

**ENGLISH PROSE STUDIES**  
**HANDOUT**

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# I. WHAT IS PROSE?

## A. DEFINITION

- The English word "prose" is derived from the Latin *prōsa*, which literally translates as "straight-forward".  
(<http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Prose.html>)
- *The Oxford English Dictionary* defines prose as 'straightforward discourse' or 'the ordinary form of written or spoken language'.
- Based on Abrams in *A Glossary of Literary Terms* (246: 1999) prose is an inclusive term for all discourse, spoken or written, which is not patterned into the lines either of metric verse or of free verse.

## B. TYPES OF PROSE

### 1. Fiction:

It is a series of imagined facts which shows truths about human life. The examples are:

#### a. Short story

- Brief, artistic form of prose which is centered on a major main incident.
- This is a narrative involving one or more characters, one plot and one single impression.
- A brief tale which can be told or read in one sitting

#### b. Novel:

- A more extensive form of prose which is elastic and can expand to hundreds of pages.
- This is a long narrative divided into chapters.
- The events may be taken from true-to-life stories and spans for a long period of time.
- There are many characters involved.

#### c. Legend

- From the Latin word, *legenda* which means "things to be read"
- A legend is a short narrative transmitted by word of mouth
- This type of traditional literature is usually an account of human actions that are alleged both by the teller and listeners to happen in recent past
- Sometimes the narrative is about a named person and will frequently be linked to a particular location.

#### d. Fairy tales

- Are old stories that were passed down by word of mouth for many years before finally writing down, and for which an original author is usually unknown.
- It is a prose narrative with fictional content that has survived as part of an oral tradition
- Fairy tales' characteristics:

- 1) Make believe
- 2) Happen long ago
- 3) Have magic
- 4) Ended happily ever after

## **2. Non-fiction:**

These are literary works that are based mainly on facts rather than on the imagination. However, it may contain fictional elements in certain cases. The examples are:

### **a. Essay**

Essay, an analytic, interpretative, or critical literary composition usually much shorter and less systematic and formal than a dissertation or thesis and usually dealing with its subject from a limited and often personal point of view.

### **b. Report**

Report means to give an account or representation of in words, written or orally.

### **c. Article**

Article is nonfictional prose forming an independent part of a publication

### **d. Journal**

Journal, an account of day-to-day events or a record of experiences, ideas, or reflections kept regularly for private use that is similar to, but sometimes less personal than, a diary.

### **e. Letter**

Letter is texts which is written and send to someone through the mail. Letter comes from the Old French *letre*, "character, letter, or note," from the Latin *littera*, "letter of the alphabet," and also "a writing or document."

### **f. Biography**

Biography, form of literature, commonly considered nonfictional, the subject of which is the life of an individual. One of the oldest forms of literary expression, it seeks to re-create in words the life of a human being—as understood from the historical or personal perspective of the author—by drawing upon all available evidence, including that retained in memory as well as written, oral, and pictorial material.

### **g. Memoir**

Memoir, history or record composed from personal observation and experience. Closely related to, and often confused with, autobiography, a memoir usually differs chiefly in the degree of emphasis placed on external events; whereas writers of autobiography are concerned primarily with themselves as subject matter, writers of memoir are usually persons who have played roles in, or have been close observers of, historical events and whose main purpose is to describe or interpret the events.

## II. THE ELEMENTS OF PROSE

### A. PLOT

According to Gill (1995) a *plot* can be defined as the order of events in which the reader learns of them. A plot is not the same with a story. Gill states “*a story* is just a set of events, whereas *a plot* is a set of events which the reader can see as related to each other” (1995: 164). Thus, a plot is not just a sequence of chronological events but it also implies that there is a meaningful relationship among the events.

E.M. Forster (1955) in *Aspect of the Novel* wrote that “the King died and the Queen died” was a story, whereas “the King died and then the Queen died of grief” was a plot. The words “of grief” according to Forster made a crucial difference, because a *reason* is given for what happened, reader knows why one event has followed another (Forster in Gill, *ibid.*).

Plot is characterized by a conflict which means a struggle between two or more opposing forces (Spack, 2010: 23). There are two types of conflict:

1. **External:** a struggle with a force outside one’s self.
2. **Internal:** a struggle within one’s self.

The conflict comprises of four kinds as follows:

1. **Human vs. human** (physical)

The leading character struggles with his physical strength against other men, forces of nature, or animal.

2. **Human vs. circumstances** (classical)

The leading character struggles against fate, or the circumstances of life facing him/her.

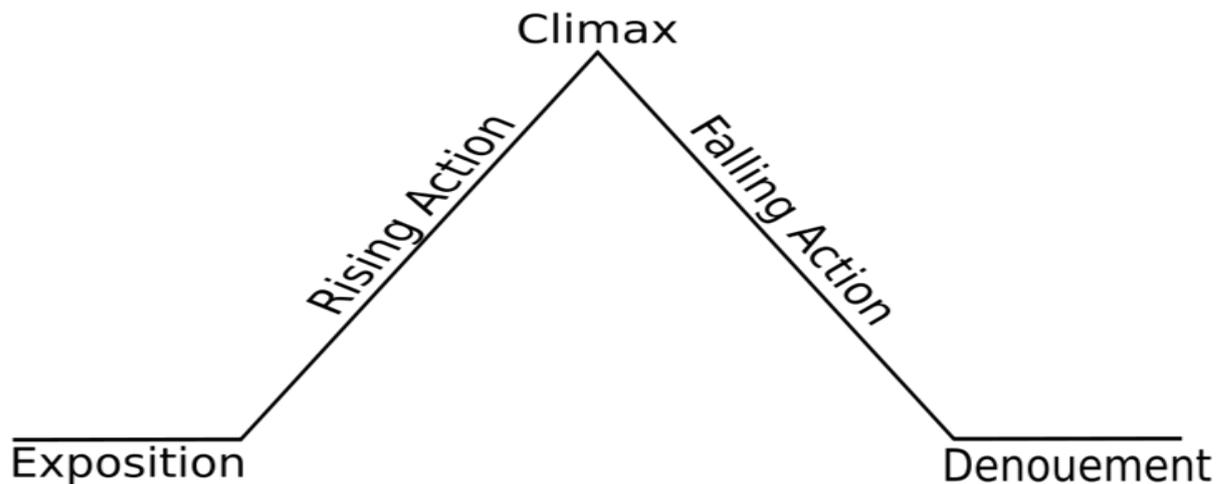
3. **Human vs. society** (social)

The leading character struggles against ideas, practices, or customs of other people.

4. **Human vs. himself/herself** (psychological)

The leading character struggles with himself/herself (their own soul, ideas of right or wrong, choices, etc.) (Dewi, 2016: 50)

Plot has some parts; the common term referred to Gustav Freytag, a German writer. He advocated a model based upon Aristotle’s theory of tragedy (Freytag, 1900: 115). This is now called “Freytag’s pyramid,” these parts are: exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and denouement.



### **1. Exposition**

The exposition is the portion of a story that introduces important background information; for example, information about the setting, events occurring before the main plot, characters' back stories, etc. It introduces the characters, especially the main character, also known as the protagonist. It shows how the characters relate to one another, their goals and motivations, as well as their moral character. During the exposition, the protagonist learns their main goal and what is at stake.

### **2. Rising action**

In the rising action, a series of events build toward the point of greatest interest. The rising action of a story is the series of events that begin immediately after the exposition (introduction) of the story and builds up to the climax. These events are generally the most important parts of the story since the entire plot depends on them to set up the climax and ultimately the satisfactory resolution of the story itself. In this phase, the protagonist understands his or her goal and begins to work toward it. Smaller problems thwart their initial success and their progress is directed primarily against these secondary obstacles. This phase demonstrates how the protagonist overcomes these obstacles.

### **3. Climax**

The climax is the turning point or highest point of the story. The protagonist makes the single big decision that defines not only the outcome of the story, but also who they are as a person. Freytag defines the climax as the third of the five dramatic phases which occupies the middle of the story.

At the beginning of this phase, the protagonist finally clears away the preliminary barriers and engages with the adversary. Usually, both the protagonist and the antagonist have a plan to win against the other as they enter this phase. For the first time, the audience sees the pair going against one another in direct or nearly direct conflict.

This struggle usually results in neither character completely winning nor losing. In most cases, each character's plan is both partially successful and partially foiled by their adversary. The central struggle between the two characters is unique in that the

protagonist makes a decision which shows their moral quality, and ultimately decides their fate.

#### **4. Falling action**

The falling action phase consists of events that lead to the ending. Character's actions resolve the problem. In the beginning of this phase, the antagonist often has the upper hand. The protagonist has never been further from accomplishing their goal. The outcome depends on which side the protagonist has put themselves on.

#### **5. Resolution / Denouement**

In this phase the protagonist and antagonist have solved their problems and either the protagonist or antagonist wins the conflict. The conflict officially ends. Some stories show what happens to the characters after the conflict ends and/or they show what happens to the characters in the future. ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot\\_\(narrative\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plot_(narrative)), [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramatic\\_structure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dramatic_structure))

To summarize a plot, we need to determine what we believe are the key events or happenings in the story and to identify the conflict(s). Ask questions such as these:

- a) What is happening?
- b) What is the main conflict?
- c) Is the conflict resolved (brought to a conclusion)? (Spack, 2010: 23)

## **B. SETTING**

The setting of a story is the time and location in which it takes place. Often, the setting of a story has a causal relationship with the events of the story. Setting also refers to social environment and physical environment of a story (Spack, 2010: 25):

### **1. Place**

The setting may include details that indicate the geographical location of the story, such as the country or city in which the story takes place in a large city or small village. The details may show whether the story takes place indoors or outdoors, or both.

