

A Study of Imperialism and the Hero's Journey through an examination of:

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe and *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad

Imperialism as defined by Merriam and Webster Dictionary

noun (*Concise Encyclopedia*)

State policy, practice, or advocacy of extending power and dominion, especially by direct territorial acquisition or by gaining political and economic control of other areas. Because imperialism always involves the use of power, often in the form of military force, it is widely considered morally objectionable, and the term accordingly has been used by states to denounce and discredit the foreign policies of their opponents. Imperialism in ancient times is clear in the unending succession of empires in China, western Asia, and the Mediterranean. Between the 15th century and the middle of the 18th, England, France, the Netherlands, Portugal, and Spain built empires in the Americas, India, and the East Indies. Russia, Italy, Germany, the United States, and Japan became imperial powers in the period from the middle of the 19th century to World War I. The imperial designs of Japan, fascist Italy, and Nazi Germany in the 1930s culminated in the outbreak of World War II. After the war the Soviet Union consolidated its military and political control of the states of eastern Europe. From the early 20th century the U.S. was accused of imperialism for intervening in the affairs of developing countries in order to protect the interests of U.S.-owned international corporations. Economists and political theorists have debated whether imperialism benefits the states that practice it and whether such benefits or other reasons ever justify a state in pursuing imperialist policies. Some theorists, such as NICCOLÒ MACHIAVELLI, have argued that imperialism is the justified result of the natural struggle for survival among peoples. Others have asserted that it is necessary in order to ensure national security. A third justification for imperialism, offered only infrequently after World War II, is that it is a means of liberating peoples from tyrannical rule or bringing them the blessings of a superior way of life.

Required:

Texts: *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe (TFA)

Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (HD)

9.5x5 composition notebook (although the most affordable of these are the black and white composition books - they do not last as long as the spiral notebooks).

Archetype notes as found on the website on the Summer Reading tab

Hero notes as found on the summer reading notes

For both texts, please read and make notation of the authors' biography in your reader response journal. In many instances, the salient historical and personal occurrences of their lives manifest themselves in their written art.

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe

Notes:

Define caste system and make notation of how this system exist within the Igbo tribe

Pay attention to the following themes and make notation within your reader response journals of how they manifest themselves within the TFA text:

Fate vs Free will

Religion

Masculinity

Justice

Social disintegration (*within the concept of how this theme exist, consider Jean Jacques Rousseau Social Contract of Man [define this theory in your reader response journal]*)

Ch 1

1. What are the characteristics of a hero and how are these characteristics applicable to Okonkwo?
2. As you read please note the archetypes that you find and how they lend to enhancing the meaning behind the text.
3. What is the significance of the numbers 3 and 7? How does this meaning of the numbers enhance the meaning of the mention of these numbers within the text?
4. What is the difference between polygamy and polyandry? Which does Okonkwo practice? What does this say about his standing within the tribe?
5. In what country on a contemporary map would the Ibo tribe live? Locate via computer images of the tribe and their aesthetics. Include in your search pictures of the people (male and female), homes, land, people at work, children at play, and leaders
6. What does Achebe mean when he states: *"Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father"* (end of ch 1). Is this idea true in modern life in America? What about other countries?
7. Why is darkness a terror? (ch 2)
8. What is zoology? Does this occur in this text? Why or why not.

Ch 2

1. What other cultures keep the heads of the tribes or opponents that are vanquished during times of war?
2. What is the underlying meaning of this quote? (ch 2) *When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk*
3. What is the irony in the characterization of the "most feared medium"?
4. What was the crux of the conflict between the Mbaino and the Umuofia? How was this conflict resolved?
5. What was Okonkwo's greatest fear? Why did this fear dominate him?
6. In popular culture, name some instances where others have sought guidance from another being or deity? What effect does night have on the people? What do they fear? How do they deal with their fear of snakes at night? Palm-wine is a naturally fermented product of the palm-wine tree, a sort of natural beer. What is the cause and nature of the conflict with Mbaino? Beginning with this chapter, trace how women are related to the religious beliefs of the people. What is the purpose of the taking of Ikemefuna? Note how Achebe foreshadows the boy's doom even as he introduces him.
7. In what ways does Okonkwo overcompensate for his father's weaknesses? In what ways is he presented as unusual for his culture? What is his attitude toward women? Why does he dislike his son Nwoye so much?

