

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

The task: You will be writing a formal essay that examines Imperialism in the context of *Things Fall Apart*, "Shooting an Elephant," and the overall history of the west's influence on non-white cultures. You will have two class periods (one school week) and one week at home to work on the essay. You should make use of Wolverine Time to consult your teachers about the direction of your essay. Waiting until the day before the essay is due to request a writing conference does not guarantee you will have the opportunity for a that conference, and that will not excuse you from turning the essay in on time.

- **SUGGESTION:** Complete the question notes and a rough outline for your essay during class today, and be prepared to discuss that outline with Mrs. Mathewson on Monday during Wolverine Time.

The requirements: The essay and your notes are due on Thursday, February 11^h. If you are absent that day, you will have to submit both the essay and the notes electronically. The notes may be handwritten, but the essay must be TYPED, DOUBLE SPACED, TIMES NEW ROMAN, 12 Font. You will lose points for not properly formatting the essay and/or the Works Cited page. This essay will be entered as a 3rd quarter grade.

- You will ONLY have TWO class periods to work on this paper. The rest of the essay MUST be completed as homework. If you do not spend 30 minutes PER CALENDAR DAY working on the essay, you will significantly diminish your ability to present a well-organized, in-depth essay about Imperialism and its effect on any culture.
- You will not be given any other homework during this time period.
- The final in-class activity for this novel study will be an examination of the poem from which the title was taken. That examination will take place during our next class time.

The specifics: Answer the following questions in note form. You will be turning in your notes. They will not count as a grade, but if you do not turn any notes in, you will not be permitted to re-write the essay for a higher grade.

1. Achebe does not present Igbo society as ideal or perfect. What does that accomplish as far as combatting stereotypes?
2. The portrait of Igbo culture on the eve of its "falling apart" in Part I of *Things Fall Apart* is complex, sometimes contradictory and critical. What aspects of pre-colonial Igbo culture does Achebe seem to question or criticize?
3. How does Achebe use characters like Obierika, Okonkwo, and Nwoye to offer social criticism of Igbo society?
4. How do the people of Umuofia react to change?
5. What aspect do you think Achebe should have criticized?
6. In "Shooting an Elephant," the ignorance of where to shoot the elephant could be equated to the author's ignorance about how to work WITH a foreign culture? In what ways did the British show their ignorance in India? (This might best be answered with information from your history class.)
7. If the elephant had not killed the coolie in "Shooting an Elephant," what would have changed about the story (not just the plot, but your perceptions of the various elements of the story – character, tone, mood, etc.)?
8. How or did the author in "Shooting an Elephant" change from the beginning of the story, and what makes you think the way you do?
9. Is it possible to oppress people without oppressing yourself? (Of course this is an opinion question, but your notes should reflect some kind of support for your answer.)

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

The prompt: In musing about the role of a novelist as an educator, Chinua Achebe once wrote:

“I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach my readers that their past—with all its imperfections—was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God’s behalf delivered them.”

In your opinion, does Achebe succeed in doing this with his novel Things Fall Apart?

You should consider the story told by George Orwell in “Shooting an Elephant,” and realize that story was written BEFORE Achebe wrote *Things Fall Apart*. (Think “change over time” as reflected in literature.)

You should consider both what you learned about colonialism and imperialism from the research presentations, as well as what you will learn about imperialism during your history class over the next two weeks.

Whether you argue that Achebe does or does not succeed (you will not be “judged” for your answer), support your position through reference to *at least* three specific examples from *Things Fall Apart* and “Shooting an Elephant.” In addition, you should be able to cite specific historical facts to support your claim (look at history, and/or the consequences of that history). You can and should use information learned in history class. You must also consult AT LEAST one outside CREDIBLE source. Do not forget to cite that source INSIDE the text of your essay, and create a Works Cited page for that source(s).

- ONE POSSIBLE SUGGESTION: Find an editorial published by a CREDIBLE news source about the lasting effects of Imperialism on either Africa or India.

