Pearson Edexcel International GCSE (9–1)

Time 1 hour 20 minutes

Paper reference **4ET1/01**

English Literature

PAPER 1: Poetry and Modern Prose

Question Booklet
Do not return this Question Booklet with your Answer Booklet.

Total Marks

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Answer TWO questions:

Answer the question in Section A and ONE question from Section B.

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Of Mice and Men, John Steinbeck	6
The Whale Rider, Witi Ihimaera	7
The Joy Luck Club, Amy Tan	7
Things Fall Apart, Chinua Achebe	8

SECTION A: Unseen Poetry

Answer the question in this section.

You should spend 35 minutes on this question.

Read the following poem.

'On Turning Ten'

The whole idea of it makes me feel
like I'm coming down with something,
something worse than any stomach ache
or the headaches I get from reading in bad light –
a kind of measles of the spirit,
a mumps of the psyche*,
a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.

You tell me it is too early to be looking back,
but that is because you have forgotten
the perfect simplicity of being one
and the beautiful complexity introduced by two.
But I can lie on my bed and remember every digit.
At four I was an Arabian wizard.
I could make myself invisible
by drinking a glass of milk a certain way.
At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince.

But now I am mostly at the window
watching the late afternoon light.
Back then it never fell so solemnly
against the side of my tree house,
and my bicycle never leaned against the garage
as it does today,
all the dark blue speed drained out of it.

This is the beginning of sadness, I say to myself,
as I walk through the universe in my sneakers*.
It is time to say good-bye to my imaginary friends,
time to turn the first big number.

It seems only yesterday I used to believe
there was nothing under my skin but light.
If you cut me I would shine.
But now if I fall upon the sidewalks of life,
I skin my knees. I bleed.

Billy Collins (1995)

Glossary

**psyche* – the human mind, soul or spirit
**sneakers* – trainers

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1 Explore how the writer presents reaching the age of ten in this poem.

In your answer, you should consider the writer's:

- descriptive skills
- choice of language
- use of form and structure.

Support your answer with examples from the poem.

(Total for Question 1 = 20 marks)

TOTAL FOR SECTION A = 20 MARKS

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SECTION B: Modern Prose

Answer ONE question on ONE text from this section.

You should spend 45 minutes on this section.

***To Kill a Mockingbird*, Harper Lee**

EITHER

2 Explore the character of Atticus Finch in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 2 = 40 marks)

OR

3 Discuss the theme of isolation in the novel.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 3 = 40 marks)

***Of Mice and Men*, John Steinbeck**

EITHER

4 In what ways is anger significant in *Of Mice and Men*?

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 4 = 40 marks)

OR

5 Explore **one** character who you consider to be important in the novel.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 5 = 40 marks)

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***The Whale Rider*, Witi Ihimaera**

EITHER

6 'Koro Apirana is a successful tribal leader.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 6 = 40 marks)

OR

7 Discuss the importance of family in *The Whale Rider*.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 7 = 40 marks)

***The Joy Luck Club*, Amy Tan**

EITHER

8 In what ways is the theme of misunderstanding significant in the novel?

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 8 = 40 marks)

OR

9 Explore the character of Rose Hsu Jordan in *The Joy Luck Club*.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 9 = 40 marks)

***Things Fall Apart*, Chinua Achebe**

EITHER

10 Explore the theme of conflict in *Things Fall Apart*.

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 10 = 40 marks)

OR

11 Which **one** character do you have most sympathy for in the novel?

You must consider the context of the novel in your answer.

