**Homegoing Summary and Analysis of Effia and Esi**

**Summary**

Effia

The novel opens in Fante (present-day Ghana in East Africa), in the mid-1700s. We are introduced to a woman named Effia. Effia was born in Fanteland just outside of her father's compound; a fire began on the night she was born and raged through the woods for days, destroying trees and crops. Effia's father, [Cobbe Otcher](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "cobbe-otcher), left the new baby with his first wife, [Baaba](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "baaba). Cobbe had lost seven yams, and he believed that the fire would haunt his family line for all the generations to come. Effia did not nurse well with Cobbe's first or second wives, so she grew extremely thin and Baaba started to think about leaving her in the forest for the god Nyame to take. Three years later, Baaba's first son, [Fiifi](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "fiifi), was born. Baaba let Effia hold Fiifi soon after he was born; the young girl dropped her brother, and though he wasn't hurt and didn't even cry, Baaba beat Effia viciously. When Cobbe found out about this, he beat Baaba. This cycle of violence continued into Effia's adolescence.

Around age twelve, Effia began to be noticed for her beauty. Men and their families started to bargain for Effia's hand in marriage by giving the family presents, especially food. In 1775, another young woman in their village, [Adwoa](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "adwoa), became the first woman to be proposed to by a British soldier. When the soldier first came to the village, Adwoa's mother asked Effia's parents to show him around while Adwoa finished getting ready; Effia came too. Later, when the white man brought goods to Adwoa's family and took her away to the Castle on Cape Coast, Cobbe took his daughter aside and warned her that white men would continue to come and take daughters from the village. He told her that he wanted her to marry a man from their village.

Effia hoped that her father would choose for her to marry [Abeeku](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "abeeku)Badu, who was next in line to be the village chief. Abeeku had been visiting their home and bringing gifts. When they ate together, Effia asked Abeeku if he would work for the British when he became chief, and he said yes. When Abeeku left the meal, he told Baaba that she should tell him when Effia is ready to marry. That night, Baaba woke Effia up while she was sleeping; she told Effia that she must put palm fronds inside of her vagina every day to check for blood and tell Baaba as soon as she finds any. Effia checked every day of the winter and spring, but there was no blood. As Abeeku's father grew ill, Abeeku prepared to take on the role of chief and married two women. One of these women, Millicent, was half-caste, meaning her mother was Fante and her father was a British soldier. Baaba asked Millicent's mother, whose white husband had died and left her with considerable money, what it was like at the castle and what the bride price is for marrying one's daughter to a white man. Millicent's mother told her that the bride price is good, but that she thinks it's better to marry your daughters to Fante men so they can stay close to you.

At age fifteen, Effia menstruated for the first time. As soon as she checked the palm fronds and saw blood, she went to tell Baaba. Baaba warned her not to tell anyone else. The next week, the old chief died and Abeeku was made chief. Three days later, Abeeku gathered all the men of the village in his compound and got them drunk on palm wine for two days. Fiifi, now twelve years old, and Cobbe attended the gathering; when they came back they were animated and blood-thirsty. That night, after Baaba and Cobbe went to sleep, Effia woke Fiifi to ask what had happened at the meeting. He told her that Abeeku made an alliance with one of the most powerful Asante villages, and that the two villages would begin working together to sell slaves to the British. Soon, Cobbe began to grow anxious about Effia menstruating so that she could marry Abeeku. He decided that Effia should go over to Abeeku's compound once a week so he wouldn't forget her beauty.

One evening when Effia visited Abeeku's compound, she found that white men were visiting as well. Abeeku said that Effia and his mother could come in and eat with the women, but that she shouldn't speak if the white men entered the room. During the meal, Abeeku entered the room where the women were eating; two white men came in with him. One white man said hello to each woman in broken Fante, and when he said it to Effia she couldn't help but giggle. The white man stared at her, his gaze turning from apologetic to lustful. He asked Abeeku if she was his wife, and Abeeku responded that she was not, sounding annoyed. Later that week, the white man, [James Collins](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list#james-collins), came to Effia's home to ask for her hand in marriage. This angered Effia's father greatly, especially because she had been promised to Abeeku, but Baaba convinced him that she might have been cursed by the fire when she was born, causing her to never menstruate. Finally, Effia's father consented; Baaba and Cobbe told Abeeku their theory about the fire and Effia's supposedly delayed menstruation and he too agreed that she should marry the white man. Before Effia left for the Castle, Baaba gave Effia a black stone pendant, saying it was a piece of her mother to keep with her.