Ch 3

1. Who is the oracle that is sought when misfortune fell upon people?
2. In what other texts has Anansi appeared? What type of character is he portrayed to be?
3. How did Okonkwo gain prosperity and respect?
4. Why was Unoka ill fated?
5. What is the meaning of the following saying? “ *Eneke the bid says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.* ”

Ch 4

1. In what culture is the term chi normally referenced? Define anachronism and explain how this is exhibited in this instance?
2. What is the Week of Peace?
3. Define controlling image. How is the yam used as a controlling image in this text?

Ch 5

1. Is the Igbo culture patriarchal or matriarchal? Prove through text
2. Considering that the largest population of slaves that were shipped throughout the slave trade came from West Africa and specifically Nigeria, what surprises you about the structures of families in contemporary America and other places where slaves were deposited?
3. What information are you able to gain about the aesthetics of the culture?
4. What type of irony is exhibited in the following quote: *Okonkwo was a great man whose prowess was universally acknowledged, he was not a hunter. In fact he had not killed a rat with his gun. And so when he called Ikemefuna to fetch his gun, the wife who had just been beaten murmured something about guns that never shot. Unfortunately, for her, Okonkwo heard it and ran madly into his room for the loaded gun, ran out again and aimed at her as she clambered over the dwarf wall of the barn. He pressed the trigger and there was a loud report accompanied by the wail of his wives and children.*
5. Why didn't the Igbo people answer “yes” when called upon?

Ch 6

1. The following quotes are examples of what type of literary devices? What is the effect of their use? *The air, which had been stretched taut with excitement, relaxed again. ...the air shivered and grew tense like a tightened bow.*
2. What can you infer about the mortality of children in this conversation? *And how is my daughter, Ezinma? She has been very well for some time now. Perhaps she has come to stay. I think she has. How old is she now? She is about ten years old I think she will stay. They usually stay if they do not die before the age of six. I pray she stays.*

Ch 7

1. What precipitates the death of Ikemefuna?

Ch 8

2. What is the response of the village to the death of the child? What is the response of Okonkwo's family? Is this surprising to you? Why or why not.
3. How can you tell that the Igbo and surrounding tribes are very insular in their concept of the world?

Ch 9

1. How long must one wait until a child is named? Are there similar rituals for naming children in other cultures? Identify and elaborate on these cultures?
2. What is an ogbanje?
3. What is Okonkwo's relationship with Enzinma?

Ch 10

1. The *egwugwu* ceremony of the Ibo has been much studied. The women clearly know on some level that these mysterious beings are their men folk in disguise, yet they are terrified of them. What do you think their attitude toward the *egwugwu* is? What seem to be the main functions of the ceremony? How does Evil Forest refute the argument of Uzowulu that he beat his wife because she was unfaithful to him? How are problems like this affected by the fact that whole families are involved in marriage, unlike in American culture where a man and woman may wed quite independently of their families and even against their families' wishes? What are the advantages and disadvantages of each system?

Ch 11

1. What is the moral of the fable of the tortoise? What values does it reflect? What does the incident involving the priestess of Agbala reflect about the values of the culture?

Ch 12

1. Notice the traditional attitudes of all small villagers toward large marketplaces like Umuike. How is the importance of family emphasized in the *uri* ceremony? Notice that the song sung at the end of the chapter is a new one. Achebe often reminds us that this is not a frozen, timeless culture, but a constantly changing one.

Ch 13

1. Having shown us an engagement ceremony, Achebe now depicts a funeral. We are being systematically introduced to the major rituals of Ibo life. How does the one-handed *egwugwu* praise the dead man? Okonkwo has killed people before this. What makes this incident so serious, though it would be treated as a mere accident under our law?

