by the stream he'd heard the crying of an infant from the forest beyond the water. He'd always heard that whenever a woman gave birth to twins, they were left in earthenware pots in the forest because they were bad luck, but he'd never encountered them until then. Hearing the baby cry had given him the feeling that he was passing an evil spirit, the same way that he felt when his father returned from killing Ikemefuna.

Topic Tracking: Religion 6



Chapter 8

For two days after Ikemefuna died, Okonkwo did not eat. He was uneasy about killing the boy, but he tried to ignore his guilt because it wouldn't be manly to do otherwise.

"When did you become a shivering old woman,' Okonkwo asked himself, 'you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed.'" Part 1: Chapter 8, Pg. 56

In an effort to divert his thoughts, Okonkwo went to visit his friend, Obierika. While they are talking, Okonkwo asks why Obierika did not go with the elders to kill Ikemefuna, and Obierika says that although he respected the Oracle's instruction to kill the boy, he did not want to take part in it. He points out that Okonkwo would have done well to stay out of it, too, because such an action as killing someone who considers you his father will displease the Earth. While they are arguing about it, a neighbor comes in to tell of the death of an elder in a neighboring village. He points out that the drums are not beating to spread the news because the old man's wife died on seeing him dead, and so they must bury her first and then spread the news of the elder's death.

Topic Tracking: Religion 7

Obierika asks Okonkwo to join him when his daughter's suitor and his family come over that night to pay the bride price for Obierika's daughter. That night Obierika and his future in-laws go through the ritualistic haggling with broom handles and then agree on a bride price for Obierika's daughter.



Chapter 9

Okonkwo was finally able to sleep for the first time in three nights when Ekwefi awakened him because Ezinma was ill. She had a fever and so Okonkwo went out to find the herbs that would help her. Ekwefi was afraid that Ezinma would die as her previous nine children had. A medicine man decided that Ekwefi was bearing the same evil child over and over again; this type of child was called an ogbanje. The only way to save a woman from an ogbanje was to mutilate the dead body of the child and then bury it in the Evil Forest across the stream from the village where twins were left.

"After such treatment it would think twice before coming again, unless it was one of the stubborn ones who returned, carrying the stamp of their mutilation - a missing finger or perhaps a dark line where the medicine man's razor had cut them." Part 1: Chapter 9, Pg. 69

Ezinma bore none of the marks of mutilation and when her iyi-uwa, the stone that was her link to the world of ogbanje, had been found and destroyed over a year before, Ekwefi was reassured that Ezinma would stay. But when the girl fell ill, Ekwefi was still afraid that her daughter might die.

Topic Tracking: Religion 8

Okonkwo came back with the herbs and made Ekwefi boil them in a pot and then put Ezinma under a heavy mat to sit in the steam of the liquid. After that, Ezinma slept.



Chapter 10

The village gathered round as the sun went down to see the ceremony where the egwugwu, men of the village who masqueraded as the ancestral spirits of the village, came to settle disputes. The women of the village stood on the fringe of the crowd because the ceremony was for men, and when the egwugwu came out of their hut where no one but the egwugwu themselves were allowed to enter, the women instinctively fled from the nine masked spirits. Each egwugwu represented one of the villages in Umuofia. A different son of the first father of the clan had started each village. Okonkwo was the egwugwu from his village, but no one was supposed to acknowledge that because the egwugwu were addressed as the actual ancestral spirits whenever they were in costume. They passed judgment on the first trial and proceeded to the next one.

Topic Tracking: Status 9



Chapter 11

One night Ekwefi and Ezinma were in their hut and Ekwefi was telling her daughter a story when a voice interrupted them. Chielo, priestess of Agbala, came into their hut to take Ezinma because Agbala wanted to see her. Okonkwo and Ekwefi tried to prevent Chielo from taking the girl, but the priestess warned them not to interfere with the commands of Agbala. "'Beware Okonkwo!' she warned. 'Beware of exchanging words with Agbala. Does a man speak when a god speaks? Beware!'" Part 1: Chapter 11, Pg. 89 Then she ran off into the night with Ezinma on her back. Ekwefi, out of fear for her child, followed the priestess through the night as she journeyed to a far-off village and then returned to the shrine of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. When Ekwefi made it to the shrine on the hillside, Okonkwo was waiting there. They waited together outside the cave as dawn approached.



Chapter 12

The next day the town was festive because Obierika's future son-in-law was to bring palm wine for all of Obierika's kinsmen and the bride's mother was cooking a great feast, as was the custom. Okonkwo's wives were to help prepare the feast, and Ekwefi and Ezinma were among them despite the late night they had spent. Okonkwo was also tired because, although no one knew it, he had gone to the shrine of the Oracle four times before Chielo and Ezinma had returned there.

