

Things Fall Apart Ch. 1-5 Close Reading Questions

- 1) Read the following quote. What does it say about Umuofian culture? What are some of the things that Okonkwo has done in his life to be considered one of the greatest men of his people?

“When Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt. Any wonder then that his son Okonkwo was ashamed of him? Fortunately, among these people a man was judged according to his worth and not according to the worth of his father. Okonkwo was still young, he was already one of the greatest men of his time.”

- 2) Explain the sequence of events that brought Ikemefuna to Umuofia.
- 3) Read the following passage and comment on the “fear” that dominates Okonkwo. How has this fear played a role in the first five chapters? Has it only had a negative influence on Okonkwo or has it had a positive influence as well?

“Perhaps down in his heart Okonkwo was not a cruel man. But his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness. It was deeper and more intimate than the fear of evil and capricious gods and of magic, the fear of the forest, and of the forces of nature, malevolent, red in tooth and claw. Okonkwo's fear was greater than these. It was not external but lay deep within himself. It was the fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father.”

- 4) Judging by the following passage, Okonkwo did not have the head start in life many men in his culture get. How did he get his start? What hardships did he face? What does this say to you about his character?

“Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men usually had. He did not inherit a barn from his father. There was no barn to inherit.”

- 5) Read the following passage and comment on the role Ikemefuna has played in Okonkwo’s house in the time he has been there. Explain the role Ikemefuna has played in Okonkwo’s household. Give SPECIFIC examples from the text to support your response.

Even Okonkwo himself became very fond of the boy - inwardly of course. Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger. To show affection was a sign of weakness, -the only thing worth demonstrating was strength. He therefore treated Ikemefuna as he treated everybody else - with a heavy hand. But there was no doubt that he liked the boy. Sometimes when he went to big village meetings or communal ancestral feasts he allowed Ikemefuna to accompany him, like a son, carrying his stool and his goatskin bag. And, indeed, Ikemefuna called him father.”

- 6) Okonkwo beats his 3rd wife in chapter 4 and his 2nd wife in chapter 5. Discuss why he beat each wife. By his culture’s standards are either of these beatings justified?

***** Please write 2 open-ended discussion questions for us to discuss in class. *****