

S.3 LITERATURE NOTES

THE NOVEL, THINGS FALL APART

How to read and understand a novel or play in literature

Read the text carefully the first time and understand the story. Make a brief summary of the main events in each chapter or Act or Scene to help you recall them and enhance your understanding of the story.

Read the novel or play again and this time, follow the development of various situations.

At the end of the second reading, you should be able to relate the title of the novel to the content.

Subsequent reading of the novel or play will enable you to explore important aspects in literature. Among these, the study of the following is important:

1. The plot

The plot in literature refers to the arrangement of incidents or events that make up the story. It is important to study the series of events as they occur in the novel or play and determine why things occur in the novel. Should be able to link up events and determine why things occur as they are.

2. Character and character traits

A character in a novel or play is a person or an animal with human qualities who takes part in a novel or play. Character traits on the other hand are a description of the characters in the novel. One should identify and study the main characters. Besides the main character, study other characters that are of equal importance in the novel. This will help you to determine their role or contribution to the novel. Study character portrayal and determine whether they have strengths or weaknesses .Determines whether he or she succeeds or fails and reasons for their destiny.

3. Themes and ideas

A theme is a central or dominant idea in a text or novel. This is seldom stated explicitly, instead, it is conveyed through the selection and arrangement of details; and through emphasis of certain words or events through actions and reactions of characters.

4. Setting

Identify the period in which the book is written, and the geographical location of the story. How does it determine the relationship among characters? How does the setting affect the plot? In what way does the setting reinforce the central ideas or themes that the story examines? Look at the time setting, geographical setting and the social setting.

ANALYSING THE CHARACTER TRAITS OF THE NOVEL, THINGS FALL APART

1. OKONKWO

His hardwork and prowess in war earns him a position of high status in his clan. He builds his fortune alone as a share cropper because Unoka, his father was never able to have a successful harvest.

Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan. In his youth, he brought honour to his village by beating Amalinse the Cat in a wrestling contest. He stammers when angry and can hardly speak. He is quick –tempered and violent.

Rules his house hold with a heavy hand, and often beats his wives and children. For example, beats up Ojiugo and does not even stop when is reminded that he is committing a serious offence against the Earth goddest.

Okonkwo is so obsessed with masculinity. He sees any tender emotions as feminine and therefore weak.

He is hasty and intolerant. Hates and is impatient with effeminate and less successful men who remind him of his father, Unoka.

Fears mostly failure, weakness and hates anything that would suggest any resemblance to his father

His relation with his father is so close that is why because of his father, he suffers an inferiority complex of which he tries to make up by hard work , pride and showing off courage and manliness.

Never at any time does he show any emotion openly, except anger. He hates being gentle and idle.

2. UNOKA

He is the father of Okonkwo. Very lazy, improvident and quite incapable of thinking about tomorrow. He Loves going for feasts and parties.

Tall but very thin and has a slight stoop. Wears a haggard and mournful look except when is drinking or playing on his flute.

He is a grown up , failure, poor and his wife and children barely have enough to eat. A musician who dies when he is heavily indebted. Dies of a swelling which is an abomination to the Earth goddess, and so is not buried but carried to the Evil Forest and left to die.

3. NWOYE

He is Okonkwo's eldest son who resembles his grandfather, Unoka. He is the greatest source of anxiety and frustration to Okonkwo.

He is rather effeminate, hates stories of violence and bloodshed.

Prefers the romantic and tender stories that are considered only good enough for women and children.

Shows affection and most especially, the loss of Ikemefuna deprives him of a dear friend and companion.

He is one of the earliest converts into Christianity, dismays his father when he runs away for good, and Okonkwo is very much affected by his son's conversion and desertion. This is the last straw in a camel's back that makes Okonkwo actively involved in destroying Enoch's home and the new church in Umuofia.

4. IKEMEFUNA

He is a fifteen year old boy from a neighbouring clan, Mbaino, who is given up to Umuofia as a sacrifice for the killing of one of the women of Umuofia. He is the unfortunate boy whose father murdered a daughter of Umuofia and as a fine to appease the of people of Umuofia, Ikemefuna was given out.

During the three years that he lives in Okonkwo's household, he becomes very popular however, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves decrees that he Ikemefuna must be killed to appease the gods.

Ikemefuna's killing proves how unfair and arbitrary the social institutions of Umuofia are.

He is innocent and loved by everyone but he dies a death of a poor scapegoat - his life is vainly and innocently sacrificed though his death impacts considerably on Okonkwo and Nwoye.

5. OBIERIKA

A great and closest friend of Okonkwo He is a great, successful and prosperous man. He tells Okonkwo that he should not have got involved in the killing of Ikemefuna.

He is calm, reserved and thoughtful unlike Okonkwo who is seen as reckless and thoughtless.

6. EKWEFI AND EZINMA

The second wife of Okonkwo whom he is very fond of and has a romantic relationship with.

She fell in love with him because of his great skill in wrestling. However, it is only later that she runs from her husband to join Okonkwo as a wife. She is the mother of Ezinma.

Her daughter, Ezinma is a favourite and beloved of Okonkwo. He wishes she was a boy instead of a girl.

Ezinma is an “Ogbanje”, a child who is believed to be evil enough to die and yet come again to plague her parents. Ezinma is the only child who understands Okonkwo’s moods.

7. **MR. BROWN AND REV. JAMES**

Mr. Brown, a white missionary is the earliest to arrive on the scene. He is very understanding, restrained and skillful in handling the new converts and their clansmen.

He uses a policy of compromise and accommodation. He even visits and makes friends with the non-believers. As such, he is tolerated and loved by the black community, and this makes his work relatively easier and more effective.

However because of poor health, he leaves and is replaced with Rev. James Smith who openly condemns the policy Mr. Brown had used. He encourages the newly converted zealots to be militant and carry out evil acts of aggression and provocation. For example, he encouraged the killing of the sacred python and the ancestral spirit.

It is Rev. James Smith who triggers off immediate conflict that lands the Elders of Umuofia, including Okonkwo in prison and consequently Okonkwo’s homicide and suicide.

In a nutshell, Rev. Smith and his bad methods of work can therefore be held partly responsible for the problems of Umuofia and Okonkwo’s fate.

ASSIGNMENT

1. With clear illustrations from the novel, *Things Fall Apart*, discuss the major themes and ideas that feature in this text.
2. To what extent is Okonkwo responsible for what happens to him in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*? Giving examples from the text to support your views.

- **END** -