### **2. Time**

The length of time during which the action occurs is a feature of the setting; this may span several years or months or only an hour. Details of the setting may reveal the time of day, not only through actual clock time, but also through descriptions of light, darkness, and shadows. Details of the setting may reveal time of year, through references to the seasons. The period of history in which the action occurs may also be revealed.

### **3. Social environment**

Not all stories include references to social environment, but when they do, such references may include details about the manners, customs, rules, and moral codes of society. Details may also reveal socioeconomic status or class level.

### **4. Physical environment**

Details of the setting reveal the physical environment in which the story takes place. Such concrete details may include references to or descriptions of objects, clothing, nature, buildings, rooms, weather, sounds, smells, and so on. These physical details often indicate the emotional state of the characters or the relationship between characters.

## 5. Mood or atmosphere

What feeling is created at the beginning of the story? Is it bright and cheerful or dark and frightening? Those are the details that may include in mood or atmosphere. (Dewi, 2016: 99)

Settings can be very important because it can be used to cover:

- the places in which the characters appear
- the social context of characters, such as their families, friends, and class
- the customs, beliefs and rules of behavior that give identity to a society
- the particular locations of events
- the atmosphere, mood and feel that all the above elements create (Gill, 1995: 148)

To examine the setting of a story, we may use these questions:

- Where does the story take place?
- When?
- How long does it take for the action to occur?
- Which details reveal the society's manners, customs, rules, moral codes, and/or the socioeconomic level of the characters?
- Which concrete details reveal a character's emotional state and/or the relationship between the characters? (Spack, 2010: 26)

## C. POINT OF VIEW

Point of view is a literary term that refers to the perspective from which a story is told. The author creates a narrator to tell the story. It is through the narrator's perspective (through the narrator's eyes and minds) that readers learn what is happening in a story. (Spack, 2010: 28)

There are two basic types of point of view (Dewi, 2016: 37):

### 1. The first person point of view

It occurs when the story is told by a character within the story using the first person pronoun "I". The narrator is one of the characters in the story.

### 2. The third person point of view

The story is not told by a character by a character but by an "invisible author", using the third person pronoun (he, she, or it) to tell the story. If the third person narrator knows almost everything about one character or every character, including inner thoughts, s/he is a **third person omniscient** (all knowing) narrator. Or the narrator may know everything about one or more character(s) *except* inner thought. The narrator may comment on the actions and thoughts, or the narrator may just describe them objectively. (Spack, 2010: 29)

It is easy to be fooled into thinking that the narrator is the author. But it is important to remember that **the narrator is a device** and **point of view is a technique** that an author uses to influence the way a reader perceives what is happening in the story (ibid.). To determine point of view in a story, here are some questions to guide:

- Who is telling the story?
- Is this narrator a character in the story?

- What does the narrator know about the (other) characters?
- Why do you think the author has chosen this point of view?
- How would the story be different if it were told from another point of view? (ibid.)

## D. CHARACTER

There is an important distinction to be made between character and characterisation:

- *A character* is a person in a literary work.
- *Characterisation* is the way in which a character is created. (Gill, 1995: 127)

Calling figures in literature 'characters' rather than, say, 'persons', is a way of reminding ourselves that a character is a literary creation. Characters in books may have all sorts of links with the people we meet everyday (in some cases we feel more strongly about them than real people) but we only meet them in books. (ibid.)

A way of putting this is to say that characters are all the product of characterisation; that's to say, they've been made in a particular way. Much of what follows in this chapter is about how characters are created. The words an author uses are the means that make each character who he or she is. Characters are what they are like because of the way they've been made. The kind of conversations they have, the things they do, their appearances and so on are the particular ways in which the author has chosen to characterise his or her characters. We might remember the difference by saying that:

*Characterisation* is a method and *character* the product. (ibid.)

Characterisation as a method to develop and reveal a character can be done through:

1. the character's physical description
2. the character's action
3. the character's speeches, thoughts and feelings
4. the comments and reactions of other characters
5. the direct statements given by the author to the character (Dewi, 2016: 62).

According to E.M Forster (1955) in *Aspect of the Novel*, characters are divided by flat and round characters.

- 1. Flat character** remains the same from the beginning of the story to the end
- 2. Round character**, surprisingly and unpredictably changing like human beings (Dewi, 2016: 59-60)

There is also another term to divide the character:

### 1. Protagonist

A protagonist is the central character or leading figure in poetry, narrative, novel or any other story. A protagonist is sometimes called a "hero" by the audience or readers.

The word originally came from the Greek language and in Greek drama which refers to the person who led the chorus. Later on, the word started being used as a term for the first actor in order of performance.

## 2. Antagonist

An antagonist is a character or a group of characters which stand in opposition to the protagonist or the main character. The term antagonist comes from Greek word “antagonistēs” that means opponent, competitor or rival. (<https://literarydevices.net>)

Most stories have at least one **central character** (also called **main or major character, hero/heroine, or protagonist**), the person around whom the story revolves. Many stories also have at least one **minor character**, who is not the focus of the story but who still plays an important role (Spack, 2010: 27)

Some questions that can help us to analyze character:

1. Who are the main characters and the minor characters in the story?
2. What do you learn about the characters when seen from their physical appearance, thoughts, and speeches?
3. Are there comments of other characters or from the narrator about the characters?
4. Does each character react to other people or events? What do these reactions reveal about him/her? What reasons might he/she have had for reacting that way?
5. In what ways does each character change over the course of the story? (Dewi, 2016:62-63)

## E. THEME

A *theme* is a truth that a story reveals. Through the creation of a fictional world, authors reveal what they believe to be true about the real world.

A *theme* is rarely directly stated by the author. Instead, the reader discovers themes, inferring meaning from the details in the story. Usually themes deal with general areas of human experience, for example:

- the nature of humanity or society,
- the relationship of human beings to the environment, or
- the question of ethical responsibility (Spack, 2010: 38)

A *theme is not a subject*. A *subject* is what the story is about. A *theme* reveals what the story says about the subject. For example:

- **Subject:** a woman’s response to her husband’s death
- **Theme:** the author shows that the only way that women can achieve freedom, which is acquiring self-assertion, is through death (ibid.)

A theme is not a topic. A topic is what an essay is about. A theme reveals a truth about the topic. For example:

- **Topic:** love and marriage
- **Theme:** It is human nature to seek love and to have a happy marriage life (ibid.)

A theme is not a moral. A moral is a statement or lesson that teaches right and wrong behavior. A theme reveals how people behave (without telling people how to behave). For example:

- **Moral:** It is best to prepare for the days of necessity
- **Theme:** Life is a series of unexpected events, which may be taken both positively and negatively (ibid.)

Since themes are not clearly stated by the author, we uncover them through *a complex reading and thinking process*. This process includes examining:

- the “facts” the author provides (plot, setting, character)
- the literary devices the author uses (point of view, symbolism, foreshadowing, irony)

By piecing together some or all of the elements of fiction, we can discover theme(s) that the details of the story reveal. (Spack, 2010: 40)

## III. THE STORIES

### B THE STORY

#### About the Author

Sinclair Lewis (1885–1951), a novelist, short-story writer, and playwright, was born in Sauk Center, Minnesota. His father was a country doctor, and Sinclair often helped him when he went to visit his patients. One of his most famous novels was *Arrowsmith*, which has a country doctor as its main character.

Sinclair Lewis went to Yale University. He was a sailor, and he went to Panama to help build the Panama Canal. He had various jobs as a reporter, editor, lecturer, and writer. He published several popular novels including *Babbitt* and *Main Street*. In 1930, he became the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature.

### Young Man Axelbrod

Knute Axelbrod was born in Scandinavia. As a young man he dreamed of being a famous scholar. When he first came to America, he worked all day and studied all evening. He even taught school for a short time. After he married, he gave up teaching and reading and became a farmer. He had a wife and three children, and he no longer had the free time to read the books he loved.

Knute worked hard for many years. Then one day, when he was sixty-five, he realized he was an old man. His wife was dead, and his children were grown up. His two sons lived in other states, and Knute decided to give the farm to his daughter Angela and her husband. He built himself a small house nearby and spent his days in the garden growing vegetables and flowers.

After Knute gave his daughter his farm, he still had the habits of a farmer. He awoke at five every morning, cleaned his house, made his bed, and worked in the garden. He was in bed by the time the sun went down. Soon, he began changing his habits. He slept until seven or eight in the mornings, and he often took long walks at night. The neighbors began to talk about Knute. They thought his night walks were strange.

He bought a cat and named her Princess. He let her drink milk from a bowl on the kitchen table. He talked to her as if she were human.

Knute often sat in the sun and looked at the trees. His wide shoulders leaned against his rocking chair, and he touched his white beard. One day while he was sitting in his chair on the porch, he looked up at the trees and thought, "I'm an old man. I've had a good life, but there's one thing I wish for in my old age. I want to go to college. I want to be a student again and read all the great books I never had time to read."

Knute always had a young soul that looked for knowledge and beauty. He loved learning and thought that all college students loved to study and learn. He pictured Harvard and Yale as famous universities where students, like the ancient Greeks, stood around under marble temples<sup>1</sup> and talked about great ideas. He ordered college catalogs and textbooks. He studied Latin, algebra, English, and history. He studied twelve hours a day, and all this time he kept it a secret. Finally, one day he told his daughter.

"I just want you to know that I'm going to college. I plan to leave next week."

"Father, what are you talking about? You can't go to college. You're too old."

