

College F. X. Vogt
English Department

FEBRUARY 2019

The A.

MID-TERM SESSION
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH

Choose One of the following topics

Topic One: Explain the importance of literature taking examples from *Things Fall Apart* and any other novel that you have read.

Topic Two: Highlight two aspects of African culture in *Things Fall Apart*. Explain their symbolic and impact, then say how they valorise African literature.

Examination Paper Correction: Things Fall Apart

Topic One: Explain the importance of literature, taking examples from *Things Fall Apart* and any other novel that you have read.

Introduction: Literature plays a crucial role in society by reflecting cultural values, historical events, and human experiences. It serves as a mirror to society, allowing readers to understand different perspectives, empathize with others, and gain insights into the human condition. Two novels that exemplify the importance of literature are *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.

Body:

1. Cultural Preservation and Representation:

- *Things Fall Apart* is a seminal work in African literature that preserves and represents Igbo culture. Through the novel, Achebe documents traditional Igbo customs, rituals, and social structures, such as the importance of yam cultivation, the role of the Oracle, and the practice of polygamy. This representation is vital in countering colonial narratives that often misrepresented African cultures.
- Similarly, *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee provides a vivid portrayal of the American South during the 1930s, highlighting issues of racial injustice and moral integrity. The novel preserves the cultural and social dynamics of the time, offering readers a deeper understanding of the historical context of racial segregation in the United States.

2. Social Critique and Awareness:

- *Things Fall Apart* critiques the impact of colonialism on African societies. The arrival of European missionaries and the subsequent erosion of Igbo traditions illustrate the destructive consequences of cultural imperialism. Achebe's portrayal of Okonkwo's tragic downfall serves as a critique of both traditional Igbo rigidity and colonial oppression.

- In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Lee critiques the racial prejudices and injustices prevalent in the American South. Through the character of Atticus Finch, the novel advocates for moral courage and the importance of standing up for what is right, even in the face of societal opposition.

3. Empathy and Human Connection:

- Literature fosters empathy by allowing readers to step into the shoes of characters from different backgrounds. In *Things Fall Apart*, readers empathize with Okonkwo's struggles and the challenges faced by the Igbo community as they navigate the changes brought by colonialism.
- In *To Kill a Mockingbird*, readers develop empathy for characters like Tom Robinson, an African American man falsely accused of rape, and Scout Finch, a young girl learning about the complexities of morality and justice.

Conclusion: In conclusion, literature is important because it preserves cultures, critiques societal issues, and fosters empathy. Both *Things Fall Apart* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* exemplify these roles, making them invaluable works that continue to resonate with readers across the world.

Topic Two: Highlight two aspects of African culture in *Things Fall Apart*. Explain their symbolic significance and impact, then say how they valorize African literature.

Introduction: Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* is a rich portrayal of Igbo culture, highlighting various aspects that are central to the community's identity. Two key aspects of African culture in the novel are the **importance of yam cultivation** and the **role of the Oracle**. These elements not only symbolize the values and beliefs of the Igbo people but also contribute to the valorization of African literature by showcasing the complexity and richness of African traditions.

Body:

1. Yam Cultivation:

- **Symbolic Significance:** In *Things Fall Apart*, yam cultivation is a symbol of masculinity, wealth, and social status. Yams are considered the king of crops, and a man's ability to grow yams is directly tied to his success and respect within the community. Okonkwo, the protagonist, is deeply associated with yam cultivation, which reflects his hard work, ambition, and desire to rise above his father's failure.

- **Impact:** The emphasis on yam cultivation highlights the agrarian nature of Igbo society and the importance of hard work and self-reliance. It also underscores the gender roles within the community, as yam farming is predominantly a male activity, while women are responsible for other crops like coco-yams and beans.
- **Valorization of African Literature:** By focusing on yam cultivation, Achebe valorizes African literature by presenting a detailed and authentic portrayal of Igbo life. This challenges the stereotypical narratives of Africa as a primitive or backward continent, instead showcasing the sophistication and cultural depth of African societies.

2. The Role of the Oracle:

- **Symbolic Significance:** The Oracle, known as the Oracle of the Hills and Caves, plays a crucial role in Igbo society as a spiritual guide and decision-maker. The Oracle's pronouncements are considered divine and are followed without question. In the novel, the Oracle's decision to sacrifice Ikemefuna is a pivotal moment that reflects the community's adherence to tradition and spiritual authority.
- **Impact:** The Oracle's role highlights the importance of spirituality and tradition in Igbo culture. It also serves as a mechanism for maintaining social order and cohesion, as the community relies on the Oracle for guidance in difficult situations. However, the Oracle's decisions also reveal the potential for conflict between tradition and individual morality, as seen in Okonkwo's internal struggle with Ikemefuna's fate.
- **Valorization of African Literature:** The inclusion of the Oracle in the narrative valorizes African literature by emphasizing the spiritual and philosophical dimensions of Igbo culture. It challenges the Eurocentric view that African societies lack complex spiritual systems, instead presenting a culture with its own rich traditions and belief systems.

Conclusion: In conclusion, the aspects of yam cultivation and the role of the Oracle in *Things Fall Apart* are not only central to the Igbo culture but also serve as symbols of the community's values and beliefs. By highlighting these elements, Achebe valorizes African literature, offering a nuanced and authentic representation of African life that counters colonial stereotypes and celebrates the richness of African traditions.