

Esteem Guide Notes

For

Ordinary Level

Literature in English

Texts Reviewed:

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|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ❖ <i>The Pearl</i> | ❖ <i>Mema</i> |
| ❖ <i>Grief Child</i> | ❖ <i>The Heart soothers</i> |
| ❖ <i>The return of Mgofu</i> | ❖ <i>Things Fall Apart</i> |
| ❖ <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> | ❖ <i>Voice of the People</i> |
| ❖ <i>Shadows of Time</i> | ❖ <i>Poetry</i> |

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Preface

Esteem Guide Notes to Ordinary Level Literature has been compiled to aid literature students and teachers in quick and easy interpretation of the set books for ordinary level. The text can be put to best use after a thorough reading of the individual text for a deeper understanding. The text is not in any way a substitute to the text but rather a compliment.

Teachers are therefore encouraged not to use this text as a substitute to reading of the complete version of the individual set books but rather to encourage the learners to study the text closely and form individual opinions about the different aspects of the text. The notes should only be used for in-depth understanding.

We hope and strongly believe that when used in a rightful way, the text will go a long way in assisting the learners to effectively prepare for their Uganda certificate of education examinations.

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*The Pearl***BACKGROUND****The author:**

John Steinbeck was the son of Olive Hamilton, a school teacher, and John Ernst Steinbeck, a flour-mill manager and Monterey County Treasurer. Like other families in California's Salinas Valley, the Steinbecks thought themselves rich because they had land; unfortunately, they could hardly afford to buy food. There were four children, but John Ernst Steinbeck, born in 1902, was the only boy. As a youth he spent much of his time exploring the valley that would become the backdrop to his fiction.

After graduating from Salinas High School in 1919, Steinbeck enrolled at Stanford University and attended intermittently until 1925. He worked to pay his tuition and was forced to take time off to earn money for the next term. This proved invaluable; he worked for surveyors in the Big Sur area and on a ranch in King City.

He wrote a number of novels which *Of Mice and Men*, and his best-known novel, *The Grapes of Wrath*, which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. Shortly thereafter, his inspirational friend Ricketts died in a train accident. In 1947 Steinbeck's parable *The Pearl* was published. Though not targeted specifically for young adult readers, the story is typically studied and discussed by students.

Steinbeck won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He died of heart failure in 1968.

SETTING

The Pearl is set in and around La Paz, Mexico, a coastal town marked by economic, social, and racial divisions resulting from colonial domination of the local native population. Because of colonial domination and racial discrimination, the local population is kept in dire poverty that they cannot afford basic social services like health care and education.

As a result of colonial subjugation and domination, there is a racial divide between the Europeans and the native Indian/Mexican population. The Europeans hold the best positions in society and control the economic means while the native Indians /Mexicans are at the receiving end. This has bred hatred between the two races as can be seen from the relationship between the doctor and Kino:

This doctor was of a race which for nearly four hundred years had beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race, and frightened it too, so that the indigene came humbly to the door...(page 14)

The Pearl also focuses of the period after the Second World War that came with the birth of new economic systems. The most critical of all was the capitalist system through which private individuals carried out the production and exchange of goods and services through a complex network of prices and markets. This was followed by the great ideology of living the American dream. These economic systems emphasised selfish holding of property and materialism. It is for this reason that Kino nurses a strong dream of being well off after selling the pearl.

The title

A pearl is a precious stone/ gem formed in mollusk. It is a lustrous sphere of calcium carbonate that forms around a grain of sand in an ocean organism such as an oyster valued as a gem. Pearls were valued and used as a medium of exchange for goods and services. In the novel, Kino goes pearl diving and gets what is thought the greatest pearl or the pearl of the world. The whole town is mesmerized and paralysed by Kino's great fortune.

The pearl rejuvenates Kino's hopes and ambitions. In the pearl he sees his son Coyotito going to school and learning to read and write. He sees himself getting married in church. He also plans to buy a rifle and harpoon for his family. In short, he sees his entire life turned around. To him it is a source of his freedom from poverty and enslavement of his family and his people. Kino becomes a center of attraction and admiration by his poor neighbours as well as the rich merchants in town. The pearl merchants conspire and attempt to cheat him of his pearl by offering a very small price that Kino rejects.

While the pearl may be seen as a sign of good luck and great fortune it ironically turns out to be a source of insecurity and misfortune to Kino's family. He is attacked twice by unknown assailants in attempt to steal the pearl and in self-defense Kino ends up killing a man who had come to steal his pearl. He has to escape from his home with his family for fear of the long arm of the law. He is turned into a fugitive but determined to sell the pearl for a good sum of money.

The discovery of the pearl brings Kino into direct confrontation with hypocrisy and all sorts of falsehood. The doctor who had earlier refused to treat Kino's son from the scorpion sting, finally shows up pretending to be concerned about the child's welfare. Much as the child is showing all signs of recovery, the doctor threatens the couple that the poison would strike soon. He poisons the child himself and later gives him the antidote. Kino's house is also visited by a priest who also wants to benefit from Kino's good fortune.

The pearl can in a way be interpreted as a symbol of evil. According to Juana, she seems to be having a strong conviction that the thing is indeed evil. She tries to

convince Kino to destroy it or throw it back into the sea but he stubbornly refuses to listen to her. He violently assaults and beats her up when she attempts to throw the pearl away. Even when he has lost his canoe and home, Kino remains very adamant and defiant. He stubbornly insists “I will fight this thing...I am a man.”

The title exposes the human weaknesses of greed and blind pursuit for material wealth. Before Kino getting the pearl, the family is poor but peaceful. However after getting the pearl, his appetite for material wealth becomes hyper. He dreams of buying a rifle, taking his son to school, getting married in church among other things. He becomes so blind and deaf to his role as the head of the family. He even forgets about his role to protect his family against any impending danger. His priority has now shifted from his family to the pearl. It is not surprising that his son is killed by a stray bullet and that is when he comes back to his senses. He kills the two trackers and decides to walk back home side by side with Juana as the song of the family sounded in Kino’s ears and he throws the pearl back into the sea.

Questions

1. How does the discovery of the pearl affect the lives of Kino and his family?
2. “The pearl is the evil that destroys Kino’s family.” How true is this statement in view of what happens in the novel, *The Pearl*?
3. Describe the ending of the novel, *The Pearl* and say whether you find it satisfying.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The Pearl is about Kino, an Indian pearl diver who cannot afford a doctor for his son’s scorpion sting. In this anxious state, he finds the Pearl of the World and is able to get medical help for his boy. Calculating the profit from the gem, the diver dreams of a better life—a grand wedding, clothes, guns, and an education for his son. But his dream of leaving his socio-economic station leads to ruin.

As he attempts to escape those who want to take the pearl from him, he is tracked by professional assassins, and tragedy ensues. He kills a man and flees his home. His child is killed along the way and Kino kills two of his pursuers. No pearl is worth the price Kino and his wife pay, so they throw the pearl back. Their story is a warning to restless dreamers yearning for an easy or magical solution to their problems.

PLOT SUMMARY

Chapter 1

The Pearl opens in Kino's home in La Paz, Mexico. The sun is beginning to lighten the day, as the "tiny movement" of a scorpion catches Kino's and his wife Juana's eyes. The scorpion is heading towards their son, Coyotito.

Kino slowly reaches out to grab the scorpion, while Juana whispers magic to protect Coyotito, but the scorpion strikes anyway. The swelling of Coyotito's flesh marks the beginning of a series of events that will not only destroy the family's home, but will take them away from their family and community.

Kino and Juana take their wounded baby to see a doctor in a "city of stone and plaster." Since Kino and Juana are desperate to find help for their baby, they swallow their pride and appeal to the town doctor, who is a member of a race that has "beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race."

The doctor, a fat man whose eyes rest in "puffy little hammocks of flesh," refuses to help Coyotito, saying that he is a doctor, "not a veterinary." Kino shows the doctor's servant his money, but it is not enough to interest the doctor. In frustration, Kino strikes the doctor's gate with his bare fist and splits open his knuckles.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the reader to the main characters in the novel thus Kino and his wife. There is a remarkable difference between the doctor's residence and where Kino lives. Can you discuss the difference and what you think it contributes to your understanding of the novel?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Kino as presented in this chapter
2. Explain the theme of the struggle between evil and good as presented in this chapter.
3. What are the causes of conflict in this part of the text?
4. What problems do the people in the novel face?

Chapter 2

Although Coyotito is beginning to heal, Juana and Kino are determined to find a way to secure the doctor's help. Juana prays to find a pearl with which to hire the doctor to cure the baby. Kino is singing the "Song of the Pearl that Might Be" as he dives into the ocean in search of oysters and pearls. He finds an isolated oyster, cracks it open, and discovers what soon becomes known as the "Pearl of the World." The family's bad luck seems to be changing, for the swelling is also going out of Coyotito's shoulder.

Analysis

This chapter brings out the theme of chance and fortune. The author uses description to develop the mood in this chapter. Can you discuss the effectiveness of description to the development of the novel? How does the author use songs to develop feelings?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Kino as presented in this chapter.
2. Explain the at least two themes that are brought out in this chapter.
3. Describe the circumstances leading to the discovery of the greatest pearl.
4. How does the author use songs to develop feelings in the novel?

Chapter 3

News that Kino had found the Pearl of the World travels so quickly through the city that many people are becoming jealous of Kino before he and his family have even had time to celebrate. Kino tells his brother, Juan Tomas, that now he and Juana will be married in a church, the family will have new clothes and a rifle, and that Coyotito will learn to read.

The local priest pays Kino a visit and reminds him to give thanks to Him who “has given thee this treasure.” Kino feels alone and unprotected in the world. Then the doctor arrives to “help” cure Coyotito. Both Kino and Juana are reluctant to let the doctor near their child, but the doctor claims that the poison of the scorpion goes inward and can wither a leg or blind an eye. Kino does not want to risk harm to Coyotito, so he allows the doctor to give Coyotito a white powder in a capsule of gelatin. The baby grows sicker; in a few hours the doctor returns to give Coyotito ammonia, which helps the baby’s stomach.

Kino tells the doctor he will pay him after he sells his pearl. The doctor sees Kino’s eyes look toward the pearl’s hiding place in the floor. After the doctor leaves, Kino finds a new hiding place for the pearl. He tells Juana he is afraid of “everyone” now.

After Kino stabs a night prowler, Juana begs him to return the pearl to the ocean, calling the pearl evil. Kino replies that Coyotito “must go to school. He must break out of the pot that holds us in.”

Analysis

This chapter shows how different people react toward the news of Kino’s great fortune. Take note of the doctor’s reaction and explain what it reveals about the relationship between the natives and the European characters.

Questions

1. Describe the following characters as presented in this chapter:
 - a) Kino
 - b) The priest
 - c) The doctor
 - d) Juana
2. Explain at least two themes presented in this chapter.
3. Explain the things that Kino wants to do after selling the pearl and say whether you agree with him or not.
4. "A town is a thing like a colonial animal." what does this statement reveal about the society in the novel?

Chapter 4

It is not easy to sell the pearl, however, as the pearl buyers all work for the same employer and have conspired to offer Kino 1,000 to 1,500 pesos for the pearl that is probably worth at least 50,000 pesos. Kino, angered, says he will go to the capital to sell the pearl.

Kino is attacked again that night, and Juana tries again to persuade Kino to get rid of the pearl. Kino tells her that he is a man and that no one will take their good fortune from them.

Early on the morning they are to leave for the capital.

Analysis

This chapter brings out the theme of greed and materialism. The pearl buyers' conspiracy reflects the complexity of international capitalism. It shows how exploitative and selfish it can be.

Questions

1. Describe the general feeling that this chapter develops towards:
 - a) Kino
 - b) The pearl buyers
2. Explain at least two themes brought out in this chapter.
3. Describe Kino's character as presented in this part of the story.

Chapter 5

Juana tries to throw the pearl back into the ocean. Kino strikes her face, kicks her, and rescues the pearl. Then Kino is attacked again, and ends up killing his attacker. Kino and his family flee for their lives.

Their canoe has been splintered and their home set on fire, so the family seeks temporary refuge in Juan Tomas's home. Juan tells Kino he should sell the pearl and "buy peace for yourself." Kino refuses. "The pearl has become my soul," he says. "If I give it up I shall lose my soul."

Analysis

This chapter brings out Kino's greed and selfish pursuit of material wealth. He stubbornly refuses to listen to Juana's advice as well as Juan Thomas. The theme of good versus evil is also brought out in this part of the story.

Questions

1. Explain the consequences surrounding Kino's discovery of the pearl.
2. Compare and contrast Juana's character and that of Kino. Which one of the then do you find likeable and why?
3. If you were Kino what would you do with the pearl at this point in the story?

Chapter 6

Kino's family leaves during the night, carefully covering their tracks behind them. Despite their care, they know that inland trackers are pursuing them. They travel as rapidly and stealthily as they can until nightfall, when Kino tells Juana and Coyotito to hide in a cave. Kino hopes to steal a rifle from one of the trackers before the moon rises.

Coyotito cries out, waking two of the trackers and causing the watchman with the rifle to shoot. Kino leaps on the man and kills him, but something is wrong. Coyotito is dead.

Kino and Juana return to La Paz, Kino with a rifle, and Juana with their dead baby wrapped in a blood-crusted shawl. They pass Juan Tomas. They pass their ruined canoe and make their way to the water. Then Kino returns the pearl, which is now "gray and ulcerous," to the ocean.

Analysis

This is perhaps the saddest part of the story but also provides the resolution to the plot. The death of Coyotito is a shattering climax to Kino's selfish ambitions. He comes to his senses and full realization that may be the pearl is not the most important thing.

Questions

1. How suitable is the ending of the novel, the pearl?
2. Describe the circumstances surrounding Coyotito's death.
3. Describe the character of Kino as presented in this part of the text.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Kino

Kino is the main character and protagonist in the story. He is portrayed as a man who is strong both physically and mentally. He confronts the challenges that come his way with a boldness that is quite surprising and baffling even to his own wife.

He is presented as aggressive and violent. He violently strikes the doctor's gate with his fist after the doctor has refused to treat his son. Kino is driven to a wild feat of temper when protecting his pearl. He violently assaults Juana when she attempts to throw the pearl away and later kills an unknown man who attempts to steal his pearl; an act that comes with dire consequences. He has to flee his home in order to escape from the long arm of the law.

He is obsessed with greed and selfishness after he has got the pearl of the world. It is this greed for material wealth that makes him to forget about his cardinal duty to his family as the head. He is quick at beating and assaulting Juana because she attempts to throw away the pearl and forgets to protect his own child Coyotito against impending danger. This comes with consequences when the boy is killed by a stray bullet.

Kino is also presented as ambitious. In the pearl he sees his long cherished dreams unfolding. He has plans of buying a rifle, taking his son to school and teaching him how to read and write:

But Kino's face shone with prophecy. 'My son will read and open the books and my son will write and will know writing. And my son will make numbers and these things will make us free because he will know-and through him we will know...'

Such and more are what Kino wishes to accomplish. He also dreams about getting married in church with his wife Juana; buying a rifle and a new harpoon for his family and many other things. Such ambition renders him immune to the tricks of the pearl buyers since he sees the pearl as his only opportunity to achieving his dreams.

He is chauvinistic and possessed with an excessive loyalty to his gender. He refuses to listen to Juana's advice about the pearl claiming that he is a man. Kino's emphasis on his masculinity is a threat to his family. His sense of reason has been beclouded by selfish ambition and greed for material wealth that he sees in the pearl. It is only until his son has been killed that Kino comes to the full realization that happiness cannot be bought by any amount of wealth. He walks majestically and throws the pearl back into the sea.

He is also portrayed as a quiet, reserved and thoughtful man. When quiet, Kino retreats into his thoughts which carry him into the ancient music of his ancestors. The music determines his mood and emotional balance. The song of the family brings relief to him while the song of the enemy invokes violent and ferocious reactions in Kino. These songs, embedded in his mind, represent his imagination.

Juana

She is Kino's wife and mother to Coyotito. She is presented as a submissive character. She carries out her domestic chores like all other traditional women and she understands her husband quite well perhaps better than Kino himself. She does not bother him unnecessarily and lets him have his way in whatever he wants without interference.

She seems to be more composed and compelling. Her proposal that they get a doctor to treat Coyotito's scorpion sting is quite revolutionary and surprising, well knowing that they cannot afford the doctor's fees. It only proves how much the baby means to them.

She also acts as a counsel to Kino. At the height of the struggle for pearl, she appeals to Kino to get rid of it:

"Kino my husband...the pearl is evil. Let us destroy it before it destroys us..."

While Kino sees the pearl as a blessing to the family, she sees it as a source of evil. But her submissiveness compels her to follow Kino's stand.

Her strong conviction that the pearl is evil drives her into sneaking out at dawn with the intention of throwing the pearl back into the sea. She is furiously attacked and assaulted by Kino. She bears no ill feelings in this because she understands Kino better.

She is superstitious and gullible in some way. When the scorpion is about to sting her son Coyotito, she invokes the ancient magic and mutters a Hail Mary between her clenched teeth. She displays a hopelessness and helplessness of a traditional woman in the face of danger.

Like a loyal wife she follows Kino to the capital, and when he proposes that he leads the trackers astray so as she and Coyotito may escape, she refuses insisting that they should stick together. She knows too well the dangers of the family being separated. She feels insecure alone without the protection of Kino.

She wins in the end when Kino finally accepts to throw the pearl back into the sea. But this comes at a cost of Coyotito's life. She teaches the reader an important lesson that a stitch in time saves nine. That Kino does not listen to her advice is very regrettable.

Coyotito

Coyotito is the child at the center of the conflict. He is presented as an innocent child who does not understand the environment around him. He is therefore seen as a symbol of innocence. His scorpion sting sparks off a series of events that bring both luck and misfortune for his family that eventually culminates in his tragic death.

Through his character, the author brings to light human injustice and unfairness. The doctor's remarks when his parents take him for treatment are very dehumanizing:

"Have I nothing better to do than cure insect bites for little Indians? I am a doctor, not a veterinary."

Coyotito is reduced to a level of an animal not fit to be treated by a doctor but by a veterinary. But when Kino finds the pearl of the world, Coyotito's status is quickly transformed. He is no longer an animal but once again a human being. The doctor who had earlier on refused to treat him now leaves his home and comes to treat him.

The priest also comes to Kino's home on account of Coyotito. It becomes important that Coyotito is baptized in church. Kino however has different plans for his son. From the sale of the pearl, Kino hopes that Coyotito will go to school and acquire an education that will give him a bright future.

He becomes the tragic victim of circumstances as his parents try to escape from the trackers pursuing them. His unprecedented death again brings to light the animal link as his cry is mistaken for that of a baby coyote (a type of fox) and the tracker shoots at it in sheer amusement.

Coyotito is therefore presented as a victim of circumstances. In him, we see injustice meted out on the innocent and vulnerable members of the society.

Juan Tomas

Juan Tomas is Kino's eldest brother. He acts as his counsel and also as an intermediary between Kino and the rest of the villagers. Kino looks to him for advice and support whenever in trouble. He is always by Kino's side. On the day when Kino finds the pearl, he squats on Kino's right hand because he was his brother. And on the day of selling the pearl, "because of the seriousness of the occasion, only one man walked with Kino, and that was his brother Juan Tomas."

He is presented as helpful and supportive whenever Kino is in trouble. After Kino has killed a man and his house is burnt, it is Juan Tomas who hides them until nightfall when they escape from the village. Much as his relationship with Kino is not very pronounced, it is very clear that they have a very strong bond between them. They have a lot they share in common and their relationship is so supportive and helpful in the course of the novel.

Apolonia

Apolonia is Juana Tomas' wife. She is not very significant in the course of the story but just like her husband, her relationship with Kino's household is very formal. She enjoys more or less the same privilege as her husband in the events that follow the discovery of the pearl. She and her husband walk with Kino and Juana ahead of the crowd in the procession to sell the pearl.

When Kino's house is burnt down, she is the one as the nearest relative to raise the formal lament for the dead. Just like Juana, she also represents the traditional roles of women. She is very submissive to her husband. Her loyalty to her in-laws is however questioned when Kino largely believes that she will not keep the secret of their whereabouts for long.

The Doctor

The doctor is described as a man whose race had dominated Kino's race for nearly four hundred years. He is a man of European origin and having a typical colonial mentality. Like most colonialists, he dislikes and abhors the natives. He refuses to treat Coyotito because he is ruled by colonial prejudice for the natives.

He is given to greed and opportunism. He refuses to treat Coyotito because his parents do not have enough money. He even insinuates that he is "a doctor and not a veterinary" and would rather treat serious illness and not "insect bites."

This opinion however quickly changes when he hears that Kino has found the pearl of the world. He is quick to callously comment that:

"He is a client of mine ...I am treating his child for a scorpion sting"

Later, he makes a surprise visit to Kino's house to 'treat' Coyotito. Although the child had apparently recovered the doctor sadistically poisons him so that he can treat him and claims to have cured the scorpion sting in order to get money from Kino.

He is also pretentious and hypocritical. When he is leaving Kino's house he pretends not to have known about the pearl and then greedily observes Kino's eyes for an indicator of where that pearl has been hidden.

His role in the novel is to largely portray the evil and injustice in the society. He has no human heart and feeling for humanity and is a complete mockery of the medical ethics. He is only obsessed with the luxurious lifestyle of Paris which he will give anything to live.

The Priest

Like the doctor, the priest is equally opportunistic. He is portrayed as a man who is deceptively humble. He cuts a figure of a pious man who lives for the service of his flock yet beneath this piety is remarkable greed and opportunism.

On hearing about the pearl he immediately starts to think of how he can benefit from it. He is however not as greedy and sadistic as the doctor. His thoughts are not in personal gains but rather in the development of the church. He thinks in terms of making church repairs.

Nevertheless his visit to Kino's house is not purposed to congratulate him upon his good fortune or ministering to him but rather to lay a stake on the pearl. He is

interesting in knowing whether the couples are wedded in church or if their child is baptized. Both of these are ceremonies that cost money and he therefore sees that the church will benefit from the pearl.

Again like the doctor, the priest is also presented as a mockery of his calling. He does not take care of his flock's spiritual needs and welfare but only seeks material gain from them. He charges them for services he ought to offer free of charge and out of compassion.

He is just as witty and crafty as the doctor. His comment to Kino about the pearl is an opportunistic expression, concealed in Christian values:

"I hope thy wilt remember to give thanks, my son, to him who has given thee this treasure, and to pray for guidance in the future..."

His feigned friendly approach does not conceal the opportunist that he is. He is therefore seen as a complete mockery of the priestly calling and profession. The church that he represents is portrayed as an opportunistic institution which only seeks material gains from its congregation in exchange for spiritual welfare.

The Pearl Dealer

The pearl buyer just like the priest and the doctor is portrayed as a pretentious character. He is presented as a stout man whose face was fatherly and benign, his eyes twinkled with friendship"

Like the doctor who pretends not to know about the pearl, the pearl buyer keeps his cool and asks Kino what he can do for him.

Being cunning by nature, he undervalues Kino's pearl and even invites his colleagues to affirm the value of the pearl. However, the buyer's cunningness does not pay off this time round and he loses the deal. His plea to increase the offer do not convince Kino. Like all cheats, the pearl buyer loses because he plays too hard.

The pearl buyers are used to show the manner in which the poor natives are cheated by unscrupulous traders because of their ignorance. While Kino is convinced about the true value of his pearl, the villagers, out of ignorance think that he was a fool not to take what the pearl buyer had offered.

It is clear that natives have not learnt from the experiences of their fathers when as Juana Tomas narrates, men sent to the capital to sell pearls on their behalf were never heard of again.

THEMES AND IDEAS

The struggle between good and evil

The novel presents the struggle between good and evil. Kino himself is an embodiment of this struggle between good and evil. He does his best to keep good coming his way but seems to have very little control over the circumstances that bring about evil.

This struggle is also enhanced by the music that Kino keeps on hearing from time to time. The song of the family hums in his mind whenever things are as they should be. The waves lapping the shore in the morning and the sound of Juana grinding corn or preparing the meal are part of the song of the family. He hears the song of evil whenever there is danger approaching. Kino listens and reacts to these songs. When the scorpion begins to come down the rope towards the baby, he hears the song of evil first.

Kino believes in fighting evil physically which amounts to failure. For instance he fails to discern that evil can sometimes appear attractive and alluring. He sticks on the pearl even when Juana tries to warn him that the pearl is evil. Even when he hears the song of evil when the priest enters, because he has been taught that the priest is good decides to look for evil elsewhere.

Juana seems to understand that the struggle between good and evil is a spiritual one. She prays the ancient magic and the new catholic prayers to ward off the scorpion. She does the same when she wishes for a way to pay the doctor. She sees the pearl as a source of evil and that men are evil because of the pearl. It is for this reason that she attempts to throw the pearl back into the sea. That Kino fails to listen to Juana he pays a hefty price for sticking to the cause of evil.

Because Kino chooses to fight alone and Juana chooses to let him, evil wins. The Song of Evil plays loudly in the silence following the deaths on the mountain—one accidental, three brutal. But instead of succumbing to Evil, Juana and Kino together trudge home, past the burnt spot where their house stood. “[T]hey were not walking in single file, Kino ahead and Juana behind, as usual, but side by side.” As they walk together, the Song of the Family revives, becoming “as fierce as a cry.” Kino even offers to let Juana throw the pearl, but she declines. He must silence the cause of his insanity. He throws the pearl and as it settles, the Song of Evil “drifted to a whisper and disappeared.” Evil is banished, but good has not triumphed as is indicated by the bloody package inside Juana’s shawl.

Evil is also portrayed by the pearl buyer, the doctor and the priest who connive to keep the peasants ignorant and docile. They use whatever methods they can to accomplish this—financial instability, religious ceremonies and threats of eternal damnation, or lack of economic choice. When the pearl is discovered, however, each

power controller makes the mistake of thinking he knows how to have his way with the finder. Due to this mistake, they alienate Kino from them. In other words, by insisting that he stays ignorant of their ways they foster his resentment and defiance. Kino is ignorant, not mentally deficient. They answer his reticence with force and are met with force.

Exploitation

The pearl buyers exploit the Indians and have them at their mercy economically. The pretense of an open market and the price wars they fake lead the Indians to think they are getting a fair deal. In this way, the Indians also believe that they are active participants in the economic order. The Indians are illiterate and cannot know how the modern world works. They are kept ignorant to be exploited.

Conversely, the pearl buyers act in concert for the benefit of one man and to exert their control over the gullible Indian populace. By this comparison, *The Pearl* criticizes the market system in a way that it is exploitative and selfish.

Religion is depicted as a tool for exploitation of the unsuspecting Indians. The priest uses threats of eternal damnation to try to steal from the poor Indian population. He exploits Kino's ignorance about the Holy Scriptures to try to advance his own motives:

I hope thou wilt remember to give thanks, my son to him who has given thee this treasure, and to pray for guidance in the future. (Page 31)

It is little wonder that when the priest enters Kino hears the song of evil.

Greed and Materialism

The novel exposes the human weakness of greed and blind pursuit of material wealth. When Kino gets the pearl of the world he becomes so obsessed that he fails to listen to the voice of reason especially from his wife. The pearl seems to have replaced the basic values of humanity and family harmony. This obsession leads to the loss of his own innocence when he kills three people in the bid to protect his pearl. This shows how greed can lure people in doing a lot of wicked things for the sake of material wealth including murder.

It cannot go without mention that Kino's greed for material wealth also makes him to forget about his cardinal duty to his family as the head. He is quick at beating and assaulting Juana because she attempts to throw the pearl back to the sea. He forgets to protect his own child Coyotito against impending danger. This comes with consequences when the boy is killed by a stray bullet.

Kino's greed also leads to the destruction of the few possessions that he had beginning with the family canoe which is their only source of livelihood and finally their home the brush house. Kino's greed leaves him spiritually, physically and

materially ruined. He is completely alienated from his own people including his immediate family. That he decides to go to the north to find market for the pearl is a demonstration of abandoning his family and relatives for what he thinks is a worthy cause, the pearl.

Hypocrisy and pretense

Besides greed, the novel also exposes the evil of hypocrisy and pretense. The doctor initially declines to treat Coyotito because Kino cannot afford the fees for treatment. However after receiving the news that Kino had got the pearl of the world the doctor is very quick to come feigning concern about the child's sickness. He even poisons the child and then administers the antidote simply because he wants to steal Kino's pearl.

The priest is another hypocrite who simply uses his religious placement to threaten the natives with eternal damnation in order to extort money from them. When he comes to Kino's house, he has only come to advance his selfish objective of securing his share from Kino's new fortune. He emphasizes the issue of giving thanks to "he who has given thee".

The pearl buyers are a big bunch of hypocrites. They connive to cheat Kino of his pearl by reducing the prices.

The Evils of Colonialism

The novel portrays a society torn apart by colonialism. The Indian people in the novel are under the control and subjugation of the Europeans for over four hundred years. They are deprived of health services and are kept in poverty. Their children do not go to school because they cannot afford the fees. It is for this reason that Kino dreams about taking Coyotito to school after selling the pearl.

The difference between the doctor's residence and the brush houses where Kino and other Indians live speaks volumes about the differences in economic status. The doctor's residence is furnished with luxury and well protected in a gate:

"After a moment the big gate opened a few inches. Kino could see the green coolness of the garden and little splashing fountain through the opening..." (page 14)

The above description reflects splendor and luxury. While on the other hand, the Indian residences are mere makeshift brush houses by the sea shore that leave them exposed to all sorts of dangers. It is little wonder that Coyotito is stung by a scorpion.

There is a sense of colonial prejudice and discrimination that is portrayed in the text. The Europeans and their agents are so inconsiderate to the natives and regard them as animals. When the doctor is informed by his servant of Kino and Juana's misfortune he is quick to say:

I am a doctor and not a veterinary. (Page 15)

This summarises the attitude of the Europeans towards the natives. The priest also has the same mentality of thinking that all Indians are like children and keeps them that way by educating them only enough to be scared of the evil they will face without his help. This is a familiar trope among colonized people. Religious missionaries often used the devil as a tool to bring the conquered into submission. Religious reasoning was also used on slaves to make them submissive.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Use of allegory

Kino's story is an allegory. Allegory is a type of symbolism where the characters are recognised more for the ideas they represent or portray than as independent characters. Allegories usually involve a journey that a character makes toward spiritual growth. The plot of Steinbeck's story is simple: a man finds the "Pearl of the World" but he does not gain happiness and throws it back. Within this narrative are many hidden meanings. The story tells us that humanity is in the dark and needs to wake up. Therefore, the opening shows Kino waking in the night, which is allegorical, but because the cock has been crowing for some time we know that he has been trying to gain a consciousness – literally wake up – to his people's plight.

Another message is that journeys should be made in communion, not just the company, of another. Kino should be in a leadership position among his people because of his fortuitous discovery, but he is not leading them. He tries to sell the pearl, which could have ruptured the economic system and provided economic opportunity for his people. Instead he falls prey to doubt and decides to go for the big city, leaving his people ignorant of his mission. Kino decides to make his own way and is followed by his wife. He returns with her, but they are still alone and everything is the same as before.

The novel is full of **symbolism** of the talismanic, allegorical, and ironic kind. The pearl itself is *a symbol of escape* for the poor man, but it also *symbolizes the effects of greed on man*. Worse than that, Steinbeck sets up the pearl to *embody the whole of the European conquest of the Americas*. He does this by saying that the pearl bed in which it was found is the same pearl bed that raised the King of Spain to be the greatest in the world. Historically, then, this pearl bed represents the gold, silver, and raw resources that

Spain extracted from the New World at the height of that nation's empire. Now, this same pearl bed lures in a victim of that colonialism to dream of an easy escape from poverty.

The pearl is a talisman: an object that comes to be interchangeable with a person or an idea. At one point Kino views the pearl as his soul and vows to keep it. For Kino, the success of the pearl's sale will indicate his success. The pearl stands opposite to the canoe that at once stands for his family and is a sure bulwark against starvation. When he makes it known that he will pursue wealth by venturing on his own to the great city, his canoe is sabotaged. This is a crime greater than homicide for it is a direct assault on Kino's family – worse than burning down the house.

Irony

Irony arises in the name of the village: La Paz or peace. The town is only peaceful because the majority of the people are demoralized. Their peace is one of an oppressed people. The pearl stirs up this peace and only bloodshed restores calm.

The Indians are constantly presented as innocent primitives further duped by the superstition of the Catholic Church. They are also, and Kino is especially, compared to animals. In their daily habits of fishing and gathering they are like the hungry dogs and pigs described as searching the shore for easy meals. More exactly, Kino howls, the trackers sniff and whine, and the baby yelps – a sound reminiscent of its namesake, the Coyote. Animals have roles in the story as well. The Watcher's horse raises the European above the Indians; this advantage is used to conquer the hemisphere.

Foreshadow

In a moment of foreshadowing, Kino watches as two roosters prepare to fight. He then notices wild doves flying inland where later Kino will prepare to fight his pursuers. Juana is like an owl when she watches Kino sneak down the cliff. Earlier, when the watering hole was described, feathers left by cats that had dragged their prey there are noticed. Those with feathers die. On the other hand, Kino is no longer an animal. Instead, when Kino kills the men who are tracking him he is a machine. He is efficient and without noise, like the cats playing with their doomed prey. He is killing to survive. The metaphor that is mixed in with this scene of tension and action is in keeping with the style of the rest of the work while also lending it a realistic dimension.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

What makes the text relevant to the modern reader?

Although written in the mid-1940s, *The Pearl* addresses numerous social issues that gained prominence at that time and that remained among the chief concerns of late 20th-century society. Among them are a growing awareness of the more sinister aspects of colonialism and the domination of native peoples by European settlers, the powerlessness of the economic underclass, and the illusory nature of the “American Dream” of financial prosperity.

Uneducated in the methods of western medicine and the victims of racial prejudice, Kino and Juana are turned away when they seek the help of the doctor in treating Coyotito's sting. The doctor, a representative of the colonial elite, compares the family to animals in a blatant expression of his racial contempt. In *The Pearl*, Kino's racial and economic powerlessness is further demonstrated in dealings with the priest and the pearl dealers, both of whom attempt to take advantage of his ignorance.

The Pearl also offers commentary on the blind pursuit of material wealth. Kino's obsession with attaining the best price for the pearl ultimately leads to the loss of his own innocence, to the death of his child, and to the destruction of the few possessions the family had to begin with. In other words, Kino's greed has left them spiritually, physically, and materially in ruins; a situation that reflects the emptiness and alienation that many mid-century writers began to associate with modern American society and its emphasis on personal wealth.

Steinbeck also depicts Kino and Juana's growing isolation from their family and community as they are compelled to flee to the city to find a buyer for the pearl. An episode of domestic violence is portrayed when Juana attempts to get rid of the pearl. Ultimately, the parental devotion that led to their desire for material wealth and enhanced social status backfires—leading to the death of their child and turning Kino into a wife-beater and murderer. The pearl, symbolizing the pursuit of wealth above all else, may be seen to drive a wedge between the couple and their community, to disrupt family relations, and to upset nature in the premature death of their child. In a negative expression of Steinbeck's literary vision of cooperation and natural harmony, Kino and Juana end unhappily through their failure to act in concert with others and for the good of all nature.

QUESTIONS FOR REVISION

1. Pretending that you are Kino or Juana (knowing only what they know), come up with a plan to relieve the deplorable situation of the community. Be sure to stay true to the characters as they are presented.
2. Comment on the significance of the following line from the story: "The thin dog came to him and threshed itself in greeting like a wind-blown flag, and Kino looked down at it and didn't see it."
3. With ample illustrations explain Steinbeck's thematic concerns in *The Pearl*.
4. Describe Kino's character and show how events in the novel influence his attitude.
5. In what ways is Kino responsible for what happens to him and his family?
6. How is the theme of greed and materialism portrayed in the novel, *The Pearl*?
7. How are the doctor, the priest and the pearl buyer used to portray injustice in the novel, the pearl?
8. "I am a doctor not a veterinary." What does this statement by the doctor reveal about the relationship between the natives and the Europeans?
9. What role does the baby Coyotito play in the novel, the pearl?
10. How does Steinbeck use musical images
11. Examine the use of allegory, symbolism, and fable in *The Pearl*.

*Grief Child***THE BACKGROUND****The setting**

The action of the novel takes place in Ghana. The action oscillates between a typical agricultural village of Susa and the small town of Buama and then another small town of Abenase. Susa is a small agricultural village inhabited by workers from different parts of the country; attracted by its reliable weather and apparently fertile soils. Most of the inhabitants are sitting tenants paying allegiance to one landlord called Yeboa. Susa is a typical African setting characterized by communalism and extended family systems. The family roles are allocated according to gender with the men doing the garden work and hunting while the women do the domestic chores.

Like all African settings, superstitions and witchcraft are very common occurrences. The weather is very unpredictable and sometimes gets destructive. Like any other African village, people are at the mercy of the weather and natural disasters which claim lots of lives. However when such natural disasters occur, they are interpreted as having been occasioned by the invisible hand of fate or malevolent forces of human nature. The death of Birago and her daughter and later Nimo are all blamed on Goma, Nimo's evil sister.

Traditional medicine and treatment are embraced as a gift from the ancestors. Nimo is a renowned medicine man in the entire village. This practice is believed to have been inherited from his ancestors. It is for this reason that he takes caution not to take pride in his trade. He restrains his son from getting any gift or praise from the people that have been healed as the gift of herbalism is freely passed on from the ancestors.

A strong spirit of communalism exists in Susa as the characters display a sense of togetherness in their work; they share their happiness and sorrows. The discipline of children is a communal affair. This is seen when Adu and his friends attempt to steal Appiah's oranges. Appiah gets the boy whipped before taking him to Nimo for discipline. He is very concerned that Nimo does not treat the matter with the seriousness it deserves. Communalism is also clearly portrayed after the storm that leads to the death of Birago and Yaa. All the members of the community form a search party to look for the two women and soon their bodies are discovered under the bough of a broken tree branch. The same thing happens when Nimo is drowned in the river. Buama, on the other hand is an urban setting that is sharply contrasted with Susa. After the death of his entire family, Adu finds himself under the care of his heartless aunt,

Goma in Buama. Unlike in Susa, the people of Buama seem to mind their own business. Goma takes advantage of this sense of individualism to unleash terror on the young Adu. She beats and tortures him at will without any intervention from anyone. Even when the community learns about it, their response is slow. Unlike Susa where people seem to live by an unwritten code of conduct, in Buama there is a constituted government that follows the law of evidence.

The epilogue takes place in Abenase another town setting. Abenase is described as a peaceful town. It is here that Adu proposes to Ama. It is a place of reconciliation and lasting happiness. It is still here that Ama also reunites with her father and family after twelve years of deception.

Questions

1. What aspects of African culture are portrayed in the novel *Grief Child*?
2. Compare and contrast the life in Susa with the life in Buama. Which of the two places would you prefer to live?
3. What qualifies the novel *Grief Child* to be an African novel?

The title

Adu is the *Grief Child* in the novel. He is exposed to a host of horrible challenges at a very tender age. From the time he gets a bad dream, Adu's happiness as a child vanishes. In the dream, Adu is walking alone in the forest when he is attacked by a leopard which chases and starts tearing him to pieces. The dream is quite disturbing to the young boy as well as his father. It portends misfortune.

The tragic death of his mother as well as his sister leaves Adu devastated and tormented. He had returned from school after the storm with his friends only to find people weeping in their compound. The sight of the two lifeless bodies of his mother and sister, Yaa who had perished in the storm is too shocking to Adu that he weeps uncontrollably to the sympathy of everybody. There is no consolation that he can accept for this tragic death of his mother and sister. Even his friend Yaro finds it hard to console the grieving child. The boy cries on for hours and questions the existence of Yaro's God:

Why didn't God whom you say is greater than Satan save my mother and my sister? **(Page 80)**

While Adu is still grieving for his mother and sister, tragedy strikes again. His father's death is the last thing he anticipates. His father is the only person left for him to lean on. Earlier on the two go to the swamp together to check on the farm as was their routine. As they are crossing the river by the log bridge, Adu loses balance and is saved by the father from being drowned in the flooded river. However by the hand of fate the

father loses balance and ends up being drowned by the flooded river. Adu watches his father struggling with the turbulent water and his cries for help amount to nothing as he runs all the way to Appiah's house and falls unconscious. Later Nimo's body is retrieved from the flooded river. The young boy is overwhelmed by grief that he feels like it was a nightmare to have all his family wiped out in a very short time:

To Adu it felt like a dream, a nightmare that scares you until day breaks and vanishes to the back of your mind. **(Page 86)**

The death of his father opens a fresh can of worms of grief for Adu. After the funeral of his father organised by his aunt Goma, Adu is taken to Buama to live with her. Grief hangs in the air as the young boy bids farewell to his friends. The silence along the way is depressing and Adu is overwhelmed by fear of the unknown. At his aunt's place he is exposed to untold suffering. He is insulted and physically tortured by Goma. She beats him without restraint and makes him do the toughest chores affecting his attendance at school.

The climax of the suffering comes when he tries to restrain his aunt from getting money from Mansa, Anane's mother as a gift for the treatment that Adu had given to Anane when bitten by a snake. Goma becomes very furious and beats Adu ruthlessly. He decides to wonder away from his aunt's compound with the aim of committing suicide. He seems to have lost hope in life. He finds himself by the river and then remembers Yaro's words:

Your father wants you to live...he wants you to live for him. His life is ended but yours is not. **(Page 128)**

These words rejuvenate in the grieving child a fresh desire to live and so he abandons his suicide plans and walks back upstream.

Amidst grief and sadness, there is hope and providence. Adu is later adopted by Teacher Ofori and Beckie who also give him an education. He eventually grows into a man and gets the love of his life, Ama who also promises to marry him. The grief child finally out grows the sorrow and anguish and becomes a happy independent person.

