

THINGS FALL APART

by Chinua Achebe



THE AUTHOR

Albert Chinualumogu Achebe (1930-2013) was born in Nigeria, the son of a Protestant missionary. The village in which he grew up still retained many of its traditional practices, however. While studying history and theology in college, he became interested in the traditional cultures of Nigeria and rejected his Christian upbringing and his Christian name (his African name means “May a *chi* – a personal god – fight for me”). He began writing in his twenties, and in many ways became the father of modern indigenous African literature. In 1958 he published his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, which became an overnight sensation. Sequels soon followed – *No Longer at Ease* (1960) and *Arrow of God* (1964). He spent time at the Nigerian Broadcasting Company, founded a publishing company and started a literary magazine, and taught English at the University of Nigeria. In the early sixties, he was caught up in the revolutionary movement for secession in Biafra and was forced into exile. In the last years of his life he taught at Bard College in New York. In 2007, he won the Man Booker Prize for fiction.

Things Fall Apart gives an African perspective on the colonial experience. The book is a deliberate response to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, and like that novel is set in 1890s Africa. African culture is pictured as sophisticated and verbally advanced, though the author clearly believes the religious practices of traditional African tribal life are as valid as those of the Christian missionaries who seek to change it. White men in the novel are not simply cardboard villains, but are portrayed with some complexity as well. Stylistically, while the book follows the form and structure of the English novel, it incorporates elements of Greek tragedy – a protagonist who is brought down by a flaw in his character – and makes frequent use of elements of African oral tradition, such as proverbs and fables. The title of the novel is taken from William Butler Yeats’ poem *The Second Coming*.

PLOT SUMMARY

PART I

The story takes place among the villages of the Ibo tribe in southern Nigeria. We are first introduced to Okonkwo, the protagonist, who has become a great man in the nine villages of the Umuofia clan because of his wrestling prowess. He is an angry and violent man, a successful

warrior, and has accumulated three wives and considerable wealth despite the fact that his father Unoka was a lazy and indolent musician who wanted nothing to do with bloodshed and accumulated debts to almost all of his neighbors. The narrative begins when Okonkwo takes in a young boy, Ikemefuna, who had been sent to Umuofia from Mbaino as a sacrifice to ensure peace. A young woman of Umuofia had been killed when she went to market in Mbaino, and Umuofia threatens war unless Mbaino sends a virgin to replace the murdered wife and a young boy as a sacrifice. While the elders decide what to do with the young boy, Okonkwo is given charge of him, and takes him into his house for the next three years.

As we come to learn more about the lives of the people of Umuofia, we find that they are enslaved to superstition, afraid of the dark, polygamous, practice ancestor worship, spiritism and polytheism, abandon twins in the forest, and are brutal in war, even engaging in headhunting and human sacrifice [Note that the author apparently finds nothing wrong with these practices]. Okonkwo, meanwhile, has accumulated three wives and eight children and treats them very harshly, especially beating his oldest son often because he fears that he is developing the laziness he so detested in his own father.

Years earlier, when Okonkwo had first set out on his own, his father had nothing to give him, so he begged seed yams from wealthy neighbors in order to start his own farm. He worked hard, but the weather that year was unpredictable, providing heat when rain was needed and vice-versa. The crop was poor and he had little to repay those who had trusted him, but he persevered despite the fact that, when he contributed to the welfare of his family, his father wasted the little he had gained. Soon he became prosperous, but he also became proud and unyielding in his attitude toward others.

When Ikemefuna comes to live with Okonkwo, he is treated harshly, but he soon becomes accustomed to his surroundings and gains the affection of the women and children, including Okonkwo's oldest son Nwoye, though Okonkwo, as a man, shows him no affection. The boy soon starts calling him "father." During the Week of Peace in honor of the earth and fertility goddess Ani before the season of planting, Okonkwo violates the peace by severely beating his youngest wife when she fails to come home in time to make his dinner. The priest of the earth goddess demands that he offer sacrifices, which he does, though many worry that his actions will cause a bad harvest. The planting and growing seasons go well, however, and young Ikemefuna becomes increasingly popular in the village because of his entertaining stories.

