Things Fall Apart is told primarily in the past tense.

ABOUT THE TITLE
The title Things Fall Apart is taken from a line from William Butler Yeats's "The Second Coming," a poem that describes the state of the world in the aftermath of World War I. Achebe, recognizing potential chaos in Nigeria's bid for independence from Britain, explores the themes in Yeats's poem—pressing questions about a world order broken by violence and dissent.

In Context
After being rejected by a number of London publishers, Things Fall Apart was accepted by Heinemann, although the publisher was admittedly uncertain about the novel's audience and its reception. Written in English, the work was unflattering to white culture, British imperialism in particular. Nonetheless, Heinemann released the book without changing a word. Its initial publishing run was 2,000. Four years later Heinemann chose Things Fall Apart as the first book in its African Writers Series. The book has sold more than 10 million copies and has been translated into more than 50 languages.

Critical Response
Critics praised Achebe's writing style. One called it "vivid," while another described it as "clear and meaty." Achebe's depiction of Igbo life and culture was also appreciated. Some, however, were turned off by his portrayal of missionaries and imperialism. These critics claimed Achebe was ungrateful and questioned whether he wanted to return to "mindless times." Today the book is viewed as a profound story that changed the way the world looks at Africa. Note that throughout the book, Achebe refers to the Igbo people as Ibo, an older, and now outdated, spelling. This study guide and other materials use the Igbo spelling.
Imperialism and Imperialist Literature

The colonization of Africa by European countries is known as imperialism. During the 19th and early 20th centuries, virtually all of the continent came under this form of government.

Among the novels depicting the imperialist experience, Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) continues to be viewed as a masterwork in the history of the English novel. Achebe, who recognized the novel's power, found its view of the natives as exotic and primitive to be deeply offensive.

Other novels that portray Africans in a negative light are *Prester John* (1910) by John Buchan and *Mister Johnson* (1939) by Joyce Cary. Some critics have argued that these works rationalize what writer Rudyard Kipling in 1899 called the “white man's burden”: the imperative to elevate primitive lives through conversion to Christianity and economic advancement.

In a *Paris Review* interview (1994), Achebe asserts that he is a historian and "that no important story can fail to tell us something of value to us." Part of Achebe's achievement is his balanced focus on the paradox of colonialism, both what it offered and what it took from his people. In 2007 the accuracy of his reports from the "heart of darkness" earned him the highest award for English fiction, the Man Booker International Prize. One of the judges in the Man Booker competition, South African author Nadine Gordimer, dubbed Achebe the "father of modern African literature," an unofficial title by which he commonly became known.

Nigerian History

The British gained a foothold in Nigeria during the 1850s, when they established a presence around Lagos on Nigeria's eastern coast. By 1861 the British had strengthened their hold over Nigeria and governed by indirect rule through local leaders.

In the 1870s emissaries from Belgium established trade with native Africans in territory surrounding the Congo River. This act inspired a land grab by various European countries for colonies in Africa.

German chancellor Otto von Bismarck convened the Berlin Conference of 1884–85 to formalize borders drawn by the individual European countries involved in the colonization of Africa. Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Russia, Spain, Sweden–Norway, and Turkey attended. The United States was invited but had no interest in establishing a presence in Africa. There were no African representatives at the meeting, and the borders the Europeans created ignored the differences among groups distinct in their beliefs, languages, and practices. The imperative for each European nation was to develop Christianity and trade. By 1914 nearly all of Africa was colonized by European countries.

Southern Nigeria and Northern Nigeria officially became British protectorates in 1906 and were united as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria in 1914. In 1958 Britain agreed to Nigerian independence, which became official in 1960. Nigeria was declared a federal republic in 1963. The 1960s were a tumultuous time for Nigeria. Divisions between the semifeudal and Muslim Hausa-Fulani people of the southeast, the monarchist Yoruba of the southwest, and the predominantly Christian and democratic communities of the Igbo north resulted in civil conflict and political instability. By the mid-20th century, when Achebe was writing *Things Fall Apart*, these various peoples had spread throughout the cities but had not integrated, as the groups and their interests were so different.

Author Biography

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe was born in Ogidi, Nigeria, on November 16, 1930, a time of religious upheaval. His parents, converts to Christianity, shunned those loyal to the traditional Igbo (also spelled Ibo) religion. Achebe was fascinated, however, by tribal practice. At eight he learned English and was exposed to Eurocentric notions of Africans as backward people, a dated, imperialist view he spent his life refuting.

At university he began to reclaim his African heritage, dropping his first name, Albert, in favor of Chinua, a shortened version of his Igbo middle name, and switching his studies from medicine to liberal arts. Achebe believed it was essential that African voices tell the stories of their people. He had come to recognize the inherent racism of British novelists of the early 20th century who chose Africa for their settings. Achebe refers in his writings and public lectures to the writer's responsibility to his or her community and to the importance of creating authentic criteria for writing in Africa.
**Characters**

**Okonkwo**

Okonkwo is a man who values masculinity, strength, and respect above all else. He is seen as a leader within his clan and his family, which includes three wives and a number of children. A man of action, Okonkwo overcomes his poor background and achieves great success. Unoka, Okonkwo's father, was lazy and a poor provider, and Okonkwo is driven to be everything his father was not. Okonkwo's rigidity causes great harm, first within his family—the killing of Ikemefuna and the rift with Nwoye—and then within society. Okonkwo is unable to adapt when the white man/missionaries come to his village. He commits suicide rather than adhere to the rules of the changed society.

**Unoka**

Unoka is viewed by Okonkwo and the clan as lazy, although he was also a gifted musician and a gentle man. Rather than working, Unoka preferred to play his flute and drink wine. He was seen as a coward because he was afraid of war. He had poor harvests because he was unwilling to put in the effort to care for the land. When Unoka died, he was in debt to all of his neighbors. Okonkwo cannot see his father's good qualities and hates him. He lives his life with the intention of avoiding anything his father enjoyed.

**Ikemefuna**

Ikemefuna comes to the clan as a form of payment for a murder that one of his tribesmen committed. The elders place Ikemefuna with Okonkwo, who puts his first wife in charge of the boy. Ikemefuna misses his family but comes to feel at home in Umuofia. He becomes popular within the family, particularly with Okonkwo’s oldest son, Nwoye. Okonkwo is also fond of Ikemefuna, though he does not reveal his feelings and eventually participates in Ikemefuna's murder.
Nwoye

Nwoye seems to have adopted some of Unoka's traits, which upsets Okonkwo. Okonkwo worries that Nwoye will grow up behaving as his grandfather behaved. Because of his concern, Okonkwo is even harder on Nwoye and beats him regularly. Nwoye begins to change under the influence of Ikemefuna. When Ikemefuna is killed, Nwoye retreats into himself and is cut off from his father. With the arrival of the missionaries, Nwoye revives. He breaks away from his father and becomes a Christian convert.

Ekwefi

Ekwefi is Okonkwo's second wife. Ekwefi was attracted to Okonkwo when she saw him defeat Amalinze the Cat in wrestling. She could not marry him because he was too poor. After he achieves success, she leaves her husband and goes to Okonkwo, who takes her in with no questions. She is particularly close with her only child, Ezinma. After losing nine children, Ekwefi was a broken woman. When Ezinma lived beyond infancy, Ekwefi rejoiced. She treats her daughter more like an equal than a child. The loss of children has also created a connection to Okonkwo, who accepts behaviors from her that he does not from his other wives. He shows her more care and concern.

Ezinma

Ezinma is the only child of Okonkwo's second wife, Ekwefi. She is particularly close to her mother. Okonkwo also favors Ezinma. He feels a connection to her and appreciates her boldness. Her behaviors and attitude make Okonkwo wish she were a boy. Ezinma feels a similar fondness for her father.

Obierika

Obierika is the closest thing Okonkwo has to a confidant. Like Okonkwo, he has achieved status within the clan. He has multiple wives and children. He marries off one daughter, and his son is a wrestling champion. When Okonkwo is forced to leave Umuofia, Obierika cares for his land and property. Unlike Okonkwo, Obierika is more nuanced in his thinking and is able to express himself. He rebukes Okonkwo for participating in the murder of Ikemefuna, tells him to have patience with his children, and cautions him about the power of the missionaries. When Okonkwo dies, Obierika speaks up on his behalf and calls him a great man.
Character Map