(Total for Question 11 = 40 marks)

TOTAL FOR SECTION B = 40 MARKS
TOTAL FOR PAPER = 60 MARKS

Acknowledgement:

'On Turning Ten' taken from *'The Art of Drowning'* By Billy Collins © University of Pittsburgh Press, 30 June 1995

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Please check the examination details below before entering your candidate information

Candidate surname	Other names

Centre Number | Candidate Number

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE (9–1)

Time 1 hour 20 minutes

Paper reference **4ET1/01**

English Literature

PAPER 1: Poetry and Modern Prose

You must have:
Question Booklet (enclosed)

Total Marks

Instructions

- Use **black** ink or ball-point pen.
- **Fill in the boxes** at the top of this page with your name, centre number and candidate number.
- Answer the question from Section A, and **ONE** question from Section B.
- Answer the questions in the spaces provided
  – *there may be more space than you need.*

Information

- The total mark for this paper is 60.
- The marks for **each** question are shown in brackets –
  use this as a guide as to how much time to spend on each question.
- Copies of the texts studied may **not** be brought into the examination.
- Dictionaries may **not** be used in this examination.

Advice

- Read each question carefully before you start to answer it.
- Check your answers if you have time at the end.
- Good luck with your examination.

Turn over ▶

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SECTION A: Unseen Poetry

Question 1

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SECTION B: Modern Prose

Indicate which question you are answering by marking a cross in the box ☒. If you change your mind, put a line through the box ☒ and then indicate your new question with a cross ☒.

Chosen question number:

Question 2 ☒	**Question 3** ☒	**Question 4** ☒
Question 5 ☒	**Question 6** ☒	**Question 7** ☒
Question 8 ☒	**Question 9** ☒	**Question 10** ☒
Question 11 ☒		

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TOTAL FOR SECTION B = 40 MARKS
TOTAL FOR PAPER = 60 MARKS

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Surname	StemUp Model Solution
Answer booklet	Write the question number in the left-hand margin at the start of each answer.

Question number

1

Collins presents reaching the age of ten as a strange, almost comic illness that is also a genuine loss: the moment a child first feels time passing and realises that the magic of early childhood is ending. The gap between his grand vocabulary and his small world lets the reader smile at his melodrama while feeling the sadness beneath it.

The first stanza presents turning ten as a disease. The repetition of "something" suggests the speaker cannot quite name what is wrong, only that it is "worse than any stomach ache". The dash after "bad light" creates a pause before a list of childhood illnesses, "measles", "mumps" and "chicken pox", which are then attached to abstract nouns: "of the spirit", "of the psyche", "of the soul". This hyperbole is funny, yet the build-up to the adjective "disfiguring" implies that the change will leave a permanent mark. Ten is presented as an inner infection rather than a celebration.

In the second stanza the direct address to "You" introduces an adult listener who dismisses the child's nostalgia. The speaker's reply, that the adult has "forgotten", reverses the usual roles: the child is the wise one. The juxtaposition of "perfect simplicity" at one and "beautiful complexity" at two is deliberately overblown, as though each year were a philosophical stage. The memories that follow are brisk, end-stopped statements of identity: "At four I was an Arabian wizard", "At seven I was a soldier, at nine a prince." The confident verb "was" shows that imagination once made these roles completely real, and the detail of becoming "invisible" by drinking milk "a certain way" captures the private logic of a younger child.

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The volta "But now" in the third stanza shifts the poem into the present and into stillness. The adverb "mostly" suggests passivity; he no longer acts but watches. The light, which once simply shone, now falls "solemnly", and the personified bicycle has "all the dark blue speed drained out of it". The world has not changed, only his way of seeing it, and the enjambment slows the stanza, mirroring the draining of energy.

The fourth stanza offers a self-aware, almost theatrical statement, "This is the beginning of sadness", undercut by the image of walking "through the universe in my sneakers". The clash between the cosmic "universe" and the ordinary trainers keeps the tone gently ironic. Saying "good-bye to my imaginary friends" marks the end of fantasy, and the euphemism "the first big number" suggests that ten is only the first of many ages that will feel like losses.

The final stanza is built on the contrast between light and blood. The younger child believed "there was nothing under my skin but light", and the short, confident line "If you cut me I would shine" sounds almost heroic. The sudden fall onto "the sidewalks of life" brings him down to earth, and the caesura in the last line, "I skin my knees. I bleed.", ends the poem with blunt monosyllables. The free verse, with stanzas of uneven length, has moved from present to past and back to a sharper present, so this ending feels like a final, sober realisation. Collins presents turning ten as the moment a child discovers he is ordinary and vulnerable, and invites the reader, perhaps the forgetful adult of stanza two, to remember feeling the same.