Your grade: I will give you a detailed rubric on Tuesday. This essay will be entered on your 3rd quarter grade, and will be assessed for an ANALYSIS grade, a CONVENTIONS & FORMATTING grade, and an ORGANIZATION grade.

Imperialism Essay

Chinua Achebe released the book *Things Fall Apart* in 1958. It was not immediately popular, but, regardless of initial reception, the true power of Achebe’s novel lies in its’ longevity; it still provides important relevant commentary on the subject of imperialism in Africa to this date. For many people, the first view of life through the eyes of an African person was the book *Things Fall Apart*. Achebe successfully changed the perspective of imperialism because many readers have only known imperialism from a distance; his book allows deeper and closer understanding of who and what was affected by the cultural clash and power struggle of imperialism.

In *Things Fall Apart*, the protagonist is Okonkwo. He is a strong man in the village of Umuofia, but is ashamed of his deceased father. Okonkwo is powerful and successful, and has a prosperous family life. He is a

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

farmer of yams, the main crop of his region in Nigeria. Okonkwo is in many ways a traditionalist: he sticks very closely to the ways of his ancestors, he has very masculine goals and characteristics, and he is a dominant alpha male who treats his women like they are almost the same person. He is resistant to change from the masculine traditional ways of his ancestors, and wants to keep the Elders in power. Okonkwo takes masculinity and power almost to an extreme, for some of his decisions are not in line with what most men in the village would do. It is very educational to see Nigerian and African life from such a close perspective, regardless of Okonkwo's flaws. The flaws of Okonkwo humanize him and may sway the audience from the preconception that Africans live in a primitive utopia that has no struggles comparable to those of modern man. This is Achebe's first success. Had Okonkwo lived in an African village with no strife or conflict, his story would have seemed too unrealistic to be regarded as valid commentary. The flaws of a person are the most indicative of their true character, desires, and goals.

Okonkwo is not a perfect jungle warrior, whose tribe adores his ferocity. Chinua Achebe humanizes the Igbo by illustrating the relatable reaction of the Igbo tribe to the choices of Okonkwo. Much of the initial conflict is caused by the decisions he makes, and his overall character. Okonkwo's own hubris and preference towards hedonism draws him away from the path to what he really wants. Imperialism, when added into what Okonkwo experiences, pushes him far past his goal. Okonkwo's true goal is to be unlike his father, this is difficult but not impossible to achieve. In fact, Okonkwo comes extremely close to being as successful, powerful, and influential as his father was not. The only shortcomings of Okonkwo are emotional, he doesn't have enough patience or understanding. These flaws, his hubris, masculinity, and goals all combine to form the conflicts that Okonkwo creates for himself. Multiple times he is punished for making belligerent decisions. Okonkwo kills the collateral (a boy) of a deal between villages, simply because he couldn't stand someone else killing the boy he raised as his own son for so long. He beats his wife during the week of peace, beats his son for being weak, and accidentally shoots a tribesman while at a funeral. Okonkwo makes all these choices towards the goal of redeeming himself for the shortcomings of his father, but does not know when he has become as much of a violent, masculine success as his father was a peaceful and likeable failure. Okonkwo's