Okonkwo
Man of action; driven by need for respect

- Father/Son
- Friends

Nwoye
Son; rebels and leaves clan

- Father/Son

Unoka
Laziness brings shame to family

- Father/Son

Obierika
Supportive equal

- Father/Son

Ezinma
Pride of father and favored child

- Father/Son

Ikemefuna
Death brings guilt and shatters family

- Adversaries

District Commissioner
Little regard for clan's past

- Minor Character

Other Major Character

Main Character
## Full Character List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo</td>
<td>Okonkwo is a wealthy, respected leader in Umuofia who is unable to adapt and who kills himself rather than live in a changed society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unoka</td>
<td>Unoka is Okonkwo's father.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ikemefuna</td>
<td>Ikemefuna is a boy from another clan who comes to live with Okonkwo in Umuofia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwoye</td>
<td>Nwoye is Okonkwo's son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ekwefi</td>
<td>Ekwefi is the second wife of Okonkwo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezinma</td>
<td>Ezinma is Okonkwo's daughter.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obierika</td>
<td>Obierika is Okonkwo's friend.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agbala</td>
<td>Agbala is an Igbo god known as the Oracle of the Hills and Caves; he influences all aspects of life in the clan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Akunna</td>
<td>Akunna is a clan leader who has conversations about religion with Mr. Brown.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amalinze the Cat</td>
<td>Amalinze is a famous wrestler whom Okonkwo defeated, bringing Okonkwo great respect.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amikwu</td>
<td>Amikwu is Okonkwo's cousin; he informs Okonkwo that Nwoye is among the Christians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anasi</td>
<td>Anasi is Nwakibie's first wife.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aneto</td>
<td>Aneto is an Igbo man hanged for committing murder.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ani</td>
<td>Ani is the earth goddess in the Igbo religion. The people worship Ani to ensure their crops will grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chielo</td>
<td>Chielo is the priestess of Agbala who is a normal woman when not possessed by the spirit of Agbala.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Commissioner</td>
<td>The British District Commissioner rules the area and has no respect for the clan and their traditions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch</td>
<td>Enoch is a passionate convert and causes trouble with his former clansmen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezeani</td>
<td>Ezeani is the priest of Ani, the earth goddess. He chastises Okonkwo for beating his wife, Ojiugo, during the Week of Peace.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezeudo</td>
<td>Ezeudo warns Okonkwo not to play a role in killing Ikemefuna. Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudo's son.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ezeugo</td>
<td>Ezeugo is an Igbo leader and powerful orator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Wife</td>
<td>First Wife is Nwoye's mother.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kotma</td>
<td>A kotma is a court messenger who works for the office of the District Commissioner.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maduka</td>
<td>Maduka is Obierika's son who wins a wrestling match.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Brown</td>
<td>Mr. Brown is the first white missionary to arrive in Umuofia.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Kiaga</td>
<td>Mr. Kiaga is a native who becomes a Christian missionary and converts people, including Nwoye.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mr. Smith</td>
<td>Mr. Smith replaces Mr. Brown and is a passionate zealot.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nneka</td>
<td>Nneka is a woman who joins the Christian church.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nwakibie</td>
<td>Nwakibie is a successful Umuofian who lends Okonkwo yam seeds that enable him to get his start in life.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Obiageli**
Obiageli is Okonkwo’s daughter, and she is ready to marry upon returning to Umuofia.

**Ofoedu**
Ofoedu tells Okonkwo and Obierika about the death of Njule.

**Ojiugo**
Ojiugo is Okonkwo’s third wife; he beats her during the Week of Peace.

**Okagbue**
Okagbue is a medicine man whom Okonkwo calls on to help Ezinma.

**Okika**
Okika is an Igbo leader and one of the men imprisoned with Okonkwo.

**Okoli**
Okoli is the Igbo Christian who kills the royal python.

**Okoye**
Okoye is Unoka’s neighbor who attempts to collect a debt.

**Uchendu**
Uchendu is the leader of Okonkwo’s mother’s side of the family.

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**Plot Summary**

*Things Fall Apart* takes place in the 1890s in Igbo villages in Nigeria. At this time, the British are colonizing Nigeria. Missionaries arrive as part of the takeover, and Britain imposes a legal system to assist them in converting villagers to Christianity. The Igbo are the last group to be converted because their culture is both prosperous and democratic. Achebe highlights the nature of a well-functioning culture and the loss that occurs in the inevitable progress of colonialism.

Readers are introduced to Okonkwo, the protagonist. Okonkwo is well respected in his village, Umuofia, one of nine villages of his clan. He gained that respect by winning a wrestling match against the undefeated champion. Since then, Okonkwo has become wealthy, marrying three wives and fathering several children. His success contrasts with the failures of his father, a musician and fun-loving gentle man but also an alcoholic slacker in debt to his entire community. Okonkwo is ashamed of his father and is driven to be fierce and masculine, unlike his parent.

Because of his father’s laziness, Okonkwo fends for himself at an early age. Nwakibe, a farmer, views Okonkwo as hardworking and respectful and gives him yam seeds to plant. Yams are the main food source, and growing them is a man’s job. Drought and violent rains turn his first planting season into a disaster, but somehow he finds a way to survive. Remembering that year “with a cold shiver,” Okonkwo is convinced he can survive anything.

As a result of his position in society, Okonkwo is chosen to look after the boy Ikemefuna. The boy arrives in the village as a form of payment from a neighboring clan whose members have murdered a woman from Umuofia.

Ikemefuna adjusts to life in Umuofia and views Okonkwo as his father. Nwoye, Okonkwo’s son, is fond of Ikemefuna, whom he sees as an older brother and admires for his skill at making bows from the local trees and building traps for hunting. This pleases Okonkwo, whose greatest fear is that Nwoye will take after Okonkwo’s father, Unoka.

When the priestess Chielo orders that Ikemefuna is to be killed, a village elder, Ezeudu, warns Okonkwo not to take part in the killing. He does so anyway, fearing that if he does not participate he will lose respect. The murder causes Okonkwo great despair, and Nwoye is devastated.

Ezinma, daughter of Okonkwo’s second wife, Ekwefi, becomes extremely ill with a fever, and Ekwefi is terrified the child will die. Although Okonkwo generally keeps his emotions in check, he rushes into the brush and collects herbs and tree bark to brew a medicine for the girl. After a restless night, Okonkwo uses the concoction to steam the fever out of Ezinma. This demonstration of care falls well outside his usual character.

Ezeudu dies, and during his funeral men beat ceremonial drums and fire their guns. When Okonkwo’s gun explodes, he accidentally kills Ezeudu’s son. The punishment for killing a clansman is seven years of exile.

Fleeing before dawn, Okonkwo and his family settle with his mother’s clansmen in Mbanta. While Okonkwo longs for Umuofia, he is treated well by his kinsmen and prospers among them.

When Okonkwo’s friend Obierika visits he describes the destruction of the Abame clan at the hands of the white man. The clan had killed the first white man who came to their village because of a warning from the Oracle. The Oracle had
said that white men would descend like devouring locusts and destroy them.

When missionaries arrive in Mbanta and request land to build a church, the clan rulers give them part of the evil forest, believing that the clan’s gods will strike the missionaries down. After the church is built and the missionaries survive, villagers begin attending services, including the first female convert and Nwoye. Soon Nwoye’s cousin spots him at the church and goes straight to tell Okonkwo. This news drives Okonkwo to severely beat Nwoye, who then leaves home and moves to Umuofia. Okonkwo wonders how he could have a son who is so weak. He decides this is just the way things are: “living fire begets cold, impotent ash.”

Okonkwo plans a triumphant return home. However, he finds that Umuofia has changed. The missionaries are established there now. He wants to fight them, but Obierika warns it is too late. The missionaries have already built a church and attracted followers. Nwoye is with them and has converted to Christianity.

The white man’s presence extends further than the church. British officials have set up a government with a District Commissioner judging cases. A missionary, Mr. Brown, has been accepted in the village, as he does not force his religion upon the people. He has also opened a school where clansmen learn to read and write.

Another missionary, Mr. Smith, replaces Brown. Smith is fiery and rouses his followers. Enoch, a zealous convert, commits a crime against the clan, and the clan members then destroy Enoch’s compound and the church. Okonkwo happily participates in the destruction. Swooping down on the clan, the District Commissioner jails six leaders, including Okonkwo. Their jailers take pleasure in humiliating and punishing the prisoners, forcibly shaving their heads, starving them, and whipping them. Okonkwo becomes eager for revenge. The District Commissioner imposes a heavy fine for their release, which, three days later, the clan pays.

The next morning the clan members—energized, angry, and fearful—gather to discuss the treatment of the prisoners, considering it a “shameful sacrilege.” Okonkwo is seething and hopes the clan will finally fight back. When court messengers approach demanding the meeting be stopped, Okonkwo’s rage boils over, and he kills the messengers’ spokesman. Sensing fear in his startled clansmen, Okonkwo knows they will not go to war.

Soon the District Commissioner and an armed band arrive at Okonkwo’s compound to arrest him. Obierika solemnly informs them that Okonkwo is not there and leads the group to where Okonkwo has hanged himself. Suicide is an abomination in their religion, and Okonkwo’s friends cannot touch his body. They must rely on the soldiers to bury him. Furiously, Obierika rebukes the District Commissioner for destroying “one of the greatest men in Umuofia.” As he walks away, the District Commissioner reflects that Okonkwo’s story might be worth including in a book he is writing, which will be called The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.
### Introduction
1. Growing up poor, Okonkwo gains fame by wrestling.

### Rising Action
2. Okonkwo and his family take in Ikemefuna.
3. Okonkwo participates in the killing of Ikemefuna.
4. Okonkwo is exiled from the clan for an accidental killing.
5. The white man and missionaries arrive in the villages.
6. Nwoye leaves his father and joins the missionaries.
7. Okonkwo and his family return to Umuofia.
8. Enoch unmasks an egwugwu.