Effia and [James](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list#james) were married in a church in the Cape Coast Castle. While James showed Effia around the castle, she heard the faint sound of crying and realized that there were slaves being kept in the dungeons. Effia yelled at James, telling her to take him home, and he aggressively clamped his hand over her mouth. Effia calmed down after a while, realizing that he could hurt her and that she wasn't wanted at home anyway. After this, he took her up to his chambers and they had sex for the first time. Effia stayed in the Castle for weeks, and she and James fell into a routine and she began to genuinely care for him. Effia taught James Fante, and he taught her English. Effia knew that James had a wife and children back in England and was curious about the letters he received from them. James told her that he wanted a child with her. Effia worried that she would not be a good mother, but Adwoa warned her that she had better get pregnant or James might take her back to her village. Adwoa told her that she would give her some roots from the woods and that she should put them under her bed. Together, the women hid the root under the bed and then prepared Effia, braiding her hair and oiling her body. When James came home, Effia quickly initiated passionate sex, the intensity of which scared him at first but which he soon reciprocated. After they finished, James spotted the root beneath the bed and scolded her harshly, calling such customs black magic.

One day soon after, Effia relaxed in the shade with a group of other Fante wives of white men. The young women discussed their husbands, and one brought up that her husband seems highly disturbed by what he saw in the dungeons and sometimes forced her to have sex without even washing the dungeon's smells of feces and death off of him. Soon, Effia realized she was pregnant, which made James very happy. However, around the same time, she found out that her father was gravely ill. She traveled for three days back to her village; Cobbe was still alive but extremely weak. Fiifi told her that it was he who wrote the letter informing her that their father was going to die, and he also revealed that Baaba was not Effia's birth mother. Her birth mother, the one who left the stone pendant, was a house girl who ran away into the fire on the night of Effia's birth. That day, Cobbe died. Effia went to Baaba to tell her that she knew about her mother, but before she could say anything Baaba spat on the ground and scorned her, saying that she was nothing and that no child can grow from nothing.

[Esi](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list#esi)

Esi, a fifteen year old girl from Asanteland, was being held in the women's dungeon at the Cape Coast Castle. She was surrounded by other women and filth; one woman was sobbing nearby because she had stopped producing milk to feed her baby. Esi had been in the dungeon for two weeks. Before being taken, she had been preparing to marry a man from her village, Kwasi Nnuro.

A soldier came into the dungeon and spoke loudly to the women in a language they didn't understand. He took the baby from the crying woman and slapped her. [Tansi](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "tansi), Esi's closest friend in the dungeon, told her that they would probably kill the baby. Afua, the woman crying, had been sold to the slave traders for getting pregnant before being married. Esi asked Tansi to tell her a story, and Tansi agreed after feigning reluctance, taking Esi's head in her lap to play with her hair while speaking. Tansi asked if Esi knows the story of the kente cloth, and Esi said she didn't, though this is all part of the ritual of storytelling. The story is brief: two Asante men first discover the way to weave a kente cloth by seeing the spider Anansi spinning a large web in the forest.

In the morning, it is discovered that Afua had killed herself by holding her breath. When the soldiers came in later, the women all had to lie down and have more women stacked on top of them since there was so little room in the dungeon. Some women were beaten unconscious before being stacked, and everyone had to urinate and defecate directly on those beneath them.

Esi recalled her life before coming to the Castle. Esi's father, called Big Man, and Esi's mother [Maame](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "maame) had celebrated their daughter's birth for days on end. Esi's father was respected as a great warrior. He got his name after leading a group of warriors into battle against a village north of theirs even after a man had warned him that they were unprepared to fight. Another man saved him and his followers by taking a small group of men, stealing some guns, and threatening them, claiming that there were more warriors with guns coming behind them. Esi's father apologized and promised to never rush into such a battle again, after which he was named Big Man. Esi had a blissful childhood with parents who gave her ample love and attention. One of the only times that Maame would scold Esi harshly was when she wasn't careful around fire, which the woman was terrified of.

Big Man led the village to many victories against nearby villages. After these victories, the warriors would bring back spoils including gold and prisoners. Those prisoners would be put in the village square for any villagers to take as slaves. Maame had never wanted to take one of these prisoners as a slave in their home, but after a while Big Man insisted. They took a girl who was about Esi's age and named her Abronoma. [Abronoma](https://www.gradesaver.com/homegoing/study-guide/character-list" \l "abronoma)was terrible at chores, so Big Man encouraged Maame to beat her. When Maame beat her, both the woman and the young girl would cry. One day, Big Man challenged Maame to get Abronoma to carry a bucket of water on her head without spilling. Abronoma was very close to succeeding, but spilled a few drops as she put the bucket down. This time, Big Man beat the girl, and the girl did not cry. Esi talked to her mother about this, saying that if her father did not beat his slave, people would think he was weak. Maame yelled at her for this, telling her that true strength is knowing that nobody belongs to anyone else. When Abronoma woke up, Esi gave her some water and apologized for what happened, telling the slave girl that her father is actually a good man. Abronoma laughed at this and revealed something that Esi had not known: Maame too had been a slave to a warrior. This warrior had raped Maame, giving her her first daughter, a sister that Esi had never met. Abronoma told Esi that separated sisters are like a woman and her reflection, meaning they can never really be together. Esi is confused and shamed by this story.

