



# Civil Peace

Chinua Achebe

## BACKGROUND

In 1967, Nigeria entered a civil war when the country's southeastern territories declared independence, calling themselves the Republic of Biafra. The Biafrans, most of whom belonged to the Igbo ethnic group, said they broke away from Nigeria because another ethnic group, called the Hausa, had massacred Igbo in the north. After nearly three years of war, the Biafrans surrendered. More than one million people had died in battle or from starvation. "Civil Peace" unfolds in the aftermath of this war.

SCAN FOR  
MULTIMEDIA 

- 1 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.
- 2 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 shoe, nor yet the two stars of

## NOTES

**inestimable** (ihn EHS tuh muh buhl) *adj.* too great to count or measure

**blessings** (BLEHS ihngz) *n.* things that benefit or bring happiness

## NOTES

**amenable** (uh MEHN uh buhl)  
adj. agreeable

**influence** (IHN floo uhns)  
n. dishonest persuasion;  
bribery

**surrender** (suh REHN duhr) n.  
act of giving up

## CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** In paragraph 4, mark words and phrases related to luck or wonder.

**QUESTION:** Why do references to luck and wonder appear so frequently?

**CONCLUDE:** What effect do these repeated references have, particularly on how readers see Jonathan?

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

3 He put it to immediate use as a taxi and accumulated a small pile of Biafran<sup>2</sup> 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<sup>3</sup> he had made a small fortune of one hundred and fifteen pounds.

4 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 Overside. 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.

5 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>4</sup> for neighbors in a hurry to start life again. With his family earnings he took his bicycle

1. **biro** (BY roh) informal British English for “ballpoint pen.”

2. **Biafran** (bee AF ruh) of the rebellious southeastern region of Nigeria, which declared itself the independent Republic of Biafra in the civil war of 1967.

3. **fortnight** two weeks.

4. **akara** (uh KAH uh) **balls** deep-fried balls of ground beans.

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.

- 6 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 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.
- 7 But nothing puzzles God. Came the day of the **windfall** when after five days of endless scuffles in queues<sup>5</sup> and counter-queues in the sun outside the Treasury he had twenty pounds counted into his palms as *ex-gratia*<sup>6</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*.
- 8 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 at 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.
- 9 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.
- 10 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

## NOTES

**windfall** (WIHND fawl) *n.*  
unexpected good fortune

5. **queues** (kyooz) *n.* British English for "lines."

6. **ex-gratia** (ehks GRAY shee uh) as a favor (Latin).



**CLOSE READ**

**ANNOTATE:** In paragraphs 24–27, mark words and phrases that suggest a casual friendliness in the way the thief speaks to Jonathan.

**QUESTION:** Why does the thief address Jonathan with seeming friendliness and familiarity?

**CONCLUDE:** What is the effect of this seemingly friendly tone?

away himself. He couldn't have been gone for long, though, when he was violently awakened again.

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

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

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

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

15 "Na tief-man and him people," came the cool reply. "Make you hopen de door."<sup>7</sup> This was followed by the heaviest knocking of all.

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

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

18 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.

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

20 "Police-o! Tief-man-so! Neighbors-o! We done loss-o! Police-o! . . ."

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

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

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

24 "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?"

25 "Na so!" replied his men. Jonathan thought he heard even more voices now than before and groaned heavily. His legs were sagging under him and his throat felt like sandpaper.

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

27 "No."

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

29 "'Na so!" answered the horrible chorus.

7. "Na tief-man . . . hopen de door" (dialect) "I am a thief with my accomplices. Open the door."

- 30 "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 . . ."
- 31 "Awright! We know say you no get plenty money. But we sef no get even anini. 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 . . ."
- 32 A volley of automatic fire rang through the sky. Maria and the children began to weep aloud again.
- 33 "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 nwayorly. No molest. Abi we de molest?"
- 34 "At all!" sang the chorus.
- 35 "My friends," began Jonathan hoarsely. "I hear what you say and I thank you. If I had one hundred pounds . . ."
- 36 "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 . . ."



### CLOSE READ

**ANNOTATE:** A **simile** is a figure of speech that uses an explicit comparison word such as *like* or *as* to make a comparison between two dissimilar things. In paragraph 40, mark the simile.

