***Things Fall Apart***

[Chinua Achebe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe)

Study Material by

Imrul Kayes Alam Sarkar

Asst. Professor & HOD

Dept. of English, S.F.S Mahavidyalaya

***Things Fall Apart*** is a novel written by Nigerian author [Chinua Achebe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinua_Achebe). Published in 1958, its story chronicles pre-colonial life in the south-eastern part of [Nigeria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nigeria) and the [arrival of the Europeans during the late nineteenth century](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scramble_for_Africa). It is seen as the archetypal modern [African novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_literature) in English, one of the first to receive global critical acclaim. It is a staple book in schools throughout Africa and is widely read and studied in English-speaking countries around the world. In 1962, Achebe's [debut novel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Debut_novel) was first published in the UK by [William Heinemann Ltd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Heinemann_Ltd). *Things Fall Apart* was the first work published in Heinemann's [African Writers Series](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/African_Writers_Series).

The novel follows the life of Okonkwo, an [Igbo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Igbo_people) ("Ibo" in the novel) man and local [wrestling](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wrestling) champion in the fictional Nigerian clan of Umuofia. The work is split into three parts, with the first describing his family, personal history, and the customs and society of the Igbo, and the second and third sections introducing the influence of [British colonialism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_colonialism) and Christian [missionaries](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Missionary) on Okonkwo, his family and wider Igbo community.

*Things Fall Apart* was followed by a sequel, [*No Longer at Ease*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/No_Longer_at_Ease) (1960), originally written as the second part of a larger work along with [*Arrow of God*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arrow_of_God) (1964). Achebe states that his two later novels [*A Man of the People*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Man_of_the_People) (1966) and [*Anthills of the Savannah*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anthills_of_the_Savannah) (1987), while not featuring Okonkwo's descendants, are [spiritual successors](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spiritual_successor) to the previous novels in chronicling African history.

**Character List**

**CHARACTERS** CHARACTER LIST

**Okonkwo** - An influential clan leader in Umuofia. Since early childhood, Okonkwo’s embarrassment about his lazy, squandering, and effeminate father, Unoka, has driven him to succeed. Okonkwo’s hard work and prowess in war have earned him a position of high status in his clan, and he attains wealth sufficient to support three wives and their children. Okonkwo’s tragic flaw is that he is terrified of looking weak like his father. As a result, he behaves rashly, bringing a great deal of trouble and sorrow upon himself and his family.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF OKONKWO.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/okonkwo/)

**Nwoye** - Okonkwo’s oldest son, whom Okonkwo believes is weak and lazy. Okonkwo continually beats Nwoye, hoping to correct the faults that he perceives in him. Influenced by Ikemefuna, Nwoye begins to exhibit more masculine behavior, which pleases Okonkwo. However, he maintains doubts about some of the laws and rules of his tribe and eventually converts to Christianity, an act that Okonkwo criticizes as “effeminate.” Okonkwo believes that Nwoye is afflicted with the same weaknesses that his father, Unoka, possessed in abundance.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF NWOYE.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/nwoye/)

**Ezinma** - The only child of Okonkwo’s second wife, Ekwefi. As the only one of Ekwefi’s ten children to survive past infancy, Ezinma is the center of her mother’s world. Their relationship is atypical—Ezinma calls Ekwefi by her name and is treated by her as an equal. Ezinma is also Okonkwo’s favorite child, for she understands him better than any of his other children and reminds him of Ekwefi when Ekwefi was the village beauty. Okonkwo rarely demonstrates his affection, however, because he fears that doing so would make him look weak. Furthermore, he wishes that Ezinma were a boy because she would have been the perfect son.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF EZINMA.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/ezinma/)

**Ikemefuna** - A boy given to Okonkwo by a neighboring village. Ikemefuna lives in the hut of Okonkwo’s first wife and quickly becomes popular with Okonkwo’s children. He develops an especially close relationship with Nwoye, Okonkwo’s oldest son, who looks up to him. Okonkwo too becomes very fond of Ikemefuna, who calls him “father” and is a perfect clansman, but Okonkwo does not demonstrate his affection because he fears that doing so would make him look weak.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF IKEMEFUNA.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/ikemefuna/)