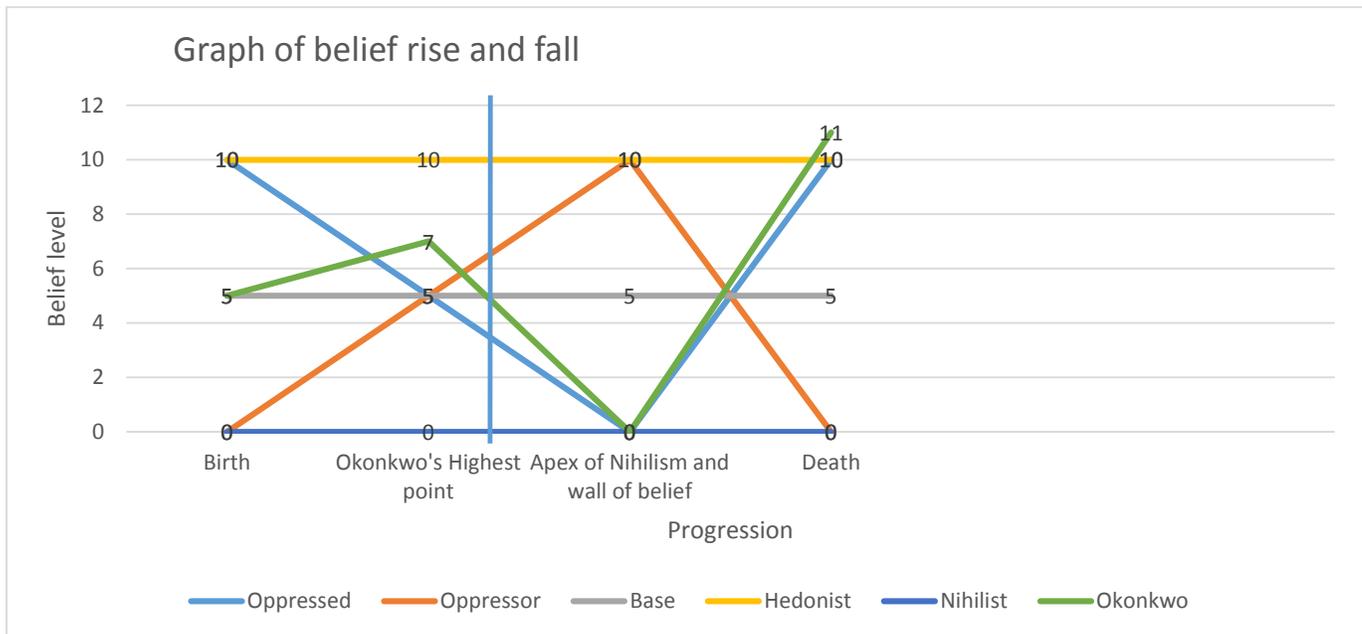
Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

goal is invisible to himself and is not a place to be, but a point that he always passes. If Okonkwo was not as visibly flawed, the Igbo would not have been shown reacting negatively to his savagery. Chinua succeeded in showing that the Igbo culture has solid moral ideas that are enforced.

Achebe made the power struggle between colonists and the Igbo very visible in the third act of the book. Okonkwo returns from exile and finds that colonists have gained influence in Umuofia as well. He loses power when he is exiled, and never truly regains it upon his return. The colonists are intent on converting the Nigerians to Christianity, because they truly believe it is their divine vocation to do so. Their belief does not falter throughout the story, however Okonkwo's belief does. The changes the colonists made to Umuofia's home and family life extended deeper into Okonkwo other tribesmen. He is a traditionalist and could see the final result of all the changes; he saw that his culture was forever going to be profoundly different. Okonkwo sees his culture slipping from his hands and does everything he can to prevent the colonists from gaining more power. It is not until Okonkwo renounces his entire belief in his tribe that he truly regains his own internal power. While attempting to work with his fellow Igbo men to resolve conflicts peacefully, the district commissioner tells them they must refrain from assembling altogether. Okonkwo snaps and kills the messenger, and the district commissioner seeks his head. Okonkwo knows that power has been entirely shifted and Umuofia has submitted to colonial rule; he also knows they will not come to his side in war. To Okonkwo, he is alone. This is the turning point of Okonkwo's allegiance; he no longer is supported by a tribe, and he is not going to follow any laws of his ancestors because their old books have never dealt with a white man having power over their people. Okonkwo now only has allegiance to himself. When he has absolutely no beliefs he is at a local minimum of his belief graph. At that turning point he is an absolute nihilist, and he destroys all previous belief that he had. By destroying those beliefs, he has broken past the wall of belief and hit the apex of nihilism. After touching and moving past that apex of nihilism he is absolutely free to be a hedonist. The one thing he wants more than anything is the glory of killing the greatest warrior in all of Nigeria. He kills himself, and is free of all loyalty, allegiance, oppression, and belief. In those final moments he developed a strong belief exclusively for himself. Despite all the colonist's changes, suicide remains taboo, so Okonkwo is thrown into

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

the evil forest...like father like son.