2 Atticus Finch is the moral centre of To Kill a Mockingbird, a widowed lawyer and father whose quiet integrity stands against the racism of 1930s Alabama. Harper

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Lee presents him through the eyes of his daughter, Scout, so the reader sees him first as an ordinary, even disappointing, parent before discovering his extraordinary courage. However, Lee also allows us to see the limits of one good man in a deeply unjust society, and I think this makes him a more convincing character than a simple hero.

At the start of the novel, Atticus seems unremarkable to his children. Scout complains that he is "nearly fifty", wears glasses and does not play football like other fathers. Lee uses this naive viewpoint deliberately: the reader is invited to look past outward signs of masculinity for something deeper. His parenting is unconventional for the Deep South of the time. The children call him by his first name, he answers their questions honestly and he refuses to force Scout into the role of a Southern lady, despite Aunt Alexandra's insistence on dresses and "fine folks". His central lesson to Scout is that you never really understand a person until you "climb into his skin and walk around in it". This idea of empathy runs through the whole novel, from Walter Cunningham at lunch to Boo Radley on the porch at the end, and it reflects Lee's own hope that her readers would learn to see from the point of view of those they judged.

Lee develops Atticus's idea of courage through contrasting episodes. When Heck Tate hands him the rifle to shoot the rabid dog, Tim Johnson, the children discover that he was once "One-Shot Finch", the best shot in the county. Jem is thrilled, but Atticus never boasted about it. Lee then places the Mrs Dubose episode straight afterwards, so that Atticus can explain that real courage is not "a man with a gun in his hand" but knowing "you're licked before you begin" and seeing it through anyway. This is a clear structural signal: the dog is a symbol of the madness of racism, which Atticus will face in the courtroom, and the kind of courage he values is moral, not physical.

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That courage is tested most directly when he defends Tom Robinson. In a society governed by Jim Crow laws, where a white woman's word would always outweigh a black man's, Atticus knows he cannot win. He tells Scout that if he refused the case he could not hold his head up in town, and that a person's conscience is the one thing that does not abide by majority rule. Lee, writing in the late 1950s as the Civil Rights Movement challenged segregation, uses Atticus to address white Southern readers directly: the right thing to do is not decided by what the majority thinks. The trial itself echoes the Scottsboro Boys case of the 1930s, in which young black men were convicted on unreliable evidence, so Atticus's careful cross-examination, showing that Mayella was beaten by someone who leads with his left hand while Tom's left arm is useless, exposes how irrelevant the truth was to such verdicts.

Atticus also faces physical danger. He sits outside the jail reading under a light bulb on an extension cord, prepared to face a lynch mob alone. The image is almost comically domestic, yet it shows his calm refusal to be intimidated. Significantly, it is Scout, not Atticus, who disperses the mob by speaking innocently to Mr Cunningham about his son. Lee suggests that Atticus's belief in seeing people as individuals, which he has passed to his daughter, is more powerful than force.

After the guilty verdict, Lee uses the black community's response to judge Atticus. As he leaves the courtroom, everyone in the coloured balcony rises, and Reverend Sykes tells Scout, "Miss Jean Louise, stand up. Your father's passin'." This silent tribute is one of the most moving moments in the novel, as it shows that his courage is recognised by the people with the least power in Maycomb. He also plans an appeal, and after Tom is shot he goes himself to tell Helen, showing

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respect that few white men in Maycomb would have offered.

Yet Lee does not make Atticus perfect. His faith in the basic goodness of his neighbours sometimes seems naive. He calls Mr Cunningham basically a good man with blind spots, and he dismisses Bob Ewell's threats after Ewell spits in his face, which nearly costs his children their lives. Some modern readers also question whether Atticus challenges the system or merely works decently within it. However, I would argue that Lee presents this as a realistic portrait of how change begins: slowly, through individuals who refuse to accept injustice even when they cannot defeat it.