Ch 14

1. In Part One we were introduced to an intact and functioning culture. It may have had its faults, and it accommodated deviants like Okonkwo with some difficulty, but it still worked as an organic whole. It is in Part Two that things begin to fall apart. Okonkwo's exile in Mbanta is not only a personal disaster, but it removes him from his home village at a crucial time so that he returns to a changed world which can no longer adapt to him.
2. What is the significance of comparing Okonkwo to a fish out of water? Note the value placed on premarital chastity in the engagement ceremony. In many African cultures virginity is not an absolute requirement for marriage but it is highly desirable and normally greatly enhances the value of the bride-price that may be paid. Thus families are prone to assert a good deal of authority over their unmarried daughters to prevent early love affairs. How does Okonkwo's lack of understanding of the importance of women reflect on him?

Ch 15

1. How does the story of the destruction of Abame summarize the experience of colonization? Movie Indians call a train engine an "iron horse," but the term here refers to a bicycle. Note that although the people of Abame acted rashly, they had a good deal of insight into the significance of the arrival of the whites. Note

how the Africans treat the white man's language as mere noise; a mirror of how white colonizers treated African languages. What sorts of stories had Okonkwo heard about white men before? In the final exchange with Okonkwo Obierika is good-naturedly refusing to accept Okonkwo's thanks by joking with him.

Ch 16

1. The British followed a policy in their colonizing efforts of designating local "leaders" to administer the lower levels of their empire. In Africa these were known as "warrant chiefs." But the men they chose were often not the real leaders, and the British often assumed the existence of an centralized chieftainship where none existed. Thus the new power structures meshed badly with the old. Similarly the missionaries have designated as their contact man an individual who lacks the status to make him respected by his people.
2. Why do you think Nwoye has become a Christian? Note how Achebe inverts the traditional dialect humor of Europeans which satirizes the inability of natives to speak proper English by having the missionary mangle Ibo. What is the first act of the missionaries which evokes a positive response in some of the Ibo? Achebe focuses on the doctrine of the Trinity, the notoriously least logical and most paradoxical basic belief in Christianity. How does this belief undermine the missionaries' attempts to discredit the traditional religion? Why does the new religion appeal to Nwoye?

Ch 17

1. What mutual misunderstandings are evident in this chapter between the missionaries and the people of the village? How does the granting to the missionaries of a plot in the Evil Forest backfire? What does the metaphor in the next to the last sentence of the chapter mean?

Ch 18

1. The outcaste *osu* are introduced in this chapter. Why do you suppose Achebe has not mentioned them earlier? Their plight was indeed a difficult one, and is treated by Achebe elsewhere. In India the lowest castes were among the first to convert to faiths which challenged traditional Hinduism; and something similar seems to happen here.

Ch 19

1. Note how traditional Umuofian custom can welcome back an erring member once he has paid for his crime. In many cultures Okonkwo would be treated as a pariah, but this culture has ways of accommodating such a person without destroying him, and in fact encouraging him to give of his best. What does the final speaker say is the main threat posed by Christianity?

Ch 20

1. Okonkwo's relationship to the newcomers is exacerbated by the fact that he has a very great deal at stake in maintaining the old ways. All his hopes and dreams are rooted in the continuance of the traditional culture. The fact that he has not been able gradually to accustom himself to the new ways helps to explain his extreme reaction. The missionaries have brought British colonial government with them. Missionaries were often viewed as agents of imperialism. There is a saying common to Native Americans and Africans alike which goes like this: "Before the white man came, we had the land and they had the Bible. Now we have the Bible and they have the land."
2. What clashes in values are created by the functioning of the British courts? Note the final phrase of Obierika's last speech, alluding to the title of the novel.

Ch 21

1. Why do some of the villagers--even those who are not converts to Christianity--welcome the British? The missionaries try to refute what they consider idolatry with the simplistic argument that the animist gods are only wooden idols; however the villagers are perfectly aware that the idol is not the god in a literal sense, any more than the sculpture of Christ on the cross in a Christian church is God. This sort of oversimplification was a constant theme of Christian arguments against traditional faiths throughout the world as the British assumed that the natives were fools pursuing childish beliefs who needed only a little enlightenment to be converted. Mr. Brown here learns better. It is worth noting that Achebe, like his fellow Nigerian writer Wole Soyinka, was raised a Christian; but both rejected the faith and have preferred to affirm certain aspects of traditional beliefs in their own lives. Note how Akunna shrewdly senses that the head of the Church is in England rather than in heaven. Note the recurrence of the phrase "falling apart" in the last sentence of the chapter."