**Mr. Brown** - The first white missionary to travel to Umuofia. Mr. Brown institutes a policy of compromise, understanding, and non-aggression between his flock and the clan. He even becomes friends with prominent clansmen and builds a school and a hospital in Umuofia. Unlike Reverend Smith, he attempts to appeal respectfully to the tribe’s value system rather than harshly impose his religion on it.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF MR. BROWN.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/mr-brown/)

**Reverend James Smith** - The missionary who replaces Mr. Brown. Unlike Mr. Brown, Reverend Smith is uncompromising and strict. He demands that his converts reject all of their indigenous beliefs, and he shows no respect for indigenous customs or culture. He is the stereotypical white colonialist, and his behavior epitomizes the problems of colonialism. He intentionally provokes his congregation, inciting it to anger and even indirectly, through Enoch, encouraging some fairly serious transgressions.

**Uchendu** - The younger brother of Okonkwo’s mother. Uchendu receives Okonkwo and his family warmly when they travel to Mbanta, and he advises Okonkwo to be grateful for the comfort that his motherland offers him lest he anger the dead—especially his mother, who is buried there. Uchendu himself has suffered—all but one of his six wives are dead and he has buried twenty-two children. He is a peaceful, compromising man and functions as a foil (a character whose emotions or actions highlight, by means of contrast, the emotions or actions of another character) to Okonkwo, who acts impetuously and without thinking.

**The District Commissioner** - An authority figure in the white colonial government in Nigeria. The prototypical racist colonialist, the District Commissioner thinks that he understands everything about native African customs and cultures and he has no respect for them. He plans to work his experiences into an ethnographic study on local African tribes, the idea of which embodies his dehumanizing and reductive attitude toward race relations.

**Unoka** - Okonkwo’s father, of whom Okonkwo has been ashamed since childhood. By the standards of the clan, Unoka was a coward and a spendthrift. He never took a title in his life, he borrowed money from his clansmen, and he rarely repaid his debts. He never became a warrior because he feared the sight of blood. Moreover, he died of an abominable illness. On the positive side, Unoka appears to have been a talented musician and gentle, if idle. He may well have been a dreamer, ill-suited to the chauvinistic culture into which he was born. The novel opens ten years after his death.

Read an [**IN-DEPTH ANALYSIS OF UNOKA.**](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/things/character/unoka/)

**Obierika** - Okonkwo’s close friend, whose daughter’s wedding provides cause for festivity early in the novel. Obierika looks out for his friend, selling Okonkwo’s yams to ensure that Okonkwo won’t suffer financial ruin while in exile and comforting Okonkwo when he is depressed. Like Nwoye, Obierika questions some of the tribe’s traditional strictures.

**Ekwefi** - Okonkwo’s second wife, once the village beauty. Ekwefi ran away from her first husband to live with Okonkwo. Ezinma is her only surviving child, her other nine having died in infancy, and Ekwefi constantly fears that she will lose Ezinma as well. Ekwefi is good friends with Chielo, the priestess of the goddess Agbala.

**Enoch** - A fanatical convert to the Christian church in Umuofia. Enoch’s disrespectful act of ripping the mask off an *egwugwu* during an annual ceremony to honor the earth deity leads to the climactic clash between the indigenous and colonial justice systems. While Mr. Brown, early on, keeps Enoch in check in the interest of community harmony, Reverend Smith approves of his zealotry.

**Ogbuefi Ezeudu** - The oldest man in the village and one of the most important clan elders and leaders. Ogbuefi Ezeudu was a great warrior in his youth and now delivers messages from the Oracle.

**Chielo** - A priestess in Umuofia who is dedicated to the Oracle of the goddess Agbala. Chielo is a widow with two children. She is good friends with Ekwefi and is fond of Ezinma, whom she calls “my daughter.” At one point, she carries Ezinma on her back for miles in order to help purify her and appease the gods.