**QUESTION:** Why does the author use this simile after the threats of violence that came earlier in the story?

**CONCLUDE:** What is the effect of this simile?

- 37 “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 . . .”
- 38 “Ok. Time de go. Make you open dis window and bring the twenty pound. We go manage am like dat.”
- 39 There were now loud murmurs of dissent 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? . . .”
- 40 “Shurru!” 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!”
- 41 “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.
- 42 At the first sign of light as neighbors and others assembled to commiserate with him he was already strapping his five-gallon demijohn<sup>8</sup> 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.
- 43 “I count it as nothing,” he told his sympathizers, 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.” 🍷

8. **demijohn** (DEHM ee jon) *n.* large glass or earthenware bottle with a wicker cover.

## Comprehension Check

Complete the following items after you finish your first read.

1. What conflict sets the scene for the story?
2. What does Jonathan get in exchange for the rebel money he had saved?
3. What type of people show up at Jonathan's door one night, and what do they demand?
4. What do Jonathan and his family do the morning after they are robbed?

5.  **Notebook** To confirm your understanding, write a summary of "Civil Peace."

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### RESEARCH

**Research to Clarify** Choose at least one unfamiliar detail from the text. Briefly research that detail. In what way does the information you learned shed light on an aspect of the story?

**Research to Explore** Choose something from the text that interests you, and formulate a research question.



CIVIL PEACE

## Close Read the Text

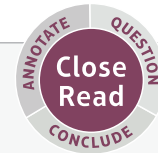
1. This model, from paragraph 9 of the text, shows two sample annotations, along with questions and conclusions. Close read the passage, and find another detail to annotate. Then, write a question and your conclusion.

**ANNOTATE:** This short clause comes at the end of a long sentence with multiple phrases and clauses.

**QUESTION:** Why does the author structure this sentence in this way?

**CONCLUDE:** The sentence structure captures the stress Jonathan feels—he cannot let down his guard until he gets home.

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.



**ANNOTATE:** These details show that Jonathan carefully avoids contact with others.

**QUESTION:** Why does the author include this point?

**CONCLUDE:** This shows Jonathan's resourcefulness. With money in his pocket, contact with others is dangerous, so he quietly avoids it.

### Tool Kit

Close-Read Guide and Model Annotation

### STANDARDS

#### Reading Literature

- Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.
- Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

2. For more practice, go back into the text, and complete the close-read notes.
3. Revisit a section of the text you found important during your first read. Read this section closely, and **annotate** what you notice. Ask yourself **questions** such as “Why did the author make this choice?” What can you **conclude**?

## Analyze the Text

**CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE** to support your answers.

**Notebook** Respond to these questions.

1. (a) What are the “five inestimable blessings” for which Jonathan is grateful? (b) **Interpret** What does Jonathan’s attitude toward these blessings show you about the nature of the Nigerian civil war?
2. **Compare and Contrast** How is Jonathan’s reaction to the loss of the *egg-rasher* different from that of the man robbed at the Treasury?
3. **Infer** After the robbery, Jonathan says, “Or is it greater than other things that went with the war?” To what is he referring? Explain.
4. **Connect** Why do you think the author chooses the term “Civil Peace” as the story’s title? Explain your reasoning, using details from the story.
5. **Essential Question:** *What do our possessions reveal about us?* What have you learned about materialism from reading this story?




## Analyze Craft and Structure

**Development of Theme** The **theme** of a literary work is the central message or insight into life it expresses. The theme may be stated directly or implied. When the theme is implied, readers must analyze elements of the text to determine the larger message the author is conveying. Thematic clues may appear in any story element, including the following:

- **setting**, or the time and place in which a story is set—key part of a setting is a work’s **historical and cultural context**. The events, conflicts, and beliefs that affect the people in the society of the story may offer thematic clues.
- **characters**, or people in the story—Their statements, behavior, actions, and reactions may be clues to the theme.
- **plot development**, or the sequence of related events in a story—The relationships among events, including how one leads to the next, may be thematic clues.
- **description**, or the use of sensory details to show what a setting or characters are like—In particular, the use of **juxtaposition**, in which disparate ideas or details are shown side-by-side, may suggest themes. For example, in “Civil Peace,” Jonathan’s children pick mangoes from a cemetery. That juxtaposition shows how death is simply part of life for survivors of the civil war. Authors may use juxtaposition to call attention to important ideas.

