

Module 6: Identifying One's Strengths and Weaknesses

Topic 9 Content: Themes in Chapters 20, 21, and 22


Introduction

Themes in Chapters Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Two


Introduction

Theme


Did you recognize any of the underlying themes in Chapters Twenty, Twenty-One, or Twenty-Two? Several important themes are present. Click on each of the dots or use the previous and next buttons to learn more about the dominant themes in these three chapters of *Things Fall Apart*.



The Conflict Between Chan...



Different Definitions of Ma...



Language and Communica...

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Topic 9 Content: Themes in Chapters 20, 21, and 22

Theme 1: The Conflict Between Change and Tradition

Themes in Chapters Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Two

Theme 1



As the influence of the British missionaries takes hold, progress within the community stretches the cultural fabric almost to the point of breaking. Umuofia now has a trading post and school; Mr. Brown makes great strides toward creating a bridge between the converts and traditionalists. On the other hand, when Mr. Brown leaves, his replacement, Mr. Smith, is an overzealous hard-nosed missionary who allows and encourages the converts to fly in the face of the tribe's rituals and traditions. This comes to an extreme boiling point when an *egwugwu* is unmasked by a convert. As you look at the theme of the conflict between change and tradition, the question remains: "Can a community be a unified group without shared rituals and traditions?" This particular community appears to struggle.

Theme 1

The Conflict Between Change and Tradition Definitions of Ma... Language and Communica...

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Theme 2: Different Definitions of Masculinity

Themes in Chapters Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Two

Theme 2



Masculinity is reflected in Okonkwo's tragic flaw: for Okonkwo, being a man means working hard, taking charge of his women and children, and holding titles. This definition of masculinity becomes a ruling force in his life and causes him to make choices that ultimately cause his total downfall. It shapes who he is as a member of his community and household, he makes fun of other men within the village and is chastised, and he exhibits a judgmental violent nature that destroys relationships in his life.

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Theme 3: Language and Communication

Themes in Chapters Twenty, Twenty-One, and Twenty-Two

Theme 3

While the Ibo speak and use a highly stylized language that includes proverbs and imagery, the British view them as savage and uneducated. Interestingly enough, this language becomes an issue even between members of their own tribe due to differences in dialect. Think back to Chapter Sixteen when the Ibo converts join the missionaries in Mbanta. When a white man speaks to the village through an interpreter, the white man mistakenly uses the word for “buttocks” when he means to say “myself.” This difference becomes a barrier and everyone laughs at him. In Chapter Twenty-Two, Mr. Smith’s lack of knowledge of the Ibo language saves him as he relies upon Okeke to interpret between him and the *egwugwu*. Okeke’s wise “translation” certainly saves Mr. Smith’s life.



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