When the Feast of the New Yam comes at harvest time, the village is in a celebratory mood. Okonkwo prefers work to festivals, and so is in a foul temper. He picks a fight with his second wife when she cuts a few leaves from a banana tree, then beats her severely. He even fires his decrepit gun at her, though he misses. After feasting among friends and relatives on the first day, the village prepares for the biggest occasion of the festival – the wrestling matches on the second day. Everyone gathers to the beating of the ceremonial drums and the two teams emerge. Bouts begin with the teenage boys, then progress to the captains of the two teams, with one finally emerging victorious.

Under the influence of his friend Ikemefuna, Nwoye becomes stronger and more assertive, much to the pleasure of his father. With increasing frequency the boys sit in the hut of their father rather than eating with the women and other children, though Nwoye secretly admits that he prefers the animal fables told by his mother to the blood-curdling stories of war and violence told by Okonkwo. One day while Okonkwo and the boys are repairing the walls following the harvest, a swarm of locusts descends on the village. At first people are excited, since the swarms appear only once in each generation and they know that the locusts were good to eat. While all are enjoying the rare treat, the oldest man in the village takes Okonkwo aside and tells him that the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has ordered the village to kill Ikemefuna, the boy who had been sent to them for a

sacrifice. He advises Okonkwo to have nothing to do with the killing, but lets him know that the decision has already been made. Okonkwo then tells Ikemefuna that he is to be taken back to his home village – news that saddens both him and his friend Nwoye. Contrary to the elder’s advice, Okonkwo accompanies the men of the village, and deep in the forest, they strike down Ikemefuna with their machetes, with Okonkwo himself striking the fatal blow as the boy cries out for his “father” to save him. Nwoye, knowing in his heart what has occurred, is never the same again.

After killing Ikemefuna, Okonkwo could neither eat nor sleep for two days, and spent most of his time drunk in his hut. When he visits his friend Obierika, he warns him that what he has done will surely displease the earth goddess, but Okonkwo believes that all he really needs to break out of his depression is something to keep him busy. Later that day, he returns to Obierika’s hut to listen to an offer by his daughter’s suitor.

After three days, Okonkwo recovers from the death of Ikemefuna and wonders why it ever bothered him in the first place. No sooner does he begin to feel himself again, however, than his second wife, Ekwefi, comes running into his hut to report that her only child, Ezinma, is sick. Ezinma is Okonkwo’s favorite despite the fact that she is a girl, and is especially beloved of her mother. Ekwefi has borne ten children, but only this one has survived. Many believe that her children are evil beings who return repeatedly to their mother’s womb, only to die again and plague her, and the wise men have prescribed all sorts of rituals to break the cycle of death. She has great hopes for Ezinma because she has survived to the age of ten, but now she, too, is sick, and the fears rise in her mother all over again. Okonkwo rushes into the forest and gathers the herbs needed for treating his daughter.

Later, a case is brought before the elders of the clan. Such cases are heard by summoning the spirits of the dead. The elders dress up in fearsome masks and present themselves as ancestor spirits, then judge the case. In this particular situation, a man’s wife and children have been taken from him by her family. When he demands the return of his bride-price, he is refused because he is known to beat his wife almost daily, in one case causing her to miscarry. The judges order that he bring wine and ask the return of his wife, and that her family yield her up, with the understanding that if he continues to beat her he will suffer at the hands of her brothers. Everyone leaves satisfied, but most wonder why such a petty case was brought before the spirits of the ancestors.

Ezinma has recovered, and one night she and her mother are telling stories. Suddenly a cry rings out as Chielo, the priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, begins to prophesy. She comes to the compound of Okonkwo and tells him that Agbala desires to see Ezinma. She takes her away despite her mother’s protests, but Ekwefi bravely follows behind. When they arrive at the cave, Ekwefi realizes that Okonkwo, too, has followed in the darkness. They return safely, but get little sleep, and awake the next morning to gather with the whole village to celebrate the marriage of Obierika’s daughter, accompanied by feasting and dancing.

That night, drumbeats and the roar of cannon fill the air, announcing the death of one of the men in the village. The dead man is Ezeudu, the oldest and greatest of the elders. During his funeral, the spirits of the ancestors again appear. As guns are fired, Okonkwo’s gun explodes and a piece of metal pierces the heart of the dead man’s sixteen-year-old son, killing him instantly. Even though the death was an accident, Okonkwo is sent into exile with his family for seven years, and all he built is destroyed by the men of the village.

