Literature History Card

**Author**: Chinua Achebe

**Title**: Things Fall Apart

**Name**: Rebecca, Jihan, Eva, Kyra, Jennifer

**When was the work written?**: 1959

**When does the work take place?**: Late nineteenth century in Pre-colonial South-East Nigeria

**How is the work organized?**: 25 chapters

**Characters** (descriptions, minor characters’ significance, names)

Okonkwo- Clan’s Leader in Umuofia, his hardwork in war have earned him a high position in his clan, wealth enough to support three wives and their children. Okonkwo is terrified of looking weak like his father

Unoka- Okonkwo’s father, whom he has been ashamed of since childhood. Unoka was a coward and a spendthrift. He borrowed money from his clansmen and rarely pays back. He never became a warrior because his fear of blood. He died of an abominable illness. He was a talented musician

Obierika- Okonkwo’s close friend, he helps Okonkwo selling yams to ensure that he won’t suffer financially.

Nwoye- Okonkwo’s older son, whom Okonkwo believe is weak and lazy.

**Plot summary**

Okonkwo is a respected leader of the Umuofia tribe

(Which is made up of Igbo people) however he lives in constant fear of becoming his father who was known for being a coward. Okonkwo strives to be nothing like his father, from an early age Okonkwo works on his reputation as a hard-working farmer and a well known wrestler. Okonkwo succeeds and becomes wetahly through his crops and obtains three wives. Okonkwo has reached all his life goals when his life is disrupted when he adopts a boy from another village. The boy is named Ikemefuna who Okonkwo comes to love more than his own son Nwoye,who Okonkwo views as similar to his father. After Ikemefuna stays with Okonkwo for some time the tribe decides that he must die so the the men of the tribe bring him into the forest where Okonkwo not only sees his adopted son die but he participles in the murder because he does not want to be seen as weak. Okonkwo after becoming isolated from his family kills a boy and is exiled for his crime (for 7 years) where he is sent to his mother’s homeland. While he is there, he sees Christian missionaries begin to convert the Igbo outcasts, but as his exile continues Christianity gains favor and just as his sentence ends and he is allowed to return home his son Nwoye converts to Christianity. Okonkwo is so angry to find that his son has converted that he drowns him.

After some time the Igbo try and negotiate with the missionaries but they just capture the Igbo leaders and imprison them for several days until the village pays for their release. After the release Igbo people hold a meeting to decide if they should go to war with the missionaries, Okonkwo being very pro war is outraged when a messenger from the missionaries tells the council that they need to stop meeting so he kills the messenger. However, after seeing that the Igbo people will not agree to go to war against the white men, Okonkwo is devastated and hangs himself.

**Point of view/narrator**

Third Person Omniscient, provides insight on the thoughts of most of the characters. Achebe does not let the readers think that the Igbo people are homogenous in thought by the internal thoughts of both the main and minor characters.

**2 literary devices for each**:

1. Identify the device and give the example
2. How does this example/device enhance the work?
3. How does this device illuminate a theme or the meaning of the work as a whole
4. Use of Folktales- “Tortoise saw all these preparations and soon discovered what it all meant. Nothing that happened in the world of the animals ever escaped his notice,- he was full of cunning” (42). This folktale is called the ‘tales of wily Tortoise’. By including folktales that the tribe would have believed in the audience can connect with them because these folktales have the same messages as the folktales that the audience had as children. Okonkwo believes that the folktales are a symbol of femininity, they show a childish need to escape reality (not being strong enough to handle reality).
5. Symbol of the Yam- because the yams are a symbol of masculinity it is easy for the author to use them as a way to explain what each character believes. For example Okonkwo put a very high value on his yams (very high value on the traditional definition of masculinity) vs his father who had no yams on his own (the traditional definition of masculinity didn’t mean as much to him).

**Theme**:

Gender- In Igbo culture women were considered the weaker sex, but they had the ability to do housework and raise children. The dominant role for women was to be pure bride for an honorable man. The ideal man provides for his family.

Family - in the Igbo culture there are a few ideas that form the basis of an ideal family: mutual respect for each other, reverence for past fathers, and unity. Father is the provider, defender of family honor, and teacher to his sons. Mother’s main duty is to add to family line by bearing healthy children and pleasing husband. Children are the inheritors of the future and are raised to continue value of older generations. This family structure is the fundamental unit of society and this structure can be expanded to fit a community or pantheon of gods.

Struggle Between Change and Tradition - the tension about whether change should be privileged over tradition often involves questions of personal status. Many of the villagers are excited about the new opportunities and techniques that the missionaries bring, however it threatens the need for the mastery of traditional methods farming, harvesting, building, and cooking.

Varying Interpretations of Masculinity - Okonkwo associates masculinity with aggression and angry is the expression he believes needs to be expressed. He believes that being effeminate is weak and should not be evident in men. He does not think before he acts. His views greatly differs from the clan, where they think about things before acting. His exile was a period of time where he could connect with his maternal ancestors, but he did not because they are not warlike or as fierce as the Umuofia people were. He faults them for their negotiation, compliance, and avoidance of violence and bloodshed.

**Quotes** – a minimum of three quotes. (Indicate speaker/situation/significance)

1. a quote that reflects the title of the work
2. a quote that reflects a significant character
3. a quote that reflects the theme

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

This quote was spoken by the narrator as a warning of what is to come later in the novel. This quote explains that nothing can ever stay exactly the same and as things change they also fall apart (are destroyed). The line “the center cannot hold” is a reference to the deterioration of the African Tribal system when the white men come with new ideas and new religions, the old way of thinking literally cannot hold against the onslaught of Christianity.

2.

* “Dazed with fear, Okonkwo drew his machete and cut him down. He was afraid of being thought weak” (pg 27).

The narrator explains to the readers what Okonkwo felt as his son was being killed. This quote perfectly describes Okonkwo and his beliefs that ultimately led to his demise. Okonkwo fears being seen as weak, so much so that he spent his entire life doing everything he can to be the manliest man in the village. This drive to be nothing like his father, who Okonkwo saw as weak, leads Okonkwo to become angry, violent, and brash. The fear consumes Okonkwo and makes him feel the need to participate in the killing of his “son” which is the beginning of the end for the story’s protagonist.

3.

* “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”

Obierika is speaking with Okonkwo about how he feels about the white men, after they have come to their village. Here we see that struggle between change and tradition has practically destroyed the Igbo culture and caused it to “fall apart”. Achebe is not only critiquing the white men for disregarding the Igbo culture and sense of life but also some of the villagers for how they reacted to these men, they embraced the changes and were fairly willing to give up the traditions that make up their history.