"I'm leaving in a few days. I'm not too old to keep learning. I've been studying, and I think I can pass the examinations."

"But the other students are eighteen or nineteen years old."

"That's not a problem. I don't have to go dancing with them. I just want to be in college with them."

"What if you get sick?"

"Angela, I'm not a child. If I get sick, I'll go to a doctor. Don't worry, my dear. I'll be all right."

Angela realized that her father was not going to listen to her. "Dad, where are you planning to go to school?"

"Yale. I'm going to Yale."

The next day he brought Princess over to his daughter's house along with some of his plants. His daughter agreed to watch his little house. Knute said goodbye and boarded a train to New Haven, Connecticut. He had to travel across the United States from his home in Minnesota.

Knute Axelbrod passed the entrance examinations and was accepted at Yale. His roommate was Ray Gribble. Ray was a teacher and wanted a degree so he could make more money. He was surprised that Knute was interested in studying literature and that he didn't care about making money.

Knute knew people at Yale thought he was strange. He listened to instructors who were younger than his sons, and his large body looked

<sup>1</sup>marble temples: buildings used for religion or education and made of hard stone

uncomfortable in the chairs in the classrooms. Most of the students stared at him and thought he was crazy. Soon, even Gribble, his roommate, stayed away from him.

65 Yale began to lose its magic for Knute. The buildings were no longer marble temples. The dining room where Knute ate his meals became a lonely place. No one sat next to him or talked to him. Several young men laughed at Knute's beard, and eventually, he began eating at a nearby restaurant. Without friends, it became harder for Knute to do his assignments. Loneliness became his friend. He missed his cat, his  
70 daughter, and his little house. He missed the walks at night and the sunshine on his porch. He had been at Yale only a month.

One day Knute climbed a large rock that overlooked the school and saw a young man sitting on a bench. It was Gil Washburn, another freshman. He was a quiet type and not very popular with the other  
75 students. Knute stared at him. The young man looked lonely, too.

80 Gil noticed Knute and walked over to him. "Great view," he said smiling. Knute smiled back and said, "Yes, I think The Acropolis<sup>2</sup> must be like this."

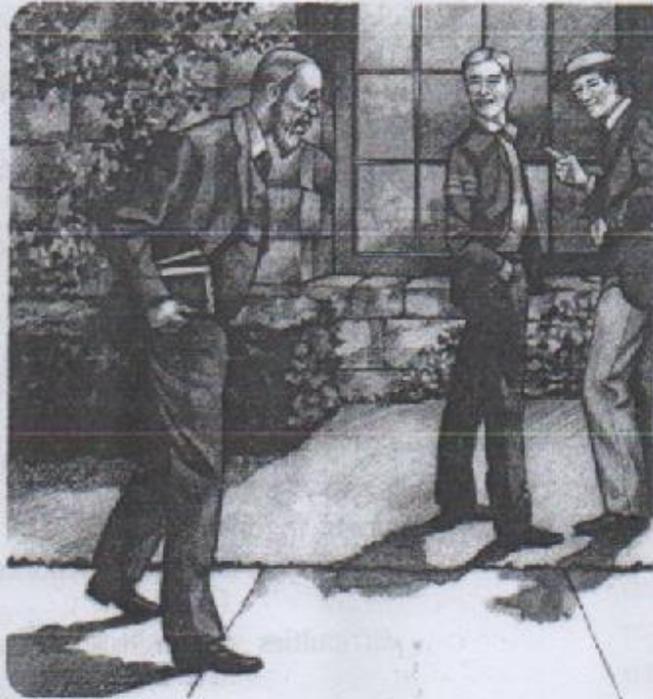
85 "You know, Knute, I've been thinking about you. We are the two who don't fit in here. We came to dream, and everyone else is here to get good grades and make money. You may not agree with me, but I think we're very much alike."

"Why do you think I came here to dream?"

90 "I listen to you talking in class. I watch you with the other students. Do you like poetry? I have a book I brought with me. Do you want to look at it?"

Knute took the thin, brown leather book in his big hands and touched it gently. The pages had gold on their edges. When he opened the pages,  
100 he saw a foreign language. "It's beautiful, but I can't read it."

"It's French poetry. Let me read you a little."



<sup>2</sup>The Acropolis: a rocky hill in the center of the city of Athens in Greece

Gil read to Knute, and the words sounded like music. Knute had been waiting for this for sixty-five years. Then Gil said, "Listen, there's a concert in Hartford tonight, and Ysaye, a famous violinist, is playing. Let's go hear him. We'll take the train and get there in plenty of time. I asked some of the other fellows, but they thought I was crazy."

Knute never heard of Ysaye, but he said, "Sure." When they got to Hartford, they found out they had just enough money to eat dinner, buy concert tickets, and pay for a train ticket to a nearby town. After the concert, Gil suggested, "Let's walk back to New Haven. Can you walk that far?" Knute had no idea how far away they were, but once again he said, "Sure."

So the young man and the older one walked beneath the October moon. They stopped to steal apples and stare at the moon. Gil did most of the talking, and Knute listened. They reached the campus at five in the morning. Knute didn't know how to thank Gil, so he said, "It was fine. I'll go to bed now and dream about our adventure."

"You can't go to bed now. The fun isn't over. Let's go get something to eat. I'm hungry. I'll go up to my room and get some money. Wait here."

Knute was delighted. He would have waited all night. He had lived sixty-five years and traveled fifteen hundred miles to find Gil Washburn. When Gil returned, the two walked arm in arm down the empty streets until they found a restaurant. For the first time, Knute felt content and happy.

They brought the food up to Gil's room. Knute sat in a comfortable chair and looked around at the books, Persian rugs, a silver tea set, and paintings. Gil started a fire in the small fireplace. As they ate, they spoke about great men and their ideas. Gil read some of his own poetry. Knute thought it was a miracle to meet someone who wrote poetry.

They began to yawn, and Knute said goodbye. As he left Gil's room, he saw the sun coming up. It was a new day.

"I can go to his room anytime now. He's my friend."

Knute held the book of French poetry, which Gil wanted him to keep. As he walked back to his own room, Knute felt very tired. In daylight, the adventure seemed hard to believe.

"Age and youth - I guess they can't be a team for long. If I saw the boy again, he would get tired of me. I told him all I know. This is what I came to college for. I waited sixty-five years for this one night. If I go away now, I won't spoil it."

He wrote a note to Gil and packed his clothes. At five that afternoon, on a westbound train, an old man sat smiling. His eyes were content, and his hands held a small book of French poetry even though he couldn't read French.

# 1. DISCUSSING THE STORY

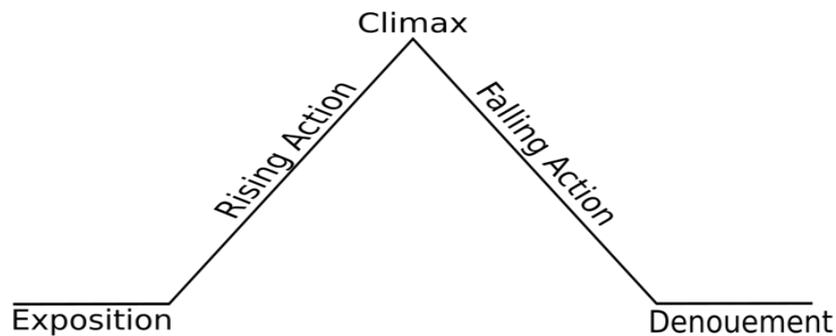
Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group:

1. Why does Knute want to go to college?
2. Why don't the younger students like Knute?
3. Compare Knut and Gil. How are they alike, and how are they different?
4. Did Knute make the right choice in returning to Minnesota? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think the story is titled *Young Man Axelbrod*?

# 2. Analyzing the Story:

## a) Plot

The following chart shows the elements of plot. Identify the events that become part of each elements.



Exposition : .....

Rising action : .....

.....

.....

.....

Climax : .....

Falling action : .....

Denouement : .....

## b) Setting

In this story, there are several settings. Knute has different experiences and feelings in each setting. Choose the correct experiences and feelings to complete the chart.

Experiences		Feelings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The other students don't sit next to Knute or talk to him.</li> <li>• Knute thinks about his adventures.</li> <li>• Gil reads his poetry.</li> <li>• Knute and Gil walk and talk beneath the October moon.</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knute has a good time, but he doesn't know how to thank Gil.</li> <li>• Knute is content.</li> <li>• Knute is lonely and disappointed.</li> <li>• Knute thinks it is a miracle to meet someone who writes poetry.</li> </ul>
SETTING	EXPERIENCES	FEELINGS
In the classrooms and dining room at Yale		<i>Knute is lonely and disappointed.</i>
On the road from Hartford to New Haven		
In Gil Washburn's room		
On a train to Minnesota	<i>Knute thinks about his adventures.</i>	

**c) Point of View**

This story is told from the point of view of a sixty-five-year-old man. Look at the story again and then make a chart like the one below and add example to each category:

Information you learn from Knute	Information from other characters
Knute's ideas:	Knute's words:
Knute's feelings:	
Knute's wants and wishes:	Knute's actions:
Knute's way of looking at students in college:	

## **B** THE STORY

### About the Author

Yoshiko Uchida (1921–1992) was born in California and grew up in Berkeley. After Pearl Harbor was bombed, her father was imprisoned, and the rest of her family was sent to a camp in Utah. This experience provides the background for “The Bracelet.” Uchida once commented, “I want to give young Asians a sense of their past . . . and to non-Asians, the picture of Japanese as real people.” Among the author’s novels are *Journey to Topaz* and *Picture Bride*.

