

**Lightning Literature & Composition**  
**World Literature I: Student's Guide**  
**Africa and Asia**  
**Second Edition**

**Acquiring College-Level Composition Skills**  
**by Responding to Great Literature**

**The difference between the right word and the almost-right word is the  
difference between the lightning and the lightning bug.—Mark Twain**

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To my World Literature students at Compass Prep,  
who helped expand my understanding of American culture,  
while I introduced them to other cultures.



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## **REQUIRED BOOKS FOR WORLD LITERATURE I**

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

*An Artist of the Floating World* by Kazuo Ishiguro

*Fountain and Tomb* by Naguib Mahfouz

*This Same Sky*, edited by Naomi Shihab Nye

An autobiography of a Third-World national, chosen from the list in Appendix A

**'TIS THE GOOD  
READER THAT MAKES  
THE GOOD BOOK.  
—Ralph Waldo Emerson**

# **Introduction**

## **Why This Course?**

Most people like to read, and most people write. But what, how well, and how often people read and write varies greatly. The Lightning Literature and Composition guides teach the skills of deep reading and the craft of writing. When you become a better reader, you widen the scope of books you can enjoy and learn from. As you improve your writing skills, writing becomes easier, so it's less daunting and time-consuming.

You may have thought that knowing the alphabet and having a decent vocabulary was all you needed to read well, but this isn't the case. Reading is a partnership with the book. When you read what is supposed to be a good book, you expect the author to write proper sentences, use words correctly, and tell a story that makes sense. In the same way, the author of the book expects the reader to have a certain level of knowledge, an understanding of language, and an openness to ideas. You can improve in these areas by reading more literature, understanding more about the times and places and cultures that shaped the authors of that literature, and learning about figurative and rhetorical language.

Just as these reading skills can be learned, so too can the craft of writing. You may never become a brilliant poet or a best-selling novelist, but you can learn to write more clearly, more powerfully, and with greater depth. The Lightning Literature and Composition series uses great literature to expose you to techniques that will improve your own writing. Think of these techniques as tools. Just as you need tools to build a cabinet, you need tools to build a paper. The more tools you have and the better you know how to use them, the better your cabinet, and your paper, will be.

Each course in the Lightning Literature and Composition series concentrates on literature of a particular period, region, or author. This course focuses on World Literature of the twentieth century. You will be reading works written by internationally-known authors from Asia, Africa, and other parts of the world, and seeing their unique perspective on the world.

Why should we study the literature of parts of the world, other than America and England, and perhaps Europe? Hasn't everything been said, every thought and feeling been expressed, in the literature of our own cultural heritage?

Jamaica Kincaid, a Caribbean author, shares her thoughts in the introduction to the text *World Writers Today*. She describes herself as “a person descended mostly from the captured people of Africa and (through one grandparent) from the vanished Carib Indian people.” But, she says, “In the world of literature that I grew up in, there was only one literature—that of the people of England.” She explains how that literature enriched her life, but at the same time, says:



“What good would it have done me to know of the world, the larger world, the world beyond England and its people, the world of other people both different from me and the same? I can only speculate that such exposure to other people and other cultures might have made me a different person. To have learned that the place where I originated was of some value—human value—would have nourished that delicate thing inside of me, my sense of being. . . . The world brought near and made intimate . . . is not a prescription for anything. It is only a contribution to truth and reality. This is true and real: There are many different kinds of human beings; they are born and sometime, sooner or later, they die. In between, they mostly do regrettable and foolish things. But their lives give meaning to ours—each life in fact gives meaning to another.” (x–xi)

As we read “world literature,” we will find, as Kincaid says, people both different from us and the same. We’re all created by God, in His image, and in all of us that image is corrupted by our sinful nature inherited from Adam. And yet God says, “From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live. God did this so that men would seek Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us.” (Acts 17:26–27) It is God who has created the nations, and understanding them better will help us to understand ourselves better, to better see our own part in His world and in His plan, and perhaps to better reach out in friendship and kinship to people from very different backgrounds than ours. We can also learn a lot from other cultures. They may lead us to question our own cultural values and to better evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of worldviews we take for granted.

I hope that as you read, you will read both with acceptance and compassion, and thoughtfully and critically. Whatever you read, you should be seeking to understand the author’s point of view, and appreciate whatever is true and good in his or her work. At the same time, you need to read critically, examining each author’s presuppositions and worldview, and analyzing and evaluating his ideas. I hope this study will enrich your life and expand your world.

## Why Read Literature?

“I hate it when I’m forced to read something. I want to be able to choose books to read when I want, according to my moods and interests. I think about what I read and enjoy discussing

## Introduction

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books with others, but I resent having to write about books all the time. I just want to relax and enjoy the story.” These statements are:

- a. Complaints made throughout time by students in literature classes
- b. Comments that English teachers are weary of hearing
- c. My own thoughts about reading literature
- d. All of the above

The answer is d. I realize you’re probably feeling some resistance to being told to read the material in this class. In an ideal world you’d choose great books to read, according to your own timing, then join a group of amiable, intelligent friends for a deep but witty discussion over a picnic lunch near a meandering stream, shaded by a weeping willow.

I regret this is not the case, but things aren’t all bad, either. I’ve tried to choose works that are representative of different cultures, well-written, but also tell a good story that I hope will interest you. They will be more work for you to understand than your normal literary fare, I expect; they will challenge you and stretch your mind, I hope. I think the understanding you will gain will be worth the effort. And you may find, once you have studied these books, that they will be a key to a whole new world of literature that you will want to read for enjoyment. In Appendix C (“Additional Reading”) I have suggested more books by these authors and others, which will be much easier for you to understand and enjoy once you have studied the required selections.

If you read a book in this class that you love, but hate the duty and writing attached to the reading, remember that someday you can reread the book for your own reasons, and no doubt you will find new pleasure and wisdom there.

So, why read great literature to begin with? Here are some reasons, in no particular order:

- To develop an appreciation for, and understanding of, literature
- To expose yourself to great writing, thus enhancing your own writing
- To learn about other times and cultures
- To expand and refine your view of the world
- To increase your understanding of human nature—both its triumphant and tragic sides
- To learn lessons in honesty, integrity, courage, and a myriad of other moral and ethical values
- To form concrete images in your mind of how these abstract values are expressed in and between people
- To revel in the beauty, elegance, and surprise that only great writers can regularly coax from language
- For pleasure

You need not have all these reasons to read literature. Any one can be sufficient, but the last one certainly reinforces all the others. I hope that you will also read for pleasure in addition

to reading for this class, and that reading for pleasure, if for no other reason, will be a habit you keep for the rest of your life.

## **HOW TO READ LITERATURE**

I chose the selections in this course to be challenging to high school students without being overwhelming. The following considerations are all important to reading comprehension:

- Careful attention to the work, which may involve reading the book twice, or at least reading some sections of it again
- Understanding the vocabulary the writer uses
- Understanding the setting (time and place, including the historical background)
- Understanding of the characters and their cultures and worldviews
- Understanding the figurative language
- Understanding the emotional context
- Understanding the symbolism—though most stories can be understood on some level without this

To give careful attention, you need to create an atmosphere that allows for this. Choose a comfortable, well-lit spot. Arrange a time when you won't be disturbed by siblings, friends, parents, the telephone, etc. Try to read in blocks of at least half an hour because this allows you to get caught up in the story. Writing your thoughts down in a reading journal (discussed below) can also encourage you to pay better attention to what you're reading. The Comprehension Questions in this Guide should help as well. Please read the Notes listed with the Comprehension Questions for each section of each book, and at least read through the questions and their answers, as you finish each section. You may wish to read the Notes before reading the section of the book and then do the Comprehension Questions afterwards. This will help keep you from getting lost or confused as you read about unfamiliar places and people groups. If you have questions not addressed in the Notes, check an encyclopedia, geography book, or the Internet.

I highly recommend that you read these books at the same time as your parent, teacher, or other students (maybe a brother or sister), and discuss the books with them. You may read the books or the poems aloud together. Discuss together anything that interests, surprises, or confuses you. The Discussion Questions in this Guide can help you dig deeper into some difficult issues.

## **Reading Poetry in Translation**

Poetry is another window into the minds, and especially into the hearts, of other people. A poet writes from the depths of his or her soul, to the depths of yours.



Much of the poetry you will be reading this semester was translated into English from other languages. As Naomi Shihab Nye says in her introduction to *This Same Sky*, when people say, “How much is lost in translation!” she wants to reply, “Perhaps—but how much is gained!” What is lost in translating poems? Often the translator is not able to capture the sounds of the original—the rhythm, the alliteration, the rhymes; those are difficult to convey in another language, though if the original language and the translated language are at least related, the translator may be able to give you some of those sounds. What can be translated? The imagery, the thoughts, the feelings, the humor, the pathos, the pictures of the world. That is what Ms. Nye means; we can gain all that from poetry, even in translation. Like the novels and autobiography you will be reading this semester, poetry will give you a window into other people, other cultures, and other lands.

**There’s an enormous comfort  
in knowing we all live under  
this same sky.  
—Zia Hyder, “Under This Sky”**

I have assigned some of my favorite poems in *This Same Sky*, but I hope you will read the whole book, relishing it, treasuring it, and discovering some of your own favorites! You can read very brief biographies of all the poets included in this collection on pages 189–197 of *This Same Sky*, and see a map locating their countries on pages 198–199.

### **HOW TO READ POETRY**

Poetry can seem daunting because the vocabulary is often unfamiliar, the syntax is different from prose, and it’s filled with figurative language. But familiarizing yourself with each poem, and with some poetic terms and techniques, will help a lot.

### **VOCABULARY AND VIVID LANGUAGE**

Poetry, like the best prose, is characterized by vivid words—words that are very specific, not general. For instance, “animal” is a general word; “dachshund” is specific.” “Good” is vague; “delightful” is vivid. Vivid language appeals to all five of our senses: sight, sound, smell, hearing, and taste. In lesson 6 we will look more at the use of vivid language.

Sometimes the poet, in order to find the most vivid or concrete image he can, will use words you don’t know. In prose you can often get a good sense of the word’s meaning from its context. This can be difficult or impossible to do in poetry, because there is much less context, and the words you don’t understand will often be vital to understanding the whole. Take the time to look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary, and write them in your vocabulary notebook, to ensure you’re understanding the basic meaning of the poem. Foreign words may be defined in the notes on the page in *This Same Sky*, or in the lesson notes. You can look up place names in an atlas, encyclopedia or online, or just enjoy their unusual flavor—don’t feel that you have to look up each one.

## SYNTAX

Syntax refers to the order of words in a sentence. The grammar and syntax of poetry is often different from the grammar and syntax of prose. You may have heard the phrase “poetic license.” When people say they’re taking “poetic license,” they mean that they’re giving themselves special permission to break the rules. This comes from the way poets break the common rules of syntax. For example, whereas in prose you could write, “I went to the beach and walked barefoot on the shore,” a poet might express this same idea: “On the beach, barefoot on the shore, I walked.” Poets usually make these changes not just to be different, but to satisfy needs of rhyme or meter.

If you’re still having trouble understanding a poem after defining the unfamiliar words, you may be stuck on the unusual syntax. In this case, take the time to write a prose version of the poem. For example, here is the first stanza of “Why There are No Cats in the Forest”:

A parrot was what  
he once had on his left shoulder,  
the thought of it,  
which came long before  
the actual bird  
which never came.  
It never came.

And here is my prose version of this stanza:

He used to imagine that he was carrying around a parrot on his left shoulder, but he never really had a parrot.

This exercise doesn’t take long and can greatly increase your familiarity with the poem.

## READING ALOUD

I strongly recommend that you read poems aloud. Even poems that don’t rhyme are written with great attention to various aspects of sound, and you will probably enjoy them more if you can hear them, even if the voice you’re listening to is your own. Read poetry a bit more slowly than prose.

## MEMORIZING POETRY

I encourage you to take the time to memorize at least a poem or two each year. That way you can keep those poems with you forever and call them up whenever you want. If you have an opportunity in a school or homeschool group, or at home, recite the poem for your friends or family. Take your time with these poems, and read them repeatedly to divine their secrets. Choose your favorites, and try to find other poems by those authors.

### **Why Learn How to Write?**

Writing well is one of the most universally useful skills, so there are many pragmatic reasons to learn how to write. Teachers and professors will require it in many classes (not just English). You'll use it to send personal news to a friend across the country (or across the world), or to plead a case with your senator. Many jobs, including journalism and teaching, require strong writing skills. Throughout your life you will encounter situations in which it's important to communicate information or persuade someone; strong writing skills increase your chances of success. Learning to research and organize your thoughts will also help you in communicating orally.

There are also many personal reasons to write. Writing is an excellent way to explore your thoughts and feelings, your relationships with others, your emotional and spiritual development, and your imagination. I hope this course will encourage you in other forms of writing, whether a journal, creative writing, poetry, or letters. What you learn in this course should make all these avenues of writing more enjoyable and rewarding.

### **THE WRITING PROCESS**

For any paper you write, you need to first plan what you are going to say and organize your thoughts. I suggest you spend five days working on each paper. On the first day, pre-write. On the second day, outline or organize your thoughts; plan what you will say and how. On the third day, write your first draft of the entire paper. On the fourth day, let the paper rest; you may want to work on revising a previous paper. On the fifth day, revise your paper. If you are working with another person, have him or her then read your paper and mark corrections or suggestions; the following week you should revise the paper again, so that you can learn from their corrections.

