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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Things Fall Apart

by Chinua Achebe

written by Michelle Ryan

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Things Fall Apart

Objectives

By the end of this unit, the student will be able to:

1. understand how African literature and literary traditions influence Achebe's writing style.

2. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

3. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

4. offer a close reading of *Things Fall Apart* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

5. discuss the dramatic development of the narrative in terms of exposition, conflict, climax, and resolution.

6. demonstrate a literal, personal, interpretive, and critical understanding of the text.

7. explain the importance of the title as a theme in the novel.

8. explain the central conflicts in the narrative, and explain the nature of the internal and external conflicts with which various characters cope.

9. understand the novel as an exploration of the ramifications of Colonialism.

10. examine Okonkwo as a tragic hero.

11. analyze the importance of literary elements like dramatic irony, foreshadowing, and suspense on the development of the story.

12. trace and discuss recurring imagery.

13. discuss the use of proverbs in the narrative and how they contribute to the overall effect of the novel.

14. analyze how point of view influences the literary narrative.

15. explain how Achebe uses character foils to illuminate the differences between the principal characters.

Things Fall Apart

Lecture

I. Achebe and His Times

Chinua Achebe, full name Albert Chinualumogu Achebe, was born in Nigeria. His father was a teacher in a missionary school; Achebe was raised as a Protestant. As a youth, Achebe attended the Government College of Umuahia and the University College of Ibadan. While in college, Achebe reclaimed his cultural name and no longer used his christened name, Albert, after Prince Albert of England. While in school, Achebe studied English, history, and theology.

Achebe began writing in the 1950s; much of his work centers on the political and social problems that face his nation, particularly during the time of unrest that came when Britain influenced the government and religion of Nigeria. His writing explores the ramifications of Colonialism. Achebe went on to found a publishing company with a fellow Nigerian writer. He since has published many other novels, short stories, and essays.

II. About the Book

Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, was Achebe's first novel. With it, Achebe established that he is one of the foremost Nigerian writers and has managed to incorporate his African heritage into English-language novels. Achebe's literature draws on African oral tradition as well as societal traditions to create a text that is accepted not only for its reflection of the human condition, but also its ability to reflect African culture.

Things Fall Apart follows Okonkwo, a powerful leader in a traditional Ibo tribe in the village of Umuofia. The story takes place in a traditional village in the 1880s before European missionaries and other outsiders have arrived. The clan is traditional in its practice of religion, sacrifice, the supernatural, and relationships among the tribal community. Driven by the memory of his lazy and unsuccessful father,Okonkwo spends his life using his strength and power to earn the respect of his fellow tribesmen. However, the novel depicts the changes that can occur when a tribal leader is banished from the community, despite the respect that he has earned from his tribesmen, and outsiders attempt to alter cultural traditions.

On October 1, 1960, Nigeria received its independence from British colonial rule. Achebe wrote this novel two years before this event. His goal was to illustrate for non-African audiences what Nigeria was like before colonization.

III. Features of Achebe's Novel

1. **Literary Language –** Readers might begin reading the novel by asking why it is written in English, given that the author was raised in Nigeria, wrote much of his early work in Nigeria, and founded a publishing house with a fellow Nigerian writer. Achebe uses the English language to tell his story for two reasons. First, Achebe was distressed by the way in which the post-colonial writers (for example, Joseph Conrad and *The Heart of Darkness*) portrayed the African continent and the African people as devoid of language. The novel does not follow the traditional literary language of European novels. The language incorporates Achebe's Ibo vocabulary and proverbs. By infusing the text with Ibo words, Achebe is able to demonstrate that the African culture is rich with language. Achebe includes songs and proverbs to illustrate the complexity of the dialogues that marks the African culture. Second, Achebe uses the English language to reach his desired audience. Achebe's fellow Nigerians would have already understood the effects of losing a tribe, a village, a country, and a tradition, but Achebe wanted to spread his message to those who would have little experience with these losses. The English language facilitated the dialogue that Achebe wanted to create with those who do not share his cultural heritage.

2. **Point of View –** Throughout the novel, Achebe uses third-person narration to mimic the oral nature of African stories. Rather than have Okonkwo or one of the other tribesmen tell the story in its entirety, he creates a tale that seems to have been passed from generation to generation, much like many of the tales that are told within the narrative. There is little dialogue between the characters; the reader can imagine an elder member of the tribe passing the story to the younger clansmen. Achebe also uses point of view to illustrate the communal nature of African society. Achebe begins the narrative by describing life in the village and the relationship Okonkwo has with his father; however, the story is not told entirely from the beginning narrator's point of view. Throughout the narrative, the point of view changes to demonstrate how Colonization affects the whole tribe rather than just one person.

3. **Structure –** The novel is written in three parts. The first part provides necessary exposition. The reader sees Okonkwo's humble beginnings and his rise to power through hard work. The reader also has an opportunity to see the ways of the Ibo people. Each chapter reflects some part of Ibo life and either supports or questions it. The second part tells the story of Okonkwo's exile from his tribe; however, the story does not focus only on what happens in Okonkwo's life during this time. The reader learns of the influence of the missionaries and the intrusion of the European government into the African culture. The two cultures collide and have several conflicts during this section. The final part of the novel focuses on Okonkwo's return to his village and his discovery that the tribe is no longer the strong, masculine entity he remembers, but has become what Okonkwo feared most: a feminine place that had lost its ways. Achebe also uses the structure of the novel to mimic traditional oral tales of Africa. In traditional African tales, like those Nwoye's mother tells, the listener is given a lesson through the story. This novel is a compilation of several stories concerning African tradition and culture. Within each of these stories, Achebe is able to illustrate the greater tale of the fall of a tribal hero and of an African culture.

4. **Tragedy –** *Things Fall Apart* is a tragedy both individually and in communally. One part of the tragedy focuses on Okonkwo, who functions as the tragic hero. He begins with a problematic past, works hard to achieve success, and then because of his temper, falls. The second part of tragedy concerns the tribe. The tribe also falls, losing its culture and traditions because the members stop praying to their gods. Achebe indicates that only one trigger for the fall is the infiltration of the European value system into African culture.

5. **Use of Language (simile, metaphor, foreshadowing, proverbs) –** Achebe's use of language helps him emphasize the meaning, action, and tone of the novel.

   A. Simile

   Be certain not to miss the "like" or "as" when reading the descriptions. For example, when Achebe describes the lack of rain during the rainy season he writes: "The earth burned like hot coals and roasted all of the yams that had been sown."

   - The image shows how little rain the tribe received and how damaging the heat was to the crops.

B. Metaphor

Metaphors can be recognized by finding the two ideas that are being compared. For example, when the narrator is describing Okonkwo's physical prowess, he states: "When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often." Achebe compares Okonkwo to a powerful cat. Okonkwo moves in the way of a cat in the way that he pounces on people. The image of pouncing, which is a verb normally reserved for animals, suggests that Okonkwo is as quick and powerful as a tiger or leopard or lion. Achebe uses this image to complement the idea of Okonkwo's masculinity.

C. Proverbs

Again, to give his reader a sense of African language traditions, Achebe uses the proverb, the pithy and memorable lesson in a well-turned phrase. For example:

- "He always said that whenever he saw a dead man's mouth he saw the folly of not eating what one had in one's lifetime." This proverb, a favorite of Okonkwo's father Unoka, means that a person should not waste what he or she is given, but instead should eat and act as if there were no tomorrow. This is not a proverb that Okonkwo believed, but is one that Unoka used to support why he did not save and work for the future.

D. Foreshadowing

The various occasions of foreshadowing in *Things Fall Apart* are not subtle. Instead, they directly lead the reader to the ultimate conclusion. For example, when the reader is first introduced to Ikemefuna, he is described as an "ill-fated lad," clearly stating from the outset that something unfortunate is going to happen to him. Ikemefuna is, in fact, killed.

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The Main Allusion

Chinua Achebe's title, *Things Fall Apart,* is an allusion to "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats, a Nobel-Prize-winning, Irish poet and dramatist. In this poem, Yeats relates his vision of the apocalyptic end of one culture and the rise of another. Notice that, in the early lines, the passing of the current age is accompanied by a loss of control, the end of traditional authority. In the final lines, the envisioned new age is frightful.

Clearly, Achebe's Okonkwo, witnessing the end of civilization as he knows it, experiences the same emotions as Yeats's speaker below:

The Second Coming

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.
Surely some revelation is at hand;
Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
The Second Coming!
Hardly are those words out
When a vast image out of *Spiritus Mundi*
Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
The darkness drops again; but now I know
That twenty centuries of stony sleep
Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

– William Butler Yeats, January 1919

Things Fall Apart

Practice Free Response Essays

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1

Read the passage that starts at the beginning of the novel and ends with the sentence, "As soon as he found one he would sing with his whole being, welcoming it back from its long, long journey, and asking it if it had brought home any lengths of cloth."

Then write a well-organized essay in which you evaluate the success of this passage as an introduction to the novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2

Carefully read two passages, the reader's introduction to Okonkwo from the beginning of the opening chapter, ending with, "He had had no patience with his father," and the passage that closes the book, from the beginning of Chapter Twenty-Five to the end.

Then write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how each episode fits into the structure of the novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3

The depiction of violence in literature is an ongoing controversy and one of the key reasons for a title's being challenged or banned from school libraries and curricula. Examine several instances of violence in *Things Fall Apart*, and write a well-organized essay in which you evaluate the contribution of the episodes to the overall meaning and impact of the work.

Do not merely summarize the episodes.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4

Many novelists, in order to recreate a past or foreign culture, borrow certain elements of that culture's language and introduce those elements into the narrative structure of the novel. In a well-organized essay, analyze Achebe's use of Ibo words and phrases—as well as other aspects of the oral tradition that are characteristic of his African culture—and their contribution to the overall impact of the novel.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5

Oftentimes in literature an author will create characters and relationships in order to contrast the main character or the main character's relationship with other people. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe develops several relationships in which the characters serve as foils for one another. In a well-written essay, discuss the nature of the relationships between Okonkwo and Ibierka, Ikemefuna and Nwoye and Mr. Brown and Rev. Smith. Do not merely summarize the plot.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6

Scenes in which a death or several deaths occur are often among the most significant in revealing theme in literature. Write a well-organized essay in which you show how *Things Fall Apart* incorporates death scenes that help illuminate the meaning of the work as a whole. Avoid mere plot summary.

Things Fall Apart

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Make a list of the incidents that foreshadow the demise of Okonkwo and the Ibo tribe. Explain what you believe is the effect of the foreshadowing on the reader's interpretation of events.

2. Analyze the relationship between men and women in the African culture as Achebe presents it. Explain how this relationship is similar or dissimilar to the Western view of the relationships between men and women. Focus on both the positive and negative aspects of the relationship. What comment is Achebe trying to make about the dynamics of the relationship in his culture?

3. Explain how the structure of the novel contributes to the reader's understanding of the events that occur.

4. Discuss the ways in which the point of view and narration affect the reader's interpretation of the events in the novel.

5. Achebe's representation of his African heritage is aimed directly at the Western reader. How do you believe Achebe wants the reader to see Africa after reading this novel? What techniques does Achebe use that are most successful? Which techniques does he use that are the least successful?

6. How does Achebe illustrate the African culture? What stereotypes do you think he is trying to erase? What stereotypes do you think he validates?

7. The title of this novel alludes to one of the themes present in the novel. Read the poem "The Second Coming" by William Butler Yeats. Note how the theme of the poem is developed throughout the story. Explain how the title relates to key scenes and how it functions as a theme.

8. Ikemefuna is introduced and killed early in the novel. What is his role in the plot of the novel as well as in the character development?

9. Discuss the ways in which *Things Fall Apart* functions as a tragedy.

10. Discuss the ways in which Okonkwo adheres to the conventions of the traditional Aristotelian tragic hero.

11. Discuss the different points of view that are present throughout the novel. Why does Achebe choose to use different points of view? What is the effect on the reader?

12. Discuss the role of fate, or "chi," in the novel. How do you think Achebe feels about fate versus a person's control over his or her own destiny?

13. How does the last chapter of the book differ from the other chapters? Why do you think Achebe chooses to narrate the last chapter from the point of view of someone who has yet to be introduced in the novel?

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PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5

Read the passage that closes Chapter Three, beginning with, "Okonkwo planted what was left of his seed-yams…," before you choose your answers to the questions below:

1. Okonkwo's considering himself to have the "heart of a lion" suggests what character trait?
   A. strength
   B. courage
   C. wisdom
   D. hubris
   E. tyranny

2. The sentence, "That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams," contains an example of
   A. simile.
   B. irony.
   C. metaphor.
   D. personification.
   E. understatement.

3. The animal imagery that is used in the passage could symbolically represent
   A. a literal description of nature.
   B. Okonkwo's father.
   C. Okonkwo.
   D. the men in Umuofia.
   E. the forest and the crops.

4. "A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride" means
   A. men who work alone are most likely to be successful because they are not worried about taking care of other people.
   B. it is important for a person to be strong because he or she will be able to survive anything.
   C. every man should experience a failure in order to ensure that he will be strong in the future.
   D. Unoka does not believe that being strong is important as long as one can take care of himself.
   E. having a strong heart is an important characteristic in the Ibo tribe and will enable the man to withstand smaller failures.

5. The tone of the passage can best be described as
   A. peaceful.
   B. reflective.
   C. ominous.
   D. lonely.
   E. pessimistic.

PRACTICE MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10

Before you choose your answers, carefully read the passage from Chapter Nine, beginning with the line "Of his three wives Ekwefi was the only one who would have the audacity to bang on his door" and concluding with "Ekwefi did as she was asked."

6. Why does Okonkwo visit the medicine man?
   A. Okonkwo believes that Ekwefi's children are dying because of him.
   B. Okonkwo believes that Ekwefi must be given some medicine.
   C. Ekwefi begs Okonkwo to visit him.
   D. The medicine man can determine why Ekwefi is miscarrying.
   E. The missionaries have told Okonkwo to take Ekwefi to the medicine man.

7. The line "…and all the tragedy and sorrow of her life were packed in those words" contains an example of
   A. personification.
   B. simile.
   C. allusion.
   D. hyperbole.
   E. alliteration.

