

Things fall apart essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Derrick Phillips 4/10/13 APLIT B-3 THINGS FALL APART ESSAY Things Fall Apart, a pivoting novel written by Nigerian native Chinua Achebe. The novel is set in Nigeria, Africa, and encompasses the adversity of a once prosperous village leader known as Okonkwo, and the Igbo people. The novel depicts the rise and fall of the Umuofia tribes, culture and society, as it conforms to the onset of White Europeans descending upon the continent. Not only does Africa change, Okonkwo does as well. Due to his constant fear of weakness, and an accidental murder that he is guilty of committing, his world quickly crumbles.

Achebe uses symbolism to convey the extinction of tribal culture by using Okonkwo's life as an example. The death of tribal life is foreshadowed by the Okonkwo's multiple homicides, the locusts that annihilate the tribes crops, and his banishment for beating his wife during the sacred Week of Peace. Okonkwo, the main character in Things Fall Apart, adopts a son named Ikemefuna, after another tribe is forced to give him up after someone from their tribe murdered someone from the Umuofia (Okonkwo's) tribe. He is a 15 year old boy who treats Okonkwo as his own father, however Okonkwo does not feel the same way to him.

Ikefuma is the centerpiece in which Okonkwo's anger flows out. Ikemefuna is constantly the subject of the blind wrath that his faux dad enacts upon him. " He [Ikemefuna] could not understand what was happening to him or what he had done. How could he know that his father had taken a hand in killing a daughter of Umuofia? " (Ch. 2 Pg. 20). This shows how Ikemefuna's fear stems directly from his adopted dad anger and fear, even though he is totally innocent, he is Okonkwo's outlet for his own pain and misery.

Eventually he murders Ikemefuna with a machete out of the fear of being weak. This was the first foreshadow that African culture was slowly receding. Even though it is quite normal for tribes to settle their differences with ultimatums such as trading children, it is not normal for tribal leaders to go insane, and brutally cut down their sons. Chinua Achebe most likely did this to show how the ancient bloodline of these people will soon die out (trading of the children pollutes the bloodline, and the children cannot follow their own tribes customs).

Another symbol that foreshadows the extinction of African tribal culture would be the giant locust swarm that covers the crop lands, completely obliterating them. The swarm of locust quickly feasts of the crops leaving the people with nothing but stripped plants. In many cultures at the time, this was considered a great omen, and a sign for the bad things to come. This quote foreshadows how white people will soon come to exploit and destroy the land. “ The Oracle . . . said that other white men were on their way. They were locusts. ” (Ch. 5 Pg. 138-139). This quote shows the omens that are laid out before the tribe. Okonkwo goes on to tell how the Abame tribe was annihilated by white men once they realized the fate of their bicycle riding companion. The locusts also represent how Christianity, a new religion to Africans, will quickly spread over the land like a plague. Okonkwo also realizes this when the Christian missionary preached to the crowd about how only the christian God was real, and all the other Gods that the African’s believed in were made up scraps of fiction.

From then on out, Okonkwo starts rebelling against the foreigners. Eventually Okonkwo strikes down the head messenger. Since no one wanted

to defend their own beliefs, he realizes that the Igbo culture, and soon to be many other African cultures were literally extinct. The final foreshadowing symbol/event in Things Fall Apart would be when he brutally beat his wife Ekwefi. He abuses his wives because it's an outlet for his rage, much like Ikemefuna. However, one time he beats Ekwefi after accusing her of taking leaves off of a banana tree to wrap up food.

During the Week Of Peace, it is forbidden to harm anyone and as a punishment for this, Okonkwo is banished from Umuofia for seven years, as villagers raze his farm, and slaughter his animals. Abusing one's wives and children during the sacred Week Of Peace is one of the most forbidden sins in Igbo society. "Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile." (Ch. 14 Pg. 134). This quote shows how in Igbo culture, family is sacred, especially during the Week Of Peace.

If you interrupt the peace, there are serious consequences for not only Okonkwo, but also his entire family. At the end of the novel, Okonkwo hangs himself after he slays the headmaster, and people go looking for him, he realizes that his culture and way of life is lost forever. Things Fall Apart is a great example of what happens to a culture if they forget their roots. They become corrupted and blind, and start conforming to outside beliefs. Their own culture is dissolved and lost forever, save the remnants of dances, and songs from the golden age.

Okonkwo evolved into a volatile human being, who viciously murdered his adopted son, beat his wife during the Sacred Week of Peace, and accidentally

shoots Ezeudu's son, which shows how he changes from a loving father, to someone who is conflicted with fear and mental weakness. Achebe's purpose for writing the novel was to convey how African culture and society was being destroyed, and how the people were too oblivious to notice their own destruction. It is a story of how Westernization affects the daily lives of Okonkwo and other Africans, and what it has done to inflict pain and suffering on their society.