**Akunna** - A clan leader of Umuofia. Akunna and Mr. Brown discuss their religious beliefs peacefully, and Akunna’s influence on the missionary advances Mr. Brown’s strategy for converting the largest number of clansmen by working with, rather than against, their belief system. In so doing, however, Akunna formulates an articulate and rational defense of his religious system and draws some striking parallels between his style of worship and that of the Christian missionaries.

**Nwakibie** - A wealthy clansmen who takes a chance on Okonkwo by lending him 800 seed yams—twice the number for which Okonkwo asks. Nwakibie thereby helps Okonkwo build up the beginnings of his personal wealth, status, and independence.

**Mr. Kiaga** - The native-turned-Christian missionary who arrives in Mbanta and converts Nwoye and many others.

**Okagbue Uyanwa** - A famous medicine man whom Okonkwo summons for help in dealing with Ezinma’s health problems.

**Maduka** - Obierika’s son. Maduka wins a wrestling contest in his mid-teens. Okonkwo wishes he had promising, manly sons like Maduka.

**Obiageli** - The daughter of Okonkwo’s first wife. Although Obiageli is close to Ezinma in age, Ezinma has a great deal of influence over her.

**Ojiugo** - Okonkwo’s third and youngest wife, and the mother of Nkechi. Okonkwo beats Ojiugo during the Week of Peace.

**Plot Overview**

**SUMMARY** PLOT OVERVIEW

Okonkwo is a wealthy and respected warrior of the Umuofia clan, a lower Nigerian tribe that is part of a consortium of nine connected villages. He is haunted by the actions of Unoka, his cowardly and spendthrift father, who died in disrepute, leaving many village debts unsettled. In response, Okonkwo became a clansman, warrior, farmer, and family provider extraordinaire. He has a twelve-year-old son named Nwoye whom he finds lazy; Okonkwo worries that Nwoye will end up a failure like Unoka.

In a settlement with a neighboring tribe, Umuofia wins a virgin and a fifteen-year-old boy. Okonkwo takes charge of the boy, Ikemefuna, and finds an ideal son in him. Nwoye likewise forms a strong attachment to the newcomer. Despite his fondness for Ikemefuna and despite the fact that the boy begins to call him “father,” Okonkwo does not let himself show any affection for him.

During the Week of Peace, Okonkwo accuses his youngest wife, Ojiugo, of negligence. He severely beats her, breaking the peace of the sacred week. He makes some sacrifices to show his repentance, but he has shocked his community irreparably.

Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo’s family for three years. Nwoye looks up to him as an older brother and, much to Okonkwo’s pleasure, develops a more masculine attitude. One day, the locusts come to Umuofia—they will come every year for seven years before disappearing for another generation. The village excitedly collects them because they are good to eat when cooked.

Ogbuefi Ezeudu, a respected village elder, informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has said that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo that because Ikemefuna calls him “father,” Okonkwo should not take part in the boy’s death. Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that they must return him to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears.

As he walks with the men of Umuofia, Ikemefuna thinks about seeing his mother. After several hours of walking, some of Okonkwo’s clansmen attack the boy with machetes. Ikemefuna runs to Okonkwo for help. But Okonkwo, who doesn’t wish to look weak in front of his fellow tribesmen, cuts the boy down despite the Oracle’s admonishment. When Okonkwo returns home, Nwoye deduces that his friend is dead.

Okonkwo sinks into a depression, neither able to sleep nor eat. He visits his friend Obierika and begins to feel revived a bit. Okonkwo’s daughter Ezinma falls ill, but she recovers after Okonkwo gathers leaves for her medicine.

The death of Ogbuefi Ezeudu is announced to the surrounding villages by means of the *ekwe,* a musical instrument. Okonkwo feels guilty because the last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in Ikemefuna’s death. At Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s large and elaborate funeral, the men beat drums and fire their guns. Tragedy compounds upon itself when Okonkwo’s gun explodes and kills Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s sixteen-year-old son.

Because killing a clansman is a crime against the earth goddess, Okonkwo must take his family into exile for seven years in order to atone. He gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother’s natal village, Mbanta. The men from Ogbuefi Ezeudu’s quarter burn Okonkwo’s buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his sin.

