

GCSE English and English Literature for OCR
resource sheets

Things Fall Apart

Chinua Achebe

Activities by Christopher Barcock

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The following pages consist of teacher's notes and classroom support sheets for *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe. These resources are to help students who are studying *Things Fall Apart* as part of the OCR GCSE English and English Literature specifications. These pages can be freely downloaded and printed out as required. This material may be freely copied for institutional use. However, this material is copyright and under no circumstances can copies be offered for sale. The publishers gratefully acknowledge permission to reproduce copyright material.

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Introduction

Things Fall Apart and the OCR Specifications for English & English Literature

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is available for study in OCR's specifications for both English and English Literature at both Higher and Foundation Tiers from June 2006 onwards.

In Specification 1900, English, Unit 2432 is entitled 'Different Cultures, Analysis and Argument'. The latter parts of this triplet refer to the writing tasks in Section B. 'Different Cultures' denotes the theme of Section A, where *Things Fall Apart* is one of three texts (the others are OCR's 'Opening Worlds' and Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*). The time available for the paper is 1 hour 45 minutes, so candidates should spend no more than 35 minutes on this question.

In Specification 1901, English Literature, *Things Fall Apart* is available for examination, again at both Higher and Foundation Tier, in both Scheme A and Scheme B. In Scheme A Unit 2442, Poetry and Prose post-1914, the time available for the paper is 1 hour 30 minutes, so candidates should spend no more than 45 minutes on this question. In Scheme B Unit 2448, the examined alternative to coursework, the time available for the paper is 1 hour 35 minutes and candidates should spend no more than 30 minutes on this question. Alternatively, in Scheme B, work on the novel may be submitted as coursework, as appropriate to the specification requirements.

All examinations are 'open book'. Candidates may take into the examination room a copy of the text they have studied, which **must not** be annotated.

Aim and content

The aim of these resources is to provide material that offers a way into the novel for GCSE students and helps develop their understanding. The resources include a summary of the novel and materials aimed at developing central issues touched on in the summary.

There are several suggested activities ranging from written tasks to speaking and listening ones. Page references in these resources refer to the Heinemann New Windmills edition of *Things Fall Apart*, as prescribed in the OCR GCSE English specification: ISBN 0 435 12162 6.

Chinua Achebe

His Early Years

Chinua Achebe was born in 1930 in Eastern Nigeria. His father was Isaiah Achebe, an early Christian convert among the Ibo people. He taught in the Church Missionary Society's Village School where Chinua was educated. Chinua went on to University College Ibadan and graduated in Literature, History and Modern Studies, having followed an essentially British education.

A Hugely Successful Writer, Politician and Literary Celebrity

A career with the Nigerian Broadcasting Corporation took him on journeys all over Nigeria, which gave him some of the material and inspiration to write about the history of the Ibo people. *Things Fall Apart*, written in 1958, 'was an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son'.

The massacre of the Ibos of Northern Nigeria in 1966 and the ensuing civil war, culminating in the attempt to form the independent state of Biafra, took him into politics. Later he became a university lecturer in Nigeria and, later, in the USA.

He has published other novels, poetry and short stories, one of which, 'Dead Men's Path', is to be found in the OCR anthology *Opening Worlds*.

Things Fall Apart

The novel is loosely based on events that took place in the time of Achebe's grandfather, Okonkwo, on whom the central character in the novel is based. Its three parts describe:

- The life of the Ibo people before the arrival of white people: 13 short, largely self-contained chapters, illustrating various aspects of the way of life of the Ibo people in a culture of tradition but also of questioning those traditions.
- Okonkwo's seven years of exile and the arrival of the colonial culture of missionaries, bureaucracy and white officialdom; the effects of that arrival, including the conversion of Okonkwo's son Nwoye and his subsequent alienation from his father.
- How the white people's law, education, power and economics strangle and destroy the whole Ibo culture as described in the first section; Okonkwo's return to Umuofia after his exile and his tragic end.

This is the *essential* novel about the colonisation of Africa, written from the point of view of the indigenous African. It has been translated into over forty languages and is as widely read and admired today as when it was first published in 1958.

A Different Cultures Text

Achebe's Cultural Background

The book sets out in absorbing and entertaining detail a whole culture which is likely to be quite different from anything within the experience of most people who set out to read and study the text for the purposes of examination, interest, or sheer pleasure.