Questions

1. How suitable is the title to the novel, *Grief Child*?
2. Who is the grief child in the novel, *Grief Child*?

The Plot Synopsis

The story of the novel *Grief Child* revolves around the life of Adu, a boy in his early teen age. The action begins with Adu getting a terrible dream which scares his father who seeks interpretation of the ominous dream. Yaro his friend simply tells him that the dream needs prayers. The family is happy as they continue with their farming activities. One day they are visited by Goma, Nimo's sister. Her hatred for her brother is easily noticed by Adu. She cuts her visit short when she learns that Yeboah, the landlord has visited Susa. Nimo's inherited skill in herbal medicine is revealed when he treats Appiah's wife of snake bite. Birago gets a bad dream and the following day when she goes with her daughter to collect fire wood they are caught up by an unusual storm. And while they are struggling to get back home, they are killed by a broken tree. The village mourns them and shortly after, the flooded river takes Nimo leaving Adu lonely and alone. He is taken to Buama by his hateful aunt. In Buama, Adu goes to school and acquires friends. He is however subjected to torture by his aunt who beats and insults him at will. This also affects his performance at school attracting the attention of teacher Ofori and his fiancée, Beckie. Because of the torture, Adu resolves to commit suicide but he remembers the words of his friend Yaro and he decides to go back home. He stumbles over two grave robbers. Adu reports the robbery leading to the arrest of the two robbers. Meanwhile, it is discovered that Ama is not Goma's child but Yeboah's child with his late wife. Adu is taken back to Susa by Appiah but too much grief for his dead parents and sister forces him to return to Buama just in time to catch up with Teacher Ofori and Beckie who are also leaving Buama for another town. Adu is adopted by the couple and is persuaded to forgive his aunt. Finally Adu and Ama grow and accept each other's love vows and promise to get married.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES

PART ONE

Chapter 1

It is mid night and Adu gets a nightmare. In the dream, he finds himself alone in the heart of the forest. A voice calls him but he is unable to see anyone. He hears a rustle behind him only to see a giant leopard. The animal chases him as he cries for help. He falls down and the animal begins to tear him to pieces. Adu is terrified when he wakes and leaps from his bed only to be apprehended by the father. His father is very worried at the mention of a leopard in a dream because it portends bad luck. His father goes to Yaro to see if he can get the dream interpreted.

Analysis

This chapter introduces us to the major characters in the novel. Adu's father is worried when his son narrates to him his dream. This reveals the theme of superstition. There is a tense atmosphere that prevails in this chapter. What is the cause of this tension?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Adu as presented in this chapter.
2. What feelings does this chapter arouse in you towards Adu?
3. Comment on the character of Nimo.
4. In groups of four can you try to act out this scene bringing out the feelings of the different characters in the novel?

Chapter 2

This chapter introduces the character of Yaro. He is an ardent Christian convert who is known for preaching the word of God. He is also a close friend of Nimo and his son Adu. Yaro is apparently brooding over Nimo's request from him to pray for Adu. Yaro is deep in thought about this puzzling dream that Adu had had the previous morning when Adu finally shows up. Yaro gives him some cocoa yams to roast. His sympathy for the little boy is portrayed.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the conflict between Christianity and tradition. Yaro is an ardent Christian convert who is so passionate about spreading the word of the gospel. However as he executes his calling he is met with resistance by several people apart from Nimo and his son Adu.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Yaro as presented in the chapter.
2. Discuss the conflict between Christianity as presented in this chapter.
3. Compare and contrast Nimo's attitude towards Adu's dream and that of Yaro.
4. What is the importance of Adu's dream to your understanding of the story of the novel, Grief Child?

Chapter 3

This chapter reveals the work life of the characters. Adu is very excited about the prospect of going to the farm with his father and Mahama, his father's hired labourer. It is revealed that all the land in Susa is owned by Yeboah and Nimo is just one of the caretakers of the numerous farms. Adu is very excited as the three men leave for the farm. There is also a flash back on Nimo's relationship with Birago and how the two

had become husband and wife. This chapter also provides background information on how Nimo had come to the farms in Susa although he was an Ashanti. The three reach the farm earlier than usual and begin on their work.

Analysis

This chapter gives us an insight into the economic life of the people in the novel. They are purely an agrarian society deriving their livelihood from farming. They grow a variety of crops for both cash and food. This chapter suggests a system of division of labour according to gender. Can you identify the roles played by either gender in the home?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Nimo as presented in this chapter.
2. Describe Adu's feelings towards farm work.
3. What important lessons can the reader draw from Nimo's family life?

Chapter 4

Adu is amazed at the work that Mahama and his father had done within a short time. His father undertakes to tell him the importance of hard work and the consequences of laziness. Adu asks his father about how their village had come to be named Susa and Nimo delves into a long sad tale of Yeboah, the land lord and how he had lost wife and daughter in a motor accident and had named the village after his first wife.

Analysis

The most important aspect in this chapter is Nimo's relationship with his son. This chapter also presents the impact of informal education on the young minds. There is use of storytelling and proverbs as means of imparting life lessons to the young people. Comment on the relevance of the story of the spider and the tree squirrel.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Nimo as presented in the chapter.
2. Identify the proverbs in this chapter and explain the relevance of each of them.
3. What feelings does the story of Yeboah arouse in you?
4. What important lessons can the reader draw from the story of Susa?
5. What is the effect of this story on the life of Nimo?

Chapter 5

This chapter opens with the arrival of Goma, Nimo's sister. Adu is quick to notice Goma's wicked character and hatred for Nimo and his family:

Adu hid behind his father and looked very carefully at the woman and her daughter as the adults engaged in exchanging information about Buama and Susa. Something about the woman sounded an alarm within him. **(Page 32)**

Adu also observes a remarkable difference between Goma and her daughter. Being a Sunday, Adu and his friend Yaro spend most of the day visiting places as Yaro preached the gospel but not many people listen to him. They insult and call him all sorts of derogatory names. The two friends discuss all sorts of topics ranging from intriguing Bible-stories to people's suffering. Adu arrives home and is intrigued by the conversation between his father and his aunt, Goma.

Analysis

The arrival of Goma is surrounded by fear and anxiety. From the time she arrives the atmosphere in the story changes. Her presence is tormenting to Adu and it is also covered in mystery. There is again the conflict between traditionalism and Christianity. The theme of suffering is introduced here.

Questions

1. Comment on the relationship between Goma and Nimo.
2. Describe the character of Goma as presented in this chapter.
3. Explain at least two themes that are developed in this chapter.
4. How does the author use language to develop the themes in this chapter?
5. In what ways does Goma's visit prepare us for what follows in the later part of the story?

Chapter 6

This chapter is a continuation chapter five. Adu eavesdrops on the conversation between his father and Goma. In their conversation Adu gathers that there is some unsettled business between his father and Goma. Goma is revealed to be a nagging and ungrateful woman. She is also an attention seeker. She blames her brother for neglecting her yet she is not grateful for the sacrifice he makes to buy her a sewing machine. The arrival of Yeboah in the village cuts short Goma's stay. The moment she hears that Yeboah has arrived, she packs her bags hastily and leaves the village abruptly. This again surprises Adu.

Analysis

This chapter brings out the strained relationship between Goma and Nimo. There is a lot of suspense surrounding Nimo's relationship with his sister. What is the effect of this suspense to the story? Why do you think Goma has to leave abruptly on hearing that Yeboah is in the village?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Goma as presented in this chapter. What do you like or dislike about her?
2. Comment on the relationship between Goma and Nimo. What is the source of misunderstanding between the two characters?
3. What is the effect of Yeboah's visit to the rest of the characters in Susa village?

Chapter 7

Appiah finds Adu and his friends attempting to pick oranges from his garden. He is so infuriated that he beats the boys. He is very disappointed that Nimo does not treat the matter with the seriousness that Appiah expects. Despite Nimo's explanation about the proper way of disciplining children, Appiah storms out of the compound in protest. Later that evening Birago tells the children a story of the three neighbours i.e. rope, bird and tortoise.

Analysis

The theme introduces the theme of communalism and collective responsibility. This is also seen in the interaction between Appiah and Nimo over the discipline of children. This theme is strongly reinforced by Birago's story of the tortoise, rope and bird. Can you think of the moral lessons taught by this story?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Appiah as presented in this chapter.
2. What is the cause of conflict between Appiah and Nimo. Who do you sympathise with and why?
3. Explain the moral lessons in Birago's story of tortoise, rope and bird.

Chapter 8

Nimo's skill in herbal medicine is revealed in this chapter. The whole village of Susa comes to him for treatment:

All Susa came to Nimo to receive treatment. The government hospital was sixty miles away. Unless an illness persisted, in which case Nimo advised them to go to the government hospital, he offered them

herbs –to chew, boil and drink, sniff, bathe in, grind mix with water and smear on affected spot. And he did it without charge, just like his father had ordered. (Page 55)

This summarizes Nimo's occupation as an herbalist. Adu is actually surprised that his father rejects a gift of a cock from Siaka's father and also tells Adu never to take any gift from anybody for the herbal treatment. He even tells him to refund the sweets he had got from a child he had treated. Later on Appiah's wife is beaten by a cobra and she is brought to Nimo for treatment. Nimo calmly treats her and she gets better.

Analysis

This chapter portrays a sense of communalism that is akin to the African cultural setting with shared happiness and sorrow. The skill of herbal treatment is used for the common good of the entire community. It is even free of charge to reflect the sense of communalism and collectivism.

Questions

1. How is the African tradition portrayed in this part of the text?
2. Compare the relationship between Appiah and Nimo in this chapter and in the earlier chapters. What does it teach you about the two men?
3. What is the role played by Nimo in the novel, grief child?

Chapter 9

There is a heavy storm during the night and Birago feel uneasy and is sound awake. She hears her daughter talking in her sleep. She wakes up the following morning feeling sickly and uneasy. Nimo and Mahama leave for the farm as Adu also prepares to go to school. Birago still has a strong premonition that something bad is likely to happen. She tries to compose herself but her uneasiness is quite visible. She remembers a terrible dream that she had also got the previous night which increases her fear. Yaa tries to seek for her mother's explanation but Birago keeps it to herself.

Analysis

This chapter also discusses the role of dreams in the novel. Yaa's dream plus Birago's premonition create suspense and anxiety in the novel. This chapter also shows division of labour in an African setting. The social weakness of male chauvinism is also discussed in this chapter. Nimo does not send his daughter to school because the entire society does not consider it a priority.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Birago as presented in this chapter.
2. Explain at least two themes presented in this chapter.
3. Explain the relevance of the legend that Birago had told to her children.
4. How does Darmani use oral tradition to develop his major concerns in the novel, *Grief Child*?

Chapter 10

Birago and Yaa set off for the farm to take food to Nimo and Mahama. Birago is still feeling ill at ease. She has the premonition that something bad is bound to happen. Nimo notices it and asks what is wrong with her but she does not open up to him. Birago and Yaa leave the farm to go and collect firewood. The storm gets them still collecting fire wood and start hurrying home. Along the way the two are hit by a falling tree. Meanwhile Nimo reaches home and discovers that his wife and daughter are not home. A search party is organised and the two are found under the broken tree bough. The village mourns for them. Adu returns from school and is aggrieved to find his mother and sister dead.

Analysis

There is a tense atmosphere prevailing in this whole chapter right from Birago's premonition that something bad is bound to happen. How does the author use Birago to foreshadow her tragic death in the story?

Questions

1. Describe Birago's character as portrayed in this part of the story.
2. What feelings are aroused in the reader in this chapter?
3. What features of African culture are presented in this chapter?
4. Explain two themes that are brought out in this chapter.

Chapter 11

The twin deaths of Birago and Yaa leave the entire family devastated. Goma also comes to condole with the family though she comes after the funeral. Nimo is grateful for the corporation of the entire village during the trying time. Yaro comes and consoles Nimo. The entire village is grieving for the twin deaths. Adu visits Yaro. He is so devastated by the death of his mother and sister. It is very hard for Yaro to console the grieving child as he cries for hours long. He questions why Yaro's God had not saved his mother and sister.

Why didn't God whom you say is greater than Satan save my mother and my sister? (Page 80)

Yaro consoles and comforts him that death was simply a temporary separation especially for people who believed in his God.

Analysis

The atmosphere in this chapter is still tense and gloomy as the village is still mourning Birago and Yaa. This very chapter also brings out the title of the novel. Take note of the Christian view about death that Yaro preaches.

Questions

1. Comment on the character of yaro as presented in this chapter.
2. Explain the role played by Yaro in the novel, Grief Child.
3. What feelings does this chapter arouse in you towards:
 - a) Adu and Nimo
 - b) Yaro
4. Explain at least two themes portrayed in this chapter.

Chapter 12

Nimo wakes up late feeling so tired and sick. He sets off for the farm with Adu. Mahama does not come with him because he is not feeling well. At the farm, Nimo notices some damage done by the previous night's storm. As they are crossing the flooded river by the log bridge Adu loses balance and Nimo is just in time to save him from drowning. Unfortunately, Nimo is thrown off balance and is swept by the flooded river. Adu tries to cry for help but to no avail. He runs all the way to Appiah's house and collapses in the door way. Afterwards Nimo's body is found trapped in a log. It is another sad incident in just a short time. The whole village is covered in sadness. Goma organizes a hasty funeral for her brother and leaves with Adu for Buama.

Analysis

This chapter marks the climax of Adu's grief. In just a short period of time his whole family is almost wiped out leaving him in grief. The character of Goma is again brought back for scrutiny. She is presented as a hard hearted woman and inconsiderate. There is use of irony in this chapter especially surrounding the death of Nimo. It is very ironic that after saving Adu from drowning it is Nimo himself who drowns. Can you identify other ironies in the novel and explain their significance? This chapter also marks the end of Adu's life in Susa and prepares us for the second part of the novel.

Questions

1. What feelings are aroused in the reader by this entire chapter?
2. Describe Goma's character as presented in this chapter.
3. What important lessons does this chapter teach to the reader?

PART TWO

Chapter 13

The second part of the novel opens with Adu's journey to Buama. As the train steams away from Susa, Adu is lost in his own thoughts. The silence along the way is very depressing as Adu ponders over what life with his strange aunt would be like. On arrival Adu is given his own bedroom and Goma reads him a litany of rules to follow. He is taken to school and gets friends. Within the first six months, Adu confirms all his fears about Goma:

Some of the things he used to fear about this woman were beginning to be real. She had a strong hatred of him, a hatred that was linked to his father...(page 95)

Analysis

This chapter describes Adu's journey and early life in Buama. The author makes use of internal monologues and stream of consciousness to develop character. The mystery surrounding Goma's character seems to be unveiling slowly. There is a sharp contrast between the life in Buama and that in Susa. What do you find likeable about the life in Buama?

Questions

1. Between Buama and Susa, where would you prefer to stay and why?
2. Describe the character of Goma and say what you like or dislike about her.
3. What problems does Adu face while at his aunt's place? How does he overcome each one of them?
4. Describe Anane's character as presented in chapter 12.

Chapter 14

This chapter describes Adu's school life in Buama. His friendship with Ama and Anane is growing stronger. Adu and Ama arrive late at school but Anane does not include Adu's name on the list of late comers in spite of Charlie's insistence. Teacher Ofori comes in and punishes all the late comers except Adu. Adu is guilty that his friend had favoured him.

Analysis

This chapter brings out a typical school setting. It also brings out the character of teacher Ofori as a strict disciplinarian.

Questions

1. Describe Adu's feelings as brought out in this chapter.
2. Describe the character of Anane as presented in this chapter.

3. In what ways does life in this school resemble life in your school?
4. Describe the character of teacher Ofori as presented in this passage.

Chapter 15

Adu wakes up feeling severe headache. He is feverish. Goma orders him to collect several cans of water before he can go to school. Adu arrives late at school and is given a punishment to clear the weeds in the garden by teacher Ofori. After the evening assembly, Adu rushes to the garden to complete his punishment. Teacher Ofori and Beckie find him still doing his work and they are amazed at his commitment. They empathize with him.

Analysis

This chapter brings out the brutality and heartlessness of Goma. It also introduces us to the relationship between teacher Beckie and Ofori. This eases the tension that dominates the first part of the chapter. The theme of hope and optimism is again portrayed in this chapter.

Questions

1. Describe the relationship between Ofori and Beckie. What is the importance of this relationship?
2. Describe the character of teacher Beckie as presented in this chapter.
3. In what ways is the school setting in this chapter similar to your school?
4. Explain the theme of hope and optimism as presented in this chapter.

Chapter 16

The chief's crier announces the robbery at the chief's grave yard. The following day during the communal Labour Day at the school, Anane is bitten by a snake. Everybody seems helpless but Adu quickly remembers his father's skill in herbal medicine. He quickly plucks herbs and administers them to Anane with confidence and calm to the amazement of all the elders. In the evening Mansa, Anane's mother comes with some money for appreciation of Adu's treatment of her son. Goma greedily gets the money from her but Adu having remembered his father's warning not to take gifts from the people he treated, tries to restrain Goma from getting the money from Mansa. Goma is infuriated by Adu's actions that she beats and insults the boy. Adu is completely heart broken by his aunt's action. At night he gets another nightmare of a leopard that kills his mother, father and sister.

Analysis

There is a theme of communalism that is revealed by the communal Labour Day and the theme of tradition. Adu has also inherited his father's skill in herbal medicine which is a reflection of the power of oral tradition. The grave robbery announced by the chief's crier shows the loss of vital morals in the society. Which other societal weaknesses does the author portray in this chapter?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Adu as presented in this chapter
2. Explain at least two themes presented in this chapter.
3. What lessons can the reader draw from this chapter?
4. What feelings does the character of Goma arouse in you in this chapter?

Chapter 17

Adu is still very bitter with his aunt. He contemplates about a number of things and then decides to find a way to end his miserable life. He walks aimlessly towards the railway with the hope that he will get knocked by a train. Then later he decides to go to the river with a mind of drowning himself. His plan is however interrupted by the voice of his friend Yaro which restrains him from committing suicide. He walks back and sits under a tree. After hours of sleep, he sees two men struggling with a box of jewels. He climbs a tree and discovers that they were the people who had robbed the chief's graves. He knows one of the men well. When he goes home, he finds Anane waiting for him. Anane reveals to him that actually Ama is not Goma's daughter.

Analysis

This dominant theme in this chapter is hope and optimism. Amidst all challenges, Yaro's voice inspires hope to Adu. He abandons his plan to commit suicide and begins to see light at the end of the tunnel. Yaro is indeed a voice of reason in the novel.

Questions

1. Describe the character Adu as presented in this chapter.
2. How does the author use suspense to create interest in this part of the novel?
3. What important lessons does the reader pick from this chapter?
4. Explain the theme of hope and optimism as presented in this chapter.

Chapter 18

Adu confides in Teacher Ofori the story of the two grave robbers. It is revealed that one of them is teacher Afram. Teacher Ofori takes Adu to the head teacher and later they report the matter to the chief's linguist who promises to act on the information. Teacher

Ofori then goes to Beckie's house and proposes to marry her and she accepts. That evening the two robbers are arrested and the jewels are recovered.

Analysis

This chapter also creates a light hearted atmosphere in the novel. Unlike the previous chapters that have a gloomy and sad atmosphere, the events in this chapter show hope and optimism. Can you identify the events in this chapter that inspire hope?

Question

1. Explain the theme of hope as presented in this chapter
2. Describe the character of the head teacher as presented in this chapter.
3. What important lessons can one learn from the events in this chapter?

Chapter 19

Adu is still plagued by the events of the previous week. He is still pondering over how to tell Ama the news that she is not Goma's daughter. He marshals all the courage and tells her on their way to school. Ama has mixed feelings about the news. She runs all the way to Mansa's house. Still in confusion she runs home and asks Goma. Goma offers to explain how it had all happened.

Analysis

This chapter prepares us for the final resolution. At this stage the reader is able to predict what Goma's end will be.

Question

1. Describe Ama's character as presented in this chapter
2. What feeling does this chapter arouse in you towards the following characters:
 - a) Ama
 - b) Goma
3. Explain at least two themes that are brought out in this chapter
4. What lessons can the reader pick from this chapter?

Chapter 20

The news of Goma's adopted daughter spreads through town like a bush fire. Different versions of the story are made up. Ama is no longer at ease. At school she is bombarded with a lot of questions about her parentage. Appiah who has visited Buam of recent gets the news that Ama is Yeboah's daughter. Goma relates the whole tearful story to Ama. How she had got the child from its dead mother and decided to keep it for herself.

Analysis

The wheel seems to have come full circle for Goma. After the long story of Goma, there is a change of attitude towards the old woman.

Questions

1. What feelings does Goma's story arouse in the reader?
2. Describe the character of Goma and say whether you sympathise with her or not. Give reasons for your answer.
3. What lessons can the reader draw from this story?

Chapter 21

Appiah leaves Buama stealthily only to return with Yeboah. They go to the chief's house and the chief rules in favour of Yeboah to take custody of his daughter. Ama is filled with mixed reactions as to whether she should go with Yeboah or stay with Goma. Ama requests that they go with Adu but Adu prefers to go back to Susa with Appiah. Adu bids farewell to Teacher Ofori and Beckie who are also leaving the town on a transfer.

Analysis

The reconciliation between father and daughter is a very happy moment in the story of *Grief Child*.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Yeboah as presented in this chapter.
2. What feelings are aroused in you by the events in this chapter towards the different characters?
3. What important lessons does the reader pick from the events in this chapter?

Chapter 22

Ofori and Beckie agree to adopt Adu. However, since he had preferred to go back to Susa, his request is respected. He is given gifts by the chief as he prepares to go back to Susa. He bids farewell to Ofori and Beckie. He goes back to Goma's house and finds Ama has arranged his luggage for him. He is escorted by his friends plus teacher Ofori to the train station. When the train arrives he detaches himself from the friends and takes his place next to Appiah and the train leaves for Susa.

Analysis

The theme of hope and optimism is again portrayed when Adu leaves for Susa. Although it is not very clear whether it would make him happier, it is a better option. This chapter also comes with a bit of relief when Adu breaks free from Goma's control.

Questions

1. Explain the theme of hope and optimism as presented in this chapter.
2. Describe the prevailing mood when at the station when Adu is about to leave for Susa.
3. Describe the character of Ofori as presented in the part of the story.

Chapter 23

When the train pulls up at Susa, Adu is overwhelmed by the sad memories. He meets some of his old friends around the village. Everything has changed. The following day he goes to his family house which has now been deserted and is assailed by the sad memories of his parents' death. He is overwhelmed by grief that he resolves to leave the village:

Susa was a wrong place for him. it was unfortunate that Adu had suffered at the hands of his aunt. But Susa was no substitute for Buama. The memories were too fresh and the events too close to keep his mind at peace.(Page 174)

He escapes and gets on the train back to Buama. He goes straight to teacher Ofori's house. Ofori and Beckie agree to adopt him and live with him.

Analysis

The irony in this passage is that while Adu had yearned to go back to his home, it turns out to be an oppressive place when he is assailed with the bitter memories of his parents' death. Comment on the prevailing atmosphere in the first part of the chapter.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Adu as presented in this chapter
2. Briefly explain the circumstances that lead to Adu's leaving Susa for Buama the second time.

Chapter 24

Teacher Ofori persuades Adu to forgive his aunt. Adu reluctantly accepts to go back to Buama and ask for forgiveness from Goma. Goma is apparently sick and alone. Ofori and Beckie, now husband and wife accompany him to Buama. Adu is surprised that Goma is not as sick as it had been reported. He asks for her forgiveness and then they proceed to Abenase to meet Ama. She is a very happy girl with her new family.

Analysis

This chapter brings out the theme of reconciliation and retribution. Goma though not directly punished for her evil deeds is sickly and lonely. The chapter also brings out an important lesson of forgiveness.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mansa as presented in this chapter
2. How is Adu's character in this chapter different from elsewhere in the novel?
3. What important lessons can the reader draw from this chapter?

Epilogue

The epilogue comes eleven years after Adu's visit to Buama and Abenase. Adu and Ama have now completed school and leaving in the same town of Abenase. They have intimate feelings for each other. Adu proposes to Ama and she readily accepts his proposal for marriage.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Adu

He is the hero and protagonist of the story. He is introduced as a boy of about twelve years and enjoying the harmony of a loving family with a loving and caring father and mother before tragedy strikes rendering him desperate and hopeless. Both his mother and sister are killed by a falling tree during a storm and then his father is drowned in a flooded river. Adu has no choice but to be adopted by his notorious aunt, Goma who exposes the already distraught child to more sorrow and torture.

He is *enduring* and *tolerant*. Adu's story is one of survival amidst adversity and hardship. He is exposed to both emotional and physical torture by his evil aunt who makes him do heavy duty work, abuses and torments him in a number of ways but he persists and perseveres through it. Due to the torture he contemplates about ending his troubles by committing suicide but he hears the voice of his old time friend Yaro restraining him from killing himself.

Adu is *optimistic* and *hopeful*. Amidst all the challenges and trials he has to go through, his hope is kept alive. The death of his entire family creates a big gap in his life. He cries uncontrollably and questions the existence of God. He is tortured by his aunt to an extent that he wishes he were dead. He walks desperately to the railway road with the hope that the train would end his miserable life. He later wonders upstream to the river with the objective of drowning himself but he remembers Yaro's words after his father's death. His hope is rejuvenated.

He is *vengeful* and *unforgiving* at first. He nurses strong hatred against his aunt for all the suffering he goes through and is obsessed with a strong desire to revenge against her. He blames her for the death of all his family members and the desire to revenge and seek retribution eats him up like a cancer until teacher Ofori convinces him to forgive his aunt. Adu reluctantly accepts the challenge and goes back to Buama and asks for Goma's forgiveness. This provides him with a peace of mind and emotional healing.

Adu is also portrayed as *emotional*. He cries hysterically after the death of his mother and sister that no amount of consolation could calm him down. His father's death is the least thing he expected. He cries his soul out and walks through life like a zombie. When exposed to mistreatment and abuse by Goma, he quickly resolves that he should commit suicide to end his troubles only to be saved when he hears Yaro's voice.

Adu is a *hardworking* and *industrious* boy. He enjoys going to the farm with his father and Mahama and does his work diligently. At school he exhibits hard work and is appreciated by his teachers. When teacher Ofori gives him a punishment, Adu does not go home after the assembly but rather goes to the school garden to clear his portion. Teacher Ofori is surprised to find the boy in the garden when everyone has gone home.

He displays a sense of honesty and truthfulness when he inadvertently runs into two men carrying stolen jewelry at night. He debates within himself as to whether to take the stolen jewelry or not. He decides to go and alert teacher Ofori who later reports the case to the head teacher leading to the recovery of the lost jewelry as well as the arrest and the prosecution of the two culprits.

Much as he is a child of a tender age, Adu portrays great intelligence and sense of responsibility. He is quick to learn his father's skill of herbalism and uses it to help other people. He takes seriously his father's warning not to get money from the people for his services. He is quite inquisitive about some intricate things that surround his home. He asks his father why his village was called Susa. He is quite curious and inquisitive about the relationship between his father and Goma.

He is the string that keeps the narrative together. It is his story right from his turbulent childhood through adversity to independence and greater freedom. He teaches the reader deliberate lessons about forgiveness and hope after adversity. Adu's character is used to depict the dark side of human nature as well as its kind side. His stay with Goma reveals how diabolic and callous human nature can be yet on the other hand, his interaction with Ofori and Beckie portrays warmth and kindness. The happy ending of the story with Adu getting married to Ama in a way shows the power of goodness over the forces of evil.

Nimo

Nimo is Adu's father and through him the theme of tradition and culture is developed. He is introduced as a skilled herbalist who is relied on by the entire village of Susa. All the people come to him to receive treatment for various sicknesses ranging from snake bites to complex diseases. He offers to them the first line of treatment before they can go to the government hospital when the sickness persisted. He does this free of charge as he was instructed by his own father to do. He also cautions his own son never to charge money for the treatment.

Besides being a *skilled herbalist*, Nimo is also a hard working farmer. Though belonging to the tribe of Ashanti, Nimo has a different attitude towards work. While his tribesmen think that it is degrading to work for a fellow Ashanti, Nimo does not feel 'embarrassed about looking after a fellow Ashanti man's cocoa farm the way some of his tribesmen did.' He wakes up every morning with Mahama, his hired labourer to go to his farm. No wonder he becomes one of the most influential people in the village both as a farmer and a herbalist.

He is *patient* and *tolerant*. Even when his sister Goma proves to be so nagging, Nimo maintains his cool and speaks with ease and calm to her explaining why he could not go to see her while she was sick. Even when Appiah is angry with him over Adu's behaviour, Nimo still greets him and keeps no grudge. He tells Adu that Appiah is a good man and he encourages Adu to always respect him.

He is *parental* and *responsible*. He instructs and encourages good behaviour in his children. He tells Adu to always embrace the values of hard work as well as respect for other people. His way of instruction is through folk tales and stories that have a moral lesson. He teaches Adu about the different herbs and even tells him never to get money from the people he treats. His instruction has a great impact on the life of the growing Adu.

He is a *loving husband* and *caring father*. He loves and respects his wife Birago. He is also concerned about the welfare of his children and family as a whole. When Adu gets a nightmare, Nimo gets so concerned about the meaning of the dream that he even seeks the help of Yaro. The death of his wife and daughter is a big blow to Nimo. He cries endlessly and even breaks down emotionally. He meets his tragic death when he tries to rescue Adu from drowning in the flooded river.

He represents the positive attributes of tradition and culture. He refuses to involve spirits in his practice of herbalism. He embraces the spirit of communalism and treats the people free of charge as tradition warrants. He is superstitious and contradictory in the way he deals with Adu's dream when he seeks Yaro's assistance. This action embodies the conflict between tradition and religion. His concern foreshadows the tragedy that eventually befalls the family.

Goma

Goma is Nimo's sister and Adu's aunt as well as the antagonist in the novel. From the time she is introduced she is surrounded by some kind of mystery. Adu's first impression about her is that 'she sounded an alarm within him.' Every time he looks at her he is repelled from her and 'something pushed him away'. Her presence is completely disturbing and baffling to the growing boy as summarized below:

His father and his aunt were talking. He wished he could hear what they were talking about. The mystery surrounding this woman was still plaguing him...' (Page 37)

She is a very nagging woman who constantly tries to find fault with everyone. She incessantly blames her brother for neglecting her after their father's death and concentrating on his family. She is cross with him that he had not gone to see her while she was sick. Nimo does not really understand why his sister acts so weird and nagging with him. However he remains patient and calm with her.

Unlike her brother Nimo, Goma is intolerant and impatient. She is a woman given to quick and violent anger that she exercises no restraint in punishing Adu when he tries to stop her from taking money from Mansa as appreciation for Adu's treatment of Anane's snake bite. She badly assaults and insults the boy calling him 'foolish boy...son of a goat.' She is only restrained by Anane's mother from inflicting further pain on the boy.

Her relationship with Adu exposes her as a callous and cold hearted woman. She punishes the boy at her will and treats him with cruelty and impunity. She shows no care whatsoever and gives him hard tasks and never appreciates anything he does. This even affects Adu's performance at school and enlists in him severe hatred for her. She shows no pity for the already grieving child even when he is sick and shows no regret for her evil actions.

She is selfish and egocentric. She is devoid of any sympathy or empathy for other people. She continuously blames her brother for neglecting her after their father's death and thinks of herself alone. She is obsessed with a selfish sense of entitlement which blinds her from seeing and valuing human relationship. She deprives Ama of her parents for about fourteen years until the truth catches up with her when Ama discovers her true father.

Goma is secretive and mysterious. From the time she visits Nimo's home, Adu realizes that she is surrounded with some kind of mystery. Her behaviour betrays a feeling of guilt in her. On learning that Yeboah has come to the village, she hastily packs up her property and sets off for Buama. She adopts a nagging behaviour as a defense for her small secret. She enters into a secret pact with Mansa to keep the secret of Ama's parentage. However this does not last long because soon or later the truth is revealed exposing her to great shame and public embarrassment.

She is greedy and materialistic. She quickly takes the money that Mansa brings as a token of appreciation for Adu's treatment of her son's snake bite. She pretends to receive the money in the name of custom. She is very disappointed and upset when Adu interrupts her selfish agenda. She severely beats and insults him calling him a foolish son of a goat.

She is a symbol of evil and darkness. Her character is used in the story to create a sad and gloomy atmosphere which enlists our sympathy towards Adu. She demonstrates that dark side of human nature dogged by selfishness and cruelty. Goma however displays a human side by breaking down emotionally when Adu comes to seek her forgiveness.

Yaro

Yaro is a young Christian preacher and a close friend of Adu. He is one of the people who migrate from the north to come and work on the cocoa farms for the Ashanti men. He proves quite hardworking and diligent in his work. He embraces the Christian teachings about work and emphasizes it as a value. Much as he is a small bodied man he astounds the villagers with the amount of work he does.

He is quite friendly and sociable. Though much older than Adu, Yaro has sincere regard for the young boy and treats him just like a fellow adult. He takes him along with him to his preaching missions and intimately talks to him about different subjects; about life; suffering; death; salvation among others. He comforts and consoles him after the tragic death of his parents restoring in him a sense of hope and optimism.

Much as many people do not believe in what he preaches, Yaro remains persistent and devoted to his evangelization work. He moves from village to village preaching the gospel. He is quite tolerant to the criticism of all sorts from the villagers. In spite of calling him several names and insulting him, Yaro does not give up on his mission work.

He is optimistic and hopeful. He does not lose hope when he is abused and criticised by the villagers. He does not feel tired answering their questions even when Adu thinks that the people of Buanyo are troublesome. Yaro replies that they are simply 'open hearted for the word of God'. He teaches his young friend very important lessons about hope and optimism by telling him that death is not the end of life.

He counsels and comforts both Nimo and Adu after the death of Birago and Yaa. He helps Adu to understand and to cope with the death of his father, mother and sister. He embodies the true Christian values of weeping with those who grieve and laughing with those who laugh. Much as Adu does not feel convinced about his words, their impact is quite strong in Adu's life. He has a strong message of hope and optimism that he passes over to the audience. He is a symbol of true Christian principles and values.

Appiah

He is also referred to as Boye's father. His description gives a picture of an ill-tempered and fierce person. He has 'an extremely dark complexion' that 'gave him a fierce look'. It is for his appearance that most of the boys in Susa fear him. He is also feared because 'he never spared anyone who tampered with his belongings'.

He is intolerant and quite impatient. Unlike Nimo, Appiah has a violent fit of anger that is demonstrated when he finds Adu and his friends about to steal his orange fruits. He whips the boys and is not happy that Nimo treats the matter so lightly. He does not listen to Nimo's advice about how to discipline children but storms out of the compound in anger. Even when Nimo meets him along the way and greets him, he refuses to respond.

Appiah however undergoes change when his wife is bitten by a cobra. He runs to Nimo who expressly administers treatment to the wife and she gets better. His attitude towards Nimo changes from then onwards. This transformation of character is also portrayed when he goes to Buama and finds Adu in a pathetic state. He goes to Goma and asks if he could take the boy back to Susa but Goma stubbornly refuses.

He is also very relevant in driving the plot of the novel. His visit to Buama and coincidental meeting with Adu sparks off a number of events. He coincidentally learns of Ama's true parentage and conveys the news to Yeboah, the rightful father. He returns to Buama with Yeboah to claim for his daughter.

Yeboah

He is the landlord and owns most of the farms in Susa. The village is named after his late wife Susa who had died in a car accident. Before his marriage to Susa, Yeboah is described as ruthless and intolerant. He is quite impatient with his tenants and would always find a bone of contention with any of the farmers at any time. His wife however transforms him into a tolerant and patient man.

The death of his wife becomes a turning point in his life. He decides to shift his home to Abenase and comes to Susa less frequently and treats his tenants with respect. His grief is escalated by the fact that while he had recovered the body of his wife, the baby was not found.

He is respected by most of the tenants in Susa and whenever he comes to the village, everybody is eager to have him around that he is forced to extend his stay for more days. He is friendly and sociable to the tenants and this is why he commands respect from them.

The death of his wife and the disappearance of his daughter have a strong impact on his life. He becomes withdrawn and comes to Susa less frequently. He is very excited about the news that his daughter had been found and expressly rushes to Buama to claim for her. The reunion of daughter and father is one of those happy moments in the novel.

Ofori and Beckie

Ofori is Adu's teacher in Buama. He is introduced as a short stout man who is also tolerant and patient and rarely 'lost his temper'. He is kind and considerate to his pupils and commands their respect without using any force. He has the ability of holding his pupils in disturbing suspense.

He is principled and professional in his work. He is concerned about the future of his pupils and their discipline. He does not compromise with the students conduct and is strict on encouraging positive behaviour. When he enters his classroom there is total silence and order.

He is a strict disciplinarian whose endeavour is to encourage positive attributes in his pupils. He punishes the late comers and roll calls for absenteeism. When Adu comes late to school, teacher Ofori understands his problem and reason why he has arrived late but still gives him a punishment lest he 'becomes hardened against authority because of what he suffered at home.'

He is tolerant and forgiving. He is well known by his pupils for being tolerant and patient unlike other short people who were so impatient and intolerant. He rarely loses his temper and disciplines them with love. He gives Adu a punishment of working in the school garden not as a punishment but rather to teach him the value of hard work.

He is an understanding man. He takes it upon himself to find out about Adu's relationship with his aunt and realizes how much trouble the boy is going through. When Adu goes missing in class he takes the trouble to call Ama from her class to find out the whereabouts of the boy. He understands Adu's plight in the hands of his aunt and later on offers to adopt him as his own son.

He is loving and caring. He shows great love and care to his pupils especially Adu. Adu confides in him because it is only Teacher Ofori that understands and shows that he loves him. He adopts Adu and treats him like his own child. His love for Beckie is considered true love that eventually culminates into a happy marriage.

He teaches Adu the true Christian values of hard work, patience and forgiveness. He encourages the young Adu to forgive his aunt and takes him back to Buama to ask for forgiveness from his aunt - a gesture that brings relief to the young boy and gives him a peace of mind. He teaches the reader the value of hard work and punctuality in

life. His marriage to Teacher Beckie is a celebrated moment in the course of the novel. Teacher Ofori also helps in developing the theme of education and parenting.

Beckie on the other hand is also portrayed as a virtuous and intelligent woman. She is loved by her students and is the attraction of several men who want to marry her. She however uses her intelligence to select the best out of the many.

Ama

She is Goma's adopted daughter. She is sharply contrasted with Goma. Although she is not exposed to physical torture by Goma, she is also a victim of deprivation and abuse. She is deprived of her father after her mother's death and kept in a false belief that Goma is her true mother.

She is friendly and sociable. From the time she is introduced she is a very friendly character with a unique display of kindness and goodness. She does not take long to become friends with Yaa and the two girls fetch firewood and water together. In spite of Goma's ranting and complaints about Adu, Ama still maintains a close relationship with him. When they are travelling to Buama Adu notices that Ama could 'not connect with her mother' and 'she looked different physically and her friendliness was unmistakable.'

She is innocent and guiltless. She is an innocent victim of Goma's selfishness and deprivation. She is deprived of her parentage by Goma for fourteen years hiding her from her true parents. When she eventually learns of her true parentage, she cries uncontrollably and runs all the way to Mansa and later to Goma asking about her rightful parents.

She is helpful and supportive. While they are travelling to Buama with Adu, Ama takes it upon herself to cheer him up. She tells him about school in Buama and about the teachers. This gives Adu something to look up to in Buama much as he is afraid of the unknown. This orientation helps Adu to settle in school easily and faster. He quickly gets good friends and works hard at his studies.

She is emotional and sensitive. She cries inconsolably when she learns that Goma is not her real mother. When Adu breaks to her the news that Goma is not her actual mother, Ama runs all the way to Mansa's house and then later to Goma. She cries all day long. She seems to have lived a life of a lie and not even Goma can console her. She is used to show the callousness of human nature when she is deprived of her father for fourteen years.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Optimism/Hope

The central theme in the novel is hope/optimism. Amidst all the challenges that Adu faces, he is encouraged by Yaro to leave everything to God. Yaro is actually the voice of reason that encourages Adu never to give up on life because better things are yet to come. After the death of his mother and sister and later his father Adu is overwhelmed by grief that he questions the existence of God. He is desperate and has lost hope for living. It is Yaro who rekindles his hope by telling him that:

‘God is able to bring something good out of a bad situation...’ (page 82)

The death of his father undoes the little hope that could have remained. He is taken to Buama to live with his notorious aunt, Goma. She is oppressive and abusive at the same time. She mistreats and tortures Adu to an extent that he contemplates committing suicide. However, amidst all these turbulent times, Adu’s hope is rejuvenated when he hears Yaro’s voice:

Your father wants you to live...he wants you to live for him. His life has ended but yours is not.(page 128)

Adu has a constant longing for a loving and caring family after the death of his father and mother plus sister. He is full of grief and pain. He is so lonely and secluded. His aunt’s mistreatment greatly affects his studies. He feels unloved and unlovable. However amidst all the isolation he finds love in Teacher Ofori and Beckie who adopt him and treat him as their own child. This revives his hope and optimism.

Hope and optimism is also portrayed at the end of the novel when after several twists and turns in his life he finds a life partner in Ama with whom he has been friends for a long time. At this moment he has completed school and living an independent life. The once grief child attains happiness and fulfillment. Hope and optimism finally triumphs over the power of evil and adversity.

Perseverance/endurance:

The story of the novel shows how perseverance /endurance can lead to success. After the death of his sister and his parents, Adu is left devastated. He is taken on by his ruthless aunt, Goma, who exposes him to physical as well as psychological torture. She gives him very difficult tasks to perform which interfere with his school program and affect his performance at school. She beats him at will and abuses and insults the boy whenever she wants.

The torture and emotional abuse becomes too severe to be borne by the young boy. At one point, Adu loses faith in life and wants to kill himself. But due to persistence and endurance he overcomes his grief and becomes a useful member of the community and finally marries Ama a woman with whom they have shared their joys and sorrows.

