

“

# WEEK 2: SELF & PERCEPTION OF THE WORLD

*BBE2082 Literature of the World*

*Alia Hanim Zainal Abidin*



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Personal and Cultural Identity in  
Literature

02

Gender and Identity in Woolf's *A  
Room of One's Own*

03

Cultural Heritage and Identity in  
Adichie's *The Headstrong Historian*

04

Literary Techniques: Metaphor  
and Imagery

“





# PERSONAL AND CULTURAL IDENTITY IN LITERATURE

*How does literature explore personal and cultural identity?*



“  
0  
1






“

What factor(s)  
shape your identity  
and how you view  
yourself?

*Do you think your identity is shaped by your  
family's aspirations? Cultural or educational  
background? Personal experiences?*



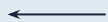


# What is Personal and Cultural Identity?

**Personal Identity** refers to how an individual sees themselves, including their beliefs, values, goals, and personal experiences. It is shaped by internal factors like personal choices, desires, and aspirations.

**Cultural Identity** involves the shared characteristics, values, traditions, and beliefs that define a person's connection to their cultural group. It is influenced by family heritage, societal norms, language, religion, and customs.



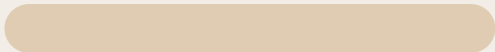


# The Role of Literature in Exploring Identity

Literature often **reflects** the complex **process of forming and understanding identity**. Authors use **stories**, **characters**, and **themes** to examine how individuals **perceive** themselves within their **cultural** and **social** contexts.

Through **character development** and **narrative techniques**, writers reveal the struggles and conflicts that arise when personal identity clashes with cultural or societal expectations.

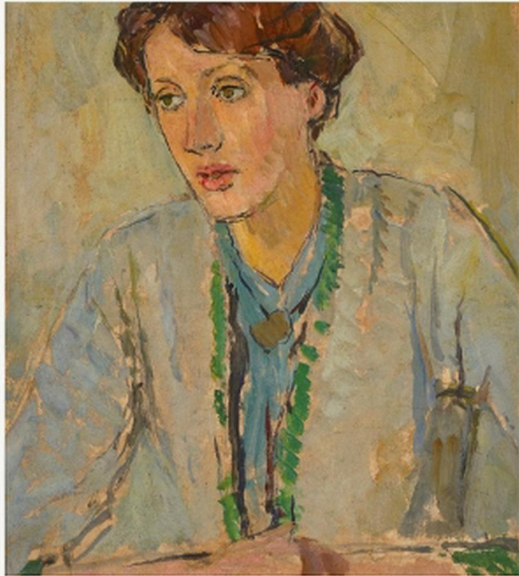
Writers like Virginia Woolf and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie use their works to explore how **gender**, **cultural heritage**, and **societal roles** shape an individual's **perception** of themselves.





MODERN  
CLASSICS

## Virginia Woolf A Room of One's Own



“

02

## WOOLF'S A ROOM OF ONE'S OWN (Ch. 2)

”

*A Room of One's Own* is Woolf's extended essay explores the challenges faced by women in achieving intellectual and creative freedom. In Chapter 2, Woolf discusses the material and social obstacles that have historically prevented women from expressing themselves fully.

*How does it address the theme of gender and identity?*





# [Gender Bias in Literature]

The narrator's decision to visit the British Museum to research "women" highlights the gender biases present in literature and scholarship. She discovers that most of the literature about women has been written by men, often filled with prejudice and misconceptions.

This part reflects Woolf's critique of the lack of authentic female voices in literary history. It emphasizes the impact of gender bias on identity formation, as women's identities are often defined by men rather than by women themselves.

*"I went, therefore, to the shelf where the books on women are kept. Here is a subject that allows itself to be treated after the fashion of the historian or the biographer."*

*"For it is a perennial puzzle why no woman wrote a word of that extraordinary literature when every other man, it seemed, was capable of song or sonnet."*

*—A Room of One's Own, Chapter 2*





# [Concept of Intellectual Freedom]

This is one of Woolf's most famous assertions, laying the foundation for her argument that women need both financial independence and a private space to create literature and express their identity fully.

The metaphor of "a room" symbolizes personal freedom, privacy, and the opportunity to develop one's thoughts independently, away from societal and familial obligations. Without this, women are restricted in their intellectual pursuits and self-expression.

