

January 29<sup>th</sup>

## Identity in *Things Fall Apart*

**Fear:** For all of his desire to be strong, Okonkwo is haunted by fear. He is profoundly afraid of failure, and he is afraid of being considered weak. This fear drives him to rashness, and in the end contributes to his death.

**Masculinity:** Masculinity is one of Okonkwo's obsessions, and he defines masculinity quite narrowly. For him, any kind of tenderness is a sign of weakness and effeminacy. Male power lies in authority and brute force.

## Identity in *Things Fall Apart*

**Greatness and ambition:** Okonkwo is determined to be a lord of his clan. He rises from humble beginnings to a position of leadership, and he is a wealthy man. He is driven and determined, but his greatness comes from the same traits that are the source of his weaknesses. He is often too harsh with his family, and he is haunted by a fear of failure.

## Individual & Community in *Things Fall Apart*

**Fate and free will:** There is an Igbo saying that when a man says yes, his chi, or spirit, says yes also. The belief that he controls his own destiny is of central importance to Okonkwo.

## Individual & Community in *Things Fall Apart*

**Tribal belief:** Particularly since one of the threats to Igbo life is the coming of the new religion, tribal belief is a theme of some importance. Igbo religious beliefs explain and provide meaning to the world; the religion is also inextricable from social and political institutions. Achebe also shows that Igbo religious authorities, such as the Oracle, seem to possess uncanny insights. He approaches the matter of Igbo religion with a sense of wonder.

## Culture & Colonialism in *Things Fall Apart*

**Memory/Documentary:** Digression is one of Achebe's main tools. The novel is the story of Okonkwo's tragedy, but it is also a record of Igbo life before the coming of the white man. The novel documents what the white man destroyed. You learn much about Igbo customs and traditions; depicting this world is a central part of the novel.

## Culture & Colonialism in *Things Fall Apart*

**Social disintegration:** Towards the end of the novel, we witness the events by which Igbo society begins to fall apart. Religion is threatened, Umuofia loses its self-determination, and the very centers of tribal life are threatened.

## Culture & Colonialism in *Things Fall Apart*

**Justice:** Justice is another powerful preoccupation of the novel. For the Igbo, justice and fairness are matters of great importance. They have complex social institutions that administer justice in fair and rational ways. But the coming of the British upsets that balance.



## Essential Questions

**Identity:** In what ways are human beings from the Igbo community like us? In what ways does the Igbo culture impact Okonkwo?

**The Individual and Community:** What holds the Igbo community together? What tears it apart? What is the relationship between the Okonkwo and the community? Why is maintaining balance in this relationship so important?

**Culture and Colonialism:** What is the impact of European colonialism on the characters in the novel? On the people and cultures of Africa?

**Read Chp. 17**

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**Group Project**