8. Okonkwo's reaction to Ekwefi's initial announcement suggests that
   A. Ekwefi is Okonkwo's favorite of his three wives.
   B. Ekwefi cannot handle a sick child on her own.
   C. Okonkwo has a soft spot in his heart for Ekwefi and her daughter.
   D. Okonkwo needs his daughter's help on the compound.
   E. Okonkwo feels obligated to Ekwefi because she has borne him so many children.

9. The despairing names Ekwefi gives her children are examples of
   A. simile.
   B. allusion.
   C. personification.
   D. metaphor.
   E. imagery.

10. All of the following are possible purposes of this episode except to
   A. illustrate the interaction between men and women in the Ibo tribe.
   B. demonstrate the nature of the relationship between Ekwefi and Ezinma.
   C. highlight Okonkwo's compassionate nature.
   D. illustrate the importance of the medicine man as part of the African culture.
   E. foreshadow events that will happen later in the novel.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-16

Carefully read the passage from the beginning of Chapter Twenty to the line, "The poor and unknown would not dare to come forth," before choosing your answers to the questions below.

11. What is important about the number seven, the number of years that Okonkwo has been away?
    A. According to religious tradition, seven is the perfect number.
    B. Okonkwo was banished for a period of seven years.
    C. Seven tribes remain in the group.
    D. Okonkwo will return to his village with seven living children.
    E. Seven signifies the number of titles that Okonkwo lost during his exile.

12. In the paragraph that begins "Okonkwo knew these things," what rhetorical technique is Achebe using?
    A. anaphora
    B. repetition
    C. polysyndeton
    D. apposition
    E. apostrophe

13. The tone of this passage can best be described as
    A. resilient.
    B. pessimistic.
    C. ironic.
    D. doubtful.
    E. optimistic.

14. How does Okonkwo's tribe try to help him while he is away?
    A. They refuse to help him because he has been banished.
    B. They sharecrop his yams so he is able to grow them in two places.
    C. They take care of his children for him because they are not allowed to follow their father into exile.
    D. They rebuild his compound so he has a place to return to when he has served his sentence.
    E. They find a wealthy man to marry his daughter.

15. The line that best explains the meaning of the proverb, "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another," is
    A. "He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits…"
    B. "He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years."
    C. "A man's place was not always there, waiting for him."
    D. "He was determined that his return should be marked by his people."
    E. "Even in his first year in exile he had begun to plan for his return."

16. Which of the following does not illustrate why Okonkwo wishes that his daughter Ezinma was a boy?
    A. Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna, who was more of a son than Nwoye.
    B. Okonkwo has disowned Nwoye.
    C. Ezinma and Okonkwo have a close relationship.
    D. Ezinma is one of the hardest workers in Okonkwo's family.
    E. The priestess told Okonkwo that Ezinma should have been a boy.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS 17-25

Read the final chapter in the novel carefully before you choose your answers.

There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let a man through.

17. The purpose of the above description is to
    A. emphasize how secluded the spot was for Okonkwo's suicide.
    B. illustrate the way that the white men are kept away from the rest of the compound.
    C. allow Achebe to create suspense in the narration.
    D. explain why Obierika had to walk the men around the compound in order to find Okonkwo.
    E. describe the new area in the compound.

18. The line, "He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot," could be an example of
    A. a metaphor for the way the district commissioner feels about the men of the tribe.
    B. a metaphor for the men in command and how they are in control of the tribesmen.
    C. a metaphor for the way the tribe feels about the district commissioner and his men.
    D. foreshadowing, looking toward a conflict that the tribesmen are going to have with the district commissioner.
    E. irony, mocking the tribe's reliance on subterfuge.

One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought.

19. Achebe includes the above line in order to
    A. show the irony in the way Europeans look at the African language.
    B. illustrate the Europeans' cruelty to the Africans.
    C. emphasize the shift in narrative point of view.
    D. illustrate why the tribe was so distrustful of the Europeans.
    E. make a statement about the significance of language in the African culture.

20. This section of the story represents the
    A. exposition.
    B. climax.
    C. denouement.
    D. inciting incident.
    E. main conflict.

His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it.

21. The above statement is ironic for all of the following reasons except
    A. Okonkwo was once one of the most powerful men in the tribe.
    B. the Europeans should no longer be considered strangers.
    C. Okonkwo would have known that this is how the tribe would treat him.
    D. the line is spoken by Okonkwo's closest friend.
    E. Obierika does not really believe what he is saying.

22. Achebe changes the point of view in this section in order to
    A. illustrate the way in which Europeans have misinterpreted the African culture.
    B. demonstrate the kindness of the district commissioner.
    C. show how the two cultures have cooperated.
    D. demonstrate the district commissioner's ability to manipulate the tribesmen.
    E. demonstrate the superiority of the Europeans.

23. Which of the following best summarizes the European view of the Africans?
    A. "In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things."
    B "Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him."
    C. "One could almost write a whole chapter on him."
    D. "…one must be firm in cutting out details."
    E. "…The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

24. Which of the following statements best demonstrates the district commissioner's inability to recognize his ignorance of African culture?
    A. "The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs."
    B. "He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot."
    C. "He warned the men that unless they produced Okonkwo forthwith he would lock them all up."
    D. "He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."
    E. "In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things."

25. Okonkwo chooses to kill himself because
    A. the district commissioner was going to put him to death.
    B. he could not live in accordance with European customs.
    C. he was trying to save his family.
    D. Obierika suggested that his death was the only way to cleanse the land.
    E. Obierika suggested that this horrible act would drive the Europeans away.

Things Fall Apart

Multiple Choice Answers With Explanations

1. Okonkwo's considering himself to have the "heart of a lion" suggests what character trait?
   A. strength
   B. courage
   C. wisdom
   D. hubris
   E. tyranny

The entire passage emphasizes Okonkwo's inflexibility and the role his will has played in his success. A is tempting, but too general an answer—does it mean physical or emotional strength? B is likewise tempting, but there is more pride in Okonkwo's reflection on his hardship. C and E are not overly satisfying, but D suggests the pride Okonkwo takes in his accomplishments, and how he credits these accomplishments to his own inflexible will.

2. "That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral, and many farmers wept as they dug up the miserable and rotting yams," contains an example of
   A. simile.
   B. irony.
   C. metaphor.
   D. personification.
   E. understatement.

A simile is a comparison using like or as. The negative outcome of the harvest and the way the Ibo tribe reacted to it are being compared to the grieving of a funeral and the way people respond to a death.

3. The animal imagery that is used in the passage could symbolically represent
   A. nature.
   B. Okonkwo's father.
   C. Okonkwo.
   D. the men in Umuofia.
   E. the forest and the crops.

Animals are very important to the Ibo tribe and to the African culture. Throughout the novel, Okonkwo is compared to various strong animals in order to illustrate his commanding presence and warrior-like qualities. It would not be used to describe Okonkwo's father because Unoka was a weak man. It could be used to describe the other men of Umuofia, but they are not the focus of the passage.

4. "A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride" means
   A. men who work alone are most likely to be successful because they are not worried about taking care of other people.
   B. it is important for a person to be strong because he or she will be able to survive anything.
   C. every man should experience a failure in order to ensure that he will be strong in the future.
   D. Unoka does not believe that being strong is important as long as one can take care of himself.
   E. having a strong heart is an important characteristic in the Ibo tribe and will enable the man to withstand smaller failures.

The proverb refers to the Okonkwo's strong spirit as it compares to the rest of the village and his father. The narrator is illustrating Okonkwo's strength in all matters, and therefore, Okonkwo should be able to survive a poor harvest. The irony of this proverb and the line following it is that Okonkwo's self-reliance and pride will ultimately result in his downfall.

5. The tone of the passage can best be described as
   A. peaceful.
   B. reflective.
   C. ominous.
   D. lonely.
   E. pessimistic.

While the passage is somewhat pessimistic, the exchange between Okonkwo and his father suggests that something to test Okonkwo's spirit will happen in the novel. After reading the novel, readers should recognize that this passage illustrates Okonkwo's tragic flaw.

6. Why does Okonkwo visit the medicine man?
   A. Okonkwo believes that Ekwefi's children are dying because of him.
   B. Okonkwo believes that Ekwefi must be given some medicine.
   C. Ekwefi begs Okonkwo to visit him.
   D. The medicine man can determine why Ekwefi is miscarrying.
   E. The missionaries have told Okonkwo to take Ekwefi to the medicine man.

The narration suggests throughout the novel that the religious culture of Nigeria is different from that of the West. In African tradition, the medicine man holds a great amount of power and is seen as a true doctor—not only of physical medicine, but also of a spiritual nature. Okonkwo would never believe that he is at fault for something that is happening to his wife because he is too full of pride. The information about the ogbanje indicates that the miscarriages are not Ekwefi's "fault" either.

7. The line "…and all the tragedy and sorrow of her life were packed in those words," contains an example of
   A. personification.
   B. simile.
   C. allusion.
   D. hyperbole.
   E. alliteration.

While the example could almost be considered personification, the line is clearly a poetic exaggeration of the fear and panic in the woman's voice as she asks for her husband's help.

8. Okonkwo's reaction to Ekwefi's statement about Ezinma indicates that
   A. Ekwefi is Okonkwo's favorite of his three wives.
   B. Ekwefi cannot handle a sick child on her own.
   C. Okonkwo has a soft spot in his heart for Ekwefi and her daughter.
   D. Okonkwo needs his daughter's help on the compound.
   E. Okonkwo feels obligated to Ekwefi because she has borne him so many children.

The complete passage describes Ekwefi's child-bearing past. The other choices are not supported by the passage. While the reader may not think that Okonkwo is capable of having a soft spot, the fact that he jumped up when Ekwefi told him that Ezinma was sick supports that Okonkwo feels especially concerned for these two women.

9. The despairing names Ekwefi gives her children are examples of
   A. simile.
   B. allusion.
   C. personification.
   D. metaphor.
   E. imagery.

While D might be tempting, all of the names Ekwefi gives her children personify Death as evil, selfishly depriving Ekwefi of her children.

10. All of the following are possible purposes of this episode except to
    A. illustrate the interaction between men and women in the Ibo tribe.
    B. demonstrate the nature of the relationship between Ekwefi and Ezinma.
    C. highlight Okonkwo's compassionate nature.
    D. illustrate the importance of the medicine man as part of the African culture
    E. foreshadow events that will happen later in the novel.

This passage looks backward to Ekwefi's history with her children, not forward to what may happen with the woman and her daughter.

11. What is important about the number seven, the number of years that Okonkwo has been away?
    A. According to religious tradition, seven is the perfect number.
    B. Okonkwo was banished for a period of seven years.
    C. Seven tribes remain in the group.
    D. Okonkwo will return to his village with seven living children.
    E. Seven signifies the number of titles that Okonkwo lost during his exile.

The number of years connects with the first part of the novel that references the number seven. Religion is a significant part of the African culture, and the number of seven symbolizes the "perfect" amount of time that Okonkwo has been gone in order to serve his punishment (determined by the spirits).

12. In the paragraph that begins "Okonkwo knew these things," what rhetorical technique is Achebe using?
    A. anaphora
    B. repetition
    C. polysyndeton
    D. apposition
    E. apostrophe

Achebe uses the repetition of the phrase "he had lost" to emphasize the significance of the gravity of the situation as Okonkwo sees it. Instead of concentrating on the fact that he is returning to his tribe, Okonkwo is consumed with what he has lost since he has been gone.

13. The tone of this passage can best be described as
    A. resilient.
    B. pessimistic.
    C. ironic.
    D. doubtful.
    E. optimistic.

The focus of the passage is how Okonkwo plans to return to his village and regain what he has lost. He is optimistic; he feels as if is control of his fate.

14. How does Okonkwo's tribe try to help him while he is away?
    A. They refuse to help him because he has been banished.
    B. They sharecrop his yams so he is able to grow them in two places.
    C. They take care of his children for him because they are not allowed to follow their father into exile.
    D. They rebuild his compound so he has a place to return to when he has served his sentence.
    E. They find a wealthy man to marry his daughter.

Obierika agrees to sharecrop Okonkwo's yams so Okonkwo will have a large number of them when he returns. The tribe can do nothing more to help Okonkwo because Okonkwo is being punished.

15. The line that best explains the meaning of the proverb, "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another," is
    A. "He knew that he had lost his place among the nine masked spirits…."
    B. "He would return with a flourish, and regain the seven wasted years."
    C. "A man's place was not always there, waiting for him."
    D. "He was determined that his return should be marked by his people."
    E. "Even in his first year in exile he had begun to plan for his return."

The proverb emphasizes the resilience of the lizard in replacing the missing part. Thus, the proverb is about regaining, not dwelling on loss. Yet, the proverb compares the clan to the lizard replacing its tale. So it is about the clan's finding someone to replace Okonkwo, not Okonkwo regaining what he has lost.

16. Which of the following does not illustrate why Okonkwo wishes that his daughter Ezinma was a boy?
    A. Okonkwo killed Ikemefuna, who was more of a son than Nwoye.
    B. Okonkwo has disowned Nwoye.
    C. Ezinma and Okonkwo have a close relationship.
    D. Ezinma is one of the hardest workers in Okonkwo's family.
    E. The priestess told Okonkwo that Ezinma should have been a boy.

Okonkwo is aware of the loss of two "sons," Ikemefuna, whom he killed, and Nwoye, whom he disowned. Of course, his closeness to Ezinma could be enhanced only by her being a son. Had she been a son, her work in the family would be more richly regarded. Only E does not fit.

There was a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound. The only opening into this bush from the compound was a little round hole in the red-earth wall through which fowls went in and out in their endless search for food. The hole would not let a man through.

17. The purpose of the above description is to
    A. emphasize how secluded the spot was for Okonkwo's suicide.
    B. illustrate the way that the white men are kept away from the rest of the compound.
    C. allow Achebe to create suspense in the narration.
    D. explain why Obierika had to walk the men around the compound in order to find Okonkwo.
    E. describe the new area in the compound.

Because of the way Okonkwo died, he had to be secluded from the rest of the tribe. This description illustrates the length to which Okonkwo went, knowing that he was desecrating his body and going against a tribal custom; so he removed himself from the community in order to commit suicide.