### Climax
9. The egwugwu, village leaders destroy church.

### Falling Action
10. Okonkwo, five other clan leaders are jailed and beaten.
11. Okonkwo kills the court messenger.

### Resolution
12. Okonkwo hangs himself.
# Timeline of Events

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year that Okonkwo was 18</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo throws Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling match and gains renown.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Three years later</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo kills Ikemefuna despite being warned not to be involved.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20 years later</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo takes in Ikemefuna to live with his family.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A few months later</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo accidentally kills a fellow clansman and is exiled for seven years.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second year of exile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The white man and the missionaries arrive in the Lower Niger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fourth year of exile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nwoye moves away from his family and joins the Christians.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day of earth goddess ceremony</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enoch unmasks an egwugwu and puts the clan into a frenzy.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A few days later</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo and five others are arrested and mistreated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The next day</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Okonkwo kills the court messenger.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter Summaries

Part 1, Chapter 1

Summary

The story is set in the fictional village of Umuofia, Nigeria, in the late 1890s. Okonkwo, the protagonist, is a member of the Igbo tribe (spelled Ibo in the novel), an ethnic group that resides in nine villages by the lower Niger River in Southern Nigeria.

Years ago Okonkwo gained fame because of his wrestling exploits. He has since become a successful farmer with a large family, including three wives. Because of his respected position, Okonkwo is given responsibility for the boy Ikemefuna, who has been sent to the tribe from another clan as a way to avoid war and bloodshed.

Readers learn that Unoka, Okonkwo’s father, was a lazy man who enjoyed music and talking. People did not respect him, and his family struggled. Unoka owed money to all of his neighbors and had no intention of paying his debts. His indebtedness left Okonkwo ashamed.

Analysis

This chapter opens the first of three parts of the novel. In Part 1, readers meet Okonkwo, the novel’s larger-than-life protagonist, and gain a sense of his almost mythic reputation. Achebe also provides a thorough introduction to Igbo culture before the devastating effects of colonialism.

In Chapter 1, readers become acquainted with both Okonkwo and the person whose behavior has shaped Okonkwo’s character: his despised father, Unoka. The chapter presents these details about Okonkwo:

- He became a hero to his clan when, as a teenager, he beat a wrestling champion who had been undefeated for seven years. Okonkwo was “as slippery as a fish” and defeated the champion in a fight that was one of the fiercest his village had ever seen.
- In the following 20 years, Okonkwo’s fame and stature have grown. His status as a successful farmer and war hero with civic titles and three wives makes him “one of the greatest men of his time” in the eyes of his clan and in his own eyes. His jaunty step makes it appear that he walks “on springs.”

Why, then, does Okonkwo so readily resort to violence? He has no patience, particularly “with unsuccessful men.” It’s no coincidence that the most unsuccessful man in Okonkwo’s life is his father, Unoka. Although Unoka has been dead for 10 years, he still influences Okonkwo’s life. Readers learn the following about Unoka:

- A gifted flute player and lover of wine, Unoka was happiest when playing music.
- Successful in music, Unoka was a failure at the practical aspects of life. He was lazy and provided little food for his family.
- He was in debt to everyone and, though he kept a record of his debts, did not repay the people who lent him money.

Okonkwo was ashamed of his father, and that shame drives him as an adult.

Part 1, Chapter 2

Summary

Night has fallen, and the clan is notified of a town meeting taking place the next morning. It is a quiet night, as the nights without moonlight are in Umuofia. The narrator notes that “darkness held a vague terror for these people.”

Okonkwo thinks the meeting might be a call to war. He had previously proven himself in warfare, having brought home five human heads as battle trophies.

At the meeting, Ezeugo, a powerful orator, explains that a clanswoman has been killed by someone from Mbaino. Clan members decide to send a delegate to Mbaino to negotiate. The people of Mbaino will have the choice of offering Umuofia a young man and a virgin as payment for the loss—or waging war.

The narrator notes that Umuofia is “powerful in war and in magic” and is therefore feared by its neighbors. The clan goes to war only if its Oracle declares the war just.

Okonkwo is chosen as the negotiator. When he goes to the
potential enemy to review the terms, he is treated with great honor and respect. Soon he brings home the virgin and a young boy—Ikemefuna. Given the responsibility to care for Ikemefuna, Okonkwo entrusts his first wife to look after the frightened and homesick young boy.

Readers learn that Okonkwo "rules his household with a heavy hand." His wives and children "live in perpetual fear of his fiery temper." Okonkwo's life is dominated by fear—particularly the fear that he will end up like his father. He has a lot of energy and works hard, which enables him to grow wealthy. Nwoye, Okonkwo's oldest son, is unlike his father. Okonkwo says he is lazy, and he tries to correct him "by constant nagging and beating."

**Analysis**

Okonkwo's intensity and heavy-handedness are revealed to be a cover-up for his "fear of failure and of weakness." In his drive to succeed and deserve the respect of his clan, Okonkwo vows never to be gentle or idle, because that is how his father was. All of Okonkwo's traits and behavior are dictated by his determination to be the opposite of his father.

- Okonkwo is the clear ruler in his household. He regularly beats his wives and children, and they are afraid of him.
- Preferring action to conversation, he is not interested in having to explain himself to anyone. When his first wife asks him a question, he answers, "Do what you are told, woman." He adds that she is not one of the elders. Thus, he reflects the patriarchal hierarchy of the tribe.
- Okonkwo is judgmental and bases his self-esteem on his perception of masculinity. With great pride he recalls his exploits in war and the symbols of his victories, five human heads.
- Okonkwo is comfortable with the clan's rules of conduct, as the clan has a clear set of behaviors that apply to war.

Here readers see that the anger and fear that drive Okonkwo to be so hard on his family allow him to be successful at war and respected by his fellow clan members. These character traits, however, allow him success only within his Igbo culture; they will create increasing conflict for him as the culture is gradually annihilated by imperialism.

**Part 1, Chapter 3**

**Summary**

The narrative in this chapter takes readers back into Okonkwo's past. When Okonkwo is a boy, his father, Unoka, consults Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, to discover why his crops always fail. People confer with Agbala's priestess because no one ever sees the god himself. The priestess, as surrogate for the god, screams, "Go home and work like a man." Unoka's fate is determined by his bad chi, or personal god. Unoka develops a swelling in his stomach and limbs, which is considered an offense against the earth goddess. Because of this, he is left to die in the Evil Forest.

With no influential parent, Okonkwo fends for himself. He approaches Nwakibie, a wealthy village farmer. Presenting him with wine, Okonkwo says, "A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness." Okonkwo then asks Nwakibie to give him seed-yams (small yams saved from the previous harvest) to sow on his farm, offering to give the bulk of the crop to the farmer in return. Nwakibie responds that many young men are lazy, but it is clear that Okonkwo is different, and he lends him yams.

That year the rains were late, and a blazing sun blistered the land. Thus, "the harvest was sad, like a funeral," because the crops failed. The memory of that year sends a shiver up Okonkwo's spine. His survival confirms his ability, however, to overcome all obstacles, natural and manmade.

**Analysis**

As readers learn details of Okonkwo's start in farming, they become more aware of the determination that drives his success, including his "fear of his father's contemptible life and shameful death." Even the local priestess knows that Unoka, Okonkwo's father, is lazy. Unoka's illness and death in the Evil Forest represent his failings in life.

From an early age Okonkwo is dedicated to the Igbo tradition of hard work and the idea that raising yams is a man's job. The fact that he has no inheritance from his father simply makes him more determined to succeed. When bad weather destroys his first crops, the experience further develops his character
and serves as an inspiration for the future. He believes that by exercising his will, he can overcome fate.

Part 1, Chapter 4

Summary

Always impatient, Okonkwo insults an untitled tribesman at a clan meeting. Everyone takes the side of Osugo, the other man, and Okonkwo apologizes.

Ikemefuna is homesick and won't eat. Okonkwo forces food on the boy, who then vomits and is ill for three weeks. Once recovered, Ikemefuna seems over his sadness. Soon he becomes a favorite with Nwoye and other family members. Even Okonkwo is fond of him, but he does not show it.

Before planting their crops, the Igbo observe the Week of Peace, during which no one is to "say a harsh word to his neighbor" or to commit physical abuse. During the Week of Peace, Ojiugo, Okonkwo's third wife, leaves the compound to plait her hair without preparing food for the family. Enraged, Okonkwo beats her, violating the holiday in a serious transgression against the clan's religious beliefs. Ezeani, the priest of Ani, the earth goddess, reminds Okonkwo that they need Ani's blessing for their crops to grow. He commands Okonkwo to bring a sacrifice to the shrine.

When the holiday ends, each family clears land and prepares yams for planting. Nwoye and Ikemefuna help Okonkwo. He is deliberately tough on them. The two boys have grown close, and Ikemefuna now feels like a family member.

Analysis

In this chapter, the narrator, having related how Okonkwo's past has influenced his character, brings readers to the present day in Okonkwo's village.

Okonkwo has already shown he has little patience with people who are less successful than he is. When he interacts with such an individual, his impatience often emerges as brusqueness—as it does at a village meeting where he disrespects Osugo. Okonkwo is concerned about the opinions of others and is now taken to task by other clansmen, who remind him not to "forget to be humble."

Okonkwo's fondness for Ikemefuna puts him in an awkward position. Believing that to show affection is to appear weak, Okonkwo must keep those feelings under wraps. His only outlets are to demonstrate strength and to show anger, so he treats Ikemefuna in the same heavy-handed manner as he treats everyone else.