It goes on to show the gradual disintegration of this culture when it is attacked by another. Neither anti-colonial diatribe, nor sentimental attempt to rediscover a lost paradise, the novel maintains an objective and impartial view of a society going through a metamorphosis, with the goods and bads of the old and the new weighed in the balance for the reader to judge. It is a profit-and-loss account which is finely balanced and movingly portrayed.

Contrasting Cultures

Achebe said that *Things Fall Apart* was 'an act of atonement with my past, the ritual return and homage of a prodigal son.' He wished to teach his (African) readers that 'their past ... with all its imperfections ... was not one long night of savagery from which the Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them'.

In the novel, both the native Ibo culture and the white people's culture have strengths and weaknesses. Achebe asks us to contemplate what it is in the former, perhaps as embodied in the portrait of Okonkwo we have just looked at, that contributes to its disintegration.

The central idea of the novel, therefore, is neither to support nor condemn either of the rival cultures that are presented, but to hold up a mirror to its readers and challenge them with their own strengths and weaknesses and those of their way(s) of life. It is not about colonisation or the rival claims of coloniser and colonised: rather about the rival claims of individual self interest and expression versus the essential need for loyalty to the clan/tribe/nation.

Where these come into irreconcilable (and at times only partly understood) conflict, things fall apart. Our mission is to understand Achebe's analysis of how that happens in the Ibo society he delineates, which, to repeat, is embodied in the portrait of Okonkwo.

The portrait of the white men at the end of the story, therefore, embodies a series of pressure points that serve to crack, uproot and destroy what has seemed to be a society in which there is a place for everything and everything is in its place.

The Ibo culture at the heart of the novel offers some striking points of comparison with modern western European culture. For example:

- The importance of ceremony in every aspect of life: eating, drinking, marriage, war, religion.
- The way in which life is underpinned by the rhythm of the seasons, marked by festivals: 'Peace week', 'The Feast of the Yam' etc.
- Rites of passage that are based on tradition: birth; initiation into adulthood; betrothal; marriage; death.
- The overriding importance of kinship: extended family duties and responsibilities. The security and emotional attachments that kinship entails.

A Different Cultures Text (*continued*)

- The all-pervasive influence of the gods, who on occasion ‘possess’ certain individuals to express their commands (the *egwugwu*, the priestess and so on).
- The extraordinarily rich language: folk tales; proverbs; conversational formulae; vivid and varied use of metaphor.
- The strictly observed conventions of war and peace within the nine settlements, which are rendered powerless by the arrival of the white people.
- A society that appears to be male dominated, but worships an earth mother.
- An economic system: based principally on barter.
- A hierarchical system of respect based on a meritocratic system of rewarding the most successful, not the highest born; a rigid sense of justice and fairness; and total obedience to both human and spiritual authority.

The challenge for the readers and students of the 21st century

This is a complex novel which can be read at a basic level as the story of the rise and fall of a central hero in a rapidly changing culture which contributes to his fate.

The broad outlines of character and narrative can be grasped readily: there are few really seminal characters and the central thread of Okonkwo’s relations with his father and his son, Nwoye, and his surrogate son Ikemefuna are clear. The language is simple and accessible. Achebe successfully recreates the simple, concrete non-literary language of the Ibo in English. There are many hallmarks of spoken language: hence the novel lends itself well to being read aloud. It is relatively short: 180 pages in the prescribed edition. Many of the chapters are very short indeed. All the chapters in the first section and most in the second section can be treated as individual units: only the third and shortest section needs study as an entity in its own right. The denouement and irony are swiftly and clearly achieved.

On the other hand, it is equally challenging at a much more sophisticated level.

The development of Okonkwo’s character is complex. His outward aggression and inner fear, his apparently unfeeling brutality towards his wife and children, and his essential inarticulacy in attempting to understand/suppress finer feelings which are emasculated by inherited taboos and role expectations – all of these make for a character with whom readers can engage and to whom they can respond.

The portrayal of Ibo society challenges us to make value judgements about it and about our own culture and society.

We are challenged, too, by the way in which we are presented with a spoken language with its own oral traditions which pass on centuries-old proverbial wisdom in speech patterns and folk tales.

The style is susceptible to detailed and penetrative analysis. Both the overall structure and individual detail repay close attention. There is a deceptive simplicity of style, subtle use of irony, and numerous contrasts: not least that between the leisurely episodic opening and the rapid, action-packed drama of the conclusion.

Synopsis

This is the story of **Okonkwo**, a great man of the village of **Umuofia** who, by his own efforts has risen to be one of the village's most admired inhabitants and 'lords of the clan'.