18. The line, "He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot," could be an example of
    A. a metaphor for the way the district commissioner feels about the men of the tribe.
    B. a metaphor for the men in command and how they are in control of the tribesmen.
    C. a metaphor for the way the tribe feels about the district commissioner and his men.
    D. foreshadowing, looking toward a conflict that the tribesmen are going to have with the district commissioner.
    E. irony, mocking the tribe's reliance on subterfuge.

As the title of the book he intends to write indicates, the district commissioner considers the tribesmen to be savages who must be "pacified." The use of the word "monkey" diminishes any type of subterfuge the men might be planning.

One of the most infuriating habits of these people was their love of superfluous words, he thought.

19. Achebe includes the above line in order to
    A. show the irony in the way Europeans look at the African language.
    B. illustrate the Europeans' cruelty to the Africans.
    C. emphasize the shift in narrative point of view.
    D. illustrate why the tribe was so distrustful of the Europeans.
    E. make a statement amount the significance of language in the African culture.

Achebe has incorporated African words and phrases in the narrative voice to illustrate the culture's rich use of language. This statements show the irony in how the district commissioner is unable to appreciate the rich context of proverbs and oral traditions that the Ibo language provides.

20. This section of the story represents the
    A. exposition.
    B. climax.
    C. denouement.
    D. inciting incident.
    E. main conflict.

This question is actually something of a giveaway, as we are in the final pages of the novel. The plot is coming to its resolution.

His body is evil, and only strangers may touch it.

21. The above statement is ironic for all of the following reasons except
    A. Okonkwo was once one of the most powerful men in the tribe.
    B. the Europeans should no longer be considered strangers.
    C. Okonkwo would have known that this is how the tribe would treat him.
    D. the line is spoken by Okonkwo's closest friend.
    E. Obierika does not really believe what he is saying.

Clearly, because of their attitude toward the Africans and their unwillingness to understand and accept the Africans' ways, the Europeans will always be strangers.

22. Achebe changes the point of view in this section in order to
    A. illustrate the way in which Europeans have misinterpreted the African culture.
    B. demonstrate the kindness of the district commissioner.
    C. show how the two cultures have cooperated.
    D. demonstrate the district commissioner's ability to manipulate the tribesmen.
    E. demonstrate the superiority of the Europeans.

Achebe's point with the final section is to illustrate the great irony in the way Europeans have portrayed African culture in literature. Using the district commissioner's point of view allows Achebe to highlight the British persistent failure to "understand."

23. Which of the following best summarizes the European view of the Africans?
    A. "In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things."
    B. "Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him."
    C. "One could almost write a whole chapter on him."
    D. "…one must be firm in cutting out details."
    E. "…The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."

E might at first be tempting, but the words pacification and primitive are not as strong as the idea in A that the district commissioner has toiled to bring civilization to Africa. The idea that the Europeans encountered an ancient and thriving civilization completely escapes him, and he sees his Imperial efforts as some sort of beneficent toil.

24. Which of the following statements best demonstrates the district commissioner's inability to recognize his ignorance of African culture?
    A. "The resolute administrator in him gave way to the student of primitive customs."
    B. "He had warned Obierika that if he and his men played any monkey tricks they would be shot."
    C. "He warned the men that unless they produced Okonkwo forthwith he would lock them all up."
    D. "He had already chosen the title of the book, after much thought: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger."
    E. "In the many years in which he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learned a number of things."

While some of the other choices may be accurate in illustrating the district commissioner's ignorance, this choice is the best because of its irony. The district commissioner, and the rest of the white men, are the reason there is so much unrest in the African community, and yet the district commissioner is naïve enough to believe that he is capable of bringing peace to the tribes.

25. Okonkwo chooses to kill himself because
    A. the district commissioner was going to put him to death.
    B. he could not live in accordance with European customs.
    C. he was trying to save his family.
    D. Obierika suggested that his death was the only way to cleanse the land.
    E. Obierika suggested that this horrible act would drive the Europeans away.

Okonkwo's entire life is founded upon the idea that he must be powerful. Paramount in his character is his utter fear of failure. By choosing not to act when he murdered the messenger, he was giving up. He was agreeing to live the rest of his life by European customs, and Okonkwo's own pursuit of manhood and strength would not allow him to follow imported customs rather than his tribe's traditions.

Things Fall Apart

Part One

Chapter One

1. Reread the first sentence of the novel. What purposes does this sentence serve?

   The first sentence of the novel serves two purposes. First, the sentence establishes the narrator as within the community about which he is speaking. The sentence also introduces Okonkwo, situating him within a community of nine villages

2. Explain the rhetorical strategies used in the first two paragraphs.

   One rhetorical strategy is the repetition of the animal imagery of the cat. Achebe immediately thrusts the reader into a culture where nature and the wild play vital roles in the village. Achebe also introduces the reader to the number seven in the mention of the man who fought a spirit for "seven days and seven nights." In Ibo religion, the number seven is symbolic of God's seal. Achebe references this number in order to create a connection between the Christian religion that is introduced later in the novel and the Ibo culture's reliance on the spiritual world. Before Things Fall Apart, *much of the literature written about Africa focused on the differences between African and the Western culture. Achebe is trying to establish that there are some similarities between the two cultures.*

3. Explain the use of figurative devices in the following line: "Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water."

   The line is an example of a simile. Comparing Okonkwo to a fish illustrates how tactical he was when fighting Amalinze. Through the simile, Achebe creates a vivid image in the reader's mind of the "cat" trying in vain to snare a slippery fish in water.

4. Explain the imagery in the following line: "That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan."

   Here is another simile. Again, Achebe creates an image—this time of a roaring bush-fire to illustrate Okonkwo's rapid rise to fame.

5. What is the rhetorical effect used in the following line: "The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath." What effect does it create?

   The line is an example of polysyndeton, which is a repetition of conjunctions in a series of words, phrases, or clauses. It creates a rhythm in the language, almost like the beat of drums.

6. Describe Okonkwo. Why does Achebe use animal imagery to describe him?

   Okonkwo is a large and imposing man. Achebe describes him as seeming ready to pounce on people. He uses the animal imagery to illustrate Okonkwo's instinctive nature.

7. Describe Unoka. How does Okonkwo feel about his father?

   Unoka is Okonkwo's father. He is a lazy man, who owed money to everyone. "He was tall but very thin and had a slight stoop." When he was alive, he spent much of his money on alcohol and did a poor job providing for his family. Even before the reader is introduced to Unoka, we learn that Okonkwo had "no patience with unsuccessful men." It is later emphasized that Okonkwo had no respect for the memory of his weak and effeminate father.

8. Why does Achebe spend so much of the first part of the chapter describing Unoka?

   Achebe is establishing the background for Okonkwo's character. One of a writer's techniques in characterization is to use other characters to illustrate aspects of a particular character's personality. In order to establish part of Okonkwo's hardworking, impulsive, personality, the reader needs to see why he feels so strongly about hard work. Achebe uses Okonkwo's father to help illustrate this quality. Okonkwo's attitude toward his father will also eventually inform his attitude toward his own son,

9. How does Okonkwo's impression of his father shape Okonkwo's character? How does he act as a result of his father's reputation?

   Okonkwo is shaped by his father's inability to provide for his family. In the African culture, family and community are very important. Unoka was not good at either. As a child, Okonkwo was embarrassed by his father's laziness and did not want to grow up to be ridiculed by the village like his father.

10. Explain the importance of the following line: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten."

    The use of proverbs is an example of the rich language the Ibo people possess. They have a rich, storytelling tradition, and the proverbs allow people to include storytelling in their everyday conversations. The metaphor comparing proverbs to palm oil emphasizes that proverbs are common in their speech and add flavor to their conversation the way palm oil adds flavor to food.

11. What does the reader learn about how Okonkwo feels about his father?

    The reader learns that Okonkwo is embarrassed and ashamed of his father.

12. How does the text refer to Ikemefuna?

    The text refers to him as "the doomed lad who was sacrificed to the village of Umuofia by their neighbors to avoid war and bloodshed." The text also refers to him as the "ill-fated lad."

13. What do these references indicate about Ikemefuna?

    These references foreshadow that something tragic is going to happen to him.

14. Explain the purpose(s) of the first chapter?

    The first chapter serves several purposes. First, it establishes Okonkwo as the protagonist of the novel. Through stories of Okonkwo's father, the reader understands the basis for Okonkwo's personality. Achebe also uses the first chapter to establish traditions and customs in the Ibo culture. Until the point this novel was written, European literature mostly characterized Africa as a barren land devoid of culture and language. Achebe manages to illustrate the complexities of the African society, as well as the complexities of the African language and oral tradition.

Chapter Two

1. How do the villages communicate with each other?

    There is a town crier who delivers messages to the villages.

2. What are the italicized words included in the text? What is the purpose of including these words in the narrative?

    The italicized words are from the Ibo language. Achebe includes these in the text to create an African-English. He is trying to illustrate for the reader that the Ibo language is rich and cannot be translated into English.

3. What does Okonkwo realize after the town crier comes through town?

    Okonkwo realizes that something tragic has happened. He can sense the tragedy in the man's voice.

4. How do the people feel about night? How do they eliminate or deal with fear?

   The people fear night unless the moon is out. On the nights when the moon is hidden, the people are very quiet. They do not whistle in the night because the sound might beckon evil spirits; nor will they call a snake by its name because they believe that animals become more evil at night.. The narrator states "Darkness held a vague terror for these people, even the bravest among them."

5. Explain the meaning of the following saying: "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk."

   The Ibo people treat the night differently if there is moonlight. In moonlight, they are not afraid to come out of their homes. The children play, and everyone—even the cripple—desires to be out and among his neighbors.

6. How does Okonkwo feel about war? Why do you think he feels this way?

   Okonkwo is a man of war. He uses war to demonstrate his strength and courage, two qualities that the tribe values.

7. Explain the purpose of the following line as it relates to characterization: "On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm-wine from his first human head." Why would Achebe mention such an act in this novel?

   Achebe uses this description to illustrate Okonkwo's hardened, almost brutal, nature. Achebe wants to present Okonkwo as a "man's man" within the context of his own culture. A European audience would be shocked by the subtle cannibalism, but Achebe wants to establish such behaviors in the context of the overall culture, not as individual, "primitive" acts to be judged.

8. Describe the nature of the conflict between the villages, Mbaino and Umuofia.

   The conflict concerns a Umuofian woman who was killed in Mbaino. The Umuofoian tribe wants vengeance for this murder, but they decide that they will reason with the other tribe.

9. How do other tribes feel about Umuofia?

   The other tribes fear Umuofia. The tribes believe that Umuofia "was powerful in war and in magic…."

10. How does Umuofia choose to settle the dispute? Why do they make this decision? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

    Umuofia sends a message to Mbaino that they must return a young man and a virgin as compensation for the loss of life or prepare for war. Unuofia will not go to war unless the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves approves that decision. The text states that Umuofia is very careful to ask the Oracle for permission to fight because if they do not, and the Oracle does not approve, they would lose the war.

11. What does the discussion indicate about the nature of medicine and religion in the Ibo tribe?

    The discussion indicates that the African culture finds the spirit world very important in both religion and medicine. The people rely on the spiritual world to determine how they are going to respond to certain situations.

12. Why is Okonkwo chosen to visit Mbaino?

    Okonkwo is chosen because he is one of the most respected men in the tribe.

13. Why does the reader suspect that something is going to happen with Ikemefuna and Okonkwo?

    The reader learns that Ikemefuna is not going to be a permanent character in the novel because Achebe indicates that Ikemefuna is involved in Okonkwo's family for only three years.

14. Describe the family structure of Okonkwo's tribe.

    Umuofia is a polygamous tribe. Okonkwo's family is typical of what a person would expect to find as the family structure of a prosperous man. Okonkwo and his family live in a compound that is composed of a hut for Okonkwo and a hut for each of his wives. Okonkwo visits his wives regularly, but he also has his own hut where he can retire. The children from each of the wives are shared and cared for by all members of the compound.

15. How would Okonkwo's rule of his household be interpreted in Western culture?

    Okonkwo would be considered an abusive husband because of the way he treats his family. He instills fear in his wives and children.

16. Why does Okonkwo treat his family the way he does? How does Achebe want the reader to feel about Okonkwo?

Achebe attempts to create some sympathy for Okonkwo through the following statement: "Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man." The text states that Okonkwo behaves the way he does because he is afraid of failure and of weakness. The reader has learned that this fear stems from the way Okonkwo feels about his father.

17. What rhetorical techniques does Achebe use in the following line: "It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw"? What effect is being achieved?

Achebe uses several techniques. One of the techniques is polysyndeton, which is the use of conjunctions in a series of words: "…of evil ***and*** *capricious gods* ***and*** *of magic." He also uses asyndeton in the final part of the sentence between "malevolent" and "red in tooth and claw." Both polysyndeton and asyndeton affect the rhythm and pace of the passage. The list of things feared is read hurriedly, while the reader tends to linger over the description of the malevolent forces of nature.*

18. Achebe informs the reader that there is a word that means both "woman" and "a man who had taken no title." Why does he share this information with the reader?

Achebe uses the word agbala *in reference to Okonkwo's father. Achebe might include this reference to illustrate that Ibo culture views women as less valuable. Women and failed men are essentially the same.*

19. Who is Nwoye? How does Okonkwo feel about him?

Nwoye is Okonkwo's firstborn son. Okonkwo believes that his son is lazy, so he tries to correct him and make him a man.

20. Is Okonkwo's description of Nwoye accurate? How do we know?

Okonkwo is frustrated with his son. He believes that his son is lazy; however, the reader understands that this is Okonkwo's perception rather than reality. The text states "At any rate, that was how it looked to his father…."

21. Reread the exchange between Okonkwo and his "most senior" wife. How does Okonkwo treat her? What does it demonstrate about the role of gender within the Ibo community?

Okonkwo is not patient with his wife, and will not have her question his authority. Some readers will see his response to his wife as rude. Okonkwo's wife obeys her husband, which many Western readers will see as chauvinistic, possibly even abusive.

22. Describe the compound where Okonkwo and his family live. What does this tell the reader about Okonkwo?

The compound is made up of huts for each of Okonkwo's wives. The wives all take care of the children. Okonkwo comes to visit each of his wives, but he also has a hut of his own where he can go when he wants to be alone. The reader should recognize that only a wealthy and important man would be able to support three wives and eight children. The number of people in Okonkwo's family is one of the things that signify Okonkwo's importance.

