

## Contemporary Classics Study Questions

### PART I

#### Chapter 1

1. Describe Okonkwo's position in the clan and his personality.  
**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, including Okonkwo's village, Iguedo. In his youth, he brought honor to his village by beating Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling contest. Until his match with Okonkwo, the Cat had been undefeated for seven years.**
2. Describe Okonkwo's father.  
**His father is named Unoka. Okonkwo is completely unlike his now deceased father, Unoka, who feared the sight of blood and was a debtor, always borrowing and losing money, which meant that his wife and children often went hungry. Unoka was, however, a skilled flute player and had a gift for, and love of, language. 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.**

#### Chapter 2

3. What does Okonkwo think when he hears the gong?  
**He wonders what was amiss, and he sensed in the crier's voice that it may be a tragedy.**
4. Summarize the conflict with Mbaino and explain how it is resolved.  
**A daughter (women) of Umuofia (their town), the wife of Ogbuefi Udo, went the market in Mbaino and was killed. It was resolved with the normal course of action, a letter sent to Mbaino and asked them to chose between war or offering a young man as compensation.**
5. Describe how Okonkwo runs his household and explain his reasons for acting this way.  
**He runs his house with a heavy hand. His wives, especially his youngest, as well as his children lived in perpetual fear of his fiery temper. He also showed his prosperity, and people respected him and did not question him, such as his wives. His reasons for acting this way are that his whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and weakness, and the failure of himself. He wanted to be everything his father was not.**
6. Why do you think Okonkwo's oldest son is becoming "a sad-faced youth"?  
**He is becoming "a sad-faced youth" because his father is correcting him by nagging and beating him since his father had great anxiety for his growing or developing laziness.**

### Chapter 3

7. Identify Agbala.

**Agbala, the Oracle is the prophet of the Igbo. People came from far and near to consult it. They came when there was misfortune and when they had disputes. They also came to see what the future held for them or to consult the spirits of their departed fathers.**

8. Why did Unoka consult Agbala? What was the result?

**To find out why he never was able to have a successful harvest, as it was always miserable. When he visited the Oracle, Unoka was told that he failed because of his laziness. Ill-fated, Unoka died of a shameful illness, "swelling which was an abomination to the earth goddess."**

9. How does Okonkwo earn his first seed-yams?

**Okonkwo works for Nwakibie, a wealthy clansman, to earn his first seed yams. Okonkwo asked him to give him 400 seed yams to start a farm. Because Nwakibie admired Okonkwo's hard-working nature, he gave him eight hundred.**

10. What does Okonkwo learn about himself after his crop fails?

**For the rest of his life he considers his survival during that difficult period proof of his fortitude and inner mettle. Although his father tried to offer some words of comfort, Okonkwo felt only disgust for someone who would turn to words at a time when either action or silence was called for.**

### Chapter 4

11. What does Okonkwo's criticism of Osugo show about his character?

**In spite of Okonkwo's beginnings in poverty and misfortune, he has risen as one of the most respected elders of the clan. Yet others remark on how harshly he deals with men less successful than himself. At a meeting to discuss the next ancestral feast, Osugo — a man without titles — contradicts Okonkwo, who in turn insults Osugo by declaring the meeting is "for men." When others at the meeting side with Osugo, Okonkwo apologizes.**

12. How does the captive Ikemefuna fit into Okonkwo's household?

**At first, Ikemefuna is very unhappy — he misses his mother and sister, he tries to run away, and he won't eat. After Okonkwo threatens to beat him, Ikemefuna finally eats, but then vomits and becomes ill for twelve days. As he recovers, he seems to lose his fear and sadness.**

**Ikemefuna has become very popular in Okonkwo's house, especially with Nwoye and the other children. To them, he seems to know everything and can make useful things like flutes, rodent traps, and bows. Even Okonkwo has inwardly become fond of Ikemefuna, but he does not show affection — a womanly sign of weakness. He treats Ikemefuna with a heavy hand, as he does other members of his family, although he allows Ikemefuna to accompany him like a son to meetings and feasts, carrying his stool and his bag. Ikemefuna calls Okonkwo "father."**

13. Why must Okonkwo pay a fine?

**He beat his youngest wife, Ojiugo because she forgot to prepare Okonkwo's afternoon meal and feed her children. When Ojiugo returns, Okonkwo beats her severely. Even when he is reminded of the ban on violence, he doesn't stop the beating. Because Okonkwo's violation of peace can jeopardize the whole village's crops, the priest of the**

earth goddess orders Okonkwo to make offerings at his shrine. It was also a sacred week and he broke the peace.