Esi tried for months to befriend Abronoma, but the girl refused. Finally, she gave Esi a way to be her friend: send word to her father back in her village about where she was. Esi worried about the risks of doing this, but finally decided to do it. She went to the messenger man and told him the message to give to Abronoma's father. When Esi returned and told Abronoma what she had done, the girl hugged her; while they hugged, Esi pretended she was hugging her sister. After this, Abronoma became fixated on the belief that her father would come for her. Then, one night after Big Man had spent the night with Maame in her and Esi's hut, there was an invasion. Big Man grabbed a machete and ran out of the hut, yelling at Maame to take Esi into the woods. Esi grabbed a knife and prepared to leave, but Maame began to panic, saying that she couldn't deal with woods and fire and running again. In the meantime, Abronoma came into the hut, laughing and yelling that her father had come to save her. Maame grabbed Esi's hand and gave her a beautiful black stone, saying she had been saving it for Esi's wedding day. She told Esi that she also had left one for Esi's sister before setting a fire and fleeing. She began to babble nonsense, and Esi saw that her mother was not going to run away. Esi took the stone, gave her mother the knife, and ran. In the woods she found a tall palm tree and climbed it. However, the warriors soon came and knocked people out of the trees by throwing rocks.

Esi was tied to a line of other people and forced to walk for days on end. A girl named Tansi said that she had heard the white men were going to eat them. The girls became friends. They walked for more days, the sores on their feet bleeding constantly. They were finally given some food and rest in a Fante village. Since Esi understood Fante, she could understand when the chief argued with one of his men about how their Asante allies would be upset to find out that they were working with their enemies. These men addressed each other by name: Chief Abeeku and Fiifi. Fiifi went out of the place the slaves were being kept and brought back some white men. They addressed one of the white men as Governor James and told the men to check how strong the Asante were. When Fiifi tried to undress Esi, which would mean losing her stone, she spat in his face. Fiifi did not react at first, and then he hit Esi very hard. This caused her stone to fall onto the ground, but she got it back by falling to the ground while crying. To keep it safe, she put it in her mouth and swallowed it.

Back in the dungeon at the Castle, the women were now packed in more tightly than ever and the waste on the floor went up to their ankles. One soldier grabbed a woman and began to touch her body. A soldier grabbed Esi; she tried to fight him but was too weak. He took her up to his quarters. He offered her water and she tried to drink some but it fell back out of her mouth. He put her on a tarp and raped her. After he finished, he looked at her with revulsion and shame. She cried, and he kept her in his room until dark, when he took her back to the dungeon. After this, Esi continued living in the dungeon, though she now had the added stress of her vagina bleeding continually. She no longer wanted to talk to Tansi or hear stories. Then, one day, Governor James came in with some other men, and they chose some women, including Esi. The women were lined up in a row and Governor James felt their breasts and between their legs. When he found blood between Esi's, he motioned for her and some other women to be taken from the dungeon. Esi panicked suddenly, trying to get back and search for her stone, but the soldiers lifted her and moved her out. Esi thought about how seeing a white man smile meant something bad was coming.

**Analysis**

Effia and Esi are perhaps the most important characters in the book. The two daughters of Maame are at the head of two lines of descendants who live in Ghana and the United States from the 17th through 21st centuries. Through the stories of these two characters' descendants, Gyasi compares the history of Africa and the United States, focusing on the continued struggles of black people in America, and of women in Africa.

The slave girl Abronoma foreshadows the separation and drastic differences in the lives of Maame's two lines of descendants when she says, "In my village we have a saying about separated sisters. They are like a woman and her reflection, doomed to stay on opposite sides of the pond" (p.45). Esi and Effia's descendants will be literally separated by a body of water: the Atlantic Ocean. The idea of Effia and Esi being reflections of one another can be further understood as meaning that they and their descendants will have lives that are similar in some ways and opposite in others, just as a reflection looks like a flipped version of the thing being reflected.

The black stone is a major symbol throughout *Homegoing*. Since Esi loses hers, her descendants quickly lose their physical connection to Ghana; in contrast, Effia's descendants stay in Africa and keep a connection to their ancestors by passing down the stone and telling the stories of those who had it previously. The stone is also symbolic in its appearance; it is dark black, underscoring the role skin color has in the book.

