

Purple hibiscus by
chimamanda ngozi
adichie as an
example of a literary
canon



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Originating from the Latin word “rule”, a canon is a standard of judgement for ecclesiastical laws based on an accepted set of religious texts. *Purple Hibiscus*, a novel written by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, is a perfect example of a literary canon considering that Adichie analyzes oppression and silence through the young character, Kambili, trying to convey her life through personal thoughts. *Purple Hibiscus* accentuates the role of culture, religion, and the specific time period while challenging accepted ideas.

A constant theme that was occurring in Adichie’s novel was the prevalence of oppression. Kambili, the daughter of Papa, voices her thoughts within her own head for the majority of the novel. A clear insight of Kambili’s feelings about Papa are shown when she says, “My nightmares started then, nightmares in which I saw Ade Coker’s charred remains splattered on his dining table, on his daughter’s school uniform, on his baby’s cereal bowl, on his plate of eggs. In some of the nightmares, I was the daughter and the charred remains became Papa’s.” This thought from Kambili shows her subconscious thoughts about Papa. After Ade Coker’s death, Kambili starts to have dreams that turn into her own Papa dying, and she possibly does not mind those thoughts. Throughout the novel, Papa has put such a subconscious silence over Kambili that she starts to get these unimaginable images of Papa’s death, till she realizes it might not be the worst thing in the world. With the topic of a canon being related to culture, Kambili would never disrespect Papa by talking back to him or voicing her opinion about a situation that has already been made. Therefore, she can somewhat live her own life and voice her own thoughts throughout her dreams, subconsciously.

Along the topic of oppression, when Papa broke Mamas beloved figurines, Kambili said “ I meant to say I am sorry that Papa broke your figurines, but the words that came out were, ‘ I’m sorry your figurines broke, Mama.”

Physical violence was also a factor in Kambili’s silence and when this scenario played out, Kambili was too afraid to disrespect Papa and what she wanted to say were not the words that she actually spoke out loud. This quote plays a significant role in a literary canon because not only does this show the significance of Kambili’s silence that lies within her subconsciously, but it also shows the culture aspect of her not disrespecting her father.

A literary canon, being one of the most important books of its time, is clearly portrayed as to why Purple Hibiscus is included. When Kambili talks about her brother Jaja, she says, “ I looked at Jaja and wondered if the dimness in his eyes was shame. I suddenly wished, for him, that he had done the imammuo, the initiation into the spirit world. I knew very little about it; women were not supposed to know anything at all, since it was the first step toward the initiation to manhood. But Jaja once told me that he heard that boys were flogged and made to bathe in the presence of a taunting crowd. The only time Papa had talked about the imammuo was to say that the Christians who let their sons do it were confused, that they would end up in hellfire.” This quote shows two large factors of this novel, religion and authority. Jaja was telling Kambili at one point about this religious ritual that converted boys to their manhood, but he was not allowed to do it because Papa thought of it as a sin and he only wanted his children to end up in heaven. Jaja was shown these different ways of life through the humanistic beliefs of his aunt and the traditionalist rituals of his grandfather. Jaja

compares himself to his cousin, Obiora, who is very articulate and mature for his age. Obiora had completed the ima mmuo in his father's hometown. Jaja is never permitted to visit his grandfather for more than fifteen minutes a year because Jaja's father does not view life the same as his own father and Jaja's grandfather. Papas view on culture is significantly different than the rest of his family, which is why Jaja was not to visit Aunty Ifeoma at first. Though she is Papas sister, they are very much different religiously, and Papa would like to keep Kambili and Jaja away from that side of the family, authoritatively.

Kambili has a strong belief in God's connection to nature and many other things. She tends to try to find him in the natural world, which was taught to her by Mama. Though she does not hold on to many religious rituals outside of Igbo song that Papa had taught, she connects the Catholic God and Chukwu. As God created the world and is prevalent, Igbo Chukwu built the earth and is associated everything in it. Kambili's home is in Enugu, but she is unsure of her future now that she has been shown a freer way of life in Nsukka with the help of her aunt. She loves Papa but does not want to live in his shadow for the rest of her life. She makes this clear by stating, " Rain splashed across the floor of the veranda, even though the sun blazed and I had to narrow my eyes to look out the door of Aunty Ifeoma's living room. Mama used to tell Jaja and me that God was undecided about what to send, rain or sun. We would sit in our rooms and look out at the raindrops glistening with sunlight, waiting for God to decide." Though Kambili has love for her father, she can only envision a better and more freeing life for herself when she gets older. This shows how traditions and culture change over time by

looking at the present time. Children are overdone with rules that they are expected to abide by, with the forceful nature of their parents, or parent. Adichie is showing a deeper meaning through her words when she describes these scenes in the novel. The inner thoughts of Kambili show how culture can change over time due to the fact that when things are pressured onto the youth, that makes them revolt and change to their own ways once they have grown.

Revolting against religion, Jaja shows his feelings by saying, 'Of course God does. Look at what he did to his faithful servant job, even to his own Son. But have you ever wondered why? Why did he have to murder his own son so we would be saved? Why didn't he just go ahead and save us?' Jaja is questioning the Bible's parables has shown his break with faith at this point and shows how low he is in his own life. The treatment of the son by God, his father, connects to the abuse Jaja had to go through because of Papa as well. Now that Papa is dead, Jaja claims his faith is as well. Depicting the clear image that religion was enforced by Papa unwillingly to the children and now that he is gone, nobody can control them to that level of severity anymore.

Following Papas death, the children's lives change dramatically. Kambili states her thoughts as they come to her, naturally saying, "'We will take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we'll go to America to visit Aunty Ifeoma,' I said. 'We'll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscus, too, and I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers.' I am laughing. I reach out and place my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans toward me and smiles. Above, clouds like dyed

cotton wool hang low, so low I feel I can reach out and squeeze the moisture
<https://assignbuster.com/purple-hibiscus-by-chimamanda-ngozi-adichie-as-an-example-of-a-literary-canon/>

from them. The new rains will come down soon". Kambili's pure joy shows that she has fully converted into her own person. She is able to support herself and take care of Mama as well. Her admiration for nature comes into sight by her planting the new orange trees in her ancestral town, a symbol of new life and new beginnings. Jaja's purple hibiscus, a symbol of freedom, will also finally come to bloom again. The ixora plants were a favorite of Father Amadi, the young priest Kambili fell in love with in Nsukka. The memories of when Kambili felt most whole will come back to life with a new planting of the ixora plant. The "new rains" symbolize the hope of a new beginning because the environment played a major symbolic role throughout this novel.