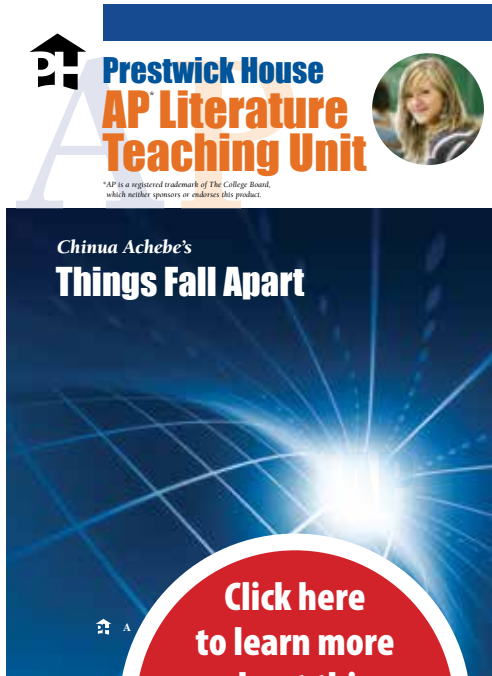




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Teaching Unit

Things Fall Apart

by Chinua Achebe

written by Michelle Ryan



Prestwick House

Item No. 303081

Things Fall Apart

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. understand how African literature and literary traditions influence Achebe's writing style.
2. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
3. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
4. offer a close reading of *Things Fall Apart* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.
5. discuss the dramatic development of the narrative in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution.
6. demonstrate a literal, personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.
7. explain the importance of the title as a theme in the novel.
8. explain the central conflicts in the narrative, and explain the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which various characters cope.
9. understand the novel as an exploration of the ramifications of Colonialism.
10. examine Okonkwo as a tragic hero.
11. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and suspense on the development of the story.
12. trace and discuss recurring imagery.
13. discuss the use of proverbs in the narrative and how they contribute to the overall effect of the novel.
14. analyze how point of view influences the literary narrative.
15. explain how Achebe uses character foils to illuminate the differences between the principal characters.

Lecture

ACHEBE AND HIS TIMES

Chinua Achebe, full name Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, was born in Nigeria. His father was a teacher in a missionary school; Achebe was raised as a Protestant. As a youth, Achebe attended the Government College of Umuahia and the University College of Ibadan. While in college, Achebe reclaimed his cultural name and no longer used his christened name, Albert, after Prince Albert of England. While in school, Achebe studied English, history, and theology.

Achebe began writing in the 1950s; much of his work centers on the political and social problems that face his nation, particularly during the time of unrest that came when Britain influenced the government and religion of Nigeria. His writing explores the ramifications of Colonialism. Achebe went on to found a publishing company with a fellow Nigerian writer. He since has published many other novels, short stories, and essays.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, was Achebe's first novel. With it, Achebe established that he is one of the foremost Nigerian writers and has managed to incorporate his African heritage into English-language novels. Achebe's literature draws on African oral tradition as well as societal traditions to create a text that is accepted not only for its reflection of the human condition, but also its ability to reflect African culture.

Things Fall Apart follows Okonkwo, a powerful leader in a traditional Ibo tribe in the village of Umuofia. The story takes place in a traditional village in the 1880s before European missionaries and other outsiders have arrived. The clan is traditional in its practice of religion, sacrifice, the supernatural, and relationships among the tribal community. Driven by the memory of his lazy and unsuccessful father, Okonkwo spends his life using his strength and power to earn the respect of his fellow tribesmen. However, the novel depicts the changes that can occur when a tribal leader is banished from the community, despite the respect that he has earned from his tribesmen, and outsiders attempt to alter cultural traditions.

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria received its independence from British colonial rule. Achebe wrote this novel two years before this event. His goal was to illustrate for non-African audiences what Nigeria was like before colonization.

Things Fall Apart

Part One

Chapter One

1. Reread the first sentence of the novel. What purposes does this sentence serve?

2. Explain the rhetorical strategies used in the first two paragraphs.

3. Explain the use of figurative devices in the following line: "Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water."

4. Explain the imagery in the following line: "That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan."

5. What is the rhetorical effect used in the following line: "The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath." What effect does it create?

8. Who is Nwakibie? How does the reader know that he is successful?

9. What does Nwakibie mean when he says, “You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break”?

10. What is the meaning of the following: “...an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb”? How does this relate to Okonkwo?

11. Why does Nwakibie agree to let Okonkwo use his yams for share-cropping?

12. Why does Okonkwo resent having to take care of his mother and sisters?

13. Explain the sarcasm in the paragraph about the unearned success of the farmers who delayed planting their yams.

14. Analyze the several literary techniques used in this chapter.

Chapter Ten

1. Explain the disconnect between the chapters. Why would Achebe choose to do this?

2. Read the following lines:

“It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders.”

What does this excerpt suggest about the role of women? What is significant about the placement of this passage relative to what has come immediately before, and what will come immediately after?

3. Explain the irony of the trial in this chapter. Is justice served in the *egwugwu*'s judgment?

4. How does the case brought before the *egwugwu* parallel Okonkwo's life?

Chapter Twenty-Four

1. What kind of opportunity would a war offer to Okonkwo?

2. Based on what we already know about Okonkwo's character, what does his insistence on war foreshadow?

3. Reread the exchange between Obierika and Okonkwo. How does it reflect the characteristics of both men? What does it foreshadow for Okonkwo?

4. How does Okonkwo's statement about not caring what the group does predict his fall as a tragic hero?

5. In what ways is Okonkwo's slaughter of the head messenger climactic?
