

# Tragic conventions in things fall apart by chinua achebe essay sample



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Tragedy, based on Aristotle's characterization, may be defined as a dramatic narrative in which serious and important actions turn out disastrously for the protagonist or tragic hero. The classical Western tragic hero is the main character of great importance usually of high social or cultural standing that possesses a tragic flaw that leads to a dramatic reversal and realization, which will later pilot to his (for tragic heroes are classically male) downfall. Things Fall Apart contains tragic conventions throughout the novel and Okonkwo's ability to be categorized as a tragic hero due to attributes including his mixed traits, tragic fall, tragic flaw, and reversal of fortune. However, there is a lack of catharsis. Okonkwo is seen as "a man of action, a man of war" and a member of high status in the Igbo village (Achebe 10). He holds the prominent position of village clansman, for the reason that he had shown extraordinary skill in intertribal warfare. Okonkwo's hard work had made him a wealthy farmer and a recognized individual among the nine villages of Umuofia and beyond. Okonkwo is not all good, however, he is a character is mixed traits.

He has a fiery, volatile temper and physically abuses his wives and children regularly. He sees violence as a constant, efficient answer to his problems, and has little patience with men less successful than himself. Okonkwo is neither thoroughly good nor evil, but of mixed qualities. The tragic fall of Okonkwo begins when an accidental murder of a virgin takes place and Okonkwo ends up adopting a boy named Ikemefuna from another village. Okonkwo comes to love him like a son. After three years, though, the tribe decides that Ikemefuna must die. When the men of Umuofia take Ikemefuna into the forest to slaughter him, Okonkwo actually participates in the murder.

Although he's just killed his adoptive son, Okonkwo shows no emotion because he does not want to be perceived as weak like his own father was. Inside, though, Okonkwo feels painful guilt and regret. Things only continue to become worse from there. During a funeral, Okonkwo accidentally shoots and kills the dead man's son and is exiled for seven years to his mother's homeland, Mbanta for his crime. It is there that he learns of the coming of the white missionaries whose arrival signals the beginning of the end for the Igbo people.

They bring Christianity and win over Igbo outcasts as their first converts. As the Christian religion gains legitimacy, more and more Igbo people are converted. Just when Okonkwo has finished his seven-year sentence and is allowed to return home, his son Nwoye converts to Christianity. Okonkwo is so bent out of shape that he disowns his son. Then, after a Christian convert desecrates an egwugwu, and in return the church is burnt down, Okonkwo and five other men are imprisoned and beaten by the missionaries until 250 bags of cowries is paid. Contemplating revenge, the Igbo people hold a war council and Okonkwo advocates for aggressive action. However, during the council, a court messenger from the missionaries arrives and tells the men to sojourn the conference. Infuriated, Okonkwo kills him. Realizing that his clan will not go to war against the white men, the proud, devastated Okonkwo hangs himself.

Okonkwo's tragic fall also shows his reversal of fortune. He went from a well-respected warrior to a man who takes his life and becomes an abomination among his village. Okonkwo's tragic flaw is his fear of weakness and failure.

He did not want to be like his father, whom always was indebted to several  
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people, was a poor farmer, could barely feed his family, and a lover of music. His tragic flaw makes him volatile, impulsive and always ready to pounce in order to keep a façade of virility. Okonkwo tries so hard to be the exact opposite of his father that he ends up making poor decisions that ultimately lead to his self-inflicted demise.

There is no notable catharsis in *Things Fall Apart*. This is where the novel diverges from Aristotle's definition of a tragedy. The reader is not left feeling relieved or elated due to the realization that Okonkwo's resistance to the Christian missionaries was useless. His death solved nothing, and the Igbo people's way of life was still expiring.

*Things Fall Apart* shows a foreign approach to classical Western tragedy. The novel included tragic conventions and an appealing standpoint of a tragic hero. While interestingly unconventional, *Things Fall Apart* can be classified as a tragedy, and Okonkwo as a tragic hero.