Okonkwo has no trouble venting his anger. Beating his wife during the Week of Peace seems justifiable to him until the priest points out that this transgression "can ruin the whole clan." Okonkwo is inwardly repentant, but his constant battle of strength versus weakness does not allow him to admit that he has made a mistake.

Okonkwo enters into the routine of yam-planting season with gusto. The skills needed for growing yams are crucial to success—a success that he wants Nwoye to share in. Although Ikemefuna and Nwoye are too young to take in the details of preparing seed-yams, Okonkwo wants to crush signs of laziness in Nwoye and instructs both boys with his usual harshness.

Part 1, Chapter 5

Summary

Now it is time for the Feast of the New Yam. The celebration includes giving thanks to the earth goddess, feasting with relatives, and enjoying the great wrestling match. "Men and women, young and old, looked forward to the New Yam Festival," the narrator says.

Okonkwo is happier working and does not enjoy feasts. Still, he hosts his large family and insists everything be prepared properly. His second wife, Ekwefi, bears the brunt of his foul mood as he finds a reason to beat her. He then nearly kills her when she mocks his poor aim as a hunter. He shoots at her with his gun but misses.

Ekwefi particularly enjoys the festival's wrestling contest. Each year the contest reminds her of the time long ago when she fell in love with Okonkwo. He had won the match—and her heart—in "the greatest contest within living memory." Although
they did not marry then, she later left her husband to become Okonkwo's wife.

Ezinma, Ekwefi's daughter, calls her mother by her first name. The two converse as if they are equals. Okonkwo is especially fond of Ezinma but rarely shows it.

Analysis

This chapter paints a picture of one of Umuofia's most important festivals, the Feast of the New Yam. Held just prior to the yam harvest, the festival is a time of relative inactivity for Igbo men.

Okonkwo, however, cannot cope with idleness. Nervous energy builds and explodes when he finds an outlet in beating Ekwefi. Wife beating is tolerated in his culture. Once again the actions motivated by Okonkwo's anger do not put him in conflict as long as he is in balance with Igbo traditions.

Readers learn more about Ekwefi in this chapter. In leaving her husband to become Okonkwo's wife, she shows an independence and desire that is unique among the women of Umuofia. Her daughter, Ezinma, has similar traits and is also beautiful like her mother.

The chapter is the first to mention guns, a symbol of Western culture. Okonkwo's inexperience with handling a gun will present a conflict for him later in the novel as well.

Part 1, Chapter 6

Summary

The villagers gather at the ilo, or village square, to watch the wrestling matches. Early matches feature boys who are 15 and 16. One particular match excites the crowd, including Okonkwo. The victor is Maduka, the son of Okonkwo's friend Obierika.

During intermission, people chat. Ekwefi speaks with Chielo, a widow who has two children. Chielo is also the priestess of Agbala. Chielo is fond of Ezinma and asks about her. Ekwefi says of Ezinma, "Perhaps she has come to stay." Chielo responds that children "usually stay if they do not die before the age of six."

The primary wrestling match is a lengthy affair that looks as if it will end in a draw. Finally one wrestler makes a tactical mistake and loses the match.

Analysis

Although Okonkwo is generally interested only in work and warfare, here he relaxes and enjoys the spectacle. He has built much of his reputation on the strength of his past wrestling championship. Watching the matches not only relaxes but also invigorates him, as it plays to his own beliefs and skills. In this setting Okonkwo behaves just as everyone else does. His passion for wrestling is clear, and he is in his element.

The seating at the match, with men on stools in front and women in the back, is an indicator of Umuofia's patriarchal society and its effect on Okonkwo, his wives, and his children. The sexes are separate and not equal.

Part 1, Chapter 7

Summary

After three years in Okonkwo's household, Ikemefuna has become like an elder brother to Nwoye. Okonkwo is pleased by the impact Ikemefuna has on Nwoye. He wants his son to "grow into a tough young man capable of ruling his father's household." Nwoye grumbles about women when they ask him to do chores, even though he is happy to prove himself. Okonkwo is glad to see this attitude because a male clan member is "not really a man" if he does not control his women and children.

In his hut, Okonkwo tells the boys violent, bloody stories. Nwoye prefers his mother's stories, which have a moral, but he stays with his father to please him.

While Okonkwo and the boys are working together, locusts descend and settle everywhere. Locusts rarely appear, and they are looked upon as a delicacy. Ezeudu, a fearless old warrior, stops by as Okonkwo and the boys are eating locusts. Privately, he reports to Okonkwo that the Oracle has ordered the clan to kill Ikemefuna. He cautions Okonkwo not to play a
Ikemefuna is told he is being taken home. While walking through the forest with Okonkwo and the men, Ikemefuna feels uneasy. However, he is comforted by the fact that Okonkwo is there. When the men strike Ikemefuna with their machetes, he calls out to Okonkwo, who goes to him and strikes the final blow.

Upon Okonkwo's return home, his family realizes what has happened. Nwoye is devastated. Thinking about Ikemefuna's fate, he recalls a memory of the Evil Forest. He heard the cry of twins who were left in the forest to die, and something inside him "had given way." Okonkwo's return from Ikemefuna's execution gives Nwoye the same feeling.

Analysis

This chapter depicts the transformation that Ikemefuna's presence has caused in Okonkwo's family. Ikemefuna has become a role model for Nwoye in a way that Okonkwo has never been, and his influence helps the younger boy mature. Nwoye has become more masculine, which pleases Okonkwo and brings the two of them closer. Earlier in the novel, Ikemefuna was described as a sacrifice and "ill-fated." That foreshadowing of Ikemefuna's fate has now come to fruition.

The locusts' arrival and reception foreshadow the missionaries' incursion in Chapter 15, where the metaphor of white men as locusts is introduced. When locusts appear in Chapter 7, it is as though a "shadow fell on the world, and the sun seemed hidden behind a thick cloud." The locusts cause darkness. There's a contrast between the darkness that announces the locusts' arrival and the joy people have in seeing and eating them.

Okonkwo's fear of being viewed as weak forces him into an action he regrets: participating in Ikemefuna's murder. Despite not being able to look when the initial blow is struck, Okonkwo strikes the final blow because he is "afraid of being thought weak." His true weakness—an excessive concern with how others see him—overrides his affection for his adopted son.

The chapter ends on an ominous note and foreshadows a deeper change in Nwoye.

Part 1, Chapter 8

Summary

Okonkwo does nothing but drink wine for two days. He calls for Nwoye, who leaves him when Okonkwo dozes off. Okonkwo can't escape thoughts of Ikemefuna. The following day, Ezinma brings food to Okonkwo and sits with him while he eats. Okonkwo wishes that Ezinma were a boy.

He visits his friend Obierika and tells him he is worried about Nwoye. He adds that his "children do not resemble [him]." Obierika reasons that the children are still young. The two discuss Ikemefuna's murder. Obierika declined to participate and asks Okonkwo why he took part in the killing of his own son. The two of them are informed of the death of some elderly people in the clan.

Okonkwo starts feeling better and believes that the problem is simply that his mind is unoccupied.

Later, Okonkwo returns to Obierika's compound, where a ceremony is taking place to set the bride-price for Obierika's daughter. The bride-price is the amount that the suitor's family will pay to obtain Obierika's daughter as a bride for their son. During the betrothal ceremony, the men drink wine and negotiate the price using broomsticks to symbolize their offers and counteroffers. The negotiations over, Okonkwo and the others discuss customs of other clans that they regard as outlandish. They also believe the concept of white men—beings with skin white as chalk who walk on feet with no toes (meaning the white men wear shoes)—to be fantastic. The men doubt the existence of these beings, whom they have heard of but have never seen. One jokingly compares white men to lepers, as the Igbo term for leprosy translates to "white skin."

Analysis

This chapter deals with the emotional aftermath of Ikemefuna's murder. Okonkwo drinks as a form of escape but cannot rid himself of guilt. Ezinma's presence comforts him. He sees in his daughter a strength that is missing in his other children, except Ikemefuna. This disturbing realization reawakens his guilt.

Okonkwo's connection with Nwoye is clearly broken. While
Nwoye comes to Okonkwo when he is called for, he leaves as soon as possible. Nwoye does not want to be near his father.

Obierika seems an unlikely companion for Okonkwo. Although they are on the same social and economic level, Obierika does not feel the same compulsion toward masculinity. Readers learn that a fear of appearing weak would not influence Obierika to assist in the killing of his son. He disagrees with Okonkwo's killing of Ikemefuna.

This is the first time that the concept of white men is introduced in the novel. The comparison to lepers, people with a disease that causes skin sores and nerve damage, is apt. The white men will destroy the villagers' culture just as leprosy destroys its victims.

Part 1, Chapter 9

Summary

Ekwefi bangs on Okonkwo's door in a panic. "Ezinma is dying," she wails. Okonkwo runs to Ekwefi's hut and declares that Ezinma has *iba* (fever).

Readers learn Ekwefi had nine children before Ezinma but all of them died. Before Ezinma was born, Ekwefi was bitter and despondent. When Ezinma reached the age of six, "love returned once more to her mother, and, with love, anxiety."

