

Things Fall Apart Exam Questions



THE TEST

On the test itself, I will give you a list of 3 questions and you will pick 2 to write **short essays** (a thesis statement and two paragraphs will do) for your response. You may have a notecard (3x5, handwritten) for the test to help recall names and characters, but you may not use the book or any other resources.

Responses that receive full credit will a) answer the prompt with strong, specific language, b) use effective, concise examples from the text, and c) demonstrate understanding of the text and our discussions.

POTENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR THE TEST

1. Even as Achebe works to educate his readers about African culture and to combat demeaning stereotypes, he does not present Igbo society as ideal or perfect. The portrait of this culture on the eve of its "falling apart" in Part I of *Things Fall Apart* is complex, sometimes contradictory and critical. What aspects of pre-colonial Igbo culture does Achebe seem to question or criticize? How does Achebe use characters like Obierika, Okonkwo, and Nwoye to offer such social criticism of Igbo society? How do the people of Umuofia react to change?
2. Chinua Achebe wrote that "African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans; that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and above all they had dignity." Does the book effectively show the beauty of African values and culture, separate from colonial influence?
3. Kwame Anthony Appiah wrote, "One of the central features of Things Fall Apart is Achebe's balancing of principles through the metaphor of masculine and feminine, a metaphor that seems to derive from deep within Ibo thought. Thus, the god who, above all others, regulates life in Umuofia is Ani, the earth goddess. And it is a reflection of Okonkwo's failure, to seek balance between the manly virtues and the womanly virtues as understood in Umuofia, that each of the disasters that afflicts him can be seen as a crime against the earth. One is tempted to say that this is Okonkwo's tragic flaw: he is a man who lives in a culture that requires a balance between "masculine" and "feminine" that he does not acknowledge (in part because he is ashamed of his father who has failed to be a "real man"). And it is through this flaw that he is destroyed." Is Appiah correct in this assessment?
4. Describe Okonkwo, the protagonist of *Things Fall Apart*. Consider him as an Igbo heroic character: how does he work to achieve greatness as defined by his and culture?
5. Why does Achebe end the novel with Okonkwo's death? Is his death meant to show the victory of the colonizers over the Igbo people? The cruelty of their laws and culture? Or is his death meant to show that Okonkwo failed to live up to the expectations of his culture? His own vision of himself?