Ch 22 - 25

1. How is Rev. Smith different from Brown? What is the result of his black and white thinking?
2. What does the District Commissioner say is the motive of the British in colonizing the Africans?
3. Once again Okonkwo uses his matchet rashly, bringing disaster on his head. But he could be viewed as a defiant hero defending his people's way of life. What do you think of his act?
4. Why do you think Okonkwo kills himself? What is your reaction to the final paragraph of the book? Analyze

Heart of Darkness – Joseph Conrad

As you read *Heart of Darkness* , mark passages and quotes in your text that will help you answer and/or illustrate the following questions and issues:

1. Consider how the following themes develop themselves within the texts: Write down supporting quotes to support their development:
 Hypocrisy of Imperialism
 Work
 Absurdity of Evil
 Racism
2. As you read the novel, be aware of how Conrad uses repeated "doubling" patterns of opposition and contrast in *Heart of Darkness*: light and dark, white and black, "savagery" and "civilization," outer and inner? What does Conrad accomplish by this contrast, especially of light and dark?
3. Marlow constantly uses vague and often redundant phrases like "unspeakable secrets" and "inconceivable mystery." At other times, however, he is capable of powerful imagery and considerable eloquence. Why does Marlow use vague and "inconclusive" language so frequently?
4. Why does *Heart of Darkness* have two competing heroes? Make the case for either Marlow or Kurtz as the true "hero" of the book. How do you define "hero" for this book? Why doesn't Marlow kill Kurtz?
5. Think about the framing story that structures *Heart of Darkness*. Why is it important to narrate Marlow in the act of telling his story? Why is the framing narrator unnamed?

6. Interpret Kurtz's dying words ("The horror! The horror!"). What do they mean? What are the possible "horrors" to which he is referring? Why is Marlow the recipient of Kurtz's last words?
7. What do women represent in *Heart of Darkness*? There are three significant women in this story: Kurtz's Intended, Marlow's aunt, and the African woman at Kurtz's station. How are they described? Contrast Kurtz's African mistress with his Intended. Are both negative portrayals of women? Describe how each functions in the narrative. Does it make any difference in your interpretation to know that Conrad supported the women's suffrage movement? What does Marlow mean early in Part 1 when he suggests that women are "out of touch with truth" and live in a beautiful world of their own?
8. Describe the use of "darkness" both in the book's title and as a symbol throughout the text. What does darkness represent? Is its meaning constant or does it change?
9. How does physical illness relate to madness? How does one's environment relate to one's mental state in this book?
10. Why does Marlow lie to Kurtz's fiancée about Kurtz's last words? Why not tell her the truth, or tell her that Kurtz had no last words, rather than affirming her sentimental and mundane ideas?

Culminating projects and paper:

Choose one of two paper topics and respond accordingly supporting your answers with quotes from the texts. Use MLA parenthetical citations and include a work cited page.

- I. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has claimed that *Heart of Darkness* is an "offensive and deplorable book" that "set[s] Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest." Achebe says that Conrad does not provide enough of an outside frame of reference to enable the book to be read as ironic or critical of imperialism. Based on the evidence in the text, argue for or against Achebe's assertion.
- II. Throughout the novel, drums, music, and the town crier's voice punctuate the narrative at key moments. When does silence occur and what does it mean? Is there more than one type of silence? Can silence be characterized as a positive or negative occurrence? What are the implications of the fact that Unoka takes his flute with him to the Evil Forest when he dies?
- III. Discuss the role of women in the novels. What does this role say of the cultures and the characters of the texts.

Choose one of the following projects in addition to your paper to complete your understanding of the texts.

- I. Design a movie poster, enticing people to come see the movie version of **Heart of Darkness**.
- II. Create a Youtube movie that embeds video and audio to showcase the development of themes and characters within BOTH texts
- III. Create a dialogue where the two authors encounter each other and justify their presentation of the texts and their characters. This dialogue should be authentic and reflect the development of the ideas that you captured from your reading
- IV. Create a multifaceted journal with imagery and dialogue that captures the inner thoughts of Okonkwo and Marlowe.