

## *Communion in The Poisonwood Bible*

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P.2

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Communion is very significant in portraying elements in *The Poisonwood Bible*.

Communion is not only important but also necessary in order to accurately and vividly describe Congolese life. It is easy to relate to acts of consumption because one needs sustenance to stay alive. All living organisms have to consume and be consumed in order to survive. Kingsolver thoroughly highlights acts of Communion in the Congo. Communion exists to give further insight on the characters, how they act and how they think. The act of eating together, sharing a bond of creation and development conveys a deeper meaning and can reveal the character in a way that is truly unique.

The first scene of Communion begins when the Price family have just arrived in the Congo. Nathan welcomes all the families together by having a massive dinner. Rachel is disgusted by the food that the people of Kilanga eat. In *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, anytime people come together to share food, they create a community with each other. Rachel expresses her disgust of the goat meat by not swallowing and, in doing so, she reveals that she doesn't want to be a part of the Congolese culture. "I could still choke on the memory of goat meat if I thought about it. I never swallowed it. I carried one bite in my mouth all evening and spat it out behind the outhouse when we went home." Communion is used as a barrier between Rachel and the Congolese people. By not involving herself with Congolese customs, Rachel is distancing herself from the Congo. She compares Kilanga to her home in Bethlehem, Georgia, and the condescending attitude of Rachel along with her narcissistic views emphasizes her

ignorance. The differences in the perceptions of Communion is highlighted and is further exacerbated by the fact that Rachel is completely self-absorbed and isn't willing to change.

Another scene of Communion can be shown when Mama Mwanza gives her precious oranges to the Price family. The generosity of this action is astounding because compared to the Price family's hardships, Mama Mwanza has had it much worse. Having lost two children and on top of having no legs, Mama Mwanza is the paragon of loss. Despite this, she goes to the trouble of bringing oranges to the Price family while walking on the palms of her hands. "Mama Mwanza from next door was the only one who felt sorry for us. She made her way over on the palms of her hands to give us some oranges, Independence or not." Not only is food extremely scarce in Kilanga, but without hesitation Mama Mwanza gives oranges to the Price family who are white outsiders; going as far as to sneak oranges onto their counter. This is an act of Communion. Mama Mwanza is the only individual to empathize with the Prices dilemma and help the Prices by sharing oranges. Sharing food is not only an act of Communion, but is also used to emphasize that even though the Price family have a different background and culture, people can still bond with each other and become friends. Kingsolver puts heavy emphasis on the significance of Communion and how it can create bonds stronger than blood through the simple action of sharing food.

Communion is very important in revealing the inner workings of characters in *The Poisonwood Bible*. It conveys feelings that no other element can, with just a simple dinner scene. Communion can convey love and friendship but at the same time it can also create a multitude of emotions. When Anatole comes over to have dinner and inform the Prices about Tata Ndu, Nathan becomes furious and tensions rise. Instead of seeking a compromise with the chief,

Nathan resorts to rage and takes it out on Orleanna by smashing her favorite plate. “‘Orleanna, shut up!’ he yelled, grabbing her arm hard and jerking the plate out of her hand. He raised it up over her head and slammed it down hard on the table, cracking it right in two.” As stated in *How to Read Literature Like a Professor*, sharing a meal can have a positive or negative connotation. The significance of this dinner displays Nathan’s resentment of being proven wrong. In addition, Orleanna’s submissiveness is revealed. The effects of Communion untangle the complex interactions of each character. Kingsolver uses Communion in a unique way to meticulously unravel the effects of one dinner and transform it into a powerful, meaningful, message that no other sentence can. Communion will always be the center of character intricacy because it reveals the convoluted actions of each character through the simple necessity of food.