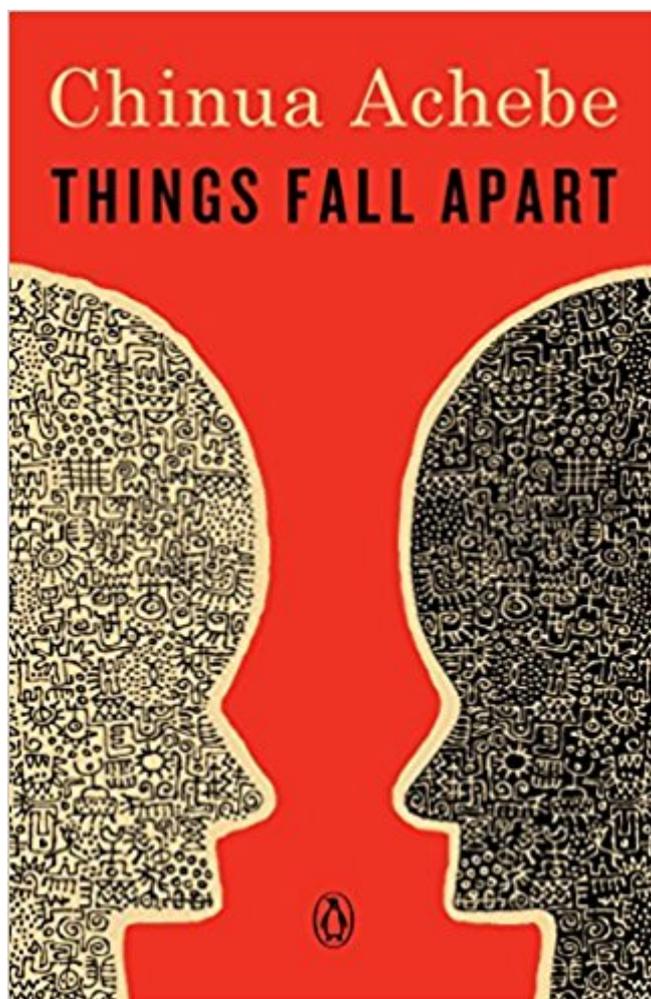


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# Things Fall Apart



## Synopsis

Things Fall Apart is the first of three novels in Chinua Achebe's critically acclaimed African Trilogy. It is a classic narrative about Africa's cataclysmic encounter with Europe as it establishes a colonial presence on the continent. Told through the fictional experiences of Okonkwo, a wealthy and fearless Igbo warrior of Umuofia in the late 1800s, Things Fall Apart explores one man's futile resistance to the devaluing of his Igbo traditions by British political and religious forces and his despair as his community capitulates to the powerful new order. With more than 20 million copies sold and translated into fifty-seven languages, Things Fall Apart provides one of the most illuminating and permanent monuments to African experience. Achebe does not only capture life in a pre-colonial African village, he conveys the tragedy of the loss of that world while broadening our understanding of our contemporary realities.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

One of Chinua Achebe's many achievements in his acclaimed first novel, Things Fall Apart, is his relentlessly unsentimental rendering of Nigerian tribal life before and after the coming of colonialism. First published in 1958, just two years before Nigeria declared independence from Great Britain, the book eschews the obvious temptation of depicting pre-colonial life as a kind of Eden. Instead, Achebe sketches a world in which violence, war, and suffering exist, but are balanced by a strong sense of tradition, ritual, and social coherence. His Ibo protagonist, Okonkwo, is a self-made man. The son of a charming ne'er-do-well, he has worked all his life to overcome his father's weakness and has arrived, finally, at great prosperity and even greater reputation among his fellows in the

village of Umuofia. Okonkwo is a champion wrestler, a prosperous farmer, husband to three wives and father to several children. He is also a man who exhibits flaws well-known in Greek tragedy: Okonkwo ruled his household with a heavy hand. His wives, especially the youngest, lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper, and so did his little children. 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. And yet Achebe manages to make this cruel man deeply sympathetic. He is fond of his eldest daughter, and also of Ikemefuna, a young boy sent from another village as compensation for the wrongful death of a young woman from Umuofia. He even begins to feel pride in his eldest son, in whom he has too often seen his own father. Unfortunately, a series of tragic events tests the mettle of this strong man, and it is his fear of weakness that ultimately undoes him. Achebe does not introduce the theme of colonialism until the last 50 pages or so. By then, Okonkwo has lost everything and been driven into exile. And yet, within the traditions of his culture, he still has hope of redemption. The arrival of missionaries in Umuofia, however, followed by representatives of the colonial government, completely disrupts Ibo culture, and in the chasm between old ways and new, Okonkwo is lost forever. Deceptively simple in its prose, *Things Fall Apart* packs a powerful punch as Achebe holds up the ruin of one proud man to stand for the destruction of an entire culture. --Alix Wilber