Okonkwo’s kinsmen, especially his uncle, Uchendu, receive him warmly. They help him build a new compound of huts and lend him yam seeds to start a farm. Although he is bitterly disappointed at his misfortune, Okonkwo reconciles himself to life in his motherland.

During the second year of Okonkwo’s exile, Obierika brings several bags of cowries (shells used as currency) that he has made by selling Okonkwo’s yams. Obierika plans to continue to do so until Okonkwo returns to the village. Obierika also brings the bad news that Abame, another village, has been destroyed by the white man.

Soon afterward, six missionaries travel to Mbanta. Through an interpreter named Mr. Kiaga, the missionaries’ leader, Mr. Brown, speaks to the villagers. He tells them that their gods are false and that worshipping more than one God is idolatrous. But the villagers do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. Although his aim is to convert the residents of Umuofia to Christianity, Mr. Brown does not allow his followers to antagonize the clan.

Mr. Brown grows ill and is soon replaced by Reverend James Smith, an intolerant and strict man. The more zealous converts are relieved to be free of Mr. Brown’s policy of restraint. One such convert, Enoch, dares to unmask an *egwugwu* during the annual ceremony to honor the earth deity, an act equivalent to killing an ancestral spirit. The next day, the *egwugwu* burn Enoch’s compound and Reverend Smith’s church to the ground.

The District Commissioner is upset by the burning of the church and requests that the leaders of Umuofia meet with him. Once they are gathered, however, the leaders are handcuffed and thrown in jail, where they suffer insults and physical abuse.

After the prisoners are released, the clansmen hold a meeting, during which five court messengers approach and order the clansmen to desist. Expecting his fellow clan members to join him in uprising, Okonkwo kills their leader with his machete. When the crowd allows the other messengers to escape, Okonkwo realizes that his clan is not willing to go to war.

When the District Commissioner arrives at Okonkwo’s compound, he finds that Okonkwo has hanged himself. Obierika and his friends lead the commissioner to the body. Obierika explains that suicide is a grave sin; thus, according to custom, none of Okonkwo’s clansmen may touch his body. The commissioner, who is writing a book about Africa, believes that the story of Okonkwo’s rebellion and death will make for an interesting paragraph or two. He has already chosen the book’s title: *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.*

**Significance of the Title of the Novel 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe**

Things Fall Apart by Chinua Achebe is a novel whose title bears the central massage of the work. The very title ‘Things Fall Apart’ foreshadows the tragedy which takes place at the end of the novel. The novel depicts the tragedy of an individual as well as the tragedy of a society. The protagonist of the novel Okonkwo who was rich and respectable at the beginning of the novel meets a tragic fate at the end of the novel. Achebe portrays how an ambitious, well known, and respected African Okonkwo’s life falls apart. But when he suffers, his whole tribe also suffers. At the beginning of the novel, the Ibo society was a peaceful, organic society, but at the end of the novel it falls into pieces. Thus, the novel records not only falling apart of Okonkwo’s life but also his whole society.

**The Title- A Literary Allusion:**

The phrase "things fall apart" is taken from the poem, “The Second Coming” by W.B Yeats, which Achebe quotes more extensively in the epigraph. Achebe’s literary allusion to Yeats’ poem might deepen or extend—by comparison and/or contrast—the meaning(s) of Achebe’s title and his novel.  The beginning four lines of the poem are referred as a preface of the novel.

“Turning and turning in the widening gyre  
The falcon cannot hear the falconer;  
Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;  
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,”

"Things fall apart" can be said when something we believed would last forever, comes to an end**.**The title Things Fall Apart refers to the fact that without proper balance, things do fall apart. The notion of balance in the novel is an important theme throughout the book. Beginning with the excerpt from Yeats' poem, the concept of balance is stressed as important; for without balance, order is lost. In the novel, there is a system of balance, which the Igbo culture seems but at the end of the novel the society people can not listen the leader, so a chaotic situation is created.

