



## Exploring Junior Cycle Texts

### *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe

*Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is a novel included as part of the Prescribed Material for Junior Cycle English (For the student cohorts commencing Junior Cycle in 2023, 2024, 2025, 2026 and 2027 and presenting for examination in 2026, 2027 and 2028, 2029 and 2030).

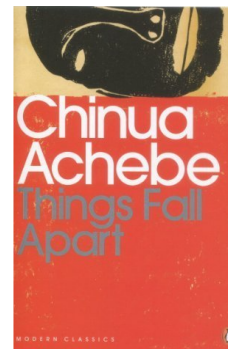


Image courtesy of  
Penguin Classics

#### Please note:

- The following tasks might be completed over a series of lessons.
- You may like to adapt and adjust the tasks to suit your context.
- *Things Fall Apart* covers themes which could be considered sensitive and controversial. You may wish to consult with our READY Framework to support you in your study.



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for this Text

### Before you read... (Teacher Guidance)

#### 1. Agree/ Disagree

Give students the following statements and ask them to respond:

"Strong people never show weakness", "Fear is something to be ashamed of", "Men should always be in control", "Your past defines your future."

They first *agree* or *disagree* individually, then discuss in pairs why they chose their answers.

#### 2. Igbo Wrestling

Allow students time to explore the tradition of Igbo wrestling.

This could be introduced by displaying a photo of the event and discussing their inferences.



Image courtesy of BBC News

#### 3. Vocabular Builder

From the extract, pick out some interesting or challenging words such as wily, slippery, perpetual, severe, pounce, stammer, capricious.

Ask students to guess what the word means from the sentence, match to a short definition you provide or use in their own sentence.



## Extract

**Background:** This is extract from Chapter one of *Things Fall Apart*. It is set in the late 1800s in Nigeria. It follows the protagonist, Okonkwo.

*Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond. His fame rested on solid personal achievements. As a young man of eighteen he had brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the Cat. Amalinze was the great wrestler who for seven years was unbeaten, from Umuofia to Mbaino. He was called the Cat because his back would never touch the earth. It was this man that Okonkwo threw in a fight which the old men agreed was one of the fiercest since the founder of their town engaged a spirit of the wild for seven days and seven nights.*

*The drums beat and the flutes sang and the spectators held their breath. Amalinze was a wily craftsman, but Okonkwo was as slippery as a fish in water. Every nerve and every muscle stood out on their arms, on their backs and their thighs, and one almost heard them stretching to breaking point. In the end Okonkwo threw the Cat.*

*That was many years ago, twenty years or more, and during this time Okonkwo's fame had grown like a bush-fire in the harmattan. He was tall and huge, and his bushy eyebrows and wide nose gave him a very severe look. He breathed heavily, and it was said that, when he slept, his wives and children in their houses could hear him breathe. When he walked, his heels hardly touched the ground and he seemed to walk on springs, as if he was going to pounce on somebody. And he did pounce on people quite often. He had a slight stammer and whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists. He had no patience with unsuccessful men. He had had no patience with his father... 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.*

(Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 1994, p. 3).

## Activities Based on Extract (Teacher Guidelines)

These prompts are designed to support close reading and personal response. They may be used orally or in writing, individually or in groups.

### 1. Exploring Language

Guide pupils to focus on language techniques Achebe uses to build Okonkwo's image, and write an analysis paragraph about how he is presented. Scaffolding could be provided such as: Tell them to find 3 similes or metaphors in the extract, asking what they notice about the verbs used to describe Okonkwo, and to highlight or underline any adjectives that describe him.



## 2. Debate

Encourage pupils to use textual evidence and their own inference to debate whether Okonkwo is a hero or a villain.

## 3. Freeze Frame

In small groups, instruct pupils to create a still image showing one of the moments from the extract such as:

- Okonkwo winning the wrestling match
- Okonkwo arguing with a family member
- Okonkwo reacting to his own fears

Ask the class guesses what's happening, and have groups explain the emotions involved.

## Reflect and Respond (Teacher Guidance)

These activities extend engagement with the extract and invite creative and personal responses. Use individually, in pairs, or in groups.

### 1. Thematic Exploration

Give pupils the prompt: *Many would argue the theme of this story is masculinity, while others say it is fear.* Guide pupils to write an argument about which theme they think is more apparent and why they think this.

### 2. Diary Extract

Invite students to write a diary entry from Okonkwo's point of view, either the night after he won the wrestling match, or a moment when he feels his fear rising inside him.

### 3. Reflective Essay

After reading the extract, have students do some reflection on what it means to be "strong". Direct them to write a short essay about this. Some title questions are below: Is strength about physical power, emotional control, or something else? Can fear and strength exist together?

### 4. Discursive Response

Give pupils the prompt below and guide them in writing a discursive or persuasive response. Prompt: *Do you agree with the statement: "Fear controls people more than strength does"? Use examples from the extract and from your own experience or reading to support your ideas.*

### 5. Poster Design

Tell pupils they will be designing a poster for the film adaptation of this novel in pairs. They should decide what elements they will focus on: theme, character etc. Then on paper or digitally, students should create a film poster which would encourage an audience to watch the film.