14. Why do Okonkwo's enemies criticize him? Is their criticism just?

**He broke the sacred peace. Their criticism is just because it was unusual, as they could only remember one or two other occasions somewhere in the dim past.**

## Chapter 5

15. Explain the importance of the Feast of the New Yam.

**Just before the harvest, the village holds the Feast of the New Yam to give thanks to the earth goddess, Ani. Okonkwo doesn't really care for feasts because he considers them times of idleness. The women thoroughly scrub and decorate their huts, throw away all of their unused yams from the previous year, and use cam wood to paint their skin and that of their children with decorative designs.**

16. How do you think the narrator feels about Okonkwo's violence toward his second wife? Explain.

**The narrator is angry and disagrees with Okonkwo's actions toward his second wife as he says on page 38 that she "merely cut a few leaves."**

## Chapter 6

17. Describe the wrestling matches.

**The wrestling match takes place on the village ilo, or common green. Drummers line the field, and the spectators are so excited that they must be held back. The wrestling begins with matches between boys ages fifteen and sixteen. Maduka, the son of Okonkwo's friend Obierika, wins one match within seconds. As the wrestling continues, Ekwefi speaks with Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, the Oracle of the Hills and Caves. The two women are good friends, and Chielo inquires about Ezinma, whom she calls "my daughter." They conclude that Ezinma seems to have "come to stay" because she has reached the age of ten.**

18. What does Okonkwo's second wife mean when she says that her daughter "will stay"?

**She means that she will live, since she reached the age of ten, and "usually stay if they do not die before the age of six."**

## Chapter 7

19. Describe Ikemefuna's position in the family after three years in Okonkwo's household.

**He had become fully absorbed in his new family. He was like an older brother to Nwoye, and seemed to have kindled a new fire in the boy. Okonkwo was pleased with Nwoye's development with the help of Ikemefuna. Each clan has its own stories, and Ikemefuna is an exciting addition to Umuofia because he brings with him new and unfamiliar folk tales.**

20. How does Nwoye react to the stories told by his father and his mother?

**He preferred his mother's stories rather than his father's that said to be masculine. The mother's were of the tortoise and his wily ways, and the bird thrown by the cat, Earth and Sky, and songs.**

21. Describe the importance of the locusts.

To the village's surprise, locusts descend upon Umuofia. They come once in a generation and will return every year for seven years before disappearing for another lifetime. The village excitedly collects them because they are good to eat when cooked.

22. What warning does Ogbuefi Ezeudu give Okonkwo about Ikemefuna? Why does Okonkwo ignore the warning?

**Ogbuefi Ezeudu pays Okonkwo a visit, but he will not enter the hut to share the meal. Outside, he informs Okonkwo in private that the Oracle has decreed that Ikemefuna must be killed. He tells Okonkwo not to take part in the boy's death, as Ikemefuna calls him "father." Okonkwo lies to Ikemefuna, telling him that he will be returning to his home village. Nwoye bursts into tears. He ignores the warning because he was surprised.**

## Chapter 8

23. How does Okonkwo react to Ikemefuna's death?

**Okonkwo sinks into a depression. He feels weak, and he cannot sleep or eat.**

24. How does Obierika feel about Okonkwo's part in Ikemefuna's death?

**He visits his friend Obierika. He and Obierika then argue over whether it was right of Okonkwo to partake in Ikemefuna's death.**

25. Why does Okonkwo doubt Ogbuefi Ndulue's strength? Do you feel his opinion of the elder is justified?

**He had died that morning but they did not beat a drum and his wife was dead. I am not sure if he is justified.**

26. Describe the negotiation for the bride-price.

**Obierika, requests that Okonkwo stay when his daughter's suitor arrives to determine a bride-price. Okonkwo sits with Obierika while Obierika bargains his daughter's bride-price with the family of her suitor. Afterward, Obierika and his future son-in-law's relatives talk about the differing customs in other villages.**