## The Bracelet

“Mama, is it time to go?”

I hadn’t planned to cry, but the tears came suddenly, and I wiped them away with the back of my hand. I didn’t want my older sister to see me crying.

“It’s almost time, Ruri,” my mother said gently. Her face was filled with a kind of sadness I had never seen before.

I looked around at my empty room. The clothes that Mama always told me to hang up in the closet, the junk piled on my dresser, the old rag doll I could never bear to part with; they were all gone. There was nothing left in my room, and there was nothing left in the rest of the house. The rugs and furniture were gone, the pictures and drapes were down, and the closets and cupboards were empty. The house was like a gift box after the nice thing inside was gone; just a lot of nothingness.

It was almost time to leave our home, but we weren’t moving to a nicer house or to a new town. It was April 21, 1942. The United States and Japan were at war, and every Japanese person on the West Coast was being evacuated by the government to a concentration camp. Mama, my sister Keiko, and I were being sent from our home, and out of Berkeley, and eventually, out of California.

The doorbell rang, and I ran to answer it before my sister could. I thought maybe by some miracle, a messenger from the government might be standing there, tall and proper and buttoned into a uniform, come to tell us it was all a terrible mistake; that we wouldn’t have to

25 leave after all. Or maybe the messenger would have a telegram from Papa, who was interned in a prisoner-of-war camp in Montana because he had worked for a Japanese business firm.

The FBI had come to pick up Papa and hundreds of other Japanese community leaders on the very day that Japanese planes had bombed Pearl Harbor. The government thought they were dangerous enemy  
30 aliens. If it weren't so sad, it would have been funny. Papa could no more be dangerous than the mayor of our city, and he was every bit as loyal to the United States. He had lived here since 1917.

When I opened the door, it wasn't a messenger from anywhere. It was my best friend, Laurie Madison, from next door. She was holding a  
35 package wrapped up like a birthday present, but she wasn't wearing her party dress, and her face drooped like a wilted tulip.

She helped me put it on, and I told her I'd never take it off, ever.

"Hi," she said. "I came to say good-bye."

She thrust the present at me and told me it was something to take to camp. "It's a bracelet," she said before I could open the package. "Put  
45 it on so you won't have to pack it." She knew I didn't have one inch of space left in my suitcase. We had been instructed to take only what we could carry into camp, and Mama had told us that we could each take only two suitcases.

"Then how are we ever going to pack the dishes and blankets and sheets they've told us to bring with us?" Keiko worried.

50 "I don't really know," Mama said, and she simply began packing those big impossible things into an enormous duffel bag — along with umbrellas, boots, a kettle, hot plate, and flashlight.

"Who's going to carry that huge sack?" I asked.

But Mama didn't worry about things like that. "Someone will help  
55 us," she said. "Don't worry." So I didn't.

Laurie wanted me to open her package and put on the bracelet before she left. It was a thin gold chain with a heart dangling on it. She helped me put it on, and I told her I'd never take it off, ever.

"Well, good-bye then," Laurie said awkwardly. "Come home soon."

60 "I will," I said, although I didn't know if I would ever get back to Berkeley again.

I watched Laurie go down the block, her long blond pigtailed bouncing as she walked. I wondered who would be sitting in my desk at Lincoln Junior High now that I was gone. Laurie kept turning and waving, even  
65 walking backwards for a while, until she got to the corner. I didn't want to watch anymore, and I slammed the door shut.

The next time the doorbell rang, it was Mrs. Simpson, our other

neighbor. She was going to drive us to the Congregational church, which was the Civil Control Station where all the Japanese of Berkeley were supposed to report.

It was time to go. "Come on, Ruri. Get your things," my sister called to me.

It was a warm day, but I put on a sweater and my coat so I wouldn't have to carry them, and I picked up my two suitcases. Each one had a tag with my name and our family number on it. Every Japanese family had to register and get a number. We were Family Number 13453.

Mama was taking one last look around our house. She was going from room to room, as though she were trying to take a mental picture of the house she had lived in for fifteen years, so she would never forget it.

I saw her take a long last look at the garden that Papa loved. The irises beside the fish pond were just beginning to bloom. If Papa had been home, he would have cut the first iris blossom and brought it inside to Mama. "This one is for you," he would have said. And Mama would have smiled and said, "Thank you, Papa San,"<sup>1</sup> and put it in her favorite cut-glass vase.

But the garden looked shabby and forsaken now that Papa was gone and Mama was too busy to take care of it. It looked the way I felt, sort of empty and lonely and abandoned.

When Mrs. Simpson took us to the Civil Control Station, I felt even worse. I was scared, and for a minute I thought I was going to lose my breakfast right in front of everybody. There must have been over a thousand Japanese people gathered at the church. Some were old and some were young. Some were talking and laughing, and some were crying. I guess everybody else was scared too. No one knew exactly what was going to happen to us. We just knew we were being taken to the Tanforan Racetracks, which the army had turned into a camp for the Japanese. There were fourteen other camps like ours along the West Coast.

What scared me most were the soldiers standing at the doorway of the church hall. They were carrying guns with mounted bayonets. I wondered if they thought we would try to run away, and whether they'd shoot us or come after us with their bayonets if we did.

A long line of buses waited to take us to camp. There were trucks, too, for our baggage. And Mama was right; some men were there to help us load our duffel bag. When it was time to board the buses, I sat with Keiko and Mama sat behind us. The bus went down Grove Street and passed the small Japanese food store where Mama used to order her bean-curd cakes and pickled radish. The windows were all boarded up, but there was a sign still hanging on the door that read, "We are loyal Americans."

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<sup>1</sup>**Papa San:** In Japan, the suffix *san* is added to a name as a mark of respect

110 The crazy thing about the whole evacuation was that we were all loyal Americans. Most of us were citizens because we had been born here. But our parents, who had come from Japan, couldn't become citizens because there was a law that prevented any Asian from becoming a citizen. Now everybody with a Japanese face was being shipped off to  
115 concentration camps.

"It's stupid," Keiko muttered as we saw the racetrack looming up beside the highway. "If there were any Japanese spies around, they'd have gone back to Japan long ago."

120 "I'll say," I agreed. My sister was in high school and she ought to know, I thought.

When the bus turned into Tanforan, there were more armed guards at the gate, and I saw barbed wire strung around the entire grounds. I felt as though I were going into a prison, but I hadn't done anything wrong.

This was our apartment, and it still smelled of horses.

We streamed off the buses and poured into a huge room, where doctors looked down our throats and peeled back our eyelids to see if we had any diseases. Then we were given our housing assignments. The man in charge gave

Mama a slip of paper. We were in Barrack 16, Apartment 40.

135 "Mama!" I said. "We're going to live in an apartment!" The only apartment I had ever seen was the one my piano teacher lived in. It was in an enormous building in San Francisco with an elevator and thick carpeted hallways. I thought how wonderful it would be to have our own elevator. A house was all right, but an apartment seemed elegant and special.

140 We walked down the racetrack looking for Barrack 16. Mr. Noma, a friend of Papa's, helped us carry our bags. I was so busy looking around, I slipped and almost fell on the muddy track. Army barracks had been built everywhere, all around the racetrack and even in the center oval.

Mr. Noma pointed beyond the track toward the horse stables. "I think your barrack is out there."

145 He was right. We came to a long stable that had once housed the horses of Tanforan, and we climbed up the wide ramp. Each stall had a number painted on it, and when we got to 40, Mr. Noma pushed open the door.

"Well, here it is," he said, "Apartment 40."

150 The stall was narrow and empty and dark. There were two small windows on each side of the door. Three folded army cots were on the dust-covered floor and one light bulb dangled from the ceiling. That was all. This was our apartment, and it still smelled of horses.

Mama looked at my sister and then at me. "It won't be so bad when

we fix it up," she began. "I'll ask Mrs. Simpson to send me some material for curtains. I could make some cushions too, and . . . well . . ." She stopped. She couldn't think of anything more to say.

Mr. Noma said he'd go get some mattresses for us. "I'd better hurry before they're all gone." He rushed off. I think he wanted to leave so that he wouldn't have to see Mama cry. But he needn't have run off, because Mama didn't cry. She just went out to borrow a broom and began sweeping out the dust and dirt. "Will you girls set up the cots?" she asked.

It was only after we'd put up the last cot that I noticed my bracelet was gone. "I've lost Laurie's bracelet!" I screamed. "My bracelet's gone!"

We looked all over the stall and even down the ramp. I wanted to run back down the track and go over every inch of ground we'd walked on, but it was getting dark and Mama wouldn't let me.

I thought of what I'd promised Laurie. I wasn't ever going to take the bracelet off, not even when I went to take a shower. And now I had lost it on my very first day in camp. I wanted to cry.

I kept looking for it all the time we were in Tanforan. I didn't stop looking until the day we were sent to another camp, called Topaz, in the middle of a desert in Utah. And then I gave up.

But Mama told me never mind. She said I didn't need a bracelet to remember Laurie, just as I didn't need anything to remember Papa or our home in Berkeley or all the people and things we loved and had left behind.

"Those are things we can carry in our hearts and take with us no matter where we are sent," she said.

And I guess she was right. I've never forgotten Laurie, even now.

## 1. DISCUSSING THE STORY

**Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group:**

1. Why do Ruri and her family have to leave their home?
2. Why is Ruri upset when she loses the bracelet? What does the bracelet mean to her?
3. How does Ruri's mother comfort her when Ruri loses the bracelet?
4. Why is the sign "We are loyal Americans" a sad contrast to the way the Japanese Americans are treated in the story?
5. Discuss some of the unjust decisions that governments make during wartime.

