

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe

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Set in the late 1800s, *Things Fall Apart* is a three-part novel that tells the story of Okonkwo, a member of the Ibo people who lives in a fictional Nigerian village called Umuofia. Okonkwo is strong, hot-headed, and fearful of weakness, which he views as feminine and thus unacceptable in a patriarchal society like the Ibo's. This greatly factors into how he acts and how much of the plot unfolds.

Part One depicts the time before European colonists invaded Nigeria. It focuses on Okonkwo's high status in the village and his familial relationships—namely that with Ikemefuna, a boy from another village who would come to be his son-figure. Part Two opens up in Mbanta, the village where Okonkwo's maternal family lives and where Okonkwo (and his family) is staying during his exile, which was imposed after he accidentally killed someone at the end of Part One. While in Mbanta, Okonkwo is occasionally visited by Obierika, his best friend from Umuofia. Obierika tells Okonkwo that Christian missionaries have arrived in Umuofia and have begun to convert the Ibo people. Okonkwo's anger at this development became a source of conflict between him and his son Nwoye. Part Three depicts Okonkwo's return to Umuofia. He discovers that his high status is gone, that the missionaries have set up their own government there, and that many Ibo people have been turned against their traditions and customs. Okonkwo despises this change, and as he takes actions to drive the colonists away, readers will find that things truly do fall apart.

I really enjoyed reading *Things Fall Apart*. The way that Chinua Achebe interweaves the elements of Ibo culture throughout the story makes this book both an educational and captivating one. I learned a lot, ranging from the importance of yams to the Ibo's customs, values, superstitions, religion, and political organization. This book is also one where I found the protagonist highly unlikeable yet still wanted to read about. I don't agree with Okonkwo's beliefs, and I don't like how he treats his wives and children. However, he was still well-written, and I thought that his character was wonderfully contrasted by that of others.

I would recommend this book for readers ages 12 and up. I think that it's important to read about what colonized societies were like before they became that way because there are still people holding views that colonists were saviors and made native populations "civilized." The Ibo were fine the way they were. They weren't inferior to the missionaries that came; I didn't agree with certain parts of their culture, but I realized that that didn't matter because their way of living should not be judged by any standard other than their own. I hope that those who read this book will come to appreciate this view as well.

Recommended Titles

A Man of the People by Chinua Achebe

Half of a Yellow Sun by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

The House on Mango Street by Sandra Cisneros

Paradise of the Blind by Duong Thu Huong