

# Analysis of "things fall apart"

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



Throughout time and progression of society the worlds' cultures have become intertwined. With expansion, globalization and new technology comes the clash of two cultures. In the past Western ideas introduced itself to countless cultures through religion and other means. Missionaries traveled all over the world bringing their way of life to foreign countries. In the book *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe Okonkwo is introduced to Western ideas and from his actions he demonstrates that if one cannot adapt to changes in life, then you cannot survive. In the book Okonkwo was a strong man, he rose up from nothing and made a name for himself. In the community he lived in he had wealth, respect, power, and titles. Growing up Okonkwo's father, Unoka, was a very poor man. Unoka had debts to everyone in the village. He had no titles, he was very laid back, and he preferred music and alcohol to work and success. Okonkwo despised his father because of his weakness, and so Okonkwo spent his life trying to be everything his father wasn't. As a young man he went to a rich man in the village to ask for yam seeds so he could grow his own empire. Growing older he remained successful, due to his dedication to attainment. With three wives and many children, Okonkwo had a good life. In the midst of his thriving life it takes an unexpected turn. " Okonkwo's gun had exploded and a piece of iron had pierced the boy's heart. " After this accident Okonkwo was forced into exile for seven years. He left his village and with it his opportunity for high titles and high accomplishments. He was devastated; for fear that he may now become more like his father. That was the first step that lead him to not fitting in to the new society. I say this because I believe that if Okonkwo had been in Umuofia the whole time Western ideas were being introduced he

could have made adaptations. But he was thrown into the new culture and was instantly hit with the full extent of Western ideas. So throughout the seven years that he was missing he planned his return, a large celebration that would kick him back into high ranks. Not focusing on his new home, he only wanted to be recognized in his old one. As the years went by and it became time for him to return to his home he prepared for his arrival. As he set home he had his plan in mind and readied himself to regain titles. Here, Okonkwo has his first encounter with Western ideas. He faces much surprise when he sees what he used to know. Churches are built, people are different and the village will never be the same. Okonkwo is stunned and with it, his return to power begins its decent from here. The entire essence of his culture has gone awry, things that were once important no longer remained. The white man separated the native people, but Okonkwo does not understand. He wishes to act as the old culture would, " ' We must fight these men and drive them from the land.' " But because of the new occurrences this is not possible, " ' It is already too late, our own men and our sons have joined the ranks of the strangers.' " Okonkwo does not understand these new ideas. He believes that if they band together and fight they can drive them out, and that is what he tries to do. But without the unity of the tribe they cannot do such things, when the Western ideas were introduced everything changed and it became essential to adapt to new ideas. This misconception he holds is a spark that does not let him comprehend the new culture, he stays with the past, and that is his own self-destruction. Okonkwo does not adapt instead he pushes for war. " He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he

mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women. " Okonkwo says this when he sees everything he knew become something else. He doesn't see the new culture as a new or better way of life; he sees it as a curse. A terrible way to live that goes against what he believes. His whole life he raised his son, Nwoye, to be like him. He wanted his son to be manly, and accept hard work and success to gain titles. But Nwoye didn't like these things, he liked women stories and he was far too soft to become what Okonkwo wished him to be. So when Western ideas came, Nwoye embraced them. He converted to Christianity and left everything he grew up with. For this, Okonkwo thought his own son betrayed him. This just added to the hate of the Western ideas that was within Okonkwo. At one point in the story six men, including Okonkwo, decide to go and tell the White men to take down the church or they will burn it. And even though they are commanded not to, they set it ablaze and leave. The missionaries end up capturing the guilty men and put them in jail. The people of Umuofia are required to pay a price or the men would all be hanged. This action was the first in a long time that made Okonkwo feel happy because he thought it meant things were going his way, but he was wrong. After this incident, even less people felt the need to rise up against the new culture, many simply embraced it. His actions seem to be hurting him more than helping. Later a meeting is held and Okonkwo adorns his war apparel because he wants to suggest that they go to war. He wants everyone to be inspired by him and follow suit. At the meeting a white messenger arrives and without thinking Okonkwo butchers him. Okonkwo waits for a positive reaction from the others but it does not come. The rest of

the men instead ask why he did that. And at that moment Okonkwo realizes that war will not happen, and that Umuofia is permanently changed. He promptly wipes the blood off and walks away in shame. This action seems to be the breaking point for him. This action shows that Okonkwo is truly the outcast. It is the final breaking point that leads to what happens next. When a white man is sent to receive Okonkwo for the murder, he discovers that Okonkwo hanged himself. In the end of all the change that occurred, Okonkwo found himself in a culture that he did not fit into. He was so accustomed to his old life that when the new ideas began to weave into his life he could not cope with it. He tried to do what he believed but in the end everyone else adapted to the changes. Okonkwo could not and this is why he committed an unthinkable act, suicide. Throughout the story Okonkwo began to lose his identity. He knew what he wanted, but without the surrounding culture he knew, he lost sight of himself. This story shows the introduction of Western ideas into a new culture, and with it Okonkwo's inability to adapt to the changes. His whole being and sense of self went into crisis when his environment began changing. While everyone and everything else adapted he could not. When he lost his titles, and was exiled he lost the chance he had to be a high rank, he never recovered. And when he was introduced to Western ideas he wanted to fight, and act as the Umuofia he knew would have acted. When everything he knew fell apart he felt no belonging and was so shamed that he killed himself, a worthless act that made him no better than his father. And from these examples Okonkwo shows that if you cannot adapt, you cannot survive.