After Ekwefi's ninth child died, Okonkwo called in a medicine man, who mutilated the child's corpse and buried it in the Evil Forest. Igbo believe that such a corpse is an *ogbanje*. (An *ogbanje* is a child who, upon death, reenters its mother's body and waits to be born again.) For an *ogbanje* to survive childhood, its *iyi-uwa* (the stone that links the *ogbanje* and the spirit world) must be found and destroyed.

Ezinma is believed to be an *ogbanje*. A year ago a medicine man searched with her for her *iyi-uwa* and destroyed the stone.

This is the first time Ezinma has been sick since then. She takes the medicine that Okonkwo prepares and falls asleep.

Analysis

In this chapter, readers see once again that Okonkwo represses his emotions because he views them as feminine. His reaction to Ezinma's sickness—running to her, collecting ingredients to make medicine, and forcing her to take it—shows that he has a compassionate side. Okonkwo has emotions, and he cares about his children.

Ekwefi's history of child death returns to haunt her as Ezinma falls ill. When Ezinma's *iyi-uwa* was found and destroyed a year ago, Ezinma's link to the world of *ogbanjes* was broken, so the girl should now remain in the world of the living. With the girl's illness, however, Ekwefi questions the validity of the previous cure.

Part 1, Chapter 10

Summary

Crowds have assembled at the *ilo* (an open space where village gatherings are held) to view a trial that is taking place. Nine *egwugwu* (masked village elders who impersonate/represent ancient spirits of the clan) act as judges. The nine *egwugwu* are "the most powerful and most secret of the clan." Each represents a village of the clan.

A man claims that his wife's relatives kidnapped his wife and children. He says he went to his in-laws and asked them to return his bride-price as called for by the law of the clan. The wife's family admits that all of this is true. However, they say the man beat his wife every day during the nine years they were married. One beating nearly killed her. They say she should not have to pay the money, because she fled to save her life.

The *egwugwu* instruct the man to go to his in-laws and beg to have his wife return. They advise the wife's family to accept his request.

Analysis

Many of the villagers realize on some level that the *egwugwu* are actually men from the area. "But if they thought these
Things Fall Apart Study Guide

Chapter Summaries 17

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things," the narrator says, "they kept them within themselves." The clan believes that their tribe’s ancient spirits are the ones permitted to judge them, and a select group of clan leaders impersonate these ancient spirits so that clan members can see, hear, and believe in this judgment process. The nine men portraying the *egwugwu* take care to costume themselves and alter their voices to further their impersonations. The remaining clan members go along with the impersonations, even if they suspect the truth.

Through this role-playing, the *egwugwu* fill an important function for the clan. They act as judge and jury. They take these roles seriously, and the people obey their verdicts. This belies the view of the Igbo as a primitive people who believe might means right. While Okonkwo certainly believes in strength and masculinity, he is an *egwugwu* and by extension recognizes the law.

The patriarchal nature of the clan is once again noted: "It was clear ... that the ceremony was for men." Women are on the outside, although the court case focuses on women’s rights. A man is not free to treat his wife any way he chooses. The husband is shamed for the way he treats his wife and must beg forgiveness. However, the wife does not speak at the trial, and her return is a foregone conclusion if her husband apologizes.

### Part 1, Chapter 11

**Summary**

Ekwefi tells Ezinma a story about Tortoise, a cunning creature who outwits birds. Tortoise enjoys the best of a feast that the birds were invited to, while the birds are stuck with scraps. The birds get their revenge, which leads to Tortoise’s shell breaking. A medicine man puts the shell back together, and "that is why Tortoise’s shell is not smooth."

Chielo comes to Okonkwo’s compound to fetch Ezinma because Agbala, the Oracle, wants to see the girl. Okonkwo pleads with her to come back, saying the child is asleep. Ekwefi wants to go with her daughter but is told coming to Agbala without being summoned would bring about a curse.

Chielo carries Ezinma away. Later, Ekwefi tells Okonkwo she is going to follow Chielo, regardless of the punishment. She follows her all night through all nine villages. Chielo takes Ezinma into the Oracle’s cave, and Ekwefi waits outside. Okonkwo appears and sits with Ekwefi. She appreciates his coming and is reminded of when she first came to Okonkwo’s hut and he took her in.

**Analysis**

In this chapter, the moral of Ekwefi’s folktale is clear: don’t be greedy. The power of language resounds within the folktale. Turtle uses language to outwit the birds. The birds are gullible and lose out because of their honesty and decency.

Readers get a look at Chielo in her role of priestess to the Oracle Agbala when she comes to fetch Ezinma. Commanding and eerie in her speech and appearance, she is hardly the woman with whom Ekwefi spoke at the wrestling match.

Another side of Okonkwo’s character is revealed when he tries to convince Chielo not to take Ezinma. He is clearly frightened for his child. This tenderness does not end with Ezinma. Okonkwo is acutely aware of the closeness of Ezinma and Ekwefi.

Ekwefi’s maternal feelings drive her to follow Chielo and Ezinma. She will go to any length to protect Ezinma, even if it means going against the gods. Okonkwo, in turn, follows Ekwefi and therefore also defies the gods. Okonkwo shows his concern for his wife when he says, “Go home and sleep. I shall wait here.” This interaction, along with Ekwefi’s reaction, is the first display of love between husband and wife in the book.

### Part 1, Chapter 12

**Summary**

Chielo returns Ezinma to Okonkwo’s compound. The narrator reveals that Okonkwo had “not slept at all [the night before]. ... He felt very anxious.” He made multiple trips to the cave before he found Ekwefi there waiting.

The villagers are in a festive mood as they prepare for Obierika’s daughter’s *uri* (part of the betrothal ceremony). Obierika has purchased a large goat in a far-off marketplace and plans to present it to his in-laws. Everyone prepares food for the ceremony. While the women are cooking, a cow gets
loose, and they run to retrieve it.

Obierika’s in-laws arrive bearing 50 pots of wine, a large number. As the feast progresses there are toasts, singing, and dancing. The bride appears and dances while the crowd cheers. As the bride leaves with her suitor’s family, they pay visits to prominent people, who present them with gifts.

Analysis

Displaying emotions publically does not fit with Okonkwo’s perceptions of manliness. In this chapter, however, his grave concern for Ezinma is an indicator that he cares a great deal about his children.

Cultural unity within the clan is depicted in the preparations for the uri, in which the community functions as one big family. Every part of the ceremony is cooperative: the preparation of the feast itself, the retrieval of the cow, the generous contributions of palm wine, the gift of the big goat, and the recognition that the joining of two families contributes to the joining of two villages.

The Umuike marketplace where the goat is purchased is large and crowded. Umuike people want their market “to grow and swallow up the markets of their neighbors.” This thirst for success and power has created a market that is unsavory and filled with thieves. "They can steal your cloth from off your waist in that market," observes one of Obierika's guests. Obierika and others believe the Umuike people use medicine (magic) to enable their thievery. The Umuike market can be seen as a symbol for the negative elements of commercialism. It presents a marked contrast to the celebration of family and community at the equally crowded uri.

Part 1, Chapter 13

Summary

Umuofia awakes to the news that Ezeudu, the clansman who told Okonkwo not to participate in Ikemefuna’s execution, has died. "A cold shiver [runs] down Okonkwo's back" as he recalls the warning.

Ezeudu was the oldest man in his village and had achieved the rare accomplishment of taking three titles. Drums are beaten, and guns and cannon are fired. Before his final rite, “the tumult increased tenfold." Words are spoken in tribute. The tumult continues and reaches “fever-heat.”

Okonkwo joins other funeral guests who shoot their guns in a salute to Ezeudu. However, his gun explodes, and the shrapnel kills Ezeudu’s 16-year-old son. Killing a clan member is an offense against the earth goddess. Okonkwo must flee, but since the killing was accidental, he will be allowed to return to the clan after seven years. Gathering their most valuable belongings, he and his family go to his mother’s village, Mbanta.

Soon Ezeudu’s neighbors storm Okonkwo's compound and destroy it, symbolically cleansing the land that Okonkwo has soiled with their clansman's blood. One of the men is Obierika, who questions the traditional cleansing ritual because the killing was an accident.

Analysis

Chapter 13 concludes the first part of the novel, ending with an event that is unthinkable to Okonkwo—his exile from the village.

Okonkwo cannot escape the killing of Ikemefuna. The death of Ezeudu, who warned Okonkwo against harming Ikemefuna, is a reminder, and it foreshadows yet another killing that Okonkwo commits. This killing—at Ezeudu's funeral—is unintentional. While Okonkwo continues to feel guilt for the intentional murder, an exercise of free will, he suffers no outward repercussions.

However, the unintentional crime causes a great upheaval in his life. Once again, his inexperience with guns leads to conflict. This crime of killing Ezeudu's son is considered “female" because it was inadvertent, an act of fate. Yet Okonkwo has offended the earth goddess and must pay for the offense.

The narrator points out that nothing like this crime has ever happened in the village. The tribe uses violence as a form of expression. At the burial of Ezeudu, clansmen brandish machetes and shoot guns and cannons; after the man's son is killed, the men destroy Okonkwo's compound. It is controlled violence and done for a ceremonial purpose.