## Chapter 9

27. Why is Ezinma so special to Ekwefi?

**Ekwefi awakes Okonkwo very early in the morning and tells him that Ezinma is dying. Okonkwo ascertains that Ezinma has a fever and sets about collecting medicine. Ezinma is Ekwefi's only child and the "center of her world." Ekwefi is very lenient with her: Ezinma calls her by her first name and the dynamic of their relationship approaches equality.**

28. Explain why the villagers believe that a stone is important to Ezinma's health.

**Okonkwo consulted a medicine man who told him that an ogbanje was tormenting them. An ogbanje is a "wicked" child who continually re-enters its mother's womb only to die again and again, causing its parents grief. A medicine man mutilated the dead body of Ekwefi's third child to discourage the ogbanje's return. When Ezinma was born, like most ogbanje children, she suffered many illnesses, but she recovered from all of them. A year before the start of the novel, when Ezinma was nine, a medicine man named Okagbue Uyanwa found her iyi-uwa, the small, buried pebble that is the ogbanje's physical link to the spirit world. Although the discovery of the iyi-uwa ought to have solved Ezinma's problems, every illness that Ezinma catches still brings terror and anxiety to Ekwefi.**

29. Describe Okonkwo's reaction to Ezinma's illness.

**Okonkwo ascertains that Ezinma has a fever and sets about collecting medicine.**

## Chapter 10

30. Who are the *egwugwu*? How do they represent the village's history?

**The village holds a ceremonial gathering to administer justice. The clan's ancestral spirits, which are known as *egwugwu*, emerge from a secret house into which no woman is allowed to step. The *egwugwu* take the form of masked men, and everyone suspects that Okonkwo is among them. The women and children are filled with fear even though they sense that the *egwugwu* are merely men impersonating spirits.**

31. How do the *egwugwu* settle the wife-beating case?

**The first dispute that comes before the *egwugwu* involves an estranged husband and wife. The husband, Uzowulu, states that the three brothers of his wife, Mgbafo, beat him and took her and the children from his hut but would not return her bride-price. The woman's brothers state that he is a beastly man who beat their sister mercilessly, even causing her to miscarry once. They argue that Uzowulu must beg Mgbafo to return to him. If she agrees, the brothers declare, Uzowulu must understand that they will cut his genitals off if he ever beats her again. The *egwugwu* decide in favor of Mgbafo. One village elder complains that such a trifling matter should not be brought before them.**

## Chapter 11

32. Why do you think that Achebe includes the story of the Tortoise?

**It relates to the stone for Ezinma and their real life. The tortoise could be Ezinma. Maliciously, Parrot tells Tortoise's wife to bring out all of the hard things. When Tortoise jumps, his shell breaks into pieces on impact. A medicine man puts it together again, which is why Tortoise's shell is not smooth.**

33. Why do you think the priestess Chielo takes Ezinma to Agbala's cave?

**Chielo, in her role as priestess, informs Ekwefi that Agbala, Oracle of the Hills and Caves, wishes to see Ezinma. Frightened, Okonkwo and Ekwefi try to persuade Chielo to wait until morning, but Chielo angrily reminds Okonkwo that he must not defy a god's will.**

34. How is Ezinma restored to her family?

**Okonkwo tells her to go home and sleep.**

## Chapter 12

35. How has Okonkwo tried to protect Ezinma? What does this say about his character?

**Ekwefi resolves that if she hears Ezinma crying she will rush in to defend her— even against a god. Okonkwo startles her when he arrives at the cave with a machete. He calms Ekwefi and sits with her. Ekwefi resolves that if she hears Ezinma crying she will rush in to defend her— even against a god. Okonkwo startles her when he arrives at the cave with a machete. He calms Ekwefi and sits with her. It shows that he really cares and has a heart.**

36. Identify and describe the *uri*.

**Okonkwo's family begins to prepare for Obierika's daughter's *uri*, a betrothal ceremony. The villagers contribute food to the festivities and Obierika buys a huge goat to present to his future in-laws. The preparations are briefly interrupted when the women retrieve an escaped cow and the cow's owner pays a fine for setting his cows**

loose on his neighbors' farms. The suitor's family members arrive and settle the clan's doubts about their generosity by bringing an impressive fifty pots of wine to the celebration. The women greet the visitors and the men exchange ceremonial greetings. The feast is a success.