PART II

Okonkwo takes his family to his mother's village of Mbanta, where he is well-received and given land to build a new compound. Okonkwo becomes depressed despite the kindness of his mother's clan, but his uncle Uchendu warns him that his sorrow may displease the dead. If he refuses to be comforted, his wives and children will die in exile. After all, many have undergone worse sufferings than his.

More than a year later, Okonkwo's friend Obierika comes to Mbanta to bring the cowries earned by selling Okonkwo's yams. He brings terrible news. A white man appeared riding an iron horse [bicycle] in the village of a nearby clan. The Oracle warned that he would be followed by many more, so they killed him. A few days later, white men surrounded the village on market day and wiped out the clan with their guns.

By the time two more years pass, missionaries have arrived in Umuofia and have built a church there. None of the converts is someone respected in the clan, but Nwoye, Okonkwo's oldest son, is among them. When missionaries come to Mbanta, he is enthralled by the Gospel they preach and the hymns they sing. Their words reach into his soul and touch the troubled thoughts that had plagued him since he had witnessed the killing of twins and heard of the murder of his friend Ikemefuna. When the missionaries ask for land to build a church, the tribal elders give them land in the Evil Forest, convinced that the spirits of the ancestors will kill them within days. But they survive and prosper, and soon converts begin to come, among them a woman who had borne many sets of twins only to have them abandoned in the forest. Soon Nwoye joins them as well. When Okonkwo finds out, he beats his son severely. Nwoye then leaves his father forever and goes to the white man's school to learn to read and write. He later returns and is instrumental in the conversion of his mother and siblings.

When new converts begin to witness in the village and propose to destroy the shrines of the people's nonexistent gods, they are beaten and driven back into the forest. The people of the village care little that the Christians are rescuing twins, for they keep them in the Evil Forest where they belong. But rumors soon spread that the white men have brought with them a government, and that those who kill or attack white men are being punished by this government. The church faces a crisis when two outcasts attend a service. Outcasts were people devoted at birth to one of the gods, and no one could associate with them. But Pastor Kiaga insists they be accepted as brothers. They shave their unkempt hair, the mark of their alienation, despite their fears that they will die if they do so, and become members of the church. Soon the other outcasts join them. One of these outcasts stirs up trouble a year later when he kills the sacred python of the village, a snake that is thought to be an emanation of the god of the water. Okonkwo argues that the Christians should be driven away with blows, but the elders insist that the gods can take care of themselves. Their counsel is simply to ostracize the Christians. The people of the village take the extreme step of beating Christian women when they go to the stream to fetch water, but soon the persecution ends because the man who had killed the python sickens and dies. The people are now confident that the gods can defend themselves.

As the end of Okonkwo's seven-year exile approaches, he sends money to Obierika to build huts in preparation for his return to Umuofia. He then prepares a generous feast for the people of Mbanta who have been so kind to him and his family.

PART III

Upon returning to Umuofia, Okonkwo realizes that his previous position of standing in the clan has been taken by others, but he plans to reassert himself, not only by flaunting his considerable wealth, but also by marrying his oldest daughters to influential young men. He still hopes to rise to the highest titles in the clan. When he arrives, he finds that the church has grown, now even including men of standing in the village. Furthermore, a Commissioner now administers the white man's justice, imprisoning those who abandon twins or attack Christians.

Over time, the Christians begin to gain respect, not only because they bring trade and money to the village through their trading post, but also because Mr. Brown, the white missionary, counsels his people against showing disrespect for local customs. Important men begin to send their sons to his school, and he spends long hours with one of the leaders of the village discussing religious matters. Eventually more come to the school and find that education gives them access to good jobs. Before long the school is sending out Christian missionaries from Umuofia to other villages who establish new churches and convert others to the faith. Nwoye, who is now called Isaac, becomes a teacher. Meanwhile, Okonkwo's plans to regain his status go nowhere, and he becomes increasingly bitter. Soon Mr. Brown's health begins to fail and he leaves for England.