Obierika is characterized as thoughtful. He questions
Okonkwo's punishment and why his own twin infants had to be abandoned. (In Igbo culture, multiple births are "an abomination." Twins are abandoned to die of natural causes in the Evil Forest.) Obierika follows the clan's customs but disagrees with some of its ways.

Part 2, Chapter 14

Summary

In his motherland, Okonkwo is welcomed by Uchendu, his maternal uncle. He and his children give Okonkwo land and assist him in building a compound. They also supply him with seed-yams to plant his farm.

This new beginning requires hard work, which Okonkwo is always willing to do. Yet it no longer sparks the enthusiasm that Okonkwo once had. His goal had been to become one of the lords of the clan, and he was on the path to achieving it. However, the goal now seems very far away.

Uchendu is the family patriarch. One of his sons is marrying a new wife. Following the ceremony, Uchendu gathers everyone together and speaks to Okonkwo, reminding him that others have suffered. Uchendu's personal loss has been great, as he has buried five wives and 22 children. His message for Okonkwo is to accept his exile and make the best of it.

Analysis

Okonkwo has been a man of action up until this point. Work has been his coping mechanism and the force that allows him to overcome his poor upbringing. His new beginning requires a great deal of work, but he is unable to muster much enthusiasm.

Okonkwo is depressed. He has come to the conclusion that his personal god, or chi, is not destined for greatness. Okonkwo now disagrees with a saying of the elders, "If a man said yea his chi also affirmed." Until now, this belief has driven Okonkwo.

Uchendu notes that everyone suffers but that they must go on. He believes that Okonkwo is fortunate to have the support system of his motherland.

Part 2, Chapter 15

Summary

Obierika pays a visit in the second year of Okonkwo's exile, and the two men go to speak with Uchendu. Uchendu notes that men in his day "had friends in distant clans," while the current generation stays home and is afraid of its next-door neighbor.

Obierika tells them the Abame clan has been wiped out. A white man had appeared in the village. When the Oracle was consulted, he declared that the man "would break their clan and spread destruction among them." The Oracle warned that other white men would follow. He called them locusts. Clan members then killed the man.

Uchendu asks what the stranger said. At first, he is told that the man said nothing. Actually, the stranger had spoken, but he was not understood.

Later, Obierika tells them, some "ordinary men like us" led three white men to the clan. The men saw the stranger's bicycle tied to a tree. They left, returned with reinforcements, and, surrounding the market in Abame, shot everyone there.

Uchendu says, "Never kill a man who says nothing. Those men of Abame were fools." Okonkwo agrees. He says they should have armed themselves and been ready for danger.

The chapter closes with an example of Okonkwo allowing his emotions to show, although in a subtle fashion. Obierika and Okonkwo have a genuine friendship. Obierika handles Okonkwo's affairs and insists there is no need for his friend to thank him.

Analysis

The white man has arrived in Abame, and the Oracle says that more white men are on their way. Language is a barrier, as the villagers cannot understand the man, nor does he understand them.

Using a metaphor, the Oracle calls the white men locusts. Earlier, in Chapter 7, the arrival of actual locusts brought joy to the people; the insects were a dietary treat. Their appearance
also foreshadowed the event that is now happening, the arrival of the first missionaries.

The locusts represent the paradox of colonialism: the advancement they bring through education and medicine comes at the cost of the oppression of indigenous people and the eradication of their culture. Achebe's use of locusts to symbolize destruction can be compared to the locusts' appearance as one of 10 plagues against Egypt in the Bible (Exodus 10:1–20).

Okonkwo suggests that the men of Abame should have armed themselves "even when they went to market." Typically, his initial reaction is to fight. This goes against the clan's established practice of turning to violence only as a last resort.

Readers see that, although there are many appearances of male bonding in the novel, Obierika is the one man with whom Okonkwo is truly connected.

Part 2, Chapter 16

Summary

Two years later, Obierika returns to Mbanta. Since his last visit, he reports, missionaries have arrived and built a church in Umuofia. They have also converted some villagers to Christianity. The elders are displeased but don't believe the new religion will last. Obierika has noticed Nwoye among the converts and wants to tell Okonkwo of the boy's activities.

However, Okonkwo won't discuss his son, so Obierika learns from Nwoye's mother how Nwoye became intrigued by the missionaries. Initially, one white man and six converts came to Mbanta. The white man had a commanding presence and spoke through an interpreter. He declared that the Igbo gods were "pieces of wood and stone" and went on to talk about the Holy Trinity.

Okonkwo, who had been hoping the conversation with the missionaries would lead to a fight, walked away, thinking they were crazy. Nwoye, however, was fascinated. The hymn they sang "seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul."

Analysis

Something inside Nwoye had broken with the killing of Ikemefuna. The new religion and Christian hymns give Nwoye a sense of fulfillment and provide "a relief within ... his parched soul." The new religion also gives Nwoye a chance to break from his father. This rupture in the family has been inevitable since Okonkwo participated in Ikemefuna's death.

Okonkwo is mentioned in this chapter but plays no active role in it. The purpose of the chapter is to document Nwoye's fascination with the missionaries and his joining the church. His attitudes and beliefs have driven him apart from Okonkwo. After joining the missionaries, Nwoye is asked about his father, to which he replies, "I don't know. He is not my father."

Readers see that Nwoye and Obierika have some similarities. Both question the way their society functions. Obierika, having a better understanding of the young man than Okonkwo does, encourages his friend to be patient with Nwoye. However, as the story has shown repeatedly, Okonkwo has no patience.

The missionaries have spread just as the locusts did. The first man was a harbinger, like the first swarm of locusts. However, the missionaries cannot be killed off and are slowly infiltrating the clan.

Part 2, Chapter 17

Summary

The missionaries have been preaching in the Mbanta marketplace. Now they request land and receive a plot in the Evil Forest that the villagers believe is filled "with sinister forces." No one expects the missionaries to accept the land. The elders are convinced the missionaries do not know what they are doing and that they will fail miserably.

After the missionaries build their church, the villagers wait for their gods and ancestors to take revenge. They expect the gods' vengeance to occur within 28 days. When the 28th day passes and nothing happens, the missionaries win a few more converts. They include a woman named Nneka, who is pregnant. Her previous pregnancies resulted in twins—an abomination in the Igbo faith. Those infants were abandoned to die, and Nneka does not want to risk the same fate.
Nwoye had been attracted to the missionaries from the beginning, but "he dared not go too near the missionaries ... for fear of his father." When Nwoye does go to the church, his cousin Amikwu sees him and tells Okonkwo. Nwoye comes home, and Okonkwo begins to beat him, but Uchendu steps in and demands the boy's release. Okonkwo contemplates what has happened with his son, but it makes little sense to him. After all, Okonkwo is called the "Roaring Flame" for his strength and boldness. How can Nwoye be so weak and passive? It then occurs to him that "living fire begets cold, impotent ash." Because Nwoye is his son, this is the natural order, and he is powerless to do anything about it.

Analysis

The elders and clan leaders believe they are clever to let the missionaries have land in the Evil Forest. This will surely mean the missionaries are doomed to failure. The clan's gods and ancestors will strike the missionaries down. Then the clan can reunite, and faith will be restored. Yet the church is built, and the time of punishment passes. The Igbo gods have failed to punish the intruders.

Up to this point, Nwoye has been attracted to the missionaries but has accepted his fate of living with his family in Okonkwo's compound. In this chapter, however, Okonkwo beats Nwoye for attending church. This may be one beating too many. Nwoye exercises free will by returning to the church and deciding to become a student at the church school in Umuofia. The leader of the Mbanta church, Mr. Kiaga, blesses Nwoye for attending church. This may be one beating too many. Nwoye exercises free will by returning to the church and deciding to become a student at the church school in Umuofia. The leader of the Mbanta church, Mr. Kiaga, blesses Nwoye because he "forsakes his father." In an example of situational irony, Nwoye is returning to Umuofia, Okonkwo's homeland, to learn skills his father would never dream of teaching him. He has forsaken Okonkwo's way of life.

Part 2, Chapter 18

Summary

The church faces challenges because it welcomes osu, or outcasts. When two osu come to church, the congregation protests. Mr. Kiaga insists that everyone is accepted. One person leaves because of this while "the wavering converts drew inspiration and confidence." The osu become the most zealous converts.

A Christian has killed a python, and the Mbanta leaders gather to decide how to proceed. The python is a revered animal that the Igbo refer to as "Our Father." Okonkwo wants to force the missionaries out of the village for this offense. However, the group decides the matter is between the person who killed the python and the god.

Okonkwo says this is cowardly and views the clan as womanly, unlike the clan of his fatherland, Umuofia. His speech causes the clan to decide not to ostracize their Christians.

Then Okoli, the man who is accused of killing the python, falls ill and dies. The clan sees this as confirmation that "the gods were still able to fight their own battles." As a result, they decide not to ostracize the Christian clan members.

Analysis

In this chapter, the Christians show a willingness to accept everyone. Their compassion inspires the converts and attracts those who had been at the bottom of the society, such as the osu. They are given a chance to be seen as equals. Accepting the osu tests the strength of the church, as several converts threaten to leave, but it eventually helps the missionaries to increase the number of new members.