That night there was a great feast to celebrate the marriage and everyone in the village was happy.



Chapter 13

The drums woke Umuofia in the early morning to tell that Ezeudu had died. All the clan came to the great man's funeral and an egwugwu would appear every now and then from the underworld. Because Ezeudu had been such an important man to Umuofia, cannons were shot and rifles fired in his honor. During one such salute, Okonkwo's gun had exploded and killed a young boy in the middle of the funeral crowd. Although Okonkwo's crime was female (accidental) in nature, he was forced to flee from his home because killing a clansman was a crime against the earth goddess. Okonkwo and his wives and children gathered up their things and left Umuofia to spend seven years in Mbanta, where Okonkwo's mother had lived before she married Unoka. Obierika stored Okonkwo's yams for him, and the next morning clansmen came into Okonkwo's empty home and destroyed it -- the required justice of the earth goddess for Okonkwo's crime. Obierika was perplexed at the calamity that had befallen his friend, and he didn't understand why such a penalty was demanded for an accidental crime, in much the same way that he couldn't understand why twins had to be abandoned. All he understood was that the earth goddess expected the payments she demanded, and if punishment were not extracted from the guilty party, the entire clan would suffer for the offense. The elders said that, "if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." Part 1: Chapter 13, Pg. 111

Topic Tracking: Religion 9



Chapter 14

Okonkwo takes his family to Mbanta. His kinsmen there receive them with open arms and help them restart their lives and endure the seven years away from home.

Okonkwo seemed defeated because living in exile was like starting all over from scratch. All the work that he had put into developing his status among his village was erased now, and he was forced to begin again. "It was like beginning life anew without the vigor and enthusiasm of youth, like learning to become left-handed in old age." Part 2: Chapter 14, Pg. 113 One of the elders of Mbanta, Uchende, noticed Okonkwo's self pity and at a large ceremony he told Okonkwo that it was his duty to his family to buck up and get through the exile so that he could take his family back home.



Chapter 15

During the second year of Okonkwo's exile, Obierika comes to visit and brings news of the destruction of Abame by white men. Apparently a white man came to Abame and the elders consulted the Oracle about what to do with him. The Oracle told them that the white man would break their clan and spread destruction among all of them. It also said that more white men were on their way, so the people of Abame killed him. He had come to Abame on an "iron horse," Part 2: Chapter 15, Pg. 120 a bicycle, and they left it tied to a tree to prevent it from returning to tell the white men what had happened. Time passed and nothing happened until a few more white men showed up and saw the bicycle. Then on the great market day in Abame, they surrounded the public market and shot all the people there before they could even realize that they were in danger. Okonkwo considers the people of Abame fools because they did not fully heed the Oracle's warning that the white man would bring danger and that other white men would follow him and Obierika confesses his fear. He says, "We have heard stories about white men who made the powerful guns and the strong drinks and took slaves away across the seas, but no one thought the stories were true." Part 2: Chapter 15, Pg. 122

Topic Tracking: Colonization 1

Chapter 16

Obierika visits again two years later and missionaries have already come to Umuofia. Obierika came to Mbanta to see Okonkwo because he had seen Nwoye, Okonkwo's oldest son, among the converts that the missionaries had brainwashed. The missionaries had wreaked havoc among the Ibo tribe, but none of the people that had been converted were esteemed members of the villages or the tribes, and so although the clan leaders were saddened by the presence of the new religion, they believed that it would fade away. Six missionaries had come to Mbanta and among them was a white man, an object of curiosity for the villagers. With the help of Mr. Kiaga, a missionary and translator who claimed to be Ibo himself, the men preached about the one true God and stressed that the people of Mbanta were wrong to worship any other gods. Although most of the villagers discounted the convoluted teachings of these missionaries, Okonkwo himself among the skeptics, Nwoye had been moved by their beliefs. Their words and songs seemed to answer the questions of the twins and the death of Ikemefuna that had long bothered Nwoye.

