

Things fall apart by chinua achebe essay sample



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

1. What kind of person is Okonkwo? Describe his physical characteristics, his personality, and the opinion others have of him. Also state your own opinion about this man.

The protagonist of the story, Okonkwo, is a strong, brawny and dominating man, who made a name for himself in Umuofia for his own hard work and expertise in war. His disillusionment and frustration with his own lazy and effeminate father drove him to work hard and succeed. This reactionary attitude however also shaped his hastiness and recklessness which he purposely portrayed to avoid being perceived as puny and weak, which led to his eventual tragedy. Okonkwo has a rather myopic notion of being of man which is being aggressive and uncompromising.

Okonkwo also exhibits a strong loyalty and high regard to the Ibo tribe, its customs and traditions, and is resistant to the influence of foreigners. This provoked his hostile and antagonistic attitude against foreigners and to their teachings, and made him very disappointed to the people who embrace foreign religion and culture.

2. The District Commissioner describes Okonkwo's people as primitive. How would you characterize the Ibo culture?

The District Commissioner is an archetype of a racist colonialist, who believes that African people are inferior and it's up for the white race to rescue them from their savage and uncultured lives. For that, he exhibits no respect to the African natives. Contrary to this belief, the Umuofia or the "people of the forest" were not primitive. They have developed their own civilization with unique culture, customs, and even government system. Ibo

society is highly patriarchal. Men were relegated in leadership positions while women were expected to remain submissive to their husbands. Instead of intellect or aptitude, they put high regard on physical strength of person. Finally, the Igbo society has a high regard of death. They value human sacrifice for maintaining peace among neighboring tribes. They consider suicide as an act of disgrace. They adhere to capital punishment as retributive justice.

3. How does Chinua Achebe give his readers a sense of what Okonkwo's culture was like before it "fell apart?"

Achebe portrayed the Igbo as independent, autonomous and self-contained. The people have well established a society with remarkable social institutions that operates within its own unique customary framework and values. Justice and equality is at the core of its traditions and laws. One of the noteworthy traditions of the Igbo is its democratic system of governance. The people are not governed by a single dominant leader or king. Instead, consultation and consensus is made from among the males in deciding on critical matters. Socio economic stratification is not rigid. Freedom and wealth can be achieved by one's contribution to society.

However, the Igbo society and culture also has its own shares of flaws. For one, its highly patriarchal society makes gender egalitarianism in accordance to Western standards certainly absent. The people willfully submit to human sacrifice to achieve tribal peace (as in the case of Ikemefuna) and in compliance to some of their irrational beliefs. An example for the latter is the killing of twin babies by exposure, which are deemed to be ill-fated.

Finally, the lack of a written language among the African natives puts emphasis on the importance of the oral tradition to pass the history, culture and customs of the people. Achebe's inclusion of some Igbo traditional folk tales and proverbs help bring to life the myths, legends and stories of Native Africans passed on verbally by the elders to the younger generation to serve as the primary source of their knowledge of the past.

4. Why do you think Achebe chose to use an objective third person point of view for this novel? How might it be different if it were told from Okonkwo's perspective?

It is crucial that Achebe use a third person point of view for the novel to achieve objectivity in its account. A third person perspective provides independence and neutrality in the discussion of the differing and sometimes conflicting views and cultures of the Igbo and Europeans. To maintain objectivity, a third person perspective functions to set the parameters in a conflict in order for parties to focus on issues and allow readers to know the two sides of the stories. A third person perspective will help facilitate and mediate the understanding between these world perspectives of each culture which are often restricted and prejudiced. If the novel is written in Okonkwo's perspective, it would definitely be biased against the Christian European colonizers, who will most probably be depicted as invaders and racists, who came to colonize and destroy the Igbo people, which is not entirely correct.

5. The author is an Ibo who was raised in a Christian family. Does this information about Achebe's background influence your opinion of this novel?

As a Christian Ibo, Achebe is able to see both the good and bad side of the Igbo culture as well as Christianity. As a native African himself, he saw the sanctity of preserving one's culture to maintain racial heritage and identity. As a Christian, he also saw the flaws of the Igbo culture such as gender discrimination, the cursing of twins, human sacrifice, among others that need to be changed. The background of the author helps the audience to understand the notion of compromise between two cultures as contained in the novel's theme.

6. In your opinion, is Things Fall Apart a tragedy?

The novel was a tragedy in the sense that it depicted how African culture had become extinct because of the European influence which in turn resulted to the sense of lost cultural identity and history of the Igbo people. As explicitly captured by the title, the novel tells of how African natives were stripped off their past and their cultural identity, which itself has its own value contrary to most European literary accounts which depict African natives to be primitive and uncivilized. Learning and understanding one's past is important for directing one's future. At the same time, the novel was not entirely a tragedy because it also recognizes the need for change. Societies and culture perpetually adapt to the changes in the environment to evolve to become better and be more abreast and responsive to the demands and requirements of the present. If the Igbo culture had remained static, it would either be ostracized or be left out in the modern world.

7. The District Commissioner comes to bring "civilization" to the Ibo.

Members of a civilization have shared values defined social roles and ways to transmit their beliefs to their children. In your opinion can the

Ibo be described as “ uncivilized”? How “ civilized” is the way the whites treat the native people?

The term civilization is used to describe a certain kind of human society as opposed to the individualistic and nomadic nature of life of primitive men. It is marked by shared values, defined social roles, economic and political system and a system of maintaining the same. Under these premises, the Ibo natives can not be considered as uncivilized because they have established their own unique system that maintains order and balance to sustain its society. The Igbo people are not uncivilized. They simply are different.

On the other hand, the white people in the person of the District Commissioner and Reverend James Smith can be argued to have acted uncivilized in treating the natives. Both exhibited an arrogant and uncompromising attitude towards the Igbo people. They impose their culture and beliefs aggressively without utter disregard and indifference to the traditional values, culture and even religion of the natives which reflects their self conceit and lack of understanding in the concept of human rights.

8. One important theme of the novel can be found in the book’s title.

Trace the progressive “ falling apart” of Okonkwo’s culture.

Okonkwo derived his strength and power from the native Igbo society he grew up and belonged. He made a repute for himself, gained fortune and created his family within the accepted and a conventional framework of his native society, which puts high premium on his skills and strength. In the advent of the white people, the natives and their society in general gradually

adapted the new culture and religion of the colonizers. The old traditions, beliefs, cultures, customs and values of the Igbo people start to fall apart. When Okonkwo came back to his native land after years of exile, he was appalled by the changes. He cannot accept and adapt to these changes like embracing the Christian religion. When an unbending or inflexible person is incapable of adapting to the changes of the times, he becomes susceptible to be left out or fade away in obsolescence and brushed away by modernity. This is the tragic fate of Okonkwo's falling apart as he ended his own life.

Reference

Achebe, C. (1996), Things fall apart. African Classics Series. Heinemann Press.