*"A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."*

*"Lock up your libraries if you like; but there is no gate, no lock, no bolt that you can set upon the freedom of my mind."*

*—A Room of One's Own, Chapter 2*





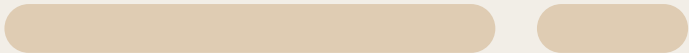
# Themes in Woolf's A Room of One's Own

## **Gender and Identity:**

Woolf argues that women need financial independence and personal space (“a room of one's own”) to realize their potential. She critiques how societal expectations and material restrictions limit women's self-expression.

## **Personal and Intellectual Freedom:**

Woolf explores the idea that having the freedom to think, write, and create is crucial to developing a strong sense of self. She suggests that without autonomy, one's identity is constrained by the roles society imposes.



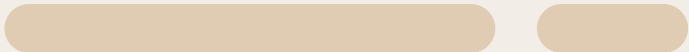


# Themes in Woolf's A Room of One's Own

## Key Points:

**The Symbol of “A Room”:** Woolf uses the metaphor of “a room” to represent personal and intellectual freedom. For Woolf, having a private space allows for self-exploration and creative expression.

**Influence of Society on Identity:** Woolf's essay demonstrates how societal structures, like financial dependency, can restrict identity. Women's voices, she argues, have been historically limited by these restrictions.





# “ 03 ADICHIE’S THE HEADSTRONG HISTORIAN ”

*The Headstrong Historian* follows the life of Nwamgba, a Nigerian woman, and her family through three generations, focusing on their struggles with cultural heritage, colonial influence, and self-identity. The story shows how personal identity can evolve across generations due to cultural and historical shifts.

*How does it discuss **identity** and **cultural heritage** ?*





# [Preservation of Cultural Heritage]

This part highlights Nwamgba's commitment to preserving her cultural heritage despite the growing influence of British colonialism. Her desire to maintain her son's connection to his Igbo roots reflects the importance of cultural identity in shaping personal identity.

Nwamgba's fear that her son might become disconnected from his heritage emphasizes the impact of colonialism on traditional cultural practices and the struggle to preserve them.

*“Nwamgba was determined to ensure that her son would remember his lineage, that he would not become a stranger to his own people.”*

*“She was pained by how easily her son embraced the white man's religion and ways, how he no longer valued the traditions she had taught him.”*

—The Headstrong Historian



## [Conversion and Adoption of Colonial Ideas]

Anikwenwa's conversion to Christianity and his adoption of a European name symbolize his growing separation from his Igbo heritage. This change highlights the transformative impact of colonial education and religion on personal and cultural identity.

The shift in Anikwenwa's perspective, from valuing traditional Igbo beliefs to seeing them as "backward," illustrates the internal conflict faced by individuals caught between two cultures.

*"Anikwenwa became Michael after his baptism. He learned to speak English, wore European clothes, and slowly began to see his parents' beliefs as backward."*

—The Headstrong Historian



# [Preservation of Cultural Heritage]

Grace's recognition of her dual heritage and her decision to become a historian signify a reconciliation between the two conflicting cultural influences in her life. By choosing to document her family's history, she actively preserves her Igbo heritage while also embracing the benefits of her Western education.

Grace's role as a historian symbolizes the preservation of cultural memory and the active choice to maintain one's identity despite external influences.

*“Grace knew that she was both Igbo and Western; she had inherited a sense of herself that allowed her to embrace both traditions. She would not forget where she came from.”*

*“Grace wrote about her grandmother, the warrior who had fought to preserve her lineage. She knew that the stories of her people were worth telling.”*

*—The Headstrong Historian*



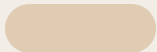
# Themes in Adichie's *The Headstrong Historian*

## **Cultural Heritage and Identity:**

The story explores how Nwamgba's sense of self is deeply tied to her Igbo culture, yet colonial forces challenge her cultural identity. She strives to ensure her legacy by encouraging her granddaughter, Grace, to remember their traditions.

## **Change and Modernity:**

Nwamgba's family faces cultural conflicts as they navigate colonial influences. Grace, her granddaughter, ultimately combines her education with her Igbo heritage, demonstrating the evolution of identity across generations.



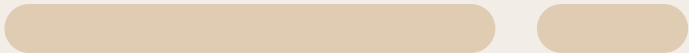




# Themes in Adichie's *The Headstrong Historian*

**Heritage vs. Colonial Influence:** Nwamgba represents a strong attachment to traditional culture, while Grace embodies a blend of tradition and modernity. This generational contrast shows how cultural identity can adapt to changing times.