**Okonkwo’s Life Falls Apart:**

At the beginning of the novel we see Okonkwo as a prosperous leader of the Igbo people. But the novel ends with his tragic end. Thus, we can say that the novel Things Fall Apart  depicts how Okonkwo’s life falls apart. Okonkwo is definitely a man of importance for his society. He is a well-known person throughout the nine villages and beyond. He is a warrior and wrestler who gains respect through his athletics. He is a fierce-free individual. He hasn’t lost one fight or any battles. And for this the people of the village love him. He is also respected because of his wealth.

Okonkwo's life first begins to fall apart when he kills Ikemefuna, a prisoner who stayed at Okonkwo's home. Okonkwo considers Ikemefuna as one of his own sons. It has been decided from the oracle that Ikemefuna will be killed. Okonkwo takes part in his murder, despite warning from his friend, “That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death.”  But when he hears Ikemefuna’s crying, ““My father, they have killed me!” as he ran towards him. Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down.”  Okonkwo’s fear of being weak, which is one of his tragic flaws, drives him to rashness, and in the end it contributes to his own tragedy that his own life falls apart.

        Another significant incidence where Okonkwo's life falls apart was when he was thrown out of the clan for seven years. From this event, one can see that Okonkwo's hopes dreams have begun to fall apart. His hopes of being a rich and popular individual had drifted away with this disturbing incident. Okonkwo had no longer had his farm or animals. Also Okonkwo lost faith with most of his friends. This goes to show that Okonkwo lost faith with his friends, like his father lost faith with his friends.  Another episode that showed the downfall in Okonkwo's life was when Nwoye, his oldest and favorite son, converted to the white mans.

Okonkwo’s life finally shattered after his returning to his village where he finds that everything is changed. After the clansman burn the Church building down, the District Commissioner asks the leaders of the clan, Okonkwo among them, to go and see him for a peaceful meeting. The leaders arrive, and are quickly seized. While they are in detention waiting for the fine to be collected from their people, they are beaten severely by the court messengers and their heads are shaved. They are held in jail until the clan pays a heavy fine. Embittered and grieving for the destruction of his clan’s independence, and fearing the humiliation of dying under white law, Okonkwo commits suicide and his life totally falls apart.

**Igbo Society Falls Apart:**

Like Okonkwo his Igbo society also falls apart. In the first part of the book we see a socially, politically and religiously organic Igbo society. But this organic society becomes divided and virtually loses all energy at the end of the book. Thus, the novel documents the falling apart of the Igbo tribe due to its own brutal rules as well as the coming of the Christian missionaries and the rule of the English government.

**The Society Itself Responsible For Falling Apart:**

At the beginning of the book we see that the Igbo people have a strong faith in their traditional religion. The religion of the Igbos consisted in the belief that there is a suspense God, the creator of the universe and the lesser gods. The supreme God was called Chukwu. The other gods were made by Chukwu to act his messengers so that people could approach him through them. People made sacrifices to the smaller gods, but when the failed, the people turned to Chukwu. Ancestor worship was also an equally important feature of the religion of the Ibo people. There were man superstitious ideas related with their religious belief. They believed in evil spirits and oracle. One of such Oracles is responsible for Okonkwo’s sacrifice of Ikemefuna. This incident underlines the superstitious brutality of traditional Igbo society. We also find the brutality, injustice and the inhuman activities in some other rituals or rules such as – people who are affected by some severe diseases are carried on the Evil Forest to die and they do not get any burial and twain babies are thrown out in the Evil Forest just after their birth. The ultimate result of such brutality is when the people, who are dissatisfied with these rules such as- Nwoye, the mother of three twin babies, get the opportunity to change their religion they do it  and the society ultimately falls apart.

**Igbo Society Encounters the Colonial Masters and Falls Apart:**

Prior to the coming of the white the political life of the Igbo people was also very organic and strong. They were very loyal to their political leaders. After the entrance of colonial masters, the colonial religion, mostly replaces the traditional religion. When the white man arrives, however, they ignore the Igbo’s values and tries to enforce his own beliefs and religious practices. Missionaries would convince these tribesmen that their tribe worshipped false gods and that its false gods did not have the ability to punish them if they chose to join the mission. Like many others, Okonko’s son Nwoye is also affected by the colonial religion.