The ending confirms how Atticus has grown. At first he insists that Jem must face the law for Bob Ewell's death, because he will not live one way in public and another at home, as Miss Maudie notes he is the same in his house as on the public streets. When Heck Tate insists that Bob Ewell fell on his knife, Atticus eventually accepts this to protect Boo Radley, and Scout's comment that exposing Boo would be like shooting a mockingbird shows that his lessons have taken root. Atticus is therefore presented as a model of justice and empathy, but also as a man who learns that true justice sometimes means compassion rather than rules.

3 Isolation in To Kill a Mockingbird is rarely chosen. Harper Lee shows that in a small, rigid Southern town, people are isolated by race, class, rumour and family, and that Maycomb's prejudices push to the edges anyone who does not fit. The most isolated characters, Boo Radley, Mayella Ewell and Tom Robinson, are also the ones the town misjudges most, so Lee uses isolation to expose the cruelty of a community that would rather gossip about outsiders than understand them.

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The setting itself is isolated. Scout describes Maycomb as a "tired old town" where there was nowhere to go and nothing to buy, and the families have lived side by side for generations. In the Depression of the 1930s, this closed world is presented as a microcosm of the Deep South, where everyone knows their place in a strict hierarchy of race and class. Lee suggests that such a community protects itself by excluding difference: whatever is unfamiliar is turned into legend or shame.

Boo Radley is the clearest example. After a teenage brush with the law, he was kept indoors by his father and has not been seen for years. The town fills the silence with rumour: Miss Stephanie Crawford's stories and Jem's description of a monster who eats raw squirrels and has bloodstained hands. Lee lets the children's games, acting out the "Radley" story, show how easily isolation turns a person into a figure of horror. Yet the gifts in the knot-hole of the tree, the chewing gum, Indian-head pennies and soap figures carved to look like Jem and Scout, reveal a lonely man reaching out in the only way he can. When Nathan Radley fills the hole with cement, claiming the tree is dying, Jem cries, because he understands that Boo's one connection to the outside world has been deliberately cut. The blanket placed around Scout's shoulders during Miss Maudie's fire, and finally Boo's rescue of the children from Bob Ewell, show that the most isolated person in Maycomb is also one of its kindest. When Scout stands on the Radley porch at the end and sees the street from Boo's point of view, Lee completes the novel's lesson about climbing into another person's skin.

Mayella Ewell is isolated by poverty and class. The Ewells live behind the town dump, beyond respectable white society yet still above the black community in the town's racial hierarchy. Context matters here: poor white families like the Ewells were despised by the white middle class, but Jim Crow laws still gave them power over black people. Mayella has no friends and must care for her many siblings

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while her father drinks the relief cheques. Lee gives her one touching detail, the red geraniums she grows in slop jars, which suggest a longing for beauty in a bleak life. During the trial, Scout realises that Mayella must have been the loneliest person in the world, even lonelier than Boo Radley. Her loneliness drives her to reach out to Tom, and when she breaks the strongest taboo of her society, she turns on him to protect herself. Lee presents her as both victim and accuser, which makes the reader's response uncomfortable and complex.

Tom Robinson's isolation is racial and, by the end, total. He lives in the segregated black settlement beyond the dump, and in court he makes the fatal mistake of saying he felt sorry for Mayella. For a black man in 1930s Alabama to pity a white woman was seen as unforgivable arrogance, and the gasp in the courtroom shows that he has crossed an invisible line. Lee's account of his trial echoes the Scottsboro trials of the 1930s, when black defendants were convicted despite weak evidence. After the verdict, Tom is held in prison, cut off from his family, and he is shot trying to escape. Atticus suggests that Tom had simply lost hope in white people's justice, and Mr Underwood's editorial compares his death to the senseless slaughter of songbirds, linking Tom to the mockingbird symbol.