Poverty/suffering:

Poverty and suffering go hand in hand. Adu's schoolmates are poorly dressed and they look pathetic. There's drought and hunger in the north that forces several people to leave their homes to come to Susa to work as casual labourers. Yaro and Mahama are just but an example of the people who left their homes because of hunger and poverty. Yaro tells his young friend, Adu that people are even driven into killing themselves because of poverty and starvation.

In the novel, suffering is caused by both humans as well as natural calamities. Adu's suffering is partly caused by fate. The death of his parents can be described as the hand of fate. His mother and sister are killed by a falling tree in the storm while his father drowns in a flooded river. The death of his family exposes him to untold mental suffering.

Adu's suffering in the hands of his evil aunt shows suffering caused by fellow humans. She mistreats the vulnerable child giving him hard and difficult tasks. She beats and assaults him all the time without cause that the young boy contemplates committing suicide. However, Darmani demonstrates to the reader that suffering is not the end of life. It is rather part of life and there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Good versus evil:

The novel also shows the conflict between the power of good and evil; Light and Darkness. Adu's dream portends ill luck and misfortune. In his dream he finds himself in the heart of the forest alone and then a leopard emerges from the bushes and vigorously chases him. By tradition, to be chased by a leopard in a dream foreshadows evil and death. From the start it seems Adu's life is claimed by the dark forces of evil and darkness. The dream worries his father that he seeks the help of Yaro asking him to pray for his friend.

Indeed when tragedy strikes Adu's family, we see the forces of darkness at play. He is left to his aunt's hand and is taken to Buama by his evil aunt who tortures him physically and psychologically. Goma is a symbol of evil. She represents the darkness in man's heart that leads to the suffering of others. She is a callous and ruthless woman who has no kind feelings for anyone. Adu becomes so desperate that he contemplates committing suicide.

However amidst all the suffering and grief, goodness still prevails. Adu's effort is rewarded by the chief and later he is adopted by Ofori and Beckie who treat him as their own son. He completes his studies and even marries the beautiful Ama. The story demonstrates how good overcomes evil.

The novel further shows how evil is punished and good is rewarded. Goma receives payment in her own currency first of all when Ama's true parentage is exposed. For a long time she had deceived people that Ama was her biological child depriving the rightful father, Yeboah custody of his child. The secret is leaked by the only person she bribes to keep it and that's Mansa. She ends up losing custody of the child to the rightful father and is left lonely and pathetic.

The role of the supernatural/superstition:

Adu's dream is not taken lightly by Nimo because dreaming about a leopard is a bad omen. He is quite disturbed that he seeks interpretation from Yaro. Yaa's sleep-talking leaves her mother ill at ease. It seems to foreshadow misfortune.

The novel also discusses the theme of superstition and spiritism. Nimo's father insisted he embraces it but Nimo refuses to practice it. There is a belief that dreams fore shadow the destiny of man. When Adu gets a bad dream, Nimo is very disturbed. Birago's dream is another aspect of superstition and foreboding as it causes a sad mood. An invisible hand is suspected as the cause of the double tragedy (the death of mother and a daughter and shortly after the death of a father/ husband which death is described as a sorrow, a menacing omen.

Child abuse:

Child abuse is portrayed in Goma's brutality and callous character. She treats Adu with a lot of impunity making him to do all sorts of work even when he is meant to be in school. She beats and insults the young boy at will making him lose hope in life. the other form of child abuse is exempted in the way Goma denies Ama the knowledge of her rightful parentage. She keeps it a secret for a very long time but finaslly her small secret is exposed to her total humiliation.

Tradition

The skill in herbal treatment is an aspect of traditional culture. Nimo inherits it from his father and he is to pass it on to his son. He is so careful in the administration of his treatment because he believes that it is a gift from his fore fathers. He does it free of charge because he believes that if he charges people for the admiration of herbs it will attract ill luck to his family.

Superstition and the belief in dreams are part of tradition. Adu's dream is taken seriously by his father as a sign of danger. Similarly when Yaa talks in her sleep, Birago gets so worried that it may be a sign of bad luck.

Goma tries to use tradition to cunningly get money from Anane's mother. This shows how unscrupulous people can use tradition for their personal gains.

Love:

The novel explores different shades of love. There is filial love that is displayed between parent and child. Adu's mother is so fond of her children. She tells them stories and takes time to correct them when they go wrong. Yeboah is so heart broken when his wife dies and the daughter disappears. This affects a great part of his life. He is however happy and excited to be reunited with his daughter.

Love is also manifested in form of friendship and loyalty. The kind of friendship that Yaro has with Adu is so selfless and genuine. Similarly, Anane's friendship with Adu is so protective and selfless. In spite of Charlie's insistence that he should include Adu's name on the list of late comers, Anane refuses for friendship's sake.

Another shade of love is the romantic type. This is depicted first by Ofori and teacher Beckie and then later Adu and Ama. This kind of love is pure and selfless and finally leads to marriage. The last but perhaps not the least is agape love that is preached by Yaro. It is that greater love that God has for humanity. It is forgiving, sacrificial and selfless.

THE STYLE/NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Description

Perhaps one of the greatest stylistic features of the novel *Grief Child* is the use of description. The author brings to life his narrative by giving detailed description of people, places, actions and feelings as well as the weather. The physical description of the village of Susa brings in view a typical African setting with a traditional lifestyle. The environment is typical of an agrarian society that is highly dependent on farming and perhaps hunting. The weather is equally unpredictable causing a lot of tension and anxiety among the characters. The nights are dark and sinister creating fear and suspense and also foreshadowing death and gloom.

Symbolism

Symbolism is where something concrete is used to represent something abstract. The author uses quite a number of symbols ranging from characters, events and things to represent certain ideas. For instance the character of Nimo is used to represent tradition and culture. He represents the positive attributes of tradition as well as

culture. He is a skilled herbalist who uses his skill to treat people free of charge. Yaro is another symbolic character who represents the Christian values while teacher Ofori can be interpreted as a symbol of education. Goma is a symbol of evil and the darkness that dwells in people's hearts.

Imagery

There are images of light and darkness used by the author to portray the conflict of good versus evil. The nights in Susa are characterized by fear and gloom. There is tension and uncertainty that accompany the fall of darkness.

RELEVANCE OF THE NOVEL

Question:

What makes the text relevant to the modern reader?

The novel portrays several aspects of African culture and tradition. Nimo's skill of herbalism is typical of African culture and tradition. He is a skilled herbalist who treats people free of charge as admonished by his ancestors. Other aspects of the African culture are superstition and belief in the supernatural. Adu's dream worries Nimo and it is interpreted as a sign of ill luck or death. The division of labour according to gender is a typical arrangement of the African culture. The men go to the field to cultivate and hunt while the women are cut for domestic chores.

The novel also portrays the value of education. Adu's story depicts the challenges that a growing child in Africa encounters while he struggles to acquire an education. The novel portrays education as a means to liberation and greater freedom. Adu's persistence in school finally wins him the love of his life and freedom from his oppressive aunt. He becomes independent and happy at the end of the novel.

The story also depicts the power of optimism and hope. It teaches the reader the need for this greater value in life. It cannot go without mention that while Adu undergoes great tribulation and suffering inflicted by fate and human unkindness, he still hangs on to the little hope that he is inspired in him by his childhood friend, Yaro. It is the hope that enables him to overcome all the challenges that he faces in the course of the story.

The novel further reveals how good overcomes evil. Adu's life is a life claimed by the forces of darkness and counter claimed by the power of goodness. The death of his parents and only sister is perhaps the darkest occurrence in the life of the grief child. His suffering in the hands of his evil aunt climaxes into a state of hopelessness and Adu contemplates committing suicide. However, the novel teaches one of the greatest lessons that goodness will always triumph over evil.

It also teaches that there is always light at the end of the tunnel. Adu is faced with a number of challenges in life that render him hopeless and desperate. He loses his parents and his loving sister at quite a tender age. He is later taken to Buma by his notorious aunt Goma who subjects him to torture and suffering. She gives him hard tasks and treats him with immense brutality. Amidst all these he is adopted by teacher Ofori and Beckie who help him to complete his studies and achieves greater freedom and happiness. He even marries Ama the girl of his dreams.

It also follows that what goes around comes around. The novel presents an important lesson on poetic justice and divine retribution that no matter how long it takes, evil shall be punished and virtue rewarded. A case in point is Goma, Adu's aunt who subjects him to a lot of torture and suffering. She is finally embarrassed and ashamed when it is discovered that Ama is not her biological child. She is left lonely and ostracized for her deceit and lack of compassion.

Questions

1. Explain the meaning of the title to the novel, *Grief Child*.
2. Describe the character of Adu as presented in the novel, *Grief Child*.
3. What important lessons can a modern reader draw from the novel, *Grief Child*?
4. In what ways is tradition presented in the novel, *Grief Child*?
5. Explain the theme of child abuse as portrayed in the novel, *Grief Child*.
6. Describe the character of Goma as presented in the novel, *Grief Child*.
7. In what ways does the author attract our sympathy towards Adu in *Grief Child*?
8. What things happen in the novel *Grief Child* that happen in your own society?
9. In what ways does the author show how good overcomes evil in the novel, *Grief Child*?
10. Describe the character of Nimo as presented in the novel, *Grief Child*.
11. Explain the role played by Yaro in the development of the novel *Grief Child*.

*The Return of Mgofu***INTRODUCTION****The author**

Prof. Francis Imbuga is not only a renowned Kenyan play wright but also an actor who has performed in many plays both on stage and on television. He was the recipient of the inaugural Kenya National Academy of Sciences Distinguished Award in Play Writing for 1986. Among his other plays are *The burning of rags*, *Game of Silence*, *The successor*, *Betrayal in the City*, *Man of Kafira* and *Aminata*.

Setting

The action happens in Nderema and in Mndika, two neighbour countries. The conflicts in Mndika force some citizens to flee the country and settle in Nderema where they are received well. They set up camp, Kadesa's camp. The first scene happens in an open market place where we have people from all walks of life to show that the story in this play is meant to appeal to all of us. Socially, Imbuga mainly shows two communities in Mndika who fight leading to some to take refuge in Nderema, the neighboring country. The time shows both contemporary and traditional activities

A synopsis

A conflict arises between two formerly friendly communities in Mndika, an imaginary African state. It's the second conflict of its kind. Just like in the first conflict, the losing community is forced to take refuge in a neighboring country, Nderema, where they find a second home. Among the many that flee is a great elderly seer, Mgofu Ngoda who leaves with a young pregnant wife. He dies soon after crossing the border. His heavy wife is helped to find her way to Kadesa's shrine where there is also a camp for those who fled Mndika in the first conflict. She gives birth soon after arrival to a son who is named after his late father, Mgofu Ngoda. Mgofu becomes a very useful person both in Kadesa's shrine and in Nderama. His counsel is sought and he is such a strong pillar in Nderema's development. His son becomes the personal assistant to the Prime Minister of Nderema and the personal doctor of the leader there. His daughter is also a well-respected figure who is studying international relations at the University of Southampton. The new progressive leader in Mndika, the country where Mgofu has his roots learns of Mgofu's existence. He embarks on efforts to bring back Mgofu Ngoda to Mndika, where he belongs. He sends emissaries who convince Mgofu to be the chief guest at the forthcoming National Remembrance Day. Mgofu graces the occasion with his daughter, only for his health situation to deteriorate as he makes his speech.

The title

Mgofu Ngoda, is a Mndikan great seer who flees his country and dies in a foreign land. He leaves behind a pregnant wife who soon bears a son, Mgofu Ngoda. The son grows up in a foreign land and becomes very useful to the people of Nderema and as well as his own people who are also refugees in the same land. Mwami Mhando, a new peace loving leader embarks on efforts to bring Mgofu Ngoda back home.

The title hence shows two forms of return; the old Mgofu returns to earth through his son and this son returns to Mndika, his homeland on the request of Mwami Mhando to be the chief guest at the National Remembrance Day celebrations. The reincarnation of Mgofu through his son demonstrates the African belief that the dead are not dead but rather present with us to influence the affairs of men. This is reinforced by the presence of Thori and Thoriwa, the messengers from beyond.

The physical return of Mgofu Ngoda to Mndika is an olive branch to the warring communities and the restoration of peace to Mndika. It marks the end of ethnic conflict and restoration of lasting peace to Mndika. Mwami Mhando as a peace loving leader realises the importance of having Mndikan refugees return home as a step towards the reconciliation of the warring communities.

The title is therefore a wakeup call for peace and reconciliation among the people of Mndika. The return of Mgofu Ngoda is in a way a step towards correcting the past wrongs as Mwami Mhando says:

“...To achieve lasting peace... our people will need a strong reminder of where the rain began to beat us. Our people need to be made to touch the scars of bad governance...”

The title is a demonstration of the old adage that east or west home is best for rest. It is a wake up call for the spirit of patriotism and devotion to one's country. Much as Mgofu Ngoda is born and raised in Ndereema, he still has strong roots in Mndika. His daughter regularly visits Mndika because she has a special connection with her ancestry. The return to Mndika is quite a relief to the old seer and when he finally stands to speak at the remembrance day ceremony his speech begins with the words “I am home...yes I'm home.”

Mgofu's speech is a message of peace and reconciliation to the people of Mndika. He admonishes them to respect human life and blood. This is a powerful message for the people who have lived in conflict and violence. His message resonates with Mwami Mhando's theme of the day that says “NEVER AGAIN.”

PLOT SUMMARY

Act 1 Scene1

In an open market place, Thori and Thoriwa his wife arrive with Thori pushing his wife in a wheelchair. They are messengers from the ancestors. Their dialogue reveals a conflict between two communities that had once lived in harmony. Suddenly there is aggression from one side towards another leading to loss of life, property and many flee the land to take refuge in a neighboring country. Among those that flee is the great old half blind seer, Mgofu Ngoda. He leaves only with his heavily pregnant young wife to Nderema. Mgofu dies soon after crossing the border and his wife is helped to Kadesa's shrine where she gives birth soon after arrival.

Analysis

This brief part acts as a prologue that helps us understand the source of the conflict and prepares us for what is to happen in the next scene. This scene also shows a clear connection between the dead and the living.

Questions

1. Explain the role played by Thori and Thoriwa as presented in this scene.
2. Explain at least two themes brought out in this scene.
3. What important lessons can the reader learn from this part of the play?
4. What is the importance of this scene to your understanding of the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?

Act 1 Scene 2

The action takes place in Kadesa's shrine also known as '*farewell to the ogres*'. Mude, a messenger from Mwami Rucho, the head of Nderema has been sent to Kadesa to warn her that a new conflict is brewing in Mndika. There is a lot of killings with the killers claiming to have been trained in Kadesa's camp to avenge their original suffering that led to their being refugees in Nderema. However, Mwami Rucho knows this is not true. Bizia urgently brings information of a heavily pregnant woman and a man who are being led to the shrine. They are victims of the fighting in Mndika, seeking refuge just like their forefathers were forced to do in the first madness (first conflict). Kadesa instructs that the strangers are admitted and given hospitality. The heavy woman soon gives birth. From the man, who is taken to be mad, we learn that the woman is the wife of the late seer, Mgofu Ngoda and that it is his son that has therefore been born to be his father's heir.

Analysis

This part of the play introduces us to a number of characters and the main stream action of the play. It lays the foundation for the action of the play by introducing the character of Mgofu Ngoda, the title character. Take note of the several proverbs and sayings used by the different characters in this scene.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mude as presented in this part of the play.
2. Explain at least two themes brought out in this part of the play.
3. How important is this scene to what happens later in the play?
4. Explain the role played by Kadesa in the play.
5. In what ways is Kadesa's shrine important to the play, *The Return of Mgofu*.
6. What is the significance of African proverbs and sayings in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?

Act 1 Scene 3

From Thori and Thoriwa, we learn that the child grows up to follow in the footsteps of his late father. He becomes a much respected person whose counsel is sought in many respects. Like his father, he is a seer. He is a symbol of unity and Nderema gains much from his wisdom. They also confirm that Nderema is now his home. We also learn that Mndika now has a very good leader, Mwami Mhando, an intelligent leader who is peace loving.

Analysis

This scene provides relief from the tension that is created in the previous scene by the news that there is a possibility of an outbreak of another genocide. The messengers from the ancestors are a connection of the world of the dead and the world of the living. They are a connection between the past and the present. They provide the audience with useful information especially about the past events.

Questions

1. Describe the characters of Thori and Thoriwa as presented in this scene.
2. Explain the importance of this scene to what happens later in the play.

Act 2. Scene 1

Mwami Mhando sends scouts to gather information about the existence of Mgofu in Nderema. The scouts have now returned and their revelations confirm that indeed, Mgofu Ngoda, the son of Mgofu Ngoda indeed exists. He is a great seer like his father, has lost his wife, has a son who is a personal doctor to the leader at Nderema, has a daughter studying in Europe and that he is now aged. Mwami Mhando resolves that Mgofu should be invited to grace the next national Remembrance Day celebrations.

Analysis

This scene takes us to Mndika and introduces the character of Mwami Mhando, the head of Mndika. He is presented as a peace loving and benevolent character.

Act 2.Scene 2

Mhando has summoned two elders to who he reveals his findings much to their shock. He stresses the need to bring Mgofu back home to where he belongs so that Mndika can gain from their own whom Nderema is currently gaining from. He also wants their advice on the people's demand that he should remain their leader. He reveals that his wife, Mama Enos has advised him to listen to the people and remain leader on condition that he brings back Mgofu and that he marries another wife. The elders leave to go and give thought to these conditions.

Analysis

This is perhaps one of the most important scenes in the play. The most dramatic event in this scene is changing the name of the elders of the inner circle from ESEL to SUJA. This development is just in line with the manipulative behaviour of most African leaders creating stooges and sycophants around themselves. It is ironic that while Mwami Mhando wants peace for Mndika, his decision to entrench himself in power seems to be a fertile ground for future conflict.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mwami Mhando as presented in this scene.
2. Explain at least two themes presented in this scene.
3. What is the role of the Sujas to your understanding of the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
4. Explain what you find interesting about this scene.
5. Compare and contrast the characters of Mtange and Mdanya as presented in this scene.

Act 3.Scene 1

The emissaries sent to talk to Mgofu to be the chief guest at the national Remembrance Day celebrations in Mndika have arrived. They have already delivered the leader's invitation and Mgofu has discussed it with his just returned daughter, Nora. Mgofu promises to give his answer after fourteen days. He also reveals the reason for having chosen to wait for such a number of days, to the emissaries' shock, Mama Enos has died, and according to tradition, there must be fourteen days of mourning.

Analysis

This scene introduces the character of Mgofu Ngoda and provides transition between the previous scene and the next one. The theme of tradition is also developed here.

Questions

1. Describe the characters of Mgofu and Nora as presented in this scene.
2. Explain at least two themes presented in this scene.
3. In what ways is this scene connected to the past events?

Act 3.Scene 2

It's Remembrance Day in Mndika and Mgofu is the chief guest at the celebrations. He is flanked by his daughter Nora who is also given an opportunity to address the gathering. Mgofu is introduced by Mwami Mhando and is invited to make his speech. His speech has undertones of unity and peaceful coexistence. It's not long before he is caught by a fit of cough which persists that he must be carried off the dais amidst worry among the people present. Thori and Thoriwa once again appear to give a befitting conclusion to the play.

Analysis

The final scene of the play provides hope and relief to the divided community of Mndika. There is hope that there is going to be lasting peace in Mndika and many are relieved that the old seer is finally back home. While the ending may be quite uncertain especially as pertaining the life of Mgofu Ngoda, there is much relief and calm.

Questions

1. How suitable is the ending of the play, the return of mgofu?
2. Describe the character of Mwami Mhando in this part of the play.
3. Explain the importance of the physical return of Mgofu to the people of Mndika.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Peace and unity

The play is a wakeup call for peace, unity and reconciliation. The people of Mndika have long been tormented by ethnic violence and conflict that has left many people dead and thousands exiled in the neighbouring countries of Nderema as well as Suguta. There is bad blood between neighbours resulting into fear and suspicion. Mwami Mhando, the new Mndikan leader comes with a message of peace and reconciliation by inviting back the Mndikan refugees who live in the neighbouring countries including Mgofu Ngoda the son of the old blind seer who is killed in the first madness. This to the people of Mndika is a ray of hope to a country polarized by conflict and prejudice. Mwami Mhando is very careful in the way he deals with his neighbours in order to avoid future conflict. The irony in the play is however presented in Mhando's decision to extend his term of office. To many this seems to be a fertile ground for future conflict. The messengers from the ancestors also come with a message of peace and reconciliation to the people of Mndika. As Thori says their message is to "shut the doors through which history repeats itself" by looking at the past.

Change

The playwright raises a concern about change. Like all traditional societies, the society in the play has strong tendencies of a conservative attitude. John Ruganda therefore uses the play to preach change to the society. The messengers from the ancestors come riding in a wheel chair to demonstrate the need for modern technology.

Education is also embraced as an avenue for change to the society. While Mgofu Ngoda is a traditionalist he endeavors to take his children to school which also uplifts them to positions of responsibility. His son is a personal assistant to the Prime Minister of Nderema while his daughter is pursuing a degree in international studies at the University of Southampton.

The messengers from the ancestors also come to preach change of attitude to the people of Mndika as a way to, maintaining lasting peace. The change of names of the elders of state for exceptional leadership to Suja is another symbol of political change.

Good leadership versus bad leadership

Just like most African writers, Francis Imbuga seems to agree that the greatest problem of Africa is not in the customs or culture but rather the failure in leadership. Ethnic conflict and violence seems to be firmly hinged on leadership failure. The play attacks leaders blaming their problems on colonialism and other people but themselves instead of looking for solutions to the problem. Suja Mtange represents such leaders who are engrossed in the blame game instead of working for the betterment of their people. He thinks the problems of Mndika are entirely caused by colonialism.

Violence

The play has a strong message that condemns violence and preaches peace and reconciliation among neighbours. Imbuga uses the play to expose the evil of ethnic violence and its consequences in society. The death of hundreds of people and the banishment of several others is all a result of ethnic violence and brutality within the Mndikan society. The messengers from the ancestors come purposely bearing a message of peace and reconciliation for the Mndikan society.

Enmity/Animosity between neighbours

The play is a crusade against enmity between neighbours and it is a wake call for unity and good neighbourliness. The Mndikan society has for long been polarized by ethnic violence and brutality that leaves many dead and others in exile. Kadesa's camp is clearly marked as a collection center for Mndikan refugees in Nderema. The enmity causes fear and suspicion among the different members of the community. It is for this reason that Mwami Mhando realises the need for reconciliation and peace between neighbours. He recalls all Mndikan refugees from Nderema starting with the old seer Mgofu Ngoda.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mwami Mhando:

He is the current leader of Mndika and is presented as an intelligent and able leader as Thori puts it that he has a 'good head above his shoulders'. He champions the idea of recalling Mndikan refugees from Nderema and other neighbouring countries including the son of the old seer Mgofu Ngoda. He realises the need to have all the sons of Mndika returning and rebuilding their country.

He is also peace loving and benevolent. He embraces peaceful means to conflict resolution as well as respecting his neighbours. His decision to invite the son of the old seer back to Mndika on Remembrance Day comes from his strong conviction that it will serve as a "strong reminder" to the people of where the rain began "to beat us". In other words it is to remind them of the evils of ethnic conflict and prejudice and hence put an end to such violence once and for all.

He is determined and resolute. Like any other good leader, Mwami Mhando shows great determination and singleness of purpose in his pursuit of good. He sends scouts to Nderema to get information about Mgofu Ngoda and even invites him to the celebrations of the National Remembrance Day. He takes the bull by the horns in preaching peace and reconciliation amongst the people of Mndika.

He is firm and strong in his leadership. Despite the frailty of his wife and her eventual death, he remains focused to the single purpose of pursuing lasting peace and building consensus among the people of Mndika. He attends the National Remembrance Day celebrations despite the fourteen day rule of mourning for his wife.

He is also presented as eloquent and outspoken. He undertakes to convince the elders of his inner circle about the need for the return of the old seer Mgofu Ngoda. He makes one of the most impassioned speeches in the play during the national Remembrance Day celebrations welcoming Mgofu Ngoda back to Mndika as well as his daughter. In his speech he also strongly condemns the violence and brutality of the past.

He is portrayed as an epitome of transformational leadership that is needed in Africa. He is an advocate of peace and unity among neighbours and teaches the audience very important lessons about the need for reconciliation among neighbours. He also teaches important lessons on good leadership and the need for patriotism. His gesture of inviting the old seer back to Mndika is an important development in the plot of the play. He gives hope and relief to the audience in the future of Mndika.

Mgofu Ngoda:

Mgofu Ngoda is the son of the old blind seer Mgofu Ngoda. He is the title character and at the center of the conversation in the play. He is presented as a symbolic character throughout the play. Though old and frail, Mgofu Ngoda is described as dignified and respectable character in Nderema as a seer and healer.

He is intelligent and gifted. Mgofu Ngoda is a gifted diviner who foretells the future. The gift of divination is inherited from his father the old seer who is killed in the first madness. He is respected throughout Nderema because of his gift of divination. He is able to understand that Mama Enos has died and had been buried even when he is not there physically.

He is a peace loving character loved and respected by the people of Nderema as well as the Mndikan refugee society in Nderema. Upon his return to Mndika on the national Remembrance Day, his message to the people of Mndika is to always respect human blood. This is a powerful message of peace and reconciliation.

He is patriotic and loyal. Much as he is born and raised in Nderema as a refugee, he still holds fond feelings and a strong sense of loyalty to Mndika and his people. It is for this reason that he readily accepts Mwami Mhando's invite to attend the national Remembrance Day celebrations flanked by his daughter.

He is a traditionalist who uses herbs and words to treat and heal. Besides being a diviner and healer, he also uses his words to heal people from different ailments and conjures rain. "His shrine is always filled with people wishing to be treated of one ailment or another." This makes him very popular in Nderema and the entire refugee population.

Mgofu Ngoda is important in shaping the narrative of the play. As the central character, he is the string that keeps the story of the play together and a close connect of the past to the future. This is an important aspect in reminding the Mndikan people about the consequences of ethnic violence and conflict. He is the voice of reconciliation and peace. He teaches us important an important lesson that east west home is best for rest.

Kedesa:

She is the leader of the exiles from Mndika after the first madness, now settled in Nderema. She is a priestess at the shrine of Kitagali and also revered as the "mother of many". She is one of the Mndikan exiles in Nderema; Kadesa flees Mndika during the first madness and settles in the forest of the ogres in northern Nderema where she establishes a powerful shrine.

She is a peace loving character as well as hospitable and for this reason her shrine is also called the shrine of peace. This is where the Mndikan refugees settle after the first

madness. She advocates for peace and reconciliation by condemning the savage behaviour of her people back in Mndika. She names her shrine “farewell to the ogres” to show her distaste for violence and brutality.

She is kind and empathetic. She nurtures and nurses the exiles fleeing from ethnic violence in Mndika. She receives Nora, Mgofu’s pregnant wife with open hands amidst suspicion and threats that there is fresh violence in Mndika. She even helps her to safely deliver the baby who is also named Mgofu Ngoda. She provides comfort and solace to the exiles and for this reason she is named “mother of many”.

She is strong-willed and resolute. For this reason she is revered and respected by her followers. Though she is old, she bears strong influence upon her followers. Her shrine is a threat to the divisive Mndikan establishment and at the outbreak of the second madness; she is accused of masterminding the second madness in Mndika.

She is traditional as well as superstitious. She treats people of different ailments using traditional means and has a strong belief in the power of tradition. She believes in dreams and seriously takes them as a warning for the future.

Mwami Rucho:

He is the leader of Nderema during the outbreak of the second madness and takes the trouble to give the Mndikan exiles asylum and protection. He is kind and considerate in the way he deals with the exiles from Mndika for example when he sends a messenger to Kadesa to warn her of impending danger or rather an eminent outbreak of a fresh conflict. Though he does not physically come on stage we are able to learn from the comments of Kadesa and Mude that he is a well-intentioned leader who is also peace-loving. He welds respect among his people as well as the refuge community for Mndika.

Thori and Thoriwa

These are also referred to as messengers from beyond. Formerly husband and wife, but now joined in death as messengers from the ancestors, Thori and Thoriwa come to warn against human brutality and ethnic violence. They are victims of the first madness and their presence gives the audience back ground information about how the conflict had begun. Being messengers from the next world they are presented as wise and judicious as compared to the living. Their role in the play is to give the prologue that lays foundation for the play and also introduce the major characters. They comment on events and characters hence enable the audience or the reader to appreciate them better. They are both peaceful as well peace-loving. Their message to the living is to remind them of the past to help them make better decisions for a better future.

DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Symbolism

The play wright employs symbolism to develop some of the major concerns in the play. Symbolism is where a writer uses objects or characters to represent abstract ideas. In the play, the play wright employs a number of character symbols to bring out the thematic concerns. The character of Mugofu Ngoda is used to bring out universal goodness and sense of humanity that prevails irrespective of one's origin or race. He is also a symbol of the influence of the dead in the affairs of the living. This can be explained by his ability to commune with the spirits. The gift of divination and healing represent the positive aspects of traditionalism.

Mwami Mhando can also be described as a symbol of unity and reconciliation. He makes conscious effort to bring back the Mndikan exiles from Nderema beginning with Mgofu Ngoda, the son of the old blind seer. The wheel chair used by the messengers from beyond represents modern science and technology that is used to make work light and easy movement. They also represent the influence of the dead in the affairs of the living. This is a typical African belief that the dead are not dead. Kadesa's shrine is a symbol of peace and reconciliation. No wonder it is also known as a farewell to the ogres.

Irony

One of the most important ironies in the play surrounds the life of the old blind seer, Mgofu Ngoda. It is very ironic that while he is blind he is able to foresee the future and provide useful divination to the people who have complete sight. He seems to see better in his blindness than the people with complete sight and his death is ironically his rebirth. This demonstrates the principle of the reincarnation or restoration. The irony also helps to bring out the theme of tradition that is based on the belief that the dead are not dead.

Contrast

There is a sharp contrast between life and death; the past and the present; the dead and the living; birth and death. The different contrasts used in the play are very important in comparing situations as well as characters attitudes and therefore depict the motivation of their actions. The contrast between life and death is brought out by the presence of the messengers from beyond. They narrate the

Music

The messengers from beyond are accompanied by strange angelic music to indicate the spirit world. This music also signifies the purity and enlightenment in the spiritual world. The two messengers from beyond display better knowledge and judgment than the living. They admonish and encourage the audience to embrace the common good and show respect for human life.

Dreams

Dreams are used as a connection between the living and the dead or the spiritual world. They are used to foreshadow the future and as a warning against imminent danger. Kadesa talks about dreaming when she is eating meat and she quickly interprets it as a warning from the spirit world against the outbreak of the second madness.

RELEVANCY TO THE SOCIETY

What makes the play relevant to the society? What lessons does the play teach to the modern reader?

The play teaches us a very important lesson that it is better to live in peace than in conflict as conflict between neighbours may have dire consequences if not well managed. Many people are killed and others banished from their homes due to the conflict in the play. The messengers from beyond narrate gruesome stories of how innocent people are killed and others have to flee the country to save their lives.

Good always triumphs over evil is another fundamental lesson that the play teaches us. It does not matter how long it takes, there is always a time when the power of goodness thrives over the power of evil. The return of Mgofu to Mndika comes with hope and relief to the people of Mndika. It is a solemn promise that what happened in the past shall not happen again.

The play further shows the destructive effects of war. The first and second madness in Mndika leave the society divided and in a state of disarray. Apart from the numerous deaths that are caused by the conflict, many people's livelihoods come to a standstill. Mgofu Ngonda the old blind seer is killed in the madness leaving his pregnant wife, Nora behind. She is helped by Adonija to Kadesa's shrine where she is helped by the kind Priestess to deliver a son.

The return of Mgofu also encourages the reader or the audience to value human life. This is a strong message that Mgofu Ngoda delivers to the people at the Remembrance day celebrations in Mndika. Kadesa also tells Bizia that "life is much more than love..." she unconditionally helps the Mndikan refugees in Nderema to demonstrate her respect for human life.

The play also teaches the reader the need for reconciliation and unity between and among neighbours. After a protracted conflict among the people of Mndika, the society is left polarized and divided. This becomes a fertile ground for future conflict that threatens peace and harmony in Mndika. It takes the foresight and clear headed leadership of Mwami Mhando to restore unity and preach reconciliation by extending an olive branch to the Mndikan refugees to return to Mndika.

There is no doubt that east or west, home is best for rest. After a long period of time in exile, the Mndikan refugees in Nderema have a strong longing for their home

country. The physical return of Mgofu Ngonda to Mndika comes with strong sentiments of nationalism as well as patriotism. In his own words Mgofu Ngoda summarises this by saying “home, as you know, is where a man returns to sow his best seed...”this no doubt summarises his happiness and joy to be back home.

The play also expounds on the causes, challenges and solutions to the refugee crisis in Africa. Kadesa’s shrine is a typical refugee camp that helps in the resettlement of the fleeing population from Mndika because of ethnic violence. It has got to be remembered that the greatest contributor of the refugee crisis in Africa is ethnic violence. Francis Imbuga comes up with some practical solutions to the refugee crisis and that is reconciliation and compromise between and among neighbouring communities.

The return of Mgofu also exposes the weakness of leaders blaming colonialism for the present challenges that affect the people they lead. The play is a call for practical solutions to Africa’s problems through self-examination and reconciliation other than blaming the colonialists.

Questions for further discussion

1. Explain the meaning of the title to the play, *The Return of Mgofu*.
2. What is the role played by the two messengers from beyond to your understanding of the major issues in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
3. Describe the character of Mwami Mhando as presented in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*.
4. What are the major causes of conflict in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*? How are these conflicts resolved in the play?
5. What important lessons does the play, *The Return of Mgofu* teach to the modern reader?
6. How important is Kadesa’s shrine in your understanding the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
7. Describe the character of Mgofu Ngonda as presented in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*.
8. How satisfying is the ending of the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
9. Select at least two scenes in the play, *The Return of Mgofu* and explain why you find them interesting.
10. What is the role played by elders Mutange and Mdanya in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*?
11. What things happen in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*, that also happen in your society?
12. Explain the roles played by each one of the following characters in the play, *The Return of Mgofu*:
 - a) Bizia
 - b) Mude
 - c) Adonija
 - d) Suja Mdanya

*The Merchant of Venice***BACKGROUND****The Author**

William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in England in 1564. Although his exact birthdate was not recorded, it would have been sometime in the week preceding his baptism on April 26 and is therefore celebrated on April 23.

As a performer with the Lord Chamberlain's Men and the primary writer of the theater company, Shakespeare was a prominent and popular fixture in the London theater scene and in London society. His company changed its name to the King's Men when James I ascended the throne in 1603, and the company attended James's coronation.

In all Shakespeare wrote 37 plays. The 14th of these was *The Merchant of Venice*, which was written and performed between 1596 and 1597. The play's content draws from several sources, including a few Italian poems and stories as well as a play by Shakespeare's contemporary and rival Christopher Marlowe called *The Jew of Malta*, first performed around 1589. Much of Shakespeare's personal life remains a point of speculation for scholars because little verifiable information is available beyond official records. His father was a prosperous and respected figure, and young William studied Greek and Latin language and literature at King's New School in Stratford. Shakespeare married Anne Hathaway in Stratford in 1582, and they had two daughters and a son, the latter of whom died in childhood. Shakespeare moved to London in the late 1580s while his wife and children remained in Stratford, but his theater career and investments made his family financially comfortable. At some point between 1613 and 1616, after the production of his final play, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, Shakespeare returned to Stratford and died there in April 1616, possibly on his 52nd birthday. He was buried in Holy Trinity Church on April 25, 1616.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

One day Bassanio asks Antonio for 3,000 ducats so he will look rich when he courts Portia. At the same time Portia entertains suitors who try to win her hand in marriage by solving her father's riddle. Later that day Antonio stakes a pound of his own flesh as collateral to get a loan for Bassanio from Shylock. Afterward Bassanio prepares to leave for Belmont, hiring Launcelot Gobbo, and agrees to take Gratiano with him.

That night Jessica and Lorenzo elope; Jessica takes with her as much of her father's fortune as she can carry. At the same time Bassanio and Gratiano depart for Belmont. Meanwhile the Prince of Morocco attempts to solve Portia's father's riddle and fails.

The next day Shylock is seen in the city lamenting the loss of his daughter and his money. A few days later the Prince of Arragon fails to solve Portia's father's riddle; Portia welcomes Bassanio. Later Bassanio solves Portia's father's riddle; Gratiano declares his intention to marry Nerissa. The same day Antonio defaults and Shylock wants his pound of flesh; Bassanio and Gratiano return to Venice.

Some days later the Duke of Venice hears Shylock's case against Antonio. Same day Portia is disguised as Balthazar and finds a loophole in the loan contract that saves Antonio's life. Afterward Shylock loses his fortune and is forced to convert to Christianity for trying to kill Antonio.

Same day, as Balthazar, Portia asks Bassanio for his wedding ring as payment, which he gives her.

Some days later At Belmont Portia shows Bassanio the ring and pretends to have cheated on him with Balthazar. Same time the couples reconcile when Portia reveals her disguise; Antonio learns his ships have returned.

SUMMARY OF THE SCENES

Act 1, Scene 1

Salarino and Solanio, two Venetian merchants, notice their friend Antonio has been out of sorts lately. Antonio has sent several ships abroad to trade goods in many ports, so his friends speculate that he has overextended his fortunes in shaky investments. They describe how anxious they would be if they were similarly invested in the fates of so many ships, watching every blip of change in the winds and weather until their fortunes returned to port. Antonio denies such concerns and tells Salarino and Solanio that his investments are diverse enough to protect him from loss. The two men then speculate that Antonio is out of humor because he is in love, which Antonio immediately denies. Salarino and Solanio briefly attempt to raise Antonio's spirits, but they are soon interrupted by the arrival of three other friends – Bassanio, Gratiano, and Lorenzo. Salarino and Solanio take leave to attend to their own business.

Gratiano also observes Antonio's sad disposition and takes it upon himself to "play the fool" and cheer him up, and he cautions Antonio not to wallow in his melancholy. Then Gratiano and Lorenzo also depart, promising to return at dinner time. Once he and Bassanio are alone, Antonio asks about Bassanio's recent visit to an unnamed woman, which prompts Bassanio to first describe the extent of his personal

debt before telling Antonio about the woman, who lives at Belmont and whom he wishes to court. Bassanio asks Antonio to lend him money so he can appear wealthy and compete with the woman's other suitors. Antonio tells Bassanio that his money is occupied in his ships at sea but gives Bassanio permission to borrow the sum elsewhere on his credit.

Analysis

This scene draws the reader's attention to Antonio's perceptions of reality which eventually becomes his source of troubles. His fellow merchants and friends seem to be worried about his multiple investments that are likely to lead to his downfall. His relationship with Bassanio is also questionable.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Antonio as presented in this scene
2. Describe the relationship between Antonio and Bassanio as presented in this chapter.
3. Explain at least two themes that are portrayed in this scene.
4. How is the theme of appearance versus reality portrayed in this scene?

Act 1, Scene 2

Portia tells her servant and friend Nerissa of her frustration and weariness at the suitors who have swarmed her home seeking to marry her. She also expresses frustration at her recently deceased father's plan to choose his daughter a husband. Even though her father is dead, Portia feels bound to follow his wishes even though it means she will not be able to choose a husband for herself. Nerissa expresses faith in Portia's father's goodness and reasoning and encourages her friend to trust that her father's plan will work out for the best.

Then Nerissa asks what Portia thinks of the suitors she has met so far. Portia describes a prince from Naples who only talks about his horse, a count whose disposition is constantly sour, a French lord whose mood changes drastically minute to minute, an English baron who does not speak Portia's language (nor she his), a quarrelsome Scottish lord, and a drunken German nobleman. None of these options appeals to Portia, but she affirms her oath to follow her father's wishes and hopes the Venetian "scholar and soldier," Bassanio, will return to woo her. Then Portia and Nerissa are called away to greet a new arrival, the Prince of Morocco.

Analysis

This chapter shows how Portia is essentially at the mercy of her father's wishes no matter how absurd it may be. Comment on Portia's reaction to her suitors. What does it

reflect about her character and the society she lives in? How does she show her preference for Bassanio?

Questions

1. Describe Portia's character as presented in this scene.
2. Explain the role played by Nerrisa in this part of the play.
3. Comment on the theme of male chauvinism as presented in the part of the play.
4. What is your view about Portia's father's plan to choose a husband for his daughter? Give reasons to support your answer.

Act 1, Scene 3

Bassanio negotiates with Shylock, a Jewish moneylender, to borrow **3,000 ducats** for three months in Antonio's name. Shylock acknowledges Antonio has sufficient fortune but worries because he has heard much of Antonio's fortune is currently at sea in ships bound for Tripoli and Libya as well as for the Indies, Mexico, and England. He speculates on the hazards of weather and pirates and wonders if Antonio will be able to repay him. Bassanio invites Shylock to join him and Antonio for dinner so Shylock can speak with Antonio directly, but Shylock refuses the invitation because he follows different customs. Just then Antonio arrives, and Shylock speaks in an aside of his hatred for Antonio and how he would like to get revenge on him. However, Shylock treats Antonio with businesslike politeness until he enumerates the wrongs Antonio has done to him in the past: spitting on his clothing, calling him a dog, and criticizing his business practices in public. Antonio becomes defensive and says he is likely to do so again, but Shylock claims he wants to forgive and forget the past. He agrees to lend Antonio the money free of interest, asking Antonio to promise a pound of his own flesh to secure the bond as "a merry sport." Antonio agrees to these terms even though Bassanio protests.