If you are doing creative writing, such as a story or poem or journal entry, you may still find it helpful to use this five-day process. On the first day brainstorm ideas; on the second day organize them into some order; on the third day write your first draft; and on the fifth day revise. You will not need a thesis statement or outline for creative papers, though it may help to list the events for a planned story in chronological order.

#### **Day One: Pre-writing**

On the first day of working on your paper, gather ideas. Choose your general topic, and write it on a piece of paper. Write down any connected ideas that occur to you. If you are writing about a topic related to a piece of literature, as you usually will be in this course, look back through the book or poem and note all the examples you can find, anything related to your topic, and where you found it. If the book is yours, you might choose to underline or mark in the margins any examples you find, and just jot down a relevant word or two with a page number for your pre-writing. If you need to do any other research on the topic, do it during

the pre-writing phase, writing what you find and your sources. Try to put connected ideas together.

If you are writing a **PERSUASIVE PAPER**, list all the possible arguments you can think of, reasonable or not, then choose the best. Also list arguments for the opposite side, and how you would respond to them. If you are explaining how to do something, write down all the steps in the process you can think of, then arrange them in order.

If you are writing a **DESCRIPTIVE PAPER**, a **CREATIVE STORY**, or a **POEM**, list the five senses and jot down as many relevant words as you can for each. Try to add words denoting colors, shapes, numbers, sizes, and emotions, and list appropriate figurative phrases such as similes and metaphors.

If you are writing a **COMPARE-AND-CONTRAST PAPER**, try making a Venn diagram. Draw two big overlapping circles or ovals on your paper. Write the two things you are comparing in the circles. For instance, to compare marriage in American and Ibo cultures, in one circle write American marriage and in the other, Ibo marriage. Then list all the characteristics of both that you can think of, with common ones in the overlapping area of the two circles. So one circle might say, “Ibo marriage,” “multiple wives,” “husband can beat wife,” “bride-price paid,” etc. The other will include “American marriage,” “one wife,” “no dowry,” etc. The overlapping area would include anything that both have in common, such as “between man and woman,” “produce children,” “women work to help support family.” Write as many things as you can; then choose the ones that seem most important, or the ones you can best support from the book, for your paper. Remember that *compare* means “to tell how things are alike”; *contrast* means “to tell how things are different.” Include both in a compare-and-contrast paper.

At the end of this process you should have a page of ideas, thoughts, evidence, or information about your topic.

## **Day Two: Organizing**

### **TOPIC SENTENCE OR THESIS STATEMENT**

On the second day of writing, look back over your pre-writing. Choose the main idea you want to communicate. Write this idea in one clear sentence—that’s your topic sentence or “thesis statement.” Your thesis statement is not just a subject, it must be an idea about the subject. For example, “Ibo marriage” is not a thesis statement. But “Ibo marriage customs, as seen in *Things Fall Apart*, are very different from American marriage customs” is a thesis statement.

This example brings me to the second point about thesis statements: It’s crucial that your thesis statement be focused enough for the length of your paper. The above statement is appropriate for a 1- to 2-page paper. The thesis “Ibo customs are very different from American customs” could be the subject of a whole book.

## Introduction

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### OUTLINE

After you've chosen your thesis statement, choose and organize the supporting facts you want to use. This can simply mean listing your ideas in an organized way, or it may be a formal outline, as shown below.

### ORDER

Whether or not you create an outline, you must organize your information. There are many ways to do this. You can present information in chronological order, in order from least to most important (or the reverse), from least funny to funniest, from least helpful to most helpful, etc. There should be some recognizable logic to your choice. For example, a paper about a historical event would most likely be in chronological order. A process analysis paper, such as an essay on how to plant yams might start with preparing the field, then continue in the order the steps should be carried out. If you're giving tips on how to keep a bedroom neat, you might start with the most helpful tip and end with the least, while if you're giving examples of funny things that happened to you while learning how to ski, you might start with the least funny and build to the funniest. A persuasive paper might be arranged with the least persuasive argument first and the most persuasive argument, the "clincher," last. A paper showing how Egyptian culture is "relationship oriented" rather than "task oriented" would probably begin with a thesis statement, followed by three or more examples, explaining how each shows the relationship orientation of Egyptian culture, and end with a concluding statement. Choose the order that presents the information in the best manner.

Here is part of a sample outline for a short paper on the topic "Ibo and American Marriage":

- I. **Thesis Statement:** "Ibo marriage customs, as seen in *Things Fall Apart*, are very different from American marriage customs."
- II. Similarities between Ibo and American marriage customs
  - A. Both between man and woman
  - B. Both to produce children, though this is more important to Ibos generally than to most Americans
  - C. Most wives work to help support family
- III. Differences between Ibo and American marriage customs
  - A. Marriage arrangements
    1. Ibo:
      - a. arranged by family
      - b. groom's family pays bride-price
    2. American:
      - a. arranged between bride and groom
      - b. no bride-price

- B. Number of marriage partners
  1. Ibo: many wives, living in separate huts
  2. American: one wife, living with husband
- C. Treatment of wife
  1. Ibos allow men to beat wives, but discourage excess
  2. American law does not allow men to beat wives, but sometimes it happens.
  3. In the book, Okonkwo and Ekwefi seem to have a loving relationship in spite of his harshness.
- D. Divorce financially discouraged by both cultures
  1. Ibos: bride-price goes to person who was not at fault
  2. America: husband may have to pay alimony and child support

IV. **Conclusion:** While Ibo and American marriages are alike in some ways, they are very different in the way they are arranged, the number of wives allowed, the treatment of the wife, and arrangements for divorce.

More or different examples could be added to this rough outline, which is arranged by subject, with similarities first, then differences. A discussion of arranging marriages comes before a discussion of divorce. The paper could also be arranged by first describing one type of marriage, then the other, then summarizing the similarities and differences

### **Day Three: First Draft**

#### **INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH**

On the third day of the writing process, write your first draft. Each paper should start with an introductory sentence or paragraph. The introduction should catch the reader's attention and announce the paper's thesis, or at least indicate to the reader where the paper is going. Let's look at each of these in more detail.

You must catch the reader's attention to persuade him or her to continue reading your paper. While it's true that your parent or teacher has to read your papers now, that won't always be the case. Start with a snappy or intriguing first sentence whenever possible. When it is appropriate, use humor to interest your reader. Another good way to begin is with some unusual or striking information, or an anecdote or story. (An anecdote will usually push your thesis statement to later in the paper, but that's fine.) Sometimes a question can work well. Remember, whenever possible, to start with a bang. Avoid starting with a dictionary definition or a statement announcing your intention.

Somewhere in your first paragraph announce the thesis of your paper, or give the reader a good idea of where you're going. Be sure you always know what your thesis is and can express it clearly in a single sentence. If you aren't certain what the point of your paper is, your paper will wander. A good place to state your thesis is in the last sentence of your opening paragraph.

## Introduction

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Here's an example of a poor introduction:

I'm going to examine and compare Ibo and American marriage. They're alike and different in a lot of ways. Both are good in some ways and bad in some ways. I think American marriage is better. Let's look at Ibo and American marriage customs.

This is not an exciting introduction. Unless you're already interested in the subject, there's nothing to draw you into the paper. The words are bland and repetitive. It doesn't give much information. It also introduces value judgments, which might be appropriate at the end of the paper, but not here.

Here's a better introduction:

“Okonkwo's prosperity was visible in his household. He had a large compound enclosed by a thick wall of red earth. His own hut, or obi, stood immediately behind the only gate in the red walls. Each of his three wives had her own hut, which together formed a half moon behind the obi.” (pg. 14)

“Okonkwo was provoked to justifiable anger by his youngest wife, who went to plait her hair at her friend's house and did not return early enough to cook the afternoon meal. . . . when she returned he beat her very heavily.” (pg. 29)

Can there be anything in common between Okonkwo and his three wives, and an American husband and wife? How different are the marriage customs in Umuofia and in America?

This starts with interesting quotes from the book and states the thesis statement in terms of a question, which we hope the reader will want to see answered!

## CONCLUSION

Every paper needs a conclusion. This paragraph (or sentence or two, in a shorter paper) sums up everything for the reader, and (ideally) leaves the reader with one final related thought. What has the reader learned from reading your paper? What point have you proven or what information have you shared? You should be able to summarize that information in your conclusion. In the same way that your introduction needs to start with a bang so your reader will want to read more, your conclusion needs to end with a bang because your paper's ending will leave the final taste in your reader's mouth and color the whole experience. You want your reader to feel like it was worthwhile to read what you had to say.

Here's a poor conclusion:

To reiterate, in conclusion, Ibo and American marriage customs are different. I think, in my opinion, Ibo customs are very bad and rotten and I'm really, truly, glad I'm not an Ibo.

First, you don't need to say things like "to reiterate" or "in conclusion." The reader can tell that you're concluding the paper, so you don't need to say it. This paragraph is also much too informal. Avoid insulting language. Don't state that something is your opinion—trust that your reader can distinguish facts from opinions. Also, by this point in your paper, this shouldn't be just an unsubstantiated opinion, but a conclusion you've reached through analysis of facts. To say it's "just my opinion" undermines the rest of your paper. Don't pad your paper with excess or repeated words; make sure each word or phrase adds something; don't waste your reader's time. Be careful not to simply restate your thesis statement in the conclusion; it should be expanded based on the specific supporting information you have given.

Here's a better conclusion:

Marriage is important both to the Ibo and to Americans. Ibo marriages are arranged more formally, and the bride-price helps to keep marriages together. Ibo marry several wives in order to have more workers for their farms and to produce more children. Americans, instead, value marriage for the companionship and mutual support of one man and one woman, and they may or may not want numerous children. While in each culture men and women need each other, the ways that they practice marriage are quite different.

### **SUPPORTING PARAGRAPHS**

In between your introduction and conclusion will come one or more paragraphs (or sentences, if you are writing a one-paragraph essay). These paragraphs build your argument, explain your point, tell your story, etc. Every paragraph should have only one topic. Just as you need to be clear about the topic of your paper, you need to be clear in your mind about the topic of each paragraph. Every paragraph needs to relate to the topic of your paper, every sentence needs to relate to the topic of its paragraph.

You will often be asked to "give specific examples from the text" or "give evidence from the novel." Be sure that you include enough specific examples to support your thesis statement. The examples may be quotes from the book, a summary of incidents that happened in the book, or descriptions of characters from the book. They should be specific. Don't just write, "Persons X, Y, and Z all believed in God." Instead, write something like, "We can see that person X believed in God because when God told him to do such-and-such, he obeyed Him. Person Y said, on page 111, 'I trust God with my children's future,'" etc.

When moving from one paragraph to the next, include transition sentences. If your paper just hops from subject to subject, your writing will feel choppy and disjointed. Because all the topics of the individual paragraphs are related it should be easy to find links between these topics. Use these links for your transition sentences.



### **Day Five: Rewriting**

After writing your first draft, it's a good idea to let it "rest" for at least a day so that you can come back to it fresh and revise it. The biggest part of writing is reviewing and rewriting. You should go through your paper at least three times when you are rewriting it. In the first review, consider the content and organization. Are you saying everything you want to say? Are there additional arguments or pieces of information you need to add? Are any sentences off topic? Does each paragraph have a focus? Are there transition sentences? Does the paper build logically? If you are writing nonfiction, each paragraph should have a topic sentence (not necessarily the first sentence of the paragraph). Each paragraph should also have a concluding sentence, which either ties the paragraph together or leads into the next paragraph. After you've corrected these problems, do a second review for grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Finally, your third review is to tighten—look for words, phrases, even whole sentences that can be dropped without harm to the paper. Look for repeated words and substitute other words for them; using a thesaurus is helpful. Eliminate words that don't add to your meaning, such as *very*, *a lot*, *a little*, *some*, *but*, *oh*, *and*, *just*, *so*, *then*—cut them out if possible. If you have used vague words, such as *good* or *nice* or *person* or *went*, replace them with more specific words, such as *entertaining* or *kind* or *queen* or *roamed*.

Depending on your situation, someone else (a parent or teacher) may be reading your final draft. Review their comments and corrections carefully. Even if it's not required of you, I strongly recommend rewriting the paper one more time, some days later, to incorporate these changes. (If a change is suggested with which you disagree, discuss it with the person.) This is not necessary if the only corrections are a couple of commas; but if there are larger problems with the paper, rewriting will help you improve your writing ability.

### **CITING RESEARCH**

Whenever you write a research paper, you must include a bibliography and parenthetical notes. Consult a handbook or style guide for formatting instructions.

P

## The Fluidity of Language and Pronoun Confusion

Language is fluid and dynamic. American English borrows words and phrases from other languages, and exports new words (like *computer* and *Internet*) to other languages. As I have noted in Unit 2, writers from other countries speak and write in their own dialects or varieties of English. Your writing will not be exactly like theirs, but it can be enriched by the different cadences and word choices of people from other countries. Achebe writes in a simple, straightforward style, intertwining phrases and proverbs from Ibo to give depth to his writing. Arabic tends to use very long, involved, flowery sentences, but Mahfouz in *Fountain and Tomb*, narrated by a child, writes in a fairly straightforward way. His sentences still tend to be quite long, in Arabic, but the translator has broken these up into shorter sentences for us in English. Mahfouz does use many common Arabic expressions, particularly expressions related to God, which are discussed in Unit 5.