Once again, Okonkwo is ready to take action. He wants to drive the Christians out, by any means necessary. Again his reaction is at odds with that of the clan. The anger that fueled his success in Umuofia does not help him in Mbanta, and the church's increasing authority over the people of the village further undermines his own.

Okonkwo has a foil in Mr. Kiaga. A foil is a character whose qualities contrast with the qualities of another character (usually the protagonist). This contrast serves to highlight the main character's qualities. Both Okonkwo and Kiaga are zealous men with an unwavering vision of how things ought to be. However, unlike Okonkwo, Mr. Kiaga is able to inspire those around him to believe as he does.
Part 2, Chapter 19

Summary

Seven years have passed in Mbanta, and Okonkwo has prospered. However, he is anxious to return home, and "he [regrets] every day of his exile." Okonkwo sends money to Obierika to construct huts in his former compound so that his family will have a place to stay when they return.

Okonkwo gathers his three wives and instructs them to prepare a great feast. The feast will be his way of thanking his mother's kinsmen.

An old family member makes a speech thanking Okonkwo for the feast, which is even bigger than they expected. He adds that it is good for kinsmen to gather. The man confides that he fears for the younger generation and for the clan because of the "abominable religion that has settled among you."

Analysis

Okonkwo's insistence on adhering to tradition and expectations is once again on display. The feast must be big because he "cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle." Okonkwo views the feast as both a social obligation and a chance to show how he has prospered.

Okonkwo regrets having left Umuofia. He believes the exile has held him back; he would have prospered even more in Umuofia. Okonkwo also feels more comfortable in Umuofia because the "men were bold and warlike."

The elder kinsman's speech is melancholy. He appreciates when kinsmen gather and strengthen their bonds. He is worried about the future and says the new generation must know "what it is to speak with one voice." The novel's title, *Things Fall Apart*, resonates as the man speaks of families breaking up and the younger people not understanding the bond of kinship.

Part 3, Chapter 20

Summary

Ever since leaving Umuofia, Okonkwo has planned his return. He is determined to "regain the seven wasted years." Okonkwo intends to build a bigger compound, take two new wives, and get titles for his sons. He has recovered from the break with Nwoye and expects to "bring [his other sons] up in the way of the clan."

Okonkwo also plans to find a husband for Ezinma, with whom he is especially close. She understands him and carries out his requests, including persuading her half-sister, Obiageli, to wait for marriage until they return to Umuofia. Okonkwo wishes Ezinma was a boy.

However, when Okonkwo arrives in Umuofia, he finds that the village has changed dramatically. The church continues to grow and includes high-ranking men. In addition, there is a court and a District Commissioner who judges legal cases. Arrogant, heavy-handed court messengers, recruited from the local men, guard a prison and mistreat the prisoners. One of the clansmen was condemned by the court and hanged after killing a man.

Okonkwo discusses the changes with Obierika and asks why the people do not fight. Obierika reminds him of the fate of the Abame people and adds, "It is already too late." Clansmen have abandoned the tribe and joined with the strangers. Obierika says the white man was smart in that he came "quietly and peaceably." He notes the white man has "put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

Analysis

Chapter 20 begins Part 3 of the novel, which shows the devastation wrought by the white men and its fatal effect on Okonkwo.

As Obierika says, Igbo society has fallen apart because the clan can no longer act as one. The white men have destroyed the things that once united the clan. But Okonkwo is slow to realize what his friend sees so clearly. He claims to recognize the changes in the village, but his plans tell a different story. He is determined that his sons will gain titles but cannot see that
the titles do not matter anymore. His goals do not reflect the fact that power has shifted to the church and to the representatives of the British government.

Okonkwo's patriarchal beliefs are also unchanged. He can sense the fire within Ezinma but can't value it in a woman.

The chapter ends with Okonkwo and Obierika sitting together in silence. They have no answers to the challenges the clan faces. Okonkwo, the man of action, is left sitting and doing nothing.

Part 3, Chapter 21

Summary

Many in the clan appreciate some of the changes brought by the white men, particularly the trading store and the money that is flowing into Umuofia.

Mr. Brown, the white missionary, is a patient man who treads "softly on his faith." He becomes friendly with the clan's leaders, including a man named Akunna. The two discuss religion, and Brown becomes convinced that the way to convert the people is not to attack their religion. Instead, he courts interest by building a hospital and a school in Umuofia.

Brown asks that children become students at the school. At first, families send only their lazy children or slaves. Brown says future leaders of the land will be those who learn to read and write. If the clans do not have educated people, outsiders will lead them. In time, families are convinced and send their children to school.

Brown comes to Okonkwo to tell him about Nwoye's education, thinking that he will be happy. Instead, Okonkwo drives him away with threats. Okonkwo's return has proven to be unremarkable. Villagers are preoccupied with the changes brought by the white men, not the return of a once-powerful farmer. He mourns for the changes that have occurred in the clan, which has "so unaccountably become soft like women."

Analysis

Mr. Brown is a decent man who does not force his religion upon the clan. He interacts with the people, enabling him to figure out the best way to draw them toward Christianity. He appeals to their sense of independence when mentioning the need to read and write. However, Brown has an ulterior motive: "From the very beginning, religion and education went hand in hand."

The people of Umuofia now appreciate the trading store, send their children to the missionary school, and utilize the hospital. They have accepted the presence of the new religion. Even the great men of the clan talk with Brown. It seems just a matter of time until larger numbers of people convert.

As Okonkwo mourns for the clan, he is increasingly out of touch with the new reality. He displays his unwillingness to adapt when he chases Mr. Brown. Okonkwo believes he came home during the wrong year because his sons cannot enter into ozo society (one of the ranks in Igbo culture) for two more years. However, the importance of this society in the village is no longer clear. In contrast, Nwoye, the son he has cursed, has adapted to the new society and is prospering.

Part 3, Chapter 22

Summary

Mr. Brown leaves the village and is succeeded by Mr. Smith. Smith is a strict zealot and sees things "as black and white. And black [is] evil." Smith does not care about the number of converts to the church, only that those who convert are strict adherents to the faith.

Enoch, an overzealous convert, sparks "the great conflict between church and clan." He commits a terrible crime when he unmasks an egwugwu in public. The next day, the egwugwu and clan elders destroy Enoch's compound.

Smith and his followers hide Enoch. Then Smith and his interpreter meet the crowd outside the church. The villagers explain they will not harm Smith. However, they are going to destroy the church and will "no longer allow it in our midst."

Smith commands the crowd members to leave, but they remain and destroy the church.
Analysis

Mr. Smith is markedly different from his predecessor; he is all fire and brimstone. Smith's goals are clear from the beginning. The converts will obey and disavow any attachment to the old religion. The narrator notes that Smith "saw the world as a battlefield." His point of view foreshadows problems to come.

Enoch, Smith's disciple, is ready for a fight. In this respect, he mirrors Okonkwo. He wants to fight for his beliefs and feels confrontation is the only way to solve a problem.

The interpreter does not understand the dialect of the mob's spokesman and cannot relay his message to Smith. The interpreter also changes the meaning of Smith's reply. Thus, neither Smith nor the group from Umuofia communicate their messages. Language is again a barrier to coexistence. As a result, the church is destroyed, and a battle is underway.

Part 3, Chapter 23

Summary

Okonkwo is rejuvenated and feels the clan has reclaimed its old ways. He has convinced the men in Umuofia to arm themselves so they will be prepared—unlike the people in Abame.

Three days later, messengers from the District Commissioner's office invite Okonkwo and five others to his office. They go because an "Umuofia man does not refuse a call." However, they bring machetes, although they choose not to carry guns, which "would be unseemly."

A member of the Umuofia delegation begins to explain why the church was destroyed, and the District Commissioner asks him to stop so he can bring in men to hear the grievances. Shortly after the Commissioner's men enter the room, there is a brief scuffle, and they handcuff Okonkwo and the others.

The clansmen are given a lecture about their ill-treatment of people, and a fine is set. The kotma, or court messengers, are told to treat the prisoners with respect. Instead, they forcibly shave the prisoners' heads, beat them, and withhold food and water. The court messengers go to Umuofia and inform the villagers what has happened. The men of Umuofia gather and decide to pay the fine "to appease the white man."

Analysis

Okonkwo thrives on action. He is content after the clan strikes at Enoch and destroys the church. The fact that the clan "listened to him with respect" leads him to think the past has returned, when men took action and were respected for it.

The invitees to the District Commissioner's office show a certain naïveté. Once they engage in conversation, they expect the meeting to be civil. The District Commissioner surprises them. The scuffle is brief, and they do not have a chance to draw their machetes. This contrasts with the war counsel in Chapter 2, when Okonkwo holds a discussion with his opponents and is treated with respect. The rules have changed, and the men are not prepared.

The District Commissioner is condescending. He tricks Okonkwo and the others. Once he has done so, he gives them a lecture about treating people badly. He serves as judge and jury and does not hear their side. In addition, the District Commissioner shows disrespect for the clan's ways by cutting off their explanation.

The court messengers are both disrespectful and cruel to the prisoners, humiliating them by shaving their heads and whipping and starving them. They also inflate the fine so that they can steal the extra funds. As agents of the court, they are far worse than the "criminals" they deal with.

