

# "things fall apart" by chinua achebe essay sample

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## **“ Things Fall Apart” by Chinua Achebe Essay Sample**

“ Things Fall Apart”, written by the late Nigerian Author, Chinua Achebe, is a book written in the view of an African native that sheds light to the effects of colonialism and the common misconceptions of the colonized due to a lack of cultural appreciation. Achebe places the reader in the shoes of the protagonist, Okonkwo, to guide them through the everyday life of Ibo society. Although on a much greater perspective, Achebe guides the reader through the everyday life of the Ibo people and their collective situation, while depicting the beauty and faults of Ibo culture at a time when things rapidly start to fall apart due to the existential impact of European colonialism. Chinua Achebe wrote “ Things Fall Apart” under the influence of “ Discourse on Colonialism” (Aime Césaire , 1950) and “ Black Skin, White Masks” (Frantz Fanon, 1952). In his book, he dared to challenge the concept of racist writing towards the effects of colonialism depicted by the ‘ West’ by being open with his criticisms of literary ‘ blindness’ to racist writing.

Achebe does not introduce the reader to colonialism until the near end. It is not until the reader has a chance to appreciate the details of the Ibo culture and put themselves in Okonkwo’s shoes that Achebe “ allows” the reader’s mind to marinate the significance and impact of colonialism and the deterioration of the Ibo culture. This way, the reader could feel as though they were part of the Ibo people before the momentum of the story is changed. Only in part two the reader is subjected to the societal changes that the conflict between the people of Umuofia (Okonkwo’s village) and the Christian missionaries present. It is when the Christian Missionaries arrive in

Africa, that the Ibo's traditions, gods, and lifestyle are challenged by the modern world. Instead of presenting themselves as a threat to the Ibo people, they live peacefully next to the tribe with a great deal of respect for the Ibo culture. Achebe depicts the complex, advanced social institutions and artistic traditions of the Igbo people prior to their contact with Europeans.

The book describes the customs and society of the Igbo and the influence of British colonialism and Christian missionaries on the Igbo community during the late nineteenth century. When the missionaries succeed in taking over Umuofia, Okonkwo is so distraught with the Christian transformation that he commits suicide. The rationale of *Things Fall Apart* is to explore the imperfections of the Ibo culture and its strengths therefore, the fall of the Ibo culture and subsequently, the fall of Okonkwo cannot only be attributed to their strong belief system and rooted cultural heritage but the impact of the missionaries had in converting many people on Umuofia. During a conversation between Obierika, Okonkwo's friend, and Okonkwo, Obierika more or less sums up the events since the white man has arrived on their land: " Does the white man understand our custom about land?"

" How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? 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." (Achebe, 176)

In an area that the tribe deemed the " Evil Forrest", Achebe states, " The white man had indeed brought a lunatic religion, but he had also built a trading store and for the first time palm-oil and kernel became things of great price, and much money flowed into Umuofia" (Achebe, 178). The ramification of colonialism and the blatant depiction of the beginning of a capitalist structure is clearly analyzed in this passage and the reader can see the great changes that have happened since the arrival of the Europeans. Through chronicling the life of Okonkwo's family, Achebe gives insight into how the process of colonization happens and the resulting physical and mental effects on both groups of people. Achebe completes a portrayal of how the process of colonization occurs and carries itself out on all of the parties involved with quite a resemblance to Fanon.

In " The Wretched of the Earth", Franz Fanon gives an accurate representation of the process of colonization and decolonization and its effects from mostly a historical and platonic standpoint. Brilliantly, Achebe tells the story in such an emotionally descriptive way that the reader becomes emotionally involved and the moment the reader realizes that colonization is taking place, the tragedy is much more real unlike Fanon's description of the process. Both Achebe and Fanon discuss the role of violence in colonization. While Fanon offers a non-emotional and somewhat external opinion about the historical process of decolonization as an aspect of modernization, Achebe fills the emotional void by focusing the majority of

the book on Ibo life, its beauty and uniqueness, from peace to colonization. He allows the reader to put themselves in the situation and let their heart, soul, and natural instincts take over their mind while simultaneously backing Fanon's idea of the process as movement of mankind towards progression.

In "Discourse on Colonialism", Aimé Césaire insists that the colonial conquest that shows how Europe's barbarism led them "to kill in Indochina, torture in Madagascar, imprison in Black Africa, crack down in the West Indies," (Césaire, 1) based on discrimination and hatred of the colonizer towards the native is harmful. It dehumanizes both the colonizer and the colonized which he refers to the "boomerang effect of colonization" (Césaire, 13). It is very similar to the events in "Things Fall Apart" when the Westerners collapsed the pillars of Ibo society. Both pieces point out the similarities between British colonial practices in Nigeria, and those Césaire encountered in his native Martinique, a French colony. While both readings condemn the brutality and twisted "idea" of colonialism, Achebe and Césaire learn different lessons from this human "catastrophe" and seem to have differing visions for moving forward. Césaire and Achebe share important ideas for the future of Africa and post-colonial societies via the study of the human catastrophe suffered during colonization.

Césaire discusses how the West exploited the natural resources of other societies through colonization under the guise of spreading religion or "civilizing" the "savage". Achebe would agree with Césaire that Europe only sought to benefit itself. They share the notion that the "Third" world must create a future where they embrace the beauty of their past but also take on

characteristics of “ modern society” that can lead newfound peace and prosperity. Although both authors ultimately agree with the path that post-colonial societies must take, they differ in their core views of human nature. In “ Things Fall Apart”, Achebe holds the notion that the faults of both the invading Westerners and the native Ibo demonstrate that all societies share the same potential for “ barbarism” and injustice. He made it very clear that Ibo culture was not perfect and that it indulged in “ barbaric” practices such as killing twins and the horrid treatment of women while pointing out the merciless massacre of entire villages by European soldiers.

On the other hand, Césaire suggests that places such as Africa were “ democratic societies, always”, (Césaire, 7) and they could move forward, creating a new path because they are “ a society rich with all the productive power of modern times, warm with all of the fraternity of olden days”. (Césaire, 11) In Conclusion, the post-colonial literature by Chinua Achebe, Franz Fanon and Aime Césaire , offer a rebuttal to “ Western” misrepresentations of their humanity and the real approach on the effects that colonization had on the colonized. By depicting the complex, advanced social institutions and artistic lifestyle of their respective cultures, the authors successfully challenge the selfish and close minded literature of European authors and offer an altruistic view of the great things about their culture as well as their faults prior to their contact with the Europeans. In that respect, Achebe’s book is a good example of post-colonial writing.

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