

Things Fall Apart: Main Points

Okonkwo: warrior of the Umuofia clan. He has three wives and eight children. Each wife has her own hut. The Umuofia is a tribe comprising 9 villages including Okonkwo's village, Iguedo. Someone from the village of Mbaino that belongs to another tribe killed a woman from Umuofia. The village give a virgin and a 15-year-old boy, Ikemefuna, to Umuofia. The leaders give the boy to Okonkwo.

Okonkwo does not like weak men. He associates weak men with femininity. He finds his twelve-year-old son, Nwoye, to be lazy, so he beats and nags the boy constantly.

To Okonkwo's delight, Ikemefuna also becomes like an older brother to Nwoye.

Okonkwo himself grows quite fond of Ikemefuna, but he does not show any affection because he considers doing so a sign of weakness, which he refuses to tolerate in himself or others. Ikemefuna soon begins to call Okonkwo "father."

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo's family for three years. He seems to have "kindled a new fire" in Nwoye, who, much to Okonkwo's pleasure, becomes more masculine in his attitude. Okonkwo knows that his son's development is a result of Ikemefuna's influence.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu pays Okonkwo a visit, but he will not enter the hut to share the meal. Outside, he informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has decreed that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo not to take part in the boy's death, as Ikemefuna calls him "father." Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that he will be returning to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

During the long walk home with the men of Umuofia, Ikemefuna thinks about seeing his mother. After hours of walking, a man attacks him with a machete. Ikemefuna cries to Okonkwo for help. Okonkwo doesn't wish to look weak, so he cuts the boy down.

Okonkwo sinks into a depression. He feels weak, and he cannot sleep or eat.

He visits his friend Obierika and feels better.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu's death is announced to the surrounding villages with the ekwe, a musical instrument.

At the funeral, the men beat drums and fire their guns. Okonkwo's gun accidentally goes off and kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.

Killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, so Okonkwo must atone by taking his family into exile for seven years. Okonkwo gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. According to the mandates of tradition.

During the second year of Okonkwo's exile, Obierika brings several bags of cowries to Okonkwo. He also brings bad news: a village named Abame has been destroyed. It seems that a white man arrived in Abame on an "iron horse" (which we find out later is a bicycle) during the planting season.

Two years after his first visit (and three years after Okonkwo's exile), Obierika returns to Mbanta. He has decided to visit Okonkwo because he has seen Nwoye with some of the Christian missionaries who have arrived. Most of the other converts, Obierika finds, have been efulefu, men who hold no status and who are generally ignored by the clan.

The narrator tells the story of Nwoye's conversion: six missionaries, headed by a white man, travel to Mbanta. The white man speaks to the village through an interpreter, who, we learn later, is named Mr. Kiaga.

He tells the villagers that they are all brothers and sons of God. He accuses them of worshipping false gods of wood and stone. The missionaries have come, he tells his audience, to persuade the villagers to leave their false gods and accept the one true God. The villagers, however, do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. They also cannot see how God can have a son and not a wife. Many of them laugh and leave after the interpreter asserts that Umuofia's gods are incapable of doing any harm.

The missionaries request a piece of land on which to build a church. The village leaders and elders offer them a plot in the Evil Forest, believing that the missionaries will not accept it. To the elders' amazement, the missionaries rejoice in the offer. But the elders are certain that the forest's sinister spirits and forces will kill the missionaries within days. To their surprise, however, nothing happens, and the church soon wins its first three converts. The villagers point out that sometimes their

ancestral spirits will allow an offending man a grace period of twenty-eight days before they punish his sins, but they are completely astounded when nothing happens after twenty-eight days. The church thus wins more converts.

Okonkwo's seven years of exile in Mbanta are drawing to an end. He expresses concern for the younger generation, as Christianity is winning people away from their families and traditions. Okonkwo returns to his village. However, Umuofia is much changed after seven years. The church has grown in strength and the white men subject the villagers to their judicial system and rules of government. They are harsh and arrogant, and Okonkwo cannot believe that his clan has not driven the white men and their church out. Sorrowfully, Obierika explains that the church has weakened the ties of kinship and that it is too late to drive the white men out. Many of the clansmen are now on the white man's side. Okonkwo observes that the white man is very shrewd because he came in peace and appeared to have only benevolent interests in the Africans, who thus permitted him to stay.

Many people of Umuofia are not entirely unhappy with the white men's influence on their community. They have set up trading posts, and money is flowing into the village. Mr. Brown, the white missionary, restrains his flock from antagonizing the clan. He and Akunna, one of the clan's leaders, meet often to debate and discuss their respective religious views.

Mr. Brown dies after getting ill. Reverend James Smith, a strict and intolerant man, replaces Mr. Brown. He demands the utmost obedience to the letter of the Bible and disapproves of Mr. Brown's tolerant and unorthodox policies.

Following an incident of the burning of the church by the natives, the District Commissioner tricks the leaders into a meeting where surprisingly they are arrested. They are handcuffed and thrown in jail for several days, where they suffer insults and physical abuse. One of the prisoners is Okonkwo. After their release, the prisoners return to the village. The village leaders gather in a meeting to discuss the fate of the tribe and the villages. They are surprised by five court messengers. Their leader orders the meeting to end. No sooner have the words left the messenger's mouth than Okonkwo kills him with two strokes of his machete. A tumult rises in the crowd, but not the kind for which Okonkwo hopes: the villagers allow the messengers to escape and bring the meeting to a conclusion. Someone even asks why Okonkwo killed the messenger. Understanding that his clan will not go to war, Okonkwo wipes his machete free of blood and departs.

When the District Commissioner arrives at Okonkwo's compound, he finds a small group of men sitting outside. He asks for Okonkwo, and the men tell him that Okonkwo is not at home. The commissioner asks a second time, and Obierika repeats his initial answer. The commissioner starts to get angry and threatens to imprison them all if they do not cooperate. Obierika agrees to lead him to Okonkwo in return for some assistance. Although the commissioner does not understand the gist of the exchange, he follows Obierika and a group of clansmen. They proceed to a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound, where they discover Okonkwo's body dangling from a tree. He has hanged himself.

Obierika explains that suicide is a grave sin and his clansmen may not touch Okonkwo's body. Though they have sent for strangers from a distant village to help take the body down, they also ask the commissioner for help. He asks why they cannot do it themselves, and they explain that his body is evil now and that only strangers may touch it. They are not allowed to bury it, but again, strangers can. Obierika displays an uncharacteristic flash of temper and lashes out at the commissioner, blaming him for Okonkwo's death and praising his friend's greatness. The commissioner decides to honor the group's request, but he leaves and orders his messengers to do the work. As he departs, he congratulates himself for having added to his store of knowledge of African customs.

The commissioner, who is in the middle of writing a book about Africa, imagines that the circumstances of Okonkwo's death will make an interesting paragraph or two, if not an entire chapter. He has already chosen the title: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.