37. Explain the importance of the palm wine which the groom's relatives bring to the wedding of Okierika's daughter.

**It shows that the people from the other village are like men and know how to treat them.**

### Chapter 13

38. Why are the villagers nervous when they hear the message of the ekwe?  
**Ogbuefi Ezeudu's death is announced to the surrounding villages with the ekwe, a musical instrument. Okonkwo shudders.**

39. How does the memory of Ezeudu suggest that trouble is coming for Okonkwo?  
**The last time Ezeudu visited him was to warn him against taking part in Ikemefuna's death. Since Ezeudu was a great warrior who took three of the clan's four titles, his funeral is large and elaborate. The men beat drums and fire their guns. Okonkwo's gun accidentally goes off and kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son.**

40. Why must Okonkwo leave his clan?

**He accidentally killed Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son. Okonkwo must atone by taking his family into exile for seven years. Okonkwo gathers his most valuable belongings and takes his family to his mother's natal village, Mbanta. According to the mandates of tradition, the men from Ezeudu's quarter burn Okonkwo's buildings and kill his animals to cleanse the village of his sin. Obierika questions why a man should suffer so much for an accidental killing. He then mourns the deaths of his wife's twins, whom he was forced to throw away, wondering what crime they committed.**

## PART II

### Chapter 14

41. How is Okonkwo received in his mother's village of Mbanta?

**Okonkwo's uncle, Uchendu, and the rest of his kinsmen receive him warmly. They help him build a new compound of huts and lend him yam seeds to start a farm.**

42. How does Okonkwo react to his exile?

**Okonkwo works hard on his new farm but with less enthusiasm than he had the first time around. He has toiled all his life because he wanted "to become one of the lords of the clan," but now that possibility is gone.**

43. How does Uchendu encourage Okonkwo to combat despair?

**Uchendu gathers together his entire family, including Okonkwo. He points out that one of the most common names they give is Nneka, meaning "Mother is Supreme"—a man belongs to his fatherland and stays there when life is good, but he seeks refuge in his motherland when life is bitter and harsh. Uchendu uses the analogy of children, who belong to their fathers but seek refuge in their mothers' huts when their fathers beat them. Uchendu advises Okonkwo to receive the comfort of the motherland gratefully. He reminds Okonkwo that many have been worse off—Uchendu himself has lost all but one of his six wives and buried twenty-two children. Even so, Uchendu tells Okonkwo, "I did not hang myself, and I am still alive."**

## Chapter 15

44. What news does Obierika bring about Abame?

**He brings bad news: Abame has been destroyed.**

45. What lesson does Uchendu find in the story of the Mother Kite?

**Never kill a man who says nothings. There is nothing to fear from someone who shouts. The men of Abame were fools.**

46. What does Uchendu mean when he says, "There is no story that is not true"?

**That anything is possible and can happen since the world has no end.**

47. What is happening to Okonkwo's farm in Iguedo?

**The yams were sold and given to sharecroppers. Obierika brings the money for the yams for Okonkwo.**

## Chapter 16

48. What news does Obierika bring on his next visit to Okonkwo?

**He has decided to visit Okonkwo because he has seen Nwoye with some of the Christian missionaries who have arrived. Most of the other converts, Obierika finds, have been efulefu, men who hold no status and who are generally ignored by the clan.**

49. Describe the arrival of the missionaries in Mbanta and the concerns they raise in the village.

**Six missionaries, headed by a white man, travel to Mbanta. The white man speaks to the village through an interpreter, who, we learn later, is named Mr. Kiaga. The interpreter's dialect incites mirthful laughter because he always uses Umuofia's word for "my buttocks" when he means "myself." He tells the villagers that they are all brothers and sons of God. He accuses them of worshipping false gods of wood and stone. The missionaries have come, he tells his audience, to persuade the villagers to leave their false gods and accept the one true God. The villagers, however, do not understand how the Holy Trinity can be accepted as one God. They also cannot see how God can have a son and not a wife. Many of them laugh and leave after the interpreter asserts that Umuofia's gods are incapable of doing any harm. The missionaries then burst into evangelical song.**