Chapter Three

1. What effect does Achebe achieve with his repetition of the phrase "they came" in the second paragraph?

Most of Achebe's rhetorical choices so far have helped achieve a rhythmic, musical effect. This repetition is no exception. Also, the repetition of "they came" emphasizes the frequency of the people's visit to the Oracle, establishing the fact that the Ibo's religion is an intrinsic part of their daily lives.

2. Why must people crawl when visiting Agbala?

The entrance to the Oracle's shrine is described as a round opening no larger than the entrance to a hen house, so, on a literal level, visitors must crawl on their bellies simply to fit through the entrance. Crawling on their bellies could also suggest their fear and reverence of this powerful god.

3. Why might it be unusual that a woman is the one who serves and can see Agbala?

In traditional Ibo society, women are largely an underclass. They take care of the men and the children. In this instance, however, a woman is given the privilege of seeing Agbala. In this instance, a woman is as feared as a god.

4. When Okonkwo's father visits the oracle, what does he learn?

Okonkwo's father learns that the reason he is not successful has nothing to do with angering the gods; instead, Unoka is accused of being a lazy and weak man.

5. What is a *chi*? How is it important in the story?

The chi *is a personal god, that which influences a person's life. The* chi *is important in the story first because it was believed that the* chi *played a significant role in determining a person's fate, and second because Okonkwo believes that he can work his way out of having a bad* chi *like his father.*

6. Why is Unoka left to die in the Evil Forest?

   Unoka is left to die in the evil forest because he has a swelling of the stomach. The tribe believes that a swelling of the stomach is an abomination to the earth.

7. Reread the first part of this chapter and the last paragraph before the break. Why does Achebe begin and end this section with the same information? What is he repeating?

   Achebe begins and ends this section by relating to the reader the fact that Okonkwo "did not have the start in life which many young had." The middle part of the story tells the reader about Unoka and his relationship with his chi. *Perhaps Achebe is illustrating for the reader that a person is capable of changing his or her* chi *even if Unoka chose not to do so.*

8. Who is Nwakibie? How does the reader know that he is successful?

   Nwakibie is the man from whom Okonkwo gets his first start in life. Okonkwo goes to him to get seed yams. The reader knows that Nwakibie is successful because of his many barns and wives and children, as well as the number of titles that he holds.

9. What does Nwakibie mean when he says, "You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break"?

   Spoken before witnesses, this is clearly a part of a ritual to enter into a contract. Okwonko has come to request Nwakibie's help, and Nwakibie is assuring him and everyone else present that he intends to enter into a mutually beneficial contract with the young Okwonko.

10. What is the meaning of the following: "…an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb"? How does this relate to Okonkwo?

    In context, the proverb is mentioned when the men are making fun of a fellow tribesman who does not honor his dead father. Okonkwo is uneasy because of the relationship he had with his father.

11. Why does Nwakibie agree to let Okonkwo use his yams for share-cropping?

    Nwakibie believes that Okonkwo is a hard worker; Nwakibie has not let other people use his yams because he believes that the young people in the tribe are lazy.

12. Why does Okonkwo resent having to take care of his mother and sisters?

    Okonkwo resents having to take care of them because it also means that he will be taking care of his father.

13. Explain the sarcasm in the paragraph about the unearned success of the farmers who delayed planting their yams.

The Ibo believe in hard work, and Okwonko is determined to change his chi *by working hard. In this one instance, however, the procrastination of the lazy farmers has paid off. While their delay in planting was merely laziness, and the success of their crops pure luck, they gloat as if they had* planned *the situation, and seem honestly to believe that their procrastination constituted some form of wisdom.*

14. Analyze the several literary techniques used in this chapter.

- *"But the year had gone mad." – personification and hyperbole. Nature is personified in this polytheistic (perhaps even pantheistic) culture. Here the hardworking seem punished and the lazy rewarded in this exaggeration of an unusual weather pattern.*

- *"That year the harvest was sad, like a funeral…." – simile. The failure of the crop is more than a mere disappointment; it is the occasion of grief. There is a connection between this harvest and death.*

- *"He knew that he was a fierce fighter, but that year had been enough to break the heart of a lion." – hyperbole. The implication is that Okwonko, a fierce fighter, was nearly broken.*

"A proud heart can survive a general failure because such a failure does not prick its pride." – proverb. Achebe emphasizes that Okwonko's ability to overcome the current hardship is not unique but built into the wisdom of his culture.

Chapter Four

1. How was Okonkwo able to achieve such a high rank within the tribe when his father died a penniless man? How is this different from colonial-era European culture?

Okonkwo was able to achieve a high rank because a person's wealth and esteem were based on his accomplishments rather than the accomplishments of his family. This is different from colonial-era European culture in that, in the European culture, a person seldom rose above the class in which he or she was born. While Americans are used to social mobility and the respect afforded a "self-made man," these are relatively modern concepts to Achebe's original intended audience.

2. What suggestion is there that Okonkwo will evolve into a tragic hero?

Okonkwo has risen rapidly to success and social prominence, and he is beginning to display hubris, or overbearing pride, presuming himself to be equal to the gods.

3. Why is the old man's rebuke significant?

   When the old man at the meeting admonishes Okonkwo that someone who had been made successful by the gods should remain humble, Okonkwo holds to the belief that his own efforts made him a success without the help of a "benevolent spirit."

4. The text mentions the *chi* again as it relates to Okonkwo's success. How strong a determiner is the *chi* assumed to be?

   The novel clearly states that, "when a man says yes his chi *says yes also." Thus, Okonkwo can take some credit for his success because he "said yes very strongly."*

5. Why does the text return to the story of Ikemefuna after spending time discussing the traditions with the harvest?

   The text returns to the story of Ikemefuna to help illustrate Okonkwo's personality and his resistance to emotion. This chapter begins by discussing Okonkwo's inability to tolerate people who are unsuccessful or men he views to be "like women." Now the reader will see how Okonkwo interacts with a boy who is not his own son.

6. Describe Ikemefuna. How does he fit into the family structure?

   At first Ikemefuna is distraught over being taken from his family. He will not eat and is sick for three weeks. Eventually, Ikemefuna recovers and becomes very popular in the family. One of Okonkwo's wives calls him her son; Ikemefuna gets along very well with Okonkwo's eldest son Nwoye. Okonkwo also likes the boy, but he will not show his emotion toward him or anyone else. Ikemefuna eventually calls Okonkwo his father.

7. What is significant about Okwonko's breaking the peace during the Week of Peace? What does this action indicate about Okonkwo?

   Okonkwo beats his youngest wife during the Week of Peace. This is important because the week is sacred, and they do not want to anger the goddess. This incident illustrates two important points. First, the incident demonstrates that Okonkwo has a quick temper and is not afraid of the goddess's rebuke. He will not stop beating his wife because he does not want anyone to think that he is soft. Second, the tribe's reaction to Okonkwo's actions demonstrates that the tribe values religion and tradition. The tribe is more concerned with how Okonkwo's actions can hurt them than whether Okonkwo is justified in beating his wife. This action also suggests that Okonkwo is selfish, placing his reputation and standing above the common good.

8. In this chapter, what does the reader learn about the customs of the Ibo and the customs of other neighboring clans? How might this be important in the story?

   The reader learns that not all tribes' customs are the same. The tribes do not have the same traditions, nor do all of them believe the same way. This may be important because it might foreshadow how the Ibo will treat the missionaries when they come to the village.

9. How does Okonkwo respond to his son? What verb does Achebe use to suggest that Okonkwo's perception of his son is not necessarily accurate?

   Okonkwo believes that his son is lazy. He equates his son with female things. Achebe chooses the word "thought" to indicate that Okonkwo's perception may not be accurate. Achebe writes, "[Okonkwo] would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him." "Thought" might indicate that others would not think the same way about Nwoye's actions.

10. Why does Achebe end this chapter by relating the nature of the relationship between Ikemefuna and Nwoye?

    The end of the chapter explores the relationship between Ikemefuna and Nwoye. The two boys are very close. The text tells the reader that Nwoye would remember conversations the two boys had until the end of his life. This relationship will be important in the story as events with Ikemefuna unfold. Achebe is setting up a positive dynamic between Ikemefuna and Nwoye and a negative dynamic between Nwoye and his father. The reader can assume that something will happen between the three of them that will change the nature of their relationships.

Chapter Five

1. Achebe begins Chapter Five by describing the Feast of the New Yam. What does the reader learn about Umuofian culture through this description?

   The reader learns that, while women generally maintain a low position in the clan's society, they are *important to the clan's religion. Ani, the earth-mother-goddess is portrayed as, perhaps, the most powerful and certainly the most important of the clan's deities. The reader also learns in the section how important the yam is to Umuofia. The yam is celebrated as the main crop of the tribe. A man's importance is determined by his ability to grow yams, so the men take this opportunity to show thanks to the land. Finally, the reader is given another glimpse of Okonkwo's personality. Okonkwo is not comfortable with the celebration because he is unable to work during this time. "But he was always uncomfortable sitting around for days waiting for a feast or getting over it. He would be very much happier working on his farm."*

2. Who is responsible for the major preparations for the Feast of the New Yam? What does this tell the reader about Ibo culture?

   The women were chiefly responsible for preparing for the feast. They are the ones who clean the materials necessary to cook; they are also the ones who take care of preparing the home with its decorations.

3. Why does Okonkwo become angry before the New Yam Festival? Was his anger directed in the right place? Why or why not?

   Okonkwo becomes angry because one of his wives used part of the banana tree. He beats her in order to satisfy his anger. His anger is not directed in the right place. Okonkwo is angry because he cannot work, and he is simply finding ways to release that anger.

4. For what reason does Achebe repeat the word "beautiful" when describing the way the women decorate their bodies and cut their children's hair into patterns?

   Such body decoration and hair cutting might seem odd and "primitive" to Achebe's European readers. He is, therefore, trying to establish that, in Ibo culture, these decorations are considered beautiful, not savage.

5. What is Ekwefi's favorite part of the festival? Why?

   Ekwefi's favorite part of the festival is the wrestling match that takes place on the second day. It is her favorite because that is where she first fell in love with Okonkwo.

6. When people call for one another, why do they respond "Is that me?"

   They respond in this manner because they are worried that there is an evil spirit who is calling them.

7. What type of relationship has Ikemefuna developed with Okonkwo's family? Cite an instance in this chapter that demonstrates this relationship.

   Ikemefuna is becoming very close with the family. In this chapter, Obiageli breaks her water pot; however, she does not tell her mother the truth about how she broke it. Her brothers were going to tell on her, but Ikemefuna keeps them from doing so.

8. What is the significance of the extended metaphor Achebe uses to describe the drums and their relationship to the village?

   Okonkwo compares the sound of the drums with the beating of a heart. "The drums were still beating, persistent and unchanging. Their sound was no longer a separate thing from the living village. It was like the pulsation of its heart. It throbbed in the air, in the sunshine, and even in the trees, and filled the village with excitement." Achebe is explaining that the drums are not something added to *the life of the village but are the things that give the village its life, its vitality.*

9. When Okonkwo's wives bring him his food for the evening, Ezinma sits with her father while she waits for him to finish her mother's dish. Why does Okonkwo yell at her?

   Okonkwo yells at Ezinma to sit with her legs closed. This exchange happens right before the reader learns how fond Okonkwo is of Ezinma, and also before Okonkwo reminds Ezinma that she is trying to do a boy's job by asking to bring his chair to the wrestling. This might indicate to the reader that sitting with one's legs together has something to do with femininity. Sitting with one's legs together could also refer to a young woman's sexual purity.

Chapter Six

1. What is significant about the number of drums used at the wrestling?

   "There were seven drums and they were arranged according to their sizes in a long wooden basket." This number is significant because it relates to the "perfect number" that Achebe has referenced throughout the novel. The number relates to religion and, in this instance, the wrestling matches and the role they play in the Umuofian culture is as important as religion.

2. What do Okonkwo's springing to his feet and then sitting immediately imply?

   Okonkwo springs to his feet to show his enthusiasm for how quickly the wrestler bested his opponent. He quickly sits down again because he feels that it is womanly to show emotion, even enthusiasm for an athletic victory.

3. Explain the literary device Achebe uses in the following line:

   "**The air, which had been stretched taut with excitement, relaxed again.**"

   The line is a metaphor in which the air of expectation and anticipation—exacerbated by the drumming—has been relaxed by the drummers' taking a break. The ambience itself is compared to a drum, a skin stretched taut over its frame.

4. Who is Chielo?

   Chielo is the woman to whom Ekwefi is speaking. She has two lives—one life is when she is a widow with two children. In her second life, Chielo is the priestess of Agbala.

5. Discuss the type of language that Achebe uses to describe the fight and how this might add to the importance of this scene.

   The language that Achebe uses is vividly descriptive. The sentences tend to be longer than in other parts of the novel. Achebe juxtaposes short and long sentences in order to mimic the give and take of the wrestling match. He includes several literary techniques in the form of similes and metaphors. He also includes a song that the women sing after the match. The language helps Achebe illustrate the richness of Ibo language and culture, which European writers failed to recognize.

Chapter Seven

1. At the beginning of this chapter, the narrator states: "He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life." Of whom is he speaking? What does this image indicate about this person?

   The narrator is speaking about Ikemefuna. The image suggests that Ikemefuna has functioned well in Umuofia society. He is growing both physically and emotionally.

2. How does Okonkwo feel about Ikemefuna and the relationship that he has developed with his Nwoye?

   Okonkwo is pleased with Ikemefuna, specifically because he feels that Ikemefuna has had a positive influence on his son. Okonkwo thinks that Ikemefuna is responsible for Nwoye's newfound appreciation for more masculine stories.

3. What line in the first page of the chapter would indicate that Nwoye is only acting in a certain way in order to appease his father?

   The reader should understand that Nwoye is only acting "more masculinely" because he is trying to appease his father, but he still appreciates the stories that his mother will tell him. The narrator states: "On receiving such a message through a younger brother or sister, Nwoye would feign annoyance and grumble aloud about women and their troubles." The word "feign" indicates that Nwoye does not necessarily feel the way he acts.

4. Consider the following lines and discuss whether or not you think they are the way everyone in Umuofia feels or just the way Okonkwo feels.

