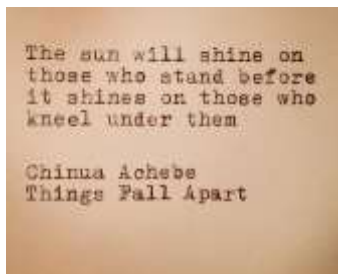


WELCOME TO MS. DEANA'S 10<sup>TH</sup> GRADE  
HONORS ENGLISH / LITERATURE  
*Summer Reading Assignment*

*"If it doesn't challenge you, it doesn't change you."  
- Fred DeVito*



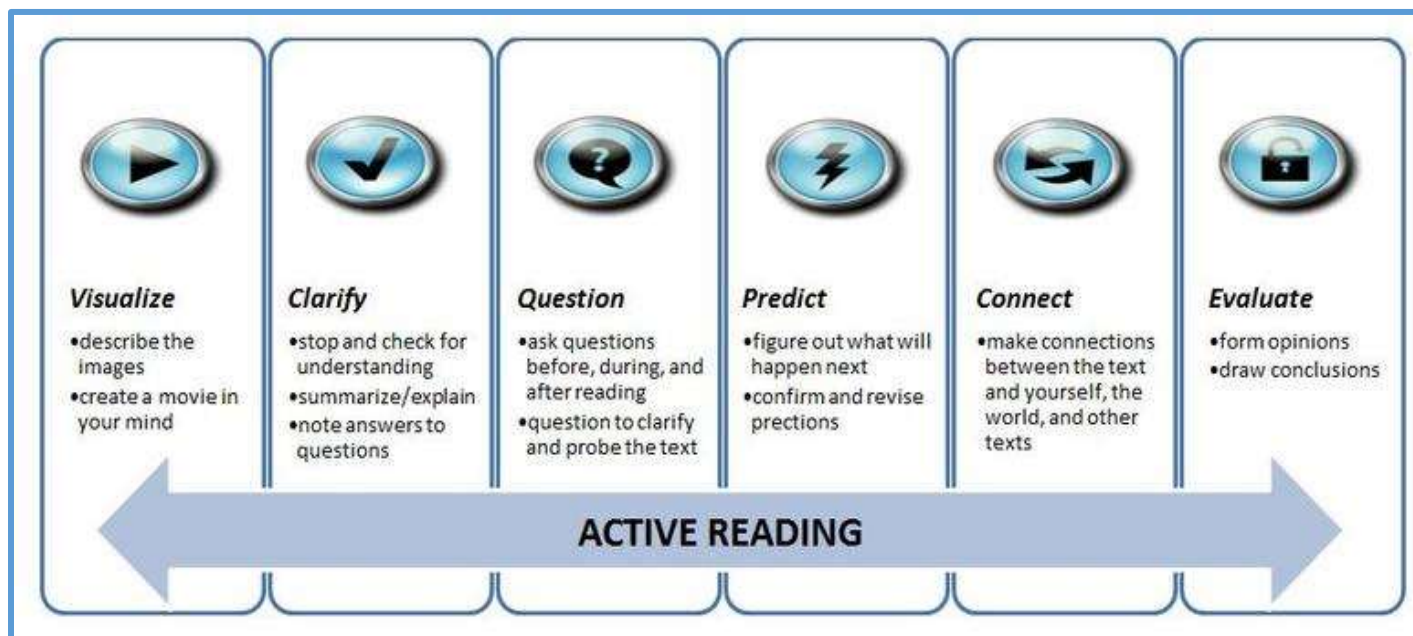
Things Fall Apart  
– Chinua Achebe

This summer you will be reading Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe.

This book is a little bit different than anything else we have read together. It is set in Africa during the time that Great Britain was colonizing the continent (think 1890's).

The title of the book is an allusion to a poem by William Butler Yeats. After you read the book, think about WHY Achebe would have alluded to this poem for the title.

The book is FULL of BEAUTIFUL figurative language, imagery, and a healthy dose of heartache, too.



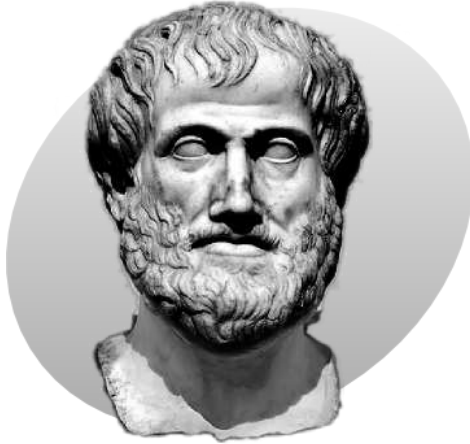
Because you are the cream of the crop, these questions are NOT MANDATORY. However, on the first day of school, you are required to turn in an MLA formatted, five-paragraph essay with outline over the following topic as it relates to the novel:

**Okonkwo as a Tragic Hero (See attached)**



If you chose not to turn in this essay, you will receive a zero as a test grade. We will also be having a general comprehension test during the first week of school over the novel. The character names will confuse you! You will need to create character cards (use index cards) with identifiers that will help keep you straight. (Okonkwo, Unoka, Nwoye, Ikemefuna, Ekwefi, Ezinma, Ojiubo, Obierika, Chielo, Agbala, Mr. Brown, Mr. Kiaga, Reverend James Smith, and The District Commissioner) Your character cards are also due the first day of school.