**Personal Experience and Identity:** Each character's experiences shape their identity. Nwamgba's resilience reflects a personal commitment to her heritage, while Grace's education allows her to reinterpret that heritage in new ways.





# LITERARY TECHNIQUES

*Metaphor and Imagery*

“  
0  
4





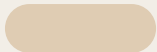
# Understanding Metaphor and Imagery in Literature

## **What is a Metaphor?**

A metaphor is a figure of speech that describes an object, idea, or action in a way that isn't literally true but helps explain an idea or make a comparison. It directly compares two unlike things by saying that one is the other, without using “like” or “as” (which would be a simile).

## **What is it used for?**

Metaphors are used to create a deeper understanding or add symbolic meaning to an idea by linking it to something familiar or powerful.



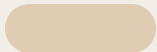
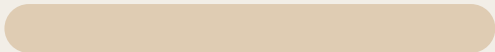


# Understanding Metaphor and Imagery in Literature

*Example from A Room of One's Own:*

**The "Room" as a Metaphor** : In Woolf's essay, the "room" symbolizes a private, personal space necessary for self-exploration and creative freedom. When Woolf argues that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction," she is not just speaking about a physical room. Instead, the room represents the broader concept of intellectual and creative freedom—a space where women can think, write, and create without interruption or societal constraints.

**Explanation** : By using this metaphor, Woolf emphasizes the importance of financial independence and privacy in allowing individuals to fully express themselves. It highlights how external conditions (like economic stability) impact one's ability to develop a true sense of identity.





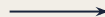
# Understanding Metaphor and Imagery in Literature

## **What is Imagery?**

Imagery involves using descriptive language to create vivid sensory experiences for the reader. It appeals to the five senses—sight, sound, smell, taste, and touch—to paint a picture in the reader's mind and evoke emotions.

## **What is it for?**

Imagery helps to immerse readers in the story, making them feel as if they are experiencing the scenes, characters, and settings themselves. It also enhances the thematic depth by creating powerful visual symbols.






# Understanding Metaphor and Imagery in Literature

*Example from The Headstrong Historian:*

**Imagery of Tradition vs. Modernity** : Adichie uses vivid imagery to illustrate the stark contrast between the traditional Igbo way of life and the Western influences brought by colonialism. For example, when describing Nwamgba's life, Adichie often uses imagery of rituals, traditional clothing, and local landscapes to evoke the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people: "The women wore coral beads and wrappers made from the finest Akwete cloth, their laughter echoing through the compound as they prepared for the yam festival."

In contrast, when depicting colonial influence, Adichie uses imagery of Western-style clothing, Christian churches, and English-language schools: "The church bell rang sharply, its metallic clang a stark interruption in the quiet rhythm of the village."

**Explanation** : These contrasting images highlight the cultural changes taking place and the tension between preserving traditional Igbo identity and adapting to the new colonial order. Through this vivid portrayal, readers can feel the deep connection Nwamgba has to her heritage and the unsettling effects of colonial disruption.

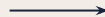




# A Room, A Historian, and Identity

## Review Key Takeaways:

- Both Woolf and Adichie explore how cultural heritage, societal roles, and personal experience influence self-perception.
- *A Room of One's Own* emphasizes the importance of financial and personal independence for self-expression, while *The Headstrong Historian* illustrates the challenges of maintaining cultural identity in a changing world.
- Metaphor helps readers understand abstract concepts by comparing them to familiar ideas, adding layers of meaning to the text. In *A Room of One's Own*, the “room” is a metaphor for the independence needed to achieve creative freedom.
- Imagery paints vivid pictures with words, appealing to the senses to immerse the reader in the setting and emotions of the story. In *The Headstrong Historian*, Adichie’s imagery contrasts the richness of Igbo traditions with the starkness of colonial influence, highlighting cultural identity.





# Next class:

1. Write a paragraph reflecting on how the main character's self-identity is shaped by their cultural background and personal experiences. Draw comparison between your perception of self-identity and culture/gender/society/religion with Woolf's or Adichie's characters where relevant. Bring this writing with you to our next class.
2. Refer to the [COURSE INFORMATION](#) document.
3. Read the stories assigned for Week 3.