> "And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about his women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man."

This statement describes Okonkwo's thoughts about Nwoye. He is pleased that Nwoye is acting as if he is put off by the women. However, the statement does not necessarily mean that all men in the Umuofian tribe believe that it is the way they are supposed to treat women. The fact that Nwoye himself prefers the stories that women tell and prefers to work alongside the women would indicate that Okonkwo might be alone in his assumptions. Also, Achebe does not present Okonkwo's actions toward women positively or sympatheticalyl. Thus, there is no reason to conclude that Okwonko's attitudes reflect his society's attitudes.

5. How does Okonkwo define manliness?

Okonkwo defines manliness through misogynistic tendencies, blood, and violence.

6. Why does Achebe spends so much time setting up the dichotomy between Okonkwo and Nwoye?

It is necessary for Achebe to establish this father-son dynamic in order for the reader to understand what happens later in the novel between the two.

7. Achebe includes one of the stories that Nwoye likes to hear his mother tell. Why does this story appear here?

The story is about a great drought and a great rain that occurred because of a quarrel between the Earth and the Sky. The story should remind the reader of what Okonkwo went through when he was trying to establish his yam crop. Okonkwo experienced a great drought and flood. The story describes how the Sky, after withholding rain for seven years, finally felt sorry for the Earth and tried to help. One could compare this to the way that Okonkwo refuses to bend in the face of suffering, but instead tries to maintain his strong masculinity, even when it may not be the best choice.

8. What type of imagery does Achebe use to describe the arrival of the locusts? What is significant about this passage?

   Achebe describes the arrival as follows:

   > "At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were the harbingers sent to survey the land. And then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star dust. It was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty."

   At first the imagery almost suggests the arrival of an invading army. Then the tone shifts to a definite positive sense when the insects' tiny eyes shine like "star dust" and the sight is "full of power and beauty."

9. Why do the village elders decide that Ikemefuna is to be killed?

   The Oracle of the Ezeudu, who is the oldest man in the village, has commanded it.

10. How does the clan strike an apparent harmony between the will of the Community and the needs of the Individual?

    The will of the Community, as declared by the Oracle, is that Ikemefuna be killed. Okonkwo, however, is like a father to the boy, so he is commanded not to take part in the killing.

11. Why does Okonkwo dress to go with the men who are taking Ikemefuna instead of staying removed from the business as he is told?

    Okonkwo does not stay out of it because he is afraid that he will be seen as weak.

12. How does Achebe change the setting to complement what is happening in the story?

    At the beginning of the journey, the men are laughing and joking. When they reach the edge of the village, they become quiet. As they travel farther, the setting changes into a more isolated and desolate place. "The footway had now become a narrow line in the heart of the forest. The short trees and sparse undergrowth which surrounded the men's village began to give way to giant trees and climbers which perhaps had stood from the beginning of things, untouched by the ax and the bush-fire." The fact that the men are moving into an isolated area, hidden from the villages and not traveled often, indicates that Ikemefuna's death is serious to the clan.

13. How does Okonkwo once again place his own fears above the good of his community?

    Because he, once again, fears being seen as weak, when Ikemefuna appeals to him as a father, Okonkwo draws his machete and delivers the killing blow. Okonkwo was specifically told not to play a part in Ikemefuna's killing because it would not be right for the boy's father figure to take part in his death.

14. What is the purpose of Nwoye's point of view?

Nwoye's point of view allows Achebe to question some of the village traditions and culture.

15. What two themes have been identified by the end of Chapter 7?

One theme that should be apparent is the danger of Okonkwo's pride—his fear of being seen as weak. Already he has endangered his standing in the tribe by violating the Week of Peace, and he has committed the heinous act of killing the boy who considered him a father. Second, the theme of cultural conflict and change is introduced when Nwoye begins to question his "brother's" death and the killing of the innocent twin babies.

Chapter Eight

1. What does the reader learn about Okonkwo from the following passage:

> "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor."

The reader learns that Okonkwo is more troubled about Ikemefuna's death than he is willing to admit. He is grieving. Achebe uses the image of a rat to emphasize Okonkwo's vile nature.

2. Again Okonkwo mentions that Ezinma should have been a boy. Why is it important that he mentions this at this point in the story?

Mentioning it at this point in the story is important because it happens right after Okonkwo has killed a boy who was, in all respects, a part of the family—like a son. Okonkwo bears no strong love for his own eldest son, and he seems to believe that Ezinma is more a man than Nwoye.

3. What theme is advanced by the following passage?

> "When did you become a shivering old woman," Okonkwo asked himself, "you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed."

This passage advances the theme of Okonkwo's inappropriate pride and fear of weakness. In this instance, his grief is natural and appropriate, yet he cannot see beyond considering it a form of weakness.

4. How does the reader know that Okonkwo is worried, not only about the future of his family, but also the future of the village?

   When Okonkwo is speaking with Obierika, he mentions that he wishes Ezinma were a boy because he does not have a son who is "man enough." However, even as he speaks about Nwoye, he says, "Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?" Who, he wonders, will emerge to be a leader of the village after this generation passes on?

5. What does Obierika believe about Okonkwo's decision to help carry out Ikemefuna's death? What might this foreshadow?

   Obierika believes that Okonkwo will be punished. He believes that what Okonkwo did "will not please the earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families." This admonition could very well foreshadow Okonkwo's downfall and, perhaps, the downfalls of his family and village.

6. Achebe spends some time developing the story of Ozoemena and Ndulue. What is the purpose of this story? What does it illustrate about the differences in the way of thinking between Okonkwo and Obierika, but also about the village as a whole?

   The story describes a couple who are so close that upon the husband's death, the wife also dies. Okonkwo questions Ozoemena's manliness because of this, but Obierika does not judge the two. Obierika is quick to defend Ndulue. The difference in the men's thinking is indicative of the differences that one might find among people in the village. In some ways Umuofia is a flexible culture in the way that it can adapt to certain changes; however, Okonkwo cannot adapt in the same way. He is inflexible.

7. How could the following statementfunction as foreshadowing in the novel?

   "**Okonkwo was not a man of thought but of action.**"

   This characterization illustrates Okonkwo's fiery temperament. In several situations, Okonkwo is quick to act because he does not know how to deal with his emotions. He does not want to talk about how to react to a situation because to do so would be to make him seem weak. This assessment of Okonkwo might a significant event in his life to which he will react in an irreparable way. His rashness has grown progressively worse. Earlier in the novel he tried to shoot one of his wives because he was angry. Then, he violated the Week of Peace. Then he killed Ikemefuna, all behavior that might anger the Earth.

8. How does this chapter establish that things are changing within the village?

   First, Ofoedu tells Obierika and Okonkwo that strange things are happening. Then, Obierika discusses the way the young men cannot tap the trees as they did in the past. Okonkwo wonders where the men are who are going to take over for the "old banana tree."

9. How are white people introduced in this chapter? What is the tone of the chapter at the time they are introduced?

   The white people are introduced after the tribesmen finish talking about the changes in some village customs. The men disagree with the changes and say that they will begin a quarrel. At this point, Obierika tells the group that others have spoken of people who are white as chalk. These people, it is rumored, have no toes. The tone is incredulous; the tribesmen compare the white men with a leper who is in the village.

Chapter Nine

1. What is an *ogbanje* and how does it relate to Ezinma's illness?

   An ogbanje *is a wicked child-spirit who torments its mother by continually being born to the same mother and dying in infancy. Ezinma is her mother's only living child, the mother having had nine children die extremely young. It is thought that the other nine were actually an* ogbanje. *Now Ezinma is also ill—perhaps she too in an incarnation of the* ogbanje.

2. How does Okonkwo's helplessness manifest itself?

   As in other similar situations, Okonkwo's helplessness manifests itself in anger. He is angry at Ekwefi for not filling the pot correctly.

Chapter Ten

1. Explain the disconnect between the chapters. Why would Achebe choose to do this?

   Chapter Nine ends with Okonkwo and Ekwefi trying to heal Ezinma. Chapter Ten begins with a description of a ceremony. The reader does not know if Ezinma is cured or if she is still ill. Achebe is probably building suspense by delaying more development about Ezinma's illness.

2. Read the following lines:

> "It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders."

What does this excerpt suggest about the role of women? What is significant about the placement of this passage relative to what has come immediately before, and what will come immediately after?

This episode comes sandwiched between the story of Ezinma's illness and the way in which her mother and father try to save her life. The following chapter deals with Ezinma's going with Chielo. In the ceremony described in this chapter, the men are in charge. The women are relegated to the edge of the circle, which is where they would be on most occasions. The reader should note that the chapter prior to and the chapter after this one celebrate the roles of women.

3. Explain the irony of the trial in this chapter. Is justice served in the *egwugwu's* judgment?

The irony is that women are not involved in the ceremony and are relegated to the periphery even to watch. Yet a woman's family has come to plead for justice in the case of her husband's constantly beating he. Answers will vary regarding whether justice is served, but it seems as though the woman is returned to her abusive husband with no guarantee that the beatings will stop.

4. How does the case brought before the egwugwu parallel Okonkwo's life?

An aspect of the case involves a man who beats his wife. This is parallel to Okonkwo who has been known to beat his wives and even nearly brought trouble to his village by violating the Week of Peace by beating one of them.

Chapter Eleven

1. Often, the setting is not just "where the story happens," but a geographical, historical, social, economic, or philosophical setting. Achebe begins this chapter with a description of the night. The reader learns earlier in the novel the significance the night has for people. What purpose does the setting serve at the beginning of this chapter?

Because the reader already understands that nighttime, and specifically complete darkness, represents a time of fear for the village people, perhaps Achebe is indicating that this chapter is going to involve some sort of fear.

2. This chapter focuses on Ibo folklore. Summarize the story of the tortoise and the birds and explain what it suggests about customs and traditions. How might this story relate to Okonkwo?

   The story centers on a turtle who is trying to join the birds for a feast in the sky. Unfortunately, the tortoise does not have any wings. The tortoise manipulates the birds into each giving him a feather so he can make two wings. On the way to the sky, the tortoise again tricks the birds by telling them that they are to have new names when they arrive because it is a tradition. He gives himself the name "All of you." When it comes time for the birds and the tortoise to eat, the tortoise eats all of the best food. When it is time for them to go home, the birds each take a feather back from the tortoise. Thus he tortoise cannot return to earth. He asks the birds to tell his wife to put out everything soft so he will have a place to fall. Instead, the birds tell his wife to put out everything hard. When the turtle falls to earth, his shell breaks into pieces. The medicine man has to put it back together again. In the story, the tortoise fabricates a custom in order to get what he wants. The story is trying to teach that a person should not toy with tradition. The story also illustrates the importance of working together. In the end, the birds work together to teach the tortoise a lesson. This story relates to Okonkwo in his strict adherence to custom. It will also relate to an incident later in this chapter when he tries to keep Ezinma from going to Agbala.

3. How does the story of the tortoise and the birds relate to colonialism?

   In the story, the tortoise does not belong with the birds but is able to trick them into allowing him to join their feast. He also takes the best food. The story foreshadows the arrival of the whites in the village.

4. What type of imagery does Achebe use to describe Ekwefi's reaction to hearing her daughter's name? Find similar language in the chapter that parallels this.

   Achebe says: "At the mention of Ezinma's name Ekwefi jerked her head sharply like an animal that had sniffed death in the air. Her heart jumped painfully within her." Achebe uses animal references to show how protective Ekwefi is of her daughter. The other references include the narrator's describing Ekwefi: "A strange and sudden weakness descended on Ekwefi as she stood gazing in the direction of the voices like a hen whose only chick has been carried away by a kite." Here, Ezinma is the defensless chick that has been taken by a bird of prey.

5. Why does Chielo visit Okonkwo and Ekwefi?

   Chielo is supposed to bring Ezinma to Agbala.

6. How does Ekwefi go against the wishes of Chielo?

   Ekwefi is not supposed to follow Chielo, nor is she supposed to assume that she can enter the presence of Agbala, yet she violates both rules.

7. Describe the rhetorical technique that Achebe uses in the paragraph that begins, "The priestess' voice was already growing faint in the distance." Why does Achebe use this technique?

   Achebe uses a series of short sentences in order to mimic the way that Ekwefi's thoughts must be racing as she tries to follow Chielo. The reader is able to feel how Ekwefi feels.

8. Explain the irony in the situation that it begins to grow lighter as Ekwefi is still following Chielo.

   The irony is that throughout the novel and throughout this situation, darkness is terrifying. However, at this point, Ekwefi fears the darkness less than she fears the light. The darkness has provided her protection from being caught. The light increases the chances that she is going to be seen.

9. How does Achebe maintain the tone of the chapter and the significance of Chielo's power when the priestess reaches the circular ring of hills? How might a western reader interpret this section?

   Achebe writes: "As soon as the priestess stepped into this ring of hills her voice was not only doubled in strength but was thrown back on all sides. It was indeed the shrine of a great god." Achebe maintains Ekwefi's fear without mentioning the reason for the phenomenon. The western reader would understand that Chielo's increase in voice is a result of the physical structure in which she is standing.

10. Who joins Ekwefi at the cave, and how does this contribute to his character development? Does this conflict with what we know about this character thus far?

    Okonkwo joins Ekwefi at the cave. This act illustrates that he is not as unfeeling as he may seem. He is close to his daughter Ezinma and demonstrates his love for her by defying the gods to protect her. The reader should not be surprised by his reaction. He has shown that he is capable of emotion; he is just unwilling to let others see him show it. In this case, no one but his wife will see what he has done.

11. How does Ekwefi's decision to follow Chielo contradict Okonkwo's ideas about femininity and masculinity?

    Ekwefi's decision to follow Chielo is very brave. She is going into the forest alone, following a woman who is a messenger of the gods and who can openly chastise her. She is taking the chance that Agbala will punish her by hurting her daughter. In Okonkwo's mind, a woman should be incapable of this type of action.

Chapter Twelve

1. Analyze Okonkwo's feelings about what happened with Chielo. How is his response different from the way that Ekwefi views the situation?

   Okonkwo did not come immediately to follow Ekwefi. Because he does not want to show affection, he waits a significant amount of time and then walks to the shrine. He makes the trip four times rather than waiting at the shrine because waiting would indicate that he was worried. While the narrator tells us that Okonkwo was gravely worried, Okonkwo does not want anyone else to know.