Mr. Brown's replacement as pastor of the church in Umuofia is James Smith, who is much stricter than his predecessor. He is opposed to any kind of compromise with evil and has little regard for the tribal culture of his flock. Shortly after his arrival, he excommunicates a woman in the church for allowing her heathen husband to mutilate her dead child in the belief that he was one of those wicked spirits who returned to his mother's womb repeatedly to plague her. Congregants who thought Mr. Brown too lenient thrive under Mr. Smith's leadership. One such man is Enoch, a violent and angry man who chooses to confront evil directly. When the festival of the earth goddess arrives, he speaks against the masked men who personify the spirits of the ancestors, and when one begins to beat him, he tears off his mask. Tribesmen believe that in doing so he has killed the spirit of the ancestor, and great mourning ensues. Tribal elders, masked as ancestral spirits, gather from all the neighboring villages. While the Christians hide Enoch and determine not to use force to defend themselves, the masked men destroy Enoch's compound, then head for the church. They leave Pastor Smith unharmed because they believe him to be acting in ignorance, but they burn the church to the ground.

Okonkwo is pleased that concrete action was taken, but is disappointed that the pastor was left unmolested and the Christians were not driven from the village. No sooner does he begin to feel some sense of contentment, however, than a message is received from the District Commissioner asking for a meeting with the head men of the village, Okonkwo among them. When they arrive for the meeting, they are bound and arrested. The Commissioner tells them that they will not be permitted to burn people's houses and places of worship, and that they must pay a fine of two hundred bags of cowries or face imprisonment. The men refuse to submit. They have their heads shaved and are abused by the African guards, who send a message to the village demanding 250 bags of cowries, fifty of which they intend to keep for themselves. The villagers collect the fine and prepare to pay it to free their leaders.

The prisoners are released, but after they arrive home a meeting of the clan is called. Okonkwo longs for war against the white man and his African collaborators, but suspects that some in the village will win the others to their cowardly advice. As the clan gathers, the first speaker advises war before it is too late. As he speaks, five men approach – the African guards from the District Commissioner. They demand in the name of the queen that the meeting cease, and

Okonkwo pulls his machete and cuts off the head of the leader of the guards. The others flee, while the men of the village stand by in a state of shock at what has been done. When the District Commissioner arrives with soldiers to arrest Okonkwo, they find he has hanged himself. The soldiers cut down the body and bury it, and the District Commissioner decides to include the incident in the book he is writing, entitled *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

MAJOR CHARACTERS

- Okonkwo – The protagonist, he is a strong, well-respected, but angry man who established his reputation by his wrestling prowess. He is unable to cope with the changes the white man brings to his clan.
- Unoka – Okonkwo’s father, he was a musician, lazy and perpetually in debt, causing his son to be ashamed of him.
- Ikemefuna – A boy sent to Umuofia as a sacrifice intended to ensure peace, he is adopted by Okonkwo, but later killed by him and the other elders.
- Nwoye – Okonkwo’s oldest son, considered a weakling by his father. He becomes a Christian when missionaries arrive in Umuofia, takes the name of Isaac, learns to read and write, and becomes a teacher.
- Ekwefi – Okonkwo’s second wife, once reputed to have been a great beauty in the village.
- Ezinma - Ekwefi’s only child and a favorite of Okonkwo, who wishes she had been born a boy.
- Chielo - The priestess of the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, she is a friend of Ekwefi and treats Ezinma like a daughter.
- Ojiugo - Okonkwo’s third and youngest wife, he earns the disapproval of the clan by beating her during the Week of Peace festival.
- Obierika – Okonkwo’s friend whose son is a promising wrestler; he refuses to take part in the killing of Ikemefuna.
- Ezeudu – The oldest man in the village and the highest-ranking of the elders, he advises Okonkwo not to participate in the killing of Ikemefuna, and it is his son who is accidentally killed by Okonkwo at his funeral, forcing Okonkwo and his family into exile.
- Uchendu – Okonkwo’s uncle, he is the head man of Mbanta, where Okonkwo takes his family in his exile.
- Mr. Kiaga – The African pastor of the church in Mbanta.
- Mr. Brown – The missionary who brings the Gospel to Mbanta.

- James Smith – The pastor who succeeds Mr. Brown in Umuofia, he is strict in his repudiation of anything to do with pagan culture or religion.
- Enoch – An angry Christian who unmask one of the ancestral spirits during the festival of the earth goddess and brings about the destruction of the church in Umuofia.
- District Commissioner - The British governor in the region, he understands little of Nigerian culture and has no appreciation for it whatsoever.

