

# Half of a yellow sun book review example

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## **Book Review: Half of a Yellow Sun**

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Back in 2004, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie published *Purple Hibiscus* that revealed her brilliant and tremendous talent. Moreover, she even won a Commonwealth writers' prize because of the novel. *Half of a Yellow Sun* is Adichie's second novel, and the title refers to the 'half' yellow sun emblem present on the flag of Biafra. In her novel, Adichie emphasizes on the impact of the Nigerian Civil War on the civilian life, not only the deaths in battle but also the starvation that followed. As a result, Adichie's work found its way among other prize-winning historical novels.

In her novel, Adichie deals with a delicate subject, the events that lead to and the course of the Nigeria-Biafra War in the 1960s. She recalls how Nigerian military forces dominated by Muslims surrounded the Christian Igbo, a Nigerian ethnic group, who were seeking to withdraw their membership from Nigeria after the mass genocide of the Igbo people in Nigeria, and tried to compel them into surrendering. Adichie's novel is instantly historical and uncannily current, and it honors the memory of the Nigeria-Biafra War, which barely remembered as a synonym for famine in countries other than Nigeria itself. Although Adichie gains leverage in her novel by using history, she is primarily telling a story.

The novel revolves around Olanna and Kainene, twin sisters, who are members of the Igbo elite. Although both sisters have a differing temperament, they constantly struggle to remain mutually loyal, but they end up betraying and mistrusting each other frequently. Then men they are ultimately attracted to are also very different. Olanna becomes Odenigbo's

mistress, who is Pan-Africanist university professor and intellectual. Kainene falls in love with Richard, an awkward, shy and timid British white emigrant, who believes he is Biafran and fights for their cause. Through Richard's character, Adichie depicts the element of racism, since he is both quietly and loudly criticized for proclaiming a Biafran identity.

Ugwu, a teenager, who works for Odenigbo as a houseboy, is another integral narrator throughout the novel. Thus, the events within the novel unfold through the eyes of these characters. As the rumors of war spread, the all-out conflict at the time throws Ugwu and the other four privileged characters right in the middle of the disorder of a chaotic civil war.

Throughout the war, unexpected circumstances force the three together and separate them, and each of them witnesses events that leave a huge impact and impression on their minds.

At times, it seems that Adichie has written the novel rather straightforwardly, causing the pace of the novel to slack. However, betrayal and loyalty seem to be her favorite themes, and whenever she is touching upon them, her prose seems to resurface with new life. It also appears that she is fond of positioning her characters at crossroads where there is the threat of a collision between private and public loyalties. Like her first novel, Adichie draws a stark contrast between the performances that male heroes make publicly and irresponsible they are privately. Furthermore, like her first novel, Adichie cleverly observes the female characters in this one, especially the daughters and wives, leaving them hanging over that gap. By depicting the uneasy relationship between the twin sisters, Adichie explores the flow of loyalty from heritage, from love and from shared adversity, under various

circumstances.

The novel is written quite beautifully, the imagery is strong and the words that Adichie has used tend to fit in perfectly. At times, she presents the most intimate and private thoughts of the characters. The manner in which she describes these thoughts tends to draw the readers into the story. Moreover, she has developed her characters in such a manner that it seems that they are actual, well-balanced individuals. As a result; all of the characters tend to seem relatable at some point in the novel. Throughout the events that take place in the novel, Adichie not only develops but also spoils the relationships between her characters. Through these events, she also shows how starkly contrasting their lives become. Before the war, everyone living life with ease, and after the war, both rich and poor are forced to live a life of fear and panic. Moreover, although Adichie does comment on the international community, she treats this topic delicately.

Adichie also interweaves several other integral themes in the main plot of her novel. For instance, she writes how necessary emergency relief for the innocent civilians who had been impacted not only by the war but also by corruption and embezzlement and how the relief was proving to be ineffective. In her novel, she also touches upon how child soldiers were used during the war and the dread and fright they had to endure. Her account is raw but realistic at the same time. She also tends to be careful when writing about subjects such as role religion played in wartime propaganda and the war itself, and how Biafra was torn apart by the political elite and tribal loyalties.

Adichie has structured her novel quite skillfully, which makes it all the more

intriguing and suspenseful throughout. Although, her account of war is quite distressing and sorrowful, it also shows how devoted and passionate she is for her country. This is why she makes sure that she describes everything elaborately, and this makes the readers want to read her brilliant novel even more. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Half of a Yellow Sun* presents readers with an alluring and intriguing account of Nigerian Civil War in the Biafra that prevented the country from having a longer life. It is not surprising that Adichie won an award for this novel, which is more of a masterpiece. Adichie's account almost seems as if she is proficiently telling a story. Perhaps this is why her novel not only has historical value but is actually interesting to read.

## References

Adichie, C. N. (2006). *Half of a yellow sun*. New York: Anchor Books.