Part One

The novel begins with a retrospective account of the life and character (twenty years since) of Okonkwo's father **Unoka**, whom he despised for his poverty, laziness and weakness. The rival villagers of **Mbaino** settle a dispute with those of Umuofia by giving two hostages rather than going to war. The male hostage, **Ikemefuna**, becomes Okonkwo's ward; he is eventually adopted. Okonkwo becomes increasingly fond of him, in contrast with his feelings for his eldest son, **Nwoye**. He attempts to repress these feelings as he does generally with emotions, regarding them as a sign of weakness.

Okonkwo beats his youngest wife, Ojiugo, in the week of peace and is punished for this blasphemy; he shoots at, but misses, his second and most beloved wife, Ekwefi. The oracle decrees the death of Ikemefuna. Despite being told not to join the killing party, Okonkwo does so and completes a botched killing. Nwoye is deeply upset, feeling about this as he does over twins, who are all *ogbanje* children inhabited by evil spirits and are thrown away in pots.

Ekwefi's daughter, Ezinma, is cured of malaria by traditional medicine.

At the funeral of Ezeudo, the oldest elder, the ceremonial gunfire is punctuated by the accidental explosion of Okonkwo's ancient gun, which kills the man's son. Okonkwo is banished for seven years to Mbanta, his mother's native village.

Part Two

At the house of his exile, Okonkwo's uncle Uchendu preaches the supremacy of motherhood, even in such a male-dominated society as this.

Two years later Okonkwo's best friend Oberieka brings news from Umuofia that white men have arrived. One has been killed on the orders of the oracle, to deter others; but later half the tribe have been massacred by more white men in an act of revenge. Another two years pass: Oberieka brings news that Nwoye has become a convert to the white men's religion. The power of the traditional gods is challenged by the survival of the missionary hut in the 'evil forest' to which the *ogbanje* children are consigned. Okonkwo is devastated and advocates the violent expulsion of the white men.

Synopsis (*continued*)

Part Three

After seven years Okonkwo plans to re-establish himself in Umuofia. Uchendu presides over a farewell feast in which he condemns the new religion for its destruction of the principle of kinship and authority of tradition as the supremely cohesive forces of their society.

Okonkwo returns to a society in which some Umuofians have been converted to Christianity and are the servants of the colonial rulers. Resistance is not possible because it would mean civil war.

There is a dramatic contrast between the first missionary priest, **Mr Brown**, who appears reasonable and respectful; and the second, **Mr Smith**, who is intolerant and zealous and prompts the unmasking of an *egwugwu*, one of the village spirits, impersonated by the elders. Smith's church is burnt down. The ringleaders are arrested but are promised release on the payment of a large fine. They are released and the villagers meet, demanding war as an act of revenge for their humiliation. A head messenger arrives with others to stop the meeting; Okonkwo decapitates him with his machete, but the others are allowed to escape and he realises that there will be no further resistance.

He commits suicide: an unpardonable act.

The novel closes on the downbeat irony of the minimalisation of the incident by the District Commissioner.

Culture

Advice from the Examiners!

Remember that you need enough awareness of the cultural background to enable you to have a clear understanding of the story.

All you will need to tackle any task that will be set in the Examination should come from a careful reading of **the text itself**. You are not expected to have any separate knowledge.

Activity 1

The way of life presented in the novel

- 1 Work individually on the differences between your and your family's way of life and that of Okonkwo and his extended family of three wives and many children.

Make some notes on the following five aspects of life:

- Tradition: how important is tradition in the way you live your life and how important is an understanding of the traditions you live in, compared with what is presented in Okonkwo's lifestyle?
- Respect: for family, *chi* (personal god), community, friends and enemies.
- Personal goals and ambitions: write down three of yours and three of Okonkwo's. What are the differences?
- Relationships: between men and women, adults and children, friends and enemies, black and white.
- The role of women: in most things subservient, but supreme in matters of life and death.

- 2 In discussion groups of three or four, compare your thoughts with others in the group. What five features of the lifestyle described in the novel are different from your own?

Characterisation

Activity 2

Okonkwo: heroic or not?

- 1 Write down five qualities you would associate with a hero or heroine, for example 'courage'. You might like to think about a personal hero or heroine and focus on the qualities they possess which you admire.

- 2 Now apply your heroic qualities to Okonkwo. Where in the novel do they apply?

For example, you might consider:

- His position of trust, power and authority in Umuofia. We learn on the first page that when Okonkwo threw Amalinze the cat he became famous throughout the nine villages and beyond.