One modern example of the fluidity of English is in pronoun usage. For a long time, English grammar dictated that, whenever writing about an unspecified person, the masculine pronoun was all-inclusive. For example, the sentence “A writer needs a strong understanding of grammar if he is going to write well” was understood to apply to both male and female writers.

English is always in flux. For the past several years, this rule has been under attack, and there is currently no clear guide on how to handle it. There are several options for dealing with this problem.

### Options for Dealing with Pronouns

1. Try to write the sentence so no pronoun is needed, but without making the sentence awkward. My example sentence could be rewritten: “A writer needs a strong understanding of grammar to write well.” Do this whenever possible because it will bother no one and will often improve the sentence (this sentence is better than the first because it says the same thing in fewer words).
2. Use both the masculine and feminine pronouns: “A writer needs a strong understanding of grammar if he or she is going to write well” or “A writer needs a strong understanding of grammar if he/she is going to write well.” This method is gaining popularity, and I sometimes use it.

3. Use the second person pronoun (you) or “one”: “You need a strong understanding of grammar if you’re going to write well” or “One needs a strong understanding of grammar if one is going to write well.” This can work sometimes. For example, I could use the first of these sentences in this Student’s Guide with no problem, because this is a teaching guide, so I’m directing my comments to you, the student. Very little nonfiction, however, and less fiction, is written in second person. And “one” is usually viewed as stilted or stuffy nowadays.
4. Continue to use the traditional masculine pronoun. Some teachers will accept this, others won’t, but this is what I usually do. Be aware though, that someday you more than likely will encounter a teacher, boss, etc., who does not approve of this method; and you will have to adjust your writing accordingly.
5. Use the plural pronoun: “A writer needs a strong understanding of grammar if they are going to write well.” Some teachers find this acceptable, though others do not because it uses a plural pronoun to refer back to a singular noun.

You’ll have to make your own decisions regarding this matter, and your views on this question may change over time. Strive to make your writing understandable and beautiful, and to express exactly what is in your heart and mind—these are your responsibilities as a writer. Keep these duties foremost in your mind when you approach difficult pronoun decisions.

## How to Use This Student's Guide

### INTRODUCTION

The Introduction provides information on why reading and writing are important, basic writing guidelines, and ideas for expanding your language arts study (for example, a family reading/writing night). Refer to this Introduction throughout the year, especially the writing suggestions and instructions.

### THE LESSONS

The lessons in this Guide should be studied in order as much as possible, since each one builds on the previous lessons.

At the beginning of Lessons 1, 3, 5, and 7 is a brief biography of the author. Please read this before beginning the selection.

### The Selection

“The Selection” or “The Selections” refers to whatever works are being read for that lesson. This Guide covers three novels, selected poetry from *This Same Sky*, and an autobiography of your choice. You can probably use any unabridged edition of the novels with little or no difficulty, but be aware that page numbers refer to the edition listed in the Hewitt catalog, which should be the most recent paperback edition of the book. Some editions include a glossary of foreign words in the back of the book; I highly recommend that you refer to those glossaries as you read. If the book includes an introduction, I recommend that you read it before starting the book.

### Historical Background, Characters, Terms

Some lessons have a list historical events and people that the author mentions, either in chronological order or in the order they appear in the text. There may also be lists of characters in the books and/or foreign terms used quite often in the book. You may refer to these to help you understand unfamiliar references and the story.

### AUTOBIOGRAPHIES

For the selection for Lesson 7, you are to obtain and read an autobiography of someone from a non-Western country. You need to start working at the beginning of the course on obtaining that book. Read through the list of recommended autobiographies in Appendix A. Choose the one you want; you may want to choose several, then compare prices and availability. Note that the books vary in length and difficulty; choose one you think will be appropriate for you, from a part of the world that interests you. If you prefer, you may choose to read two autobiographies and compare and contrast them. Please read the notes in Appendix A on choosing and obtaining books.

### **While You Read**

This is a list of questions to keep in mind while reading the selection. They will help prepare you for the literary lesson that follows, as will the Lesson Preview in the sidebar

### **Perspectives**

I have included an overview of the history of literature for several countries or areas, such as “Indian Literature” and Latin American Literature.” These Perspectives are intended to give you an idea of how literature developed in that part of the world and what styles and topics have been popular there. They mention many authors, works, periods, and styles that you may want to investigate with further reading or research. Sometimes references are made in your assigned reading to past authors, works, or time periods, so it would be helpful to read this section before the assigned reading.

### **Notes and Comprehension Questions**

Every reading selection includes notes to help you better understand the selection, and short answer and multiple-choice questions to help you make sure you understand what you are reading. For the books, I recommend that you answer the questions for each section immediately after reading it. Answers to the questions are in the Teacher’s Guide.

### **Discussion Questions**

More in-depth Discussion Questions follow each set of Comprehension Questions. The discussion questions allow you to explore the issues these courses don’t teach (questions of morality, theology, philosophy, etc.), which arise naturally from these works. I encourage you to talk these issues over with your family and friends. They can make for great dinner conversation. Sometimes only a small part of the work need be read to get the context for the question, so everyone can participate without having read the whole work. Alternatively, you can summarize the salient points for everyone else. This is an excellent way to reinforce the story in your mind.

### **Literary Lessons**

With each selection, there is a Literary Lesson covering one or more topics. Examples of these literary concepts from the selection are given to show how they work, to increase your understanding of how to read deeply, and to demonstrate how to use these techniques to improve your writing. Specific chapters or pages of books are often referred to in the Literary Lesson. Review those chapters when they are discussed in the lesson.

### **Cultural Lessons**

The selections in this course come from various cultures. To better understand the plots, characters, and themes of the selections, it is helpful to be familiar with some general principles about cultures and worldviews. These ideas will also help you understand literature you may read in the future, and I hope will help you better understand your own cultural background and that of other people. For each full-length selection I have included a cultural

lesson following the literary lesson. The Notes also include some specific cultural information.

### **Writing Exercises**

The writing exercises relate to the selection or to the literary lesson. I recommend that you complete at least one writing exercise for each of the poetry lessons and at least two writing assignments for every lesson covering a book. Choose a variety of paper types (compare/contrast, poems, stories, analysis, persuasive, character analysis, etc.). Each paper should be approximately one to two pages long (except in obviously different situations, like poems). The autobiography paper counts as two papers and should be at least four pages long (typed, double-spaced).

Preview the writing exercises before you begin reading the selection. If there are exercises that interest you, keep these at the back of your mind while you read. You can also make notes or mark places in your book, to help when you are ready to write the paper. This technique is particularly useful for longer works in which you may have difficulty finding a certain passage later.

## **APPENDICES**

### **Appendix A: Autobiography Choices for Unit 4**

Booklists from which to choose an autobiography for Unit 4 are divided by country.

### **Appendix B: Project Suggestions**

Optional project suggestions provide ideas for further research and for hands-on projects related to Bible and religion, history and geography, art and music, science and nature, and language. These may be pursued for the your own interest and enjoyment or as projects for other courses. If possible, for each unit try to find people from that part of the world and ask them about their culture, beliefs, or anything else you want to learn more about. People from other countries often enjoy showing you their traditional clothing, sharing some of their special foods with you, and telling you about their home cultures, if you ask with respect and interest.

### **Appendix C: Additional Reading**

This is a list of additional books written by the authors covered in this Guide and other recommended authors from Africa and Asia. I hope you will read some of these books for your own enjoyment. If you need additional challenge in this class, I strongly encourage you to read and write about some of the books on this list.

### **Appendix D: Additional Reading for Younger Children**

The is for parents or teachers who have younger students they want to learn about the same areas of the world as older students who are studying this course.

### **Appendix E: Culture**

This is a reference for various writing assignments throughout the course.

### **Appendix F: Schedules**

This Appendix gives three schedules. The first is for completing the course in a semester, which we recommend for most students. The second is for taking a full year to finish the course. The third schedule coordinates a study of world geography, world cultures, and world missions with world literature.

## **Activities to Enhance Your Study**

### **VOCABULARY NOTEBOOK**

During your reading you will encounter words that are new to you. I recommend that you keep a vocabulary notebook for recording each word and its appropriate meaning. (Many words have more than one meaning, so just record the meaning that is indicated by context—i.e., the meaning the author is using at that point.) To further solidify the word in your mind, follow your definition with a sentence of your own using the word. This will increase your vocabulary and your understanding of the work more than simply gliding over new words.

### **READING JOURNAL**

Keep a notebook or journal, separate from your vocabulary notebook, where you record what you've read and your thoughts and feelings about it. You can also use this to record any quotes from your reading that you particularly like. This will encourage you to think more about your reading, and you'll have a record of your reactions, which can be fascinating to read months or years later. It can also inspire writing ideas. For each book or selection you read, record in your Reading Journal the book's title and author, date read, source (e.g., your own book, a library book, a selection from some other book), a sentence or two summarizing the plot or main ideas, and some personal reaction, which may be your feelings, questions, or thoughts about what you read.

### **FAMILY READING OR WRITING NIGHT**

Start a tradition in your family: Once a week everyone shares something they've read or written or both. Everyone should agree on the guidelines (Does everyone have to write something or could it just be something that was read? Is there a time or page limit? Should there be a theme each week? How much discussion, if any, should there be about each selection? Does the reader need to



explain why the selection was important to them? Etc.). Even children who can't yet read can participate by asking a parent or older sibling to read something that has been read to them, or they can dictate a story to be written down and read.

## **ORAL SUMMARIES**

If your family is agreeable, take the time over dinner each night to summarize for everyone what you've read that day. You'll find this is very helpful for memory and comprehension, and it will be a sure indicator of what you didn't understand or remember (and that you probably need to review). Also, others may have questions or comments that will make the selection even more interesting.

## **WRITING GROUP**

You may be able to form a writing group with some friends. Again, the group will need to agree on guidelines before beginning. (How often will everyone meet? How much writing is to be done in between meetings? Are there any restrictions on the type of writing? What sort of comments will be considered unwelcome? Etc.) Once the group decides on rules, meet regularly and everyone should make enough copies of their writing each time for everyone else. That way it's easy for everyone to make comments on each paper. I strongly recommend that everyone try to make as many positive comments as possible, because too many negative comments—or just a few of the wrong type—can hurt both the group and friendships. In our writing group, which was for younger students needing encouragement, we made it a rule that people could only say positive things about what was read; they had to point out specific, concrete, positive things about each paper. Of course, negative comments can also improve your writing.

## **RESEARCH PAPER**

Some students may be required to do a research paper along with this course. While you are free to choose any topic you wish, if you want to coordinate your research with the literature you are studying, I suggest the following possible topics:

- Write about some aspect of the culture or history of one of the countries whose literature you are studying in this course (Japan, Egypt, Nigeria, China, Chile, India). You will need to focus your topic, of course. Shinto Practices in Japan, or Egyptian Family Life, would be possible topics.
- Write about some aspect of imperialism or colonialism. For instance, why did the European countries develop empires in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? What were the positive and negative aspects of imperialism or colonialism? You could choose one country and find out how it became a colony, how it became free, and what has happened to it since.



## Introduction

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- Do a study on different cultures. Two excellent books are recommended in this course: *Foreign to Familiar* and *Honor and Shame*. Read one of those books and then do an analysis of your own culture and compare and contrast it with another culture, using the concepts in the book you read. If you know someone from another culture, part of your research could be interviewing that person to find out about his or her cultural values and practices. Perhaps you have grandparents or other relatives who grew up in another country and could explain their culture to you.
- Do a study on different worldviews. Read the book *Clash of Worlds*, and other books, on a worldview that interests you, such as a Hindu, Muslim, or Buddhist worldview. Write a paper explaining some aspect of that worldview (e.g. What do Hindus believe about their gods?) or comparing and contrasting some aspect of that worldview with your own.
- Research the literature of some other country. What are their traditional literary forms? How do they differ from Western literary forms? Who are their most famous authors, of the past and of today? What themes do those authors write about? How is their literature similar to, and different from, Western literature?

### **INTEGRATED STUDIES**

This course would work well integrated with world geography. Recommended books and a possible course of study from a Christian perspective, combining world geography, world literature, world cultures, and world missions, is included in Appendix F.



IT BEGAN TO  
DAWN ON ME THAT  
ALTHOUGH FICTION WAS  
UNDOUBTEDLY FICTITIOUS IT COULD  
ALSO BE TRUE OR FALSE, NOT  
WITH THE TRUTH OR  
FALSEHOOD OF A NEWS  
ITEM BUT AS TO ITS  
DISINTERESTEDNESS,  
ITS INTENTION,  
ITS INTEGRITY.

—Chinua  
Achebe in  
*Home and  
Exile*

## Unit 1—Lesson 1

### Chinua Achebe

#### The Lions Produce Their Own Historian

Chinua Achebe (CHEE-noo-ah ah-CHEH-beh) is probably the most well-known African writer, and *Things Fall Apart* is the most popular African novel. As a young man, Achebe read these words in a European novel about Africa:

We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. . . . But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were traveling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled and leaped and spun and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend (Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, chapter 2).