This chart shows hypothetical extremities. An oppressor begins life with a positive slope towards free will, subjectivity, choices, possessions, power, and they rise towards a belief value of 10. When the oppressor or implementer reaches 10 they are at the highest level of free will. They have nothing more to gain and have the free will to do whatever they please. Hedonism will present itself in that situation, but due to the insecurity of their position (everything to lose) the only decisions that anyone who reaches a high belief will make are conservative ones. This leads to an illusion of choice because there are finite ways to maintain power. The wall of belief is utilized by the oppressor to maintain their position by deifying the implementations of themselves on the oppressed. If the oppressors reach maximum belief in themselves and their own deification, they lose power, belief, and motivation. Then, the wall of belief is broken and they hit an apex of nihilism. Hitting that local maximum turns the oppressor's slope downwards. As their graph continues with a negative slope, they increase objectivity while they clamor to regain their position of power. Every time a wall of belief is broken, the beliefs on the left side of it are annihilated during the turning point at the apex of nihilism. The oppressor's new beliefs are now rooted in fear, amorality, inhumanity, and reckless clamoring. They will continue with those beliefs until death or they will change beliefs and cycle back to subjectivity.

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

This chart also illustrates Okonkwo's life. He was born with a normal level of belief in his forefathers and his culture, and he gained power and subjectivity by being successful and traditional. His first turning point is when he is exiled. Okonkwo does not reach an apex of nihilism when he reaches his first turning point because the local max/min did not occur when his beliefs were at the highest or lowest level possible. His beliefs changed, but they were not destroyed. Okonkwo simply turned from gaining subjectivity while on a positive slope of belief to gaining objectivity on a negative slope of belief- losing free will, possessions, humanity, motivation, and goals. He shifted towards a more objective approach, and this is apparent when he interacts with the colonists after returning from exile. He has a negative belief slope, and the stains of imperialism on the tablecloth of his culture push Okonkwo closer and closer to not believing in his tribe at all. Once Okonkwo knows with all certainty that he is alone in his fight for traditionalism, he reaches his true wall of belief. To break it he renounced all allegiance to his tribe and annihilated all previous beliefs during his moment at the apex of nihilism. He was able to move past the wall because he had nothing to lose and everything to gain. The last 1% of Okonkwo's life was lived as a subjective hedonist on a positive slope. He gained subjectivity, choices, power, control, and motivational nihilism. Okonkwo gained the power needed to kill himself, and died with more free will than he ever could have imagined.

Chinua Achebe's book allows for a reader to see what life is like for a Nigerian, both before and after Imperialism. He changed the perspective the world has on imperialism because it makes it so much more accessible and puts it into relatable context. *Things Fall Apart* provides the character Okonkwo to humanize the people of Africa. Many readers identify with the way Okonkwo defends his culture against the oppressive foreign invaders. The book also allows readers to see imperialism from a much closer distance. Umuofia is depicted at multiple points in the story and the contrast of life before and after colonists illustrates the dark shadow of imperialism very well. From the moment colonists interacted with the Igbo, their culture began to assimilate to European standards. Chinua beautifully crafts a power struggle between traditionalist and imperialist. The rise and fall of beliefs in the story is nicely applicable to a graph; the third act illustrates the clash of oppressor vs oppressed very well. *Things Fall Apart* is a new set of eyes with which to see an issue that

Imperialism Formal Process Research and Analysis Essay

can only be truly understood from the viewpoint of someone close to it. Chinua's depiction of imperialism is through the eyes of someone who understands its' effects and how it changed Nigerian culture forever. Chinua Achebe succeeded.

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