Topic Tracking: Religion 10

Topic Tracking: Colonization 2



Chapter 17

The missionaries approached the elders of Mbanta to ask for a plot of land to build a church. The elders provided them with a space in the Evil Forest expecting that the forest would finish them off. The people of Mbanta waited for the gods to exact their vengeance against the missionaries, but time passed and nothing happened to the church in the forest -- with the exception of an increasing congregation. The white man who had come to Mbanta with the missionaries went back to Umuofia where he had built a school to educate the natives and left Mr. Kiaga in charge of the Mbanta church. Although Nwoye was curious about Christianity, he was careful not to make it too obvious because he knew Okonkwo would be furious. But one of Okonkwo's kinsmen noticed Nwoye near the church and reported it to the boy's father. When Nwoye came home that evening, Okonkwo began beating him until Uchende interrupted him. Nwoye left that night and joined the Christians. He went to work at the school in Umuofia and his father disowned him. Okonkwo could not understand how a man as strong and influential as himself could have had such a womanly son for an heir -- a boy so much like Unoka, his lazy and title-less grandfather. He believed his chi, or personal god, was turned against him. First the exile and now the betrayal of his eldest son -- he was cursed. Looking into the fire, Okonkwo realized that "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash." Part 2: Chapter 17, Pg. 134

Topic Tracking: Colonization 3



Chapter 18

The church and the village coexisted with few quarrels until several converts went into the village and proclaimed that the gods of the Ibo were impotent and dead and threatened to burn their shrines. They were soundly beaten and sent away, and the relationship between the church and the village went back to its grudging peace for quite a while. Meanwhile the people of Mbanta learned that the white men had not stopped with the introduction of their religion, but they had also set up a place of judgment in Umuofia to protect the missionaries. One man had even been hanged for killing a missionary, but people in Mbanta didn't quite believe the stories because the church had not yet seriously interrupted life in Mbanta and Mr. Kiaga was not a threat.

Topic Tracking: Colonization 4

The little church in Mbanta soon faced its first internal rift over accepting village outcasts. The members of the church still believed that those ostracized by Mbanta were not fit to be Christians either, but Mr. Kiaga disagreed. Finally the missionary convinced his congregation that the village outcasts were welcomed in the Christian church just as much as the twins they had rescued from the Evil Forest. Two of the village outcasts joined the church and were then followed by all the other outcasts. One of these introduced the first conflict between the elders of Mbanta and the Christians because he killed a royal python, a sacred emanation of the god of water for the Ibo. The elders and rulers of the village met to determine the punishment for such insurrection, and Okonkwo was disgusted to see that the men of Mbanta were so womanish that they would not declare war against the Christians. Instead, the Christians were ostracized altogether from Mbanta and all its activities.

The next day when the women converts went to Mbanta and to the stream, they found that there were armed men there to prevent them from entering the village or using the water source that the villagers used. Mr. Kiaga learned that they had been outlawed because one of the converts had killed the sacred python. The convert accused of the crime had fallen ill the night before and was dead before the end of the day. This seemed to prove to the people of Mbanta that their gods were still alive and powerful and so they left the Christians unharmed.

Topic Tracking: Colonization 5



Chapter 19

Okonkwo's last year of exile dragged along and he sent money to Obierika to build the beginning of a home for Okonkwo's family in their native village. Okonkwo had spent his seven years in Mbanta planning for ways to regain his former social status when he returned to his village. He planned to buy the first in the rung of social titles for two of his sons when they returned.

Topic Tracking: Status 10

Just before Okonkwo took his family back to their native village, he gave a great feast to thank his kinsmen in Mbanta for their kindness while he'd been in exile in their village. At the ceremony, one of the elders gave a great speech about the danger that this new religion posed to their clan because it made it possible for sons to separate from their fathers and severed the ties of family on which their tribe was built.



Chapter 20

While the family had been in exile Ezinma, Okonkwo's favorite daughter, had come of age to marry as had one of his other daughters. He insisted that they wait to marry a man of their native village and so they did. He expected that the suitors who would pursue them would be men of great wealth and status in Umuofia.

When Okonkwo and his family returned to their home, it was greatly changed by the presence of the white man's church and his government. Now even men of status had been converted and renounced their tribal titles. There was a District Commissioner who judged cases concerning the Ibo people without any knowledge of their customs or religion, and he had court messengers who hunted down the men to be tried and dragged them before the court. Obierika told Okonkwo that

"The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." Part 3: Chapter 20, pg. 152

Topic Tracking: Colonization 6



Chapter 21

Although Okonkwo saw the destruction of the clan and believed that the white men were the source of it, not everyone in the tribe agreed. Many appreciated the introduction of a trading store among other innovations of the white men and they had no problem with most of the Christians there because their leader, Mr. Brown, worked to keep his converts from provoking the villagers. Mr. Brown made it a point to learn more about the religion of the natives so that he could better understand them. He even built a school to educate their children so that they could be the leaders of their own village rather than have the white men rule them. After a while many people came to the school to learn, children and adults alike.