Analysis

This scene introduces us to the character of Shylock. He expresses doubts about Antonio's fortunes and is hesitant to extend credit to him as well as help Bassanio from the start of their negotiation. In his aside, he expresses his hatred of Antonio and his desire to revenge on him. There is hostility between the two characters that also presents a sharp contrast between them. Can you take note of these similarities and differences between the two characters?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Bassanio as presented in this scene.
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Antonio and Shylock as presented in this scene.
3. Describe the relationship between Antonio and Shylock.

4. What important lessons can the reader draw from the relationship between Antonio and Shylock?
5. Explain two important themes that are portrayed in this scene.
6. In what ways do the events in this scene affect the rest of the play?

Act 2, Scene 1

The Prince of Morocco greets Portia upon his arrival at Belmont, saying "Mislike me not for my complexion" and telling her his blood is the same as the most fair-skinned man. He goes on to tell her how much the women of his own land desire him, but Portia assures him that she is not driven to choose a suitor by his appearance. She is not driven to choose her own husband at all because of her father's "lottery," so the Prince of Morocco has as much chance as any other man who seeks her hand. The prince agrees to the terms of the challenge, even though he must swear "never to speak to lady afterward in way of marriage" if he loses. They agree he will undertake the challenge after dinner.

Analysis

The Prince of Morocco's choice of introductory words hints at a fear of rejection based on his obvious difference from Portia and his separation from European society. He talks of his people living close to the sun, so his skin is dark. Hailing from Morocco, a Muslim country, he is probably not a Christian, so he has been subject to prejudice in his interactions with European society just as Shylock has. His boasting about his desirability in his home country makes him appear confident on the surface, but it is the kind of confidence that seeks to compensate for insecurity. When the audience sees Portia in Act 1, she laments her father's arrangement, but she now uses the same arrangement to create distance between herself and the Prince of Morocco, which indicates she does in fact "mislike" his complexion—a sentiment she will confirm when he loses the challenge in Act 2, Scene 7.

Questions

1. Describe Portia's character as presented in this scene.
2. In what ways are Shylock and the Prince of Morocco similar in character?
3. If you were Portia, would you have taken the Prince of Morocco as your suitor? Give reasons for your answer.

Act 2, Scene 2

Launcelot Gobbo works for Shylock as a servant, but he is debating whether or not to leave his job and seek a new master. His conscience tells him to remain with Shylock because it is the honest and responsible thing to do, even though Launcelot hates

Shylock. The "fiend," as Launcelot calls his opposite impulse, tells him to run away. Launcelot talks with his father, Old Gobbo, and reveals his desire to leave Shylock's employment. At that moment Bassanio appears, and Old Gobbo engages him in a conversation telling him Launcelot is unhappy in his current position and wishes to serve another employer. Bassanio becomes impatient with their wordiness, but Launcelot steps in and asks Bassanio for a job—a wish Bassanio immediately grants. Launcelot is overjoyed and reads a positive, if unlikely, fortune in his own palm before leaving to give Shylock notice. Gratiano finds Bassanio and asks to accompany him to Belmont. Bassanio is afraid Gratiano is "too wild, too rude and bold of voice" and his behavior might ruin Bassanio's chances with Portia. Gratiano promises to "put on a sober habit" and behave himself as a man might "to please his grandam." Bassanio agrees to let Gratiano come along, but he allows Gratiano this night to indulge his "merriment" without judgment.

Analysis

This scene once again brings the character of Shylock into cross examination. Launcelot's complaints reveal that Shylock is selfish and mean to his employees. This scene also echoes on the subject of anti-Semitism. Comment on Launcelot's reading of his own fortune in his own palm. What does it reveal about his social status and perhaps education?

Questions

1. Describe the following characters as presented in this scene:
 - a) Launcelot Gobbo
 - b) Bassanio
 - c) Gratiano
2. Explain at least two themes that are presented in this scene.
3. Comment on the description of Shylock in this scene. What feeling does it arouse in you about him?
4. What two important lessons can you learn from this scene?

Act 2, Scene 3

Jessica bids Launcelot Gobbo goodbye as he prepares to leave her father's service. She tells him he has been a source of fun in their serious house and sends Launcelot to Bassanio's dinner with a letter for Lorenzo. Launcelot predicts she will marry a Christian, and they both cry at parting. Once Launcelot is gone, Jessica hopes Lorenzo will get her message and come to take her away and marry her.

Analysis

It is possible to question Launcelot Gobbo's reliability as a judge of Shylock's character in Act 2, Scene 2, because Launcelot is a silly character whose primary purpose is to serve as comic relief in the play. But Jessica's judgment of her father is more reliable. She describes her house as "hell" and credits Launcelot with bringing some merriment into it. If the only other person who lives in her house is Shylock, he must be the source of her unhappiness. Unlike the Christian characters in the play, Jessica has no prejudice against her father. Quite the opposite, she should be predisposed to love her father, so whatever she feels for him is based entirely on his actions toward her throughout her life. Her desire to escape from her father's house is the clearest evidence against Shylock's character presented thus far in the play.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Jessica as presented in this scene.
2. How does the interaction between Jessica and Launcelot help us in understanding the character of Shylock?
3. Explain the theme of love as presented in this scene.

Act 2, Scene 4

Lorenzo makes plans with Gratiano, Salarino, and Solanio to "slink away in supper time" and disguise themselves to prepare for a masquerade at Bassanio's dinner. Launcelot delivers Jessica's letter to Lorenzo, and Lorenzo sends him back to her with word that "[he] will not fail her." After Salarino and Solanio leave for the party, Lorenzo tells Gratiano that Jessica has told him how to get her away from her father's house and that she will be waiting, disguised as a page and carrying "what gold and jewels she is furnished with."

Analysis

Lorenzo's friends support his pursuit of Jessica and are happy to see he has received a letter from her. They will later assist him as he escapes with her from Shylock's house. The decision to hold a masquerade as part of dinner mirrors the deception and disguise that will be necessary to carry out the elopement and also adds a touch of authenticity as such masquerades were part of Venetian culture. Even today masked celebrations remain a traditional part of the celebration of Carnival in Venice.

Questions

1. Explain the theme of deception as presented in this scene.
2. In what ways does disguise help in your understanding of the play *The Merchant of Venice*?

3. In what ways do Lorenzo's friends support him in his pursuit of love in this scene and elsewhere in the play?
4. Explain the theme of love as presented in this scene.

Act 2, Scene 5

Launcelot brings Shylock an invitation to Bassanio's dinner, and Shylock tells Launcelot he will be able to judge the difference between his new master and his old one. Before Shylock leaves for dinner, he warns Jessica to close and lock all the doors and windows, not to look outside, not to even allow the sounds of merriment in the streets outside into his home. Launcelot takes her aside to tell her to keep an eye out at the window for Lorenzo. Shylock asks about the exchange, but Jessica tells him Launcelot was only telling her goodbye. After Shylock leaves, she offers an unheard farewell to her father.

Analysis

Act 2, Scene 5 provides some evidence to support Jessica's hostility toward her father. He forbids her to leave the house, look outside, or even open the windows. He keeps Jessica isolated from the outside world, which shows why she is eager to leave home quickly, especially without the comical Launcelot around the house. Her isolation also raises the question of how she and Lorenzo ever saw one another enough to begin a courtship even as it explains why the courtship has been conducted entirely through letters. Launcelot's role as messenger shows how his participation has probably been essential. His departure, hence the loss of their messenger, provides another reason why their elopement must happen as soon as possible. Although Jessica perceives her father's strict rules as "hell," Shylock's reasons for those rules are most likely founded in his religion and his paternal love for her. As her father, he wants to protect her from the sinful behavior of the rowdy young men on the street.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Shylock as presented in this part of the play.
2. Do you find Shylock justified in the way he acts towards his daughter. Give reasons to support your answer.
3. Explain the role played by Launcelot in your understanding of the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.
4. What do you find so amusing in this scene?
5. Describe the relationship between Shylock and Jessica. What important lessons about parenting does it teach you?

Act 2, Scene 6

Gratiano and Salarino meet Lorenzo outside Shylock's house, speaking about the wonders of love to pass the time because Lorenzo is late. When Lorenzo arrives, he asks

them to keep watch, and Jessica appears above disguised as a boy. They exchange greetings, and then Jessica throws down a chest filled with gold and jewels. She is embarrassed by her appearance as a boy but she believes it is safer for her to travel in disguise. Lorenzo reassures her she is lovely anyway. When she goes back into the house to collect a little more money, Gratiano says she is "a gentle and no Jew!" Lorenzo describes how he loves her for her wisdom, fairness, and loyalty. Jessica returns, and she, Lorenzo, and Salarino leave while Gratiano remains behind. Antonio arrives, looking for Gratiano. Bassanio's masquerade has been cancelled because the winds have changed and Bassanio is ready to depart, so Gratiano is off to join the voyage.

Analysis

The Christians are much more readily accepting of Jessica than they are of Shylock, as Gratiano's declaration of Jessica's status as a gentle, or Gentile—a Biblical word commonly used to describe non-Jews—indicates. He has just met her, observed her in a window for a few minutes, and reached this conclusion. As a woman, especially a woman who intends to convert and marry a Christian man, Jessica may be subject to different standards than her father faces. Gratiano's assessment of her may also be a comment on her other positive characteristics. She is clearly brave, as she is willing to take a tremendous risk, leave her family, her society, and her culture to be with the man she loves. She generously brings as much gold as she can carry to their union, which indicates a sense of equality; she does not expect Lorenzo to provide their sole means of financial support. These traits are reflected in her choice of disguise for the escape.

Questions

1. Describe the characters of Jessica and Lorenzo as presented in this scene.
2. What do you find likeable about the character of Jessica as presented in the play?
3. What is the effect of Jessica's escape to the events that happen later in the play?
4. Explain at least two themes presented in this scene.
5. What important lessons can one draw from the events in this scene?

Act 2, Scene 7

The Prince of Morocco undertakes the challenge left by Portia's father. He is to choose between three "caskets" or chests. One made of gold, one of silver, one of lead. One of the chests contains a portrait of Portia, and if the suitor chooses that chest, he can marry Portia. If he chooses the wrong chest, he goes home in shame. Each chest is inscribed with a hint. The gold one reads "Who chooseth me shall gain what many men desire." The silver one reads "Who chooseth me shall get as much as he deserves." The lead one reads "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he has." The Prince of Morocco deliberates over the chests and their inscriptions. He finds the lead casket threatening

and eliminates it right away. Then he thinks of what he may deserve, but he questions whether that extends to Portia, even though he believes he deserves much. He settles on the golden casket because he believes Portia is the thing many men desire. He also thinks the golden casket is the only one worthy to contain her image, so he chooses gold. When he unlocks the casket he finds a skull and a message cautioning against being seduced by outward appearances—"All that glisters is not gold." He leaves quickly, and Portia expresses relief at his failure.

Analysis

With the inscriptions on the caskets, it becomes apparent that Portia's father has not entrusted his daughter's fate to a game of pure chance. The inscriptions provide clues to the location of her portrait, and the man who can figure out the clues correctly will be the one worthy of Portia's hand. The Prince of Morocco is not that man. He is seduced by the outward appearance of the gold casket, which is an ironic turn of events for a man whose first words in the play are "Mislike me not for my complexion." Even though he met Portia with an entreaty that she not judge him by his outward appearance, the statement also indicates his own preoccupation with outward appearances as evidenced by his choice of casket.

Questions

1. Describe the character of The Prince of Morocco as presented in this scene. What do you like or dislike about him?
2. With ample illustrations describe Portia's feelings towards the Prince of Morocco.
3. What makes this scene amusing to you?
4. What important lessons can you draw from this scene?

Act 2, Scene 8

Salarino and Solanio meet in the city square to review recent events. They have seen Bassanio set sail with Gratiano, but they say Lorenzo and Jessica did not depart with them. Shylock wanted to search Bassanio's ship and got the duke's approval to do so, but the ship was already gone. Antonio has assured Shylock and the duke that Jessica and Lorenzo did not set sail with Bassanio, so Shylock has been seen in the streets wailing for his lost daughter and lost money. Children mock him. There has also been some discouraging news about a ship from Venice lost near England, and Antonio hopes it is not his. Salarino and Solanio both express their liking for Antonio, saying "A kinder gentleman treads not the earth." They talk about Antonio's sadness at Bassanio's departure and speculate that Antonio "only loves the world for [Bassanio]." They decide to go try to raise Antonio's spirits.

Analysis

It is a typical conceit in Shakespeare's plays to use conversation between characters to explain what has happened or is happening offstage. Since Salarino and Solanio are gossips, they are perfect for taking on this important role of providing plot exposition. From a practical standpoint, their conversation in Act 2, Scene 8 spares the time (as well as the expense of sets and props) of staging scenes showing Shylock attempting to search Bassanio's boat, the loss of the ship near England, and Antonio's farewell to Bassanio.

Questions

1. Describe the characters of Solanio and Salarino as presented in this scene.
2. What do you learn about the character of Shylock in this scene? What feelings does he invoke in you?
3. Describe the dramatic role played by Solanio and Salarino in understanding the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.
4. What important lessons does the reader learn from this scene?
5. Explain at least two themes developed in this part of the play.
6. What is the importance of this scene to the development of the play, *The Merchant of Venice*?

Act 2, Scene 9

The Prince of Arragon attempts the challenge of choosing between the three caskets to find Portia's portrait and win her hand. He reiterates the conditions of accepting the challenge: If he loses he can never reveal which casket he chose, and he may never seek to marry another woman. He considers the inscription on the lead casket, "Who chooseth me must give and hazard all he hath," and dismisses the lead casket right away because it is not beautiful. He looks at the gold casket, "what many men desire" and decides it is foolish to follow the "multitude that choose by show." He does not want to be associated with the common man. He looks at the silver casket that promises "as much as he deserves" and decides he deserves the wealth and privilege he has, so he chooses the casket he deserves as well. Inside is a portrait of a fool and a message telling him his judgment is foolish. The Prince of Arragon departs unhappily as a messenger arrives to announce the approach of "a young Venetian." Portia is excited, hoping it is Bassanio, and Nerissa prays for the same thing.

Analysis

The Prince of Arragon does not deliberate over the caskets as long as the Prince of Morocco does in Act 2, Scene 7. Like the Prince of Morocco he dismisses the lead casket almost immediately, and at the end of the scene the audience knows by the process of elimination that the lead casket is the correct one. Also like the Prince of Morocco, the

Prince of Arragon is driven by a sense of ego and entitlement. He chooses the casket that appeals most directly to his ego, the one that promises what he deserves. Even though he avoids the Prince of Morocco's mistake by acknowledging the folly of "choosing by show," this wisdom comes from a haughty desire to separate himself from other men because he feels superior to them. Bassanio's approach at the end of the scene foreshadows his success at the challenge and creates dramatic irony. Now Portia knows the answer to her father's riddle if she did not before, and the audience knows the answer as well. It makes sense that Bassanio will choose the casket not yet chosen. Even though the characters do not know the outcome of Bassanio's suit yet, the audience has a good idea.

Questions

1. Describe the character of the Prince of Arragon as presented in this scene.
2. What feelings does he arouse in you?
3. What important lessons can this scene teach the reader?
4. In what ways is this scene important to what happens later in the play?
5. Describe the characters of Nerissa and Portia as presented in this scene.

Act 3, Scene 1

Salarino and Solanio reflect on the news that another of Antonio's ships has been reported lost in "the Goodwins." They hope the news is only hearsay but call their source "an honest woman of her word." Just as they are hoping this will be the end of bad news for Antonio, Shylock approaches them. The three men discuss Jessica's departure as well as Antonio's lost ship and what it means for his bond. Salarino and Solanio ask Shylock what he wants with a pound of Antonio's flesh, and Shylock tells them it doesn't matter what he does with the flesh: he just wants revenge. Even though he's Jewish, he says, he has the same feelings and the same weaknesses and desires that any Christian has. He concludes by saying a Christian would seek revenge on a Jew if wronged, so he is also entitled to revenge. Salarino and Solanio do not have an opportunity to respond because they are summoned to Antonio's for dinner. Shylock talks to his friend and fellow money lender Tubal, who brings news from Genoa about Jessica. No one has been able to find her, but Tubal shares stories he has heard about her. Shylock laments the loss of his daughter, the money she took, and the money he is spending on the fruitless search for her.

He wishes Jessica were "dead at [his] foot and the jewels in her ear! Would she were hearsed at my foot and the ducats in her coffin!" Tubal offers news that a third ship of Antonio's has been lost near Tripoli. The conversation shifts back and forth between Jessica and Antonio. Shylock is upset to hear Jessica traded his turquoise ring for a monkey—a ring her mother had once given Shylock. But he's happy to hear more about

Antonio's losses and asks Tubal to "fee [him] an officer" to arrest Antonio before meeting him at the synagogue.

Analysis

Salarino and Solanio continue to participate in gossip about Antonio's fortunes, although they do not consider themselves gossips; this is a title they only reserve for the source they consider trustworthy. The ship she has told him about is allegedly lost in an area called the Goodwins, which is likely a reference to the Goodwin sands, an area of the English Channel known for treacherous currents. Their conversation with Shylock establishes a connection between Shylock's anger at losing his daughter and his anger at Antonio. Even though Antonio did not take Jessica—and there is no evidence he is involved with her elopement with Lorenzo in any way—Shylock knows Antonio and Lorenzo are associated with one another, at the very least through their mutual friendship with Bassanio. Furthermore, they are both Christians, and this is sufficient reason for Shylock to associate the two in his mind and add Jessica's disappearance to his other grievances against Antonio. In a sense Shylock expects Antonio to suffer for all his kind, just as he believes Antonio has made him suffer because of his "nation." The connection between Antonio and Jessica in Shylock's mind becomes more apparent during Shylock's conversation with Tubal, which literally shifts focus between Antonio and Jessica from one line to the next.

Questions

1. Describe the character of shylock as depicted in this scene and explain your feelings towards him.
2. Describe the role played by Salarino and Solanio in this scene.
3. What is the importance of this scene to what happens later in the play?
4. Explain the lessons that the reader draws from the events in this scene.
5. Describe shylock's attitude towards Antonio in this scene.

Act 3, Scene 2

Portia wants Bassanio to wait a few days before he undertakes her father's challenge, fearing he might choose wrong and be forced to leave her. She believes if she has more time with Bassanio, she can "teach [him] to choose right." Bassanio cannot take the suspense of not knowing his future and insists on accepting the challenge right away. He professes his love for Portia, and Portia hopes his love will guide him to the correct choice among the caskets. Bassanio reasons his way through the challenge, rejecting the gold and silver caskets because "the world is deceived with ornament." He chooses the lead casket and finds Portia's image inside. Both Portia and Bassanio rejoice at this outcome and agree to marry. Portia gives Bassanio a ring. Gratiano reveals his plan to marry Nerissa. Lorenzo and Jessica arrive with Salerio, who brings Bassanio a message

from Venice: Antonio has lost his ships and is now unable to pay Shylock. Bassanio is forced to tell Portia the true state of his finances, but she is not bothered by his confession. She is more concerned with Antonio's welfare. Portia offers any sum necessary to save Antonio's life; even though Salerio tells her Shylock claims he will refuse repayment if offered. Jessica confirms her father's stubbornness, saying he has told her he would "rather have Antonio's flesh/Than twenty times the value of the sum." Portia sends Bassanio back to Venice to help his friend.

Analysis

For the first time Bassanio confesses his love for Portia, and he does so in a manner that appears shy and subdued. He describes the delay before he undertakes the challenge as torture, and then "confesses" his love when pressed to do so. Portia's declaration that he will win the challenge if he truly loves her speaks to her confidence in his ability to choose as well as her confidence in her father's judgment, the recent focus of her complaints. Indeed, when Bassanio wins the challenge, he sees almost precisely what Portia's father wanted his future son-in-law to see in the caskets. Bassanio looks at the gold casket and knows not to be deceived by appearances—he even refers to skulls and graves concealed by ornaments. Interestingly, Bassanio's choice of casket is based on the process of elimination. He is well aware of the two caskets he should not choose, but he makes no reference to the inscription on the lead casket that requires him to "give and hazard all he hath." Bassanio does not yet understand the truth of this phrase, so he seems not to notice it. He has sacrificed some to be here, but most of the sacrifices for his love of Portia have actually been made by Antonio who, it seems, has even sacrificed his own life for Bassanio's potential happiness.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Bassanio as presented in this scene.
2. In what ways is this scene important to what happens before or after in the course of the play?
3. Describe the relationship between Portia and Bassanio.
4. What important lessons about love does this scene teach you?
5. Explain at least two themes presented in the scene.

Act 3, Scene 3

Shylock and Salarino accompany Antonio to jail. Shylock mocks Antonio for lending money without interest. Antonio wants to talk to Shylock, but Shylock refuses to listen to anything Antonio says. Shylock is confident the Duke of Venice will uphold his claim and leaves Antonio alone with Salarino. Salarino tells Antonio Shylock is "an impenetrable cur," a stubborn dog. Antonio acknowledges why Shylock hates him for

interfering with his business in the past. He also says, "These griefs and losses have so bated me,/That I shall hardly spare a pound of flesh." Antonio is certain the Duke of Venice is powerless to stop Shylock. His only wish is that "Bassanio come/To see [Antonio] pay his debt."

Analysis

Shylock's stubbornness prevents him from acknowledging anything Antonio might say to him. As a result, the audience does not know what kind of plea Antonio might make to Shylock. His comments to Salarino demonstrate that he knows why Shylock hates him, but they stop short of revealing any remorse for his past actions toward Shylock. Antonio offers no apology or repentance to Shylock, so it is difficult to know if Shylock might be swayed by an act or word of atonement from his enemy. Instead, Salarino calls Shylock a dog again, and Antonio doesn't correct him. Antonio's inability to express full remorse or regret for his wrongs toward Shylock or even to make clear whether he believes his past behavior was wrong shows that Shylock may not be the only "impenetrable" figure in this situation.

Questions

1. Compare and contrast the characters of Shylock and Antonio as presented in this scene.
2. Describe the feelings that are aroused by the events in this scene.
3. Explain the role played by Salarino in this part of the play.
4. What important lessons does this scene teach you?
5. In what ways do the events in this scene affect what happens after in the play?

Act 3, Scene 4

With Bassanio and Gratiano on their way to Venice, Portia makes her own preparations to depart Belmont. Lorenzo thanks her for offering such generous assistance to Antonio and praises her goodness, but Portia says she is only doing what is right. She asks Lorenzo and Jessica to watch over her estate while she and Nerissa go to a monastery while their husbands are away. She then sends her servant Balthazar to her cousin, a Doctor Bellario in Padua. She tells him to return quickly with the papers and clothing he provides. After Balthazar leaves, Portia tells Nerissa of her plan: The two women will disguise themselves as men and follow their husbands to Venice. But she will not reveal more about her reasons until they are on the way.

Analysis

Portia expresses her sympathy for Antonio's predicament and her happiness at being able to assist, but she stops short in the middle of her speech, saying, "This comes too

near the praising of myself." In this respect she reflects the modesty expected of a woman in her station. In Act 4, Scene 1 her plan to assist in Antonio's defense will become clear, which makes her modesty here a practical matter as well. She is compelled to conceal her intended involvement in Antonio's defense. For performance purposes her reluctance to reveal the full plan to Nerissa here sets up the surprise of the big reveal when she appears in court. The reference to Doctor Bellario—whose name will come up in the court scene—sets up the audience to recognize the young legal scholar as Portia when she appears before the duke in the next scene. For now Portia's vague request for "clothing" sets up suspense for the tense scenes to come.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Portia as presented in this scene.
2. In what ways does this scene prepare the audience for the coming scenes?
3. Explain the role played by Nerissa in this scene.
4. What do you find so interesting in this scene?

Act 3, Scene 5

Launcelot and Jessica talk in the gardens at Belmont, and Launcelot tells Jessica she should hope Shylock isn't really her father, lest she someday suffer for his sins. Jessica counters by saying if her mother cheated on Shylock she would have to suffer for her mother's sins. Launcelot agrees Jessica is doomed either way, and Jessica declares "I shall be saved by my husband; he hath made me a Christian." Lorenzo appears and teases Launcelot for trying to steal his wife, and Jessica tells him why Launcelot has declared them both unfit for heaven: Jessica was born a Jew, and Lorenzo has raised the price of pork by converting Jessica. Lorenzo then tells Launcelot he has impregnated a Moor, and Launcelot jokes "if she be less than an honest woman, she is indeed more than I took her for." Lorenzo sends Launcelot to ask the household to prepare for dinner. Then he and Jessica share a quiet moment in which they speak of Bassanio's good fortune at finding a wife as good as Portia. Lorenzo talks of his own good fortune.

Analysis

Even though Launcelot is joking with Jessica, his prejudice against Jews is on full display. His jokes about Jessica still being unworthy of heaven because of her father and her birth as a Jew raise questions about how fully she will be accepted into Christian society. Lorenzo clearly loves his wife unreservedly, and Portia's household has made her welcome. However, Launcelot's joke gives voice to the possibility of small elements of prejudice lingering in Jessica's future interactions.

Despite the hospitality she has been shown, she will never really be one of *them* in the same way as if she had been born into their society.

Questions

1. What is the importance of the conversation between Jessica and Launcelot in your understanding of the play?
2. Describe the dramatic role that Luancelot plays in this part of the play.
3. Describe the relationship between Lorenzo and Jessica and explain the lesson that it teaches to the reader?
4. Briefly explain the dilemma that Jessica faces in converting to Christianity.

Act 4, Scene 1

Shylock and Antonio appear before the Duke of Venice. Shylock demands fulfillment of the letter of their contract, and Antonio believes it is pointless to argue or try to reason with Shylock. The duke hopes Shylock will relent and show Antonio mercy at the last minute, but Shylock makes it clear he has no such plan. He says he wants the pound of flesh because it is "[his] humor," and he refuses when Bassanio offers him twice the sum of the original loan. Shylock compares his entitlement to Antonio's body to the way other Venetians feel entitled to do as they will with the bodies of their slaves and animals. The duke calls Doctor Bellario from Padua and Balthazar, Doctor Bellario's colleague from Rome, who is actually Portia in disguise. She first appeals to Shylock to show Antonio mercy because mercy is its own reward. She goes on to respond to Shylock's calls for justice by saying, "That in the course of justice none of us/Should see salvation. We do pray for mercy." Shylock remains unmoved, just as he remains unmoved by Bassanio's repeated offers to pay twice or 10 times the sum of the loan. Portia looks at the bond and urges Shylock to accept three times the amount of the loan. When he refuses again, Portia bids Antonio to prepare for Shylock's knife. She waits until Shylock approaches Antonio with the knife before stopping him and informing him that the bond allows him a pound of Antonio's flesh, but it does not allow him any drop of Antonio's blood. It is impossible for Shylock to take his pound of flesh without spilling blood, so Shylock is found guilty of conspiring to commit murder against a citizen of Venice. He could receive the death penalty for this crime, but the duke spares his life. The duke takes half Shylock's fortune for the state and gives the other half to Antonio. Antonio asks the court to drop the fine of half his goods to the state and says he will give his own half of Shylock's fortune to Lorenzo and Jessica upon Shylock's death. He requires Shylock to leave any of his own possessions to Lorenzo and Jessica upon his death as well and that Shylock convert to Christianity. Shylock agrees to these terms and leaves the court. After Shylock departs and Antonio is freed, he and Bassanio

thank Portia—still believing her to be Balthazar—for her assistance. They insist on giving her some payment for her trouble, and she takes Bassanio's gloves. She then asks

for his ring, the one she gave him when they were wed. Bassanio refuses to part with the ring, and she scolds him for not giving her the ring and takes her leave. Antonio then convinces Bassanio to send the ring to the legal scholar saying, "Let his deservings and my love withal/Be valued 'gainst your wife's commandment." Bassanio sends Gratiano to catch up with Portia and give her the ring.

Analysis

Antonio's trial represents a confrontation between ideas that define the two religions at the heart of *The Merchant of Venice*. As presented in the play, Judaism is a religion focused on rules, following law, obedience, and justice in the form of punishment and atonement for wrongdoing. Shylock represents this point of view. On the other hand, Portia, the duke, and others represent the Christian ideal of mercy and salvation even for those who do not deserve it. Portia's trickery of Shylock comes with a dramatic twist that leaves Shylock helpless and hopeless. She entraps Shylock with his own contract which is based on his desire to punish and exact revenge on Antonio. Comment on the final verdict against Shylock and say what you feel about it.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Portia as revealed in this scene.
2. What are your feelings about the final verdict against Shylock in this scene?
3. In what ways is Shylock presented as a villain in this scene?
4. Describe the character of Antonio as presented in this scene.
5. What is the importance of this scene to the rest of the play?
6. What important lessons does this scene teach the reader?

Act 4, Scene 2

Portia instructs Nerissa to go to Shylock's home and have him sign the deed that gives his property to Jessica and Lorenzo. Before she leaves, Gratiano arrives to deliver Bassanio's ring and invite her to dinner. She turns down the dinner invitation but accepts the ring and asks Gratiano to show Nerissa the way to Shylock's house. Nerissa tells Portia she will try to get her own ring from Gratiano. Portia believes she will get the ring easily and assures Nerissa they will have the last word on their husbands.

Analysis

Portia plans to return to Belmont with Nerissa immediately after Shylock has signed the deeds associated with his trial, which provides a practical reason for her to reject Bassanio's invitation to dinner. To preserve their ruse, the women need to return to Belmont before their husbands. However, Gratiano's delivery of the ring provides an additional reason for Portia to avoid Bassanio. She now knows his loyalty to Antonio

has persuaded him to part with the ring she warned him never to lose or give away. The doubts this exchange raises about her marriage prompt Nerissa to subject Gratiano to a similar test of his affection for her.

Questions

1. Explain at least two themes as presented in this scene.
2. What important lessons do the events in this scene teach you?
3. Explain the role played by Portia in the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.

Act 5, Scene 1

Jessica and Lorenzo enjoy the moonlight in Belmont and compare the night—and themselves—with doomed lovers from classical myths. A messenger arrives to tell them Portia and Nerissa will return before daybreak. Shortly thereafter, Launcelot arrives to say Bassanio and Gratiano will arrive before morning as well. Jessica and Lorenzo move to prepare for their arrival. Portia and Nerissa hesitate outside the house, enjoying the music Stephano is playing within. Portia sends Nerissa inside with instructions to the servants not to mention their absence. Lorenzo hears them talking and welcomes them home. Bassanio and Gratiano arrive shortly afterward with Antonio. Portia greets Antonio warmly as Nerissa and Gratiano argue about the lost ring. Portia scolds Gratiano for parting with Nerissa's ring, and Bassanio considers telling Portia he lost the ring defending it. Before Bassanio can tell his story, Gratiano announces Bassanio gave his ring away to the legal scholar, and Portia promises not to sleep with Bassanio again until the ring is returned. Bassanio tries to plead his case, but Portia claims to suspect "some woman had the ring." Antonio intercedes, saying he is the cause of these troubles, and apologizes. Portia gives Antonio a ring to give to Bassanio, and Bassanio sees it is the same ring as before. Portia claims she got it from the legal scholar when she slept with him. Nerissa claims to have gotten Gratiano's ring by sleeping with the scholar's clerk. Gratiano and Bassanio are dumbfounded. But Portia knows how they disguised themselves and her role in Antonio's trial. She also gives Antonio a message containing the news that three of his ships were not lost and have "richly" returned to Venice. They all enjoy the joke and make amends. Portia also gives Lorenzo Shylock's deed, which leaves Lorenzo his property after his death. The household happily retires to bed before the sun rises.

Analysis

There is a sharp contrast between Jessica's relationship with Lorenzo and the other two couples; Portia and Bassanio and Gratiano and Nerissa. Jessica and Lorenzo's relationship reflects pure loyalty while the other newlyweds are suffering from divided

devotion. Bassanio is divided between Antonio and Portia and for this reason he is persuaded to give the ring away on Antonio's account the same with Gratiano. The impasse between Bassanio and Portia is only corrected when Antonio takes it upon himself to confess that he is entirely to blame for the conflict.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Portia as presented in this scene.
2. Describe the relationship between Lorenzo and Jessica. What does it teach you about love?
3. Briefly explain the source of conflict between the couples in this scene?
4. How is the conflict resolved?
5. How dramatically satisfying is the ending of the play?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Shylock

Shylock is the *antagonist* in the play and a father to Jessica. He is such a puritan who is confined by the laws limiting Jews' participation in Venetian society and subject to prejudice and scorn. He turns down Bassanio's invitation to dinner in order to meet Antonio. He says:

"I will buy with you, sell with you, talk with you,
walk with you, and so following, but I will not eat
with you, drink with you, nor pray with you..." (Act I, Scene iii)

It is for his puritanical ways that he finds himself in constant scorn by the Christian characters.

He is a *vengeful* character who embraces the Old Testament writings of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. He bears a special grudge against Antonio because Antonio has mistreated him and interfered with his business in the past. When Antonio comes to borrow money from Shylock, Antonio offers a pound of his own flesh as collateral. Shylock sees an opportunity to have his revenge against Antonio for the past wrongs. When Antonio's ships are lost, Shylock demands the letter of his bond be honored, and the case goes to court because taking a pound of Antonio's flesh is tantamount to murder.

He is *greedy* and *materialistic*. He is only interested in money that puts him into sharp contrast with the Christian characters like Antonio. While Merchants like Antonio lend money free of interest and put themselves at risk for those they love, Shylock agonizes over the loss of his money and is reported to run through the streets crying, "O, my ducats! O, my daughter!" (II.viii.15). With these words, he apparently

values his money at least as much as his daughter, suggesting that his greed outweighs his love.

He is a *sadist* who takes pleasure in seeing others suffer. His contract with Antonio demonstrates his desire to inflict pain onto others. He is happy when he hears the news of the disappearance of Antonio's ships. He rushes to the Duke to have his bond effected. Even when offered twice his principle, he insists on having the law take its course.

He is *rigid* and *inflexible*. He stubbornly refuses to change his mind to have twice his principle because he wants to satisfy his revenge against Antonio. He does not listen to the counsel of the Duke to have mercy on Antonio and later when Portia tries to plead with him his answer is a callous:

My deeds upon my head! I crave the law,
The penalty and forfeit of my bond. (Act IV Scene I)

His relationship with his daughter reveals a *mean* and *selfish* character that is equally void of love and affection. It is little wonder that she decides to elope with Lorenzo taking along part of her father's wealth. Shylock's heart is broken by the jewels and ducats she takes rather than his daughter. He laments for the money he spends on searching for his daughter and wishes she were dead with the jewels in her ears.

Shylock is *merciless* and *brutal*. He refuses to take pity on Antonio and cold heartedly demands for Antonio's pound of flesh as stated in the bond. Despite the pleas by Bassanio to offer twice the principle sum, shylock maintains his brutal craving for Antonio's flesh. Much as he logically claims that he has been wronged by the Christians, his lack of clemency and compassion is very clear in his intention of hurting Antonio.

Much as he is meant to be the villain in the play, shylock enlists our sympathy as a greatly wronged party. Besides being abused and insulted by the Christian community of Venice, he is deprived of his daughter and forfeits his fortune. He is also forced to convert to Christianity and abandon his trade of money lending. Shylock also helps in bringing out the cruelty of racism and anti-Semitism. His obsession with revenge against Antonio propels the plot of the play and enhances humour.

Antonio

Antonio is a Venetian merchant, the title character of the play, who borrows 3,000 ducats from his rival, the Jewish moneylender Shylock, on behalf of his friend Bassanio. Antonio's own money is tied up in his ships at sea, so he offers Shylock a pound of his own flesh as collateral for the loan, reflecting his confidence that he will be able to repay Shylock. When Antonio's ships are temporarily lost, he can't repay the

3,000 ducats, and Shylock demands the pound of flesh. When the dispute goes to court, Antonio ultimately prevails. His life is spared, and his fortune is restored when the lost ships return to port.

He is presented as *loving* and *selfless*. Much as he refuses to admit that he is love sick, the evidence suggests that he is in love with *somebody*. It is very true that Antonio's love for Bassanio is love beyond self. He stakes his own life to secure happiness for his friend. His friends think he is in love, and while he denies the suggestion that he is worried about his ships with a calm, well-reasoned argument, he responds to the suggestion that he is in love with a simple "[f]ie, fie" (I.i.46).

Antonio is also *generous* and *open handed*. He is known among all the merchants in Venice as one who lends money for no interest. He criticizes and attacks Shylock for being selfish and stingy and for this reason there is an inevitable rift between the two characters. Shylock complains that Antonio:

"...lends out money gratis and brings down
The rate of usance here with us in Venice..."

He is a *risk taker*. As a merchant, Antonio seems to have taken a great risk in investing in overseas ventures. He has dispatched several trade ships to various ports. His friends express concern for such risky ventures and so does Shylock. Antonio's ability to carry out risky projects is also expressed in his contract with Shylock. He undertakes to secure a loan for his friend and offers his own pound of flesh as collateral.

He has *exceptional contempt* for Shylock and treats him with scorn. Shylock vividly illustrates the depth of this contempt, wondering aloud why he should lend Antonio money when Antonio has voided his "rheum," or "spit", on Shylock's beard, and he kicked Shylock as he would a stray dog. Antonio swears to maintain the same attitude towards Shylock and asks him to lend money to him not as a friend but rather his enemy.

The most important role that Antonio serves in the play is advancing the plot of the play when he offers a pound of his flesh as security for Bassanio's loan from Shylock. He is however a less active character in the play than Shylock. He is also important in developing the theme of love through his sacrifice of laying his life down for a friend. His brutal and contemptuous attack on Shylock enlists our sympathy for the Jew. Antonio's character also teaches the reader important lessons about love and mercy.

Bassanio

Bassanio is Antonio's friend who needs money so he can court the wealthy heiress Portia, a woman famed for her wealth, wisdom, and beauty. At the time he is

introduced, Bassanio has squandered his own fortune and is in debt to Antonio and others, but Antonio cares deeply for Bassanio and does not refuse the request. Bassanio is successful in his courtship and marries Portia, but he returns to Venice shortly after they are wed to support Antonio in his time of need.

He is *friendly* and *sociable*. He is always hanging out with friends and enjoys merry making. It is perhaps for this reason that he has squandered most of his own fortune and living on debt. His friendship with Antonio is quite unquestionable and his loyalty is evident especially when Antonio is arraigned in court by Shylock, Bassanio offers twice the sum that Shylock owes Antonio but the Jew is not ready to take the offer.

He is *loving* and *caring*. He harbours strong love and passion for Portia that he undertakes to borrow money in order to travel to Belmont to court her. His love and care can be depicted through his choice of casket. While it could be rightly thought that Bassanio is simply interested in Portia's fortune, it is very clear that he has fond feelings for her.

Portia

Portia is a *wealthy* heiress who lives at Belmont, an estate near Venice. Her father has died, and he devises a riddle involving three boxes of gold, silver, and lead to help her choose a worthy husband. The suitors must choose between the three boxes to find a portrait of Portia. The man who chooses correctly wins her hand. Portia is lucky enough to have the man she loves, Bassanio, win this challenge, and they get married. When she learns of Antonio's troubles in Venice, she disguises herself as a young man named Balthazar and presents herself at court as a legal scholar. Her reading of the contract and her cleverness allow her to help Antonio go free.

Gratiano

Gratiano is Bassanio's close friend who accompanies him to Portia's estate, Belmont, to offer moral support as Bassanio attempts to woo Portia. Gratiano shows great humor and fierce loyalty to Bassanio, a loyalty he also shows for Antonio during Antonio's trial. At Belmont Gratiano notices Portia's lady-inwaiting, Nerissa, and marries her.

Nerissa

As Portia's "waiting-gentlewoman," Nerissa is part servant, part adviser, part best friend. She advises and encourages Portia when Portia is frustrated by the suitors who swarm her home seeking her hand in marriage. She also disguises herself as a man and accompanies Portia to Venice when Portia goes there to defend Antonio. Nerissa is distinguished by her strong common sense and good judgment.

Jessica

Jessica's father, Shylock, has protected and sheltered his only child throughout her life. He limits her contact with the outside world, and Jessica feels stifled and suffocated by his overprotection. Despite Shylock's efforts, Jessica meets and falls in love with Lorenzo, a Christian. Her father would forbid the match and punish her for even talking with Lorenzo, so she disguises herself, takes as much of her father's wealth as she can carry, and elopes with Lorenzo in the middle of the night. At the end of the play, the couple end up at Belmont with Portia, Bassanio, Nerissa, and Gratiano.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Prejudice

Shylock seeks revenge on Antonio as a representative of all the wrongs Christians have visited upon him and his people. Shylock's desire for revenge also reflects his prejudice against Christians, but that prejudice is a response to the prejudice he has faced as a Jew. Antonio has personally been responsible for many of the wrongs he has experienced, calling Shylock a dog and spitting on him. Antonio's friend Lorenzo also lures Shylock's only child away from home and marries her—making her a Christian at the same time. In a larger sense Shylock is limited to moneylending as a profession because other trades are essentially closed to him; he resides in Venice's crowded ghetto, not even allowed to own land or choose where he lives. These prejudices create the anger that causes him to lash out at Christians, Antonio in particular; this in turn leads the Christians to act on their own prejudices, stripping him of his wealth and forcing him to convert to Christianity. These actions reveal how prejudice creates a fruitless cycle of mutual hostility.

Mercy

At court Portia (disguised as a legal scholar named Balthazar) pleads with Shylock to show Antonio mercy, to rise above the letter of his contract and be the better man despite the wrongs Antonio has shown him. Shylock refuses, and in turn the Christians of Venice, whose very belief system hinges on the mercy of God, spare Shylock's life but punish him. He loses half his fortune, but Antonio takes away Shylock's community and identity when he demands Shylock convert to Christianity. Paradoxically, those who want Shylock to be merciful show him little mercy once he has been defeated by the letter of the law. Perhaps neither Shylock nor Antonio truly deserves mercy, but that is the point of mercy. It should be offered to those who do not deserve it.

