Albert Chinualumogu Achebe

- Prominent Igbo (Ibo) writer, famous for his novels describing the effects of Western customs and values on traditional African society.

- Achebe's satire and his keen ear for spoken language have made him one of the most highly esteemed African writers in English.
Albert Chinualumogu Achebe

- Born November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, Nigeria
- Son of Isaiah and Janet Achebe
  - Teachers in missionary school
  - Devout evangelical Protestants
  - Instilled in him many of the values of their traditional Igbo culture
Albert Chinualumoga Achebe

- **Schooling:**
  - Government College in Umuahia (1944)
  - University College of Ibadan,
    - studied English, history and theology
    - Graduated with a BA, 1953
  - Rejected his British name and took his indigenous name Chinua.
College of Ibadan
Chinua Achebe

- Traveled in Africa and America and worked for a short time as a teacher
- Joined the Nigerian Broadcasting Company in Lagos, 1954
- Director of External Services in charge of the Voice of Nigeria, 1960s
- Married Christie Chinwe Okoli in 1961
  - Four children
Achebe’s Works

- THINGS FALL APART, 1958
- NO LONGER AT EASE, 1960
- THE SACRIFICIAL EGG AND OTHER STORIES, 1962
- ARROW OF GOD, 1964
- A MAN OF THE PEOPLE, 1966
- CHIKE AND THE RIVER, 1966
- BEWARE, SOUL BROTHER, 1971
- GIRLS AT WAR, 1972
- HOW THE LEOPARD GOT HIS CLAWS, 1972
- CHRISTMAS IN BIAFRA AND OTHER POEMS, 1973
- MORNING YET ON CREATION DAY, 1975
- THE DRUM, 1977
- THE FLUTE, 1977
- LITERATURE AND SOCIETY, 1980
- THE TROUBLE WITH NIGERIA, 1983
- THE WORLD OF OGBANJE, 1986
- ANTHILLS OF THE SAVANNA, 1987
- THE UNIVERSITY AND THE LEADERSHIP FACTOR IN NIGERIAN POLITICS, 1988
- HOPES AND IMPEDIMENTS, 1989
- NIGERIAN TOPICS, 1989
- ed.: THE HEINEMANN BOOK OF CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN SHORT STORIES, 1992
- HOME AND EXILE, 2000
Achebe’s Literary Language

- Standard English blended with...
  - pidgin
  - Igbo (Ibo)
    - vocabulary
    - proverbs
    - images
    - speech patterns
All of Achebe’s writings display three concerns:

- the legacy of **colonialism** at both the individual and societal levels
- the fact of English as a language of national and international exchange
- the obligations and responsibilities of the writer both to the society in which he lives and to his art
Chinua Achebe

- **Things Fall Apart**
  - Achebe’s response to inaccurate portrayals of African civilization by British writers
    - Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*
  - Reiterates how colonization by European missionaries changed Igbo society after Nigeria was claimed
- Uses language, which he sees as a writer's best resource, to expose and combat the propaganda generated by African politicians to manipulate their own people.

- Faced with his people's growing inferiority complex and his leader's disregard for the truth, the African writer cannot turn his back on his culture.
"A writer has a responsibility to try and stop [these damaging trends] because unless our culture begins to take itself seriously it will never....get off the ground."

He states his mission in his essay "The Novelist as Teacher":

"Here is an adequate revolution for me to espouse -- to help my society regain belief in itself and to put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of that word. Here, I think, my aims and the deepest aspirations of society meet."
Things Fall Apart

- Setting: Nigeria toward the end of the 19th century, just before the arrival of the white man.
- Shows us what life was like in Nigeria in a specific historical period
- Centers on tribe known as the Ibo (Igbo)
Things Fall Apart

- Style
  - Simple sentences
    - Much like its telling by a member of the Ibo tribe.
  - Imagery
    - “He grew rapidly like a yam tendril in the rainy season.”
  - Proverbs
    - “A toad does not run in the daytime for nothing.”
- Folk tales
  - The Mosquito and the Ear (Ch. 9)
Things Fall Apart

- **Religious beliefs:**
  - Supreme deity (*Chukwu*)
    - Most powerful
    - Controls fertility and creation
  - Personal gods (*chi*)
    - Believed to be in control of the person’s destiny
  - Ancestors (*egwugwu*)
    - Greatly respected and worshipped
    - Constant interaction between the worlds of the living and the dead
Chinua Achebe

- Wrote two sequels to *Things Fall Apart* which feature descendants of Okonkwo
  - *No Longer at Ease* (1960)
    - Shows how postcolonial Nigeria became corrupted by an alien government imposed upon them.
  - *The Arrow of God* (1964)
    - Further exploration of the failure of the British to understand traditional beliefs and values.
Chinua Achebe

- Exiled from his homeland because of his writings
- Returned for brief visit in 1998
- Started teaching in New York
  - Univ. of Mass., Amherst, Univ. of Conn., Dartmouth Univ., Bard Univ.
- An automobile accident in 1990 left Achebe confined to a wheelchair.
“The African Writer and the English Language”

- Major problem – defining African literature
  - “...you cannot cram African literature into a small, near definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units – in fact the sum of all the *national* and *ethnic* literatures of Africa” (428).
  - *National* literature: “one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realized or potential audience throughout its territory...a literature that is written in the *national language*” (428).
  - *Ethnic* literature: “one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation” (428).
    - eg. The national literature of Nigeria is the literature written in English and the ethnic literature are Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, etc.
  - No defined group should be excluded from “African literature”
“The African Writer and the English Language”

- Why is the national literature of Nigeria and many other African countries is, or will be, written in English?
  - “…these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British which, I hasten to add, is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British” (429).

- What impact has colonialism had on Africa?
  - “Colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before” (429).
    - Unified countries of Africa
    - Some ethnic groups were divided into 2 or 3 powers
    - “But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue, for sighing” (429).
Fondly called the "father of African literature", Achebe died after a short illness on 21 March 2013 in Boston, United States. An unidentified source close to the family said that he was ill for a while and had been hospitalised in the city. [Penguin publishing director Simon Winder said: "...we are all desolate to hear of his death." [ ]
THE SECOND COMING

Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;
Things fall apart; the centre 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 the 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 at last,
Slouches toward Bethlehem to be born?