

# The struggle between change and tradition: essay examples

[Countries](#), [England](#)



**Question 3:**

Things Fall Apart is filled with all kinds of conflicts. Choose the one you feel is most important to Achebe's theme, discuss that conflict in detail, and show why it is so crucial to our understanding of the book.

Things Fall Apart deals with the tale of a culture at the edge of change. It portrays the reality and the prospects pertaining to change that affect the various characters. The contentiousness of whether the change should be allowed to prevail over tradition revolves around personal status. In the novel, Okonkwo is reluctant of the new religious and political orders. He feels that embracing these changes may portray him as less manly. He is also afraid to tolerate these changes for fear of losing his status in society. It may be noteworthy to understand that Okonkwo's fear emanates from his sense of self-worth. This sense may be dependent on the standards set traditionally, and upon which the society may judge him.

Okonkwo, a renowned wrestler, fierce warrior, and successful yam farmer wages war on the endless battle of status. His life is mainly occupied by the fear of failure and weakness. He is extremely harsh and ruthless especially when dealing with men who are lazy, debtors, and weak like his father. He is ashamed of his father's weakness (womanly ways) and ends up over compensating through his lack of tolerance to gentleness or idleness. However, at times he feels affections inwardly but never portrays it to anyone around him. He even goes to an extent of isolating himself and exhibiting his anger through irrational, stubborn, and violent behaviour.

Okonkwo goes to a new level demanding that his family works long hours

regardless of their limited physical stamina or age. He even beats up his wives and son, who he believes in weak like his father, Unoka.

Okonkwo is quite impulsive and irrational, always acting before thought.

When the white man brings Christianity to the Igbo community, he is repulsive and opposes the new ways. Okonkwo is adamant and believes that these changes are destroying the Igbo culture. These changes also required accommodation and compromise; qualities that Okonkwo could not tolerate. He was too inflexible and proud, clinging to traditions and constantly mourning the loss of the past. Okonkwo kills a messenger from the British office forcing his clan men to hold back in fear. He soon realizes the gravity of his actions, and that no one may be willing to support him. He also comes to the conclusion that he may not be able to save his village from the British colonialists. His resistance to change finally brought defeat upon him and he commits suicide, a shameful and disgraceful death.

Outcasts of the Igbo cultural values end up embracing Christianity as a value system. They take refuge in this value system and may be seen as enjoying a more elevated status. This may be in contrast to the Igbo cultural values which, for so many years, have placed them below everyone else. In general, the villagers are portrayed being captured between embracing and resisting this change. They also face a dilemma of having to choose how best to adapt to change which was now becoming more realistic. It was now becoming more evident that the villagers were happy and excited about the new techniques and opportunities that the Christian missionaries were bringing. Even with the excitement that Christianity brought, this European influence threatened to extinct many of the principal traditional values. Some of these

values were core to the community and existed as an identity to them. Some of the traditions that faced the fear of being extinguished included harvesting, building, cooking, and the mastery of traditional farming methods. These traditions were viewed as vital for survival by the community; some of them now appeared to some extent to be dispensable. When using English, Achebe faces a problem of how he can present the culture and African heritage. He finds that English may never describe this culture adequately. The book may be mandated to confront the lack of understanding that exists between the colonialist culture and the Igbo customs. This may be evident where the Igbo ask how the Europeans can refer to the Igbo customs as bad when they do not even speak the language. Achebe tries to outdo himself in trying to bridge the cultural gap. He incorporates certain elements of the Igbo language into the novel such as language, concepts, Igbo word, and rhythms. All this Achebe does seamlessly to assist the reader understand the meaning of the Igbo words in their context. He also goes a step further and incorporates traditional Igbo tales and proverbs, giving *Things Fall Apart* an authentic African taste. Today's readers of this novel are not only able to relate easily to traditional tales and proverbs, but also sympathise with problems that the characters may face.

The struggle between Change and Tradition leads to the Igbo society falling apart. Their religion is threatened, the fabrics of tribal life are threatened too, and Umuofia loses its self-determination. The book depicts what the Europeans destroyed. The reader learns much about the Igbo and their way of life that no longer exists. Achebe shows that the Igbo religious authorities

like the Oracle, seem to possess mysterious insights. Coming of a new religion threatened the Igbo life. For the Igbo, fairness and justice were matters of immense importance. They had social institutions where justice was administered rationally and fairly. However the coming of the Europeans upset this balance. They claimed that these rules were barbaric, using this claim to impose their own laws. Soon it is evident how the British law is inhumane and hypocritical. Events that lead to the death of Okonkwo may be linked to the miscarriage of justice under the British administration.

Achebe converted to Christianity and wrote *Things Fall Apart* not only to respond to the bastardizations of this native people, but to show that the Igbo were dignified people. In his book, he points out how the Igbo's culture and democratic institutions serve as self-tests against modern-day liberal goals of democracy, showing how the Igbo people met these standards. Europeans in the book are portrayed as intolerant of the Igbo religion and culture. They even tell the villagers that their gods are not real. However, the Igbo are depicted as wholly tolerant of other cultures. On the other hand, Achebe does not idealize the Igbo people, and shows the readers what cracks exist within the Igbo culture. These weaknesses aid in the destruction of the culture or require change. An example may be that of the fear of twins who were abandoned immediately after birth and usually left exposed to die. In general, Achebe attempts to show that British colonial sentiments towards Africans were mistaken. He intends to correct the British who think that the civilization progress is wholly theirs. By contrast, the Igbo people may be seen to have followed a democracy that judged each man according to his personal merit. Before this book, Europeans wrote novels largely portraying

Africans as savages who required being enlightened by them. Achebe, however, broke apart this picture by bringing out the Igbo people as a sympathetic. He also allowed the readers of his book to examine the effects of the British colonial rule from a different perspective.

**Works cited:**

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