Appearance versus Reality

Whether the truth is locked in a casket, hidden under a suit of clothes, or written into a contract, in *The Merchant of Venice* appearances constantly deceive. Portia's suitors, the Prince of Arragon and the Prince of Morocco, lose their chances at her hand because they are drawn to the glittery appearance of gold and silver caskets and choose the wrong casket in the challenge set up by Portia's father. Bassanio, who recognizes that great things may be hidden in humble exteriors and glittering exteriors may conceal emptiness beneath, wins the challenge by choosing the lead casket. Bassanio himself appears to be a wealthy man when he arrives at Portia's home, only later revealing the extent of his debts and poverty. In keeping with this theme, Portia disguises herself as a man so the reality of her wisdom and cleverness may be of service at court. While Shylock appears to be the play's villain, his suffering elicits the audience's sympathy.

Worth

Much of the plot of *The Merchant of Venice* hinges on wealth and who has it, but the real driver of the action is the emotional value placed on different objects. Bassanio and Antonio seek the loan from Shylock because Bassanio is in love with Portia, and Antonio values Bassanio enough to put his life on the line to help him win her. Even though he is offered two or three times the sum of his loan in repayment, Shylock persists in demanding the pound of flesh because revenge on Antonio is more important to Shylock than money. Portia offers this money freely because she values Bassanio's happiness more than gold. She then tricks Bassanio into giving her alter ego his wedding ring—not because of the ring's inherent value but as a test of his loyalty. Gold, silver, and jewels are only valuable to these characters because of the feelings behind these items.

Lack of Control

Few characters in *The Merchant of Venice* are in control of their own lives and destinies. Antonio's fortune and eventually his life is at the mercy of the waves and weather that carry his ships abroad and back to port. Portia has no control over who she marries because her father set up a riddle designed to choose her husband for her. Bassanio is controlled by the debts he owes. Jessica lives her life under the heavy hand of her father's protection. Shylock is subject to the control of the city's laws, which tell him where he can live and what kind of work he can do. Each of these characters attempts to overcome the forces that control them but with mixed results.

LANGUAGE AND STYLE

Ships

Venice is a city built on a series of islands, connected by a network of waterways and canals. Ships are the primary means of transportation and show mobility and motion in this environment. Bassanio, for instance, travels by sea to Belmont to court Portia. When Jessica and Lorenzo flee the city, they likely do so by ship as well. These characters have the privilege of mobility; only Shylock, stationary in Venice, has no affiliation with ships or travel. Ships are also the foundation of Venice's busy and lucrative trade with the rest of the world. Antonio's fortunes are entirely based on the ships that carry the goods he trades as a merchant, and it is the loss of those ships that almost costs him his life.

Disguise

Disguise is a part of Venetian life, as the citizens of the city are described as masquers" who go about the city wearing masks as part of their revelries and celebrations. When Jessica escapes from her father's house, she does so dressed as a boy. Portia and Nerissa disguise themselves as young men so they can be heard at court and, later, test their husbands' loyalties to them. It is worth noting that, in William Shakespeare's time, it was illegal for women to act on the stage; female roles were portrayed by boys or young men. So disguise was a necessary part of the play. The audience knew it, and Shakespeare played on this awareness in his dialogue, as when Lorenzo and Jessica discuss her embarrassment over being dressed "in the lovely garnish of a boy," as Lorenzo puts it (Act 2, Scene 6). The audience, knowing Jessica was a boy anyway, found this sort of banter amusing. Also, since men had to perform their roles, Shakespeare often had the supposedly female characters masquerade as boys or men—which was naturally very convincing. As a result, it was believable that even their husbands would not recognize Balthazar and his clerk as their wives.

Allusion

Allusion is a literary device in which the playwright makes a passing reference to something, someone, or someplace of cultural or artistic significance. The allusion is not explained, but the audience is expected to understand the reference and see how it relates to the events on the stage. Biblical and classical allusions abound in *The Merchant of Venice*. Shylock, Antonio, and other characters often refer to the Bible when discussing the ethics of issues such as moneylending, revenge, and mercy.

Throughout the play, characters draw on classical mythology to illustrate the points they are making. The first allusion to a classical topic comes in the very first scene, when Solanio says, "Now, by two-headed Janus/... Nature hath framed strange

fellows in her time" and, a few lines later, "That they'll not show their teeth in way of smile/Though Nestor swear the jest be laughable." Janus was the Roman god of beginnings and endings, especially associated with doors and gates; he was always shown with two faces—one looking forward and one backward. Nestor was a wise old king who advised the Greeks at Troy.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

What makes the play *The Merchant of Venice* relevant?

- The play depicts the human weakness of revenge
- Portrays true love friendship and affection/sacrifice
- Marriage and commitment
- Justice and the law
- Greed and materialism
- There is no gain without pain
- He who laughs last laughs loudest
- Prejudice and stereotyping
- Relationship between parents and children

Questions

1. Describe the character of Shylock as presented in the play, *The Merchant of Venice*.
2. Describe the relationship between Shylock and Jessica and explain the lessons that the audience can draw from it.
3. What makes the play, *The Merchant of Venice* interesting?
4. Describe the character of Antonio as presented in *The Merchant of Venice*.
5. What important lessons can the reader draw from the play, *The Merchant of Venice*?
6. If you were to take part in the school presentation of the play *The Merchant of Venice*, which part would you take and why?
7. How suitable is the ending of the play *The Merchant of Venice*?
8. What feelings does the play arouse in you towards the character of Shylock in the play, *The Merchant of Venice*?

*Shadows of Time***BACKGROUND****The setting**

The time is today (contemporary). The issues the writer stresses are the same that we live with. Issues such as sex for money, greed, materialism, love, injustice, political strife, abuse of human rights, climate change, male chauvinism, immorality and crime among others.

Physical: The events happen in an imaginary African country. Like some African countries that we are aware of, the government is overthrown and replaced with a greedy self-seeking leadership that does whatever it takes to keep itself in power. Extrajudicial killings, blackmail of potential opposition members are all witnessed in the novel. Jane's house, hotels, the white man's house, university party, Steve and Flora's home, the university, the Datsun car etc.

Social: Socially the writer creates the social setting on a gender landscape. The men shamelessly exploit the women (symbolized in Flora). Flora is used by Tom, the white man, Mr. Lupoi and Mike to satisfy their sexual desires. Flora is raped by Tom and the strange man in the Datsun car. The police officers rape women at the different roadblocks. Jennifer commits suicide.

The setting is an anonymous city with an urban population. The characters have been alienated from their roots by city life. They are an urbanized population with prejudiced attitude against village life.

The novel also focuses on contemporary period characterized by a high rate of unemployment, lawlessness, poor quality education, political instability, male chauvinism as well as economic hardships.

The title

The title *Shadows of Time* is adopted from the words of Professor Ruhu in chapter nine when talking about the state of hopelessness prevailing in the country:

"All of us have lost ourselves, and have lost our country. That is why these people are committing these crimes. There is nothing to live for and we, you and I, and my student, are mere shadows of time..."

The statement reflects a state of hopelessness prevailing in the country that has deprived the citizens of their sense of pride and belonging. There is cold blooded murder orchestrated by the state in the name of state security. The members of the entire intelligence machinery are but criminals who mastermind all sorts of crime and

create fear amongst the citizenry. The case in point is the murder of Mr. Kungu and his brother and then later Steve. They are killed by the state operatives who accuse them of conspiring against the government.

The hopelessness is also escalated by the brutality of the security forces. The citizens live in a state of fear and panic for the police. When Flora is returning from Jennifer's burial, she is harassed and brutalized by the police at a roadblock. Later when she is identified as wife of one of the Directors, she is saluted and given VIP treatment. However, she witnesses innocent women being beaten and tortured by the police at the road block, a thing that leaves her in shock.

The title further shows how the characters are haunted by their past actions. Flora, the central character is caught up in the web of her own past reckless life when she carelessly gets romantically involved with Tom, a city gangster. At first, life seems plain sailing and fun to Flora but later she realizes that she is completely trapped and finds it hard to extricate herself from her former lover. Even when she thinks she is happily married to Steve, Flora's happiness is so short-lived when Tom reappears in her life and forcefully asks her to accept to be his mistress, a thing that she is not ready to do. He kidnaps her and even rapes her. Later he plots for the gruesome murder of her husband Steve, leaving her in agony.

The title also brings out the effect of colonialism on the lives of the African people. While the setting of the novel is an imaginary independent African state, the Africans still suffer the indignity and the prejudices of colonialism. When Steve goes on a trip up country with Flora, they are confronted with a terrible sense of colonial prejudice at Aribo Hotel. They cannot freely enjoy their stay at the hotel because it is dominated by whites. The waiters ignore the couple for some minutes without serving them because they are attending to the whites. The white guests are upset by their presence that they all walk away leaving them alone by the verandah lounge. The manager is very cross with them threatening to throw them out of the hotel if they did not 'behave' themselves.

Mr. Kungu, the manager of Aribo Hotel harbours strong prejudice and hatred against fellow Africans. He warns Steve and Flora for laughing in what he calls an irresponsible manner and even threatens to throw them out of the hotel. Even after, they have mended fences with Steve; Kungu still has very low opinion about fellow Africans. He strongly feels that the political instabilities, insecurities and the state of economic stagnation are caused by the fact that Africans are incapable of providing leadership to their own countries.

The characters also decry of the dysfunction colonial system of education whose products are only out to seek for jobs rather than create them. This kind of system ends

up paralyzing the entire economy especially after the change of government in the country and creates a complex web of unemployment. This leads to a state of hopelessness and despair. Young people are exposed to sexual abuse by unscrupulous men in the guise of helping them to get a job in one way or the other. Flora's friend commits suicide because of the prevailing hopeless situation in the country.

THE PLOT SUMMARY

Part 1:

Chapter one

This chapter opens with Flora being convicted of treason. When the executioner asks whether she has anything to say, she launches into a regrettable tale of her life, how and why she is driven into a desperate mode leading to her suicide attempt. She narrates how she, on a fateful evening as she was returning from school meets a stranger after a heavy down pour. She is driven by her love for adventure and the adolescence desire of proving herself a woman like the other girls by having a man in her life, she accepts Tom's offer to drive her in his car. She ends up falling prey to tom's wicked plans for the evening. After a few drinks that evening, Flora ends up in bed with Tom in a hotel room. She wakes up the following morning shrouded by guilt and remorse. She is now "a woman."

Analysis

This chapter introduces a number of themes. First and foremost, Tom's meeting with Flora reveals deception, immorality, greed and cunning. It also depicts the plight of young girls and how they can easily be lured by men into the web of deception. After her night with Tom, Flora's life is completely altered and distorted.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Tom as presented in this chapter.
2. Describe how nature dictates upon the destiny of mankind in this chapter
3. In what ways is Flora to blame for what happens to her in this chapter?
4. Describe the character of Flora as Presented in this part of the story
5. What feelings are aroused in you by this chapter?

Chapter Two

Months after Flora's encounter with Tom, she is introduced to Kit, Tom's friend. She becomes so fond of their company though she does not know what kind of work they do. They give her lots of money with which she buys a lot of luxurious stuff. Her sister, though uncomfortable with Flora's life style remains silent about it. One evening,

her sister leaves her home alone to go to the village. She is surprised to hear a knock at the door. It is Mike, her sister's man. Mike takes advantage of her sister's absence to have sex with Flora. Later, they go together to a party at the university. To her surprise, Mike cunningly introduces her as his niece to his men friends. She is seduced by several men in Mike's presence. She has mixed feelings about the men at the party. Later she meets Steve who warns her against two suspiciously looking men and advises her to go home. Flora seems to have fallen in love at first sight with Steve:

The party had been good. Full of events. All the men I met were interesting and admirable. All of them helpful or ready to help me. All of them looked rich and educated. But all of them were strangers. Worse still, men. Nevertheless, I wished I could meet Steve again. (Page 27)

Analysis

This chapter brings out the exploitation of young women by unscrupulous men. Take note of the way Mike takes advantage of Flora and the way he introduces her to his friends at the party. What does it show about the society in the novel? This chapter also reveals glaring pockets of immorality. Can you identify examples of immorality in this chapter and elsewhere in the novel? There is suspense in the appearance of Steve in the story. What feelings are created by this suspense in the story? Comment about the gender conflict in this chapter.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mike as presented in this chapter and say whether you like or dislike him.
2. Explain Flora's feelings towards the male characters in this chapter. Do you share some of these feelings? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Describe the character of Steve as presented in this chapter.
4. What societal evils are exposed in this part of the novel?

Chapter Three

Six days after the party, Flora goes to Simon's office as earlier agreed. She is promised a job after her examinations. She later receives a note from Tom inviting her to the *Comfort Bar*. She is filled with mixed feelings. On reaching the comfort bar, Flora meets Tom and his friend Kit. The two ask her incessant questions about the party and her job hunting exploits. They tell her that they are connecting her to a *mzungu* who would give her a job. She is suspicious about the whole business but kit coerces her to take the deal anyway. She is handed over to two men who are presupposed to take her to the white man who would give her the job. Along the way she is sexually harassed and raped by one of the men in the back of the car. Flora is disgusted by the experience.

Soon they arrive in the *Mzungu's* compound and like a piece of luggage she is handed over to an old white man. Later in the night they are woken by a terrifying knock. On opening the white man learns that his car has been stolen. He leaves Flora alone in the house for the rest of the night. Flora leaves feeling more disgruntled.

Analysis

This chapter introduces the problem of unemployment. Flora is obsessed with her search for the job that exposes her to sexual exploitation by men. The atmosphere in this chapter is so tense and oppressive from the time she meets Tom and Kit. The worst bit of it is the fateful journey to the *mzungu's* place. Comment on the atmosphere along the way. The chapter also brings out the theme of pretense and hypocrisy.

Questions

1. "I was a woman. A plaything for men." What does this statement reveal about the men in the story?
2. Describe the characters of Tom and Kit as presented in the chapter.
3. Comment on the character of Flora as presented in this part of the story.
4. What social evils are depicted in this chapter?
5. What are the three main themes discussed in this chapter?

Chapter Four

In this chapter, Flora has sat for her examinations and life seems boring. She has a strong hatred for the men folks. In her desperate pursuit for a job she is tricked by Mr. Lupoi, one of the men she had met at the party. He takes advantage of her and sleeps with her. They spend the night in a hotel and the following morning he finds his car has been stolen from the hotel parking. Back home, Flora is very harsh towards her sister. She inadvertently meets Steve, another man she had met at the university party. He takes her to Dr. Ruhu a university professor who gives her a job.

Analysis

The unemployment problem is stressed here and how young people are exposed to sex exploitation by unscrupulous men. There is use of coincidence especially in the meeting between Steve and Flora. Can you identify other coincidences in the novel and explain the feelings they arouse in you. There is a sharp contrast between Mr. Lupoi and Professor Ruhu. Can you discuss the contrast between these two men and their attitudes towards women?

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mr. Lupoi as presented in this chapter.
2. Briefly comment on the relationship between flora and Mr. Lupoi. What does show about the society in the novel?
3. Comment on the meeting between Steve and Flora. What feelings does it arouse in you?
4. From what happens between Flora and Mr. Lupoi, what important lessons can the reader draw?

Chapter Five

At her new work place, Flora is fond of her new workmates. She finds them sociable and interesting to work with. Mr. Ruhu, her employer is equally an interesting and friendly character. One day as Flora is walking back home she is stopped by Tom and Kit. Her attitude towards Tom has now changed:

I did not see Tom the same way I used to in the earlier days...In those days Tom was my support, my guardian, my man, my everything. But on that day he looked different....I began to realise that I no longer needed him. (page

Her feelings for Steve have taken over and her relationship has grown stronger. Tom asks her out for the evening but when she tells Jane about it Jane is against the idea. After a long argument with her sister Flora resolves not to go out with Tom. It is also revealed that she is pregnant. When Jane returns, she is glad that Flora had not gone out with Tom.

Analysis

This chapter reflects the suitability of the title as Flora's past reckless life catches up with her. She is haunted by her relationship with Tom who seems to be determined to ruin her present relationship with Steve. There is also a sharp contrast between Tom and Steve.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mr. Ruhu and show what you like or dislike about him.
2. Compare and contrast the characters of Tom and Steve. Whom do you admire and why?
3. Briefly explain a change that has taken place in Flora's life. How does it affect her future decisions in the course of the story?

Chapter six

One Saturday, Steve comes to see Flora at her place of work. Steve offers to take her on an upcountry trip to the national park before he could go back to Zaire. The journey is quite exciting. They book accommodation at Aribo Hotel. They are however surprised that the waiters prefer serving the white guests. They are befuddled when they laugh and all the Europeans walk away in protest. Steve and Flora are confronted by the manager of the hotel who accuses them of laughing 'irresponsibly' to the annoyance of the white guests:

You don't know what you have done? How can you laugh like that when these people are here?

Steve however calmly identifies himself and takes the trouble to explain to the manager:

Mr. Manager, this is our country and let us laugh or cry in it. If the Europeans are disturbed by our ways let them go away. (Page 80)

The following day after breakfast, Steve is shocked to discover that his car has been stolen. Their attempts to secure transport back to the city are futile. Everyone is hostile and selfish. They finally secure a lift on a truck loaded with charcoal. They meet Komposita, the turn boy of the truck. They arrive in the city in the wee hours of the morning.

Analysis

The most important theme in this chapter is neo colonialism and its associated evils. Steve and Flora are ignored by the waiters at Aribo hotel and later humiliated by the manger for laughing "irresponsibly." The theme of haunting past is also reflected in the stealing of Steve's car by unknown people. Flora's past seems to be following her like a shadow.

Questions

1. Comment on the character of Steve as presented in this chapter.
2. Describe the character of Flora as presented in this part of the story.
3. Comment on Kungu's attitude towards fellow African and the whites. What does it tell you about the society?
4. What are some of the social problems faced by the people in the story?

Chapter seven

This chapter comes a month after the visit to the national park. Flora is worried about her pregnancy because she is not sure who is responsible for it yet she does not want to lose Steve. She is interviewed by the police over the theft of Steve's car. She convinces

Steve to carry out an abortion. She is given some substance by an old woman. The entire process of abortion is too painful and regrettable because of its consequences. Throughout the ordeal, Steve remains by her side.

Analysis

This chapter discusses the problems associated with teenage pregnancies which are a contemporary issue. This also reflects the gross immorality in the society which translates in such acts as abortion and their associated evils. Again Flora is faced with the haunting past especially during the interrogations. The title is also reflected in this chapter especially when Flora is going through the pain of abortion. There is a complete disregard for life manifested by Flora's choice to abort rather than keep the baby.

Questions

1. Comment on the character of Steve as presented in this chapter.
2. Is abortion a solution to unwanted pregnancies? Give reasons
3. Explain at least two themes presented in this chapter

PART 2

This part shows a grown up Flora who is living the life she always dreamt of. However, her actions of the past emerge to destroy her completely.

Chapter 8:

Five years have passed since Flora's abortion. She is now at the university and is married to Steve with whom they have a child, Peter. In this chapter, the narrator recounts the events surrounding her marriage ceremony. We are given a glimpse at her relationship with her mother. At the university, Flora meets Jennifer, one of the girls she worked with at Dr. Ruhu's. Their friendship is immediately rekindled. Jennifer introduces to Flora another friend, Ruth.

Analysis

This chapter ushers in a relaxed mood from the previous tense atmosphere and prepares the reader for another series of sinister episodes. It is also a transition chapter from the life of Flora as a child to a more mature and clear headed adult. At the university she is mature and composed. Her marriage and wedding are brought to the reader through a flash back.

Questions

1. Explain two themes that are brought out in this chapter?
2. Describe the character of Flora as presented in this chapter.
3. What is importance of the events in this chapter to the rest of novel?

Chapter 9:

Steve and Flora go to check on Dr. Ruhu but they find that he is out. He later shows up and explains the difficult process one must go through to get beer. He also informs them about Dr. Kungu's death. They drive to the place and Steve gives five cases of beer. Jenifer jumps to her death leaving a suicide note for her friend Flora. By coincidence, Flora meets Komposita who seems to be one of the assigned officers to investigate Jenifer's suicide. Komposita invites her to his office the following day where he delivers a message to her from Tom. Tom demands that she should be his mistress or else he will kill her husband. This is in vengeance for Steve having led to his two year imprisonment having been found guilty of stealing his car.

Analysis

This chapter depicts the economic stagnation that follows the change of government. There is scarcity of some commodities that escalates the prices. Beer is sold on black market and to those that have technical-know-who. The death of Kungu demonstrates insecurity and bloodshed in the country. The death of Jennifer reveals the hopelessness prevailing in the country. People have lost hope in the state that to some death is the only option.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Dr. Ruhu as presented in this chapter.
2. Describe the character and role played by Komposita in your understanding the novel, *Shadows of time*.
3. How is the title brought out in this part of the novel?
4. How important is this chapter to what happens after?
5. Explain at least two themes brought out in this chapter.

Chapter 10:

Jenifer is buried. Flora decides to leave early. On the way home, they find a roadblock on the highway. At the roadblock, she is nearly assaulted by a policeman. When she is identified, she is given VIP treatment. However she witnesses acts of abuse by the police to different travelers, especially women. At home, she finds Dr. Ruhu, Mr. Kungu and Mr. Macai who have come to visit. They discuss the deteriorating political situation and want Steve to take over as president, something which Steve isn't ambitious of. She finds a note from Komposita requesting her to fulfill Tom's demands. After the visitors have gone, Steve reveals to his wife a strange dream he had in the night. In the dream, she is kidnapped and Peter is thrown into a bottomless pit. She contemplates telling him about Tom but when she decided she should, she finds him sleeping.

Before she can go to bed, she spends some time with her son, who for no apparent reason is very clingy.

Analysis

This chapter shows the deteriorating political situation in the country. The police brutality and harassment of the innocent citizens is a sign breakdown in law and order. The prevailing mood in this chapter is one of hopelessness and gloom. The hopelessness is also escalated by the bad weather.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Flora as presented in this chapter.
2. Explain two themes presented in this chapter.

Chapter 11:

Special prayers are offered so that the country that has experienced a prolonged drought gets rain. Steve and Flora attend the church service presided over by the Archbishop. When they get home, Steve breaks the news of the shooting of Mr. Kungu who is shot after accusations of treason. Other ten people are reported to have been arrested on charges of planning to overthrow the government later in the evening news but Mr. Kungu's death isn't mentioned. Days later, we learn that Flora has informed her husband about Tom following him and his plan to kill him (Steve). However, she does not reveal to him that three days earlier, she had been kidnapped and taken to Tom who also had raped her on the occasion. In the incident, Kit takes pictures of Tom and Flora naked in bed which they plan to use to frame her and wreck her marriage completely. The writer paints a picture on a family that is close since we see father, mother and child engaging in play together. Jane comes to visit Flora at the latter's request. Flora wishes to share her problems with her sister. Jane decides that the best thing to do is to get rid of Tom before he can destroy Flora's marriage. Steve comes home suddenly to inform his wife that he has been selected to lead a delegation to Japan. Her intuition tells her there's something fishy and for the first time she protests his going, though she soon realizes that she is powerless and hence cannot do much. He leaves. Flora embarks on looking for her driver, who she has not seen in days. In Komposita's office, she learns that her husband is in custody on charges of treason. She is made to understand that her husband will be killed. She passes out and when she wakes up, she finds herself home. She is playing with her son in the night when Tom comes to her home. He rapes her. She decides to commit suicide. She is stopped just after the noose tightens on her neck. She wakes up in a cell and a week later she is found guilty of treason for conspiring with Steve, Prof. Ruhu, the late Mr. Kungu and others to overthrow the government.

Analysis

This is perhaps the longest chapter in the novel and packed with action. The chapter reveals hypocrisy and intrigue of the new regime. The numerous deaths reported create a state of fear and terror.

Questions

1. Explain at least two themes presented in the chapter.
2. Describe the character of Flora as presented in this chapter.
3. What feelings does this part of the story invoke in you?
4. Describe the character of Tom as presented in this chapter.
5. What challenges do the people in the story face in this part?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Flora

She is the heroin of the novel and the narrator. She is introduced to the reader while she is in the dock facing charges of treason for conspiring with Steve, Prof. Ruhu, the late Mr. Kungu and others to overthrow the government. After she has been convicted, the executioner asks if she had anything to say and that is how she launches into her long tale of sadness.

She is *beautiful* and *attractive*. She is the kind that sweeps the men off their feet. It is her attractive beauty that she uses to try to manipulate men with the objective of getting a job and other material benefits. It is however sad that she ends up being used and abused by several men. To these men a beautiful woman is an object of sexual gratification and exploration.

Flora is *promiscuous* and *immoral*. She has a loose moral character that exposes her to a lot of abuse. She tries to use her sexuality to lure men into her trap but more often than not she ends up the victim. Her first encounter with Tom demonstrates her ability to seduce men. Her questionable moral standard is also displayed when she seduces Mike, her sister's boyfriend and later she finds her way through with Steve. When she discovers that she is pregnant she quickly procures an abortion because she is not sure about who is responsible for the pregnancy.

She is *loving* and *passionate*. Much as she is involved with several men, it is very clear that Flora has passionate love for Steve and her son Peter. From the moment she meets him she is swept off her feet and falls head over heel for him. Her love for Steve can be described as love at first sight. She quickly forgets Tom and all the other men she had slept with before. She is even ready to risk her own life to procure an abortion because she does not want to lose him.

She is *naïve* and *ignorant*. She is extremely simple and blindly trusting. Flora always finds herself in trouble because of her gross lack of experience and exposure. She is on several occasions manipulated by Tom because of her gullibility as well as naivety. Tom uses her as bait for his evil schemes. He sends her to an unsuspecting white man and that night his car is stolen. Later Mr. Lupoi and Steve also become victims of Tom's scheme; their cars are stolen under unclear circumstances.

She is *materialistic* and *greedy*. She gets involved with Tom because of her greed for material wealth. She cannot break loose from his trap because of the goodies she gets from him. Tom buys her dresses, necklaces and other things that make her enslaved to him. She constantly sleeps with different men because she is in need of money. In this masculine world, she becomes prey for the lustful men who take advantage of her greed and materialism.

Her cardinal role is to bring us the story. She is the narrator as well as the heroin of the novel. Flora's story is one of suffering, exploitation, abuse as well as prejudice. Flora enlists our sympathy and helps the reader to understand the society better.

Tom

He is one of the gang leaders who control the city. He is the antagonist in the story and the villain. He takes advantage of Flora's naiveté and exploits her in all respects. He exploits her sexually and also uses her as bait for stealing vehicles from the men who sleep with Flora.

He is *evil minded* and *diabolic*. He uses Flora as bait in fulfilling his very dangerous scheme of stealing vehicles from the men she sleeps with. He abuses the trust that Flora has for him as a lover when he hands her over to ruthless men who rape and molest her in the car. He even follows her when she is married to Steve, kidnaps and even rapes her in front of a camera threatening to expose the pictures if she refuses to comply.

He is *manipulative* and *scheming*. He takes advantage of Flora's blind trust to use her to get whatever he wants. He takes advantage of her lack of experience and exposure to exploit her sexually and later he begins 'loaning' her out to other men with the purpose of using her as bait for stealing cars from the men she sleeps with.

He is *possessive* and *jealousy*. He is driven by jealous and a selfish sense of entitlement to pursue Flora wherever she goes. He follows her at the party at the university and is later furious that Flora has got another man. He masterminds the kidnapping and later the murder of Flora's husband Steve because of jealous and envy.

He is *cunning* and *crafty*. When he meets Flora the first time after the heavy storm, he cunningly deceives Flora that there was someone in the car who wanted to talk to her. Later to her surprise he tells her that he was the one that wanted to talk to

her. He takes advantage of her gullibility to drive her and later takes her to the bar for several drinks before sexually taking advantage of her.

He is *antisocial* and at times *hostile* and *indifferent* to the needs of Flora. Right from the onset he is described as a repulsive and irritating character. He has a constant smell of onions and such features that are repulsive. He is a creature of the dark and his world is a world of seclusion and constant hiding.

He is a *cunning opportunist* who takes advantage of situations to his benefit. Besides using Flora as bait, Tom takes advantage of the turbulent political situation to elevate his position as the boss of police. He uses this position to carry out several atrocities. He masterminds the kidnapping and murder of Steve and Flora's driver. He also plots the abduction of Flora; he rapes her and constantly threatens her with death if she refuses to become his mistress.

He is *revengeful* and *unforgiving*. Having realised that he has lost Flora to Steve, he embarks on a mission to have his revenge against Steve. He blackmails him and plots for his arrest and his eventual death. When he breaks into Flora's house he reveals his revenge scheme to her dismay and disgust:

"I love yee, dear. I love yee so much. That's why I've killed him. Because I love yee. He took yee from me. He threw me into prison so as to take yee"

He is a *blackmailer* and a *hardened criminal*. Having failed to reconcile with Flora, he resorts to underhand methods. Her driver is killed and she is kidnapped and driven to Tom's home. He intoxicates her and then later rapes her in front of the camera threatening to expose the photographs to the public if she refuses to be his mistress:

"Either yee become my mistress, a regular mistress, or I'll show this to the police," he said dryly. "This can cost your husband a job and can earn yee a divorce..." (**Page 156**)

He is a devil in a human form. He follows and haunts Flora throughout the story. He is used to arouse fear and anxiety in the text.

Steve

He is Dr. Ruhu's friend and an envoy to Zaire. He is later appointed Director of National Media Services in the new government. His love for Flora can be described as love at first sight. He encounters Flora at the university party and shows great interest in her.

He proves to be *loving* and *caring* to Flora. Unlike all other men in the course of the story, Steve's love for Flora can be described as true and genuine love. He loves and cherishes her for what she is and does not use her for any selfish motives. He drives her and recommends her to Dr. Ruhu for a vocational employment and later marries her hence restoring her hope in the future.

He is *gentle* and *protective*. Unlike the other male characters who want to use women to quench their lustful appetites, Steve is gentle and protective to Flora. Having been suspicious about Tom and Kit at the party, he advises Mike to take Flora home for safety reasons. He is soft spoken and always takes precautionary steps to ensure that Flora is safe.

He is *helpful* and *supportive*. He is like a guardian angel to Flora whenever she is faced with a challenging situation. At the time when Flora is badly in need of a job, Steve miraculously shows up, drives her and recommends her to Dr. Ruhu for a vocational job. He does not leave her side when she undertakes an abortion and takes her out on a country drive to break her free from the routine of work.

He is *hardworking* and *reliable*. It is for this reason that he is appointed director in the new government. He diligently does his work as he goes to the office at around eight and leaves at six in the evening. His tight work schedule affects his relationship with his family as he spends most of the time in office.

He is *calm* and *relaxed*. He always exempts a controlled temperance even when he is upset. He calmly explains his position to Mr. Kingu at the Alibo hotel that without being overly bossy that “this is our country and let us laugh or cry in it.” He tells him without prejudice that he is on duty in the service of the government as he displays to him his official card. Mr. Kungu is so humbled and mortified by his calmness.

He is also depicted as *intelligent* and *understanding*. In his interaction with Professor Ruhu he displays critical insights on the state of affairs and in this case he is the only director in government who is educated. For this reason, he is requested to offer leadership in the campaign to change government. Much as he holds an important position in government, he strongly identifies and empathizes with the common folk.

He is hoodwinked and arrested by the notorious National Intelligence Squad towards the end of the novel and later reported dead.

Ruhu

He is a professor at the National University and an intelligent character. He is also a very close friend and a confidant of Steve. As a university pundit, he displays a deep knowledge and understanding on a variety of issues affecting the lives of the people. And like most university pundits he finds himself in a position that pits him against the government of the day which eventually causes him trouble.

He is kind and considerate. Unlike most of the male characters, he offers to help Flora without any strings attached. He offers her a job in his office and provides such a warm atmosphere for all his subordinates a thing that makes the young people enjoy their work at the office.

He is presented as friendly and welcoming. Right from the time we encounter him at the university party, Ruhu maintains his close association with Steve and later Flora and Kungu to the end of the story. The way he interacts with the workers at his office is very warm and friendly. Flora and her colleagues like him because of his friendly disposition.

He is generous and hospitable. When Flora and Steve pay him a visit, they find him just returning home. He is ill at ease but still has time to entertain his guests. He tells them that he has to go back to the national breweries to pick a case of beer for the mourners at Dr. Kungu's place.

He is thoughtful and attentive. Sometimes he is caught lost in thought about the situation. He has a lingering sense of sadness that he hides behind his humorous face. He sadly observes that:

"All of us have lost ourselves and we have lost our country. That is why these people are committing these crimes. There is nothing to leave for. And we, you, and I and my student, are mere shadows of time."(page 120)

Mr. Kungu

He is the manager of Aribo Hotel. He is prejudiced and possesses a very low opinion about fellow Africans. He has a colonial mentality of thinking that Africans are incapable of managing their own affairs. He is very quick to condemn Steve and Flora for intruding on the comfort of the European clients at the hotel and threatens to throw them out of the hotel if they did not conduct themselves appropriately. He is used to show the evil of neocolonialism and the extent to which it has influenced the African personality. He is later arrested and condemned for conspiring to overthrow the government and is to face the gallows.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Sex exploitation

The novel exposes the plight of young girls in the modern world and how they are exploited sexually by uncouth men. Flora like any other girl from a humble background dreams of getting a good job in order to fit in the society. However as she pursues her dream she is exploited sexually on several occasions by several men starting with Tom a leader of a city gang. Having used and abused her sexually, he starts using her as bait for his dark schemes. He gets her a white man from whom he steals a car from.

The story points out the vulnerability of young girls in a gender insensitive world. The society looks at women as a source of sexual gratification. When Flora attends the party at the university, she becomes a source of attention to the lustful eyes of the lecherous men. The men seem to have a single minded objective of getting to her

thighs beginning with Mike, her sister's fiancé. He only uses her when her sister is not around but does not want to identify with her beyond that.

Mr. Lupoi is another character that exploits Flora sexually. He promises to get her a job but when she visits his office he lures her into going out with him. He hires a room in a hotel and sexually takes advantage of her. Flora begins questioning the integrity of all her male characters. She wonders what it was in sex that sends men on their knees.

In the later part of the novel, she is again sexually molested and raped by Tom on several occasions.

Political instability

Victor Byamazima projects the consequences of an unstable political climate to the lives of the citizens. As it is said that the political substructure determines the economic superstructure of a state, it becomes very clear that the political environment greatly affects the lives of the people. There is economic stagnation that comes along with her hand maid unemployment. Due to the state of political instability and economic stagnation, a state of hopelessness reigns.

Essential commodities become scarce and very expensive. Getting a crate of beer requires high level connection and technical know who. Dr. Ruhu narrates how he gets a crate of beer from his former student who happens to be a manger with the Nile breweries company. Such beverages are only kept for the ministers and directors of government.

Political instability climaxes into a state of terror when the citizens are kidnapped and killed in cold blood by state operatives. Power slips into the hands of less educated men and opportunists who take advantage of the already volatile situation to unleash terror on the innocent citizens. Tom is one of such opportunists who take advantage of the turbulent political climate to advance his selfish motives. People are killed in cold blood and others disappear under unclear circumstances.

The citizens are exposed to the wrath of a brutal police that harasses and brutalizes the innocent civilians. Flora witnesses the worst form of abuse when she is returning from Jennifer's burial. She is harassed by the police but when they identify her, they give her VIP treatment. But as she leaves she witnesses women and men being harassed and beaten by the police.

Love

The novel brings about different aspects of love. There is the first aspect of love at first sight projected through the lives of Flora and Steve. These two meet at the party at the university. Flora has been invited by Mike to attend the party where she becomes

the attraction of all sorts of men. However, when she is introduced to Dr. Ruhu, she meets Steve who warns her against two suspiciously looking men. This gesture shows Steve's readiness to help Flora. Their relationship is further facilitated by the forces of chance and coincidence. Their love matures and flourishes into marriage. However their happiness is short lived when Tom returns to haunt Flora with his threats.

Tom's relationship with Flora can be described as selfish and conditional. He only takes advantage of Flora's naiveté to sexually exploit her and even uses her as bait for stealing cars from the men she sleeps with. This relationship is beclouded with doubt and uncertainty. It is hinged on evil and selfish motives. When Tom realises he has lost Flora's love and confidence, he resorts to black mail and dark methods to try and win her back but she declines.

There is also parental love. This displayed through Flora and her son, Peter. This kind of affection is void of manipulation and selfishness. It stands out as a symbol of purity and innocence.

Crime

Because of the political quagmire, there is a breakdown of law and order in the country that gives rise to the increase in violent crime. There are several criminal gangs that are highly connected that ply the country under direct supervision of the state. Tom is a gangster who uses Flora as bait to steal vehicles from unsuspecting randy men. Car thefts are rampant in the country as well as cold blooded murders. Power has slipped into the hands of criminals who preside over violent crime in consort with the security operatives. They kidnap, rape, molest women and kill without any reservations. The murder of Kungu's brother and later Kungu himself are a few examples of the cold blooded murders that leave the population in deep fear.

Neo colonialism

The society in the novel *shadows of time* is faced with a challenge of neo colonialism that affects service delivery and leads to the failure in developing strong public institutions. Like most African countries there is a spillover effect of the colonial mentalities and prejudices that influence the characters' attitudes and motives. When Steve goes on a trip up country with Flora, they are confronted with a terrible sense of colonial prejudice at Alibo Hotel. They cannot freely enjoy their stay at the hotel because it is dominated by whites. The waiters ignore the couple for some minutes without serving them because they are attending to the whites. The whites are upset by their presence that they all walk away leaving them alone by the verandah lounge. The manager is very cross with them threatening to throw them out of the hotel if they did not 'behave' themselves.

Mr. Kungu, the manager of Aribo Hotel harbours strong prejudice and hatred against fellow Africans. He warns Steve and Flora for laughing in what he calls an irresponsible manner and even threatens to throw them out of the hotel. Even after, they have mended fences with Steve; Kungu still maintains a low opinion about fellow Africans. He strongly feels that the political instabilities, insecurities and the state of economic stagnation are caused by the fact that Africans are incapable of providing leadership to their own countries.

Male chauvinism

Male chauvinism refers to the excessive or prejudiced loyalty to the male gender. It is the feeling that the male gender is superior to the female gender. In the novel, this feeling of superiority is depicted through the men who take advantage of their female counter parts. They have a feeling that women are for sexual gratification and therefore exploit their female counter parts. Flora describes how she is sexually exploited by several men starting with Tom.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

First person narrator

The story is told by one of the characters who happens to be the central character as well as the protagonist of the novel, Flora. She narrates her personal experience before the executioner who asks her if she has anything to say. It is a sad tale that starts with her encounter with Tom a city gangster who seduces her and finally becomes her constant pain in the neck.

Letters

The author also makes use of letters to advance the plot, develop characters as well as enhance the themes in the novel. The most remarkable letters are the letters from Tom to Flora. They are usually snappy and short. These letters reveal a lot about the relationship between the two characters and the character of Tom as a manipulative and scheming. He has very little time for Flora and wants to just use her for personal convenience. Some of the letters are used to create tension and anxiety.

Dialogue

Dialogue refers to a conversation between two or more characters in a literary piece of work. The novel is punctuated with several dialogues and conversations. The characters are interactive and associate naturally. The use of dialogue adds credibility and brings the narrative to life. The conversations arouse tension and sometimes anxiety especially the dialogues between Tom and Flora. The conversations between Steve and Flora create a lovely and relaxed atmosphere.

Irony

Irony refers to contrast between what is stated and what is really meant or what is expected to happen and what actually happens. The most tragic irony in the novel perhaps surrounds Flora's first encounter with Tom after the storm. While Flora takes it jokingly and simplistically, this event turns out to influence the rest of her life. She is haunted and tormented by Tom throughout the novel.

Contrast

Contrast means a striking difference between two things. In the novel, shadows of time, there is a sharp contrast between characters and situations. The character of Tom has been sharply contrasted with that of Steve. While the two characters are attracted to the same woman, they are totally opposite in character. Steve is presented as warm and welcoming while Tom is cold, malicious and revengeful. The other characters that are presented in sharp contrast are Ruhu and Simon Lupoi. They are both elderly characters but unlike Lupoi who is selfish and exploitative, Ruhu is parental and considerate.

Symbolism

A symbol is any object, person, place or action that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, such as a quality, an attitude, a belief, or a value. The novel has symbolic characters as well as symbolic events. The storm for example is used to represent instability both in the lives of the characters as well as the social political and economic set up of the society. Tom as a character is a symbol of evil, exploitation and abuse while Steve is a symbol of goodness. Steve's first encounter with Flora at the party at the university symbolises his readiness to help Flora in the future.

RELEVANCE TO SOCIETY

What makes the novel relevant to your society?

The novel examines the problem of Sexual abuse and exploitation in a male dominated society. Flora's dilemma is one faced by most young girls in the modern society. Just like many young girls, she finds herself exposed to numerous incidents of sexual abuse by lustful men such as Tom, Mr. Lupoi and Mike. She is used and abused by these uncouth scheming men as she pursues her ambitions of getting a job and perhaps improve on her station in life. She is raped along the way by one of the men she is given by Tom to take her to the *Mzungu's* place.

Dictatorship and *maladministration* are a common subject of discussion in post colonial Africa. The novel exposes a very high level of high-handedness amongst the powers that be in the name of state security. Horrendous crimes are committed in the name of the state. For example Flora is accused of conspiring to commit treason and

sentenced to death. Other characters are victims of extra judicial killings by state operatives who ply the entire country.

Male chauvinism is another interesting subject discussed in the novel that makes it relevant to the modern reader. The society depicted in the novel is a patriarchal and chauvinistic society that shows total disregard for the female gender. The men in the novel are a kind that takes women as chattels and things to be used for sexual gratification. Flora is sexually used and abused by several men as she struggles to find employment and a better life.