NOTABLE QUOTATIONS

“Proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (ch.1, p.7)

“Among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father.” (ch.1, p.8)

“Age was respected among his people, but achievement was revered.” (ch.1, p.8)

“Okonkwo’s fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father.” (ch.2, p.13)

“To show affection was a sign of weakness; the only thing worth demonstrating was strength.” (ch.4, p.28)

“What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families.” (Obierika, ch. 8, p.67)

“What is good in one place is bad in another place.” (Obierika’s brother, ch.8, p.74)

“His life had been ruled by a great passion – to become one of the lords of the clan. That had been his life-spring. And he had all but achieved it. Then everything had been broken.” (ch.14, p.131)

“The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others.” (Uchendu, ch.15, p.141)

“The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear seemed to answer a vague and persistent question that haunted his young soul – the question of the twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna who was killed.” (ch.16, p.147)

“I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and his ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan.” (Mbanta elder, ch.19, p.167)

“The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart.” (Obierika, ch.20, p.176)

“Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women.” (ch.21, p.183)

“That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself; and now he will be buried like a dog.” (Obierika, ch.25, p.208)

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Discuss the following in a five-paragraph essay:

1. The title of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* is taken from a poem by William Butler Yeats called *The Second Coming*. Read the poem and discuss the thematic similarities between it and the novel. Be sure to note the differences as well, and cite specifics from both works in your analysis.
2. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was written as a response to novels reflecting a colonial perspective such as Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. His rationale for doing so was that, “until the lions have their own historians, the history of the hunt will always glorify the hunter.” Does Conrad’s book really “glorify the hunter”? Does Achebe’s novel provide an effective corrective to this imbalance? Why or why not? Support your arguments with details from both novels.
3. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was written as a response to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Compare and contrast the portrayal of Africans in the two works. What stereotypes does Achebe seek to combat? How does he choose to do so? To what extent is his corrective effort effective?
4. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was written as a response to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. Compare and contrast the portrayals of European colonizers in the two works. While neither appears to view colonialism favorably, analyze the different reasons for their reactions, being sure to incorporate details from both novels.
5. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* was written as a response to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. In Conrad’s novel, the Africans are portrayed as silent or inarticulate. Achebe, on the other hand, goes to great lengths to picture the complexity of the language by which the members of the clan in Umuofia communicate with each other. What were the two authors trying to say in making these choices? Did the silence of Conrad’s Africans have symbolic significance, or did he literally think them to be incapable of complex communication? What role does complex communication play in the thematic structure of Achebe’s novel?

6. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* was written as a response to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. Compare and contrast the portrayals of human nature in the two works. Conrad sees darkness in the human heart, whether that heart beats in the chest of a European or an African. Does Achebe see the same? Why or why not? Support your assessment with specifics from both novels.
7. Both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* deal with the consequences of European colonialism in Africa, though the former considers the beginning of that experience while the latter deals with a time when colonialism has been in place for centuries. Compare and contrast the views of African tribal experience found in the two novels. Do both view traditional African life in the same way? Why or why not? Be sure to cite specifics from both novels in your analysis.
8. Both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* deal with the consequences of European colonialism in Africa. Compare and contrast the views of the two authors concerning the causes for the collapse of African society. Do they agree on the causes? On the results? Why or why not? Which of the authors in your opinion gives greater insight into the impact of colonialism on Africa?
9. Both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* deal with the consequences of European colonialism in Africa. The first is a tragedy, picturing destruction but offering little hope, while the second ends hopefully and proposes concrete solutions to the problems facing Africa. Why do you think this is the case? What about the differing perspectives of the two authors leads them to these diverse conclusions?
10. Both Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* deal with the consequences of European colonialism in Africa. The first pictures Christianity as being at the heart of the problems facing Africa, while the second pictures Christianity as the only solution to those problems. Which is the more faithful picture of Christianity in Africa? In what ways do both pictures contain an element of truth, and why?
11. Compare and contrast the two white pastors in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Do you believe the author intends them to represent two kinds of Christianity or two kinds of European colonialism? Why do you think so? Support your conclusion with specifics from the novel.
12. Evaluate the approach taken to cultural accommodation by the two white pastors in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Brown is clearly more willing to accommodate the Igbo culture than Smith is, but consider also the basis for their distinctions. Which of them takes a more biblical approach to retaining what ought to be retained in a culture and rejecting what ought to be rejected? Why do you think so?
13. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the qualities of the protagonist are revealed through his attitudes to other characters. What do we learn about Okonkwo's values and priorities from his interactions with his children – Nwoye, Ikemefuna, and Ezinma?