Advice from the Examiners!

We will assume that you have read the novel from start to finish and that you can select relevant episodes to support your response to the task you choose in the exam. We do not want or expect you to tell us the story of the novel: use your knowledge and understanding to develop **your** response to the task that we set.

Characterisation

Activity 2 prompts

1 Below is a list of qualities you could discuss with students.

- Courage
- Humanity
- Integrity (i.e. they say what they mean and mean what they say; they are what they seem to be)
- Honesty
- Principle
- Loyalty
- Endurance
- Maturity (a high degree of self knowledge)
- Defiance of what is predicted or fated.

2 Below are some prompts to help students answer this question.

- How he is **respected**: his position of trust, power and authority in Umuofia. We learn on the first page that when Okonkwo threw Amalinze the cat he became famous throughout the nine villages and beyond.
- He is a **fearless warrior**: Okonkwo was the first to 'bring home a human head'. Through him Umuofia was 'feared by all its neighbours'.
- He has the **authority of his peers**: he is chosen by the elders as the ambassador to Mbaino.
- He is **strong and determined**: he possesses a massive capacity for hard work and self improvement.
- He is **intolerant of slackness**: consider his vicious beating of Ojiugo in the Week of Peace; his beating and shooting of Ekwefi.
- He **despises failure**: think about his feelings about his father, Unoka.
- He has a **strong sense of duty and obligation**: consider his insistence on being involved in the death of Ikemefuna.
- He has a great deal of **self awareness**: the essential and profound fear that drives him, 'It was fear of himself, lest he should be found to resemble his father'.
- He has a **stoical respect for law, tradition and custom**: his acceptance of his seven-year exile is absolute.
- He is **prepared to stand up for what he believes in**: think about his desire for revenge at the end of the story: his killing of the head messenger and his subsequent suicide.

Themes

Activity 3

Answer the following question.

Why do things fall apart?

Consider the following six conflicts and, working in groups, decide why they threaten and destroy traditional Umuofian life. Try to put them in a rank order of their contribution to the disintegration of Umuofia that we see at the end of the novel.

- **Failure and success**

Okonkwo despises his father for his laziness and weakness and lack of possessions and title. He thinks that these represent failure, so he strives to be the opposite in all ways. He is presented as one of the 'great men' of Umuofia, yet he is disgraced by his exile and final act of suicide. Are these two qualities what they seem to Okonkwo, and what are the consequences of his pursuit of 'success'?

- **Powerful emotions which Okonkwo finds it difficult to understand and express**

Okonkwo loves his son Nwoye but treats him very harshly when Nwoye disappoints him. He thinks highly of Ikemefuna but will not express his feelings or admit them to himself. What does his part in the killing of Ikemefuna (which he is told he does not have to be involved in) tell us about this inner conflict?

- **Personal ambition which exceeds loyalty to the traditions of Umuofian culture**

Okonkwo beats Ojuiugo, his second wife, in the week of peace: a blasphemous act; he joins Ikemefuna's killing party; he is responsible for his own exile by the accidental shooting of Ezeudu's son.

- **The ambiguous place of women in Umuofian culture**

They are treated as the inferiors and servants of the men and yet have a central place in the religious beliefs of the Ibo.

- **The effects of Okonkwo's exile from his homeland which intensify his wish to return but also detach him from the way it develops in his absence**

How would Okonkwo have dealt with the arrival of the white men in Part Two of the novel if he had been in Umuofia, not in exile?

- **The double standards which the white men demonstrate to the native Ibo**

Does Okonkwo's behaviour at the end of the story, culminating in his killing of the messenger, have any of its roots in the behaviour of (some of) the white men?

Themes (*continued*)

Activity 4

Remind yourself of the following passage from *Things Fall Apart* and then answer the question which follows. Note that you will not see this question in the examination because it has been used as an example before. However, it will help you practise demonstrating your knowledge of the novel.

As soon as his father walked in, that night, Nwoye knew that Ikemefuna had been killed, and something seemed to give way inside him like the snapping of a tightened bow. He did not cry. He just hung limp. He had had the same feeling not long ago, during the last harvest season ... They were returning home with baskets of yams from a distant farm across the stream when they had heard the voice of an infant crying in the thick forest. A sudden hush had fallen on the women, who had been talking, and they had quickened their steps. Nwoye had heard that twins were put in earthenware pots and thrown away in the forest, but he had never come across them. A vague chill had descended on him and his head seemed to swell, like a solitary walker at night who passes an evil spirit on the way. Then something had given way inside him. It descended on him again, this feeling, when his father walked in, that night after killing Ikemefuna.