## 2. Analyzing the Story:

### a) Character

The chart below has the names of the character. Complete the chart.

<b>Characters</b>	<b>Dialogues</b>	<b>Adjectives</b>
Ruri	"I thought maybe by some miracle a messenger from the government might be standing there, tall and proper and buttoned into a uniform, come tell us it was all a terrible mistake, that we wouldn't have to leave after all."	.....
Ruri	.....	sensitive
Ruri	"The crazy thing about the whole evacuation was that we were all loyal Americans. Most of us were citizens because we had been born here."	.....
Mama	"'Who's going to carry that huge sack?' I asked. But Mama didn't worry about things like that. 'Someone will help us,' she said. 'Don't worry.' So I didn't."	.....

Mama	....	calm
Mama	"Those are things we can carry in our hearts and take with us no matter where we are sent," she said.	....

**b) Theme**

The theme of a story gives the author's opinion about life. *The theme of a story is its main idea or insight into life.* But remember, the author does not tell you the theme; you must find it from the words in the story. Answer these questions to find out the theme of the story:

1. In your opinion, what is the main insight that Uchida intends to convey in this story?
2. With the understanding on the insight of the story, how does Uchida's description strengthen the theme conveyed?

# Before You Read

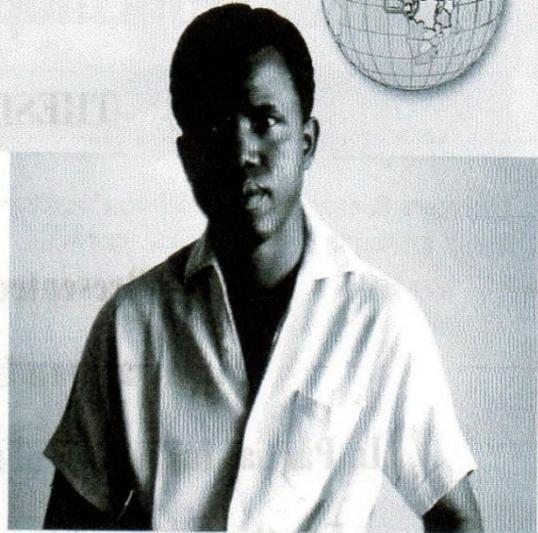
World Literature  
Africa



## Civil Peace

### Meet **Chinua Achebe**

(born 1930)



**T**he story is our escort; without it, we are blind." Chinua Achebe (ə chā' bā) wrote these words to stress the importance of keeping Africa's precolonial stories and culture alive.

Achebe was born in Ogidi, Nigeria. His family was Ibo and Christian. While growing up, Achebe experienced traditional village life. After graduating from University College in Ibadan, he worked for more than ten years for the Nigerian Broadcasting Company. Achebe left this job in 1966 partly because of political problems that led to civil war in Nigeria in 1967. The Ibo, one of Nigeria's largest ethnic groups, tried to separate from Nigeria to form the independent Republic of Biafra. Achebe worked for the Ibo cause and represented Biafra as a diplomat.

He has since taught in universities in Nigeria, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. Throughout his career, he has authored five novels, as well as many essays, poems, and children's stories. He was also the director of Heinemann Education Books Ltd. (now called the Heinemann African Writers Series) and helped develop series to foster publication of African and Caribbean writers.

*"It is the story that outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters."*

—Chinua Achebe, from *Anthills of the Savannah*

**The African Voice** Achebe writes in English so that his stories will have a wider audience.

However, his themes revolve around the people of Africa, their struggles under colonial rule, and their fight for independence. Achebe combines the rhythms and speech patterns of the Ibo with the English language so that English readers will gain a sense of the African people and culture. Achebe writes about his people honestly, detailing both the good and the bad. By communicating his messages about life, Achebe has preserved the African storytelling tradition.

**Civil War and Civil Peace** Achebe wrote radio programs that supported the Biafrans during the Civil War, but he could not bring himself to write novels during the war. He did, however, write three short stories about the war. "Civil Peace," which provides a true-to-life description of the region after the war, is one of those stories.

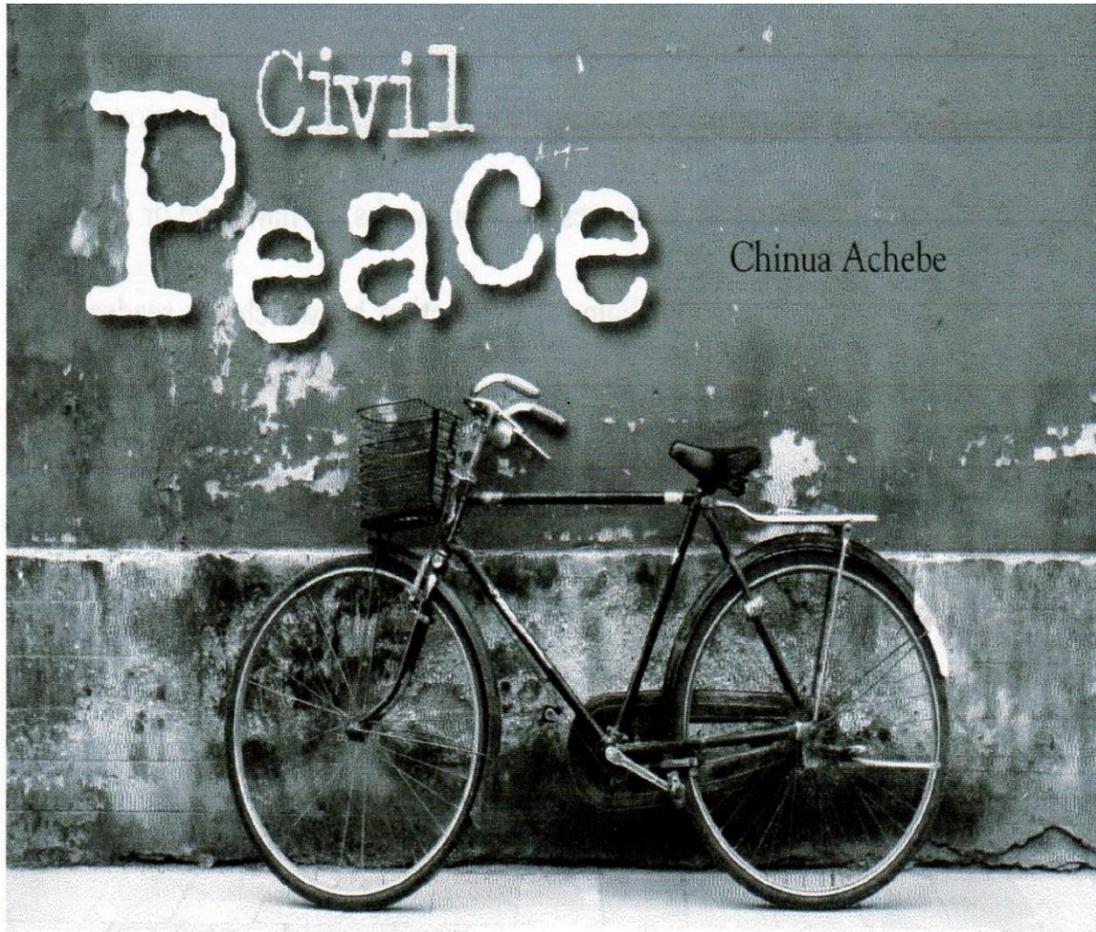
The title of Achebe's most popular novel, *Things Fall Apart*, is an allusion to the William Butler Yeats poem "The Second Coming." Achebe's novel, a powerful account of a "strong" man whose life is dominated by fear and anger, is recognized as a masterpiece of modern African literature.

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**Author Search** For more about Chinua Achebe, go to [glencoe.com](http://glencoe.com) and enter QuickPass code GL59794u1.



Jonathan Iwegbu counted himself extraordinarily lucky. “Happy survival!” meant so much more to him than just a current fashion of greeting old friends in the first hazy days of peace. It went deep to his heart. He had come out of the war with five inestimable blessings—his head, his wife Maria’s head and the heads of three out of their four children. As a bonus he also had his old bicycle—a miracle too but naturally not to be compared to the safety of five human heads.

The bicycle had a little history of its own. One day at the height of the war it was **commandeered** “for urgent military action.” Hard as its loss would have been to him he would still have let it go without

a thought had he not had some doubts about the genuineness of the officer. It wasn’t his disreputable rags, nor the toes peeping out of one blue and one brown canvas shoes, nor yet the two stars of his rank done obviously in a hurry in biro,<sup>1</sup> that troubled Jonathan; many good and heroic soldiers looked the same or worse. It was rather a certain lack of grip and firmness in his manner. So Jonathan, suspecting he might be **amenable** to influence, rummaged in his raffia bag and produced the two pounds

1. The stars signifying the officer’s rank had been hand-drawn in ink. *Biro* (bi’rō) is a British term for a ballpoint pen.

**Analyze Historical Context** Why would Jonathan have let his bicycle go “without a thought”? Why did he think of himself as “extraordinarily lucky”?

#### Vocabulary

**commandeer** (kəm’ən dēr’) v. to seize for use by the military or government

#### Vocabulary

**amenable** (ə mē’ nə bəl) adj. responsive; able to be controlled

with which he had been going to buy firewood which his wife, Maria, **retailed** to



**Visual Vocabulary**  
A *raffia* bag is one woven from the fibers of the raffia palm tree.

camp officials for extra stock-fish and corn meal, and got his bicycle back. That night he buried it in the little clearing in the bush where the dead of the camp, including his own youngest son, were buried. When he dug it up again a year later after the surrender all it needed was

a little palm-oil greasing. "Nothing puzzles God," he said in wonder.