Unwanted pregnancies and *abortion* is another problem that the novel addresses that also affects the modern society. Much as the law criminalises abortion, it remains a bitter reality plaguing the modern society. Because of poverty and wide spread promiscuity, young girls are forced into premarital sexual relationships that more often than not lead to unwanted pregnancies and just like Flora in the novel, these girls are left with no choice but to have the pregnancies terminated illegally. Besides, the process of abortion used is just as crude, painful and traumatizing as the experience that Flora goes through in the novel.

Education is always looked at as a way to a better life in the modern society. Just like in the novel, the system of education raises a lot of discontent and leaves a lot to be desired. The system is designed to create job seekers other than job creators and because of this, the young people are constantly looking for jobs; a thing that exposes them to sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse. Flora is on several occasions exploited by uncouth men who promise to get her employment beginning with Simon Lupoi the manager of National Glass works.

Organised crime is another problem that plagues the modern society. There are several criminal gangs in modern cities that are highly connected with the police and other security organs. This is the kind of situation portrayed in the novel. Komposita confesses to Flora that he cannot help her because Tom is his boss. Later in the novel, we see Steve Kidnapped and later announced dead and Tom comes out to brag about it. This is just similar to the actions of modern terrorists who come out and boast after committing atrocities.

Political instability and insecurity are also discussed in the novel, *shadows of Time*. Just like many African states, there is a high level of political instability in the novel with one coup d'état after another. These political upheavals affect the population negatively creating fear and suspicion. Cold blooded murders are the order of the day and people disappearing under very unclear circumstances.

REVISION QUESTIONS

1. How suitable is the title of the novel, *Shadows of time*?
2. Describe the character of Flora as presented in the novel, *Shadows of time*.
3. In what ways does the novel explore the plight of the girl child in your society today?
4. How does Byamazima show us the problem of social injustice in the novel, *Shadows of time*?
5. In what ways is Flora to blame for the problems she faces in the novel, *Shadows of time*?
6. Explain the problems faced by the society in the novel, *shadows of time*.
7. Compare and contrast the characters of Tom and Steve as presented in *Shadows of time*.
8. What important lessons do the novel *Shadows of Time* teach to the reader?
9. In what ways is colonialism to blame for the problems faced by the people in the novel, *Shadows of Time*?
10. Describe the relationship between Flora and Tom as presented in the novel, shadows of time.

*Mema***BACKGROUND****About the author**

Daniel Mengara is a born of 1967 in Minvoul, Gabon - West Africa. He is a pronounced scholar whose love for literacy and elitism, preservation of African culture is pronounced and prime. This is vividly explained in the establishment of the Society of Research on African Culture (SORAC), where he sits in as the executive director.

He is an associate professor of French and Francophone studies in the department of French, German and Russian at Montclair state university, Montclair, USA. The novel *MEMA* is his first novel.

General Summary

Set in the post-colonial era, Daniel Mengara takes us through a society that is undergoing transformation. This takes many different forms of transformation: social, economic, and political and above all, cultural. These dimensions of change are evident from the very beginning of the text through to the end in the eyes of a passionate and caring mother, Mema “Ntsame Minlame.”

Elang Sima, the narrator, takes us through the various encounters and the memoirs of his mother through the text that we understand the various changes this society has gone through.

In the beginning of the times, the land belonged to the people and so does up to today. But because of power and greed that some leaders have, land becomes a vulnerable area of concern to prove greatness in power – hence territorial conflicts. It is for the reason that great leaders who fought for the well-being of the masses like Gol fought against Dzaman who had grabbed land from the blacks resulting to new states and communities with different names. This is how Gabon derives its name after the war to ‘*Ngabon*’.

This society exhibits a very strong and passionate love for one another with a social strata headed by elders. This council of elders provide advice and solve disputes among members of the society. This council of elders is called a “Medzo”. This *Medzo* would always take place in a thatched round hut called *aba*.

Personalities with serious conflicts would have their issues solved in the *Medzo*. Also good things and plans for successful marriage arrangements and plans would be strategically planned in the *Medzo*. *Medzo* is a good thing that has shaped the people in this land. In the *Medzo*, women were not meant to talk but extreme characters like

Mema Ntsame and Akoure Okang, would never leave *Medzo* without imposing themselves to talk.

It is from such a gathering further that wisdom was acquired. Great speakers and orators like Nkulanveng and Mema /Ntsame bring in their art of proverbs and wise sayings to teach the community. Young people would acquire a lot of wisdom from this gathering. This wisdom is used to pass on knowledge and to condemn evil in society. Women who are beaten and go back their homes would force the *Medzo* to sit and they are brought back. Marriage and well-being of everyone in society is a social concern.

Elang Sima tries to reecho how this kind of wisdom from elders has been overtaken by the wisdom of the Whiteman. Decision making has now been left in the hands of the wisdom of the Whiteman. The more reason decisions in the village on very important and delicate matters waits for Zula Mebiang because of his wisdom of the Whiteman. Wisdom of the Whiteman is all the land has demanded for to be successful as Mema Ntsame commits herself to plant and sell cassava, save money and send her son to obtain the wisdom of the wise man for one day, he will be her savior and the savior of the land:

My mother knew that going to Beyok, the big town, would give me schooling. With schooling would come power, and with power total protection for her and my elder brother. ... My mother knew that the Whiteman's school would make me Osuga Zame of the family. '*Ntol osu, ntol n'vouss,*' to mean 'elder ahead, elder behind'. **Pg. 83**

Therefore, set in this era, society has really proved to be ever changing and never static. As people change, situations and times so does society. The wisdom of the elders that was looked at as ultimate truth that can never be disapproved has been replaced by the wisdom of the Whiteman. This change has also been seen the roles of women in society. What initially was the role of men alone has been taken over by the women. A case in point is Sima Okang that now the wife has taken all the manly roles in the home. This is true change that has taken the society so fast.

PLOT SUMMARY

The book is divided into 23 very short parts that would be equated to chapters. I will therefore divide this summary into the 23 brief divisions using roman numerals for easy comprehension of the text.

I

The text opens with Elang (the narrator) expressing powerful relationship he holds for his mother Mema. A passionate, strong and brave woman who has stood the taste of time in the times of peace and war. The memoirs of her unveils the revelation of relationships between the Whiteman and the blacks. The Fulassi and Dzaman.

Through the eyes of Mema, we get to see the conflict between the whites and blacks as chiefs struggle to retain back their long lost land that the whites had taken over. A chief like Gol stands to walk his talk when he demands for the settlers to join him and fight for the land to be retained. When he wins the battle, he gives back the land to the inhabitants hence creating peace.

Bravery in Mema is seen when she cannot allow anyone to falsely condemn her actions that are justifiable. She believes nothing can oppress her when she has the truth and she out rightly believes her actions will always take her for the best. She lives by it and the mediators fear to handle her cases.

II

Society has great value for practices and customs that supports and upholds morality. Mema is a good orator who makes very poignant statements beginning her speeches with a proverb or a tale, a characteristic of a good speaker. This is a practice that each good speaker and an orator does for his message to be packed with wisdom.

A sitting of elders *Medzo* is very important to handle issues that affect the community positively or negatively. It settles disputes and organizes marriage ceremonies among others. A *Medzo* is an arena where common disputes ranging from individual, family, inter family to inter village conflicts / disputes are settled. Matters like land disputes, husband - wife and cross village conflicts are also handled in the *Medzo*. When disputes prove to be very difficult, a seer, *Minguegan*, is engaged to show whether such a matter can be solved. When a woman goes back to their home, the women bother their husbands till such a woman is brought back and the rest of the women provide solace to comfort her on return.

If the woman who has gone back home fails to return, it stirs up the unison spirit from the women of the village who stage a united spirit against their husbands of the village till the other women strike. This forces the men to call a *Medzo* to meet over her. A team is therefore sent to negotiate for her return with a heavy fine to the in-laws. Men with the rhetoric and wisdom of elders are selected to go along. Men like Nkulanveng, who is full of tact and skill in handling such matters must accompany the team. It is only after this and bringing back of the woman that the other women feel comfortable and return to their happy families once again.

III

The behaviors and character of female counterparts in the village is all alike. It is characterized by the use of witchcraft to humble down their tough husbands. This is typical of Mema except that hers is much more than meets the eye. She is outright, and forthright in all she does making her husband Pepa completely docile. She is a man in a woman's dressing. She handles her family single handedly like a man. She extends her

character to the church that she sometimes preaches when she finds the Catechist preaching what she feels has not been preached to the satisfaction of the biblical truth, by using day-to-day citations and condemning the evil that exists in society without mentioning names.

Her character is extended to personal and family life. In case she is offended by anyone, the whole village is on fire. She speaks out her mind furiously until the spittle of fire has place to settle in the village. This kind of gait is what every man would hope for as a wife. Mema is therefore “both admired and loathed, respected and feared” pg. 36

IV

At a particular point in time, Mema, whose other name is Ntsame Minlame to mean “*destroyer of villages*” p.42 has endured the untold ailment that has befallen her dear husband Pepa Sima Okang. She has tried all means possible to treat him including all medicine men and sorcerers. All Whiteman’s medicines have failed till she decides to take her husband to the *Mimbiri* doctors of *Kom* for a journey to the underworld. This arouses a stiff resistance from her in-laws yet she is adamant to heed to their views. She is determined to save the life of a beloved husband. She does not mind the consequences despite the threats of excommunication from the church.

A few days to the visit to the village of *Kom*, she encounters a head-on resistance from her sister-in-law Akoure Okang, who is the elder sister to Pepa Sima Okang. Akoure comes along with a team of perplexed women from her village ready to attack Ntsame and to take the wasting body of Pepa Sima Okang.

Amidst all threats that Akoure hurls on her, she is silent. When her temper finally arouses, she dashes into the kitchen and returns with a machete forcing all those who accompanied Akoure to flee in different directions to the bushes and the nearby banana plantations except the brave in-law. Ntsame manhandles her making her fall on the ground. Her friends pester her to run, but she adamantly insists. Only to be saved by Ekan Mba and Mbira Ndong who “were quicker than the machete.” Pg. 48.

This reminds her of her famous fight with her husband some years back when she had a born to break with the husband. She picked the machete and ran after her husband. When she was defeated catching up with the husband, she sank deep her forearm making her faint. This is how fierce she is. The duo whisk Akoure out of the compound making her to never look back.

V

Mema goes on to allow the *Mimbiri* doctors take Pepa on for the treatment to the underworld. He takes all the concoctions and goes on. Unfortunately for Mema, Pepa

does not return. The *Mimbiri* doctor describes that Pepa had gone well and even met his parents in the underworld. He described his illness and while deciding on the nature of his treatment, his mother Akoma Mba brought for him food to eat. This is against the doctrines of the Doctors for the instruction does not allow any sick person to eat in the underworld. This explains the cause of Pepa's death.

VI

Even sad enough, on the very day Pepa passes on, two of his daughters fall terribly ill and immediately die. This is a blow below the belt to Mema that tears her down for a long while.

VII

Losing the three dear ones with a day is no easy situation for any woman, bold as she maybe seem to handle, especially for Ntsame whose birth story is far-fetched too. Her younger sister (Mema Afome) had produced four children when Mema Ntsame had none.

She accepts to raise all the four till one single day she, in disbelief realizes something has miraculously happened. For three months she doubts herself but she finally shares with her husbands who receives the news with all excitement. He accepts to handle all family chores and women in the village start to whisper from one area to another; from the river spots and all avenues where they can meet to throw a word. All this is excitement to Ntsame who believes the good Lord has finally answered her prayers.

When time reaches, she decides to go to her mother's village to give birth in fear of those with bad wishes at Otongwaku, her husband's village. She therefore decides to Akom with a little boy who Elouma Ze, who cries dearly to accept go with her wherever she would be going. He is allowed because she is like a real mother to him. Ntsame successfully gives birth at Akom and when the baby, Awono Sima, is a few days old, Old Akouma (Mema's mother) stealthily enters the maternity hut early morning with the intention of taking away the baby when Mema has gone to ease herself. Elouma Ze screams loudest that someone wants to take away the baby and he protects the baby from the old woman. Amidst all her efforts to carry the baby, Elouma out rightly rejects. The news only gets around that the old woman has passed on.

This explains the different persons with different spirits in them. Those who wish others well, bad and those who do not appreciate others to do well. The innocent people *miminye* and the wicked and hard hearted *Beyem*. The *Beyem* are also divided into two: the good ones who fight the evil deeds of the other bad *Beyem*.

It is therefore clear to the entire villagers that Old Akouma; Mema's mother is a bad *Beyem* who wanted to waste the life of the poor baby boy.

VIII

Now Ntsame has lost three of her own whom she used to care for. Her plans and dreams have all been shattered. When the daughters are of age to marry, she is to get the bride wealth to pay for the son's wives to come; for she has two handsome and two beautiful daughters. All her hopes have now all gone. She realizes that there is no more hope to live.

The blame game now starts when she realizes that Akoure Okang wants her to lose her entire family and wants her completely unhappy. The husband's family of course blame her for she was earlier on warned of the *Mimbiri* doctors who feast on their customers. She had also earlier on warned by the white Preachers but she heeded to no word. She has now wasted the life of her husband and that of her daughters. What else does she hold, nothing?

Then at the apex of pain, she decides to have all pain relieved when she intends to join her ancestors. All this misfortune is too much for her to handle. How sad she wanders when everyone sees a traitor in her.

IX

Her husband has people. He is laid to rest and the daughters too. The two surviving sons have been planned to stay away from her for she is believed to be a bad woman who will ruin the two sons. These two sons have to be removed from her before she presents them to the *Mimbiri* doctors for sacrifice again.

Elders held secret meetings and when one year has passed, they come to take the children. Mema is mute as she does not utter a word:

They entered my mother's hut.

My mother remained silent.

They sat down.

My mother remained silent.

They spoke.

My mother listened.

They said they had come to get the children.

My mother asked them to say it again.

They said it again.

My mother showed them the machete.

They fled in panic.

She kept the children. (Pg. 66-67)

She strongly holds that the children are the only hope she has in her entire life and there is no power that can drive them away from her.

X

A story goes about a village of humans. The village of humans is a normal village full of vigor and life headed by Zame Ya Mebegue; to mean “patriarch of the village” pg. 69. He is “the only human to whom the spirits had given the power to protect his people against all evils, including the evil of the ghost people” pg. 81.

Sad enough, he falls ill and really torn down. All medicine men come to treat him but all the medicines fail. The Whiteman comes and realizes that he can treat the ailment, only that he has to be taken to the big city. This is outrightly rejected by the *Medzo*. In the night, Zame Ya Mebegue gets a vision that a skin from a boar killed by his son can cure him. He then summons the members of the village and tells them of the vision. His eldest son Ntole Zame goes first, and is lured by eats and drinks and women. He returns without it. The second son Ebara Zame goes, like Ntole returns without it, third Emor La Zame, Emor Nin Zame, Emor Tan Zame, all fail. Then now the least expected last born Osuga Zame requests that he goes to the bush and hunt for the boar to bring the father a boar skin.

Osuga Zame is a weakling, not recognizable to have ever hunted even a rat and now demands to go for a boar hunt since the rest of the brothers have gone and failed. He obeys all the rules and finally brings the boar skin home, paying heed to the elders’ words of wisdom: “*Ntol osu, ntol n’vouss*, elder ahead, elder behind” pg. 77.

When he returns with the boar’s skin, he returns with a good reward of a beautiful wife and the community accord him respect drawing a lesson that the community will always remember: “it is sometimes through the neglected, the excluded and the meekest among us that salvation and blessings come to a people” pg. 83.

On the long trek from Mimbiri camp with her son Elang Sima, she reminds her son of the story of Osuga Zame and his father, Zame Ya Mebegue. She is confident that Elang Sima shall be her rescue in deeds to save her. She therefore decides to go back to her marital land where she has to look after her two sons: Owono Sima and Elang Sima.

Though the custom provides that a woman if a widow has to remarry, she has no right to leave her husband’s village because she bears the blood of that family. If she is to remarry, the new husband has to stay in that village. This is something that is not about to enter into the minds of Mema.

XII

In the case of the immediate successor, a *Medzo* is organized to come up with decisions that will help the widow live in the village. Ironically for Mema, it is Zula Mebiang, the first born son to her greatest village rival, Akoure Okang. Three parties to settle Mema’s situation is set. On one faction is those of Mema headed by her brother

Pepa Otsaga Minlame, those from Okang's family are headed by Zula Mebiang and those of Otongwaku village headed by Nkulanveng.

During the sitting at the *Medzo*, Zula points a figure at Mema for killing Pepa Otsaga. They exchange a few words with Zula but after a heated discussion and exchange of words with Pepa Otsaga, it is unanimously agreed that Elang Sima the youngest son to Mema be taken to Beyok city with his Uncle Zula. Zula is a known man now in his 30's, a government servant who commands respect. This excites Elang as he is going to learn the ways of the Whiteman, learn his language and his ways and this will make him a respectable man. Meanwhile, Owono Sima the elder son will be left with Mema to give her warmth and comfort. This is the only time Mema is silent and does not raise a machete or determine the fate of her children. She is silent through the entire Palaver.

XIII

The following day, Elang Sima and Mema take a long walk to Ebang where Zula is to set off with Elang for Beyok, the big city. Although Elang is excited, he doesn't share the pain that his mother holds for losing her husband, two beautiful daughters and now her son leaving her for the sit. He weeps all night long in their shared bed with her dear son to set off the following day.

XIV

Early in the morning, villagers come to Zula's home to bid him farewell back to the city. Others wait for him while others trek to Ntem River. Elang walks with his mother till the ferry picks them to cross Ntem River. It is then that pain is transferred from mother to son. Mema falls on the muddy ground as the ferry crosses. The image of Mema keeps fading with the bending road. The tears from Mema, rolling on the mud infiltrates into Elang like a double edged sword for he has gone off to another new land and he does not know whether he will ever see his mother again or whether his mother will ever see him again,

XV

The journey to Beyok takes three days and the night arrival surprises Elang. Lights all-round the city like day time. First, it has been his first time to ever sit in a car for such a long distance. The nature of life at Beyok commits your life and time to working for yourself making you forget about anything outside the city. The life at Zula Mebiang's house is not that easy. It is a hassle and demands your total commitment.

XVI

Life alone at Beyok is not one a child desires to settle for. Zula's own children brought from the previous marriage and Elang cannot see the dawning hope for life. Ekang Zula and Abogo Zula 6 and 9 respectively live a very miserable life. Zula with his wife Alphonsine leave home early morning for work and return late in the evening without food left for the children. While at school and it is lunch time, they return home to eat nothing but to gnash till afternoon break is done.

Zula comes home very drunk that everyone is afraid of him. He has to create a situation that has to pin the children down then he starts caning them for failure to bathe with soap when there is no soap, for failing to go to school when they have been sent home for fees and beating the wife for his calling office and the wife does not pick the call. The little boys have to devise means of surviving by stealing empty bottles at the neighborhood and selling it to the nearby bars. This helps them raise little money for survival for a few days. One unsuccessful day happens when they are caught and thoroughly beaten for escaping from home in the night during their night duty using his "black serpent".

XVII

The school times have proved tough and Elang finds it a better place. Zula's own children find education difficult to master. Ekang and Abogo Zula keep repeating the same grade year after year preempting the father to have a dislike for his own children and admiration for Elang who is always excelling. Zula goes to the extent of raising a pole of crucification where his own children are tied and severely punished for any sort of idea that befalls Zula.

This has set tougher times for Elang who is intelligent. Whenever he has to sleep, the duo, torture him and pinch him. He has nothing to do than to live for the purpose of his coming to the big city. Zula's liking for Elang increases and he is so proud of him because of his excellence in acquiring the Whiteman's wisdom. Elang becomes Zula's favorite that he is so proud of.

XVIII

Beyok has had a marked impact that the memoirs of Mema is almost forgotten. Elang is then the best in class and he is proud of every school situation. For the past five years, the beauty of being a scholar brings peace. When time comes to go back to the village, Elang begins to realize the beauty of his mother he has left behind. Mema, the mother with unending love. He now longs to go back to his village to see and be with his mother.

XIX

While in the village, the other children receive them with all excitement for children from Beyok are like gods with good clothes and shoes. This alone creates village friends who end up joining them and fun is all over. It is sad that Zula's father had passed on at the times they were in the city. And Akoure has shifted to a new house at Eboman. These tribulations alone thrust someone in the village to call for Mema who immediately arrives and calls for Elang who is playing with the rest of the village children.

Five years has been long enough for Elang to recognize his impatient mother who shoots up from her chair, holds him tight in his hands with tears raising sympathy from other women in the hut.

XX

Within one week of Elang's stay with the mother in the village, many stories emerge. He gets to know that his mother had married another man from his father's clan Essangwame, from the nearby village of Allen. He is so much insulted by the relatives of the deceased husband because of envy of taking over the wealth. Mema with her new husband finally decide to shift to his village. She has therefore decided to come and see her son who had gone for a long time. She comes along with a pig, chicken that the entire village visitor and members enjoyed for two days.

XXI

Life in the village is very interesting and quite educative at the same time especially for the long holidays of two solid months. The most hectic one is collecting water from deep in the forest for use at home especially during the dry spell. It is the duty of the children and women to collect water. Though it turns out to be fun with all the sliding at the well and falling on the mud. It finally ends up to be the most interesting game though a domestic chore they are expected to do.

The most interesting and challenging is hunting the underground squirrel. It is tiresome yet a good expedition that ought to be done by boys of the age. A team of up to ten (10) boys have to prepare headed by a commander to go for the attack; either by smoking or digging. When the enemy has been successfully attacked, the evening meal is enjoyed by all members of the community including elders, women and children. Hunting the underground squirrel teaches a lot among all the village games.

XXII

Two weeks have now rolled down and Mema has sent a message that she is visiting the Zula's so there should be a *Medzo*. When she arrives, she explains her disappointment in the way Zula has mistreated her the fact that he has her son and does

not want him to be with her son. In return, Zula wakes up and out rightly insults her back, inviting unwelcomed slap on his cheek sending him back on his bottoms.

Before the *Medzo*, Elang had been cautioned not to accept to go with the mother but rather cry and role on the ground in protest against the mother who wants to take him away. This does not help at all when the mother starts to drag him straight out of the *Medzo*. Zula and Akoure's efforts to pull back Elang invites an unceremonious machete that forces everyone in the *Ada* into several directions for dear life. Mema goes unpursued with her son Elang to Allen, not to Beyok with uncle Zula.

XXIII

Back home at Allen, Elang realizes that the decisions Mema took to allow her son go to Beyok is to empower him with the Whiteman's wisdom that has now surpassed all other ways in the land. Mema makes sure she plants and sells cassava in order to save all the money for Elang to go back to school to study and master the Whiteman's ways and food. By this, he will protect the family from any form of intrusion and disgrace. This is seen when Zula Mebiang has to be waited upon to make decisions on very crucial matters in the village.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Male chauvinism

The indicative activity of belief in the superiority of men over women is paramount from the deepest villages of Allen, village of com to the famous great city of the Beyok. This is very visible in the manner women are portrayed in terms of life style and the treatment by men over work in society.

During *Medzo* no women is expected to talk whatsoever for very important decisions have to be taken by men. Even major conflicts cannot be discussed by women in such *Medzos*. This is the reason women like Mema, Akoure Okang who are out right in society are regarded as mad and crazy because the wisdom and will in them is above that of men and they talk in *aba* during *Medzo*. There is no woman who in marriage is tortured and left to go forever. No man easily follows till they return by themselves. It is evident that Alphonsine suffers terrible physical and psychological torture from her husband who believes that she will return on her own. So he has all the powers to do whatever he does after all she will come back.

Women are not allowed to enter the *aba* during *Medzo*. It is supposed to be only men and any decisions that happen and have an effect on women are imposed on them.

One married woman always remains a man's property no matter what to the extent that when he passes on she is part of the husband's clan and property. If she is to be married again, she has to leave that village and go to the man's place with opposition from her in laws. If not the man will have to pay back all the bride wealth. This makes women appear like commodities.

Marriage and family relationship

Once marriage has taken place there is a natural bond that hold the family of the man to that of the woman. This expands the relationships of the two families. This is the reason Akoure Okang tough as she may be has a blood relationship with Pepa. There is a relationship of brother and sister the sole reason she fights to rescue him from the Mimbiri doctors. Akoure fears that her brother Pepa will die which indeed happens.

Furthermore Zula Mebiang is touched by what happens to Pepa his uncle and takes up the responsibility of taking care of Elang. It is a duty of a blood relationship. By helping Elang Zula is honouring his uncle Pepa and also his mother Akoure.

Marriage is a result of consent between two people who chose to form a family. It is common that most marriages in the society based on time and love between the two parties. The parents are secondary and that is why marital challenges are based handled between the two members of the family. It is only with cases of domestic violence that other members of society have to intervene for peace.

Marriages in this African set up were considered sacrosanct with children. Mema is restless when she fails to give birth. Things are worsened by her young sister's ease at giving birth. In fact Pepa threatens to bring another woman and so many excuses are brought out. Eventually when she conceives it is all joy and satisfaction. Mema can finally breathe and be considered part of the clan after giving birth.

Cultural transition

Society is not static and it is dynamic and so do the people. Situations change with time. Women can out rightly demand their men to prove their love for them. By ganging up together to demand redress on Biloghe's situation with Ntutume they are going against culture that demands men to be in charge instead it is reversed.

At the very beginning of time immemorial the elders imparted knowledge through stories and short sayings this has transitioned to formal education and Elang is sent to Beyok to achieve this. Zula Mebiang is respected and his opinion is taken seriously because he is educated lives and works in the big city. He is admired by his village folk.

The behavior of women like Ntsame Minlame and Akoure Okang, who stand up against tradition is worth commenting. Mema is extremely outspoken and charismatic. She is daring, provocative and also confrontational when disturbed. It is a quality that is considered alien by traditional standards yet society must accept that some people are bound to resist oppression despite the consequences. Akoure Okang is as crazy as Mema and people begin to live with that fact.

Mema is also forced to adjust from her difficult stance of keeping Elang with her to letting him acquire the white man's education in Beyok city. Times have indeed changed and respect is accorded to men like Zula Mebiang because of his education. Therefore like Akoure, Mema would relish the fact that she also has Elang as her very own, famous and respected, able to provide security and to help her when need arises.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Mema (Ntsame Minlame)

The central focus of the narrative

- Extremely traditional in habits, outlook and presentation.
- Outspoken/domineering/never allowed to be bullied by men in village gathering. She easily speaks her mind, much to the ire of the men. Those who were called to resolve conflicts.
- Charismatic, she always made the catechist uncomfortable by taking over the preaching during Sunday services.
- Violent /aggressive: fights her husband and humiliates him in the public, especially in the eyes of the community/almost killed Akoure Okang.
- Strong and hardworking, she single handedly manages the family after the death of her husband.
- Loving/caring to her Children/husband, all her actions despite the controversy is geared towards the love that she has for it and willingness to stake her life.
- Protective/tough towards her family and husband, she fights the tribe and her in-laws when they attempt to withdraw Sima from the Mimbiri doctors.
- Superstitious, like others, she believes in the supernatural forces as the cause of all her woes; the delay in giving birth to also the misfortune of losing her husband and two daughters at the same time.

Sima Okang/Pepa

He is Mema's husband, not much is developed about Pepa, and he can be described as;

- Calm / reserved, he never raised his hand or voice despite the numerous provocations from his violent wife.
- Loving/caring. He was submissive to his wife and showed her unconditional love
- Hardworking, by village standards, Sima is able to keep his family intact.
- Respectful/kind. Sima never got into any disagreements with village folk and exercised restraint with his wife, Mema.

Akoure Okang

Sima Okang's elder sister and Zula Mebiang's mother.

- Akoure is very sensitive to her sister – in – law. She continuously provokes Mema and also confronts her. When Sima's sickness worsens, Akoure tries to drag him away from the Mimbiri doctors.
- Akoure is abusive and irrational. She accuses Mema of being responsible for the death of Sima Okang something that is false.
- Akoure is also considered crazy because she is outspoken and non – feminine. Tradition considers women to be more submissive and calm.
- Akoure is violent and destructive. Despite her weakness, Akoure always wanted to get physical with Mema. Something that nearly costs her life.

Zula Mebiang

He is Akoure Okang's eldest son who lives in the big city of Beyok. Zula is married to Alphonsine.

- Zula is loving and caring. He takes up the responsibility of taking care of Elang in Beyok. Zula does this in the honour of his late uncle Sima.
- Zula is a drunkard who spends most of his time in the bars, filling up with liquor.
- Zula is violent and aggressive, repeatedly beats up his children, wife and Elang for minor offences.
- Zula is insensitive and disrespectful. Like mother, like son, the two attack and blame Mema for the death of Sima Okang.
- Zula is a male chauvinist, he tortures and harasses his wife, Alphonsine and never takes her seriously. Deep inside, Zula refuses go and pick Alphonsine whenever she escapes because he knows that she will come back.
- Zula is respected by his village folk because of his education and the fact that he lives in Beyok city. They seek his opinion on all matters that affect the rural lives.

Elang (The narrator)

Based on the story, Elang can be described as;

- Kind/ understanding. He is able to read into the various conflicts in his homestead. Elang also refuses to take sides in all these Palavers.
- Elang is also an intelligent young boy. He excels in his studies and finds ways of surviving in Zula's violent homestead.
- Loving/caring. Despite the separation from his mother, Mema, when he goes to Beyok, he never forgets the love of his mother.
- Adventurous /outgoing. Elang easily blends well with village peers; hunting and doing chores together.
- Superstitious. In the narrative, Elang shares his people's beliefs and how they shaped lives in the rural community.

Questions

1. What problems do the people in *Mema* face according to the narrator?
2. Explain the biggest conflicts that Elang has within his family.
3. How are women portrayed in the community of *Mema*?
4. Why does the community find Ntsame Minlame and Akoure Okang crazy?
5. Explain the contribution of oral literature to your enjoyment of *Mema*.
6. In what ways is tradition the cause of instability in the community of *Mema*?
7. What lessons do you learn from your understanding of *Mema*?
8. Describe the relationship between Sima Okang and Ntsame Minlame.
9. Explain the way tradition is portrayed in *Mema*.
10. Explain the suitability of the title *Mema* to the story and the novel.

*The Heart Soothers***BACKGROUND****The author**

Sylvester Onzivua is a medical doctor by profession. His area of specialization is forensic and anatomical pathology. He is a contributing author of the book *Forensic Medical Law and Ethics in East Africa* published in 2005. He was also among the regular contributors to the humour column *The Rib Breakers* in *The Monitor Newspaper* in Uganda.

Setting

The play is set in contemporary Africa characterized by the conflict between tradition and modern civilization. The action oscillates between Jimmy's village home, his apartment and then the apartment of his mistress, Jez. The people in the play are contemporary young people faced with the dilemma of the conflict between tradition and modernity. The social setting is very important in developing generational conflict. Iyaa is perhaps the one character that has been used to represent the old generation. She is constant conflict with all the views of the young generation including her own son and daughter. She is very disappointed and saddened at the loss of the family pot. To her this portends misfortune and bad luck.

The title of the play

The title is adopted from the dialogue between Mini and Florence. The gist of the conversation is marital dissatisfaction and suspicion. Apparently, Mini is unhappy with her marital life and so she shares her troubles with one of her closest friends, Florence. She complains about the change in her fiancée's conduct and that he no longer gives her sufficient time and spends most of the evenings out and comes home very late. He seems to have lost interest in the relationship. She strongly suspects that Jimmy is cheating on her. Her suspicion becomes clearer when she discovers a love note in his jacket.

Florence advises her in a matter of fact manner that she should also find herself a 'panadol' to 'sooth her heart.' In other words she should find another lover beside Jimmy to sooth her heart. She adds:

...This new man you will call your **heart soother**, your pain killer or simply your panadol.

From this context, a heart soother refers to an extra marital affair that is intended to bring relief to the characters in case of their marital troubles. At first, Mini does not take this so seriously given her Christian background. However, as the rift between her and Jimmy increases especially when he has to spend days on safari leaving her alone in the house, she reconsiders her position and finds herself Jogo, a taxi driver to relieve herself of the boredom and stress. This relationship becomes her undoing when Jimmy returns unexpectedly back home and finds Jogo in the house. The happiness seems so short-lived.

Jimmy is also prompted to seek for a *heart soother* to escape Mini's nagging character. She is ever complaining about this and the other. To escape from the seemingly turbulent relationship, Jimmy gets romantically involved with Jez who is apparently revealed as pregnant but not willing to keep the pregnancy. In spite of Jimmy's pleas she refuses to change her mind. She would rather have an abortion than keep the pregnancy. The title therefore reveals how young people in the modern day are looking for quick fixes.

The title also in a way exposes infidelity and marital unfaithfulness. The characters apparently find themselves entangled in a complex web of unfaithfulness and infidelity as they try to seek for quick solutions to their seemingly stale relationships. Having caught Mini red handed with Jogo, Jimmy decides to move in with Jez. Ironically, it is revealed that Jez is not sure about the person responsible for her pregnancy. She has also had an extra affair with Jogo. Jimmy is so disappointed and furious with the whole affair when he again finds Jogo in his house this time with Jez. It seems he has been beaten at his own game.

The title further points to witch craft and black magic that is usually resorted to as a quick fix to marital problems. Florence is very quick to advise Mini to visit a witch doctor in order to fix her problems with Jimmy. Mini rejects this advice because she still has a little bit of her Christian conscience. The same thing happens to Jez later on in the play. She invites *jaja* for the ritual 'cleansing' of the house after Mini has left.

Ironically, the title exposes the consequences of trying to find cheaper and quicker solutions to domestic problems. As the characters are faced with the dilemma of finding cheaper solutions, they end up in a more complex dilemma than what they were trying to run away from. Jimmy for instance is completely baffled to learn that he is not responsible for neither Mini's nor Jez's pregnancies. It is a double jeopardy for him as he is given a taste of his own medicine.

THE TEXT

The Heart Soothers is a play that explores the all too common clash between tradition and modern civilization. This clash is manifested in the institution of marriage and love relationships. A lot of questions are raised. Must parents choose for their children marriage partners? Can educated women fit in or adjust to rural life? Is church marriage superior to traditional marriage? Does infidelity solve marital challenges? All these questions come to life as the protagonists in the play struggle to make personal decisions and ensure personal happiness, as their relationship takes a nose dive. The playwright echoes the need for the preservation of the traditional values, culture and heritage, while embracing the positive aspects of western civilisation.

SUMMARY OF THE PLOT

Act One

Jimmy takes his fiancée Mini to the village to meet his mother. His mother, Iyaa, is not impressed by Mini's sophisticated lifestyle and considers her a bad influence to her daughter Recho. Iyaa has the local catechist's daughter in mind as the best wife for her son because she is hardworking and respectful. Her negative attitude towards Mini is further compounded when the latter breaks the family pot, which has been handed down from generations. To her this is a sign of bad omen and ill luck.

Analysis

This scene introduces us to the main characters and the cause of conflict in the play. It introduces the conflict between tradition and modernity. How is this conflict depicted in this scene? This conflict is symbolically brought out in the broken pot which represents the collapse of traditional values and norms.

Questions

1. Describe the following characters as presented in this scene:
 - a) Iyaa
 - b) Recho
 - c) Mini
 - d) Jimmy
2. Explain at least two themes portrayed in this scene.
3. What is the source of conflict in this scene?
4. Explain the significance of the broken pot to the rest of the play

Act Two

Jimmy's and Mini's relationship seems to be thriving. Jimmy wants Mini to permanently move in with him. But she is reluctant and wants Jimmy to first formerly visit her parents. Jimmy considers this an expensive venture. Several months later, all is not well. When Mini's friend Florence pays her a visit, she pours out her heart about how Jimmy has changed and does not love her anymore. Florence suggests that Mini either visits a native doctor to fix the problem, or she gets another man on the side (a 'heart soother'), to get even with Jimmy. Mini rejects these suggestions. However, she stumbles on a letter that seems to prove Jimmy's infidelity. But in her naiveté, Jimmy convinces her that it is the other woman who is after him. Jimmy however continues with his waywardness, under the influence of his friend Patrick. Mini gets agitated and confronts him. Jimmy assaults her.

Analysis

This scene is used to show the causes of conflict between modern couples. Peer influence and extra marital affairs are clearly shown as the causes of conflict in marriage today.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Mini as presented in this scene.
2. What are the major causes of conflict between Mini and Jimmy?
3. How best do you think these problems can be solved?
4. Comment on the character and role played by Florence in this scene.
5. Describe the character of Patrick and say what you like or dislike about him.
6. Explain at least two themes that are brought out in this part of the play.

Act Three

Jimmy visits his lover, Jez. She reveals that she is pregnant. Jimmy is excited but Jez feels she is not ready to be a mother and wants to abort the baby. Jimmy threatens her and warns her not to try it, promising to look after her. Meanwhile, Mini has succumbed to Florence's temptations and has got a 'heart soother' for herself. She gets a taxi driver, Jogo, as a lover who seems to light up her life.

Analysis

1. Describe Jez's character and say what you learn about her relationship with Jimmy
2. Describe the character of Jimmy as presented in this scene.
3. Explain the major causes of conflict in this scene.

4. Describe the character of Jogo and show the role he plays in your understanding of the play, *The Heart Soothers*.
5. How important is this scene to the rest of the play?
6. Explain at least two themes brought out in this part of the play.

Act Four

Jimmy seems to have come to his senses and now wants to formally visit Mini's parents. He prefers a traditional marriage to a church wedding. This conversation is however cut short when he receives a message that his mother is very ill. He prepares to leave for the village. In his absence, Mini invites her lover Jogo into the house. She reveals that she is pregnant for him. Later in the night, Jimmy and Patrick return. Apparently, Jimmy has had an accident on his way to see his mother. Jogo disguises himself as a female friend of Mini. However this disguise is blown when Jimmy discovers Jogo's clothes in the bedroom. Both Mini and Jogo flee the house. Jimmy now decides to bring in Jez to replace Mini. He is supported in this by Patrick. Jez comes to clean the house in preparation for her moving in, as Jimmy and Patrick go to the hospital. Florence brings a native doctor to help cleanse the house. The doctor gives Jez a concoction that upsets her stomach and sends her into early labour. She confides in Jez that she is not sure if Jimmy is the father of her child, suggesting that it could be Jogo, who happens to be Florence's brother. Jogo is called to help take Jez to hospital. Jimmy returns to find Jogo again in his house. Florence reveals the truth to him. He attacks Jogo and strangles him to death. His sister, Recho, bursts in to announce the death of their mother. His mother's ghost drifts in lamenting about the broken pot.

Analysis

This scene brings the play to a shattering climax. The wheel has apparently come full circle when all the actors are finally exposed in their evil schemes. The scene demonstrates the consequences of marital unfaithfulness and infidelity in modern marriages.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Jez as presented in this scene.
2. How is Florence responsible for the conflicts in the play?
3. Whom do you blame for the conflicts in the play?
4. Describe the character of Jogo as presented in this scene.
5. How satisfying is the ending of the play, *The Heart Soothers*?

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Jimmy

He is a graduate and a company executive. He is elitist and very dismissive of traditional norms. He ignores his mother's pleas to uphold the family name by getting involved with Mini; a relationship which his mother does not approve of. His downfall is hastened by his lack of parental guidance and selfish motives.

He is very chauvinistic and controlling. He does not have genuine love for either Mini or Jez. He simply uses them to satisfy his male ego. He exerts his will upon Mini in a way that he coerces her to cohabit with him and later shows no consideration for her interests as he spends nights out without any proper explanation to her. When Mini tries to question him about his suspicious movements, all he says is "when did you become the man and me the woman in this house to question my movements?" This statement clearly underpins his chauvinistic attitude and low opinion about the female gender.

He is cunning and crafty. He willfully takes advantage of Mini's naivety and gullibility to advance his own lustful motives and manipulate her. When she discovers a love note in his jacket, he cunningly downplays the incident and tells her that it is actually the other woman who is after him and then deceives her that he had intentionally brought the note to show her and encourages her to write back and abuse the woman who had written the note. Incidentally she falls for it.

He is easily swayed by the wave of peer pressure. He listens to Patrick's advice to suppress his fiancée's pleas for his company. He spends most of his time drinking and partying and returns home late with a biting hangover. He is quick to follow Patrick's influence that he abandons his fiancée in the house for most evenings forgetting about the need to build a lasting relationship with her. It is for this reason that she also decides to find herself a heart soother in the name of Jogo.

He is violent and aggressive. He has a strong inclination to threatening and using violence in sorting out domestic problems. When Mini tries to question his movements and wayward actions, he becomes furious and threatens her with violence. When she remains defiant Jimmy turns violent and beats her up leaving her wailing in the house. He attacks Jogo and strangles him when he finds him in his house with Jez and Florence.

He is also presented as an unfaithful character. He is involved in multiple sexual relationships with several women. While he cohabits with Mini promising to marry her, he is also involved in an extra relationship with Jez who is apparently pregnant. He keeps playing ping pong with the two women until life catches up with him. He is exposed in the end when he discovers that the women have also been

involved with other men and that he is not responsible for the pregnancies of Mini and Jez.

He is impatient and intolerant. He always looks for cheaper and quicker options. For instance he convinces Mini into cohabiting with him avoiding the formal channels of marriage claiming that it is expensive and backward. He is given to quick temper and lacks patience for his fiancée. This makes her very miserable and lonely as she laments to her friend Florence:

“Jimmy is a total stranger to me these days, with a short temper and intolerance at the slightest excuse...”(page 22)

He is selfish and egocentric. He shows no care for other people except for himself. He totally disregards Mini’s interests and spends a lot of his time drinking and partying with friends leaving her miserable and lonely in the house. He stubbornly declines to give proper accountability for the money he earns claiming that ‘my money is my own affair’ a thing that creates more animosity and suspicion in his relationship with Mini. He shows little or no concern to his mother’s apprehension and disapproval of his relationship with Mini.

Mini

She is a school teacher who falls in love with Jimmy. She seems to want to live a straight life. She embraces the traditional norms, even though she is educated. She tries to live to the expectations of a traditional wife but her upbringing seems to let her down. For instance when she visits Jimmy’s village home, she goes and fetches firewood and draws water from the well.