14. Novelists often bring out the qualities of characters in their books by establishing a *foil* – one whose characteristics contrast with those of the leading figure in order to make the protagonist stand out in bolder relief. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, what character would you consider to be the foil for Okonkwo? Why did you choose this character rather than other possibilities?
15. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* has the plot structure of a Greek tragedy. The protagonist is a noble man who is brought down to destruction by a tragic flaw in his character. In order for the story to be a true tragedy, however, the protagonist must be a noble figure. Does Okonkwo qualify? How does the author seek to establish his nobility? Does he succeed? Why or why not?
16. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* has the plot structure of a Greek tragedy. The protagonist is a noble man who is brought down to destruction by a tragic flaw in his character. What would you consider Okonkwo’s tragic flaw? How does this flaw eventually destroy him?
17. Analyze the moral values of Chinua Achebe as revealed in his famous novel *Things Fall Apart*. Pay particular attention to his attitudes toward African tribal traditions and Christianity, respectively. How do his values contrast with those presented in Scripture?
18. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the religious and cultural practices of the inhabitants of Umuofia are pictured as noble and natural. How does the Bible explain and evaluate these practices? Pay special attention to Paul’s discussion in Romans 1:18ff.
19. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, how well does the author understand Christianity? Use evidence from the novel to support your discussion. Keep in mind that his parents were missionaries, and that he rejected the faith in which he was raised while in college.
20. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* famously says that “proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.” Discuss the role played by proverbs and fables in the novel. Choose three examples of these and comment on the role they play in advancing the plot and the themes of the book.
21. In Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, the members of the clan who most easily embrace Christianity are its outcasts. This is not unusual – witness the success of Christian missionaries among the Dalits (Untouchables) in India. Why would Scripture lead us not to be surprised by such a development? What biblical principles are clearly illustrated in the attitude of the church toward those rejected by society in the novel? Be sure to support your argument with specific examples from the book and verses from the Bible.
22. The Igbo tribe in southern Nigeria, the focus of Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, was largely converted to Christianity in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries through the efforts of missionaries such as Mary Slessor, who came to be greatly respected by the Africans among whom she worked. Research her life and career and contrast it with the picture of the relationship of Christians to African tribesmen portrayed in the novel.

23. Twentieth-century African writers often debated the virtues of writing in the indigenous languages of Africa as opposed to writing in English. Chinua Achebe chose to write *Things Fall Apart* in English. Why do you think he made this decision? What about the novel would argue in favor of such a choice? To what extent does he succeed in preserving the rhythms and stylistic distinctives of native language despite his decision to write in the language of the colonizers?
24. Twentieth-century African writers often debated the virtues of writing in the indigenous languages of Africa as opposed to writing in English. Chinua Achebe chose to write *Things Fall Apart* in English because he saw it as a means of “infiltrating the ranks of the enemy and destroying him from within.” How did he attempt to do this in his first and most famous novel? To what extent was he successful? Support your arguments with specifics from the book.
25. Consider the place of gender roles in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. What does the author consider the ideals of masculinity and femininity? How are these roles portrayed in the novel? Be sure to cite specific characters and quotations to support your analysis.
26. Women play a clearly subordinate role in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, yet they are clearly important in the social structure of the clan portrayed in the story. Would a feminist approve of the perspective presented by the author? Why or why not?
27. Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* clearly portrays a tribe that has double standards for men and women in almost every area of life. Discuss the author’s attitude toward this. Does he accept such double standards, deplore them, or simply present them as they are and leave evaluation to the reader? Why do you think so? Support your answer with specifics from the novel.
28. Consider the relationship between the individual and his *chi* (personal god) in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Does belief in such beings lead to fatalism or an emphasis on personal responsibility? Support your answer with quotations from the novel.
29. Compare and contrast the killing of the sacred python in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* to the story of Boniface, the missionary to the barbarian Goths, chopping down their sacred oak during a thunderstorm and building a church from the wood. What do these stories have in common? How is the perspective on the event seen in the novel different from the actual historical occurrence and its consequences?
30. Analyze the reasons for the conversion to Christianity of Nwoye, the oldest son of Okonkwo, in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. What do those reasons tell you about the differences between Christianity and paganism? Do they indicate a true understanding of Christianity on the part of the author, who was raised by Christian parents? Why or why not?
31. Compare and contrast the versions of justice meted out by European and African authorities in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. Choose specific examples of each from the novel and consider their relative fairness, being sure to support your conclusions from Scripture.