He put it to immediate use as a taxi and accumulated a small pile of Biafran money ferrying camp officials and their families across the four-mile stretch to the nearest tarred road. His standard charge per trip was six pounds and those who had the money were only glad to be rid of some of it in this way. At the end of a **fortnight** he had made a small fortune of one hundred and fifteen pounds.

Then he made the journey to Enugu and found another miracle waiting for him. It was unbelievable. He rubbed his eyes and looked again and it was still standing there before him. But, needless to say, even that monumental blessing must be accounted also totally inferior to the five heads in the family. This newest miracle was his little house in Ogui Oversight. Indeed nothing puzzles God! Only two houses away a huge

concrete **edifice** some wealthy contractor had put up just before the war was a mountain of rubble. And here was Jonathan's little zinc house of no regrets built with mud blocks quite intact! Of course the doors and windows were missing and five sheets off the roof. But what was that? And anyhow he had returned to Enugu early enough to pick up bits of old zinc and wood and soggy sheets of cardboard lying around the neighborhood before thousands more came out of their forest holes looking for the same things. He got a destitute carpenter with one old hammer, a blunt plane and a few bent and rusty nails in his tool bag to turn this assortment of wood, paper and metal into door and window shutters for five Nigerian shillings or fifty Biafran pounds. He paid the pounds, and moved in with his overjoyed family carrying five heads on their shoulders.

His children picked mangoes near the military cemetery and sold them to soldiers' wives for a few pennies—real pennies this time—and his wife started making breakfast akara balls<sup>2</sup> for neighbors in a hurry to start life again. With his family earnings he took his bicycle to the villages around and bought fresh palm wine which he mixed generously in his rooms with the water which had recently started running again in the public tap down the road, and opened up a bar for soldiers and other lucky people with good money.

At first he went daily, then every other day and finally once a week, to the offices of the Coal Corporation where he used to be

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Encountering the Unexpected *Why was Jonathan surprised by the condition of his bicycle?*

**Vocabulary**

**retail** (re' tãl) v. to sell directly to the consumer  
**fortnight** (fôrt' nîl) n. two weeks

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2. *Akara balls* are ball-shaped bean cakes.

Analyze Historical Context *What do the actions of Jonathan's family members show?*

**Vocabulary**

**edifice** (ed' ə fis) n. a building, especially a large, important-looking one

a miner, to find out what was what. The only thing he did find out in the end was that that little house of his was even a greater blessing than he had thought. Some of his fellow ex-miners who had nowhere to return at the end of the day's waiting just slept outside the doors of the offices and cooked what meal they could scrounge together in Bournvita tins. As the weeks lengthened and still nobody could say what was what Jonathan discontinued his weekly visits altogether and faced his palm wine bar.



**Visual Vocabulary**  
Here a queue (kyū) means a line of people.

But nothing puzzles God. Came the day of the windfall when after five days of endless scuffles in queues and counter queues in the sun outside the Treasury he had twenty pounds counted into his palms as *ex gratia*<sup>3</sup> award for

the rebel money he had turned in. It was like Christmas for him and for many others like him when the payments began. They called it (since few could manage its proper official name) *egg rasher*.

As soon as the pound notes were placed in his palm Jonathan simply closed it tight over them and buried fist and money inside his trouser pocket. He had to be extra careful because he had seen a man a couple of days earlier collapse into near madness in an instant before that oceanic crowd because no sooner had he got his twenty pounds than some heartless ruffian picked it off him. Though it was not right that a man in such an extremity of agony should be blamed yet many in the queues that day were able to remark quietly on the victim's carelessness,

especially after he pulled out the innards of his pocket and revealed a hole in it big enough to pass a thief's head. But of course he had insisted that the money had been in the other pocket, pulling it out too to show its comparative wholeness. So one had to be careful.

Jonathan soon transferred the money to his left hand and pocket so as to leave his right free for shaking hands should the need arise, though by fixing his gaze at such an elevation as to miss all approaching human faces he made sure that the need did not arise, until he got home.

He was normally a heavy sleeper but that night he heard all the neighborhood noises die down one after another. Even the night watchman who knocked the hour on some metal somewhere in the distance had fallen silent after knocking one o'clock. That must have been the last thought in Jonathan's mind before he was finally carried away himself. He couldn't have been gone for long, though, when he was violently awakened again.

"Who is knocking?" whispered his wife lying beside him on the floor.

"I don't know," he whispered back breathlessly.

The second time the knocking came it was so loud and imperious that the rickety old door could have fallen down.

"Who is knocking?" he asked then, his voice parched and trembling.

"Na tief-man and him people," came the cool reply. "Make you hopen de door." This was followed by the heaviest knocking of all.

Maria was the first to raise the alarm, then he followed and all their children.

3. Something that is awarded *ex gratia* (eks grāsh' ē ə) is given as a favor rather than as a legal right. The Latin word *gratia* means "kindness."

Encountering the Unexpected *What visitors might be at the door? Are Jonathan and his wife completely surprised? Explain.*

"Police-o! Thieves-o! Neighbors-o! Police-o!  
We are lost! We are dead! Neighbors, are you  
asleep? Wake up! Police-o!"

This went on for a long time and then  
stopped suddenly. Perhaps they had scared  
the thief away. There was total silence. But  
only for a short while.

"You done finish?" asked the voice  
outside. "Make we help you small. Oya,  
everybody!"

"Police-o! Tief-man-o! Neighbors-o! we done  
loss-o! Police-o! . . ."

There were at least five other voices  
besides the leader's.

Jonathan and his family were now com-  
pletely paralyzed by terror. Maria and the  
children sobbed inaudibly like lost souls.  
Jonathan groaned continuously.

than before and groaned heavily. His legs  
were sagging under him and his throat felt  
like sandpaper.

"My frien, why you no de talk again. I de  
ask you say you wan make we call soja?"

"No."

"Awrighto. Now make we talk business.  
We no be bad tief. We no like for make  
trouble. Trouble done finish. War done fin-  
ish and all the katakata<sup>4</sup> wey de for inside.  
No Civil War again. This time na Civil  
Peace. No be so?"

"Na so!" answered the horrible chorus.

"What do you want from me? I am a  
poor man. Everything I had went with this  
war. Why do you come to me? You know  
people who have money. We . . ."

"Awright! We know say you no get  
plenty money. But we sef no get even anini.<sup>5</sup>  
So derefore make you open dis window and  
give us one hundred pound and we go  
commot. Orderwise we de come for inside  
now to show you guitar-boy like dis . . ."

A volley of automatic fire rang through  
the sky. Maria and the children began to  
weep aloud again.

"Ah, missisi de cry again. No need for  
dat. We done talk say we na good tief. We  
just take our small money and go nway-  
only. No molest. Abi we de molest?"

"At all!" sang the chorus.

"My friends," began Jonathan hoarsely.  
"I hear what you say and I thank you. If I  
had one hundred pounds . . ."

"Lookia my frien, no be play we come  
play for your house. If we make mistake  
and step for inside you no go like am-o.  
So derefore . . ."

4. The word *katakata* may be meant to imitate the sound of  
gunfire. The rest of the phrase is Nigerian dialect for "that  
went with it."

5. An *anini* (à nē'ē) is a small Nigerian coin worth less than  
one cent.

Dialect What does the author's use of dialect here add to  
the story?

The silence that followed the thieves'  
alarm vibrated horribly. Jonathan all but  
begged their leader to speak again and be  
done with it.

"My frien," said he at long last, "we don  
try our best for call dem but I tink say dem  
all done sleep-o . . . So wetin we go do  
now? Sometaim you wan call soja? Or you  
wan make we call dem for you? Soja better  
pass police. No be so?"

"Na so!" replied his men. Jonathan  
thought he heard even more voices now

Analyze Historical Context Why does no one in the  
neighborhood respond when the thieves pound on  
Jonathan's door? Why do the thieves call for the police?

Dialect What does the term "soja" mean? Why are this  
and other words presented here with unusual spellings?

"To God who made me; if you come  
inside and find one hundred pounds, take  
it and shoot me and shoot my wife and  
children. I swear to God. The only money  
I have in this life is this twenty-pounds  
egg rasher they gave me today . . ."

"OK. Time de go. Make you open dis  
window and bring the twenty pound. We  
go manage am like dat."

There were now loud murmurs of dis-  
sent among the chorus: "Na lie de man de  
lie; e get plenty money . . . Make we go  
inside and search properly well . . . Wetin  
be twenty pound? . . ."

"Shurup!" rang the leader's voice like a  
lone shot in the sky and silenced the  
murmuring at once. "Are you dere? Bring  
the money quick!"

"I am coming," said Jonathan fumbling in  
the darkness with the key of the small  
wooden box he kept by his side on the mat.

At the first sign of light as neighbors and  
others assembled to commiserate with him  
he was already strapping his five-gallon  
demijohn to his bicycle carrier and his wife,  
sweating in the open fire, was turning over  
akara balls in a wide clay bowl of boiling  
oil. In the corner his eldest son was rinsing  
out dregs of yesterday's palm wine from old  
beer bottles.

"I count it as noth-  
ing," he told his sym-  
pathizers, his eyes on  
the rope he was  
tying. "What is egg  
rasher? Did I depend  
on it last week? Or is  
it greater than other  
things that went with  
the war? I say, let egg  
rasher perish in the  
flames! Let it go  
where everything else  
has gone. Nothing  
puzzles God." ☞



Visual Vocabulary  
A demijohn is a large  
earthenware or glass  
bottle, encased in  
wicker.