She later becomes unfaithful and disloyal. She, just like Jimmy succumbs to the forces of peer pressure and influence when she decides to get herself a ‘*panadol*’ in the name of Jogo. She seems to have run out of patience because of Jimmy’s errant and abusive behaviour. Her adventure with Jogo is however too short when Jimmy returns and catches her pants down with him in the house. This brings their relationship to a sudden end.

She is naïve and gullible. When she discovers a love note in Jimmy’s jacket she is very furious and frantic. She laments about what she should do when Jimmy returns. However, when he arrives, he easily convinces her that he had actually brought the note home to ensure that their relationship is transparent and that it is the other woman who is after him and she quickly falls for the lie and follows his advice to write back and abuse the woman.

Her loyalty to Jimmy is tested to the limit when he betrays her. She has no option but to fall into the trap of infidelity, which she hopes will secure her personal happiness. She gets involved in an extra marital relationship with Jogo, the taxi driver. Unfortunately, her happiness is only for a short time. Her unfaithfulness is soon

discovered when Jimmy returns and finds Jogo in the house which leads to a violent outcome and break up.

She has a sophisticated lifestyle that does not impress Iyaa, her prospective mother in law. She appears too lazy and weak in the way she carries herself contrary to the expectations of her prospective mother in law. Iyaa's fears about her are confirmed when she breaks the family pot. She is in all presented as a victim of circumstances beyond her own making. Her infidelity is brought about by Jimmy's failure to live to his expectations as a husband. She is also a victim of peer pressure and influence.

Iyaa

She is the mother of Jimmy; a traditional woman who has dedicated her life to educating her son. She has a strong belief in the traditional roles of women such as child birth and hard work. For this reason she comes into conflict with her son and would be daughter in law who embrace the modern lifestyle and perspectives to family values.

She is quiet blunt and sharp tongued in her comments towards the young and so called modern generation. She bluntly attacks and criticizes Jimmy for accompanying Mini to the forest to look for fire wood. To her the role of collecting firewood is exclusively reserved for women and not men. She has no kind words for Recho's laziness as well as Mini's sophisticated ways.

She is hard working and industrious. She single handedly undertakes to educate her son through university and strives to make sure that he has a bright future by marrying a hardworking woman. Her efforts are however wasted when her son neglects the family and fails to uphold the family's name by cohabiting with a girl whom she does not approve of.

She considers it tragic when the daughter-in-law, whom she does not approve of, breaks the symbolic family pot. To her it is a symbol of bad luck and misfortune. Her illness and death at the end of the play are a result of the curse that has befallen the family brought about by Jimmy's waywardness.

Recho

She is the sister to Jimmy. She is portrayed as a lazy girl who lacks a sense of direction in life. Her mother compares her to her brother's fiancée who is equally detestable. She enjoys giving excuses for her sluggishness for instance when she is asked why the compound is dirty she is quick to blame the neighbours children and later she says 'I failed to find a broom.'

She is irresponsible and careless. She takes to playing and forgets about her domestic assignments. She leaves the beans to burn and when asked by her mother, she says without regret "...are we bean weevils to feed on beans endlessly?" This statement is very irresponsible and uncalled for. She completely has lost touch with her background.

She is playful and childish. She is fond of playing games with others without any seriousness. Her mother reprimands her over the childish games she plays even when she is a grown up girl. She takes to playing and forgets about the beans on the fire. When asked by her mother her response is a cynical "shall we ever eat meat in this house?" she takes life so lightly and carries herself slovenly.

Florence

She is an acquaintance of both Jimmy and Mini. She is particularly close to Mini and a confidant as such. She shares intimate moments with Mini and gives her advice on how she can strengthen her relationship with her fiancée. Unfortunately her advice turns out to be Mini's undoing when she (Mini) is caught by her fiancée with another man in the house.

She is portrayed as a typical modern woman who has no sense of humility. She takes pride in herself for successfully playing two men and advises Mini to also find herself another man in case she suspects that Jimmy is cheating on her. Just like Jimmy, she also believes in getting cheaper and quicker solutions to her marital problems.

She will do anything to get what she wants, including witchcraft. She advises Mini to get a *side dish* or take to witch craft as a way of solving her marital woes. She is a bad influence on both Mini and Jez. Much as Mini resists her advice at first, the influence remains strong. She later finds herself another lover leading to her downfall. It is no coincidence that the man that Mini gets turns out to be Florence's brother. Ironically, it is the same man she gets for Jez and apparently responsible for Jez's pregnancy.

She is a gossip. She is the one who feeds Mini with gossip and rumours about her fiancée's whereabouts. She is in one way responsible for the conflicts between Mini and Jimmy. Her strong belief in witch craft and black magic portrays the typical modern day youths who are always looking out for quick fixes and cheaper solutions.

Patrick

He is a friend and close associate of Jimmy. He too is chauvinistic. He is clearly responsible for Jimmy's waywardness and encourages him never to let women rule him. He keeps Jimmy too busy to think about his fiancée and even exerts very strong influence upon him that he eventually loses touch with Mini. This no doubt escalates

conflicts between mini and jimmy. He is also presented as helpful when he helps jimmy after the accident and makes sure he arrives safely home. But he, just like Jimmy has lost a sense of responsibility as well as, morality which is a typical flaw for the modern day youth.

Jez

She is Jimmy's lover. She is portrayed as a victim of the chauvinistic Jimmy who exerts his strong masculine ego to fulfill his lustful desires. Jez is apparently pregnant and wants to have an abortion for fear of what her parents may think of her.

She initially presents herself as innocent and guiltless hence may attract our sympathy when she is trying to plead with jimmy to allow her carry out an abortion. However, her apparent innocence is tainted by the fact that she is running two men at the same time and ultimately she does not know who is responsible for her pregnancy and it is for this reason that she wants to carry out an abortion.

She is clearly a protégé of the sly and no nonsense Florence. Unlike Mini who tries to resist Florence's advice at first, Jez tries to follow it to the dot. She is involved with Jimmy as well as having an affair with Jogo. It is little wonder that she is confused and not sure about the man responsible for her pregnancy. Her unfaithfulness is finally revealed at the end when she develops complications and is exposed by Florence who spills her small secret.

Jogo

He is a taxi driver. He is a lover to both Mini and Jez. He is one of the 'heart soothers'. Jogo reflects the male chauvinism that is out to strangle the feminist struggle of women like Mini and Florence. Much as he comes at the later stage of the plot, he plays an important role in the advancement of the story line of the play. His involvement with Mini provides a turning point in the story. That he is caught red handed in jimmy's house is a memorable event that is both humorous and morally insightful. He demonstrates how short-lived quick fixes can be.

Jaja

He is a native doctor. His presence in the play depicts the desperateness of women in the face of a harsh male dominated society. It also presents the conflict of tradition versus modernity. Jaja is important in bringing the play to a logical climax and resolution. He is the one that exposes Jez's infidelity and unfaithfulness.

THEMATIC CONCERNS

Tradition versus Modernity

This is the principle concern of the play. The play depicts the struggle between tradition and western civilization. Western civilization (modernity) is out to destroy tradition. This is clearly symbolized in the breaking of Iyaa's family pot by Mini. Tradition is fast fading away as modernity takes over. The young people show little or no interest in the traditional values as they pursue their own course. Jimmy refuses to uphold the family name and rejects his mother's choice of a wife. He insists on his relationship with Mini, yet he does not treat it with care.

This conflict is further amplified in the perspectives about marriage. While marriage is traditionally regarded as a communal affair, with the aim of bearing children, in the modern circles it is an individual concern. Jimmy decides to move in with Mini without consulting his mother or any of her relatives. The use of modern contraceptives seems to directly contravene the traditional objective of marriage and that's child birth. Iyaa strongly recommends the catechist's daughter for her son because she:

"...is the girl who understands that a woman is brought home to fetch water, cook and produce fat and healthy children, not two or three but ten and beyond..."

Marriage and its challenges

Marital strife is one of the common challenges we face in society. The relationship between Jimmy and Mini breaks down because of failure to appreciate the values of marriage such as faithfulness and trust. Jimmy is always out with friends ignoring Mini's interests. This no doubt forces mini to also seek for a quick solution by getting into a relationship with Jogo.

The author brings forth a number of views about marriage. First and foremost is the traditional view that portrays marriage as a communal affair involving the parents and vital members of the community. This is Iyaa's view. She looks at marriage as a source of labour, children and respect. For this reason, she recommends to Jimmy, the catechist's daughter who seems to have all these qualities.

The second perspective on marriage is the modern elitist view that is embraced by the young generation. It is dismissive of the traditional values and non-committal by nature. This view is portrayed through the character of Jimmy. It is driven by convenience and the search for quick fixes. Since it does not involve many people, it comes with the malaise of infidelity and unfaithfulness.

Loyalty, Betrayal and Loss of Trust

The relationship between Jimmy, Mini and Jez, brings out an interplay of loyalty and betrayal. Mini comes to Jimmy's home committed to start a new life with him. She endures the scorn of her parents because she is committed to him. But he betrays her in the sense that he more often than not spends nights out partying with friends and other women. She loses trust in him and revenges by bringing another man into his house. Just as Jimmy betrays Mini, he too is betrayed by Jez who conceives for Jogo. This drives him furious towards the very end of the play.

The more subtle but significant aspect of betrayal in the play is Jimmy's betrayal of his mother by neglecting her and getting involved with a woman whom she does not approve of. Florence is another treacherous creature in the play. She betrays both Mini and Jez. She seems to be aware of Jimmy's involvement with the two girls but she does not reveal it to any of them. She is very quick to reveal Jez's secret to Jimmy at the end of the play.

Peer Influence

Peer influence is something that usually has more negative consequences than positive. Patrick's influence on Jimmy leads him to falter in his relationship with Mini and leads to tragic actions in the end. He is swayed to spend most of his nights out partying and drinking forgetting about his fiancée's interests. This leaves her so lonely and miserable hence forcing her into infidelity.

Similarly, Florence is a bad influence on both Mini and Jez. Her advice is radical and misleading to the two young women. When Mini shares with her about some of the challenges that she is facing in her relationship, Florence's advice is that she should get a *panadol* to soothe her heart. She convinces Jez to take to witchcraft as a way of strengthening her relationship with Jimmy.

Male Chauvinism versus Feminism

Jimmy and Patrick's male act is up against the effort by Mini, Florence and Jez to defend their feminine values. Jimmy and Patrick see themselves as conquerors of the feminine domain. The women see themselves as victims of a male dominated society which they must fight against or get even with. Florence stands at the forefront of this fight. Her method of war is infidelity and witchcraft which in the end prove futile and fruitless.

STYLE / DRAMATIC TECHNIQUES

Symbolism

Perhaps the most important symbol in the play is the breaking of Iyaa's family pot by Mini in scene 1. To Iyaa the family pot represents the values that have survived through generations and that Mini finally destroys this important family souvenir portends doom to her relationship with Jimmy and perhaps marks the beginning of misfortunes for Jimmy. Jimmy down plays this incident to show his disregard for traditional values and norms.

Iyaa as a character can also be interpreted to symbolise tradition. She is in constant conflict with the ideologies of the young people. She attacks all the vices that come along with modernity. That her own son does not listen to her advice of marrying a village woman is in itself a reflection of the conflict between modernity and tradition. Her tragic death in the course is a double jeopardy for Jimmy.

Contrast

There is a sharp contrast in the setting of Jimmy's village home and his town apartment. This contrast helps in developing the conflict between tradition and modernity. In a similar manner there is a sharp contrast between the young generation and the older generation represented by Iyaa. This depicts a generational conflict which culminates into conflict and misunderstanding. Jimmy strongly opposes his mother's choice of a wife and all the values that she attaches to marriage. The other area of contrast is the contrast between the male and female gender.

Humour

These are words or actions intended to cause laughter. Humour is often categorized broadly as Comedy, the humor of exaggeration or incongruity, and Wit, the humor of analogy and word-play. *The heart soothers* has a number of humorous scenes and statements. Can you identify some of those things that make the play funny and humorous?

RELEVANCE OF THE PLAY

How relevant is the play The Heart Soothers to the modern society?

The Heart Soothers is a play that explores the all too common clash between tradition and modern civilization. This clash is manifested in the institution of marriage and love relationships. A lot of questions are raised. Must parents choose for their children marriage partners? Can educated women fit in or adjust to rural life? Is church marriage superior to traditional marriage? Does infidelity solve marital challenges? All these questions come to life as the protagonists in the play struggle to make personal decisions and ensure personal happiness, as their relationship takes a nose dive.

The playwright echoes the need for the preservation of the traditional values, culture and heritage, while embracing the positive aspects of western civilisation. Such values as family involvement in the choice of marriage partners, payment of bride price and traditional marriage systems are brought to the fore front of the discussion. Jimmy defiantly and stubbornly ignores his mother's choice of a wife and takes to cohabiting with Mini without her parents' consent. The relationship later proves to be lacking a sense of direction as the two take to infidelity and mistrust.

The play further discusses the danger of peer influence in marital relationships. Once the parents and elders are sidelined, the married couple are left with no choice but listen to their peers. It is however depicted that much of the advice that the young people receive from their peers is destructive and misleading. The case in point is Florence's advice to Mini to find herself another lover as a solution to her pain and loneliness in her relationship. This kind of advice sounds quite convenient and expedient in the short run but proves fatal in the end.

The play teaches the importance of faithfulness and trust in a marital relationship. The absence of which creates mistrust and suspicion leading to violence and break ups. Mini is aggrieved by Jimmy's errant and wayward behaviour that she becomes suspicious and apprehensive. In her desperate state she decides to get herself another lover to sooth her pain. This comes along with destructive consequences when she is caught red handed with Jogo in the house.

Trial questions

1. Describe the character of Jimmy as presented in the play, *The Heart Soothers*.
2. How suitable is the title to the play, *The Heart Soothers*?
3. Describe the character of Mini as presented in the play, *The Heart Soothers*.
4. What are the causes of marital problems in the play *The Heart Soothers*?
5. Explain the role played by Florence in your understanding of the play, *The Heart Soothers*.
6. What important lessons can the reader draw from the play, the heart soothers?
7. Who is to blame for the problems faced in the play, *The Heart Soothers*?
8. Explain the theme of marriage as presented in the play, *The Heart Soothers*.
9. If you were to take part in your school's presentation of the play *The heart soothers*, which part would you take and why?

*Things Fall Apart***INTRODUCTION****The author**

Chinua Achebe is a world-renowned scholar recognized for his ability to write simply, yet eloquently, about life's universal qualities. His writing weaves together history and fiction to produce literary broadcloth that offers visions of people enduring real life.

Achebe writes primarily about his native Africa, where he was born Albert Chinualumogu Achebe in 1930. He grew up in Ogidi, Nigeria, one of the first centers of Anglican missionary work in eastern Nigeria. His father and mother, Isaiah and Janet Achebe, were missionary teachers. Achebe's life as a Christian and member of the Ibo tribe enables him to create realistic depictions of both contemporary and pre-colonized Africa. He blends his knowledge of Western political ideologies and Christian doctrine with folklore, proverbs, and idioms from his native tribe to produce stories of African culture that are intimate and authentic.

His numerous articles, novels, short stories, essays, and children's books have earned prestigious awards. For example, his book of poetry *Christmas in Biafra* was a winner of the first Commonwealth Poetry Prize. His novels *Arrow of God* and *Anthills of the Savannah* won, respectively, the New Statesman-Jock Campbell Award and finalist for the 1987 Booker Prize in England.

Chinua Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart* not for his fellow Nigerians, but for people beyond his native country. He wanted to explain the truth about the effects of losing one's culture. Published in 1958, the book was not widely read by Nigerians or by Africans in general. When Nigeria became independent in 1960, however, Africans appreciated the novel for its important contribution to Nigerian history.

SETTING

Things Fall Apart is set in Umuofia, a tribal village in the country of Nigeria, in Africa. It is the late 1800s, when English bureaucrats and missionaries are first arriving in the area. Although there is a long history of conflict between European colonists and the Africans they try to convert and subjugate, by placing the novel at the beginning of this period Achebe can accentuate the clash of cultures that are just coming into contact. It also sets up a greater contrast between the time Okonkwo leaves the tribe and the time he returns, when his village is almost unrecognizable to him because of the changes brought by the English.

PLOT SYNOPSIS

The story of Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* takes place in the Nigerian village of Umuofia in the late 1880s, before missionaries and other outsiders have arrived. The Ibo clan practices common tribal traditions—worship of gods, sacrifice, communal living, war, and magic. Leadership is based on a man's personal worth and his contribution to the good of the tribe. Okonkwo stands out as a great leader of the Ibo tribe. Tribesmen respect Okonkwo for his many achievements.

Even though the tribe reveres Okonkwo, he must be punished for his accidental shooting of a young tribesman. The Ibo ban Okonkwo from the clan for seven years. Upon his return to the village, Okonkwo finds a tribe divided by the influence of missionaries and English bureaucrats who have interrupted the routine of tradition. Only when Okonkwo commits the ultimate sin against the tribe does the tribe come back together to honor custom.

Critics appreciate Achebe's development of the conflict that arises when tradition clashes with change. He uses his characters and their unique language to portray the double tragedies that occur in the story. Readers identify not only with Okonkwo and his personal hardships but also with the Ibo culture and its disintegration.

The title

The title is adopted from W.B Yeats poem '*The Second Coming*':

*Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer,
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.*

The speaker in the above verse is lamenting about the discomfort that comes with a sudden approach of change. Just like it is in the poem, the title *Things Fall Apart* brings out the inevitability of change in the novel. The Ibo society, like any other African society is faced with this inevitable approach of change that comes with the advent of European colonialism. When Okwonkwo returns from his exile in Mbata, he finds that Umuofia has completely changed under the influence of the colonialists.

A new religion has been established and several people are converted to Christianity abandoning the traditional religion. The first missionary in Umuofia, Mr. Brown, wins the people's admiration because he respects their customs and develops personal relationships with them. Because of his approach a number of people including Okwonkwo's son, Nwoye are converted to the new religion.

Tensions however rise when Mr. Brown has to leave for health reasons and he is replaced by the Reverend James Smith, an ethnocentric zealot who stirs up deep antagonism between the new Christian converts and the rest of the town. He denounces

the Ibo gods as false and evil. The climax of these tensions is finally reached when Enoch, an overzealous new convert, eats a sacred python and publicly unmasks an *egwugwu* spirit. The Umuofians avenge Enoch's blasphemies by burning down the Christian church, and the British retaliate in turn by arresting the leaders of Umuofia and fining them 200 bags of cowries.

The title therefore describes the chaos and tension that follows the arrest of the umuofian elders after burning the church and the treatment they are given by the British administrators. A meeting is called to express their discontent. However there is mixed reaction as to what should be done to the white man. The meeting ends up in chaos when the Okwonko kills the messenger who had been sent to stop the meeting the old social order seems to have fallen apart.

The title further brings out the futility of attempting to stand in the way of change. Having killed the messenger, Okwonko commits suicide for fear of being arrested and humiliated by the new government. Okwonko's death can be seen as a final blow that brings the traditional African establishment to its knees as the district commissioner notes. However it is important to note that his death is a demonstration of the strong conviction and belief in the African culture.

PLOT SUMMARY

PART I: Okwonko's Rise to Fame

The first section of the novel describes Okonkwo's rise to a position of power. Determined to overcome the unmanly and unsuccessful example of his father, Unoka, Okonkwo develops a strength and determination unmatched among his peers. These attributes enable him to become a great wrestler, strong warrior, wealthy farmer, and prestigious member of his community. As the Umuofians notice his extraordinary talents, they reward him with numerous titles and honors. For example, they make him the guardian of Ikemefuna, a young boy awarded to Umuofia as compensation for wrongs committed by a neighboring village. Similarly, when Okonkwo starts a farm, he receives a generous loan of 800 yams from Nwakibie, a wealthy farmer. Nwakibie is willing to loan these yams to Okonkwo because he knows that Okonkwo will succeed, and Okonkwo proves his ability to succeed by surviving even after a terrible drought destroys his crops. Undaunted by either his humble origins or the forces of nature, Okonkwo soon becomes one of the most successful and well respected men in Umuofia. Okonkwo's success, however, quickly begins to lead toward his ultimate downfall. Because he is so successful, he has little patience with unsuccessful and "unmanly" men like his father. In fact, he publicly insults Osugo, a less successful man, by calling him a woman during a kindred meeting. Not only does Okonkwo's success lead to conflicts with other members of the village, but it also drastically disrupts his ability to rule his

own family. Because of his autocratic style of ruling and impulsive anger, his own family fears him. In fact, his own son, Nwoye, eventually rejects him, much like Okonkwo had rejected his own father earlier—only Nwoye rejects Okonkwo for being excessively masculine, whereas Okonkwo rejected Unoka for not being manly enough. Even more significantly, Okonkwo's hasty temper provokes him to beat his third wife, Ojiugo, during the sacred Week of Peace, a festival time during which Ibo custom strictly forbids any form of violence. Okonkwo commits his worst crime, however, when he participates in the sacrifice of Ikemefuna. After Okonkwo had raised Ikemefuna as his own son for several years, an Oracle required that the Umuofians sacrifice Ikemefuna. Because Okonkwo had been like a father to Ikemefuna, Okonkwo's friend Ezeudu warns him not to participate in the sacrifice. When the rest of the men begin sacrificing Ikemefuna, however, Okonkwo disregards Ezeudu's advice and participates in the sacrifice because he fears that the others might consider him unmanly. When Nwoye eventually finds out about Ikemefuna's death, he has a serious crisis that causes him to question not only his father's example but also the customs and beliefs of his people.

Despite Okonkwo's numerous violations of custom and violent behavior, he ultimately loses his prestigious position in Umuofia not because of his misdeeds but because of an accident. During Ezeudu's funeral ceremony, his gun misfires and accidentally kills a boy. Ironically, it is for this accident rather than for his numerous misdeeds that the Umuofians burn down Okonkwo's home and exile him for a period of seven years.

PART II: Okwonko's Exile to Mbanta

After being exiled from Umuofia, Okonkwo seeks refuge among his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta, a neighboring village. During this time, the British begin colonizing the surrounding areas, and this begins a vicious cycle of mutual confrontation as the two cultures clash. For example, the inhabitants of Abame kill the first white man who arrives in their city because they fear him and cannot communicate with him, and the British destroy Abame in retaliation for this murder. Christian missionaries also begin arriving in Umuofia and Mbanta, and they hold debates to gain converts. Most of the people are not interested in the missionaries' religion, but a few people, including Okonkwo's son Nwoye, convert. When Okonkwo finds out about Nwoye's conversion, he becomes enraged and disowns Nwoye. Toward the end of Okonkwo's exile, the tensions between the village and the missionaries escalate when the Christian converts kill a sacred python and the tribe retaliates by ostracizing the Christians. After Okonkwo's period of exile ends, he holds a great feast to thank his relatives, and he begins making preparations for his return to Umuofia.

PART III: Okwonko's Return to Umuofia

In the final section, Okonkwo returns from exile with hopes of reclaiming a position of power in Umuofia, but Umuofia has changed drastically since the arrival of the Europeans. The first missionary in Umuofia, Mr. Brown, won the people's admiration because he respected their customs and developed personal relationships with them. When Mr. Brown has to leave for health reasons, however, he is replaced by the Reverend James Smith, an ethnocentric zealot who stirs up deep antagonism between the new Christian converts and the rest of the town. These tensions finally explode when Enoch, an overzealous new convert, eats a sacred python and publicly unmasks an egwugwu spirit. The Umuofians avenge Enoch's blasphemies by burning down the Christian church, and the British retaliate in turn by arresting the leaders of Umuofia and fining them 200 bags of cowries.

The Umuofians pay the fine, but the leaders are angered by the duplicitous and unjust manner in which the District Commissioner treated them. Consequently, they hold a meeting to decide how to respond. The village is divided as to whether they should ignore this injustice or retaliate with violence, but Okonkwo has made up his mind that he will oppose British colonization even if nobody else will join him. When a messenger from the government arrives to stop their meeting, Okonkwo kills the messenger, and the meeting ends in chaos.

The next day the District Commissioner himself comes to arrest Okonkwo, but Okonkwo has already committed suicide. The people of Umuofia ask the commissioner to bury Okonkwo because it is against their custom to bury a man who has committed suicide. The commissioner orders his men to take down Okonkwo's body because he has an interest in African customs, but he refuses to help personally because he fears that cutting down a dead body might give the natives a poor opinion of him. Achebe's bitterly ironic conclusion to the novel describes the District Commissioner's callous response to Okonkwo's tragedy. In the many years that he had toiled to bring civilization to different parts of Africa he had learnt a number of things. One of them was that a District Commissioner must never attend to such undignified details as cutting down a hanged man from the trees. Such attention would give the natives a poor opinion of him. In the book which he planned to write he would stress that point. As he walked back to the court he thought about that book. Every day brought him some new material. The story of this man who had killed a messenger and hanged himself would make interesting reading. One could almost write a whole chapter on him. Perhaps not a whole chapter but a reasonable paragraph, at any rate. There was so much else to include, and one must be firm in cutting out the details. He had already

chosen the title of the book, after much thought: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*.

Ironically, the District Commissioner thinks that he has helped pacify the 'primitive' tribes of the Lower Niger, but he is blind to his complicity in destroying these tribes and provoking the chain of events leading to Okonkwo's suicide. The District Commissioner's thoughts are doubly ironic because he claims to understand Africa enough to write a history of it, but he remains thoroughly ignorant of the people he intends to write about. Okonkwo's tragic demise, like the tragic destruction of indigenous African people and their traditions, is a long and complex history, but the District Commissioner only sees it as a mere paragraph. For far too long, Europeans like the District Commissioner have ignored and misrepresented the history of Africa, but Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* begins to correct the historical record by retelling the conquest of Africa from Okonkwo's African perspective rather than the District Commissioner's European one.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Okwonko

He is the central character and the hero of the story. Out of awe and respect, the Ibo tribe refers to Okonkwo as 'Roaring Flame.' Fiery of temper with a blazing appearance, Okonkwo strikes fear in the hearts of his clan members as well as his own family unit. Okonkwo's huge build topped by bushy eyebrows and a very broad nose give him the look of a tornado on the warpath. His whole demeanor reeks of controlled fury; he even breathes heavily, like a dragon ready to explode. He always appears to be wound for fierce action.

While Okonkwo's appearance portrays a man people fear, it belies the terror Okonkwo hides within himself. For his entire life, Okonkwo has had to deal with having a father who is considered weak and lazy – 'agabala' in the tribe's terms. The tribe detests weak, effeminate men. Okonkwo is terrified to think that the tribe will liken him to his father. He is even more afraid of recognizing in himself some semblance of weakness that he sees in his father. Thus, he despises gentleness, idleness, and demonstrations of sensitivity. He will not allow himself to show love, to enjoy the fruits of hard work, or to demonstrate concern for others, nor can he tolerate these in other men.

He is brutal and cruel. He rules his family unit with an iron fist and expects everyone to act on his commands. Because of his autocratic style of ruling and impulsive anger, his own family fears him. In fact, his own son, Nwoye, eventually rejects him, much like Okonkwo had rejected his own father earlier – only that Nwoye

rejects Okonkwo for being excessively masculine, whereas Okonkwo rejected Unoka for not being manly enough.

An extremely proud man, Okonkwo continually pushes to overcome the image his heredity might have given him. He speaks curtly to those he considers less successful than himself and dismisses them as unimportant. Because he is so successful, he has little patience with unsuccessful and “unmanly” men like his father. In fact, he publicly insults Osugo, a less successful man, by calling him a woman during a kindred meeting.

The tribe sees Okonkwo as powerful. They respect him for his many achievements. Not only has he overcome his father's weaknesses, but also he has accomplished more than the average tribesman. As a young man, he wrestles and beats Amalinze, one of the fiercest fighters in the land. Next, Okonkwo goes on to amass three wives and two barns full of yams. Then, he acquires two titles and is considered the greatest warrior alive.

Unoka

Unoka is Okonkwo's father, the root of Okonkwo's fear and problems. Unoka represents all that the Ibo abhor—gentleness, lack of ambition, and sensitivity to people and nature. He is a gifted musician who loves fellowship, the change of the seasons, and children. Although Unoka is tall, his stooped posture bears the weight of the tribe's scorn.

Unoka is happy only when he is playing his flute and drinking palm wine. Tribal customs frighten, sicken, and bore him. He hates war and is nauseated by the sight of blood. He would rather make music than grow crops. As a result, his family is more often hungry than not, and he borrows constantly from fellow tribesmen to maintain his household. He dies in disgrace, owing everyone and holding no titles.

Nwoye

Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, disappoints him. Nwoye shows all the signs of his grandfather's sensitivity and laziness, and Okonkwo fears that Nwoye will shame the reputable name Okonkwo has worked so hard to achieve. Nwoye knows that he should enjoy the masculine rites of his fellow tribesmen, but he prefers his mother's company and the stories she tells. He questions and is disturbed by many of the tribe's customs. Okonkwo beats and nags Nwoye, making Nwoye more unhappy and further distancing him from the ways of the clan.

When Ikemefuna comes to live with Okonkwo's family, Nwoye grows to admire his knowledge and to love him like a real brother. Out of his respect for Ikemefuna, Nwoye begins to associate more with the men of the family and tribe, and to act more like the man that his father wants him to become.

After Ikemefuna's death, Nwoye feels an emptiness that cannot be filled by the clan's traditions. He is plagued by old questions for which the clan has no answers.

Ikemefuna

Ikemefuna comes to live with Okonkwo's family as a peace offering from Ikemefuna's home tribe to the Ibo for the killing of a Umuofian daughter. From the beginning, Ikemefuna fills the void in Okonkwo's life that Okonkwo's own son cannot. Ikemefuna adjusts quickly to his new family and tribe and energetically participates in activities. He earns everyone's love and respect because he is so lively and talented. Only two years older than Nwoye, Ikemefuna already knows much about the world and can do almost anything. He can identify birds, trap rodents, and make flutes. He knows which trees make the best bows and tells delightful folk stories. Okonkwo appreciates Ikemefuna for the example he sets for Nwoye.

Ikemefuna lives with Okonkwo for three years. The tribe then agrees to kill Ikemefuna because the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves has requested it. Ikemefuna's death brings far-reaching consequences.

Ekwefi

Ekwefi, forty-five years old, is Okonkwo's second wife. Although she fell in love with Okonkwo when he won the famous wrestling match, she did not move in with him until she left her husband three years after the contest. Ekwefi had been lovely in her youth, referred to as 'Crystal of Beauty.' The years have been hard on her. She has become a courageous and strong-willed woman, overcoming disappointment and bitterness in her life. She has borne ten children, only one of which has lived. She stands up to Okonkwo and lives for her daughter, Ezinma.

Ezinma

Ekwefi lives for Ezinma, her only living child, her pride and joy. Okonkwo favors his daughter, who is not only as beautiful as her mother once was, but who grows to understand her father and his moods as no one else does. Father and daughter form a special bond. Okonkwo and Ekwefi treat Ezinma like she is their equal rather than their child. They permit her privileges that other family and tribal children are not granted. Okonkwo's only regret towards Ezinma is that she is not a boy.

Nwoye's mother

Nwoye's mother is wise to the ways of the tribe. While she knows that her sons will never be able to display such emotions, she tells her children wonderful stories that describe feelings like pity and forgiveness. She attempts to keep peace in the family by lying at times to Okonkwo to help the other wives avoid punishment. She tries to

adhere to sacred tribal customs. She shows compassion at the message that Ikemefuna is to return to his family. In her own way, Nwoye's mother displays the courage of a tribesman.

Ojiugo

Ojiugo evokes Okonkwo's anger through thoughtless acts and prompts him to break the sacred Week of Peace. As a result, the priest of the earth goddess punishes Okonkwo.

Obierika

Obierika is Okonkwo's best friend. Unlike Okonkwo, he is a thinking man. He questions the circumstances that are sending his friend into exile, even while trying to console Okonkwo and taking care of Okonkwo's preparation for departure. Obierika is the one who visits Okonkwo while Okonkwo is exiled and brings him the first news of the missionaries' arrival, knowing that Okonkwo's son has joined them. At the end of the seven-year exile, Obierika builds Okonkwo two huts and sends for him. Finally, a sad and weary Obierika bids a last tribute to his friend when he leads the diminishing clansmen through the rituals required to cleanse the land Okonkwo has desecrated.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu

A noble warrior and the oldest man in all the village, Ogbuefi Ezeudu has achieved a rare three titles. He is the one to tell Okonkwo that the tribe has decided to kill Ikemefuna. Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to be a part of Ikemefuna's death. At Ezeudu's death, the clan gathers to bid a final sacred tribute to a man who has nearly attained the highest tribal honor—lord of the land. When Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu's son during the ceremony, the clan is horrified. Okonkwo can think only of Ezeudu's warning.

Ogbuefi Ugonna

A worthy tribesman of two titles, Ogbuefi Ugonna is one of the first of the village men to receive the sacrament of Holy Communion offered by the Christian missionaries.

Mr. Brown

The first white missionary to come to Umuofia, Mr. Brown gains the clan's respect through his calm nature and patience. He neither attacks the tribe's customs nor badgers them to join him. He restrains his overzealous members from harsh tactics. He simply offers education to the Umuofians and their children. The mission is flourishing when Mr. Brown has to leave for health reasons.

The District Commissioner

The District Commissioner arrives in Umuofia at the same time as the missionaries. He and his court messengers—called 'Ashy-Buttocks' for the ash-colored shorts they wear—try clansmen for breaking the white man's law. These white men are greatly hated for their arrogance and disrespect for tribal customs.

Reverend James Smith

Mr. Smith replaces Mr. Brown when Mr. Brown has to leave the mission. The Reverend Smith leads the overzealous with a passion. Where Mr. Brown was mild-mannered and quiet, Mr. Smith is angry and flamboyant. He denounces the tribe's customs and bans from his church clan members who must be, according to him, filled with the devil's spirit to want to continue tribal tradition.

Enoch

Enoch is an overzealous member of Mr. Brown's mission. While Mr. Brown restrains Enoch from taking his faith to extremes, Mr. Smith does not. Mr. Smith not only condones Enoch's excessive actions, he encourages them. Enoch instigates the battle between Umuofia and the church by unmasking an *egwugwu*, or ancestor spirit, during a public ceremony. This is one of the greatest crimes a man could commit.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Custom and Tradition

Okonkwo's struggle to live up to what he perceives as “traditional” standards of masculinity, and his failure to adapt to a changing world, help point out the importance of custom and tradition in the novel. The Ibo tribe defines itself through the age-old traditions it practices in *Things Fall Apart*. While some habits mold tribe members' daily lives, other customs are reserved for special ceremonies. For example, the head of a household honors any male guest by praying over and sharing a kola nut with him, offering the guest the privilege of breaking the nut. They drink palm-wine together, with the oldest person taking the first drink after the provider has tasted it.

Ceremonial customs are more elaborate. The Feast of the New Yam provides an illustration. This Feast gives the tribe an opportunity to thank Aní, the earth goddess and source of all fertility. Preparations for the Feast include thorough hut-cleaning and decorating, cooking, body painting, and head shaving. Relatives come from great distances to partake in the feast and to drink palm-wine. Then, on the second day of the celebration, the great wrestling match is held. The entire village meets in the village playground, or *ilo*, for the drumming, dancing, and wrestling. The festival continues through the night until the final round is won. Because the tribe views winning a match as a great achievement, the winner earns the tribe's ongoing respect.

Tribal custom dictates every aspect of members' lives. The tribe determines a man's worth by the number of titles he holds, the number of wives he acquires, and the number of yams he grows. The tribe acknowledges a man's very being by the gods' approval of him. Without custom and tradition, the tribe does not exist.

Choices and Consequences

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo makes a choice early in life to overcome his father's legacy. As a result, Okonkwo gains the tribe's respect through his constant hard work. The tribe rewards him by recognizing his achievements and honoring him as a great warrior. Although the tribe believes that Okonkwo's personal god, or chi, is good (fate has blessed him), they realize that Okonkwo has worked hard to achieve all that he has (if a man says yes, his chi says yes). When he breaks the Week of Peace, however, the tribe believes that Okonkwo has begun to feel too self-important and has challenged his chi. They fear the consequences his actions may bring.

The tribe decides to kill Ikemefuna. Even though Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to be a part of the plan, Okonkwo himself kills Ikemefuna. Okonkwo chooses to kill the boy rather than to appear weak.

When Okonkwo is in exile, he ponders the tribe's view of his chi. He thinks that maybe they have been wrong—that his chi was not made for great things. Okonkwo blames his exile on his chi. He refuses to accept that his actions have led him to this point. He sees no connections among his breaking the Week of Peace, his killing Ikemefuna, and his shooting Ezeudu's son. In Okonkwo's eyes, his troubles result from ill fate and chance.

Alienation and Loneliness

Okonkwo's exile isolates him from all he has ever known in *Things Fall Apart*. The good name he had built for himself with his tribesmen is a thing of the past. He must start anew. The thought overwhelms him, and Okonkwo feels nothing but despair. Visits from his good friend, Obierika, do little to cheer Okonkwo. News of the white man's intrusion and the tribe's reactions to it disturb him. His distance from the village, and his lack of connection to it, give him a sense of helplessness. Even worse, Okonkwo's son, Nwoye, joins the white man's mission efforts.

Okonkwo's return to the village does nothing to lessen his feelings of alienation and loneliness. The tribe he rejoins is not the same tribe he left. While he does not expect to be received as the respected warrior he once was, he does think that his arrival will prompt an occasion to be remembered. When the clan takes no special notice of his return, Okonkwo realizes that the white man has been too successful in his efforts to change the tribe's ways. Okonkwo grieves the loss of his tribe and the life he once knew. He is not able to overcome his sense of complete alienation.

Betrayal

In *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo feels betrayed by his personal god, or chi, which has allowed him to produce a son who is effeminate. Nwoye continually disappoints Okonkwo. As a child, Nwoye prefers his mother's stories to masculine pursuits. As an adult, Nwoye joins the white missionaries to Okwonko's disappointment.

Okonkwo also feels betrayed by his clan. He does not understand why his fellow tribesmen have not stood up against the white intruders. When Okonkwo returns from exile, his clan has all but disintegrated. Many of the tribe's leaders have joined the missionaries' efforts; tribal beliefs and customs are being ignored. Okonkwo mourns the death of the strong tribe he once knew and despises the "woman-like" tribe that has taken its place.

Change and Transformation

The tribe to which Okonkwo returns has undergone a complete transformation during his absence in *Things Fall Apart*. The warlike Ibo once looked to its elders for guidance, made sacrifices to gods for deliverance, and solved conflicts through confrontation. Now the Ibo are "woman-like"; they discuss matters among themselves and pray to a god they cannot see. Rather than immediately declare war on the Christians when Enoch unmasks the egwugwu, or ancestral spirit, the Ibo only destroy Enoch's compound. Okonkwo realizes how completely the Christians have changed his tribe when the tribesmen allow the remaining court messengers to escape after Okonkwo beheads one of them. The novel depicts the inevitability of change and transformation. Okwonkwo war against the approach of change later turns futile when he ends up committing suicide after killing the messenger from the district commissioner's office.

Good and Evil

Many of the tribesmen view the white man as evil in *Things Fall Apart*. Tribesmen did not turn their backs on one another before the white man came. Tribesmen would never have thought to kill their own brothers before the white man came. The arrival of the white man has forced the clan to act in ways that its ancestors deplore. Such evil has never before invaded the clan.

Culture Clash

The arrival of the white man and his culture heralds the death of the Ibo culture in *Things Fall Apart*. The white man does not honor the tribe's customs and strives to convince tribesmen that the white man's ways are better. Achieving some success, the white man encourages the tribesmen who join him, increasing the white man's ranks. As a result, the tribe is split, pitting brother against brother and father against son. Tribal practices diminish as the bond that ties tribesmen deteriorates. Death eventually comes to the weaker of the clashing cultures.

NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Third person

Achebe develops *Things Fall Apart* through a third-person narrative—using “he” and “she” for exposition—rather than having the characters tell it themselves. Often speaking in the past tense, he also narrates the story with little use of character dialogue. The resulting story reads like an oral tale that has been passed down through generations of storytellers.

Imagery

While the characters in *Things Fall Apart* have little dialogue, the reader still has a clear image of them and is able to understand their motives. Achebe accomplishes this through his combination of the English language with Ibo vocabulary and proverbs. When the characters do talk, they share the rich proverbs that are 'the palm-oil with which words are eaten.' Achebe uses the proverbs not only to illustrate his characters but also to paint pictures of the society he is depicting, to reveal themes, and to develop conflict. Vivid images result, giving the reader a clear representation of people and events.

Use of proverbs and African sayings

Divided into three parts, *Things Fall Apart* comprises many substories. Yet Achebe holds the various stories together through his use of proverbs, the traditional oral tale, and *leitmotif*, or recurring images or phrases. Ibo proverbs occur throughout the book providing a unity to the surface progression of the story. For example, 'when a man says yes, his chi says yes' is the proverb the tribe applies to Okonkwo's success, on the one hand, but is also the proverb Okonkwo, himself, applies to his failure.

Traditional oral tales always contain a tale within the tale. Nwoye's mother is an expert at telling these tales—morals embedded in stories. The stories Achebe tells throughout *Things Fall Apart* are themselves tales within the tale. Leitmotif is the association of a repeated theme with a particular idea. Achebe connects masculinity with land, yams, titles, and wives. He repeatedly associates this view of masculinity with a certain stagnancy in Umuofia. While a traditional Western plot may not be evident in *Things Fall Apart*, a definite structure with an African flavor lends itself to the overall unity of the story.

RELEVANCE OF THE TEXT

What is the relevance of the novel *Things Fall Apart* to the modern reader?