Lee also explores self-chosen or partial isolation. Dolphus Raymond lives with the black community and pretends to be a drunk, sipping Coca-Cola from a paper bag, so that white Maycomb has an explanation for his choices. His mixed-race children, he says, belong nowhere, isolated by both communities. Mrs Dubose is isolated by age, illness and her morphine addiction, and her vicious insults keep the children away until Atticus makes Jem read to her. Dill, neglected by his parents, tells elaborate lies and runs away to Maycomb, admitting that his family seem to get on better without him. Even Atticus becomes isolated when he takes Tom's case: his children are taunted at school and he is threatened by neighbours.

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Writing in the late 1950s, as the Civil Rights Movement was challenging segregation, Lee seems to argue that isolation is not a natural state but something a community does to people. The novel ends with Scout walking Boo home and seeing the street through his eyes, an image of isolation finally being broken by understanding. In this way Lee suggests that the cure for the town's prejudice is empathy, and that the outsiders Maycomb fears are often the ones who show the most humanity.

4 Anger in Of Mice and Men is significant because it grows out of powerlessness. Steinbeck shows a ranch full of people trapped by the Great Depression, by racism, sexism and age, and their frustration has nowhere to go except downwards, towards someone weaker. Anger therefore drives the plot towards tragedy, but it also reveals how loneliness and lost dreams poison relationships in 1930s America.

Steinbeck introduces anger in the first section through George. When Lennie asks for ketchup, George explodes in a long tirade, imagining how easy his life would be if he were alone: he could get a job, spend his wages as he liked and go into town for a drink. The repeated fantasy of freedom shows that George's anger is really frustration at the burden of responsibility in a world where migrant workers had nothing but their labour. Yet his anger fades quickly into shame, and he admits he has been mean to Lennie before retelling the dream of the farm. This pattern, anger followed by tenderness, establishes that George's temper comes from fear and exhaustion rather than cruelty. It also matters at the end: George does not shoot Lennie in anger, but with the calm, painful mercy that Candy wished he had shown his own dog.

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Curley is the angriest character, and Steinbeck makes anger his defining trait. Candy explains that Curley is "like a lot of little guys" who hates big guys and is always picking fights. As the boss's son, Curley holds power over the workers, yet he seems insecure about his size and about his new wife, whose flirting makes him jealous and suspicious. His anger is a performance of masculinity in an all-male world where strength was the measure of a man. When Slim and the men mock him, he turns on Lennie, who is smiling at a private thought, and punches him repeatedly. Steinbeck's violent description of Lennie crushing Curley's hand shows that Curley's anger has unleashed a strength he cannot control. This incident foreshadows the tragedy: when Curley discovers his wife's body, his anger turns to murderous revenge, and his threat to shoot Lennie "in the guts" forces George to kill Lennie himself to spare him a more brutal death. Curley's anger is therefore the immediate cause of the ending.

Crooks shows a different, more bitter anger. As the only black man on the ranch, he is forced to live alone in the harness room and is excluded from the bunkhouse. In a society shaped by Jim Crow segregation, he cannot express his resentment openly to white men, so when Lennie wanders into his room, he lashes out, telling him he has no right to be there. He then cruelly suggests that George might not come back, enjoying Lennie's distress until Lennie's anger flares and Crooks has to back down. Steinbeck presents this as a needless episode of cruelty, but it reveals how racism makes Crooks so lonely that he takes his pain out on someone more vulnerable than himself. When Candy describes the farm, Crooks briefly hopes he might join them, which shows that his anger hides a desperate wish for belonging.

Curley's wife exposes how anger works within the ranch's hierarchy. She is unnamed, isolated and resented by the men, and her own frustration at her trapped life erupts in Crooks' room. When Crooks tells her to leave, she reminds

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him of her power with the threat that she could get him "strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny". Her anger is shocking because it uses the threat of lynching, a real danger for black men in the 1930s South, and Steinbeck shows Crooks shrinking into himself. Here anger moves downwards exactly as the social order dictated: a white woman, powerless among men, can still crush a black man. Later, in the barn, her angry outburst about her lost chance in films shows that she too has been embittered by a broken American Dream.