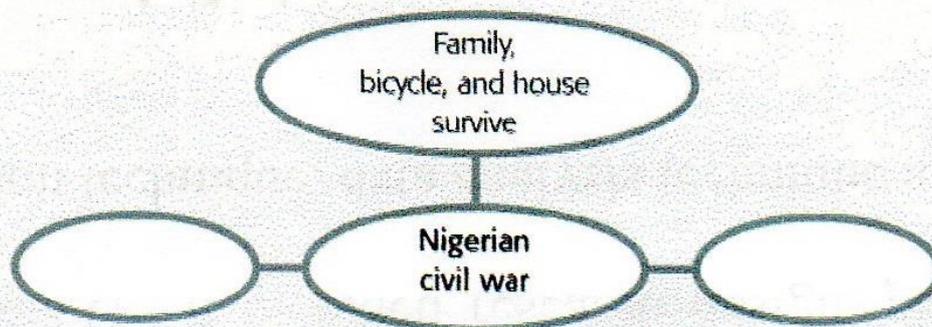
## 1. DISCUSSING THE STORY

a) Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group:

### Reading Strategy Analyze Historical Context

When you **analyze a story's historical context**, you think of how the characters and events in the story are affected by what is taking place at the time the story is set. As you read, ask yourself, How does living through the Nigerian civil war affect Jonathan Iwegbu's life?

**Tip: Analyze Effects** Use a web diagram like the one below to list the effects of the Nigerian civil war on Jonathan Iwegbu's life.



b) Respond and interpret

1. What is Jonathan Iwegbu's attitude toward life?
2. How would you describe the civil peace in Nigeria based on the setting description?
3. What is the main conflict of Chinua Achebe's short story *Civil Peace*?
4. Do you think that the title of this story is appropriate, or would *Civil War* have been a better title? Explain
5. How might Achebe's personal history have influenced his portrayals of Jonathan and the other characters?

# The Answer Is No



*Naguib Mahfouz*

## ***About the Author***

Naguib Mahfouz is a well-known Egyptian author whose portrayal of life in present-day Egypt won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1988. His latest novel, *The Beginning and the End*, looks at the harsh life of ordinary Egyptians and in particular the plight of women. In addition to writing fiction, Naguib Mahfouz works as a journalist for the Egyptian newspaper *Al Ahram*.



## ***Something to Think About***

In some Third-World countries such as Egypt, the setting of the following story, a woman loses her prospects for marriage if she loses her virginity, even if she is raped. What do you think might be a woman's options if she finds herself in such a situation?



## ***Words to Keep in Mind***

**headmaster** (1) principal

**decorously** (4) politely; showing good taste in behavior, speech, and dress

**attired** (4) dressed

**spherical** (4) round

**attained** (11) achieved, gained

**byword** (12) one that is proverbial as a type of specified characteristics

**rapacious** (12) greedy

**coercion** (13) force

**solitude** (13) being alone

**asperity** (14) harshness or sharpness of temper

**T**he important piece of news that the new headmaster had arrived spread through the school. She heard of it in the women teachers' common room as she was casting a final glance at the day's lessons. There was no getting away from joining the other teachers in congratulating him, and from shaking him by the hand too. A shudder passed through her body, but it was unavoidable.

"They speak highly of his ability," said a colleague of hers. "And they talk too of his strictness."

It had always been a possibility that might occur, and now it had. Her pretty face paled, and a staring look came to her wide black eyes.

When the time came, the teachers went in single file, decorously attired, to his open room. He stood behind his desk as he received the men and women. He was of medium height, with a tendency to portliness, and had a spherical face, hooked nose, and bulging eyes; the first thing that could be seen of him was a thick, puffed-up mustache, arched like a foam-laden wave. She advanced with her eyes fixed on his chest. Avoiding his gaze, she stretched out her hand. What was she to say? Just what the others had said? However, she kept silent, uttered not a word. What, she wondered, did his eyes express? His rough hand shook hers, and he said in a gruff voice, "Thanks." She turned elegantly and moved off.

She forgot her worries through her daily tasks, though she did not look in good shape. Several of the girls remarked, "Miss is in a bad mood." When she returned to her home at the beginning of the

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Pyramids Road, she changed her clothes and sat down to eat with her mother. "Everything all right?" inquired her mother, looking her in the face.

"Badran, Badran Badawi," she said briefly. "Do you remember 6 him? He's been appointed our headmaster."

"Really!" 7

Then, after a moment of silence, she said, "It's of no importance 8 at all—it's an old and long-forgotten story."

After eating, she took herself off to her study to rest for a while 9 before correcting some exercise books. She had forgotten him completely. No, not completely. How could he be forgotten completely? When he had first come to give her a private lesson in mathematics, she was fourteen years of age. In fact not quite fourteen. He had been twenty-five years older, the same age as her father. She had said to her mother, "His appearance is a mess, but he explains things well." And her mother had said, "We're not concerned with what he looks like; what's important is how he explains things."

He was an amusing person, and she got on well with him and ben- 10 efitied from his knowledge. How, then, had it happened? In her innocence she had not noticed any change in his behavior to put her on her guard. Then one day he had been left on his own with her, her father having gone to her aunt's clinic. She had not the slightest doubts about a man she regarded as a second father. How, then, had it happened? Without love or desire on her part the thing had happened. She had asked in terror about what had occurred, and he had told her, "Don't be frightened or sad. Keep it to yourself and I'll come and propose to you the day you come of age."

And he had kept his promise and had come to ask for her hand. 11 By then she had attained a degree of maturity that gave her an understanding of the dimensions of her tragic position. She had found that she had no love or respect for him and that he was as far as he could be from her dreams and from the ideas she had formed of what constituted an ideal and moral person. But what was to be done? Her father had passed away two years ago, and her mother had been taken aback by the forwardness of the man. However, she had said to her, "I know your attachment to your personal independence, so I leave the decision to you."

She had been conscious of the critical position she was in. She had either to accept or to close the door forever. It was the sort of situation that could force her into something she detested. She was the rich, beautiful girl, a byword in Abbasiyya for her nobility of character, and now here she was struggling helplessly in a well-sprung trap, while he looked down at her with rapacious eyes. Just as she had hated his strength, so too did she hate her own weakness. To have abused her innocence was one thing, but for him to have the upper hand now that she was fully in possession of her faculties was something else. He had said, "So here I am, making good my promise because I love you." He had also said, "I know of your love of teaching, and you will complete your studies at the College of Science."

She had felt such anger as she had never felt before. She had rejected coercion in the same way as she rejected ugliness. It had meant little to her to sacrifice marriage. She had welcomed being on her own, for solitude accompanied by self-respect was not loneliness. She had also guessed he was after her money. She had told her mother quite straightforwardly, "No," to which her mother had replied, "I am astonished you did not make this decision from the first moment."

The man had blocked her way outside and said, "How can you refuse? Don't you realize the outcome?" And she had replied with an asperity he had not expected, "For me any outcome is preferable to being married to you."

After finishing her studies, she had wanted something to do to fill her spare time, so she had worked as a teacher. Chances to marry had come time after time, but she had turned her back on them all.

"Does no one please you?" her mother asked her.

"I know what I'm doing," she had said gently.

"But time is going by."

"Let it go as it pleases, I am content."

Day by day she becomes older. She avoids love, fears it. With all her strength she hopes that life will pass calmly, peacefully, rather than happily. She goes on persuading herself that happiness is not confined to love and motherhood. Never has she regretted her firm decision. Who knows what the morrow holds? But she was certainly unhappy that he should again make his appearance in her life, that she

would be dealing with him day after day, and that he would be making of the past a living and painful present.

Then, the first time he was alone with her in his room, he asked her, "How are you?" 21

She answered coldly, "I'm fine." 22

He hesitated slightly before inquiring, "Have you not . . . I mean, did you get married?" 23

In the tone of someone intent on cutting short a conversation, she said, "I told you, I'm fine." 24

## 1. DISCUSSING THE STORY

a) Discuss the following questions with a partner or in a group:

1. Describe the main character. Is she attractive and educated? What is her economic status?
2. From where does the main character know the new headmaster, Badran Badawi? What had their relationship been?
3. What crime had been committed against the main character when she was about fourteen? Why didn't she tell her parents about the incident? Did she report it to the police?
4. Why is the main character's mother astonished that the daughter takes so long to refuse the old tutor's marriage proposal? Similarly, why is she at a loss when her daughter refuses other marriage proposals?

b) Respond and interpret

1. The author, Naguib Mahfouz, has not given the main character a name. What may be some reasons for this omission?
2. Considering that in the Moslem culture a woman loses her opportunity for marriage when she loses her virginity, do you think it is a difficult decision for the main character? Explain
3. The main character tries to persuade herself that "happiness is not confined to love and motherhood." Is a woman's happiness confined to love and motherhood, in your opinion? Explain
4. What is the theme of this story and give the reason?

# IV. LITERARY CRITICISM

## A. DEFINITION

- **Literary criticism**, is the overall term for studies concerned with defining, classifying, analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating works of literature.
- **Theoretical criticism** proposes an explicit **theory** of literature, in the sense of general principles, together with a set of terms, distinctions, and categories, to be applied to identifying and analyzing works of literature, as well as the **criteria** (the standards, or norms) by which these works and their writers are to be evaluated.

(M.H. Abrams. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 9<sup>th</sup> Edition. 2005)

## B. BRANCH OF LITERARY CRITICISM

(Based on: Tyson, Lois. 2006. *Critical Theory Today: A User Friendly Guide, Second Edition*. NY. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.)