Part 3, Chapter 24

Summary

Okonkwo and the others are set free. Wary clansmen do not welcome them but simply move out of their way. Okonkwo's male relations and friends gather at his hut, but they notice the whip marks on his back, and nobody talks to him except Obierika.

A meeting is called for the next day. In anticipation, Okonkwo cannot sleep, the "bitterness in his heart ... now mixed with a kind of childlike excitement." Okonkwo is preparing for war, and he swears vengeance. If Umuofia will fight, he will join
them. If not, he will avenge himself.

People enter the meeting place "from every quarter of the nine villages." Okika, one of the six prisoners, speaks to the crowd, lamenting that their gods are weeping and that some clan members have joined the British. He vows that they need to fight, even though it means they must "shed the blood of a clansman."

The meeting is interrupted by court messengers demanding they stop the meeting. Using his machete, Okonkwo beheads the messenger in charge of the group, and the villagers allow the other messengers to get away. Okonkwo now realizes that there will be no war.

Analysis

Okonkwo's return to the village is tense. Others surround him, but there is no interaction among them. He will take revenge and fight, even if it means doing so alone. The narrator notes that the meeting place is filling with people from all of the nine villages. However, other than a brief exchange with Obierika, Okonkwo talks to no one. He has separated himself from the clan members and will join them only if they act as he feels they should act.

Okonkwo's anger derives from his tragic flaw: his fear that he will be weak, like his father. In the new society, his final act of murder sets him apart from the rest of the clan. He will not adjust to the new society, and the clan will not act as he believes it should, by going to war. He is a classic tragic figure, caught between his own needs and values and those of his people.

Part 3, Chapter 25

Summary

The District Commissioner descends on Okonkwo's compound with a group of soldiers and court messengers. He asks for Okonkwo, but Obierika tells him he is not there. After the District Commissioner threatens the men, Obierika agrees to show them where Okonkwo is and asks for the group's help.

Obierika then leads the District Commissioner to the tree where Okonkwo has hanged himself and asks the men to take the body down. Because suicide is an abomination, Obierika says, "His body is evil and only strangers may touch it." He also explains that only strangers may bury the body.

Obierika speaks angrily to the District Commissioner and says Okonkwo was a great man. Obierka declares, "You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog." The District Commissioner tells his men to remove the body.

At the novel's end, the District Commissioner, who is planning to write a book about his experiences, decides this event might be worth a paragraph. He plans to call the book The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.

Analysis

Okonkwo's physical death is anticlimactic. The changes in his village and demise of the clan have left him dead inside.

The family is noticeably absent from this chapter. Despite his dedication to the clan and his family, Okonkwo dies alone. Even his good friend cannot go near him. Because of his suicide, Okonkwo is considered an abomination—a tragic fall for a man who was once highly respected.

Okonkwo's decision to end his life can be seen as heroic. He was a principled man who could not survive in a society that did not abide by his view of right and wrong. Always a man of action, he took the only one available to him. Unable to face change, he rejected it.

The District Commissioner claims to understand the people of Africa and plans on writing a book about them. His proposed title shows how little the white men understand the culture they have destroyed.

"Quotes"

"Okonkwo had clearly washed his hands and so he ate with the kings and elders."

— Narrator, Part 1, Chapter 1

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This description makes it clear that Okonkwo's ambition and drive have enabled him to succeed. Hard work is valued and respected by the clan.

"Okonkwo was ruled by one passion—to hate everything that his father Unoka had loved."

— Narrator, Part 1, Chapter 2

Okonkwo is driven by this one simple goal. He is ashamed of his father and wants to be rid of any reminder of him.

"He was not afraid of war. He was ... a man of war."

— Narrator, Part 1, Chapter 4

Okonkwo is ready and eager to do his part. He needs to be engaged in activity to feel useful.

"That boy calls you father. ... Bear no hand in his death."

— Ezeudu, Part 1, Chapter 13

Okonkwo does not heed this advice. He decides he must be involved in Ikemefuna's death or he will lose respect. The decision is disastrous, as it leads to the rupture with his son Nwoye.

"It was like beginning life anew without the vigor and enthusiasm of youth."

— Narrator, Part 2, Chapter 14

These words describe Okonkwo as he begins his exile in Mbanta. He never completely adjusts to his new surroundings.

"Never kill a man who says nothing."

— Uchendu, Part 2, Chapter 15

Uchendo says this about the Abame people who killed the white man. He associates silence with danger.

"Living fire begets cold, impotent ash."

— Narrator, Part 2, Chapter 17

These thoughts are going through Okonkwo's mind as he contemplates the loss of Nwoye. He wonders how he could have produced a son so different from himself.

"He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

— Obierika, Part 3, Chapter 20

This reference to the book's title is part of Obierika's analysis of how the missionaries and white men destroyed the clan.

"Okonkwo was deeply grieved. ... He mourned for the clan ... for the warlike men."

— Narrator, Part 3, Chapter 21

Okonkwo is saddened over the state of the clan. He is
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nostalgic for the time when the men were violent and would fight back when wronged.

"He had already chosen the title ... The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

— Narrator, Part 3, Chapter 25

The District Commissioner's choice of title for his book shows his lack of understanding of the Igbo culture and underscores his role in destroying it.

Symbols

Fire

Fire represents Okonkwo's rage and combustible nature. Okonkwo's nickname, "Roaring Flame," refers to these defining traits.

Okonkwo's rage is never far from the surface. The narrator mentions that "whenever he could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists."

As Okonkwo reflects on the loss of Nwoye in Chapter 24, he acknowledges that even the most powerful fire produces cold, useless ash. In this statement Okonkwo refers to himself as a fire—both strong and fierce—while he sees Nwoye as ash—weak and lazy. At the end of the novel, Okonkwo succumbs to his rage and kills the court messenger, leading to his own downfall.

Yams

Yams are grown by Igbo men and symbolize masculinity, wealth, and respect. Okonkwo begins to increase his stature in the clan after he borrows and plants yam seeds in Chapter 3.

Growing yams is thought of as a man's job because it is challenging. This is noted in Chapter 4: "Yam, the king of crops, was a very exacting king." A clansman who succeeds at growing yams proves his masculinity and earns the respect of those around him.

Locusts

The locusts represent the arrival of the white man and missionaries. In Chapter 15, the Oracle states directly that the white men are locusts.

In Chapter 7, actual locusts arrive in the village, appearing as a cloud blocking the sunlight. Throngs of them descend, and "the whole country [becomes] the brown-earth color of the vast, hungry swarm." Okonkwo and the others view the locusts as a delicacy and munch on them happily. This appearance—and enjoyment by the clansmen—of the real insects strengthens the symbolism used in Chapter 15.

In Chapter 15, one white missionary comes to the area. Told by the Oracle that the white man will spread destruction, the people kill the man. He is soon followed by many more foreigners, until their presence is felt in all the villages. Like locusts, they bring benefits—education and medicine—yet they also devour the clan's traditions and culture.

Themes

Culture and Change

The title of the book refers to the pressure that the clan faces from the arrival of white men and missionaries. The colonizers bring a new religion and court system and give little consideration to how Igbo society previously functioned. They assume that the clan is without culture and living in a haphazard manner, in need of enlightenment.
Yet the clan has a fully functioning society that includes traditions and holidays. Vibrant celebrations mark the beginning and ending of the harvest season, while detailed rituals accompany both weddings and funerals. They have a justice process, and their culture is rich in music, dance, folktales, and proverbs.

Changes come about rapidly when the white men and missionaries arrive. The impact of the changes is negligible at first, but it grows and begins to dominate the clan. Outcasts are the first to abandon traditions and adapt to change.

Even the clan leaders eventually recognize that they are unable to stop the changes. Okonkwo is the only member left who refuses to alter his beliefs and behavior. His refusal to adapt leads to tragedy and to his suicide—the ultimate transgression against his beliefs.

Fate versus Free Will

In the Igbo religion, an individual's chi, or personal god, is said to determine a person's fate. Thus, a person's failure and success are both attributed to that person's chi. This indicates that the chi predetermines the good and bad that happens to an individual (fate). However, this is not always true. As an Igbo proverb about the chi reveals, "When a man says yes, his chi says yes also." This shows a belief that a person's chi can also be ruled by free will.

Okonkwo works hard to become a wealthy and respected leader of the clan and is said to have overcome his chi. He lives life on his own terms by exercising free will. However, when he accidentally kills Ezeudu's son and is forced into exile, he curses his fate. He now believes that fate—not free will—rules his destiny. This change in belief will affect him later, after his arrest and release in Umuofia.

Betrayal

According to Okonkwo, the men of the clan should resist the incursions of the white man and use their Igbo warrior skills to drive the missionaries from their territory. In Okonkwo's eyes, the clan responds to these foreigners with passivity rather than strength. He sees the clan's acceptance of the missionaries as a betrayal of the clan's tradition and of their warlike ancestors.

Although Ikemefuna's execution is demanded by the Oracle and is therefore an accepted part of Igbo tradition, Okonkwo's participation in the act can be seen on a personal level as an act of betrayal. Okonkwo—though warned not to—helps kill the boy who called him father.

His son's departure from the clan makes Okonkwo wonder how a man could abandon the gods of his father. This, Okonkwo believes, is the ultimate betrayal.

Suggested Reading


