



Introduction to Characterisation in Things Fall Apart

Student Name: _____

Class: _____

Due Date: _____

Introduction to the Novel and Characterisation

The novel "Things Fall Apart" by Chinua Achebe is a seminal work of African literature that explores the complexities of cultural identity, tradition, and the impact of colonialism on indigenous societies. At the heart of this exploration is the character of Okonkwo, a complex and multifaceted figure whose story serves as a lens through which we can examine the themes and ideas of the novel. Characterisation, the process by which authors create and develop characters, is a crucial aspect of literary analysis, allowing readers to understand the motivations, conflicts, and relationships that drive the plot and explore the deeper meanings of the text.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyse the character of Okonkwo and his significance in the novel
- Evaluate the impact of cultural and societal expectations on character development
- Demonstrate an understanding of the author's use of characterisation to convey themes and ideas
- Develop critical thinking and analytical skills in relation to literary texts

Reading and Review of Chapters 1-5

Chapters 1-5 of "Things Fall Apart" introduce us to the protagonist, Okonkwo, and the Igbo society in which he lives. We see Okonkwo's strengths and weaknesses, his relationships with his family and community, and the cultural and societal expectations that shape his actions and decisions. As we read these chapters, it is essential to consider the following questions:

1. What are Okonkwo's strengths and weaknesses, and how do these traits influence his relationships and decisions?
2. How does Okonkwo's cultural background influence his actions and decisions, and what role does tradition and custom play in Igbo society?
3. What significance does the concept of "manliness" hold in Igbo culture, and how does Okonkwo embody or challenge this ideal?

Character Profile: Okonkwo

To deepen our understanding of Okonkwo and his role in the novel, it is helpful to create a detailed character profile. This profile should include:

Physical and Personality Traits:

- Age
- Appearance
- Personality traits (e.g. brave, stubborn, proud)

Background and Family Relationships:

- Family members (e.g. Unoka, Ekwefi, Nwoye)
- Significant events or experiences in his past

Motivations and Conflicts:

- What drives Okonkwo's actions and decisions?
- What conflicts does he face, and how does he respond to them?

The Impact of Colonialism on Igbo Society

The arrival of British colonizers in Igbo land marks a significant turning point in the novel, as it disrupts the traditional way of life and introduces new values, beliefs, and practices that challenge the existing social order. Okonkwo's experiences and reactions to these changes serve as a microcosm for the broader impact of colonialism on Igbo society. It is essential to consider how the imposition of foreign rule affects the social, cultural, and economic structures of the community, and how individuals like Okonkwo respond to these changes.

The Role of Missionaries

The introduction of Christian missionaries and their teachings plays a crucial role in the disruption of Igbo traditions. The missionaries' emphasis on the importance of individual salvation and their rejection of polygamy and other Igbo customs create tension and conflict within the community. Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, is particularly drawn to the Christian teachings, which further exacerbates the generational and cultural divide.

Themes and Symbolism in the Novel

Achebe employs a range of themes and symbols throughout the novel to convey the complexities of Igbo culture and the impact of colonialism. Some of the key themes include the struggle between tradition and change, the importance of cultural identity, and the dangers of unchecked ambition. Symbols such as the yam, the egwugwu, and the oracle of the hills also carry significant meaning and contribute to the rich tapestry of the narrative.

The Significance of the Yam

The yam is a symbol of masculinity, prosperity, and community in Igbo culture. Okonkwo's obsession with yam farming and his desire to be recognized as a great farmer reflect his own struggles with identity and status. The yam also serves as a symbol of the connection between the individual and the community, highlighting the importance of shared values and traditions.

Literary Devices and Style

Achebe's writing style in "Things Fall Apart" is characterized by simplicity, clarity, and a deep understanding of Igbo culture and traditions. He employs a range of literary devices, including imagery, foreshadowing, and symbolism, to create a rich and immersive narrative. The use of proverbs, folk tales, and other oral traditions adds depth and authenticity to the story, while also highlighting the importance of storytelling in Igbo culture.

The Use of Imagery

Achebe's use of imagery is a key aspect of his writing style, as it allows the reader to visualize the characters, settings, and events of the novel. The vivid descriptions of the Igbo landscape, the characters' appearances, and the rituals and ceremonies all contribute to a powerful and evocative narrative. The imagery also serves to underscore the themes of the novel, such as the beauty and richness of Igbo culture, and the devastating impact of colonialism.

Historical Context and Cultural Significance

"Things Fall Apart" is a novel that is deeply rooted in the historical and cultural context of Nigeria and the Igbo people. The novel is set in the late 19th century, a time of great change and upheaval in Nigeria, as the British colonial powers were expanding their control over the region. Achebe's portrayal of Igbo culture and traditions is both a celebration of the richness and diversity of African cultures and a critique of the destructive impact of colonialism.

The Scramble for Africa

The late 19th century was a time of intense competition among European powers for control of African territories and resources. The Scramble for Africa, as it came to be known, resulted in the partitioning of the continent into colonies, with Nigeria being colonized by Britain. This period of colonization had a profound impact on African societies, leading to the disruption of traditional ways of life, the imposition of foreign systems of government and education, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Conclusion and Final Thoughts

In conclusion, "Things Fall Apart" is a novel that offers a powerful and nuanced portrayal of Igbo culture and the impact of colonialism on African societies. Through Okonkwo's story, Achebe explores themes of identity, culture, and the human condition, raising important questions about the nature of tradition, community, and the individual. As we reflect on the novel and its significance, it is essential to consider the historical and cultural context in which it was written, as well as the ongoing relevance of its themes and messages in contemporary society.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

As you conclude your reading of "Things Fall Apart", consider the following questions:

- What are the key themes and messages of the novel, and how are they developed throughout the narrative?
- How does Achebe's portrayal of Igbo culture and traditions contribute to our understanding of African societies and the impact of colonialism?
- What insights does the novel offer into the human condition, and how can we apply these insights to our own lives and communities?



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