How do these paragraphs show Africans? Are they presented as individual, valuable people, created by God like anyone else? Or as something almost inhuman, out of man's primitive, "ugly" past? When Chinua Achebe was studying English literature at University College, Ibadan, Nigeria, around 1950, he read *Heart of Darkness* and other novels about Africa, written by Europeans. He found Africans presented as primitive, animal-like, barely human. When his class read Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson*, proclaimed by *Time* magazine in 1952 as "the best novel ever written about Africa," Achebe says, "One of my classmates stood up and told an astounded teacher point-blank that the only moment he had enjoyed in the entire book was when the Nigerian hero, Johnson, was shot to death by his British master, Mr. Rudbeck." Achebe calls the "hero" a "bumbling idiot" and an "embarrassing nitwit." As he read other Western books about Africa, he found an undercurrent of racism, "distaste, hatred, and mockery" (*Home and Exile*, pgs. 22–24). He explains this phenomenon later in the same book as the desire of the enslaver and the conqueror to justify himself, by saying that the conquered people are inefficient, primitive, foolish, subhuman. Elsewhere he proposes that the West, in its insecurity, seeks to reassure itself by comparing itself with black, evil Africa. In any case, Achebe believes that, "Until the lions produce their own historian, the story of the hunt will glorify only the hunter" (*Home and Exile*, pg. 73).



Achebe's work is a good example of what is called post-colonial literature. *The Empire Writes Back* is the title of a book about such literature. Post-colonial literature is the literature of former colonies (sometimes written while they were still colonies) in which the authors from those countries respond to the experience of colonization and express ideas that are different from the assumptions of the colonizing powers. Much of African literature has responded to colonialism and its effects on African society and traditions.

Achebe set out to write a book to "teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them." His first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, tells the story of an Ibo<sup>1</sup> man, describes his world and his traditional beliefs, and it shows the changes brought about by the arrival of white missionaries and administrators. Achebe was well-equipped for this task. He was born in Nigeria in 1930 and grew up in a Christian family. His father, Isaiah, was an evangelist and teacher for the Church Missionary Society. Chinua was educated in the CMS school in his native tongue, Ibo<sup>1</sup>, and in English. He devoured Christian and British classics. Although he only began learning English at school when he was eight years old, his friends soon called him "Dictionary" because of his knowledge of English. The British still controlled Nigeria at that time. Chinua not only learned the Christian faith at home and at school, but he learned Ibo tales, traditions, and history from his mother's stories. He describes his family this way:

1. Ibo is now called Igbo, a more accurate spelling. However, I have usually used Ibo in this Guide as that is the spelling used in *Things Fall Apart*.

## Unit 1—Lesson 1: Chinua Achebe and African Literature

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Both my parents were strong and even sometimes uncompromising in their Christian beliefs, but they were not fanatical. Their lives were ruled, I think, as much by reason as by faith; as much by common sense and compassion as by doctrine. My father's half-brother was not the only heathen in our extended family; if anything, he was among the majority. Our home was open to them all, and my father received his peers and relatives—Christian or not—with kola nut and palm-wine in that piazza, just as my mother received her visitors in the parlour. It was from the conversations and disagreements in these rooms, especially the piazza, that I learned much of what I know and have come to value about my history and culture (*Home and Exile*, pgs. 10–11).

Among other stories, Achebe learned about his great-grandfather, who, when he took the third highest title, gave out food at cooking places, which he set up all along the road for two miles. His great-grandfather's name, Osinyi, means “someone who cooks more than the whole town can eat.”

Achebe describes himself as growing up at a crossroads. His father grew up in the traditions of Igbo life before becoming a Christian. His children are more a part of international culture. Achebe sees himself as interpreting the past for those living in the present.

After completing his college degree in liberal arts, Achebe went to work in radio broadcasting, trying to help Nigerians develop a national identity. In 1958, *Things Fall Apart* was published. Achebe had sent it to a British publisher, Heinemann, who at first didn't know what to do with it. However, one daring director saw it as an opportunity to start something new and began the African Writers Series. This series has been crucial in getting many African works published and making them available to the world, and it has encouraged other publishers to begin publishing African writing. As editor of the series, Achebe was able to help and encourage many African authors.

Achebe has gone on to write other novels about the struggles of Nigeria during and after colonialism. *No Longer at Ease* (1960) shows Okonkwo's descendant dealing with bribery and corruption. In *Arrow of God* (1964), an Ibo priest struggles against colonial rulers and his own people. *A Man of the People* (1966) shows the greed, violence, and corruption of post-colonial Nigerian politicians. *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987) shows how power corrupts a strong leader who begins with good intentions. Achebe has also written nonfiction, poetry, children's stories, short stories, and other novels. He is sometimes called the “father of African literature.”

Achebe says his work, overall, has an important message:

This theme—put quite simply—is that African people did not hear of culture for the first time from the Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and beauty, that they had poetry, and above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost



LESSON

PREVIEW

**Historical fiction involves us in the lives and culture of people of a certain place and time, and it shows how historical events affect individual people.**

during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain (*Nigeria Magazine*, quoted in Ogbaa, pg. 167).

Truly, Achebe is the “lion’s historian,” showing the other side of the European “hunt” to take over Africa.

## THE SELECTION

*Things Fall Apart* is Achebe’s first, and most famous, novel. It shows the unity and diversity of Ibo (or Igbo) culture with its traditions, proverbs, stories, and relationships; and it shows the way “things fell apart” when white missionaries and administrators arrived in that area of Nigeria. Okonkwo, the hero, is a powerful, ambitious, yet insecure man. His dreams of honor and power in his clan are dashed by changes he cannot control.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

This novel takes place in the late 1800s, when the British were just beginning to take over Nigeria (which was not yet a country). In the 1600s, the British began visiting the Nigerian coast to take slaves. Slavery was abolished in the British Empire in 1807. But the British continued to trade for Nigerian groundnuts, cotton, cocoa, rubber, and palm oil. The palm oil was used in the factories of the Industrial Revolution. The British annexed Lagos in 1861 and extended their rule until in 1914 they were governing the whole “Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria.” The area they put together includes more than 250 ethnic groups with distinct languages and cultures. In 1960, Nigeria became an independent nation. There are about 20 million Ibo in southeastern Nigeria today. They tried to secede from Nigeria and form an independent nation, Biafra, in the Nigerian Civil War, 1967–70. Achebe was involved in trying to get international support for Biafra. However, Biafra lost the war and the country was reunited. The Ibo (Igbo) are the third largest people group in Nigeria, after the Hausa-Fulani in the northern areas (these are two people groups, Hausa and Fulani; but they have intermixed so much that they are often considered as one), and the Yoruba in the southwestern part of the country.

## MAJOR CHARACTERS

Since the names are unfamiliar to you, and are sometimes similar, I list the major characters here for your reference:

- Okonkwo: the main character
- Unoka: his father
- Ekwefi: one of his wives
- Ezinma: daughter of Okonkwo and Ekwefi
- Nwoye: one of Okonkwo's sons
- Ikemefuna: a hostage boy who lives for three years with Okonkwo
- Chielo: priestess of the god Agbala
- Obierika: Okonkwo's closest friend
- Uchendu: Okonkwo's uncle (his mother's brother)
- Missionaries, in order of appearance: Mr. Kiaga (African), Mr. Brown, Rev. Smith

## WHILE YOU READ

Consider these questions as you read *Things Fall Apart*:

- What does this novel show you about African history?
- What do you learn from it about the culture, society, and government of the Ibo people?
- What is positive and what is negative about Okonkwo's character?
- What is positive and what is negative about the influences of the British who come to Umuofia?
- How are the culture and values of characters in this book similar to, and different from, your own?
- What motivates the characters in this book; why do they act and react as they do?

**NOTE:** Please use the Glossary in the back of *Things Fall Apart* to look up unfamiliar words, and read the explanatory Notes on each section that accompany the Comprehension Questions in this Guide.

**NOTE:** You should already be working on obtaining an autobiography for Unit 4. See Appendix A.

P

## African Literature<sup>2</sup>

For many generations, most African “literature” was not written down; it was transmitted orally from generation to generation. Poetry was usually chanted or sung and included praise songs about chiefs and kings, historical poetry listing lineage and towns, hunters’ songs, children’s rhymes, and magic spells. People of various African civilizations also created and passed down myths, folktales, proverbs, riddles, histories, and legends of cultural heroes. According to *World Book Encyclopedia*, in Africa, “Oral literature has a role in religious ceremonies and serves to record the past, to teach morals and traditions to young people, and to glorify political leaders. It is often recited to music before family groups or larger audiences.”

African folktales are often trickster stories. In some areas a hare is the hero; in other areas, a tortoise or a spider, a man or even a god are the tricksters who cunningly oppose others and sometimes defeat themselves by being too tricky! The Uncle Remus stories about Brer Rabbit and his friends are based on these African trickster tales. Some stories are dilemma tales in which the audience has to supply the ending. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica 2003*, “A variant of the trickster tale is the escape story, in which the hero extricates himself from an impossible task by imposing an impossible condition. One such story tells how a cruel king of Benin ordered his subjects on pain of death to build a new palace but to start at the top and build downward. All were in despair until one wise old man went to the king and said that they were now ready to begin and asked him, according to tradition, to lay the foundation stone.”

Proverbs and riddles are also an important part of the African oral tradition. Proverbs are “the palm-oil with which words are eaten,” according to the Ibo. They express people’s accumulated wisdom, give a code of behavior, and enable people to communicate indirectly, without confronting or affronting people, but stating important principles. Riddles are generally statements that are a puzzle. For instance, what do you think this Yoruba riddle means: “We tie a horse in the house, but its mane flies above the roof.” (It is a picture of fire or smoke.)

Missionaries and anthropologists have recorded some African oral literature, and today Africans are also involved in preserving their heritage. Amos Tutuola, a Yoruba, has included Yoruban myths and folktales in his books, such as *The Palm-Wine Drunkard* and *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*. In 1911, the Reverend Carl Christian Reindorf, from Ghana, used oral traditions to write a history of the Gold Coast and Asante. Many modern African writers intertwine oral traditions, proverbs, and folktales with their stories and poetry, as Achebe does in his novels.

2. Much of the information in this article is from *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “African Literature,” 2003.



Some areas of Africa have had a written language and literature since early times. From at least the fourth century A.D., the Ethiopian Coptic Church used the Ge'ez language to write church liturgy, the Bible, the lives of saints, and religious poetry. Muslim areas of Africa, particularly North Africa, have a long tradition of literature written in Arabic. Since the mid-seventeenth century, poetry has been written in Swahili, a language used in much of East Africa.



In the early twentieth century, many African writers, educated by the colonial powers, began writing plays, novels, and poetry in English, French, or Portuguese. Using these European languages gave them a much wider market for their work and easier access to publishers and printers. (See “International Writing in English” in Unit 2.) The first known English account by an African is *The Interesting Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa, the African*, published in 1789. It is an autobiography of an Igbo man who describes his life in Africa (Benin) and his enslavement and emancipation. Some African writers have chosen in recent years to write in their own languages, including Kikuyu, Hausa (of northern Nigeria and Niger), Amharic (of Ethiopia), Shona (of Zimbabwe), Somali, Swahili, Yoruba (of Nigeria), and Zulu. Africa is a continent of many countries, languages, and people groups. These African writers believe that writing in their own languages may help their people and their countries to develop their identities as nations that recognize and appreciate their unique cultures and histories.

Some of the earliest modern African literature was a reaction to colonial rule. Leopold Senghor, a poet from Senegal, joined with black writers from the French Caribbean in the 1930s and began the movement called *Négritude*, which protested French colonial rule and the idea that Africans should be assimilated into European culture. They claimed that Western culture was soulless and out of step with nature, and called black Africans “the leaven that the white flour needs.” Senghor later became the first president of Senegal. Mongo Beti and Ferdinand Oyono, from Cameroon, wrote novels aiming to explode the “French colonial myth” that stated that the people of the French colonies were simply black Frenchmen, not Africans under colonial rule. One factor that helped lead to the independence of Angola was the militant poetry, in Portuguese, of Mario Pinto de Andrade and Agostinho Neto.

Much modern African literature focuses on cross-cultural conflict. It may explore the differences between traditional culture and Westernized modern culture and the alienation that young people, educated in Western ways, experience from their families and homes. Some of Achebe’s novels explore this theme. Other modern African literature focuses on religious conflicts

between tribal religions and Christianity. James Thiong'o Ngugi of Kenya was the first East African to write a major novel in English. *Weep Not, Child* tells the story of a boy who puts his hope in education and the Christian God; but as he grows up during the violence of the Mau Mau War, he gradually loses his faith. Ngugi later adopted his Kikuyu name, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, and began to write in his native language, Kikuyu (or Gikuyu). In Ngugi's novel *The River Between*, Waikayi, the son of a tribal "seer," tries to unite the Christians in his clan with those who follow traditional customs. Traditional Gikuyus consider circumcision for both boys and girls a necessary passage to adulthood, but Christians in their community consider it a sin. In the end, there is a "river" between the two; no common ground can be found. Tsitsi Dangarembga's novel *Nervous Conditions* shows a black African girl who gets the opportunity to study in white mission schools and thus improve her condition in life. However, she finds herself more and more alienated from her family and her roots and begins to question who she is. Two Muslim Sudanese authors, Sheikh Hamidou Kane and Yambo Ouologuem, wrote philosophical novels, partly in the form of dialogues, comparing Islam and Western materialism, and comparing Christian compassion and traditional autocracy.

Race relations are an important theme in many places, especially South Africa. Writers expressed their opposition to apartheid (rigid legal separation of races) through autobiographies, novels, short stories, and poetry. Some of the many black South African authors are Bloke Modisane, Alfred Hutchinson, Alex La Guma, Mazisi Kunene, and the playwright Lewis Nkosi who wrote *The Rhythm of Violence*. Many writers went into exile, but continued to write scathing indictments of apartheid until it was abolished in 1991.

