

# Okonkwo: a life story of a tragic hero

[Literature](#), [Character](#)



Esha Moore Honors English II- Hyatt May 23, 2012 Things Fall Apart Final Literally Analysis Essay Okonkwo: A Life Story of a Tragic Hero What makes up a hero in today's society? Young children today imagine a hero with superpowers and a cape, but little do they know heroes come in many different forms. In his novel, *Things Fall Apart*, the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe illustrates the making of modern hero. Even though Okonkwo does not act like a regular hero, he still has a noble structure, makes mistakes throughout life, and experiences a great downfall.

Elijah Wood once said “ There is nothing noble in being superior to your fellow men. True nobility lies in being superior to your former self. ” Growing up, the Umuofia clan did not consider Okonkwo noble because of his impecunious father, Unoka: “ Unoka was, of course, a debtor, and he owed every neighbor somemoney, from a few cowries to quite substantial amount” (Achebe 5). When Unoka died ten years ago he has taken no title at all and left Okonkwo in debt. Greatly ashamed of his father, he based many of his beliefs about how life should be lived by doing the exact opposite of his father.

Okonkwo's nobility all begins about twenty years ago, when his clan announces him the best wrestler. This all happened when Amalinze the Cat- seven year champion- who fights Okonkwo; however, Okonkwo throws the Cat and won the match. Meanwhile, a war was going on in Mbaino, so in the nine villages of Umuofia, all the men must be present tomorrow morning. Umuofia needed a young man and a virgin: “ He was a man of action, a man of war” (10). Okonkwo leaves for Mbaino knowing not to suspect upon his arrival. Okonkwo suffers various hamartia or mistakes that he truly regrets.

Okonkwo starts out being his town hero; however, his biggest flaw was having uncontrollable anger, which eventually leads to his violent behavior. Okonkwo's violent behavior starts before the Week of Peace. He comes home expecting Ojiugo and dinner she usually prepares for him. Okonkwo realizes her lack of absence; he then starts freaking out because she went to her friend's house to plait her hair. Since she was not at the house, he came back to the hut and waits upon her arrival, which lead to Ojiugo beating.

Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess comes to the hut to discuss Okonkwo's actions and how he could ruin the clan. While getting ready for The Feast of the New Yam, he makes another mistake by shooting at Ekwefi- his second wife- she mocks her husband's poor hunting ability, making a remark about guns that never shoot: " He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children" (39). Okonkwo tends not to think and he acts impulsively and inconsiderately.

Okonkwo tries instilling his personal views on how to live as a man to Nwoye and according to Okonkwo, showing emotions are signs of acting womanly. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves pronounce Ikemefuna should be killed, and the oldest member of the clan informs Okonkwo of this. Okonkwo has an obsessive fear of anything that can be associated with the image of his weak, lazy and gentle father whom he always considered a failure. As an ambitious man who became a successful, respectable warrior of the clan, he wants to take part in the killing of the boy; however, the older clan member forbids him to do so.

Forced to march in a procession, Ikemefuna stricken by one of the clan members, when he tries to seek Okonkwo's protection, Okonkwo so as not

appear weak performs: “ Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down” (61). His irascible behavior leads to besmirching his reputation. Ikemefuna's death generates a series of events, which lead to Okonkwo's downfall. Okonkwo's son, Nwoye and Ikemefuna have grown close like brothers and even Okonkwo has grown fond of Ikemefuna.

While attending Ezeudu's funeral another disaster befalls him: “ Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart” (124). The death of Ezeudu's son went against the Earth Goddess, so he was forced into exile for seven years to his mother's village. During the time of exile, white missionaries appeared on their bicycles. The Oracle warns the clan about death and destruction in the future. They ask for land to build a church and they are given the Evil Forest, with hope the cursed land will lead to their demise; instead, their church flourishes and gains more and more converts each day.

When Okonkwo finds out about Nwoye's conversion, he beats him so severely. Upset by his father's action Nwoye runs away and never comes back; he joins the missionaries as a teacher. He sees himself and his fathers' crowding around their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man's god. After seven years he returns to his village, hoping to regain his position of importance, but much has changed with the invasion.

Resistance to the white men was agreed upon because of fear of killing their own clansman. While the meeting was taking place, a group of messengers from the white men arrive and orders them to stop: “ In a flash Okonkwo

drew his machete. The messenger crouched to avoid the blow. It was useless. Okonkwo's machete descended twice and the man's head lay beside his uniformed body" (204). From this action, Okonkwo knows that his clan will not go to war. He has lost his respect and authority he once had from his family and his Umuofia clan.

He then commits suicide by hanging himself. Okonkwo starts out being his town hero but later sees himself in situations he regrets. Okonkwo's inflexibility to accept causes his downfall because he became so obsessed with being everything his dad was not. This causes Okonkwo to no longer care whether things were wrong or right. Although Okonkwo demonstrates fear and anger actions much consideration should be taken to make sure his personal flaws in society do not interfere with one's judgment.

Work Cited Achebe, Chinua. *Things Fall Apart*. Anchor Books: New York: 1994.