Explain how this passage helps you to understand what happens to Nwoye later in the story.

What do you think?

- First of all put the passage in context (where it comes in the development of the story). It comes at the end of chapter seven: and is the postscript to the description of the brutal killing of Ikemefuna, the hostage boy who has come to regard Okonkwo and Umuofia as his father and fatherland. It marks the first stirrings of rebellion in Nwoye with instinctive inner sense of loss, tragedy and wrong. His recall of the *ogbanje* reinforces this.
- Then think about Nwoye later in the story: he reacts against the customs, traditions and culture of the Ibo in Umuofia and becomes Issac, a Christian convert. The relationship with his father falls apart; Okonkwo is jealous of Obeika's wrestling champion son. Okonkwo is stopped from beating Nwoye at their final meeting by Uchendu (page 133): they never meet again. Okonkwo later learns that Nwoye has gone to study to be a teacher in Umuru.

Themes *(continued)*

Activity 4 *(continued from page 13)*

- So how does the passage help us to understand all these outcomes?
 - Nwoye is shown to be highly sensitive to injustice and suffering, which runs contrary to Okonkwo's views on 'manliness'.
 - It shows his discomfort with the values his culture proclaims: the treatment of the *ogbanje* children who are left to starve because of its refusal to shed the blood of its own.
 - And thus how he is attracted to a religion that preaches a gospel of love and forgiveness, and succours the weak and rejected.
 - The long-standing rift over Okonkwo's part in the killing of Nwoye's 'brother' Ikemefuna is now unbridgeable.
 - The passage on pages 128/9 stresses Nwoye's emotional attachment to the new religion which he has failed to find previously.

Advice from the Examiners!

Remember that there is no 'right' or 'wrong' answer to a question like this. What we want to see is the skill with which you can use your knowledge of the novel to develop your response to the task.

Structure

Advice from the Examiners!

Whenever you are focusing on what to say in your response, remember to keep the **whole text** in mind. Sometimes it can be helpful to start with the conclusion and work backwards.

Remember that you will be asked 'how does the writer' or 'in what ways does the writer' or something similar. These are all prompts to talk about the way in which the writer has chosen to present the book and the reasons he has chosen the words he has to write it. That should be your response to the 'how' in the question.

Activity 5

How do the three sections of the story connect and interrelate? How does this structure support the issues of theme and character we have already looked at?

Some points to think about:

The **opening section** is the longest and gives an account of many aspects of the Ibo culture prior to the arrival of the white men. Look back at the previous sections of these Notes to see how clearly and firmly the culture is presented. Many key aspects of culture are highlighted and questioned:

- The role of the family and the place and status of individuals within the family.
- The differences in gender roles, both literally and symbolically.
- The concept of heroism and the purpose and function of war and fighting.
- The concept and purpose of justice.
- Relationships between parents and children.

The **second section** concerns Okonkwo's exile. He is exiled because his killing of Ezeudu's son is a female crime: it is accidental, committed in a society which is obsessed with masculinity. As a result Okonkwo is limited by his incapacity to do anything other than attend to his family's needs, and hence to the nurture of his basic sense of himself as the 'hunter-gatherer' Ibo man.

Because Okonkwo has been uprooted from his homeland, we focus on his second-hand responses to the news of the white man's arrival. He is consumed with anger and hatred at what he hears (is there any evidence of fear here, also?). Increasingly he finds himself in conflict with the society he has left behind. He accuses his fellow tribesmen of being no longer men but old women: the very reason for which he has been exiled from his homeland. What follows is the inevitable consequence of this contradiction.

Structure *(continued)*

Activity 5 *(continued from page 15)*

The **third section**, therefore, charts the inevitable consequences of the contrasts of the first two sections. It is brief, clear cut and predictable. Okonkwo commits suicide because he has failed to recognise and respond to the way his community is changing. His eldest son has changed sides: the head messenger becomes the personification of Nwoye. Okonkwo and the white missionaries and bureaucrats are equally ruthless and intransigent. We are left to judge the niceties of this comparison for ourselves.

So each of the three sections informs the other two.