Depending on the literary work in question, we might ask one or any combination of these questions. Or we might come up with a useful question not listed here. These are just some starting points to get us thinking about literary works in productive ways.

### a) Marxist Criticism

#### **Some questions Marxist critics ask about literary texts**

The following questions are offered to summarize Marxist approaches to literature.

1. Does the work reinforce (intentionally or not) capitalist, imperialist, or classist values? If so, then the work may be said to have a capitalist, imperialist, or classist agenda, and it is the critic's job to expose and condemn this aspect of the work.
2. How might the work be seen as a critique of capitalism, imperialism, or classism? That is, in what ways does the text reveal, and invite us to condemn, oppressive socioeconomic forces (including repressive ideologies)? If a work criticizes or invites us to criticize oppressive socioeconomic forces, then it may be said to have a Marxist agenda.
3. Does the work in some ways support a Marxist agenda but in other ways (perhaps unintentionally) support a capitalist, imperialist, or classist agenda? In other words, is the work ideologically conflicted?

4. How does the literary work reflect (intentionally or not) the socioeconomic conditions of the time in which it was written and/or the time in which it is set, and what do those conditions reveal about the history of class struggle?

5. How might the work be seen as a critique of organized religion? That is, how does religion function in the text to keep a character or characters from realizing and resisting socioeconomic oppression?

Our goal is to use Marxist theory to help enrich our reading of literary works, to help us see some important ideas they illustrate that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without Marxist theory, and, if we use Marxist theory the way it is intended to be used: to help us see the ways in which ideology blinds us to our own participation in oppressive sociopolitical agendas.

## **b) New Historical and Cultural Criticism**

Some questions new historical and cultural critics ask about literary texts

The following questions are intended to summarize approaches to literary analysis employed by new historicists and cultural critics. In the terminology of cultural criticism, these questions offer us ways to examine the cultural work performed by literary texts. As you read these questions and imagine the ways in which a new historical or cultural critic might address them, keep in mind that, for such critics, no historical event, artifact, or ideology can be completely understood in isolation from the innumerable historical events, artifacts, and ideologies among which it circulates, and our own cultural experience inevitably influences our perceptions, making true objectivity impossible. For we can use new historical and cultural criticism properly only if we keep clearly in mind that our analysis is always incomplete, partial, and our perspective is always subjective. We can't stand outside our own culture and analyze texts from an objective vantage point. We can write only from within our own historical moment.

1. How does the literary text function as part of a continuum with other historical and cultural texts from the same period, for example, penal codes, birthing practices, educational priorities, the treatment of children under the law, other art forms (including popular art forms), attitudes toward sexuality, and the like? That is, taken as part of a "thick description" of a given culture at a given point in history, what does this literary work add to our tentative understanding of human

experience in that particular time and place, including the ways in which individual identity shapes and is shaped by cultural institutions?

2. How can we use a literary work to “map” the interplay of both traditional and subversive discourses circulating in the culture in which that work emerged and/or the cultures in which the work has been interpreted? Put another way, how does the text promote ideologies that support and/or undermine the prevailing power structures of the time and place in which it was written and/or interpreted?

3. Using rhetorical analysis (analysis of a text’s purpose and the stylistic means by which it tries to achieve that purpose), what does the literary text add to our understanding of the ways in which literary and nonliterary discourses (such as political, scientific, economic, and educational theories) have influenced, overlapped with, and competed with one another at specific historical moments?

4. What does the literary work suggest about the experience of groups of people who have been ignored, underrepresented, or misrepresented by traditional history (for example, laborers, prisoners, women, people of color, lesbians and gay men, children, the insane, and so on)? Keep in mind that new historical and cultural criticism usually include attention to the intersection of the literary work with nonliterary discourses prevalent in the culture in which the work emerged and/or in the cultures in which it has been interpreted and often focus on such issues as the circulation of power and the dynamics of personal and group identity.

5. How has the work’s reception by literary critics and the reading public—including the reception at its point of origin, changing responses to the work over time, and its possible future relationship with its audience—been shaped by and shaped the culture in which that reception occurred?

Our goal is to use new historicism and cultural criticism to help enrich our reading of literature by helping us see how literary texts participate in the circulation of discourses, shaping and shaped by the culture in which they emerge and by the cultures in which they are interpreted; by helping us see the ways in which the circulation of discourses is the circulation of political/social/intellectual/economic power; and by helping us see the ways in which our own cultural positioning influences our interpretations of literary and nonliterary texts.

### **c) Reader-response Criticism**

Some questions reader-response critics ask about literary texts

The questions that follow are offered to summarize reader-response approaches to literature or, more accurately, to the reading of literature. Question 1 draws on transactional reader-response theory. Questions 2 and 3 relate to affective stylistics. Question 4 draws on psychological reader-response theory. Question 5 relates to social or psychological reader-response theory, and Question 6 draws on subjective reader-response theory.

1. How does the interaction of text and reader create meaning? How, exactly, does the text's indeterminacy function as a stimulus to interpretation? (For example, what events are omitted or unexplained? What descriptions are omitted or incomplete? What images might have multiple associations?) And how exactly does the text lead us to correct our interpretation as we read?
2. What does a phrase-by-phrase analysis of a short literary text, or of key portions of a longer text, tell us about the reading experience prestructured by (built into) that text? How does this analysis of what the text does to the reader differ from what the text "says" or "means"? In other words, how might the omission of the temporal experience of reading this text result in an incomplete idea of the text's meaning?
3. How might we interpret a literary text to show that the reader's response is, or is analogous to, the topic of the story? In other words, how is the text really about readers reading, and what exactly does it tell us about this topic? To simplify further, how is a particular kind of reading experience an important theme in the text? Of course, we must first establish what reading experience is created by the text (see Question 2) in order to show that the theme of the story is analogous to it. Then we must cite textual evidence—for example, references to reading materials, to characters reading texts, and to characters interpreting other characters or events—to show that what happens in the world of the narrative mirrors the reader's situation decoding it.
4. Drawing on a broad spectrum of thoroughly documented biographical data, what seems to be a given author's identity theme, and how does that theme express itself in the sum of his or her literary output?

5. What does the body of criticism published about a literary text suggest about the critics who interpreted that text and/or about the reading experience produced by that text? You might contrast critical camps writing during the same period, writing during different periods, or both. What does your analysis suggest about the ways in which the text is created by readers' interpretive strategies or by their psychological or ideological projections?

6. If you have the resources to do it, what can you learn about the role of readers' interpretive strategies or expectations, about the reading experience produced by a particular text, or about any other reading activity by conducting your own study using a group of real readers (for example, your students, classmates, or fellow book-club members)? For example, can you devise a study to test Bleich's belief that students' personal responses to literary texts are the source of their formal interpretations?

Our goal is to use reader-response theory to help enrich our reading of literary works, to help us see some important ideas they illustrate that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply otherwise, and to help us understand the complexities and varieties of the reading experience.

## **d) Postcolonial Criticism**

### **Some questions postcolonial critics ask about literary texts**

The questions that follow are offered to summarize postcolonial approaches to literature. Keep in mind that most postcolonial analyses, regardless of the issues on which they focus, will include some attention to whether the text is colonialist, anticolonialist, or some combination of the two, that is, ideologically conflicted.

1. How does the literary text, explicitly or allegorically, represent various aspects of colonial oppression? Special attention is often given to those areas where political and cultural oppression overlap, as it does, for example, in the colonizers' control of language, communication, and knowledge in colonized countries.

2. What does the text reveal about the problematics of postcolonial identity, including the relationship between personal and cultural identity and such issues as double consciousness and hybridity?

3. What does the text reveal about the politics and/or psychology of anticolonialist resistance? For example, what does the text suggest about the ideological,

political, social, economic, or psychological forces that promote or inhibit resistance? How does the text suggest that resistance can be achieved and sustained by an individual or a group?

4. What does the text reveal about the operations of cultural difference—the ways in which race, religion, class, gender, sexual orientation, cultural beliefs, and customs combine to form individual identity—in shaping our perceptions of ourselves, others, and the world in which we live? *Othering* might be one area of analysis here.

5. How does the text respond to or comment on the characters, topics, or assumptions of a canonized (colonialist) work? Following Helen Tiffin's lead, examine how the postcolonial text reshapes our previous interpretations of a canonical text.

6. Are there meaningful similarities among the literatures of different postcolonial populations? One might compare, for example, the literatures of native peoples from different countries whose land was invaded by colonizers, the literatures of white settler colonies in different countries, or the literatures of different populations in the African diaspora. Or one might compare literary works from all three of these categories in order to investigate, for example, if the experience of colonization creates some common elements of cultural identity that outweigh differences in race and nationality.

7. How does a literary text in the Western canon reinforce or undermine colonialist ideology through its representation of colonization and/or its inappropriate silence about colonized peoples? Does the text teach us anything about colonialist or anticolonialist ideology through its illustration of any of the postcolonial concepts we've discussed? (A text does not have to treat the subject of colonization in order to do this.)

Whatever ways we may choose to apply postcolonial criticism, our goal in using this approach is to learn to see some important aspects of literature that we might not have seen so clearly or so deeply without this theoretical perspective; to appreciate the opportunities and the responsibilities of living in a culturally diverse world; and to understand that culture is not just a fixed collection of artifacts and customs frozen in time but a way of relating to oneself and to the world, a psychological and social frame of reference that necessarily alters in response to cross-cultural encounters, whether those encounters occur in our community or on the pages of a literary text.

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