32. To what extent does the author take a sociological view of religion in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*? Does he see religion as no more than the product of one's culture, or does he recognize the existence of the supernatural in a way that would allow one to distinguish true religion from false religion? Support your arguments with specifics from the novel.
33. To what extent does the author give a balanced view of European colonialism in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*? Does he portray the British interlopers in the same negative way in which some of them tend to view African culture, or does he see some value, or even some improvement, associated with the British takeover of Nigeria? Support your answer with details from the book.
34. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* examines two cultures, one in detail and the other only in relation to the first. Does the author picture the culture of the European colonizers as more primitive than that of the Africans on whom it is imposed? Why or why not? Support your conclusion with specific incidents and quotations from the novel.
35. Discuss the view of greatness held by the people of the Igbo tribe as portrayed in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. To what extent does Okonkwo's notion of what makes a man great lead to his downfall? Evaluate the tribe's notion of greatness in the light of biblical teaching on the subject.
36. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* portrays three generations of men in the family of Okonkwo. In each case, the son rebels against the father, determining not to be like him at all costs. What factors cause the sons to rebel? What are the consequences of these acts of rebellion? How do these father-son relationships contribute to the themes of the novel?
37. In chapter 8 of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika's brother says, "What is good in one place is bad in another place." In chapter 15, Uchendu says, "The world has no end, and what is good among one people is an abomination with others." To what extent does the author of the novel espouse relativism? Consider moral, religious, and cultural aspects of the book in structuring your answer.
38. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo is a very ambitious man. The same may be said of Macbeth in Shakespeare's play of the same name. Compare and contrast the ambitions of the two men. Be sure to consider the nature of their ambitions, the way they seek to fulfill them, and the consequences of their endeavors.
39. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, two important incidents involving Okonkwo and his children occur in the forest - the murder of Ikemefuna and the kidnaping of Ezinma by Chielo and the subsequent pursuit by her parents. What do these two incidents reveal about the protagonist? How do they appear to contradict one another, and how does each one contradict the traditions and values of the society that Okonkwo is so zealous to protect?

40. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, the accidental killing of Ezeudu's son by Okonkwo is the event that forces him to go into exile for seven years. Compare and contrast the justice meted out in this incident with the provision by God of Cities of Refuge for the Israelites in Numbers 35. Be sure to consider the crimes themselves, the punishments, and the motives involved in both cases.
41. In many works of literature, suicide is seen as a noble act in which a man sustains his integrity in the face of unendurable pain or shame. In Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, however, the suicide of the protagonist is seen as in itself shameful. Why is this the case? Why does the author choose to end his story in this way?
42. Some critics have noted the inherent contradiction that exists between our society's demand for the recognition and valuing of multiculturalism and the insistence on certain universal human rights. Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* clearly shows that the culture on which he focuses, that of the nineteenth-century Igbo, violates the dogmas of human rights in many particulars. At the same time, the author, as well as many readers and critics today, argues for the inherent value of the Igbo culture in all its manifestations. How can this blatant contradiction be resolved? Must advocates of contemporary thought give up either their insistence on universal human rights or their affirmation of the equal value of all cultures and their right to exist? Does the novel suggest a way of dealing with this paradox? If so, what is it? If not, can a solution be found in Christianity that both Achebe and modern thinkers have ignored?
43. John Steinbeck's *The Pearl* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* are both powerful critiques of European colonialism and its destructive influence on native cultures. In both novels, Christianity is pictured as on the side of the oppressors. How legitimate are the criticisms of the church found in these books? Do the authors misrepresent Christianity? Are the primitive cultures really as pure and innocent as they are pictured?