An important idea that Gyasi communicates in *Homegoing*is the way people form prejudices and can pass these down to their children and communities. At the end of Esi's chapter, Gyasi writes, "for the rest of her life Esi would see a smile on a white face and remember the one the soldier gave her before taking her to his quarters, how white men smiling just meant more evil was coming with the next wave" (p.56). Esi's distrust against white men makes sense given her history, and many of her descendants also deal with violence and discrimination at the hands of white men, while others will face difficulty trusting white men who genuinely wish them well, because of this ingrained distrust originating from Esi's experience.

Effia and Esi's sections have a kind of dark irony to them regarding the ephemerality of social status. Effia is born to a good family, but she herself is low born; her mother was a slave, and she is raised by another woman who schemes to marry her off for money. Esi, on the other hand, is born to a well-respected father and, while she has the same mother as Effia, her mother is no longer a slave. While the reader might expect that Esi would have a better life outcome than Effia, Effia marries a white man, giving her money and power, while Esi is taken into slavery. These abrupt shifts in social status occur in later chapters as well, demonstrating how political events and simple happenstance can have major impacts on individual's opportunities.

The primary form of inequality explored in *Homegoing* is racial inequality, but throughout the novel, Gyasi also reveals the ways in which racism intersects with gender. For both men and women, rigid gender stereotypes become a large factor in the way that they are violently oppressed: for women, the patriarchal societies on both the Gold Coast (modern-day Ghana) and in America lead to a lack of autonomy and sexual violation; for men, assumptions of strength and anger lead to brutal working conditions and physical degradation.

From the beginning of the book, the men are expected to take on roles that require physical strength and unemotional demeanors. As a result, the types of struggles they face stem from that expectation as they are physically tormented. On the Gold Coast, society is structured in the way that men are expected to be fearsome soldiers and strong fathers. For men like [Quey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/quey) and [James](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/james), who are the son and grandson of a British official and a Fante woman, it is assumed that they can be both emotionally and physically hardened to the social systems around them, like other men on the Gold Coast. Quey takes part in the slave trade because he worries that if he does not, he will look weak. James has the same fear, although he tries to overcome it by running away from his village, despite the knowledge that his family will judge him harshly for doing so. In America, [Sam](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters) is forced to work in brutal conditions on a plantation and is treated like he is subhuman and an animal. Because of his anger at his enslavement and his refusal to surrender his culture, he is often whipped until pools of blood form at his feet. When he tries to escape with wife, [Ness](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/ness), he is hanged. The slave system initiates a vicious catch-22: men are expected to be strong to work, but they are also expected to submit to cruel treatment, otherwise they are killed. Two generations later, [H](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/h) is sentenced to prison and sold in the convict-lease system. He watches as other men bid on him like goods. H then works in the coal mines alongside other black prisoners. He is under constant threat of being crushed by the falling rock or killed if he doesn’t work hard enough.

For the female characters in the book, the opposite assumption is made: the oppression of women is not in order to make them feel weak, but based on sexist assumptions of their weakness. Thus, in addition to being brutalized, women are often unable to find autonomy or jobs, instead being controlled by men and often sexually violated. From the very beginning of the novel, men control the fates of [Maame](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/maame) and her two daughters: Maame was been raped as a house girl before escaping to her old village. Her first daughter, [Effia](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/effia), is married off by her father to a British officer named [James Collins](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/james-collins). Maame’s other daughter, [Esi](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/esi), is sold by the same officer and sent to America. Before she leaves, she is subjected to terrible conditions inside the women’s prison of the Cape Coast Castle. She watches as women are starved, abused, and have their babies taken away. She, like many others, is also raped by a soldier. Other characters also endure sexism: on the Gold Coast, women are largely responsible for watching over the children and cooking, and men control their fates. For example, [Abena](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/abena) cannot marry because her father is not wealthy, and thus she is treated like an old maid and a mistress. The sexual violation continues into more contemporary time periods. In the early twentieth-century in Harlem, a white man discovers that [Robert](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters)(whom he had thought was white) and [Willie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/willie) are married. He then forces Robert to kiss and touch her while he watches and masturbates. Even though both of them are being victimized, it is Robert who still relents to this act.

Gyasi reveals patterns in the novel of how stereotypes and bias based on gender can greatly affect characters in conjunction with race. Even by the end of the novel, [Marcus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/marcus)describes how easy it is for him to be thought of as an angry, violent black man, and [Marjorie](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/homegoing/characters/marjorie) sees how her identity as a black girl makes her unable to date a white boy in her class while the school won’t even listen to her arguments. Yet even as they face these issues, Gyasi shows the progress that has been made: both of them are attending Stanford for graduate school, something that would not have been possible even one generation earlier. Although gender stereotypes persist, Gyasi suggests, progress eventually bends toward equality.