Another important theme of African literature today is the stresses within urban African society, especially political corruption and inefficiency in African governments. Ben Okri, a Nigerian novelist who uses "magic realism," Chinua Achebe (in *A Man of the People* and *Anthills of the Savannah*), and the Ghanaian Ayi Kwei Armah in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, all express disillusionment with modern Africa. The first black African to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, in 1986, was the Nigerian Yoruba playwright Wole Soyinka. Some of his plays are satirical and light, mocking pompous, Westernized schoolteachers and clever, grasping preachers. Others are serious and even tragic, showing flaws in modern Nigerian society and government and attacking colonialism. He uses Yoruba folklore and religion as well as Western ideas in his plays. Soyinka spent two years in jail for trying to stop the Nigerian civil war in 1967. His autobiography, about his childhood, is listed in Lesson 7 of this Student's Guide.

Some African writers focus on women's issues. *Second-Class Citizen*, written by Buchi Emecheta from Nigeria, tells the sad story of an Ibo woman who moves to England to live with her student husband. She faces both

discrimination from English society and the oppressive demands of her Nigerian husband; she feels that she is a “second-class citizen” both in her Nigerian life at home and in British society outside her home. Bessie Head, from Botswana, wrote *The Collector of Treasures and other Botswana Village Tales*, which ranges from folklore to modern stories. Some stories show the tragedies of modern life, such as a boy killed by a truck representing “progress, development.” Others show the consequences, especially for women, of a society in which sexual promiscuity is accepted. Some show the results of deep poverty, the effects of witchcraft, and conflicts between various forms of Christianity and tribal beliefs. Flora Nwapa’s novel *Efuru*, based on an old folktale of a woman “chosen by the gods,” is the tragic story of an Ibo woman named Efuru. Efuru’s first husband deserts her, then her daughter dies, Efuru remarries, her husband takes a second wife because she does not bear children, she becomes ill and is accused of adultery, and finally she leaves her husband. Like Achebe, Nwapa includes customs and proverbs, and she also includes the continuing practice of men and women taking titles. Again, the effects of grinding poverty and of men’s unfaithfulness are vividly shown. Fauziya Kassindja’s autobiography *Do They Hear You When You Cry?* protests both the custom in Togo of female circumcision and the difficulties she faced seeking asylum in the United States.

Other novelists besides Achebe have written historical novels about their past from their perspective. Solomon Mutsaers has written novels in the Shona language about Zimbabwe’s struggle for independence. The Ethiopian writers Abbe Gubanna and Birhanu Zarihun have written historical fiction about the reign of their nineteenth-century emperor Tewodros II, who attempted, unsuccessfully, to unify and modernize Ethiopia. Zulu novelists R. R. Dhlomo, Leonard Mncwango, and Muntu Xulu have written about Zulu kings and prophets of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the Zulu king Cetshwayo who resisted the British and wiped out a British regiment. (The movie *Zulu Dawn* graphically shows this battle.)

In Achebe’s words,

Everywhere new ways to write about Africa have appeared, reinvesting the continent and its people with humanity, free at last of those stock situations and stock characters, ‘never completely human,’ that had dominated European writing about Africa for hundred of years. The new literature that erupted so dramatically and so abundantly in the 1950s and 1960s showed great variety in subject matter, in style of presentation and, let’s face it, in levels of skill and accomplishment. But there was one common thread running through it all: the thread of a shared humanity linking the author to the world of his creation; a sense that even in the most tempting moments of grave disappointment with this world, the author remains painfully aware that he is of the same flesh and blood, the same humanity as its human inhabitants” (*Home and Exile*, pg. 49).



## NOTES AND COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

### Chapter 1–3

#### NOTES

**Titles:** (1<sup>3</sup>) Ibo men gained honor and influence in their community by taking “titles,” such as Ozo, Idemili, Omalo, and Erulu. When they reached a certain level of wealth, they would host feasts with music and dancing, make sacrifices, and give away much of that wealth, gaining instead a title. This was a way of redistributing wealth in the community, and honored those who were diligent and generous. It was very rare to take a fifth title, which made a man a king; he had to pay the debts of everyone in the community. A person with the first title could mark his big toe with chalk, as Okoye does in chapter 1. In chapter 11 of Flora Nwapa’s novel *Efuru*, set in twentieth century Nigeria, a poor man takes a title, using up money that should have repaid a debt or paid for the next season’s plowing, because, he says, “You know how much I was humiliated by the members of my age-group who took titles.” His wife rebukes him and asks, “Are you richer now that you have taken the title? Is it a sin to be poor? Are the members of your age-group who laughed at you your *chi*?” (your destiny; see below). Ibo women can also take titles.

**Cowries:** (1) seashells used as money.

**Yams:** (1) The yams referred to are not the orange, sweet potato-like yams eaten in America. African yams are white inside, starchy and stringy, and are huge; they may be a foot long or more. They can be roasted, fried, boiled, or pounded into a mash, called *foo-foo*. *Coco-yams* are a brown root vegetable also called “taro.” *Cassava* is a shrub with thick roots that is also called “manioc.”

**Polygamy:** (1) “had just married his third wife”: The Igbo considered marriage and raising a family important for everyone. The more people in a household, the more workers there were for the fields; thus more food, and therefore wealth, could be produced. A wife would sometimes even bring a second wife to her husband, to increase their prosperity and to increase both his and her prestige in the community. The first wife shared in the husband’s titles and presided over the household. In Flora Nwapa’s novel *Efuru*, about modern Nigeria, a wife who cannot have children helps her husband find a second wife. She tells herself, “What is wrong with his marrying a second wife? It is only a bad woman who wants her husband all to herself.”

**Medicine:** (2) magic or magical objects.

**Umuofia kwenu, “United Umuofia”:** (2) The Ibo did not have a central government, but lived in self-governing communities, combined into loose confederations averaging about 5000 people. Villages were bound together by common religious shrines, like the Oracle, and by markets held every four or eight days. (Their week was four days long.) This shout is a reminder of the unity of the community. In traditional African culture, each person finds value as being part of a community that extends back through previous generations and will extend on to future generations. David Burnett, in *Clash*

3. Numbers in parentheses refer to chapters.

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of *Cultures*, says, “The person finds individual value in the assumption, ‘I am, because I participate,’ ‘I am, because we are.’ This contrasts markedly with the secular worldview, which assumes, ‘I can reason therefore I am.’ This assumption leads to the individualistic focus within secular cultures . . . [In Africa,] Important decisions are made by the community as a whole and not by individuals” (pgs. 62–3).

**Chi:** (3) A kind of life-force, or a person’s individual fate. Also defined as spirit-double, guardian angel, guiding spirit, or personal god. In the video interview, *Chinua Achebe: Africa’s Voice*, Achebe describes *chi* as each person’s “god-agent” that may have created him, that travels with him, and is responsible for whatever happens to him. He says that a person about to come into the world chooses what kind of life he will live, and his *chi* is a witness to that choice. Then if he wants to do something and his *chi* is in agreement, it will happen easily, but if his *chi* is not in agreement (meaning he wants to change his mind about what he originally chose), it will be difficult. But he says that if you feel strongly enough about something, and say “yes” to it strongly, your *chi* will agree. For instance, a person who agreed before birth that he would not have children, will have a hard time having children, but eventually, if he wants it badly enough, he will succeed. Achebe says this concept makes the Ibo very democratic, as each person has his own *chi*, his own element of god, standing beside him. Achebe’s name Chinua is short for Chinualumogu, “My spirit (*chi*) come fight for me.”

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. List at least five characteristics of Okonkwo that you observe in these chapters.
2. List at least five characteristics of Okonkwo’s father, Unoka.
3. Why was Okonkwo so determined to be different from his father in every way?
4. How could you best describe the government of Umuofia, as it appears in chapter 2?
  - a. monarchy, with one man in control
  - b. oligarchy, with a council of a few men in control
  - c. democracy, with each man having a voice in government
  - d. anarchy, each person does as he or she pleases
  - e. republic, with elected representatives governing
5. Which of the following choices describe Ibo religion, based on chapter 3?
  - a. monotheistic, worshipping one God
  - b. polytheistic, worshipping many gods
  - c. animistic, worshipping natural forces
  - d. worshipping ancestors
6. What do the people of Umuofia believe their power is based on?
7. Agbala is the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves. On what matters is she consulted in chapters 2 and 3?
8. What is involved in hospitality in Umuofia? Does it appear to have a standard structure, or is it informal?
9. The people of Umuofia made their living by agriculture. What did the men grow? What did the women grow?

## Chapters 4–7

### NOTES

**Twins:** (7) Many African cultures regarded the birth of twins as evil. The Ibo believed that the birth of twins was somehow abnormal and excessive. The twins would be left in the forest to die, and the mother would go through various rituals to try to prevent her from having twins again. The birth of twins was considered to be an offense against Ala, the earth goddess, who was in charge of fertility. The Ibo believed that the whole community would be harmed if the twins were kept. One of the best things the missionaries and the colonial government did was to stop the murder of twin babies.

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. The following events took place in the regular cycle of the year in Umuofia. Put them in order by putting a number in front of each:  
  
\_\_\_\_ Week of Peace  
\_\_\_\_ Planting other crops (maize, melons, beans) at beginning of rainy season  
\_\_\_\_ Season between harvest and planting (fixing houses, tapping palm trees, locusts may come) [Also called harmattan—dry, dusty season]  
\_\_\_\_ Staking yams and weeding crops during rainy season  
\_\_\_\_ Harvest (digging up yams, gathering firewood)  
\_\_\_\_ Clearing bush for farms by cutting and burning  
\_\_\_\_ Feast of the New Yam (sacrifices, feasting, wrestling)  
\_\_\_\_ Preparing and planting seed-yams  
\_\_\_\_ Heavy rains
2. From what you have read so far, what could shame a person in Ibo society?
3. What things does Okonkwo avoid, because he thinks they show weakness?
4. In chapter 4, what crime does Okonkwo commit, and what does he have to do? Who was the crime against?
5. Ikemefuna at the beginning is very lonely for his family. What position does he come to hold in Okonkwo's family?
6. What is the condition of Okonkwo's gun? Why does he shoot at his wife?
7. How are events announced in Umuofia, which has no clocks?
8. How would you describe Okonkwo's family life?
9. On what occasions so far have we seen the nine villages of Umuofia united?
10. What two examples of the darkness within the Ibo traditional religion do we see at the end of chapter 7?

## Chapters 8–9

### NOTES

**Bride-price:** (8) Many cultures of the world require a dowry or bride-price for marriage. In some places, such as India, the dowry is money that the bride brings into the marriage or to the groom's family. This custom was followed in parts of Europe also, until the twentieth century. In other cultures, such as Arab cultures today and the Ibo culture

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described here, the groom's family pays the bride's family a bride-price for the bride. In Umuofia, if the bride left the groom or behaved badly, her family or her new husband would have to repay the bride price to the groom. However, if he behaved badly, she could leave him without paying the money back. So it was costly for either of them to be unfaithful or mistreat the other. In chapter 8, the bride's family and the groom's family negotiate a bride-price by passing a bundle of sticks back and forth, with each stick representing a bag of cowries, used as money.

**Ogbanje, iyi-uwa:** (9) The *Ibo* explained infant mortality with a belief in the *ogbanje* (“come and go”) child, a wicked spirit who was born into the world as an affliction, only to die soon, then come back and die again. They saw it as a curse or a punishment on the parents. They believed the cycle could be broken by a witch-doctor, who would mutilate the child after it died so that it would not want to come back again. The *iyi-uwa* was a talisman that the child supposedly buried so it could come back again after it died.

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. How does Okonkwo feel after he has helped to kill Ikemefuna?
2. Why does Okonkwo not believe that the dead Ogbuefi Ndulue could have been a strong man?
3. How do the Umuofians negotiate a bride-price? How is this different from two other clans mentioned?
4. Why do you think rumors say white men have no toes?
5. What had happened to Ekwefi before Ezinma's birth?
6. Why is Ekwefi so terrified when Ezinma has *iba* (probably malarial fever)? What does Okonkwo do?

### **Chapters 10–12**

#### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Chapter 10 shows a court case judged by the *egwugwu*, Ibo elders dressed up as the spirits of their ancestors. How do they get the facts in the case? What do they rule? Does the ruling seem just to you?
2. The priestess takes Ezinma on a nighttime journey around the villages and to Agbala's cave. How do her parents react? What does this show you about them?
3. What does Ekwefi fear when she follows Ezinma and Agbala?
4. In chapter 11, as she heads toward the caves, what names does Chielo call her god?
5. In chapter 12, how is the wedding celebrated?

### **Chapters 13–14**

#### NOTES

**Ancestors and death:** (13) Chapter 13 says, “The land of the living was not far removed from the domain of the ancestors. There was coming and going between them, especially at festivals and also when an old man died, because an old man was very

close to the ancestors. A man's life from birth to death was a series of transition rites that brought him nearer and nearer to his ancestors."

David Burnett, in his discussion of "the traditional worldview" in *Clash of Worlds*, says, "Some aspect of the ancestor's soul is transmitted to make" [the individual] "the person who he is, and as such he has a responsibility to ancestors. He is only because they were. The ancestors are therefore superior to him, and every person has a responsibility to his or her ancestors. Death is not the end. It is the change of existence in which the person moves from the world of the living to become a part of the world of the ancestors" (pg. 61).