2. On what type of ceremony does this chapter focus? How is this ceremony different from the other ceremonies that have been discussed in the book?

   The ritual in this chapter is a wedding ceremony. It is different from the others because it is a ceremony primarily for women rather than men.

Chapter Thirteen

1. What happens that causes the cannons to boom? What does Okonkwo remember in relation to this event?

   Ezeudu has died. Okonkwo remembers when Ezeudu came to him to tell him not to participate in Ikemefuna's death.

2. Why does Achebe include a funeral ceremony at this point in the novel?

   The funeral ceremony of this chapter balances the wedding/betrothal ceremony depicted in the previous chapter.

3. What does the one-handed spirit's benediction ironically foreshadow?

   The one-handed spirit ends his benediction by saying, "If your death was the death of nature, go in peace. But if man caused it, do not allow him a moment's rest." This foreshadow's Okonkwo's ironic accidental killing of Ezeudu's son in this same chapter. This accident will prove to be an unfortunate turning point in Okonkwo's life.

4. What is the significance of this death's occurring at the center of the novel?

   This death is at the center because it is the point at which everything will change for Okonkwo and for the village. Achebe has introduced the reader to the idea that things are strange within the community, and the fact that this event is unprecedented confirms that things are about to change.

5. How is the accidental killing punished by Okwonko's clan? How does Okonkwo face his punishment? How do the village elders handle his punishment?

   The law of Okonkwo's clan is clear: because Okonkwo caused another man's death, he must be exiled, but because the death was accidental, he can return to his village after seven years. Okonkwo willingly faces his punishment and leaves even before the village elders have the opportunity to pronounce sentence on him. The elders themselves handle the punishment as something regrettable but unavoidable. When they come to Okonkwo's compound, they do not come vengefully but prepared to execute the law.

6. How does Obierika react to the punishment? Why do you think he reacts this way? What does he resolve after his contemplation? How does this resolution advance one of the themes of the novel?

   Obierika reacts to the punishment by questioning the tribal customs. He does not understand why Okonkwo and his family must be punished for an accident. This incident also causes Obierika to question why his wife's twins needed to be thrown into the forest. In the end he resolves that the punishments are just because they will absolve the tribe of any punishments from the earth. He states, "As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others." One of the themes in the novel explores the idea of the community versus the individual. Okonkwo has often behaved in ways that concern only himself, while the rest of the characters are concerned with the well-being of the tribe.

7. How might the village interpret Okonkwo's role in the death? What had Obierka warned Okonkwo about his role in Ikemefuna's death?

   The tribesmen might believe that the death is a direct punishment for Okonkwo's role in Ikemefuna's death. Obierka warned him in Chapter Eight that Okonkwo's act was "the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families."

8. How does Achebe create dramatic tension in this chapter? What purpose does the shooting serve?

   Achebe creates dramatic tension by describing the frenzied beat of the drums, the increased dancing, the ancestral visits. The actual shooting serves as the climax to the situation.

9. Explain the irony in Okonkwo's having to return to the motherland and that he committed the "female" crime.

   Throughout the novel, Okonkwo is concerned with appearing as masculine as possible. His actions are influenced by his fear of femininity. Committing a female crime and having to return to the motherland is in direct opposition to his life's ambition.

10. What might Obierika's final statement foreshadow?

"**As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others.**"

The statement seems to indicate that Okonkwo's actions might bring the tribe's ultimate downfall, just as Okonkwo's actions earlier in the novel contributed to what happened with Ezeudu's son's death.

Part Two

Chapter Fourteen

1. What does Okonkwo learn about family in his transition to life in Mbanta?

Okonkwo learns that family is important in how they help each other in times of need. Uchendu's sons give Okonkwo seed-yams in order to begin his farm.

2. Cite several literary devices that Achebe uses when describing nature after the first rains and analyze the effect Achebe creates with their use.

Some examples are:

- *"…the sun had been gathering strength till it seemed to breathe a breath of fire on the earth."- personification*
- *"…and the sands felt like live coals to the feet." – simile*
- *"Evergreen trees wore a dusty coat of brown." – personification*
- *"…and the world lay panting under the live, vibrating heat." – personification*
- *"It was an angry, metallic and thirsty clap, unlike the deep and liquid rumbling of the rainy season." – personification and metaphor*
- *"Palm trees swayed as the wind combed their leaves into flying crests like strange and fantastic coiffure." – personification and metaphor*

Achebe often uses personification to portray nature as either a fire-breathing monster or a drought-ridden, thirsty beast. With the arrival of the rain, the imagery becomes more luxuriant and beautiful.

3. How does Okonkwo compare beginning life as an older person to beginning life as a young man?

Working does not hold the same enthusiasm as it once did. It is harder than it once was, and it does not fulfill the same purpose.

4. Why is Okonkwo unable to deal with his punishment? How does he seem to be behaving by sitting in "a silent half-sleep"?

   Okonkwo is having a difficult time dealing with his punishment because the only thing that he wants in his life is to be one of the lords of the clan. He realizes that his exile has made that achievement nearly impossible. Okonkwo seems to be depressed, which is ironic because he would attribute depression to being a female. He would never admit that he is depressed.

5. Explain the significance of being "cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting."

   In Chapter One, Okonkwo was described as "slippery as a fish in water." He was just beginning to build his reputation as a powerful man and rising in prominence in his clan. Now he is older, has lost his prominence, has lost his connection to his clan, and is compared to a "fish out of water." He has been removed from the surroundings he needs in order to survive.

6. What does Okonkwo find discouraging about his *chi*?

   Okonkwo is discouraged by the idea that once he accepted the Ibo belief that, "when a man says yes his chi says yes also." He believes that he has said "yes," but his chi has failed him.

7. What does Uchendu try to teach Okonkwo about the role of women?

   Uchendu tries to impress on Okonkwo the fact that women are the nurturers and protectors. He tries to encourage Okonkwo to accept the "feminine" comfort of the motherland because that is its purpose: to provide healing.

8. What might Uchendu's lecture portend for Okonkwo and foreshadow for the plot?

   As Uchendu lists everything he has lost in his life, he concludes, "I did not hang myself, and I am still alive." This probably foreshadows greater losses for Okonkwo, and possibly even his death—by hanging.

Chapter Fifteen

1. What is the purpose of Obierka's visit?

   Obierika brings the money from the sale of Okonkwo's property and yams. Obierika had to destroy Okonkwo's property in order to fully cleanse the land of Okonkwo's crime.

2. How do Obierika and Okonkwo greet Uchendu when they come to visit him?

   Okonkwo and Obierika go through the same tribal customs that they do in Umuofia. They break a kola nut, they drink palm-wine, and they discuss stories that are unrelated to why they are meeting.

3. What news does Obierika bring to Okonkwo?

   The village of Abame has been wiped out, massacred by a group of white in retaliation for the villagers' killing of a white man.

4. What did the Oracle mean when it told the Abame that the white men were locusts?

   Like the locusts in Chapter Seven, the white men first arrived in a small party that seemed harmless, even beneficial. Then a large horde of them arrived bringing mass destruction.

5. To what do Obierka, Uchendu, and Okonkwo liken the arrival of the white men in Abame?

   The men recall the stories of slavers who came and captured Africans to be sold into slavery in Europe and the Americas.

6. How does Achebe conclude the chapter? Why is this significant?

   Okonkwo asks Obierka how he can repay his friend's stewardship. Obierka replies that Okonkwo can kill either one of his sons or himself. This is significant because, while Obieraka is not serious, it calls to mind Okonkwo's role in Ikemefuna's death and foreshadows future events.

Chapter Sixteen

1. How do the clan leaders feel about the white men's religion? Why?

   The clan leaders believe that the white men's religion is innocuous and short-lived. They are not concerned because the people who are following the religion are not anyone who is important in the clan.

2. In what ways is Nwoye's being with the missionaries significant?

   Nwoye's apparent conversion is significant for a number of reasons. First, because his father has always seen him as weak and effeminate, he is *one of the disenfranchised to whom the new religion is so attractive. Second, his conversion, turning his back on the traditions of his clan, is a personal slight to Okonkwo. It is a part of the main story, not a mere subplot or bit of background detail.*

3. How are Nwoye and Okonkwo revealed to be more similar than different?

   Just as Nwoye will not speak of his father, claiming to have no father, Okonkwo will not speak of his son.

4. What imagery does Achebe use to illustrate how Nwoye felt after hearing the missionary's message?

   Achebe uses two images. The first one is of a parched soul. "He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his parched soul." The second image mimics the first in that it references how Nwoye has felt the past few years. "The words of the hymn were like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth."

5. Why does Achebe create a situation in which the missionaries cannot speak the African language?

   Achebe has spent considerable time illustrating the importance of spoken communication to the Ibo and emphasizing the richness of their conversation, the role of proverb and story. To introduce a European missionary who cannot speak their language—and an interpreter whose dialect is strange and inferior—allows Achebe to illustrate how ill-prepared the missionaries were to really communicate with the people they came to convert.

Chapter Seventeen

1. What do the missionaries ask of the village? What do the leaders of the village grant the men? How does this backfire?

   The missionaries ask the village for a plot of land to build their church. The leaders grant them a piece of land in the Evil Forest because they believe that it will take care of the problem of the men's being in their village. It backfires because the white men are able to survive in the forest, thus lending credence to the power of the white man's God.

2. What prevents Nwoye from attending church the first Sunday it is open? What does this illustrate about the power of superstition?

   Nwoye is afraid because the church is on the edge of the Evil Forest. He believes that the forest will kill him. The narrator relates a belief that the spirits will allow a man to defy them rather than punish him right away. This illustrates that, while Nwoye has been questioning his culture's traditions for some time, his superstitious fear is still very powerful.

3. Whom do the missionaries allow to join their church? What is unusual about this?

   The villagers allow Nneka to join the church. This is unusual is because she is a woman and because she has delivered four sets of twins. She is shunned among her people, so they are not upset when she joins the church.

4. How does Okonkwo react when he learns that Nwoye has been at the church? Why do he and Nwoye no longer talk?

   Okonkwo becomes so angry that he grabs Nwoye by his neck. His reaction to Nwoye emphasizes Okonkwo's fiery temper and illustrates that despite all of the trials that he has experienced he has not learned to control it. Ultimately, Okonkwo cannot accept that Nwoye is refusing the traditions of his tribe. "Now that he had time to think of it, his son's crime stood out in its stark enormity. To abandon the gods of one's father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination."

5. At the end of the chapter, what metaphor does Achebe use to illustrate Okonkwo's belief about his son?

   "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash."

Chapter Eighteen

1. What does the narrator suggest has arrived along with the new religion?

   There are stories that the missionaries' new religion includes a system of justice to protect converts.

2. Why do the missionaries insist that the outcasts shave their heads?

   There are two main reasons. First, the dirty and tangled hair represents the osu's previous status as outcast under the old (heathen) religious system. As converted Christians, they are no longer outcasts. Second, the osu's shaving their heads will prove that the old gods do not have power. The osu will not die when the mark of their outcast status is removed.

3. Part two of the novel relates much of what happens to the clan as a unit rather than just to Okonkwo. How does the reader know that Okonkwo is still the same man who came to the village after being banned from his fatherland?

   The reader knows that Okonkwo is still the same man because of the way he reacts in various situations that plague him. For example, when he first learns about the white men coming into the village, he wants to fight. When he discovers that Nwoye is going to the church, he physically attacks them. When someone in the new church kills a python, he wants to fight the church. His immediate reaction is always violence.

4. In what two, almost contradictory, ways is Okoli's death significant?

   Okoli's death seems, on the one hand, to give some credibility back to the old religion. Okoli, an osu *convert, committed the blasphemy of killing a royal python, and the clan believes that gods have punished him. On the other hand, it is with Okoli's death that the clan decides it does not need to harass the members of the new church, and this leniency is probably what allows the church to survive.*

Chapter Nineteen

1. What do we learn about Okonkwo in the opening paragraphs of this chapter?

   Okonkwo has prospered in his motherland. He has been active in community affairs. He has maintained his wealth, and he has had more children. Yet he considers the seven years of his exile to be "wasted and weary years." The narrator says that Okonkwo "regretted every day of his exile." In short, Okonkwo has not learned a thing or grown at all as a character from anything he has experienced.

2. What do the names of the children that are born to Okonkwo during his exile symbolize about how he really feels about living in his motherland? How do the names of his children illustrate Okonkwo's personality?

   Okonkwo's first child is named Nneka, meaning "Mother is Supreme." However, he only uses this name because he feels a polite obligation to do so. The second child is named Nwofia meaning "Begotten in the Wilderness." The second name represents how Okonkwo really feels about living in his motherland. The naming of these children is representative of Okonkwo's actions throughout the novel. Okonkwo's initial motivation is consistently appearance—he does not want to appear weak; he does not want to appear lazy. He does not want to appear ungrateful or despondent. He hides his emotions. The second explanation for Okonkwo's actions usually reflects his true feelings.

3. Explain the significance of the final speech in the chapter. What does it foreshadow for Part Three of the novel?

   The speech is significant because one of the oldest men in Mbanta is warning Okonkwo about the future. He tells Okonkwo that he fears for the younger generation becauseir does not understand what it means to function as a whole. The old man condemns the new religion because it is tearing the clan apart. This speech is interesting because it comes in the middle of a celebration. Achebe includes this foreboding speech in this unexpected context, so the reader should take the words of the man very seriously. This speech could foreshadow the ultimate demise of the clan.

Chapter Twenty

1. The first part of the novel focuses on Okonkwo and how he rises to prominence in his society. The first part also details customs and traditions among the people. The second part of the novel depicts Okonkwo's exile, and the beginning of both his decline and the potential decline of Ibo culture. Chapter Twenty is the beginning of Part Three. What do you think Part Three will be about?

   Because of the final speech in Chapter Nineteen, part three will probably be about the continued dysfunction of the Ibo people. The reader will probably learn how Okonkwo fulfills his fate as the tragic hero.

2. Explain the meaning of the following simile: "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another."

   This simile illustrates how Okonkwo feels as he is getting ready to return to Umuofia. No one is indispensable, and Okonkwo knows that his former positions have all been filled as easily as a lizard replaces its tail.