### Practice

**CITE TEXTUAL EVIDENCE**  
to support your answers.

 **Notebook** Respond to these questions.

1. (a) Find an example of the juxtaposition of two ideas in “Civil Peace.” (b) What effect does Achebe create by pairing these two ideas?
2. (a) Describe the events in the story that prompt Jonathan to use the expression “Nothing puzzles God.” (b) Judging from the circumstances of each event, explain what you think Jonathan means by this expression.
3. Using a chart like the one shown, analyze three episodes that spark a strong response in Jonathan.

EPISODE	JONATHAN’S RESPONSE	WHAT RESPONSE SHOWS ABOUT JONATHAN

4. How are the episodes you noted in your chart related? What do Jonathan’s responses suggest about the story’s theme? Explain.
5. What theme do Jonathan’s actions and the events in the story develop? Support your answer with evidence from the text.



CIVIL PEACE

## Concept Vocabulary

inestimable

amenable

surrender

blessings

influence

windfall

**Why These Words?** These concept vocabulary words all relate to fortune, good or bad. For example, Jonathan thinks of his five *blessings* as *inestimable*. Both of these words relate to Jonathan's perceptions of his life as being full of good fortune.

1. How do the concept words help the reader understand how Jonathan views his world?
2. What other words in the selection connect to this concept?

### Practice

**Notebook** The concept vocabulary words appear in "Civil Peace."

1. With a partner, choose one of the concept words, and take turns naming as many related words as you can.
2. Find the sentences containing the concept words in the selection. With a partner, replace each concept word with a synonym. Discuss how your substitutions change the meanings of the sentences.

### WORD NETWORK

Add words related to materialism from the text to your Word Network.

### STANDARDS

#### Reading Literature

- Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- Analyze how complex characters develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

#### Language

- Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.
- Spell correctly.
- Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

## Word Study

**Compound Nouns** The concept vocabulary word *windfall* is an example of a compound noun. A **compound noun** is a noun formed by combining two or more separate words—in this case, the words *wind* and *fall*.

Compound nouns may be "open," as in *pizza parlor*; hyphenated, as in *meat-eater*; or "closed," as in *basketball*. Whether a given compound noun is open, hyphenated, or closed is a matter of convention, and writers sometimes deviate from the conventional spelling for effect. If you are unsure how to spell a particular compound noun, consult a dictionary.

Read this passage from paragraph 2 of "Civil Peace." Mark the three compound nouns, and label each one *open*, *hyphenated*, or *closed*. Then, write a meaning for each of them. Consult a dictionary as needed.

*So Jonathan . . . produced the two pounds with which he had been going to buy firewood which his wife, Maria, retailed . . . for extra stock-fish and corn meal, and got his bicycle back.*

## Author's Style

**Character Development** Fiction writers use a variety of techniques to create engaging, interesting, and believable characters. Sometimes writers give characters a voice with **dialect**. Dialect is a form of a language spoken by people in a particular region or group. It may involve changes to the pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structure of the standard form of the language. A writer's choice to have characters speak in dialect may add a sense of authenticity to a story.


### Read It

1. Mark examples of dialect that appear in the two passages from "Civil Peace" that are shown in the chart. Then, revise each passage using standard English.

PASSAGE	REVISION IN STANDARD ENGLISH
<p><b>Jonathan:</b> "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." (paragraph 43)</p>	
<p><b>Thief Leader:</b> "Awrighto. Now make we talk business. We no be bad tief. We no like for make trouble. Trouble done finish. War done finish and all the katakata wey de for inside. No Civil War again. This time na Civil Peace. No be so?" (paragraph 28)</p>	

2. Consider differences between the original passages and your revisions. What is lost and what is gained by the author's choice to use dialect? Explain.

### Write It

 **Notebook** Dialect is one form of nonstandard language. There are other forms, including the language common to social media and texting. Write a brief paragraph in which you describe your morning routine. Use standard English. Then, write another paragraph on the same topic. Use nonstandard language variations with which you are familiar.