Some questions for you to consider, either in groups or on your own:

- 1** What would be the gains and losses of making the final section the first?
- 2** Looking back from the last section to the first: can you find clues in the opening descriptions in the first three chapters that suggest the inevitability of the ending? Look closely at the descriptions of Okonkwo and the comparisons made with his father, Unoka.
- 3** Conversely, in what ways does the ending of the novel – the beheading of the head messenger – come as a surprise to you? Or did you guess that the story would end like this?
- 4** In the first section, which are the most important chapters when it comes to understanding the conclusion of the novel? Look especially for chapters that deal with conflicts between children and their elders.
- 5** What are the three best examples of the way the second section links the first and third sections? Think especially about the things Obeieka says to Okonkwo.

Style

An important feature of Achebe's style is his use of proverbs. These come from an oral tradition of story telling, but are told in the language of the white men who trigger the falling apart at the centre of the story. Achebe is writing in the English that Nwoye would have learnt at his teacher-training college.

Activity 6

- 1 Find three examples each of:
 - oral tradition
 - proverbs
 - Ibo wisdom.
- 2 How does each of these *and the language that is used to portray them* add to the effect of the novel's tragic ending and the downfall of Okonkwo we have looked at earlier? Start with the story of the vulture on page 47 and see how this informs the account of how Nwoye rejects his father's way of life.
- 3 Find some proverbs that are either familiar or unusual in your own society. Start with Unoka on page 7: 'Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them'.
- 4 Find some Ibo lore and wisdom that reflects the *duality* in Okonkwo of strength and weakness, conformity and rebellion and so on. Start at the same place on page 7: 'if a child washes his hands he could eat with kings'.
- 5 Look for and distinguish between folk tales, myths, and history, for example the story of the tortoise that Ekwefi tells Ezinma on pages 84–6 prior to the trip to the Oracle of the caves and hills, and the final paragraph of the story on page 183. What are the contrasts in tone and audience and what do they add to the picture of disintegration?
- 6 Compare the way Achebe presents Okonkwo's disgust with his father in chapter one and Okonkwo's own tragic demise in the final chapter. What are the links between the two and what are the differences in the way they are presented?

Language

Activity 7

- 1** Achebe uses Ibo words and phrases for particular points of emphasis. What, do you think, is being stressed by the choice of the following words?

Agbala (a woman, but also a man who has taken no title)

Chi (a personal god)

Iyi-uwa (a special kind of stone that forms a link between the *ogbanje* and the spirit world; only when it is discovered will the child live)

Kotma (a court messenger, not an indigenous Ibo word but derived from the English word)

Nna ayi (our father)

Ogbanje (a changeling: a child who repeatedly dies and returns to its mother reborn. It is impossible to bring up unless its *iyi-uwa* is found and destroyed)

Uri (the part of the betrothal ceremony when the dowry is paid)

In your group of five or six, brainstorm the meaning, significance and use of some of these words in the novel. Then present your findings to the class. Go to the Glossary of Ibo terms at the end of the novel to find some more. Start with Ezinma's sickness in chapter nine.

- 2** Look again at the court hearing of Uzowulu and his wife on pages 80–2, then at the District Commissioner's dealings with Okonkwo and his fellows on pages 170–2. What are the differences in the way each of the parties speaks to the other? Which is the richer, clearer English and why?

Exam practice question

Advice from the Examiners!

You will have seen by now that of all the things you can do with this novel, the essential one is to read it, re-read it and then read it again. You can never know the text well enough.

What do you learn about Okonkwo and the culture in which he lives from his relationship with Ikemefuna, the hostage boy?

Remember to:

- support your answer by referring to and quoting from the novel.
- remember to put quotation marks around any words or phrases you use from the novel.

What to do:

Split the relationship into manageable chunks (usually three or four or five) and think about what they contribute to the answer.

- 1** The reasons for the relationship in the first place: Okonkwo's place as the chosen emissary to Mbaino to claim the virgin and the boy.
- 2** Okonkwo's harsh treatment of Ikemefuna: made harsher by his suppression of his warm feelings towards the boy.
- 3** His part in the death of Ikemefuna and the reasons for it: Obaeriaka's later condemnation of this.
- 4** Okonkwo's fear of emotions and hatred of his father: his obsession with all things 'masculine': war, fighting, status, wealth and so on. His failure to take advice.
- 5** The concept of a 'just war' with Mbaino, and of a reasonable and peaceful means of resolving the conflict. An absolute obedience to the authority of tradition.

Make sure that you make points about both Okonkwo **and** the culture of Umuofia as they are described in the first section of the novel; there is little need to go outside this.

And, finally ... Good luck!