# *Tragic hero as defined by Aristotle*



**A tragic hero is a literary character who makes a judgment error that inevitably leads to his/her own destruction.**

## **Characteristics**

Aristotle once said that "A man doesn't become a hero until he can see the root of his own downfall." An Aristotelian tragic hero must possess specific characteristics, five of which are below:

- 1) Flaw or error of judgment: **Note the role of justice and/or revenge in the judgments.**
- 2) A reversal of fortune: brought about because of the hero's error in judgment.
- 3) The discovery or recognition that the reversal was brought about by the hero's own actions
- 4) Character Flaw: Usually excessive pride (hubris)
- 5) The character's fate must be greater than deserved.

Initially, the tragic hero should be neither better nor worse morally than normal people, in order to allow the audience to identify with them. This also introduces pity, which is crucial in tragedy, as if the hero was perfect we would be outraged with their fate or not care especially because of their ideological superiority. If the hero was imperfect or evil, then the audience would feel that he had gotten what he deserved. It is important to strike a balance in the hero's character.

Eventually the Aristotelian tragic hero dies a tragic death, having fallen from great heights and having made an irreversible mistake. The hero must courageously accept their death with honor.

## **Other common traits**

Some other common traits characteristic of a tragic hero:

- Hero must suffer more than he deserves.
- Hero must be doomed from the start, but bears no responsibility for possessing his flaw.
- Hero must be noble in nature, but imperfect so that the audience can see themselves in him.
- Hero must have discovered his fate by his own actions, not by things happening to him.
- Hero must understand his doom, as well as the fact that his fate was discovered by his own actions.
- Hero's story should arouse fear and empathy.
- Hero must be physically or spiritually wounded by his experiences, often resulting in his death.
- The hero must be intelligent so he may learn from his mistakes.
- The hero must have a weakness, usually it is pride
- He has to be faced with a very serious decision that he has to make

***BACKGROUND / INTRODUCTION***“Historical and Cultural Context” Questions

1. What is the setting of *Things Fall Apart*?
2. Why were the Igbo difficult for the British to take over?
3. Name the three stages through which the British conquer the Igbo?
4. Describe how the world of *Things Fall Apart* is “oppressively patriarchal.”
5. What are the three sources of authority in Igbo society?
6. What type of government do the Igbo people have? Who rules each clan?
7. Explain the concept of the *Egwugwu*.
8. Explain the concept of gods and oracles. Who is a main god for the Igbo?

***PART ONE***Chapters 1-2 Questions

1. What accomplishments have helped to make Okonkwo a great man of the village?
2. Compare and contrast Okonkwo with his father, Unoka. Why do you think Okonkwo feels as he does toward his father?
3. Okonkwo is a wealthy man and a noble. What are the signs of his wealth?
4. How do the men of Umuofia decide what to do about the murder of a woman from their clan? What role do the women of Umuofia have in the decision?
5. According to Achebe, what emotion dominates Okonkwo’s life? What is the source of this emotion?
6. Achebe tells us, “Among the Ibo . . . proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten.” This statement itself is a proverb. How do you interpret it?

### Chapters 3-4 Questions

1. Why does Unoka consult the Oracle? What does the Oracle tell him?
2. What is the Week of Peace? What does Okonkwo do to break it and what action does the clan take?
3. Who is Nwoye and how does Okonkwo treat him? Describe the relationship between Nwoye and Ikemefuna.
4. Okonkwo's first year as a farmer is difficult. How is the difficulty due to Okonkwo's family history and how was it due to nature?
5. In a sentence or two, explain the concept of *chi*. What is the meaning of the proverb, "When a man says yes his *chi* says yes also?" What does Okonkwo mean when he says he challenged his *chi*?

### Chapters 5-6 Questions

1. When is the Festival of the New Yam held? Explain Okonkwo's reaction to the festival?
2. What causes Okonkwo to shoot at Ekwefi? What does this say about Okonkwo?
3. What is an *ilo*? How is it used during the Festival?
4. How do the Ibo treat the winner of the final wrestling match? Why are the winners so revered?
5. When Obiageli broke the pot, how did Okonkwo react and how did you expect him to react? How do you account for any discrepancies?