Peter Frances James offers a superb narration of Nigerian novelist Achebe's deceptively simple 1959 masterpiece. In direct, almost fable-like prose, it depicts the rise and fall of Okonkwo, a Nigerian whose sense of manliness is more akin to that of his warrior ancestors than to that of his fellow clansmen who have converted to Christianity and are appeasing the British administrators who infiltrate their village. The tough, proud, hardworking Okonkwo is at once a quintessential old-order Nigerian and a universal character in whom sons of all races have identified the figure of their father. Achebe creates a many-sided picture of village life and a sympathetic hero. A good recording of this novel has been long overdue, and the unhurried grace and quiet dignity of James's narration make it essential for every collection. Peter Josyph, New York Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

This was such a good book! I loved the way the author described the customs and beliefs of the

main character and his people. The similes and personification was beautiful. Part two and Part three make the book hard to read at times. In my previous history classes I was told a black and white version of a similar story. This book shows there are some important gray areas that need to be addressed. The last few pages are so infuriating for they explain how the Commissioner felt about these people. It really makes you root for the main character and his cause. I would suggest this book to anyone looking to understand West African Culture before and during the Britain Imperialism period, but it gets difficult to read for extended periods of time close to the end. Don't let that get to your head, this is one of the best books I've ever read for a class. I am certainly going to look at the rest of the books in this trilogy.

This short novel has a distinct voice and lyrical style. This might be somewhat challenging but the messages and tones are clear, and the chapters are short, so that even flipping back to the beginning of a chapter, or to the glossary in the back, or looking up an Igbo word on your smartphone won't take you out of the flow of the story or make this book too daunting to read. The short chapter are constructed in a way to be part of the story - the way the story is told is part of the total message of the book. But whether you pick up on it subconsciously or through careful and thoughtful reading and analysis, Achebe is always pulling you in one direction so you won't get lost and the meaning is always clear. I really appreciate how the book presents a variety of emotions and so-called "sins", such as anger, shame, pride, laziness, and even love without judgement or sentiment. The book is as much about the inner-turmoil of the main characters as the external turmoil of a society bounded by tradition and harried by imperialism.

Written in a cadence that reminds me of oral stories, this book is a powerful commentary on religion, and also has interesting elements of gender roles -- the culture depicted is completely foreign to me, and yet fascinating, with the weight of tradition woven through. Definitely worth reading, and I may read its sequel.

In Politics, Section 2 part XIII, Aristotle defines the tragic hero as one "who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty". In Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe has introduced us to Okonkwo, a perfect example of a tragic hero. The irony in Achebe's novel is that Okonkwo's error is in his false judgement of gentleness as frailty. Attempting to compensate for his father's lack of success, Okonkwo dons a mask of rigidity and ultimately breaks because of his own faults. Although Okonkwo is recognized by society as a

successful man because of his accomplishments within the clan, throughout the novel he continuously errs; thus his life spirals out of control. One particular misfortune that befalls Okonkwo's clan toward the end of the book is out of his hands but intertwining subplots that Achebe weaves into the story show that Okonkwo, through dealing with these misfortunes in his own way, is still fumbling around in the dark. This is a great book and the ending is truly tragic in every sense of the word.

The themes in "Things Fall Apart" were powerful, especially the deterioration of a traditional society once outsiders brought their own values into the culture. Well-meaning foreigners brought their own religions and Western customs into a traditional African culture they viewed as backwards or savage, and in need of redemption and modernization. I never understood the deeper meaning of colonialism before I read this book. I was also left with a deeper understanding of indigenous cultures and a realization that people who lived in traditional societies didn't have anything broken that needed to be fixed by the colonialists. The characters aren't particularly likable, but I don't believe the author intended to write a book with admirable or lovable characters. Truly, some parts of the book were excruciatingly dull, but the importance of "Things Fall Apart" is the history behind it, even though the book is a work of fiction. If the book is required reading for a literature course, I highly recommend purchasing a study guide to accompany the text. This is a book that needs a roadmap if you're going to spend a serious amount of time analyzing it for a research or term paper.

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