Mr. Brown had to leave Umuofia because his health was deteriorating, but just before he left, he made a visit to Okonkwo to tell him of Nwoye's progress. Okonkwo chased him away with threats. Okonkwo was disappointed that his return to his native village had been insignificant to most other villagers. He'd married his daughters off to worthy suitors, but no one had taken great notice. He'd also been unable to have his sons initiated into the prestigious society he'd planned on because the initiations only occurred every three years and they hadn't made it back to their native village in time. Okonkwo's insignificance grated on him as much as the presence of the white men and the way that they unraveled the tapestry of Ibo society.

Topic Tracking: Status 11

Topic Tracking: Colonization 7



Chapter 22

Mr. Smith came to Umuofia to replace Mr. Brown and he encouraged the zealots of the church to act out against the pagan tribe. It was this encouragement that brought about a great conflict between the church and the tribe. Enoch, a fanatic Christian and the son of a tribal spiritual leader, unmasked an egwugwu in public, which was a great crime and insult against the ancestral spirits. Because of this insurrection, the tribe determined that Enoch had to die, and when they went to kill him, they found that Mr. Smith was protecting him in the name of the Christian church. Rather than hunt Enoch down and kill him, the egwugwu who had come to the church in the night to exact their vengeance settled for burning the church, the shrine that had bred all this trouble. Mr. Smith was powerless to stop them.

Topic Tracking: Religion 11



Chapter 23

Okonkwo was finally pleased with the actions of his tribe members because they had not cowered like women, but burned the Christian shrine. For several days after the burning, the men of the village walked around armed, determined not to be caught unaware as the people of Abame had been. When Mr. Smith went to speak to the District Commissioner, the men of the tribe paid no attention. And when the court messengers came and invited the leaders of the tribe to a meeting at his headquarters, they thought nothing of that either because he often called them together to talk. Okonkwo and five other leaders met with the Commissioner and were trapped into imprisonment there for several days until the tribe paid two hundred cowries for their release. The corrupt court messengers who guarded the men and demanded the ransom not only kept the men without food or facilities to relieve themselves, but they also whipped them and upped the ransom to two hundred and fifty cowries so that they could receive a share of the money.

Topic Tracking: Colonization 8



Chapter 24

After the release of the tribal leaders, Okonkwo went home feeling defeated. But in the night the messenger came around announcing a tribal meeting in the morning. Okonkwo got out his wardress and felt alive again because he knew that his clan was finally coming together to defend itself. They would finally break free from the white men and drive them from Umuofia. Okonkwo's only concern was that some cowardly members of the tribe might try to prevent them from going to war, and he planned to speak out against them and incite his neighbors and the men of neighboring villages to go to war against the white men who had divided them.

As the people of Umuofia met, emotions ran high and Okonkwo prepared himself to urge them to war. He knew that one man in particular would oppose violence, and so he readied himself to speak out in the packed market place. But before the people of Umuofia could be urged to lash out at the white men, court messengers arrived and ordered that the group disperse on the order of the District Commissioner. Without a second thought, Okonkwo used his machete to sever the head messenger's head.

"Okonkwo stood looking at the dead man. He knew that Umuofia would not go to war. He knew because they had let the other messengers escape. They had broken into tumult instead of action. He discerned fright in that tumult. He heard voices asking: 'Why did he do it?'" Part 3: Chapter 24, Pg. 176

As the crowd murmured in fear, Okonkwo cleaned his blade in the sand and left.

Topic Tracking: Colonization 9



Chapter 25

When the District Commissioner arrived to take Okonkwo away, he found many of the villagers standing around Okonkwo's home. The Ibo men led the white man to a tree behind Okonkwo's house where Okonkwo's body hung. Obierika, Okonkwo's greatest friend, asked that the commissioner cut him down because it would be an offense against the earth for any of the clansmen to cut him down. Okonkwo had committed a sin against the Earth by taking his own life, and to touch him would bring abomination on the others. They could not bury him, but when strangers had buried him, they would perform sacrifices to cleanse the land that he had desecrated. Obierika blamed the District Commissioner for the death of Okonkwo, one of Umuofia's greatest men. The Commissioner ordered that Okonkwo be cut down and then he made his way back to his court. As he walked he thought about the peculiar beliefs of the natives and how such stories would fill the book he was planning to write. He thought of Okonkwo's story and thought that it would be a nice paragraph to include in his book entitled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

Topic Tracking: Colonization 10

Topic Tracking: Status 12