### Chapter 7-8 Questions

1. How long has Ikemefuna been with the family? Who decides his fate? What does Ezeudu tell Okonkwo about this decision?
2. In your opinion, did Ikemefuna know what was about to happen? What do Okonkwo's actions reveal about him?
3. How does Okonkwo feel about his daughter Ezinma? Why?
4. Describe the scene between Okonkwo and Obierika. List two things you learn about Ibo culture from this scene and two things about the characters.
5. Analyze Okonkwo's idea of masculinity? Do you think Okonkwo's ideas of masculinity are typical of Ibo society, or are they extreme?
6. At the end of the discussion among Okonkwo and his friends, what major historical event is foreshadowed? What peculiar belief about white people is expressed?

### Chapter 9-10 Questions

1. Why does Ekwefi have a bitter attitude about life? Describe her relationship with Ezinma. What does Okonkwo do to help Ezinma?
2. An *ogbanje* is a changeling, a child who repeatedly dies and returns. How can humans defeat an *ogbanje*'s wickedness? What do these beliefs reveal about Ibo society?
3. Who are the judges in the legal case in Chapter 10, and how do they behave? Do you feel the judges decision is fair?
4. In your opinion, do the people of Umuofia know what is behind the *egwugwu* masks or not? Find textual evidence to support your answer?

### Chapter 11 Questions

1. Achebe devotes several pages to Ekwefi's folktale. Why do you think he chose to include the tale?
2. Chielo, the priestess, interrupts the story-telling. What announcement does she make? Where does she take Ezinma? Why do you think the Oracle called for Ezinma?
3. How does Okonkwo react when the priestess first makes her announcement? What actions does he take later and what do they show about his character?

### Chapter 12-13 Questions

1. What does the priestess do with Ezinma after emerging from the cave?
2. What joyous ceremony takes place the day after the return from the cave? While preparing for ceremony, what do the men of Umuofia discuss at the market and what does this discussion show about them?
3. What sorrowful news does the drum announce?
4. What terrible accident occurs at the funeral and what happens to Okonkwo's family as a result?
5. In your opinion, why did Achebe choose to end Part One the way he did? What aspects of the funeral ceremony make it possible for dangerous accidents to occur? How is this accident related to the infiltration of Western technology into a traditional culture?

## ***PART TWO***

### Chapter 14-15 Questions

1. According to Achebe, how does Okonkwo feel about his new life? Cite at least one example of figurative language that Achebe uses to describe Okonkwo's feelings.
2. Uchendu tells a story about a kite who takes a duckling and a chick. What is the point of the story? How does it relate to the encounter between the Abame and the whites?
3. What does Obierika bring with him on his visit to Okonkwo? Why does he not want Okonkwo to thank him?
4. What disaster happens to the Abame clan? How did it happen?

### Chapter 16-17 Questions

1. What step does Nwoye take concerning the missionaries? Does this decision show strength or weakness? Why do you think Nneka converted to Christianity?
2. What is Uchendu's reason for giving the missionaries part of the Evil Forest and what is the result?
3. How do you interpret Okonkwo's thought, "Living fire begets cold, impotent ash."
4. State one way in which the European missionaries understand Ibo culture and one way in which the Ibo misunderstand the Europeans.

### Chapter 18-19 Questions

1. What role did outcasts play in bringing Christianity to Iboland? Why is this important?
2. On two occasions, converts actively threaten the religious traditions in Mbanta. What are the occasions?
3. What unfortunate event happens to the Christians during the week before Easter?
4. Why is there no punishment in Ibo law for killing a python? Why could the clan not kill the converts?

## ***PART THREE***

### Chapters 20-22 Questions

1. How has Umuofia changed during Okonkwo's exile? Give three specific examples.
2. How is Mr. Smith different from Mr. Brown? How are they similar?
3. How does Enoch spark a conflict in Umuofia? What does the clan do about it?
4. According to Obierika, the clan could easily drive out two white men. Why then, does he feel the clan is falling apart?
5. How does Okeke, Mr. Smith's interpreter, show wisdom in dealing with the leaders of Umuofia? What do you think is the cause of his wisdom? What do you think would have happened if Okeke weren't so wise?

### Chapters 23-25 Questions

1. Why do you think the guards and messengers treat the men of Umuofia so badly? What do they do?
2. In what way do the court messengers take money dishonestly from Umuofia?
3. What kind of person do you think the District Commissioner is? Describe your views.
4. At the end of Chapter 24, Okonkwo hears his clansmen asking, "Why did he do it?" What are they referring to, and why do you think he did it?
5. In the last paragraph of the novel, the point of view shifts although the narrative is still third-person. Whose point of view is shown in this paragraph? Why do you think Achebe makes this shift? What tone, or attitude, does Achebe adopt in this paragraph?