**"So I shall ask you to come again the way you came before":** (13) The Ibo believed that each child was a reincarnation of part of an ancestor's spirit. When the person died, sacrifices had to be offered to cleanse his soul, so that it could rejoin the other part of that spirit in the spirit world, and later be reincarnated again.

"A second burial rite enables him to rejoin the other half of his spirit in the spirit world, thus making him a whole ancestor again, and ready to be reincarnated in the future" (Ogbaa, pg. 133).

**Defilement and Cleansing:** (13) Making something unclean, impure, shameful. Western culture has lost the emphasis on ceremonial cleanness and avoiding defilement, but the Bible has a great deal to say about it, especially in Leviticus and Numbers. In the Bible, defilement could come from many sources, including killing someone in war, touching a dead body, and idolatry. Bloodshed, adultery, sacrificing children to idols, and other sins could make the whole land unclean. Cleansing from defilement could be made by sacrifices, ceremonial washing, or sometimes exile. In Ibo society, the following were some of the abominations against the earth goddess, bringing defilement: giving birth to twins, murder, adultery, suicide, incest, and rape. In Ibo culture, cleansing was performed by animal sacrifices (or even human sacrifices) and offerings to the gods, burning the offender's home, and exile. Denial of burial was another punishment for offenses against the earth goddess, as in the case of Okonkwo's father.

**Exile:** (13) In cultures where identity comes from being part of a community, the ultimate punishment may be exile; exclusion from the community makes a person feel that he is "nobody," without value or identity.

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Okonkwo and his family suddenly face a huge change. Why?
2. Why did the Ibo believe a person who had committed murder, even accidentally, had to be exiled, and his possessions burned?
3. Okonkwo is depressed and discouraged when he has to leave all he has accomplished and go to his mother's village. How does Okonkwo's uncle, Uchendu, explain to him the importance of his motherland?
4. "For whom is it well, for whom is it well? There is no one for whom it is well." Why does Uchendu quote this song to Okonkwo?
5. So far, the book has shown us many traits that the Ibo value highly. Which traits, out of the following, would you say they value most?



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|------------------|--------------------|
| a. courage       | g. kindness        |
| b. gentleness    | h. strength        |
| c. generosity    | i. humility        |
| d. thrift        | j. social standing |
| e. unity         | k. hard work       |
| f. individualism | l. restfulness     |
6. The author says, “Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.” Proverbs are obviously a very important part of communication in Ibo culture. They are used to communicate indirectly rather than directly. Choose two or more of the following proverbs used in the book, and tell what you think they mean. You may give an English equivalent if you can think of one.
- “A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.”
  - “Eneke the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.”
  - “A man who pays respect to the great paves the way for his own greatness.”
  - “Looking at a king’s mouth, one would think he never sucked at his mother’s breast.”
  - “Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble.”
  - “When a man says yes his *chi* says yes also.”
  - “They called him the little bird *nza* who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi*.”
  - “When a mother-cow is chewing grass its young ones watch its mouth.”
  - “A man who makes trouble for others is also making it for himself.”
  - “If one finger brought oil it soiled the others.”

### Chapters 15–18

#### NOTES

**“Abame has been wiped out”:** (15) This fictional incident is probably based on a true incident that occurred in 1905. A white man, Dr. Stewart, on a bicycle trip, made a wrong turn and ended up in an Ahiara village where he was supposedly killed and eaten. According to a later investigation, the people of the village thought he was a ghost, and not a man. Soldiers came a month later and killed 19 people from that village and a neighboring village, and confiscated all their guns. No one knows whether the villages were actually destroyed. This was an example of “collective punishment,” which Europeans often used against Africans; rather than trying to identify a guilty person, they shot a number of people, and destroyed many homes, in retaliation for an offense. Dr. Stewart’s death also provided a justification for a later British expedition against native people.

**Iron horse:** (15) bicycle.

**“Myself” or “My buttocks”:** (16) The Ibo (or Igbo) language is a tonal language, like Chinese. Whether you say a syllable on a high or low note, with your voice going down or going up, changes the meaning of the word. The word *ike* can mean strength or buttocks, depending on the pronunciation of the tones. The translator spoke a slightly different dialect of Ibo than the people of Mbanta did, and so used the tones differently, to the great entertainment of the people of Mbanta.

**“They asked who the king of the village was”:** (17) The British often governed by controlling the king or headman of a village. They were confused by the fact that the Ibo did not have kings; that made it more difficult for the British to control them.

**Ancestor Worship:** (17) “He saw himself and his fathers crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice . . .” The Ibo believed that their ancestors’ spirits prowled around, looking after their descendants’ welfare. A man would pour out a libation (a drink offering) before drinking his palm wine, and he would give a piece of kola nut in the ancestors’ names, asking for protection and guidance. The Ibo also offered animal sacrifices in the names of their departed ancestors.

### COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. (15) Achebe has spent about 2/3 of the book setting up for us Ibo society before the coming of the white man. White men have been mentioned once in chapter 8, but only as a kind of myth. How do they suddenly become very real to Okonkwo and his friends?
2. (15) What did the Oracle of Abame warn about the white men?
3. (16) Re-read chapter 16. What did the missionary and his interpreter say that the Ibo people found offensive or ridiculous? What did some of the Ibo find attractive? Why?
4. (17) Why is Okonkwo so frightened about Nwoye’s becoming a Christian?
5. (18) When one of the Christians, Okoli, supposedly kills the sacred python, what does the village do? Why? What happens to Okoli?
6. What kind of people are attracted to the missionaries so far? Why do you think these people are interested in the “new” religion?

## **Chapters 19–21**

### NOTES

**Mr. Brown:** (21) It appears that the good missionary Mr. Brown is based on a well-respected missionary named G. T. Basden, who diligently investigated the customs and religion of the Ibo among whom he ministered.

**“Breaking up and falling apart”:** (21) According to *Clash of Worlds*, traditional worldviews, such as the Ibo worldview, work best in societies that are not in contact with other cultures. Contact with foreign cultures can cause people to question their traditions and their elders. Their world “falls apart,” and they may adopt one of the major world religions, abandoning the traditional beliefs that were only relevant to their society when it was isolated and they thought their society was “the center of the world.”

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

1. (19) How is the importance of family unity stressed in chapter 19?
2. What five institutions has the white man brought to Umuofia?
3. (20) What criticisms are made against the British government?
4. (21) What positive things is the missionary Mr. Brown doing in the community?
5. (21) Summarize Ibo beliefs about Chukwu and the lesser gods.
6. (21) In what ways so far is the clan “breaking up and falling apart”?

**Chapters 22–25**

**NOTES**

**District Commissioner sending “his sweet-tongued messenger”:** (23) Sadly, this fictional meeting was based on actual practice at the time. “. . . as early as 1900 a Major Gallaway wrote to Sir Ralph Moor . . . ‘The practice of calling chiefs to meetings and then seizing them and of calling in guns to mark and then destroying them has resulted in a general distrust of the government and its policy.’” (*Achebe’s World*).

**COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS**

1. (22) How do Reverend Smith and Enoch bring about a crisis between the Christians and the rest of the village?
2. (22) How does the village react to what they see as desecration?
3. (23) What injustices do the District Commissioner and the court messengers (*kotma*) commit?
4. (24) At this point, at the beginning of chapter 24, what do you think and feel about “the great queen,” “peace and good government” that the District Commissioner talks about? What do you think Okonkwo and the other elders think of them?
5. (24) In chapter 24 Umuofia meets, as in chapter 2. How is this meeting similar to, and how is it different from, that earlier meeting?
6. (25) What does Okonkwo do at the end of chapter 24, and what does he do afterwards? Why?
7. (25) Ironically, Okonkwo, who spent his life afraid of being shamed like his father, has now defiled the land by his death and will have a shameful burial, as his father did. Who does Obierika blame? Why?
8. In chapter 13 Okonkwo accidentally “defiles” his community by killing someone from his clan. How is Okonkwo’s defilement of his community in chapter 25 different from the earlier one? Do you think Achebe is really saying that the white men have defiled Umuofia? Why or why not?





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Achebe, while trying to show us the positive aspects of Ibo culture, also shows us negative aspects. He said, “The question is how does a writer re-create the past? Quite clearly there is a strong temptation to idealize it—to extol its good points and pretend that the bad never existed. This is where the writer’s integrity comes in. . . . The credibility of the world he is attempting to re-create will be called into question and he will defeat his own purpose if he is suspected of glossing over inconvenient facts. We cannot pretend that our past was one long, technicolor idyll. We have to admit that like other people’s pasts ours had its good as well as its bad side” (*Nigeria Magazine*, quoted in Ogbaa, pg. 2). Do you think Achebe has succeeded in giving a balanced picture of Ibo culture? What, in your opinion were some positive and negative characteristics of Ibo culture, as Achebe shows it, before the white man’s arrival? Consider government, marriage and family, cultural values, hospitality, entertainment, war, religious beliefs and practices, music, food and clothing. Are some of these features ungodly, and some godly? Are some of these areas neutral?
2. What impression does the book give you of the British colonial government? How was it harmful to the Ibo people? Do you think colonialism did anything good for the Ibo people? If so, what?
3. Some people have said that Okonkwo is like a tragic hero of Western literature. He begins in prosperity, ends in tragedy, and is brought down by a tragic flaw and by “fate.” Do you agree? If so, what do you think his tragic flaw was? Was there any point in the novel where he could have acted differently and not ended up as he did, or do you think his ending was foreordained?
4. What did people in this novel value most? What were they trying to attain or achieve? How did their values affect their actions? How were their values similar to and different from your own values, or the values of the culture in which you live?

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LITERARY LESSON: HISTORICAL FICTION

A historical novel is a story that brings to life some time period and place of the past. It may focus on or include real people and events, or it may place only fictional characters in that period. It attempts to re-create the culture, society, and everyday life of the time in a way that enables the reader to experience that period. What impact did historical events have on ordinary people living then? How did those people think, feel, and act? How did they speak, where did they live, what did they eat, how did they treat each other? How were they different from us, and how were they like us? A historical novelist attempts to answer these questions. A good historical novelist generally does in-depth research, using primary sources (that is, writings or stories of people who lived at that time, rather than secondary sources that are written about that time). The novelist tries to write a story that is interesting in itself, but is also realistic for the time period, with fully-developed characters who think and act as people of that era might have. They should still be characters we can identify with in some ways, and we may gain insights from the story that are applicable to any time and place.

How does historical fiction differ from history or biography? In a history or biography, all the characters are real people, and all the events really happened (though the author gives his or her own perspective on those people and events). In historical fiction, the author may use real people and events, or he may change those people and events in some way. Usually he adds people and events that are fictional, but which could have existed in that time and place. Achebe uses some real events and characters which he modified, perhaps to suit his plot better, or perhaps because we don't know all the details about those real characters and events. (Some of those events and characters are noted in this Student's Guide, such as the missionary G. T. Basden who appears to have been a model for Mr. Brown, and the incident of Dr. Stewart's death, which seems to have been the model for the massacre at Abame in *Things Fall Apart*.) Sometimes Achebe has combined several events or people into one character. The D.C. and his actions are probably based on a number of British D.C.'s and their actions. In this way Achebe could include specific actions directed toward his fictional characters, but still be faithful to the historical record.

A writer of historical fiction may use all fictional characters, as Achebe does, or may use fictional characters for the main character or supporting characters, interacting with some real characters. This can make the story more interesting or entertaining. For instance, in Robert Lawson's work of children's historical fiction, *Ben and Me*, the author invents a mouse named Amos who is supposedly Benjamin Franklin's friend and adviser. Franklin's inventions and experiments are historical; the mouse and his contributions are not. This addition of a mouse as a main character makes the story attractive and fun for children. Other authors may use children as the main fictional characters, interacting with adult real characters. The theory is that children prefer to read about someone close to their own age, therefore they will be more involved in a story about children. Do you agree? Do you prefer to read about people around your own age, or about people substantially older or younger than you are? In children's historical fiction, authors generally leave out material they consider inappropriate for children; perhaps



gory war scenes, or a historical person's not-so-heroic character traits and actions. They may want to focus on the good aspects of the person and events, to give children models to live by.

Sometimes authors create characters because they want to talk about ordinary, everyday people of a time period rather than about the people who were famous, whose lives we know more about. They may have an idea for a type of character whose characteristics were either encouraged or discouraged in that time period and want to develop that character by putting him or her in various situations that might have occurred. This is what authors do with any kind of fiction; historical fiction gives them a specific time and place in which to do it.

An author might want to write about a specific theme, or give a different perspective on historical events, so he or she invents characters and events that express that idea and perspective. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe is trying to show us history through the eyes of Ibo leaders, rather than giving the perspective of white leaders and visitors that had been shown in British history books and novels. The character of Okonkwo, with his extreme energy and courage, helps us see how the changes of colonialism affected people who were very tied to Ibo traditions and values.

