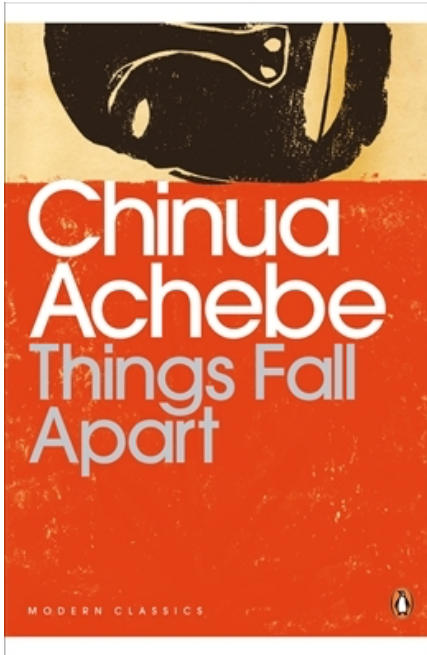




Things Fall Apart

By Chinua Achebe



The story is set within village life in pre-colonial Nigeria. The novel is based on the life of Okonkwo, an Ibo man who is the local wrestling champion in the fictional Nigerian clan of Umuofia. The story is split into three parts. First it describes his family, their personal history, and the customs of society of the Ibo. Okonkwo being a champion wrestler and warrior, his fame spreads throughout the region, he becomes a wealthy and powerful man. And then he accidentally kills a clansman. Second section is about Okonkwo facing the consequences for that killing. In accordance with custom, with his family, he is sent into exile for 7 years. And the third section is about his return to his village which is now at the beginning of the influence of European colonialism and Christian missionaries, with the effect on Okonkwo, his family, and the whole community.

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria, raised in the large village of Ogidi, and is a graduate of University College, Ibadan. Raised by Christian parents in the Ibo town of Ogidi in southeastern Nigeria, he became fascinated with world religions and traditional African cultures. Achebe wrote more than 20 books and received numerous honours from around the world. Things Fall Apart is his first novel. It has become a milestone book in schools throughout Africa as a study of African literature. It is also widely read and studied in English-speaking countries as a piece of work which shows the traditionally rich, pre-colonisation, African life.

Discussion Questions

1. Looking at the various characters in "Things Fall Apart. Does the author give us a comprehensive understanding of each of them? Are each of their actions consistent with their individual characters? Which characters do you find likeable, and which are not?
2. How does this book reflect on the role of family and community in traditional pre-colonisation Africa? How does that change when the missionaries arrive? Do you have a view of how African life changed from its traditional ways to the way African life has now become; in being like behaviours in the West?

3. Traditional African ways of religious beliefs and worship are shown to have been changed to a Christian approach as portrayed in this book? Do you think the Christian missionaries had a positive or negative impact on the characters and on African life as a whole?

4. There is an issue here of fate versus personal control over destiny. For example, Okonkwo's father is sometimes held responsible for his own actions, while at other times he is referred to as ill-fated and a victim of evil-fortune. Which do you think Okonkwo believes is true? What do you think the author believes is true? What do you believe applies in this story?

5. In this story the villagers believe that the "Supreme Court" of the nine Egwugwu are ancestral spirits. In fact, they are men of the village in disguise. Basically the village elders administering justice using their wisdom via that disguise? What does this say about the nature of justice in general at that time, and in this village in particular? How do you compare that with the way justice is administered globally today?

6. Can we identify what are the main conflicts reflected in "Things Fall Apart?" Can those conflicts be categorised as physical, moral, intellectual, or emotional? Or would they be better categorised by other definitions; political or conflicts of cultures, or conflicts of generations, etc.?

7. Is there any significance about the title: "Things Fall Apart?"

8. There was a time this book was considered controversial and a few people wanted it censored or banned? Do you think the author intended this book to be political? Or what do you think was the point being made by the author in this story and do you think that it was in any way controversial?

9. Today this book is used in schools throughout Africa in their African literature study curriculum? Do you agree it should be taught in schools, and how do you justify whatever position you adopt?

10. How did you feel in the way the story ended? What point do you think the author was making by using the type of ending he wrote for this book?

11. Would you recommend this novel to a friend? Why or why not?