

Things Fall Apart

by Chinua Achebe

(Published in 1959)

Approved for use in grade 10.

Summary of the Work:

The novel chronicles the life of Okonkwo, the leader of an Igbo community, from the events leading up to his banishment from the community for accidentally killing a clansman, through the seven years of his exile, to his return, and it addresses a particular problem of emergent Africa—the intrusion in the 1890s of white missionaries and colonial government into tribal Igbo society. Traditionally structured, and peppered with Igbo proverbs, it describes the simultaneous disintegration of its protagonist Okonkwo and of his village. The novel was praised for its intelligent and realistic treatment of tribal beliefs and of psychological disintegration coincident with social unraveling. Written with quiet dignity that builds to a climax of tragic force, this book is about the dissolution of an African tribe, its traditions, and values.

Brittanica.com

Rationale:

This novel is part of the required Springboard sophomore curriculum which prepares students to take future AP English courses. This novel is known as “the most authentic narrative ever written about life in Nigeria at the turn of the twentieth century. Although the novel was first published in 1958 — two years before Nigeria achieved its independence — thousands of copies are still sold every year in the United States alone. Teachers in high schools, colleges, and graduate schools use the novel as a textbook in many types of classes — from history and social studies to comparative literature and anthropology. Achebe announced that one of his purposes was to present a complex, dynamic society to a Western audience who perceived African society as primitive, simple, and backward. Unless Africans could tell their side of their story, Achebe believed that the African experience would forever be “mistold” (Cliffnotes.com).

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Written by a Nigerian African trained in missionary schools, this novel tells quietly the story of a brave man, Okonkwo, whose life has absolute validity in terms of his culture, and who exercises his prerogative as a warrior, father, and husband with unflinching single mindedness. But into the complex Nigerian village filters the teachings of strangers, teachings so alien to the tribe, that resistance is impossible. One must distinguish a force to be able to oppose it, and to most, the talk of Christian salvation is no more than the babbling of incoherent children. Still, with his guns and persistence, the white man, amoeba-like, gradually absorbs the native culture and in despair, Okonkwo, unable to withstand the corrosion of what he, alone, understands to be the life force of his people, hangs himself. In the formlessness of the dying culture, it is the missionary who takes note of the event, reminding himself to give Okonkwo's gesture a line or two in his work, *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*. This book sings with the terrible silence of dead civilizations in which once there was valor.

Noted Distinction:

- Margaret Wong Memorial Prize 1959
- Man Booker International Prize for fiction 2007
- Dayton Literary Peace Prize 2010
- *Things Fall Apart* sold more than 10 million copies worldwide and been translated into more than 50 languages.

Readability

- Lexile Score: 890L

Learning Resources Guidelines

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: ([link](#))

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Teaches literary devices such as:

- Foreshadowing
- Irony
- Metaphor
- Personification
- Proverb
- Simile
- Theme

Teaches themes such as:

Connection to the Curriculum:

Springboard grade 10 curricular goals prepare students for AP English.: In units that study the power of language to persuade, students will:

- Read works such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Sophocles' *Antigone*, Susan B. Anthony's "On Women's Right to Vote," and Kofi Annan's Nobel Prize acceptance speech.
- Examine how culture influences worldview.
- Incorporate textual evidence into a written argument.
- Write in argumentative, narrative, information, and other modes.

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Tradition — While some embrace the work of the missionaries, many Igbo are wary of the destruction of their culture and customs.

Conflict of Individual and Society — Okonkwo resists the changes that are overtaking his community and turns away from his tribe on more than one occasion.

Responsibility — Okonkwo feels responsible for the Igbo people, especially when he must uphold obligations that he may not completely agree with.

Prestwickhouse.com

- Research a culture and present findings in a collaborative presentation using digital media.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

“Millions of copies have been sold around the world in its many translations. The novel has been adapted for productions on the stage, on the radio, and on television” (Cliffnotes.com).