The only point in the book in which the title is referenced is Chapter Twenty, when the main character, Okonkwo, and his friend, Obierika, are discussing the invasion of white men into their community. Obierika says, "The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We were amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan can no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." his passage clearly ties the destruction of the Igbo people's way of life to sneaky, divisive action on the part of European missionaries and imperialists.

The colonial politics affects the Igbo society. Okonko’s life is also affected by the colonial politics. The Igbo people become the victims of the colonial politics and many people die as a result of colonialism. The same things happen to Okonkwo.

The novel concludes with the end of the Igbo society and the death of the hero. In the face of the chaos caused by the incursion of Christianity, Okonkwo becomes a murderer and then hangs himself. His world has literally fallen apart, and it symbolically represents that Igbo society has fallen apart. Thus, we can say, the title of the novel, Things Fall Apart denotes its theme appropriately.

**Okonkwo - CHARACTER**

Okonkwo is a self-made, well-respected member of the Umuofia clan. Though outwardly stern and powerful, much of his life is dictated by internal fear. His greatest, overwhelming worry is that he will become like his father – lazy, unable to support his family, and cowardly. Okonkwo considers many of his father’s characteristics to be feminine. Much of Okonkwo’s behavior results from a reactionary desire to be completely unlike his father. This means that Okonkwo attempts to work hard, provide for his family materially, be brave, and be masculine in every possible way. As a result, Okonkwo’s becomes successful in many ways – he becomes very wealthy, holds a high-ranked position in the community, has three wives, and is known for his skill as a wrestler and warrior. But he also tends toward emotions that are extreme, and his fear motivates him to take actions which are often unnecessary and ultimately destructive. His fear of being feminine leads him to assist in the murder of Ikemefuna whom he loved, to beat his wives, be emotionally distant from his children, and to disown his oldest son.  
  
As an uncompromising man’s man, Okonkwo’s relationship towards his family is one of complete dictatorship. His three wives are there to serve him his food and raise his children. By seeing them as his subjects, Okonkwo can justify his brutal behavior against them. He can beat his wives without guilt. He can threaten Ekwefi with a gun when she talks back. He can rebuke Nwoye for listening to old wives’ tales. This sense of ownership is exemplified when Okonkwo takes Ikemefuna’s life. Though he does have qualms about killing Ikemefuna, they are not qualms about whether or not he has the right to do it. Okonkwo feels complete ownership over his family.  
  
  
  
There is, however, the problem of love and intimacy. Okonkwo rarely shows these aspects of himself since he considers emotion soft and feminine – but the emotions are there nonetheless. The fact that he lies to Ikemefuna to protect the boy from fear and later feels guilty about killing him are proof of that Okonkwo isn’t devoid of positive human emotions. But, whenever there is a clash between showing true emotion and maintaining the show of his strength, Okonkwo will always go with the latter.  
  
This doesn't mean that Okonkwo never admits he is wrong; more than anything, Okonkwo tries to follow the laws of the clan. Whenever he breaks them – either deliberately through a loss of temper or inadvertently as in shooting the boy – he never questions the punishments brought upon him. Okonkwo abides by his punishment whether or not he thinks they are fair. This is one way of maintaining his honor and reputation. He reads the laws literally, unlike his father who bent the rules and tried to circumvent certain aspects of the law.  
  
Thus we come to one of the central conflicts in the novel: the divide between Okonkwo’s personal pride and the actions forced on him by the external social laws of the Umuofia. His final act of suicide is the ultimate demonstration of things falling apart because it is the first and only time that Okonkwo purposefully and calculatedly breaks the clan laws. As a character, Okonkwo remains pretty consistent throughout the book. We see no sudden changes in behavior or mindset; in fact, that may be Okonkwo’s problem – his inability to adapt or compromise his ethics to changing situations that call for more tolerance or compassion. Okonkwo, whose sense of pride and dignity continues until the end, chooses to live and die on his own terms rather than submit to the white man. For Okonkwo, giving in would be against so much of what he has stood for – courage, tradition, and manliness.