Usually all the dialogue in historical fiction is the author's creation, though occasionally an author may include a famous speech or saying of a historical person. Should characters speak in exactly the same style as people used in that time period? Obviously Okonkwo and his friends would have spoken in Ibo, which we do not understand. However, Achebe has tried to give us the flavor of the Ibo language by his sentence structure and use of proverbs and images. You probably would not want to have characters in a medieval novel speaking in Middle English, which your readers would not understand. However, you could use sentence structure and expressions that would give their speech a medieval flavor. You would avoid modern slang and expressions that would sound out of place. To find out how people spoke in a certain time period, consult references or read a primary source. For instance, in writing a medieval story, you could read Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and look for words and expressions for your characters to use.<sup>4</sup> E. L. Konigsburg, in her novel *A Proud Taste for Scarlet and Miniver*, about Eleanor of Aquitaine, includes words like *bailey*, *frail*, *bedchamber*, *master-at-arms*, *vassal*, and *homage*. These are not difficult words, but words seldom used today. While she writes with an informal style, she does not use contractions, such as "don't," which would sound out of place in the medieval language of kings and queens.

The same is true if you write a story set in another culture or country; include appropriate words and expressions. In the books you will be reading this semester, you will find that the translators and authors have often included some foreign words, perhaps because they are difficult to translate (since any given language has specific words for things other languages do not have words for, such as *chi* and *egwugwu* in Ibo), or perhaps because, repeated, they give the flavor of the language, such as the use of the word "Allah" for God in the book *Fountain and Tomb*.

4. Use those expressions sparingly or your readers will not understand the story.

Achebe has written a historical novel set in a time when Western influences were just beginning to affect the Ibo people. Much of the book takes place before the arrival of the English. Achebe takes the time to draw in detail a picture of a complex, rich, but flawed society (as all societies in the world are flawed, in different ways). On a surface level, he shows the clothing, food, and daily occupations of the people of Umuofia. He shows a democratic government, in which decisions are made by consensus, based on reason and tradition. On a deeper level, Achebe presents a society held tightly together by ties of kinship, respect for elders (including those who have died), and mutual responsibility. This society has a system of “titles” that encourages hard work and generosity. Their religious beliefs seek to understand and propitiate a world of unpredictable spirits. Achebe presents the complexity of a society in which there are creative people like Unoka who value art and music and who make people laugh, as well as strong, tough warriors like Okonkwo. He also shows the difficulties of women in this culture, who may share their husbands with other wives, who may be beaten for the slightest excuse, and who are sold for a bride-price; yet he also shows loving husbands and fathers. He mentions the suffering of a woman who kept giving birth to twins, who were “thrown away” in the forest because of the teachings of her traditional religion; she turns to Christianity for hope. Achebe says in the video interview *Chinua Achebe: Africa’s Voice* that he is presenting a portrait of a culture, not a criticism of it. He believes that Umuofian society suffered partly because of the way they treated their women.

**Perhaps down in his heart  
Okonkwo was not a cruel man.  
But his whole life was  
dominated by fear, the fear of  
failure and of weakness.—  
*Things Fall Apart*, pg. 13.**

We should evaluate historical fiction as we would evaluate any piece of literature: according to how well-written it is, whether it has an interesting plot based on a valid conflict, whether the characters are realistic and three-dimensional, etc. In addition, we need to consider how historically accurate it is; Has the author faithfully re-created the world as it was in that time and place? Are the characters actually motivated by values common to people at that time? Poorer historical fiction may have characters who seem to be modern Americans in their thinking and goals and culture, transported into foreign-looking places and given foreign costumes. When you read historical fiction, evaluate how much the characters seem to be motivated by the cultural values people had in that place at that time. Of course the characters should be individuals as well, with their own strengths and weaknesses. Achebe has done a masterful job of re-creating a society that is historically accurate and whose members share Ibo traditional values, yet are unique individuals. Since many aspects of that Ibo society still exist today, Achebe had the advantage of experiencing some of what he described!

When you are writing your own historical fiction, you will want to do research from general sources such as history books as well as material that was written during that time. Be careful that you do not include anachronisms, things that are in the wrong time, such as inventions or styles from a later period than the time you are writing about. For instance, a quick check in the encyclopedia, under “tomato,” tells me that tomatoes were brought to Europe from Latin

America in the mid-1500s, and were not widely accepted as a food in Europe until the 1800s. So I wouldn't have the hero of my story set in Italy in the 1400s eating spaghetti with tomato sauce! If you are writing about another part of the world and you know someone from that area, ask them your questions, and if possible have them read your story and tell you anything they see as out of place. You can do the same if you are writing a story set in the recent past, such as the time of your grandparents; they can check the story for you and tell you what doesn't fit. Try to make your fictional world as similar as you can to the real world of that time, place, and people group.

## **CULTURAL LESSON: CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS IN LITERATURE**

Achebe, in re-creating pre-colonial Ibo society for us, presents complex and orderly ways that Ibo people relate to one another. Many of these characteristics are found in cultures around the world today, but some are very different from the emphases of Western culture. Let's look at one of the interactions in the book more carefully.

In chapter 1, Okoye goes to Unoka to ask him to repay a debt. Unoka is at home playing his flute. He immediately gets up and shakes hands with Okoye, who rolls out his goatskin and sits down. Unoka goes in and gets a kola nut, some alligator pepper, and chalk. They pass the kola back and forth for a while, arguing over who is going to honor the other by having him break open the kola. Okoye draws his personal symbols with the chalk, which signifies coolness and peace. Unoka finally breaks open the kola nut, praying to their ancestors for life and health and protection against enemies. They eat and talk about "many things," including the weather, the next feast, politics (an impending war), and music. Okoye then thanks Unoka for the kola nut, mentions that he intends to take a title, and speaks in proverbs for some time. He never directly states his business, but Unoka finally figures out that his friend wants him to return some money Unoka had borrowed from him (in the form of cowry shells). Unoka laughs and answers him by showing him a wall with all his debts painted on it. He says, "I shall pay you, but not today. Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them. I shall pay my big debts first." He takes a pinch of snuff, and Okoye rolls up his goatskin and leaves.

How would this conversation have gone in your culture? Among Americans, it might have gone something like this: Bob owes Joe money. Joe calls Bob to make sure he'll be home at a certain time, then arrives at that time. Joe may invite him in or stand with him at the door. Joe says, "Hey, Bob, how are you doing?" Bob says, "Fine, Joe, and you?" Joe says, "Can't complain." Bob says, "What can I do for you?" Joe says, "Well, you know, I'm in a financial crunch right now. I was wondering if you could return that money you borrowed from me a while back." Bob says, "Sorry, Joe. I haven't got the money right now. Maybe next week." Joe says, "Okay. Let me know when you've got it because I need it as soon as possible. See you later." Bob says, "Okay, bye!"



## Unit 1—Lesson 1: Chinua Achebe and African Literature

What do these two conversations show you about two very different cultures?

Okonkwo's culture is *relationship-oriented* rather than *task-oriented*. Westerners generally want to "get the job done"; we can do business with someone without even knowing their name or anything about them. In Umuofia, as in

many cultures, the person is more important than the task. You must talk for awhile, find out how the person is really doing, and ask about their family, before you can do any kind of business with them. In chapter 8, when Ofoedu joins Okonkwo and Obierika, "It was clear from his twinkling eyes that he had important news. But it would be impolite to rush him. Obierika offered him a lobe of the kola nut he had broken with Okonkwo. Ofoedu ate slowly and talked about the locusts." After some time, he finally gets around to sharing his news about the deaths of a husband and his wife. Renewing the relationship, with hospitality, had to happen before he could share the news. Again, in chapter 8, when a suitor and his family come to negotiate a marriage, the men greet each other and drink together first. "As the men drank, they talked about everything except the thing for which they had gathered."

### NON-WESTERN CULTURE

Relationship-Oriented

Indirect Communication

Spontaneous Hospitality

Formal

Community

Inclusion

### WESTERN CULTURE

Task-Oriented

Direct Communication

Structured Hospitality

Informal

Individualism

Privacy

Okonkwo's culture uses *indirect communication* more than *direct communication*. "Having spoken plainly so far, Okoye said the next half a dozen sentences in proverbs. . . . Okoye was a great talker and he spoke for a long time, skirting round the subject and then hitting it finally." The focus of indirect communication is on being friendly and not offending or embarrassing the other person. People use proverbs and stories to communicate their message in a non-threatening way. The message itself may be offensive. When someone contradicts Okonkwo in a meeting at the beginning of chapter 4, he says, "This meeting is for men," rather than directly addressing the man and saying, "Your opinion is worthless because you have no titles." He is rebuked by an older man with a proverb, "Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble." The older man could have said, "Okonkwo, you're out of line. You're getting too big for your britches." But he rebukes him indirectly with a proverb. Okonkwo understands him perfectly and immediately apologizes, without taking offense at the older man. In negotiating a dowry in chapter 8, rather than directly discussing money amounts, the men pass a bundle of broomsticks back and forth, until they agree on a bundle of the right size. They make fun of another clan, in which people "haggle and bargain as if they were buying a goat or a cow in the market."

Okonkwo's culture tends toward *spontaneous hospitality* rather than *structured hospitality*. Okoye shows up to see Unoka with no warning, and Unoka immediately stops what he is doing and greets him. In modern Western societies, we generally tend to "invite people over," make appointments, call before coming, and the host or hostess will prepare food and drink and possibly entertainment for a specific time. In many other cultures, people stop by and visit whenever they are free, and the host or hostess is expected to drop any other plans or activities and give their attention to the guest until the guest chooses to leave. This also shows

an *event-orientation* rather than a *time-orientation*. People enjoy what is in front of them, responding to whatever happens, rather than keeping to a schedule and trying to arrive places “on time” and leave “on time.” In many places, people often come to a meeting, even a church service, an hour or more after it has started. However, since the focus is on the event, not the time, they feel they have participated as much as those who came “on time.”

Okonkwo’s culture tends to be *formal* rather than *informal*. There are strict rules and ceremonies for various occasions. If a guest comes, a person brings out kola and they ceremonially argue over who breaks it. A prayer is made when breaking the kola. The chalk is used to make certain symbols on the floor and on the person, prescribed by the person’s rank in society. In chapter 3 when Okonkwo approaches a wealthy man to sharecrop for him, he brings certain gifts. Okonkwo, who brought the wine, must drink it first (to prove that it is not poisoned). The men drink, then the wives come in and drink, kneeling, in order of seniority. Everything is done in orderly, established ways. Again, after all the ritual and chatting, Okonkwo finally broaches the purpose of his visit, and it is discussed indirectly with much use of proverbs on both sides. In formal cultures, it is also important to show respect to older people or people with higher positions in society. In Okonkwo’s society, the *egwugwu*, who represent the ancestors, are greeted with a hand touching the ground in submission. In chapter 22, when a Christian unmask an *egwugwu*, it is a terrible offense because “One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything that might reduce its immortal prestige in the eyes of the uninitiated.” Disrespect for the ancestors is not tolerated.

Okonkwo’s culture is based on the *community* more than on *individualism*. A person’s identity is tied to the group, who protect and provide for him. His behavior reflects on the whole group. The importance of unity is emphasized by the cry, “Umuofia kwenu!” “United Umuofia!” at the beginning of meetings where the clan meets to make important decisions. When the clan decides Okonkwo has to leave because of his accident, he submits to their decision without question. Disagreeing or arguing against that decision would be an act of betrayal. His mother’s clan takes him in; he continues to have an identity as part of his mother’s community. But he is frustrated that he has lost his place in his father’s community; he feels that by losing his status there he has lost everything. In a group-oriented culture, people are not encouraged to take initiative and make their own decisions. However, Okonkwo does assert his individuality in seeking to become a leader in his home community. And there is an individualistic aspect to Ibo society in that each person has his own *chi*, his own personal god-force, and each person in an assembly is listened to. Some are respected more than others, of course, because of their achievements, signified by their titles. One reason Okonkwo commits suicide is that his community, which gave him his identity, his goals, and his dreams, has fallen apart, and he can no longer live in this disconnected world.

Okonkwo’s culture values *inclusion* rather than *privacy*. Everyone is included in common activities, and people don’t like to be left alone. In chapter 12 we see a good example of the community working together as a group. All the women and children gather to help the bride’s mother in “her difficult but happy task of cooking for a whole village.” They each

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bring contributions of food and pots of water. When someone's cow escapes, all the women go after it, except those delegated to watch the cooking pot. They make sure that everyone has come to help catch the cow, except those with a valid excuse. The village witnesses the blessings exchanged by the bride's and groom's families, then all celebrate together by feasting and dancing. In an inclusion culture, anyone nearby is included in a conversation, and everyone is included in any plans that are made. Possessions are often shared. In Okonkwo's society people do have private possessions, although generosity is highly valued and honored in his society.<sup>5</sup>

Achebe has given us a detailed picture of a people group at a certain time in history. We see their culture, their way of life, their clothing and food and ways of making a living. And we see the historical event that changed much of that—the coming of the British and of Christianity. Some changes were for the better: The Christian gospel could free people from many of their fears. It prevented some unnecessary deaths. Other changes brought by imperialism were for the worse. As in any good historical novel, we see the effects that this historical event, British colonial rule in Nigeria, had on individual people, such as Okonkwo and his son Nwoye, as well as on their society as a whole.