Anger also finishes the dream. Lennie's fear turns to panic as Curley's wife screams, and Steinbeck writes that he shook her and was angry with her, the anger of a frightened child rather than a violent man. Earlier he had flung away the dead puppy with the same confused rage, so the reader recognises the pattern. When Candy finds the body, his sorrow and anger grow into words and he calls her a "God damn tramp", blaming her for destroying the farm. His fury is directed at a dead woman because he cannot bear the death of his last hope.

Overall, anger is significant because it links the characters' private frustrations to the wider injustices of Depression America. Steinbeck shows that the men's anger is rooted in loneliness, insecurity and disappointed dreams, and that in a hostile world it leads almost inevitably to violence. Only Slim remains calm, which may suggest Steinbeck's hope for a dignity that rises above such anger, but the novel's ending shows how rarely that dignity is enough.

5

I consider Curley's wife to be the most important character in Of Mice and Men. On a plot level, her death destroys the dream of the farm and forces George to shoot Lennie. More importantly, she is the only woman on the ranch, and through her Steinbeck exposes how 1930s American society trapped and silenced women.

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She begins the novel as a stereotype seen through the men's eyes and ends it as a lonely young woman whose dreams were as fragile as theirs, which makes her central to Steinbeck's portrait of a world without hope.

Steinbeck first presents her entirely through male judgement. Before she appears, Candy describes her as a tart who gives the men "the eye", and the reader, like George, is primed to distrust her. When she arrives at the bunkhouse, she blocks the sunlight in the doorway, so that the rectangle of light is cut off. This image suggests that she brings shadow and danger with her, foreshadowing the darkness she will bring to George and Lennie's plans. Steinbeck's description lingers on her "full, rouged lips", heavy make-up and red fingernails, and red, a colour linked earlier to the girl in Weed who accused Lennie, becomes a warning sign. George immediately calls her "jail bait" and tells Lennie to keep away. The fact that she has no name, and is defined only as Curley's possession, shows how women were regarded in this male world: as property, temptation or trouble.

However, Steinbeck gradually reveals the reasons behind her behaviour. She repeatedly claims to be looking for Curley, which may be an excuse, but it also shows that she has no other legitimate reason to speak to anyone. Her marriage is unhappy, and she later admits that she does not like Curley because he is not a nice fellow. In the 1930s, a young woman with little money and limited education had few choices beyond marriage, and she seems to have married Curley quickly to escape her mother. On the ranch she is utterly isolated: the men avoid her for fear of Curley's jealousy, and she has no female company at all. Her complaint that she never gets to talk to anybody and gets lonely shows that her flirting is a desperate bid for attention and conversation rather than simple wickedness.

Her scene in Crooks' room is crucial because it shows both her powerlessness and

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her power. When the men go into town on Saturday night, she is left behind with the "weak ones": Lennie, Candy and Crooks. She scorns them bitterly, yet she is in the same position, excluded and dismissed. When Crooks tells her to leave, she turns vicious, threatening that she could have him "strung up on a tree so easy it ain't even funny". This reference to lynching shows how Jim Crow society gave even a powerless white woman authority over a black man. Steinbeck shows Crooks reducing himself to nothing in response. The episode makes her less sympathetic, but it also reveals the hierarchy of the ranch, where each oppressed group can only assert itself by crushing someone lower down.

Her conversation with Lennie in the barn is the turning point of the novel. Here she finally tells her own story: a man from a travelling show said she could join it, and another man promised to put her in the movies, but she believes her mother stole the letter. Her dream of Hollywood, of nice clothes and staying in big hotels, is a version of the American Dream, as unrealistic as George and Lennie's farm. Steinbeck uses the parallel to suggest that everyone on the ranch is sustained by fantasies that the Depression makes impossible. The tragic irony is that she pours out her heart to Lennie, the one person who cannot really listen, and her invitation to stroke her soft hair leads directly to her death when she panics and he cannot let go.