3. What effect does Achebe achieve with his use of anaphora in the first page of this chapter?

   Throughout the seven years of Okonkwo's exile, we have seen him dwell on the negative, on what he has lost—despite the exhortations of his brother-in-law. Now, as he is about to return to his fatherland, he is still more concerned with what he has lost than with the riches he has gained. This is emphasized through Achebe's three-time repetition of "he had lost" in this paragraph.

4. Why is it ironic that Okonkwo now blames his *chi* for his losses, especially the "tragedy of his first son"?

   In Part One, Okonkwo insisted that one could control one's chi, *one's destiny. Now that things have not worked out as he had planned, he does not blame himself or his own decisions and actions; he blames his* chi.

5. Why, according to Obierka, did the village not resist the white man's initial encroachment? Why won't he agree to fight now that Okonkwo has returned?

   Obierka and the other village elders were afraid that something like the massacre of Abame would destroy their village. Now that Okonkwo has returned, Obierka believes it is too late to fight. Too many of the village elders have converted to the white man's ways.

6. Explain the significance of the following line: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

   This line is one of the most significant in the novel because it touches on the major theme of the book. The title of the novel is Things Fall Apart, and here we learn that the white man cut the cultural traditions and values that held the people together so that the clan—the very fabric of their society—would collapse.

7. Okonkwo and Obierika seem to disagree a great deal throughout the novel. What does each person represent?

   Okonkwo is a traditionalist. He does not question any of the customs or traditions of the tribe. He wants to fight to protect the status quo and is resistant to change. On the other hand, Obierika is a transitional character. Throughout the novel he questions some of the decisions and practices of the clan. He does not want to fight the white men who come to the village.

Chapter Twenty-One

1. What turns out to be the real underlying reason for the white man's success in Umuofia?

   The Europeans have brought commerce to the village, and a great deal of money is flowing into the village.

2. Explain Mr. Brown's method of conversion and why he is successful.

   Mr. Brown listens to the people of Umuofia and engages in dialogue with them. He does not merely preach, but finds similarities between his new religion and the Ibo traditional religion on which to base his evangelism.

3. How does Umuofia respond to Okonkwo's return? Why?

   The clan barely notices Okonkwo's return. It is a vastly different village from the one Okonkwo left, and the position he once held no longer even exists.

4. What does Mr. Brown's visit to Okonkwo emphasize about relations between the Ibo and the Europeans?

   Mr. Brown visits Okwonko to share with hin the "good news" that Nwoye, now called Isaac, has been sent to a seminary-school. He thinks Okonkwo will be happy to receive this news. This indicates that even well-intended Europeans did not understand the hearts and attitudes of the people they intended to convert.

5. How is the theme of the novel repeated in the last paragraph of this chapter?

The theme is repeated as Okonkwo thinks about the destruction of his clan. Just as the final words of the eldest man in Mbanta expressed fear for the younger generation, Okonkwo mourns that his clan has fallen apart. In the last paragraph, the phrase "falling apart" is repeated, as well as the idea that Okonkwo views those who are unwilling to fight as women: "He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart, and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women."

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. How does Mr. Smith's arrival portend trouble for the clan?

Whereas Mr. Brown was respectful and tolerant, finding similarities between his culture and the Ibo's, Mr. Smith sees only the extremes and the differences. To him, the Ibo culture is primitive and evil—something to be eradicated.

2. How does Enoch create the conflict between the church and the clan? How was this event foreshadowed earlier in the novel?

The egwugwu are some of the most respected spirits in the clan. No one is allowed to see their faces. On one occasion, Enoch rips the mask off of one of the egwugwu and all of the people are able to see him. This has never happened before in the life of Umuofia, and the tribe does not know what to do in response. In Chapter Ten, the narrator suggests that the women may have recognized Okonkwo as one of the masked egwugwu, but no one thought about it. Clearly, it is important to maintain the masquerade.

3. Explain the importance of the following line: "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming—its own death."

This statement is important because it is a reiteration of the theme that "things fall apart." The end of the previous chapter repeated the idea as well, and the incident with Enoch and an egwugwu *seems to be the catalyst for the final upheaval.*

4. How are Enoch and Okonkwo similar?

While Enoch and Okonkwo do not believe the same things, they both protect their beliefs with violence.

5. What is the inevitable result of Mr. Smith's inability to understand and communicate?

The spirit of the village is willing to compromise and —out of respect and affection for Mr. Brown—and allow Mr. Smith to stay and even worship his own God; but Smith is unyielding in his desire to eradicate the village's traditions. As a result, the village spirits demand the destruction of the church, which they see as an abomination.

Chapter Twenty-Three

1. What do the first two paragraphs of this chapter suggest are the reasons that Okonkwo begins to feel happy again?

The first paragraph reveals that Okwonko believes that the village might be returning to its roots. The second paragraph further reveals that Okonkwo is happy that the village elders listened to him with respect when he demanded they take action.

2. How does the District Commissioner break faith with the leaders of Umuofia?

The District Commissioner pretends that he is going to ask the village leaders to share their side of the story about what has happened. Instead, the District Commissioner instructs guardsmen to arrest the men.

3. What punishment does the District Commissioner impose on the men? What is the men's reaction?

The District Commissioner tells the men that they must pay 200 cowries and then they can be released. The men refuse to answer the District Commissioner.

4. How are the men treated in the jail that is in opposition to what the District Commissioner tells the guards to do?

The District Commissioner tells the guards to treat the men with respect, but as soon as he leaves, the guards shave the men's heads.

5. What simile does Achebe use to describe the village's alarm and confusion? Why is this significant?

Achebe writes: "Umuofia was like a startled animal with ears erect, sniffing the silent, ominous air and not knowing which way to run." He has used animal imagery throughout the novel to signify the place from which the tribe has come. Up until now, however, the animal imagery has suggested strength, speed, agility. Now we have the image of an animal prepared to flee.

6. How is village life portrayed as already ended?

   It is the period of the full moon, but there is no fun or play. The village is silent. Remember the earlier belief: "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk."

Chapter Twenty-Four

1. What kind of opportunity would a war offer to Okonkwo?

   One reason Okonkwo could want to go to war is to avenge the clan for the way it has been treated; however, the more likely reason is that he wants to return to the way he once was within the tribe. Since his return, Okonkwo has been unable to return to the level of power that he once had—a war would be his opportunity to reclaim some glory.

2. Based on what we already know about Okwonko's character, what does his insistence on war foreshadow?

   Several times in the past, we have seen Okwonko act rashly and selfishly, contrary to the will of his village and its elders. He violated the Week of Peace by beating his wife. He participated in Ikemefuna's death—actually delivering the death-blow to a boy who considered him a father—against the edict of his superiors. Now he is advocating an ill-advised war, at least in part hoping to restore himself to some of his lost status in the village. It is strongly foreshadowed that any violence against the Europeans can only end badly for the village.

3. Reread the exchange between Obierika and Okonkwo. How does it reflect the characteristics of both men? What does it foreshadow for Okonkwo?

   During the exchange, Obierika asks Okonkwo if he is afraid that Egonwanne will convince the clan not to fight. Okonkwo responds in a fashion that is typical of him—he does not care what the group does; he will fight anyway. The attitudes of both men are consistent with the way they have acted over the course of the novel. It clearly foreshadows Okonkwo's destruction.

4. How does Okonkwo's statement about not caring what the group does predict his fall as a tragic hero?

   Throughout the entire novel, Okonkwo has acted rashly, arrogantly, not caring about the overall good of the village. Each time the consequence was a little more severe. Eventually, his arrogance and disregard for the general welfare must result in his destruction.

5. In what ways is Okonkwo's slaughter of the head messenger climactic?

   This is the most serious of Okonkwo's rash and thoughtless actions. Even his killing of Ikemefuna and Ezeudu's son was unplanned and accidental. This death is intentional, and it cannot go unpunished. This event, then, must mark the beginning of Okonkwo's final downfall as tragic hero.

Chapter Twenty-Five

1. Why has Okonkwo commited suicide?

   Okonkwo cannot accept the end of his culture. There is really no place for someone like him in the developing new order. Also, Okonkwo probably knows that, unless he kill himself, he has brought devastation upon himself and his village.

2. Given his role as the tragic hero in the novel, is it inevitable that Okonkwo commit suicide?

   If Achebe intended Okonkwo to be a tragic hero, Okonkwo would certainly have had to die, but his death would not have needed to be a suicide. He could have been killed by the Europeans or even by his own villagers.

3. On what kind of note does the novel end?

   From the African perspective, the novel ends on a foreboding and pessimistic note. The District Commissioner is the last character we see, and his last thought is of the book he is going to write after his "successful" career "pacifying" the "primitive tribes."

Things Fall Apart

Part One

Chapter One

1. Reread the first sentence of the novel. What purposes does this sentence serve?

2. Explain the rhetorical strategies used in the first two paragraphs.

3. Explain the use of figurative devices in the following line: "Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water."

4. Explain the imagery in the following line: "That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan."

5. What is the rhetorical effect used in the following line: "The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath." What effect does it create?

6. Describe Okonkwo. Why does Achebe use animal imagery to describe him?

7. Describe Unoka. How does Okonkwo feel about his father?

8. Why does Achebe spend so much of the first part of the chapter describing Unoka?

9. How does Okonkwo's impression of his father shape Okonkwo's character? How does he act as a result of his father's reputation?

10. Explain the importance of the following line: "Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten."

11. What does the reader learn about how Okonkwo feels about his father?

12. How does the text refer to Ikemefuna?

13. What do these references indicate about Ikemefuna?

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14. Explain the purpose(s) of the first chapter?

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Chapter Two

1. How do the villages communicate with each other?

2. What are the italicized words included in the text? What is the purpose of including these words in the narrative?

3. What does Okonkwo realize after the town crier comes through town?

4. How do the people feel about night? How do they eliminate or deal with fear?

5. Explain the meaning of the following saying: "When the moon is shining the cripple becomes hungry for a walk."

6. How does Okonkwo feel about war? Why do you think he feels this way?

7. Explain the purpose of the following line as it relates to characterization: "On great occasions such as the funeral of a village celebrity he drank his palm-wine from his first human head." Why would Achebe mention such an act in this novel?

8. Describe the nature of the conflict between the villages, Mbaino and Umuofia.

9. How do other tribes feel about Umuofia?

10. How does Umuofia choose to settle the dispute? Why do they make this decision? Provide textual evidence to support your answer.

11. What does the discussion indicate about the nature of medicine and religion in the Ibo tribe?

12. Why is Okonkwo chosen to visit Mbaino?

13. Why does the reader suspect that something is going to happen with Ikemefuna and Okonkwo?

14. Describe the family structure of Okonkwo's tribe.

15. How would Okonkwo's rule of his household be interpreted in Western culture?

16. Why does Okonkwo treat his family the way he does? How does Achebe want the reader to feel about Okonkwo?

17. What rhetorical techniques does Achebe use in the following line: "It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw"? What effect is being achieved?

18. Achebe informs the reader that there is a word that means both "woman" and "a man who had taken no title." Why does he share this information with the reader?

19. Who is Nwoye? How does Okonkwo feel about him?

20. Is Okonkwo's description of Nwoye accurate? How do we know?

21. Reread the exchange between Okonkwo and his "most senior" wife. How does Okonkwo treat her? What does it demonstrate about the role of gender within the Ibo community?

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22. Describe the compound where Okonkwo and his family live. What does this tell the reader about Okonkwo?

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Chapter Three

1. What effect does Achebe achieve with his repetition of the phrase "they came" in the second paragraph?

2. Why must people crawl when visiting Agbala?

3. Why might it be unusual that a woman is the one who serves and can see Agbala?

4. When Okonkwo's father visits the oracle, what does he learn?

5. What is a *chi*? How is it important in the story?

6. Why is Unoka left to die in the Evil Forest?

7. Reread the first part of this chapter and the last paragraph before the break. Why does Achebe begin and end this section with the same information? What is he repeating?

8. Who is Nwakibie? How does the reader know that he is successful?

9. What does Nwakibie mean when he says, "You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me. Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other, let his wing break"?

10. What is the meaning of the following: "…an old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb"? How does this relate to Okonkwo?

11. Why does Nwakibie agree to let Okonkwo use his yams for share-cropping?

12. Why does Okonkwo resent having to take care of his mother and sisters?

13. Explain the sarcasm in the paragraph about the unearned success of the farmers who delayed planting their yams.

14. Analyze the several literary techniques used in this chapter.

Chapter Four

1. How was Okonkwo able to achieve such a high rank within the tribe when his father died a penniless man? How is this different from colonial-era European culture?

2. What suggestion is there that Okonkwo will evolve into a tragic hero?

3. Why is the old man's rebuke significant?

4. The text mentions the *chi* again as it relates to Okonkwo's success. How strong a determiner is the *chi* assumed to be?

5. Why does the text return to the story of Ikemefuna after spending time discussing the traditions with the harvest?

6. Describe Ikemefuna. How does he fit into the family structure?

7. What is significant about Okwonko's breaking the peace during the Week of Peace? What does this action indicate about Okonkwo?

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8. In this chapter, what does the reader learn about the customs of the Ibo and the customs of other neighboring clans? How might this be important in the story?

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9. How does Okonkwo respond to his son? What verb does Achebe use to suggest that Okonkwo's perception of his son is not necessarily accurate?

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10. Why does Achebe end this chapter by relating the nature of the relationship between Ikemefuna and Nwoye?

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Chapter Five

1. Achebe begins Chapter Five by describing the Feast of the New Yam. What does the reader learn about Umuofian culture through this description?

2. Who is responsible for the major preparations for the Feast of the New Yam? What does this tell the reader about Ibo culture?

3. Why does Okonkwo become angry before the New Yam Festival? Was his anger directed in the right place? Why or why not?

4. For what reason does Achebe repeat the word "beautiful" when describing the way the women decorate their bodies and cut their children's hair into patterns?

5. What is Ekwefi's favorite part of the festival? Why?

6. When people call for one another, why do they respond "Is that me?"

7. What type of relationship has Ikemefuna developed with Okonkwo's family? Cite an instance in this chapter that demonstrates this relationship.

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8. What is the significance of the extended metaphor Achebe uses to describe the drums and their relationship to the village?