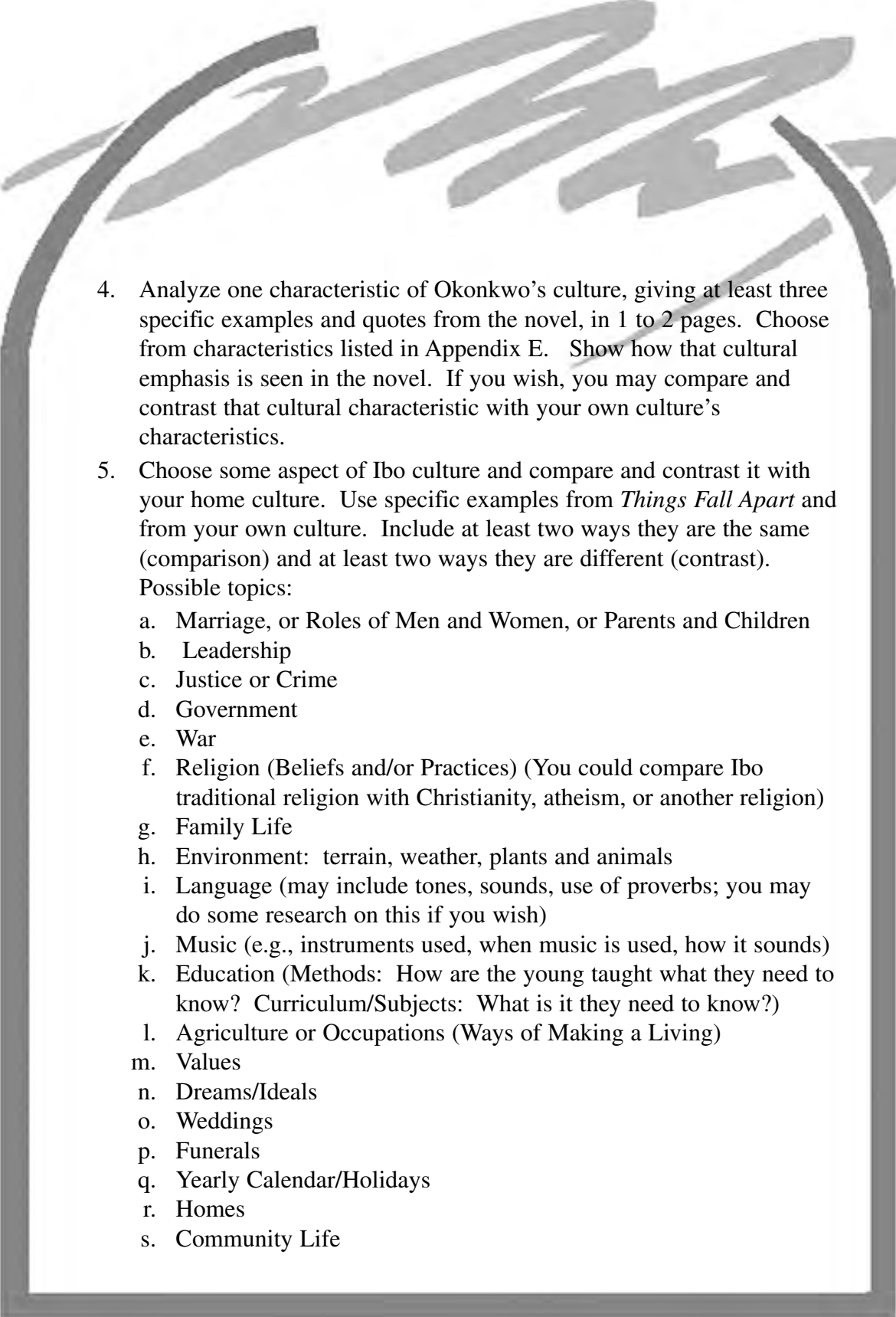
5. I highly recommend the book *Foreign to Familiar*, by Sarah A. Lanier, if you want to further explore the differences between cultures. These ideas are also summarized in Appendix E, for your reference in this course.




**WRITING EXERCISES**


1. Write a short story, no more than five pages long, set in the past. If you have recently studied a certain time period in history, or the history of another country, you may use that as your setting. Or research a time period that interests you. Try to develop interesting characters and an interesting plot appropriate for the time period. Include historical details. Some possibilities are
  - a. Japan during the time of the samurais
  - b. China during the Cultural Revolution
  - c. Algeria during its struggle for independence
  - d. Egypt under the Pharaohs
  - e. Israel under King Solomon
  - f. Rome under Julius Caesar
  - g. India under the Mogul emperors
  - h. the fall of Constantinople
2. Pretend that you live in a certain historical time and place. Write a journal of one or several days of your life. Research your era so that you will include accurate details. Include your feelings about “current” events, and speech/word usage. Try to talk the way a person from that time would have talked. You might pretend to be an Ibo person during the time of this book, or you can choose a different time and place.
3. In a 1- to 2-page essay compare and contrast two characters. They may both be from the novel, or you may compare yourself to a character in the novel with which you can identify in some way: in character, in personality, in situation, in struggles, in hopes and dreams. Perhaps you lose your temper easily, as Okonkwo does. Perhaps you have different ideas than your father, as Nwoye does. Perhaps there is someone you love deeply and are afraid to lose, as Ekwefi loves Ezinma. How are you alike? How are you different? You may include ways in which that person’s cultural background makes him or her different from you.

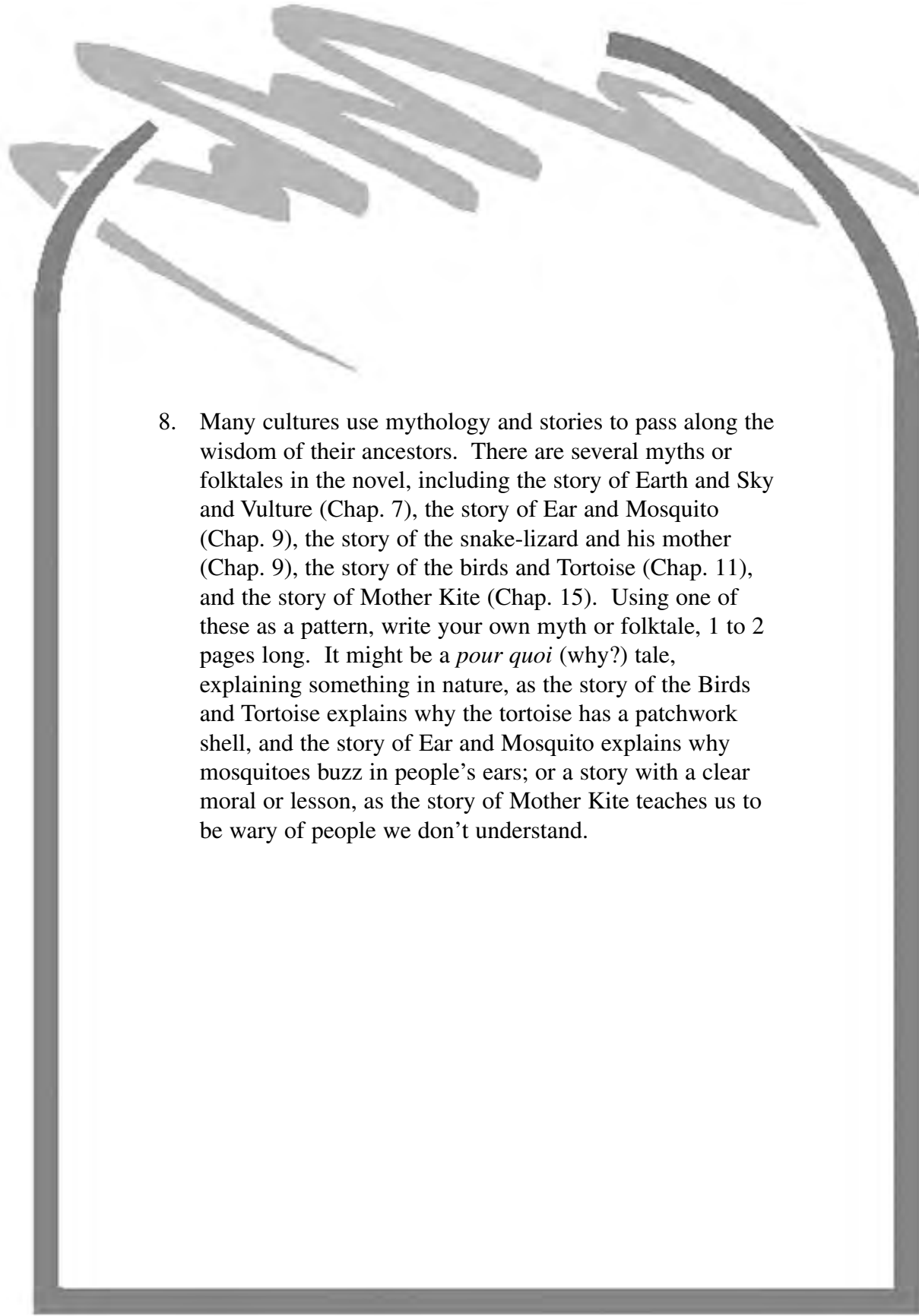
## Unit 1—Lesson 1: Chinua Achebe and African Literature

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4. Analyze one characteristic of Okonkwo's culture, giving at least three specific examples and quotes from the novel, in 1 to 2 pages. Choose from characteristics listed in Appendix E. Show how that cultural emphasis is seen in the novel. If you wish, you may compare and contrast that cultural characteristic with your own culture's characteristics.
  5. Choose some aspect of Ibo culture and compare and contrast it with your home culture. Use specific examples from *Things Fall Apart* and from your own culture. Include at least two ways they are the same (comparison) and at least two ways they are different (contrast).  
Possible topics:
    - a. Marriage, or Roles of Men and Women, or Parents and Children
    - b. Leadership
    - c. Justice or Crime
    - d. Government
    - e. War
    - f. Religion (Beliefs and/or Practices) (You could compare Ibo traditional religion with Christianity, atheism, or another religion)
    - g. Family Life
    - h. Environment: terrain, weather, plants and animals
    - i. Language (may include tones, sounds, use of proverbs; you may do some research on this if you wish)
    - j. Music (e.g., instruments used, when music is used, how it sounds)
    - k. Education (Methods: How are the young taught what they need to know? Curriculum/Subjects: What is it they need to know?)
      - l. Agriculture or Occupations (Ways of Making a Living)
    - m. Values
    - n. Dreams/Ideals
    - o. Weddings
    - p. Funerals
    - q. Yearly Calendar/Holidays
    - r. Homes
    - s. Community Life

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6. Write a 1- to 2-page paper explaining how to do something in Ibo society. Write from an Ibo point of view. Tell how to do these things in their society, not in yours. Include at least three steps in your process, and explain them clearly and in logical order. Use as much evidence from the book as you can find. You are free to add a bit of humor, if you can. You may consider writing about how to:
    - a. find a bride
    - b. arrange a marriage
    - c. grow yams
    - d. be a good wife
    - e. gain honor in the village
    - f. lose honor in the village
    - g. take a title
    - h. lose your place in the village
    - i. raise children
    - j. treat your wives
    - k. celebrate a funeral
    - l. “keep” an *ogbanje* child
    - m. solve disputes within the village
    - n. solve disputes with other villages
    - o. have (or win) a wrestling match
    - p. please (or how to displease) the “gods”
    - q. treat an “*egwugwu*”
    - r. cleanse the village from a “defilement”
  7. Write a paper persuading someone in the book of something. Include at least three arguments to convince them of that point of view. Feel free to use proverbs, stories, and/or humor in your persuasion. You may choose from these:

## Unit 1—Lesson 1: Chinua Achebe and African Literature

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- a. Pretend you are Mr. Kiaga or one of the other missionaries, and persuade Okonkwo (or another character) to become a Christian. Be sure to use arguments that will relate to him—talk about defilement, or his fears, or his need to prove himself. Remember that his idea of God is very different from yours. You might use a story as part of your persuasion.
  - b. Pretend you are Okonkwo and persuade Nwoye, or another character, to leave Christianity. What arguments would Okonkwo use? What is important to him, and what does he think about the Christians? (Remember, we need to understand the other person's point of view before we can persuade him; so try to understand what Christianity looked like from Okonkwo's point of view!) You may use proverbs or stories.
  - c. Write from the point of view of an Englishman, to convince Okonkwo that he should accept English rule. You might include the benefits he thinks Okonkwo will get, the things he thinks are wrong with Okonkwo's society, or the simple argument of power and fear (We are stronger, therefore you should give in. Otherwise you die.).
  - d. Write from Okonkwo's point of view to convince the English that they should go home and leave the Ibo alone. He might talk about the strengths of his society, and the things he doesn't like about the English. He might use proverbs or stories mentioned in the book.
  - e. Write to Okonkwo, convincing him to be kinder to his wives and children. Give him reasons he could relate to: Will they take better care of him if he's nicer to them? Would his children be more likely to grow up the way he wants them to?
  - f. Choose any other character and write to him or her, persuading him of something.

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8. Many cultures use mythology and stories to pass along the wisdom of their ancestors. There are several myths or folktales in the novel, including the story of Earth and Sky and Vulture (Chap. 7), the story of Ear and Mosquito (Chap. 9), the story of the snake-lizard and his mother (Chap. 9), the story of the birds and Tortoise (Chap. 11), and the story of Mother Kite (Chap. 15). Using one of these as a pattern, write your own myth or folktale, 1 to 2 pages long. It might be a *pour quoi* (why?) tale, explaining something in nature, as the story of the Birds and Tortoise explains why the tortoise has a patchwork shell, and the story of Ear and Mosquito explains why mosquitoes buzz in people's ears; or a story with a clear moral or lesson, as the story of Mother Kite teaches us to be wary of people we don't understand.