

Things Fall Apart Exam Questions



INSTRUCTIONS

- Answer **two** of the questions below on a separate sheet of paper. Don't worry too much about spelling or grammar but do try to make your response intelligible. 😊
- Answers receiving an "A" score will have a clear argument, well-developed claims underneath that argument, and copious examples from the text. Because this is an open-book test over two days, I will expect you to include specific quotes from the text in answers that are **at least 2 paragraphs** long.
- You have 50 minutes to complete the test. Good luck!

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. 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?
3. 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? Is this story ultimately a tragedy? Is he a tragic hero?
4. 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?