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9. When Okonkwo's wives bring him his food for the evening, Ezinma sits with her father while she waits for him to finish her mother's dish. Why does Okonkwo yell at her?

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Chapter Six

1. What is significant about the number of drums used at the wrestling?

2. What do Okonkwo's springing to his feet and then sitting immediately imply?

3. Explain the literary device Achebe uses in the following line:

   "**The air, which had been stretched taut with excitement, relaxed again.**"

4. Who is Chielo?

5. Discuss the type of language that Achebe uses to describe the fight and how this might add to the importance of this scene.

Chapter Seven

1. At the beginning of this chapter, the narrator states: "He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season, and was full of the sap of life." Of whom is he speaking? What does this image indicate about this person?

2. How does Okonkwo feel about Ikemefuna and the relationship that he has developed with his Nwoye?

3. What line in the first page of the chapter would indicate that Nwoye is only acting in a certain way in order to appease his father?

4. Consider the following lines and discuss whether or not you think they are the way everyone in Umuofia feels or just the way Okonkwo feels.

> "And so he was always happy when he heard him grumbling about his women. That showed that in time he would be able to control his women-folk. No matter how prosperous a man was, if he was unable to rule his women and his children (and especially his women) he was not really a man."

5. How does Okonkwo define manliness?

6. Why does Achebe spends so much time setting up the dichotomy between Okonkwo and Nwoye?

7. Achebe includes one of the stories that Nwoye likes to hear his mother tell. Why does this story appear here?

8. What type of imagery does Achebe use to describe the arrival of the locusts? What is significant about this passage?

   Achebe describes the arrival as follows:

   > "At first, a fairly small swarm came. They were the harbingers sent to survey the land. And then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia. Soon it covered half the sky and the solid mass was now broken by tiny eyes of light like shining star dust. It was a tremendous sight, full of power and beauty."

9. Why do the village elders decide that Ikemefuna is to be killed?

10. How does the clan strike an apparent harmony between the will of the Community and the needs of the Individual?

11. Why does Okonkwo dress to go with the men who are taking Ikemefuna instead of staying removed from the business as he is told?

12. How does Achebe change the setting to complement what is happening in the story?

13. How does Okonkwo once again place his own fears above the good of his community?

14. What is the purpose of Nwoye's point of view?

15. What two themes have been identified by the end of Chapter 7?

Chapter Eight

1. What does the reader learn about Okonkwo from the following passage:

> "Okonkwo did not taste any food for two days after the death of Ikemefuna. He drank palm-wine from morning till night, and his eyes were red and fierce like the eyes of a rat when it was caught by the tail and dashed against the floor."

2. Again Okonkwo mentions that Ezinma should have been a boy. Why is it important that he mentions this at this point in the story?

3. What theme is advanced by the following passage?

> "When did you become a shivering old woman," Okonkwo asked himself, "you, who are known in all the nine villages for your valor in war? How can a man who has killed five men in battle fall to pieces because he has added a boy to their number? Okonkwo, you have become a woman indeed."

4. How does the reader know that Okonkwo is worried, not only about the future of his family, but also the future of the village?

5. What does Obierika believe about Okonkwo's decision to help carry out Ikemefuna's death? What might this foreshadow?

6. Achebe spends some time developing the story of Ozoemena and Ndulue. What is the purpose of this story? What does it illustrate about the differences in the way of thinking between Okonkwo and Obierika, but also about the village as a whole?

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7. How could the following statementfunction as foreshadowing in the novel?

"**Okonkwo was not a man of thought but of action.**"

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8. How does this chapter establish that things are changing within the village?

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9. How are white people introduced in this chapter? What is the tone of the chapter at the time they are introduced?

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Chapter Nine

1. What is an *ogbanje* and how does it relate to Ezinma's illness?

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2. How does Okonkwo's helplessness manifest itself?

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Chapter Ten

1. Explain the disconnect between the chapters. Why would Achebe choose to do this?

2. Read the following lines:

> "It was clear from the way the crowd stood or sat that the ceremony was for men. There were many women, but they looked on from the fringe like outsiders."

What does this excerpt suggest about the role of women? What is significant about the placement of this passage relative to what has come immediately before, and what will come immediately after?

3. Explain the irony of the trial in this chapter. Is justice served in the *egwugwu*'s judgment?

4. How does the case brought before the egwugwu parallel Okonkwo's life?

Chapter Eleven

1. Often, the setting is not just "where the story happens," but a geographical, historical, social, economic, or philosophical setting. Achebe begins this chapter with a description of the night. The reader learns earlier in the novel the significance the night has for people. What purpose does the setting serve at the beginning of this chapter?

2. This chapter focuses on Ibo folklore. Summarize the story of the tortoise and the birds and explain what it suggests about customs and traditions. How might this story relate to Okonkwo?

3. How does the story of the tortoise and the birds relate to colonialism?

4. What type of imagery does Achebe use to describe Ekwefi's reaction to hearing her daughter's name? Find similar language in the chapter that parallels this.

5. Why does Chielo visit Okonkwo and Ekwefi?

6. How does Ekwefi go against the wishes of Chielo?

7. Describe the rhetorical technique that Achebe uses in the paragraph that begins, "The priestess' voice was already growing faint in the distance." Why does Achebe use this technique?

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8. Explain the irony in the situation that it begins to grow lighter as Ekwefi is still following Chielo.

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9. How does Achebe maintain the tone of the chapter and the significance of Chielo's power when the priestess reaches the circular ring of hills? How might a western reader interpret this section?

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10. Who joins Ekwefi at the cave, and how does this contribute to his character development? Does this conflict with what we know about this character thus far?

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11. How does Ekwefi's decision to follow Chielo contradict Okonkwo's ideas about femininity and masculinity?

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Chapter Twelve

1. Analyze Okonkwo's feelings about what happened with Chielo. How is his response different from the way that Ekwefi views the situation?

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2. On what type of ceremony does this chapter focus? How is this ceremony different from the other ceremonies that have been discussed in the book?

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Chapter Thirteen

1. What happens that causes the cannons to boom? What does Okonkwo remember in relation to this event?

2. Why does Achebe include a funeral ceremony at this point in the novel?

3. What does the one-handed spirit's benediction ironically foreshadow?

4. What is the significance of this death's occurring at the center of the novel?

5. How is the accidental killing punished by Okwonko's clan? How does Okonkwo face his punishment? How do the village elders handle his punishment?

6. How does Obierika react to the punishment? Why do you think he reacts this way? What does he resolve after his contemplation? How does this resolution advance one of the themes of the novel?

7. How might the village interpret Okonkwo's role in the death? What had Obierka warned Okonkwo about his role in Ikemefuna's death?

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8. How does Achebe create dramatic tension in this chapter? What purpose does the shooting serve?

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9. Explain the irony in Okonkwo's having to return to the motherland and that he committed the "female" crime.

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10. What might Obierika's final statement foreshadow?

"**As the elders said, if one finger brought oil it soiled the others.**"

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Part Two

Chapter Fourteen

1. What does Okonkwo learn about family in his transition to life in Mbanta?

2. Cite several literary devices that Achebe uses when describing nature after the first rains and analyze the effect Achebe creates with their use.

3. How does Okonkwo compare beginning life as an older person to beginning life as a young man?

4. Why is Okonkwo unable to deal with his punishment? How does he seem to be behaving by sitting in "a silent half-sleep"?

5. Explain the significance of being "cast out of his clan like a fish onto a dry, sandy beach, panting."

6. What does Okonkwo find discouraging about his *chi*?

7. What does Uchendu try to teach Okonkwo about the role of women?

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8. What might Uchendu's lecture portend for Okonkwo and foreshadow for the plot?

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Chapter Fifteen

1. What is the purpose of Obierka's visit?

2. How do Obierika and Okonkwo greet Uchendu when they come to visit him?

3. What news does Obierika bring to Okonkwo?

4. What did the Oracle mean when it told the Abame that the white men were locusts?

5. To what do Obierka, Uchendu, and Okonkwo liken the arrival of the white men in Abame?

6. How does Achebe conclude the chapter? Why is this significant?

Chapter Sixteen

1. How do the clan leaders feel about the white men's religion? Why?

2. In what ways is Nwoye's being with the missionaries significant?

3. How are Nwoye and Okonkwo revealed to be more similar than different?

4. What imagery does Achebe use to illustrate how Nwoye felt after hearing the missionary's message?

5. Why does Achebe create a situation in which the missionaries cannot speak the African language?

Chapter Seventeen

1. What do the missionaries ask of the village? What do the leaders of the village grant the men? How does this backfire?

2. What prevents Nwoye from attending church the first Sunday it is open? What does this illustrate about the power of superstition?

3. Whom do the missionaries allow to join their church? What is unusual about this?

4. How does Okonkwo react when he learns that Nwoye has been at the church? Why do he and Nwoye no longer talk?

5. At the end of the chapter, what metaphor does Achebe use to illustrate Okonkwo's belief about his son?

Chapter Eighteen

1. What does the narrator suggest has arrived along with the new religion?

2. Why do the missionaries insist that the outcasts shave their heads?

3. Part two of the novel relates much of what happens to the clan as a unit rather than just to Okonkwo. How does the reader know that Okonkwo is still the same man who came to the village after being banned from his fatherland?

4. In what two, almost contradictory, ways is Okoli's death significant?

Chapter Nineteen

1. What do we learn about Okonkwo in the opening paragraphs of this chapter?

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2. What do the names of the children that are born to Okonkwo during his exile symbolize about how he really feels about living in his motherland? How do the names of his children illustrate Okonkwo's personality?

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3. Explain the significance of the final speech in the chapter. What does it foreshadow for Part Three of the novel?

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Chapter Twenty

1. The first part of the novel focuses on Okonkwo and how he rises to prominence in his society. The first part also details customs and traditions among the people. The second part of the novel depicts Okonkwo's exile, and the beginning of both his decline and the potential decline of Ibo culture. Chapter Twenty is the beginning of Part Three. What do you think Part Three will be about?

2. Explain the meaning of the following simile: "The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it soon grew another."

3. What effect does Achebe achieve with his use of anaphora in the first page of this chapter?

4. Why is it ironic that Okonkwo now blames his *chi* for his losses, especially the "tragedy of his first son"?

5. Why, according to Obierka, did the village not resist the white man's initial encroachment? Why won't he agree to fight now that Okonkwo has returned?

6. Explain the significance of the following line: "He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."

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7. Okonkwo and Obierika seem to disagree a great deal throughout the novel. What does each person represent?

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Chapter Twenty-One

1. What turns out to be the real underlying reason for the white man's success in Umuofia?

2. Explain Mr. Brown's method of conversion and why he is successful.

3. How does Umuofia respond to Okonkwo's return? Why?

4. What does Mr. Brown's visit to Okonkwo emphasize about relations between the Ibo and the Europeans?

5. How is the theme of the novel repeated in the last paragraph of this chapter?

Chapter Twenty-Two

1. How does Mr. Smith's arrival portend trouble for the clan?

2. How does Enoch create the conflict between the church and the clan? How was this event foreshadowed earlier in the novel?

3. Explain the importance of the following line: "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming—its own death."

4. How are Enoch and Okonkwo similar?

5. What is the inevitable result of Mr. Smith's inability to understand and communicate?

Chapter Twenty-Three

1. What do the first two paragraphs of this chapter suggest are the reasons that Okonkwo begins to feel happy again?

2. How does the District Commissioner break faith with the leaders of Umuofia?

3. What punishment does the District Commissioner impose on the men? What is the men's reaction?

4. How are the men treated in the jail that is in opposition to what the District Commissioner tells the guards to do?

5. What simile does Achebe use to describe the village's alarm and confusion? Why is this significant?

6. How is village life portrayed as already ended?

Chapter Twenty-Four

1. What kind of opportunity would a war offer to Okonkwo?

2. Based on what we already know about Okwonko's character, what does his insistence on war foreshadow?

3. Reread the exchange between Obierika and Okonkwo. How does it reflect the characteristics of both men? What does it foreshadow for Okonkwo?

4. How does Okonkwo's statement about not caring what the group does predict his fall as a tragic hero?

5. In what ways is Okonkwo's slaughter of the head messenger climactic?

Chapter Twenty-Five

1. Why has Okonkwo commited suicide?

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2. Given his role as the tragic hero in the novel, is it inevitable that Okonkwo commit suicide?

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3. On what kind of note does the novel end?

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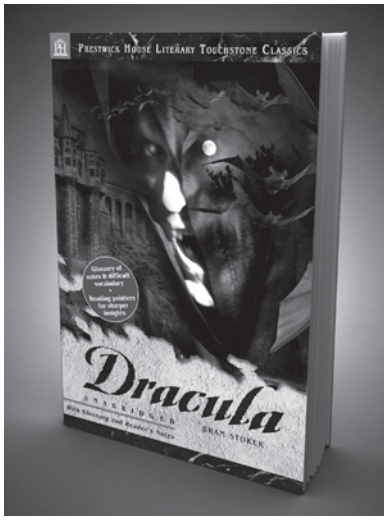

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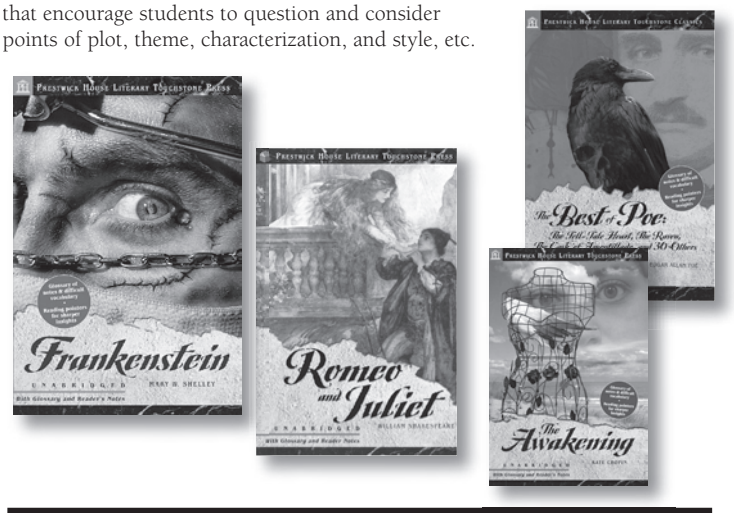

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