Perhaps one of the most outstanding significances of the novel is that it portrays the effects of colonialism to the African people and society. One of the most important

results of Europe's colonization of Africa was the division of Africa into at least fifty nation-states. Rather than being a part of a society determined by common language and livelihood, Africans lived according to political boundaries. The divisions often split ethnic groups, leading to tension and sometimes violence. The cohesiveness of the traditional society was gone. This effect is still felt up to the present day.

Much as the novel was published in 1958 just prior to Nigerian independence, it depicts a typical traditional African society. The story takes place in the typical tribal village of Umuofia, where the inhabitants practice rituals common to their native traditions. Just like many African traditional societies, the Ibo worship gods who protect, advise, and chastise them and who are represented by priests and priestesses within the clan. For example, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves grants knowledge and wisdom to those who are brave enough to consult him. No one has ever seen the Oracle except his priestess, who is an Ibo woman but who has special powers of her own.

The novel also addresses the question of change. Just like all African societies, the Ibo society is confronted with the inevitable forces of change orchestrated by the advent of European colonialism. When Okwonkwo returns from exile in Mbata where he had been in banishment for seven years, he is surprised at the changes that Umuofia has undergone. Several individuals have been converted to Christianity including his own son Nwoye and the white man had also brought a government and built a court. Okwonkwo is shocked that the once hostile and aggressive Umuofian society had now become docile and receptive.

The novel further depicts an agrarian society characterized by hunting and gathering. Just like all African societies, the Ibo community is a hunting and gathering society that existed on vegetables, with yams as the primary crop. Yams are so important to them that the Ibo celebrate each New Year with the Feast of the New Yam. This festival is to thank Ani, the earth goddess and source of all fertility. They prepare for days for the festival, and the celebration itself lasts for two days. Yams also play a part in determining a man's status in the tribe—the more yams a man has, the higher his status.

Within the village, people were grouped according to families, with the eldest man in the family having the most power. On matters affecting the whole village, an assembly of adult men debated courses of action, and men could influence these assemblies by purchasing “titles” from the tribal elders. This system encouraged hard work and the spread of wealth. People who transgressed against the laws and customs of the village had to confront the *egwugwu*, an assembly of tribesmen masked as spirits, who would settle disputes and hand out punishment. Individual villages also

attained various degrees of political status. In the novel, other tribes respect and fear Umuofia. They believe that Umuofia's magic is powerful and that the village's war-medicine, or agadi-nwayi, is particularly potent. Neighboring clans always try to settle disputes peacefully with Umuofia to avoid having to war with them.

While Christianity spread across north and South Africa as early as the late fifteenth century, Christianity took its strongest hold when the majority of the missionaries arrived in the late 1800s. When the mission and its converts accepted even the outcasts of the clan, the missionaries' ranks grew. Eventually, some of the more important tribesmen were converted. As the mission expanded, the clan divided, discontent simmered, and conflicts arose. The conflict between Christianity and traditional African religion has remained rife to the present situation.

Questions

1. Describe the character of Okwonkwo as presented in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*.
2. How suitable is the title to the novel *Things Fall Apart*?
3. In what way does Chinua Achebe portray the African culture in the novel *Things fall apart*?
4. What important lessons can the reader draw from the novel, *Things Fall Apart*?
5. How is Okwonkwo responsible for his own downfall in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*?
6. How does the death of Ikemefuna influence the events in the novel, things fall apart?
7. Describe the traditional life of the Ibo people as presented in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*.
8. Explain the theme of change as presented in the novel, *Things Fall Apart*.
9. In what ways does Okwonkwo violate the Ibo social code and what are the effects of his actions?
10. What feelings does Okwonkwo's death invoke in you?

*Voice of the People***Author and background**

Andrew Okiya Omtatah Okoiti is a Kenyan playwright, a human rights defender and civil activist. The play “Voice of the People” is set in an unmentioned country but in the era of Post – colonial modern Africa. A continent that has suffered from corruption, graft, injustice, plunder of its resources, intolerance to media freedom and criticism because of poor and incompetent leadership.

SCENE SUMMARIES**FIRST SEQUENCE (summary)**

The curtains unfold before the audience to the picture of Boss. He is the head of state and center of attraction at the moment. Boss is immersed in a telephone conversation with one of his overseas associates. The person on the phone is an agent whom Boss has given the task to scout for properties abroad that he can easily lay his hands on. Boss talks about properties in millions of dollars, located in exclusive cities in Europe. The payments for a particular mansion will be met using the export earnings from tea. Boss desires that particular mansion which is worth Ten million dollars as a gift for the first lady. He is also interested in more properties of historical importance associated with great leaders such as Napoleon.

Shortly, in the middle of the phone conversation, Sibuur walks in. this arrival of Sibuur annoys Boss because he does not expect any interruptions. Sibuur has come with disturbing news about a group of women who are bent on blocking the project on Simbi forest. The group is called the mother’s front. This group is led by a woman called Nasirumbi. Sibuur finds it very important to diffuse her because their actions could raise civil unrest.

Boss is not ready for anything that will block the huge project on Simbi. On second thought he feels unprepared to meet Nasirumbi and needs more information about her. Its information that he can easily use as a negotiation tool or as a distinguisher, to bring Nasirumbi to a stop. Sibuur insists that Boss should meet Nasirumbi and that she has already come to his residence.

Boss is erratic but as it stands he has no way out. Firstly, Boss must get some off - hand information about his guest. Boss is informed that Nasirumbi is a mother of three and a teacher of Swahili and mathematics at St. Bakhita Primary School. That she lives off her meagre salary and is a great teacher who has won several honors in her life.

Armed with such information, Boss accepts Siboor to usher in Nasirumbi. Although he is uncomfortable, Boss has to create an atmosphere of calm and hospitality. Nasirumbi is welcomed warmly by Boss and is offered a cup of tea. She dives straight in enquiring about Boss' stand on Simbi forest. Boss is non-committal and hesitant to take the side of the project but pretends that he will wait for the decision which the cabinet will make on the matter. Boss makes a firm declaration that he has a duty to perform and will do so based on the rules of democracy and not emotion.

Nasirumbi is furious that Simbi is not a very serious matter in the eyes of Boss and yet it is a very sacred site to the people. Simbi is a water reservoir and a habitat for flora and fauna. It is also a game reserve and any construction on it will affect the heritage of wild animals and also cause water shortage.

Boss insists that there are two sides to the project which must be thoroughly studied. The provision of jobs and income, on the other side the needs of the people clearly one of them outweighs the other. Boss intends to put the Simbi issue to a referendum and that people should vote on it. That way a democracy will be seen by the people.

Nasirumbi stands up to bid her host farewell and she is given a donation of one hundred thousand shillings. Boss insists that it is a token towards the cause of the mothers' front. Nasirumbi is surprised but delighted that the sum will push them for some time. She also promises to have it receipted by the treasurer and acknowledged as a sum from Boss.

Boss finds this honesty surprising because he expected it to serve as Nasirumbi's personal token. He scribbles down phone numbers and requests direct contact with Nasirumbi. He later takes her on a tour around his garden.

Comment on first sequence

The Boss' personality is brought out prominently. He is a lavish old man with pomp and extravagance. Boss loves attention and above all vintage property. He is an epitome of plunder, grant and corruption. Boss intends to spend tax payer's money totaling to ten million dollars on a private luxurious villa in Europe.

Boss is also unpatriotic because he is willing to give away Simbi forest and Game reserve for the construction of a resort hotel. In his interaction with Nasirumbi, Boss comes out as a hypocrite and a man of pretense. He shows that his actions are meant for the good of the masses yet the consequences of his decision on Simbi would be to the detriment of the people.

Boss also boasts of a variety of tree species in his compound as he shows Nasirumbi around but he is the center of giving away Simbi forest. Nasirumbi is portrayed as an honest, hardworking and patriotic citizen. Sibuur is a sycophant.

SECOND SEQUENCE

“The voice of the people” has published another head – turning article and Sibuur has gone to meet Indondo at the publishing house. Sibuur is clearly angry that Nasirumbi’s cause has been given prominence by the editorial and he feels this is likely to invite civil unrest. Sibuur has gone to meet Indondo over the contentious matter of Simbi forest. Indondo is supportive of the peoples’ desire and he is critical of the entire project of building a resort in the land. Indondo is also critical of the fact that two blocks of flats belonging to the War veterans are supposed to be knocked down in the interest of national development.

In Sibuur’s defense, he claims the project will offer massive jobs and opportunities for the people. Furthermore the dollars will have a trickle-down effect to the economy and make lives of people better.

Indondo interjects in the interest of conservation and continued encroachments on gazette public property. He also believes that such projects only benefits a hand full of individuals like Sibuur and that it is little wonder that he is a filthy rich man. Indondo also says that poverty is a highly politicized and well-funded program by the westerners. He calls this the hypocrisy of the west. Indondo produces the document that shows the master plan and deliberations by the cabinet committee. This makes Sibuur surprised on how such a secret document could have been leaked to the press.

Later Sibuur threatens to destroy Indondo and his publication if he continues publishing articles by the mothers’ front. Indondo says that it is his duty to inform the masses for as long as he holds that information important, Sibuur produces a parcel with pictures of Indondo in a hotel. It is an example of Indondo’s extra – marital affair and a show of his weakness. Indondo is speechless and surprised that if such information is leaked to the public, it is likely to damage his reputation and disintegrates his family.

Commentary on second sequence

It is clear that Sibuur and Boss are uncomfortable with the press. They feel that it is likely to incite civil unrest and this should be blocked or gagged. Sibuur and Boss are intolerant to public opinion and free speech. Through Sibuur, the reader has an insight into the architects of plunder. He is not remorseful and apologetic for his actions; rather Sibuur is proud of his achievements. He tries to bully Indondo into accepting to turn down Nasirumbi’s articles from the publication.

The pictures of Indondo in a hotel with his mistress is an example of promiscuity and extra –marital affairs that dot the country today.

THIRD SEQUENCE

Sibuor visits Boss again and shows that things are getting out of control. Nasirumbi has been given prominence by *The Voice of People*. The editorial is offensive and the remarks it makes are seditious in the eyes of national interests. Boss is at first slow to react but on second provocation from Sibuor, he begins to use the danger that such articles present to the project.

Boss orders Sibuor to make sure that such talk is silenced or controlled. This should be done by cutting a deal with the owner of the publication. On second thoughts, Sibuor produces a parcel of pictures of Indondo in his adulterous affair. Boss is excited and calls them, gem". The pictures will help them to cut a deal or so they think.

Sibuor exaggerates the actions of the publication and wants Boss to have a quick response. Unfortunately, Boss is calculative and does not want to have his hands soiled. He chooses to play slow but sure. However he is bitter with Sibuor that the confidential document that details the plans on Simbi was leaked, Boss desires that the culprit must be found. Sibuor is apologetic for such an act of irresponsibility and carelessness.

Boss forgives Sibuor but insists that whatever should be done must be handled with caution.

Commentary on third sequence

Boss is an irrational person seen from the way he easily takes to Sibuor's information that is manipulative and insensitive. His only desire is to please Boss and increase the returns that he makes from loyalty to Boss. Sibuor exaggerates the impact of Indondo's publication in order have it closed. The corrupt always work towards silencing public opinion and controlling the press using slander and blackmail. It is a tool used in cooperate espionage. Indondos' photos should be used in order to strike a compromise with his critical paper.

There is increasing intolerance and lack of freedom of expression.

FOURTH SEQUENCE

Things begin to change steadily much to Nasirumbi's disappointment. Indondo is quiet and compromised; he does not want to publish anything else that causes anger for Dalangi and Boss. It is apparent that the media house has been infiltrated and Indondo is now cold and silenced. He pleads his case that he fears for the closure of the publication.

Nasirumbi walks in with the news that the courts of law have blocked their injunction in the interests of the state. Indondo is not surprised and feels that he saw it coming because the legal system relies on financial support from the state. Nasirumbi insists that another article calling for signatures from the public be published, to which Indondo declines. Action shifts to a flash back of papers purported to be from Dalangi and his immediate instructions to Indondo on compliance with the state. Nasirumbi feels betrayed and has no one else to turn to for help.

Commentary on Fourth Sequence

It becomes apparent that Nasirumbi is now fighting a losing battle. Her right hand man has been compromised with and can no longer serve the purpose that she wants. Indondo is cowardly and a hypocrite. He has turned his back on Nasirumbi, the theme of corruption is highlighted through the courts of law.

Fifth sequence

Indondo, Sibuur and Boss are hiding in a hotel room wearing female clothing. Indondo's complicity is now very vivid as he is seen in the company of Boss and Sibuur. The trio are waiting for a secret appointment and meeting with an incognito expert sent to make a report on Simbi. It is Indondo who discovers her presence and reports directly to Boss and Sibuur. The plan is to have the report tilted in the favour of the project on Simbi. This would give the donors an upper hand to release the much needed finances.

There is panic because of the delay and time seems to be running out. Boss is willing to bribe the expert with a good sum of money in order to have a good report. Sibuur is uncomfortable with Indondo because of his sudden turn around to their side. He urges Boss to be cautious and recommends that Indondo be eliminated after fulfilling their business.

Indondo is positive that the foreign visitor should be coming down for the meeting shortly. Sibuur and Indondo are still terrified by Nasirumbi and have plans to have her co-opted or eliminated. Boss is interested in negotiating with Nasirumbi where as Indondo and Sibuur want to sexually subdue her as a way of weakening her enthusiasm to fight for Simbi forest.

Commentary of fifth Sequence

The hypocrisy of Indondo is brought out vividly in this sequence. The vulnerability of Boss and Sibuur is also exposed. Despite the vanity and hype, the government officials are as ordinary as any other common people. This is shown through the disguise that Boss and Sibuur is able to put on through female clothing.

Corruption and bribery is also brought out as key evils that the regime of Boss employs for subjugation and patronage.

SIXTH SEQUENCE

Sibuor visits Nasirumbi's residence clad in his expensive suits. He is carrying with him his briefcase loaded with money. Boss has sent Sibuor to cut a deal with Nasirumbi and come to a memorandum of understanding. There is a planned demonstration by the Mothers' Front and Boss feels that such actions will cause bad publicity for the government. This is coming at the back of a recently inaugurated project of the resort on Simbi forest.

Nasirumbi is bitter that Sibuor can freely come to her house despite the insults that were made and quoted by the press. In the article, Sibuor labeled her a "whore" and someone with no dignity to champion people's interests. Furthermore that being unmarried, Nasirumbi is unworthy public office and trust.

Sibuor denies ever making such statements and pleads his case as having been misquoted and got out of context. Nasirumbi does not believe him but pretends to tolerate his presence.

Shortly Sibuor makes a deal of two million shillings towards Nasirumbi's cause and accepts to make the sum of ten million that Nasirumbi demands. Nasirumbi takes the briefcase and enters the house to pick petrol and a match box. She intends to burn Sibuor's money and also the agent of corruption but Sibuor is lucky, snatching the brief case and escaping unhurt. He goes out with threats against Nasirumbi's life.

Commentary on sixth sequence

Corruption and embezzlement come out clearly in this sequence. Sibuor is an agent of this evil. Sibuor is willing to spend two million shillings of tax payers' money on bribing Nasirumbi.

The press can also be used for black mail and slander. This is what happens to Nasirumbi as reported in the papers. Nasirumbi is also portrayed as a woman of honesty as she refuses the bribe that Sibuor had brought.

SEVENTH SEQUENCE

Boss drives to Nasirumbi's house and hoots for several minutes without response. Meanwhile Indondo and Nasirumbi are inside the house having a conversation. Indondo reports that the children are missing their mother. Nasirumbi pities them for having a mother like her. Indondo touts Nasirumbi on taking the opportunity of contesting for leadership. Nasirumbi turns down any such dream and affirms that she has no interest at all.

Indondo has to hide because he does not want Boss to find him in Nasirumbi's house so he is forced to get under the bed.

Boss walks in to the house and finds Nasirumbi organizing the debris that is left of her ransacked abode. Boss comes to show empathy towards Nasirumbi's loss which she feels is pretense and hypocrisy.

Nasirumbi is sure that Boss has a hand in what has befallen her house. Boss tries to sexually assault Nasirumbi but gets a kick on his crouch. He is forced to leave the house in pain cursing and threatening Nasirumbi with revenge. Indondo appears from his hiding and tries to comfort Nasirumbi on her painful ordeal from the assault.

Commentary on the seventh sequence

The habit of corrupt governments include harassment and torture. Nasirumbi's house has been ransacked by state sponsored goons as a way of making her to bow out and also immoral from his actions on Nasirumbi. Indondo on his part comes out as a coward and a hypocrite. Never wants to be seen by Boss because of the secret dealings he has with him.

EIGHTH SEQUENCE

People have gathered at the National stadium. There is a very big ceremony where Boss is going to be rewarded with the "Golden shield of Honour" by the World Bank representative. The mood is expectant and jubilant with dignitaries and members of the various groups that support Boss' government. Indondo is invited to give opening remarks and also invite Siboor. It's Siboor's speech that cements all his hypocrisy and sycophancy for Boss. Siboor heaps Boss with all manner of praise filled with lies. Boss is ushered in with pomp and applause to make his speech. He is later asked to kneel down in order to have the lights switched off. This is meant to precede the arrival of the special Envoy who would then present Boss with the shield of Honour. As lights are switched off, Nasirumbi appears with the body of a child and hands it to Boss. When lights are switched back on, there is tension before the press and all dignitaries. Nasirumbi blames such deaths on Boss because of the plunder that he has orchestrated whereby hospitals have no drugs and yet all the money goes to buying expensive villas abroad. Siboor sensing danger, attempts to exit the stage but he is stopped to face the biggest shame of their lives.

Commentary

The true image of the regime is revealed to the gathering of all and sundry. The ceremony of crowing Boss with "The shield of Honour" by the World Bank special Envoy turns into a function of parading evil. Nasirumbi expresses the effects of plunder and corruption.

There is general breakdown of social service, schools, hospitals are in shambles and people are left to die from preventable diseases. Sibuur and Boss are crowned as epitomes of graft and plunder.

CHARACTERS AND CHARACTERIZATION

Sibuur

He is always dressed in expensive suits and does Boss errands because of the trust. Sibuur is an adviser, a fixer and a technocrat in Boss' regime. He can be described as;

Selfless. In the play, Sibuur works to please his Boss. When he hears about the actions of "The Mother's front" He is quick to arrange a meeting between Nasirumbi and Boss. Sibuur is aware of the consequences of Nasirumbi's actions as devastating to that cause. He fears for the sabotage of the Simbi project and resort because of millions in kick -backs that he stands to miss.

He is vain and presented as a lover of attention and one given to exhibition. The description of his expensive suits gives presidency over this personality. He attempts to stand out as a classy and distinct individual.

He is corrupt. Indondo says that Sibuur is among the richest people in the country. These riches are from dubious means associated with deceitful and illegal business transactions. Sibuur does not hide this and seems to be bent on protecting his cake.

He is insensitive / heartless; Sibuur does not care a thing about the lives of the people around him. He like Boss are held responsible for the numerous deaths of children and people because of inadequate and lack of drugs in hospitals. They two have siphoned the finances that should have supplied the much needed drugs and better health care to the citizens.

Similarly, Sibuur is responsible for the destruction and attack on Nasirumbi's house. He pays the thugs who ransack and set a blaze Nasirumbi's property. He does this to threaten her and make sure that she supports the project on Simbi.

Sibuur is immoral and lecherous. He prides in sleeping with any women that he lays his hands on Sibuur promises to sleep with Nasirumbi in order to weaken her resolve. Although he fails, the revelation brings out this evil character in him.

Insecure / cowardly. When Indondo switches allegiance and helps Boss with information about the mysterious visitor in town, Sibuur is seen as uncomfortable working with Indondo. In fact he tries to persuade Boss to eliminate Indondo after he has served their purpose. Relatedly during the crowning ceremony in the eighth sequence, realizing that things are going out of hand, Sibuur attempts to escape but he is restrained by Indondo.

Sibuor is a sycophant of boss .He heaps praises on boss as a champion of peace, prosperity and progress, words that are filled with emptiness and hypocrisy his actions are meant to point boss in good stead for personal benefit and patronage.

Sibuor is arrogant /intolerant to criticism. In his argument with Indondo ,Sibuor cuts a figure of a person who takes the law in his hands. He promises to deal with any opposition towards simbi with force no matter the cash .he also openly dangles his gun in order to shows the impunity that the government tolerates among people like him.

In the play, Sibuor is one of the architects of the regimes incompetence on the biggest agent of graft and plunder. The evils that have caused apathy and suffering to the population.

Boss

He is the head of state, a man in his early sixties as described by the stage directions. Boss is leading a government characterized by impunity, corruption injustice and general apathy because of untold suffering among the citizenry boss can be described as:

He is extremely corrupt. Boss intends to spend a tune of ten million dollars of tax payers' money to purchase a villa in Europe .he feels very comfortable and excited by vintage objects and deserves to be identified with them. He is also accused of starching millions of shillings in foreign overseas accounts, much to the chagrin of his starving citizenry. .Boss is willing to pay the special envoy highly read" a hearty hand shake" if she can write a friendly report about Simbi forest. Boss openly flaunts money for his selfish interest.

Boss is vain, in the play, he speaks of expensive property and wines that are as old as half his age .Boss also carries the aura of acquiring various properties a broad clearly cement him as a man of vanity.

He is irrational /naïve. Boss is easily hoodwinked by Sibuor whenever he has personal scores to settle .for instance, Sibuor exaggerates Nasirumbi's threat as very severe and dangerous .it is such words that boss relies on in order to mete acts of torture, or subjugation based on misinformation this weakness exposes boss as indecisive and irrational, unable to make personal judgment on numerous issues and relying on hear -say.

Boss is cowardly. At the beginning of the play, he fears to meet Nasirumbi because he is not prepared .it is only after Sibuor's pleas that boss accepts to usher Nasirumbi into his office. In the hotel, Boss shows cowardice when he feels insecure wearing female clothing in order to meet the special envoy.

Boss is insensitive and inhuman. He fails to take care of the social services of his people by denying them the much needed finances. Nasirumbi brings this to light when

she presents boss with the body of a child who died due to lack of medicine in the hospitals.

Boss is greedy .he is interested in a massing as much wealth as possible whereas the citizens live in slums and lack basic services.

Boss is also immoral and disrespectful of women he attempts to sexually assault Nasirumbi in her house .the kick that he gets from her, serves him right .Boss is given to treating women like mere objects of pleasure.

He is also incompetent .as a head of state, Boss is presiding over a failed state and hands over the day to day business of state duties to people like Sibuur. In the end all he does is harvest the biggest shame in the presence of media international and local, for his incompetence.

Boss is an epitome of poor leadership and governance, worsened by graft, corruption and impunity. The biggest challenge of modern post independent, sub-Saharan Africa.

Nasirumbi

- She is teacher by profession and a civil activist who rises to challenge the establishment of a resort on Simbi forest. She does this through a group of women ,called “the mothers front” she can be described as:
- Selfless, in the play ,she risks her job and life to go against powerful state machinery such the president and Sibuur. to her, Simbi is a very important source of livelihood to the people by assuming leadership and control ,Nasirumbi becomes “the voice of the people “ tortured, insulted and harassed. She does not give up the struggle to save Simbi forest
- Nasirumbi is intelligent and honest .when boss offers her an envelope worth one hundred thousand shillings, she is quick to inform boss that it will be taken into account as public donation .she refuses to receive it as a bribe which by all intent and purpose boss meant it to be .Nasirumbi’s donation. Her honesty surprises as well as offends Boss, because he finds her a hard nut to crack.
- Nasirumbi is also a very brave women as it is seen from her actions. She refuses to be intimidated by boss and Sibuur. When Boss assaults her, Nasirumbi fights back without fear of any consequences of her actions.
- She is famous and well known .Nasirumbi is said to have received several honours for her duties as a teacher a civil activist. This makes her a very hardworking person and above all admirable by the population.
- Nasirumbi is outspoken and resilient. She attacks all attempts at taking simbi forest using the media and many public fora, all this is done for public good.

- She withstands all manner of bad publicity from Sibuur and boss but rises to victory in the end. She achieves this by exposing all the evil that has been perpetrated by Boss and his government.
- Nasirumbi is an epitome of civil activism in society .she refuses to watch acts of impunity pass her by but choose to mobilize people to advocate for fairness and justice.

Indondo

- He is a journalist and Nasirumbi's fiancé in the play. .Indondo is one of the most confusing characters because he plays double standards .Indondo can be described as :
- Brave and outspoken .Indondo helps Nasirumbi advance the opposition against the establishment of a resort on Simbi forest. Indondo allows Nasirumbi space in the publication that he works for. He also supports her cause directly in the second sequence.
- Indondo is intelligent. He is able to get his hands on a very secretive document that details a project on Simbi forest. Indondo also refuses to be bullied by Sibuur and makes known to him on how things are unfairly done by the state. Indondo also tells the audience about Sibuur's riches.
- Relatedly, Indondo plays devil's advocate when he allows to support Boss and Sibuur in the hunt for the special Envoy. This does not quench his fight for justice.
- Indondo is also immoral and adulterous. He cheats on Nasirumbi and Sibuur has pictures that implicate Indondo in his adultery.
- Indondo is supportive and understanding. He sympathizes with Nasirumbi when her house is ransacked and destroyed. He stands by her during all the difficult times she faces fighting for Simbi.
- Indondo is patriotic. This is seen by the exposure that he helps Nasirumbi achieve in the end. Indondo being the coordinator allows Nasirumbi to sneak in unaware and shame Boss and Sibuur. This act allows the whole gathering, local and international to have a glimpse at the regime's dirt and evil.
- Indondo puts forward the role of the fourth estate (media) in civil activism and also promoting proper governance.
- Indondo is also a very cunning individual. He easily blind folds Sibuur and Boss to think that he belongs to their side, only to show his true colours in the end of the play.

THEMES AND IDEAS

Graft /corruption /embezzlement

- It is clear that the citizens have been deprived of basic social services by the regime led by Boss from the on-set of the play, Boss is busy making property negotiations with a European real –estate agent .as a matter of fact Boss has already secured a villa valued as ten million dollars for the first lady .Boss does not hide his greed for more exclusive properties in Europe’s leafy settlements. He intends to use the money from tea exports to settle the villa’s debt .such actions demonstrate the highest level of corruption, perpetrated by the president of the republic.
- Elsewhere, Boss hands over a cash donation of one hundred thousand shillings to Nasirumbi. His intention is to bribe Nasirumbi into accepting a deal for Simbi forest .however, she is too honest to take the sum for herself but channels it for the good of the association .boss in this scene is a perpetrator of corruption of the highest order.
- Boss is reported to be repatriating millions of tax payers’ money into private overseas accounts together with Sibuur, the two are rumoured to be by far the richest individuals in the country, whereas ordinary citizens are wallowing in poverty and deprivation.
- Boss and Sibuur are bent on handing over Simbi forest to foreign development because of the cash that they stand to pocket from the deal.
- The death of innocent children and citizens from preventable diseases is an indictment on the extent of corruption in the state. Nasirumbi feels that people have had enough suffering and deserve better from their leaders and accountability by the donors.

Injustice / Intolerance

- In many poorly run countries of sub-Saharan Africa, human rights and civil liberties are trampled upon by state machinery. It is not surprising that Boss and Sibuur mirror this in their actions.
- Firstly, Sibuur threatens Indondo with gun that he will do whatever it takes to silence any defiance against the Simbi project. Sibuur acts with impunity because he is the President’s right hand man. Relatedly, Sibuur sponsors thugs to ransack Nasirumbi’s house. The sole purpose is to teach her a lesson and scare her from opposing the government’s mission of re- developing Simbi forest.
- The courts of law are compromised and rulings are made in favour of the state. A good example is Nasirumbi’s injunction which is overturned by Judge Opoti.

Indondo says that it is difficult to win and secure fair judgment from the court because they have been infiltrated by state machinery.

- Acts of assault and malicious damage on individuals and property goes unpunished. This is because the perpetrators are key state officials of high placements.
- Newspapers and publications are silenced and forced to subscribe to the state narrative and position on controversial issues affecting the masses. The best example is the fate that befalls “The voice of the people” Dalangi the proprietor is forced to obey government orders in order to avoid being shut down. This compromises true journalism and media freedom to operate.
- Boss is uncomfortable with Nasirumbi and will do anything to discredit her reputation. Together with Sibuur, they publish slanderous information about Nasirumbi’s personal life. This is because of their intolerance towards her activism.

Batrayal

- The people have vested interests in the way things affecting them should be handled. In the play, Boss has clearly digressed from the service of the people to service of self. He has willingly and selfishly given away Simbi forest to an international Hotel construction for the establishment of a resort.
- The repercussions on the people are severe and will cause untold suffering. There will be shortage of water and displacement of people from their land and property. This is what Nasirumbi is trying to fight. However, Boss is adamant and the people feel betrayed by their leader.
- Also the two flats belonging to the war veterans are due for demolition. Despite the outcry made by the people, the state is deaf to their pleas.
- There is a general breakdown of social services. The hospitals, the schools are suffering from inadequate finances. There is too much apathy because of suffering. People feel betrayed by the leadership of their country.
- Indondo’s pictures with a woman in a hotel suit show betrayal. Despite being in a relationship with Nasirumbi, Indondo still goes ahead to sleep with other women.
- The refusal by Indondo to publish Nasirumbi’s article which was calling for signatures is betrayal. Nasirumbi feels she has been let down at the last moment by Indondo. Therefore the failures to live up to people’s expectations give rise to civil activism as demonstrated above specifically by the leadership of the people.

Neo – Colonialism

- Many states in Africa despite getting independence decades ago are still dependent on their colonial masters for budget support. The colonial masters still dictate on so many policies.
- Projects through multi –national companies. This has rendered people powerless and without any input in the progress and development of their economies.
- Indondo asks Sibuur why poverty eradication is one of the biggest well-funded programs in the developed world. It is sheer hypocrisy that the colonial masters continue the plunder and destruction of natural resources. Yet they pretend to have good intentions such as provision of employment and payment of taxes.
- The reality is the policies contribute more to dependency than independence. The true image is continued corruption and embezzlement of resources right through their eyes. Therefore, it is high time Africans stood up to dictate where and how their economies should be handled less the reality of independence remains a mere fallacy.

Questions

1. What evils are exposed in the play *Voice of the People*?
2. Describe the character of Boss in the play.
3. What makes Nasirumbi the heroine in the play?
4. Describe the relationship between Sibuur and Boss in the play *Voice of the People*.
5. What makes the play *Voice of the People* interesting to you?
6. How do leaders in your community betray their people? Refer to the play *Voice of the People* in your answer.
7. Choose two themes of your choice and show how they are developed.
8. What lessons do you learn from the play *Voice of the People*?
9. What are the consequences of bad governance as portrayed in the play?
10. How suitable is the title *Voice of the People* to the play?

A General approach to Poetry

The scope

There are two alternative anthologies prescribed for ordinary level:

1. *Growing up with poetry* (David Rubadiri)
2. *The anthology of east African poetry*

The candidate is therefore expected to attempt questions on only one of them. However the approach to all poetry questions remains the same.

Aspects of poetry

Poetry at ordinary level emphasizes aspects that enable you to interact with the poem from a mutual and emotional perspective. You should be a part of the poem or to get absorbed in the poem. The aspects to be emphasized include: title, speaker, subject matter, character, themes, feelings, lessons, relevance and poetic appeal.

The title of the poem

Attention should be drawn to the meaning and suitability of the title. Some titles are symbolic while others are direct. The title of the poem is very important in as far as your understanding the poem is concerned. So you should be able to explain the appropriateness of the title to the poem by looking at the content of the poem or subject matter.

The Speaker

Also known as the '**persona**', the speaker is the voice that speaks to us in a poem. Note that there is a clear difference between the 'speaker' and the 'poet'. The **poet** is the writer of the poem while the **speaker** is an individual/voice in the poem who communicates the poet's message. In the poem 'From the outside' (pg 28), the poet is M.P. Gwala, while the speaker is a mourner or relative of Madaza. In 'A Freedom Song' (pg 79), the poet is Marjorie Oludhe Macgoye, while the speaker is Atieno's uncle.

Subject Matter

Subject matter refers to what is happening in the poem. In explaining the subject matter of a poem, a student is expected to summarise the poem in one paragraph by paraphrasing it. For instance we can say, the poem 'Building the nation' (pg 63), is about a Permanent Secretary who is driven to a state function at a classic hotel. While the PS enjoys himself at the function with plenty to eat and drink, the driver is left to starve in the car, waiting to drive him back. On the return journey the PS sarcastically asks the driver if he ate anything, to which the latter replies that he is 'slimming'. The PS pretends not to have eaten anything as well and complains of stomach ulcers.

Character

In analyzing character, we focus on the traits or behaviour of individuals in the poem. Generally, we use adjectives which denote behaviour. Character thus can be identified as; loving, obedient, humble, rude, arrogant, proud, exploitative, hypocritical, insensitive/inhuman, irresponsible, etc. For instance, we can characterize the PS in 'Building the nation' and Atieno's uncle in 'A Freedom song' as being: exploitative, insensitive/inhuman, hypocritical, irresponsible, etc.

Themes

Just like in any text, themes in poetry refer to the core concerns of the poet. They are derived from the subject matter of the poem. Sometimes, students tend to confuse subject matter and theme. This is usually when a general question is posed such as; 'What is the poem about?' You will find students saying it is about love, suffering, poverty, etc. Such a question clearly calls for subject matter, not themes. For instance, after analyzing the subject matter of 'Building the nation' and 'A Freedom song', we can say the themes therein include; exploitation, hypocrisy, child abuse/labour (in a A freedom song), etc.

Feelings and Attitude

Poetry is one genre (branch) of Literature that appeals directly to our conscience. We are therefore more inclined to respond to poetry with our emotions rather than our thoughts (reasoning). These emotions may be directed at individuals or situations in the poem. In expressing feelings or attitude, students should avoid stating; 'I feel...' This creates monotony. Express the feeling by stating: 'I am ...' For instance one can say: I am disgusted, I am disappointed, I hate him, I sympathise with her or I am sympathetic to her, I am proud of him, etc. Sometimes students may be asked to explain the feeling or attitude of an individual in the poem, say the speaker. The response is the same, ie: he is disappointed, he is disgusted, he is sympathetic, etc.

Lessons

As poetry appeals to our emotions, it is imperative we draw moral lessons from the poems that we read. Note here that lessons are not themes. Themes are the poet's message in the poem. Lessons can be defined as: 'A collection of wisdom derived from phenomena, character, themes and events in a text/poem to be applied to related real life situations.' Just as is the case with feelings, lessons should not be expressed with the monotonous phrase: 'I learn' or 'we learn'. Lessons are best expressed with proverbs, sayings or idioms. One can for instance say: 'A bird in hand is worth two in the bush', and then proceed to relate the saying to an appropriate example/situation in the poem.

Alternatively, one can simply use plain statements for example: 'Children should not be used as house helps, as is the case with Atieno', or 'Bosses should show concern for their employees and not neglect them the way the PS does with his driver'.

Relevance

Just like it is with other texts, poetry draws comparison with society. This is its relevance. In other words, what we see in the poem is also evident in society. Poems, like other texts, reflect on the evils, challenges and other aspects of life in society. They are a reflection of what goes on in society. Therefore, when analyzing the relevance of a poem, we should relate it to what happens in society. For instance, there are so many employees who are mistreated by their bosses just like the driver in 'Building the nation'. There are also many young girls in society who suffer the fate of Atieno in 'A Freedom song'. We should not confuse relevance with lessons. Some students, when asked for the relevance of a poem, instead talk about lessons. You will thus find one who says: 'The poem is relevant because it teaches us about the consequences of mistreating children.' This is wrong because it changes the question or response from relevance to lessons.

Poetic Appeal

After analyzing poetry through the various aspects discussed above, we are expected to appreciate it. Poetry is essentially meant to entertain us and humour us, as it educates us in the process. Therefore, we are always expected to find every poem we read appealing or interesting.

What makes a particular poem interesting or appealing depends on you the reader. However, aspects of interest can include:

- The title being captivating /enchanted/ fascinating/revealing
- The structure of the poem (short stanzas or lines); easy to memorise
- The language (simple/plain)
- Vocabulary/diction/choice of words
- Some poems use local words
- Poetic devices such as; metaphors, similes, repetition, irony, etc
- Lessons learnt
- Relevance to society
- Subject matter (easy to interpret/understand)
- etc

Conclusion

Poetry should therefore be treated as a hands-on experience in which learners interact with poems, appreciate poems and live the poems. The notion that poetry is hard or complicated needs to be demystified to encourage learners to appreciate the beauty of poetry.

Worked out Examples in Poetry

Note: These examples are not prescriptive in any way neither are they authoritative but they are simply intended to provide guidance to the student on how the questions are to be approached.

Example 1:

Read the following poem and answer the questions after it

The Zulu girl

When in the sun the hot red acres smoulder,
Down where the sweating gang its labour plies,
A girl flings down her hoe, and from her shoulder
Unslings her child tormented by the flies.

She takes him to a ring of shadow pooled
By thorn-trees: purpled with the blood of ticks,
While her sharp nails, in slow caresses ruled,
Prowl through his hair with sharp electric clicks.

His sleepy mouth plugged by the heavy nipple,
Tugs like a puppy, grunting as he feeds:
Through his frail nerves, her own deep languors ripple
Like a broad river sighing through its reeds.

Yet in that drowsy stream his flesh embibes
An old unquenched unsmotherable heat –
The curbed ferocity of beaten tribes,
The sullen dignity of their defeat.

Her body looms above him like a hill
Within whose shade a village lies at rest,
Or the first cloud so terrible and still
That bears the coming harvest in its breast.

Roy Campbell (S. Africa)

Questions

- a) Explain briefly what the poem is talking about. (04 marks)
- b) Describe the relationship between the people mentioned in the poem (04 marks)
- c) What challenges do the people in the poem face? (04 marks)
- d) Explain the lessons that you learn from this poem. (02 marks)
- e) What feelings are aroused in you towards the mother in the poem? (03 marks)
- f) What makes this poem interesting? (03 marks)

Sample Response

- a) The poem is describing the relationship between a young Zulu mother and her baby/child. Tired and fatigued after a hard day's work in the hot sun, she unslings/unties him from her back and finds a comfortable place to feed him as she gently cuddles and caresses him with her fingers. The poet describes a special relationship that exists between mother and child. She protects him against the hot sun and adverse effects of the weather. In him she sees a generation of the future.
- b) -The two people mentioned in the poem are *mother and child*. The young Zulu mother depicts a *special relationship* that exists between her and her child. Their relationship goes beyond the physical attachment
-She is *protective* of her son that she finds a thorn tree shade to feed him as she cuddles and caresses him. In spite of the adverse weather conditions, she makes sure that he is not affected by the smouldering heat of the sun.
- it is a *dependant* and *dependable* relationship. The mother is a dependable and *reliable* source of the child's livelihood and welfare. She feeds and protects him from the sun, flies and ticks.
-there relationship is *warm, loving and caring*. Irrespective of the prevailing circumstances, the young Zulu mother gives her son care and attention as she feeds him.
- c) The Zulu girl and her son face the following challenges:
 - The smouldering heat of the sun
 - Hard labour
 - The child is tormented by flies because of poor hygiene
 - Enslavement

- d) The poem teaches the reader that love surpasses all obstacles. The young mother despite all the challenges she is faced with still shows very strong care and affection to her child.

That love is not limited to time or space as the young Zulu mother sees the future of her progeny in the young baby.

Example 2

Armanda

- a) What is the poem about?

The poem is about conditional/selfish love. The character in the poem is an opportunistic woman called Armanda. She is beautiful and proud and so attracts the attention of several men but she rejects them all. Armanda later marries a crippled man called Ray in the pretext that it is true love. She lures him to distant lands and manipulates him to transfer all his money into her account. She recommends a plastic surgery for Ray but it turns out to be a disaster as Ray simply regresses back into his wheel chair. Armanda is disappointed that she abandons Ray and flies back home leaving him heart broken.

(06 marks)

- b) What is the character of Armanda?

She is portrayed as:

- Manipulative/scheming
- Cunning/crafty
- Materialistic/money minded
- Selfish and mean/egocentric/self-centered
- Lazy/indolent/slothful
- Inconsiderate/ Insensitive
- Greedy/avaricious

(06 marks)

- c) What feelings does the poem arouse in you?

For Ray:

- Sympathy/pity
- Empathy
- sadness

For Armanda

- Disgust/revulsion
- Hatred/abhorrence
- Dislike/displeasure
- contempt
- disapproval

(04 marks)

d) What makes the poem interesting?

- The title
- The subject matter
- The language
- The structure
- The character of Armanda
- Lessons

Any 4x1 = (06 marks)

Example 3

I too sing America (Langston Hughes)

a) Briefly explain what the poem is talking about (06 marks)

The speaker is an African American or a black American or a negro being segregated/discriminated because he is black. He is sent to eat in the kitchen whenever the family has visitors. The speaker is however happy and optimistic that time will come when he will grow and become strong and free from segregation. His tormentors will fear to send him to the kitchen.

Any 6x01 (06 marks)

b) Describe that character of the speaker as presented in the passage.

The speaker is presented as:

- Optimistic/ hopeful
- Patriotic
- Determined
- Confident
- Carefree

Any 3x01 (03 marks)

c) The poem arouses:

- Admiration
- Liking
- Sympathy/pity
- Hope/optimism
- Relief/respice
- Tranquility/serenity

Any 4x01=(04 marks)

d) What do you find appealing about the poem?

- The title is captivating and eye-catching/striking
- The subject matter; educative/
- The structure; short and brief and therefor easy to read and understand
- The character of the speaker is very appealing; courageous and optimistic
- The poem teaches important moral lessons
- The language is simple and easy to read and understand

Any 4 x 01 =(04 marks)

e) Explain the lessons the poem teaches the reader.

- Every cloud has a silver lining
- There is always light at the end of the tunnel
- Suffering is not the end of life
- Etc