50. How does Okonkwo react to the missionaries?

**Okonkwo thinks that these newcomers must be insane, but Nwoye is instantly captivated. The "poetry of the new religion" seems to answer his questions about the deaths of Ikemefuna and the twin newborns, soothing him "like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate."**

51. Why is Nwoye attracted to the missionaries?

**Nwoye is instantly captivated. The "poetry of the new religion" seems to answer his questions about the deaths of Ikemefuna and the twin newborns, soothing him "like the drops of frozen rain melting on the dry palate."**

## Chapter 17

52. Why do the elders of Mbanta give the missionaries land in the Evil Forest?

The missionaries request a piece of land on which to build a church. The village leaders and elders offer them a plot in the Evil Forest, believing that the missionaries will not accept it. To the elders' amazement, the missionaries rejoice in the offer.

53. What happens after the church is built in the Evil Forest?

The elders are certain that the forest's sinister spirits and forces will kill the missionaries within days. To their surprise, however, nothing happens, and the church soon wins its first three converts.

54. What is significant about the conversion of Nneka?

The church wins more converts, including a pregnant woman, Nneka. Her four previous pregnancies produced twins, and her husband and his family are not sorry to see her go.

55. How does Okonkwo react to Nwoye's conversion?

One of Okonkwo's cousins notices Nwoye among the Christians and informs Okonkwo. When Nwoye returns, Okonkwo chokes him by the neck, demanding to know where he has been. Uchendu orders him to let go of the boy. Nwoye leaves his father's compound and travels to a school in Umuofia to learn reading and writing. Okonkwo wonders how he could ever have fathered such an effeminate, weak son.

## Chapter 18

56. What is the status of the relationship between Mbanta and the church at the beginning of this chapter?

The church wins many converts from the efulefu (titleless, worthless men). One day, several osu, or outcasts, come to church. Many of the converts move away from them, though they do not leave the service. Afterward, there is an uproar, but Mr. Kiaga firmly refuses to deny the outcasts membership to the church.

57. How does the church handle the issue of the outcasts?

There is an uproar, but Mr. Kiaga firmly refuses to deny the outcasts membership to the church. He argues that they will not die if they cut their hair or break any of the other taboos that have been imposed upon them. Mr. Kiaga's steadfast conviction persuades most of the other converts not to reject their new faith simply because the outcasts have joined them. The osu soon become the most zealous members of the church. To the clan's disbelief, one boasts that he killed the sacred royal python. Okonkwo urges Mbanta to drive the Christians out with violence, but the rulers and elders decide to ostracize them instead. Okonkwo bitterly remarks that this is a "womanly" clan. After announcing the new policy of ostracism, the elders learn that the man who boasted of killing the snake has died of an illness. The villagers' trust in their gods is thereby reaffirmed, and they cease to ostracize the converts.

58. Describe the logic behind the action taken by the clan over the killing of the sacred python.

After announcing the new policy of ostracism, the elders learn that the man who boasted of killing the snake has died of an illness. The villagers' trust in their gods is thereby reaffirmed, and they cease to ostracize the converts.



## Chapter 19

59. Summarize Okonkwo's regrets during his time in exile.

**Before he returns to Umuofia, he provides a large feast for his mother's kinsmen. He is grateful to them but secretly regrets the missed opportunity to have further increased his status and influence among his own clan. He also regrets having spent time with such un-masculine people. At the feast, one man expresses surprise that Okonkwo has been so generous with his food and another praises Okonkwo's devotion to the kinship bond. He also expresses concern for the younger generation, as Christianity is winning people away from their families and traditions.**

60. Trace Okonkwo's preparations for his return to Umuofia.

**He sent money to Obierka to build him two huts in his old compound until more huts and walls were built by Okonkwo himself.**

61. Why does Okonkwo's old kinsman feel the Christians have come to Mbanta?

**They thought he brought them together but also an abominable religion has settled among them.**

## PART III

## Chapter 20

62. How does Okonkwo feel about his social position?

**He feels he has lost his place among the nine masked spirits who administered the justice in the clan. He would not be able to lead his clan against the new religion, which has gained ground. He lost the years in which he could have taken the highest titles in the clan.**

63. Describe Okonkwo's plans to rebuild his prestige when he returns to Umuofia.

**Okonkwo has planned since his first year in exile to rebuild his compound on a larger scale. He also wants to take two more wives and get titles for his sons. He has managed to get over Nwoye's disgraceful departure, but he still regrets that Ezinma is a girl. He asked that she wait to marry in Umuofia, after his exile, to which she consented. She even persuaded her sister, Obiageli, to do the same. Okonkwo hopes to attract interest when he returns with two beautiful, marriageable daughters.**

64. What changes does Okonkwo find in Umuofia?

**Umuofia is much changed after seven years. The church has grown in strength and the white men subject the villagers to their judicial system and rules of government. They are harsh and arrogant, and Okonkwo cannot believe that his clan has not driven the white men and their church out. Sorrowfully, Obierika explains that the church has weakened the ties of kinship and that it is too late to drive the white men out. Many of the clansmen are now on the white man's side. Okonkwo observes that the white man is very shrewd because he came in peace and appeared to have only benevolent interests in the Africans, who thus permitted him to stay.**

65. How does Okonkwo respond to the changes in his fatherland?

**Okonkwo cannot believe that his clan has not driven the white men and their church out. Sorrowfully, Obierika explains that the church has weakened the ties of kinship and that it is too late to drive the white men out. Many of the clansmen are now on the white man's side. Okonkwo observes that the white man is very shrewd because he came in peace**

and appeared to have only benevolent interests in the Africans, who thus permitted him to stay.

## Chapter 21

66. What are some of the positive effects of the new government?

**Many people of Umuofia are not entirely unhappy with the white men's influence on their community. They have set up trading posts, and money is flowing into the village.** Mr. Brown, the white missionary, restrains his flock from antagonizing the clan. He and Akunna, one of the clan's leaders, meet often to debate and discuss their respective religious views. Akunna explains that the clan also has just one god, Chukwu, who created the world and the other gods. Mr. Brown replies that there are no other gods. He points to a carving and states that it is not a god but a piece of wood. Akunna agrees that it is a piece of wood, but wood created by Chukwu. Neither converts the other, but each leaves with a greater understanding of the other's faith.

67. Compare Okonkwo's actual return with the homecoming he planned.

**Okonkwo's daughters attract many suitors, but to his grave disappointment, his clan takes no particular interest in his return. The ozo initiation ceremony occurs only once in three years, meaning that he must wait two years to initiate his sons. He deeply regrets the changes in his once warlike people.**

## Chapter 22

68. Contrast Mr. Smith with Mr. Brown.

**Reverend James Smith, a strict and intolerant man, replaces Mr. Brown. He demands the utmost obedience to the letter of the Bible and disapproves of Mr. Brown's tolerant and unorthodox policies. The more zealous converts are relieved to be free of Mr. Brown's policy of restraint.**

**Mr. Brown urges the Igbo to send their children to school because he knows that the colonial government will rob the Igbo of self-government if they do not know the language.**

69. What motivates Enoch to commit an offense against Ibo religious customs?

**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.**

**That Enoch is the son of the snake-priest makes his suspected killing of the sacred python all the more dire a transgression. Enoch's conversion and alleged attack on the python emblemize the transition from the old order to the new. The old religion, with its insistence on deism and animal worship, is overturned from within by one. In its place comes the new religion, which, for all its protestations of love and harmony, brandishes a fiery logic and fierce resolve to convert the Igbo at any cost.**

70. How do the egwugwu respond to the crime?

**The next day, the egwugwu burn Enoch's compound to the ground. They then gather in front of the church to confront Reverend Smith and his fellow Christians. They tell the Christians that they only wish to destroy the church in order to cleanse their village of Enoch's horrible sin. Smith replies that he will stand his ground. He forbids them to touch the church, but his interpreter alters Smith's statement for fear that the unvarnished truth will be too harsh and that he will suffer as the messenger of bad news. He tells the egwugwu that Smith demands that they leave the matter in his hands. They ignore Smith's orders and burn the church.**

## Chapter 23

71. Account for Okonkwo's high spirits at the beginning of the chapter.

**He was almost happy again because the clan that had changed during its exile seemed to be making a comeback.,.**

72. How does the District Commissioner trick the leaders of Umuofia?

**The District Commissioner returns from his tour and requests that the leaders of Umuofia meet with him. They go, taking only their machetes because guns would be "unseemly." The commissioner talks to them in condescending terms and says that they should discuss the church's burning "as friends." No sooner have they put their machetes on the floor than a group of soldiers surprises them. They are handcuffed and thrown in jail for several days, where they suffer insults and physical abuse. A kind of bail is set at two hundred bags of cowries.**

73. Summarize the District Commissioner's decision.

**The court messengers tell the people of Umuofia that they must pay a fine of two hundred and fifty bags of cowries or their leaders will be hanged—by upping the price these messengers will make a profit as intermediaries. The town crier announces an emergency village meeting. Even Ezinma returns home from her twenty-eight-day visit to her future in-laws. The next morning they decide to collect the cowries necessary to pay the fine.**

## Chapter 24

74. Why does no one in the village welcome the leaders when they return? How is Okonkwo's mood different from the others'?

**After their release, the prisoners return to the village with such brooding looks that the women and children from the village are afraid to greet them. The whole village is overcome with a tense and unnatural silence. Ezinma takes Okonkwo some food, and she and Obierika notice the whip marks on his back.**

**Okonkwo has slept very little out of excitement and anticipation. He has thought it over and decided on a course of action to which he will stick no matter what the village decides as a whole. He takes out his war dress and assesses his smoked raffia skirt, tall feather headgear, and shield as in adequate condition. He remembers his former glories in battle and ponders that the nature of man has changed. The meeting is packed with men from all of the clan's nine villages.**

75. What does Okonkwo see as the greatest threat to Umuofia? How does he plan to respond to that threat?

**The white man. Okonkwo has slept very little out of excitement and anticipation. He has thought it over and decided on a course of action to which he will stick no matter what the village decides as a whole. He takes out his war dress and assesses his smoked raffia skirt, tall feather headgear, and shield as in adequate condition. He remembers his former glories in battle and ponders that the nature of man has changed. The meeting is packed with men from all of the clan's nine villages.**

76. What unprecedented action does Okika propose?

**He proposes an uprising or a revolution of sorts.**

77. What happens when the court messengers arrive?

**.A tumult rises in the crowd, but not the kind for which Okonkwo hopes: the villagers allow the messengers to escape and bring the meeting to a conclusion. Someone even asks why Okonkwo killed the messenger. Understanding that his clan will not go to war, Okonkwo wipes his machete free of blood and departs.**

## Chapter 25

78. Why do you think Okonkwo kills himself?

**It is in Okonkwo's nature to act rashly, and his slaying of the messenger constitutes an instinctive act of self-preservation. Not to act would be to reject his values and traditional way of life. He cannot allow himself or, by extension, his clan to be viewed as cowardly. There is certainly an element of self-destructiveness in this act, a kind of martyrdom that Okonkwo willingly embraces because the alternative is to submit to a world, law, and new order with which he finds himself inexorably at odds.**

**The commissioner, Obierka, and others proceed to a small bush behind Okonkwo's compound, where they discover Okonkwo's body dangling from a tree. He has hanged himself.**

79. Explain Obierka's request to the District Commissioner.

**Obierka displays an uncharacteristic flash of temper and lashes out at the commissioner, blaming him for Okonkwo's death and praising his friend's greatness. The commissioner decides to honor the group's request, but he leaves and orders his messengers to do the work. As he departs, he congratulates himself for having added to his store of knowledge of African customs.**

80. Contrast the way Obierka and the District Commissioner react to Okonkwo's death. **Obierka explains that suicide is a grave sin and his clansmen may not touch Okonkwo's body. Though they have sent for strangers from a distant village to help take the body down, they also ask the commissioner for help. He asks why they cannot do it themselves, and they explain that his body is evil now and that only strangers may touch it.**

81. Why do you think the novel ends with the District Commissioner's thoughts about his book?

**Achebe uses the commissioner, who seems a character straight out of Heart of Darkness, to demonstrate the inaccuracy of accounts of Africa such as Joseph Conrad's.**

**The commissioner, who is in the middle of writing a book about Africa, imagines that the circumstances of Okonkwo's death will make an interesting paragraph or two, if not an entire chapter. He has already chosen the title: The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger.**