After she dies, Steinbeck changes the way he describes her. The narrative says that the meanness, the plannings, the discontent and the ache for attention were all gone from her face, and that she looked pretty, simple, sweet and young. This softened description asks the reader to reconsider the judgements made by the men, and by us. In death she is finally seen as a girl rather than a threat. Yet even now the men do not mourn her. Candy calls her a "God damn tramp" for ruining the dream, and Curley thinks only of revenge. Her death matters to them

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only for what it costs them.

Structurally, her death sets the ending in motion. It ends the dream for Candy, George and Lennie, provokes Curley's lynch party and leads George to shoot Lennie by the pool. Steinbeck, writing in 1937 about the hardships of itinerant workers, uses her to show that women suffered from the same loneliness and broken dreams as the men, but with even less freedom to escape. For these reasons, Curley's wife is not just a cause of the tragedy but one of its victims, and I find her the most important character in the novel.

6 I agree only partly that Koro Apirana is a successful tribal leader. Ihimaera presents him as a devoted guardian of Maori language, customs and sacred knowledge at a time when these were under real threat, and in that sense he serves his people well. However, for most of the novel his leadership fails because he cannot see beyond the traditional belief that only a male descendant can lead. He becomes truly successful only at the end, when he learns that the future of the tribe lies in his granddaughter, Kahu. The novel therefore suggests that a great leader must be able to change, not simply preserve.

Koro's strengths come from his deep commitment to his culture. Ihimaera wrote The Whale Rider in 1987, during a period of Maori cultural renewal, when communities were working to save te reo Maori after decades in which it had been discouraged in schools. Koro reflects this movement. He helps to establish the Kohanga Reo, the "language nests", and teaches the boys of Whangara chants, genealogy and the old ways in his school on the marae. He is the guardian of "sacred knowledge", and through him Ihimaera shows how much the tribe depends on someone to remember. He is also deeply attuned to the natural world: his

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knowledge of the fishing grounds and his sense that "Something's going on" when the whales approach suggest an instinctive authority. When the herd strands at Wainui, it is Koro who understands that the whales are a sign for his people, and he speaks of the oneness the world once had between humans and nature. In these moments, he is a leader of real spiritual stature.

Yet Ihimaera also presents Koro as a man whose love of tradition becomes rigid and wounding. From the moment Kahu is born, he is angry that Porourangi's first child is a girl, and he refuses to have anything to do with her. His hope that Porourangi will have "a son next time" shows how completely he identifies leadership with the male line, reflecting the patrilineal structure of the Paikea legend from which the tribe descends. When Kahu tries to join his lessons, he sends her away with "Go away", and Ihimaera's use of the verb "thunder" makes him sound like a god rather than a grandfather. His justification, "Them's the rules", is revealing: he follows the rules without asking whether they still serve his people. A successful leader recognises talent wherever it appears, but Koro is blind to the child who clearly loves him most and understands his teaching best.

His failure is clearest in the episode of the carved stone. Koro throws the stone into the sea and challenges the boys to bring it back, believing that the one who succeeds will be the next leader. None of them can, and he falls into despair, convinced that the line will end with him. Ironically, it is Kahu who later dives and finds the stone, although Nanny Flowers keeps this secret. The structure is deliberately ironic: the leader of the tribe is searching for a sign that is already in front of him. His absence from Kahu's school ceremony, where she has prepared a speech in his honour, shows how his obsession harms his family as well as his judgement.

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Ihimaera also uses other characters to question Koro's authority. Nanny Flowers, who descends from the strong female ancestor Muriwai, constantly challenges him, and the family's nickname for him, the "old Paka", gently mocks his stubbornness. There is humour in the description of him as a "bald man with no teeth", which deflates his grandeur. Porourangi's letters about Raukawa show that the younger generation sees the need to prepare Maori youth for "new challenges and the new technology", while Koro is anxious about change. A modern leader, Ihimaera implies, must balance the old and the new, and Koro struggles to do so.

The climax both exposes and redeems him. When the ancient bull whale strands at Whangara, Koro leads the attempt to return it to the sea, believing that the tribe's fate is bound to the whale. His efforts fail, and it is Kahu who climbs onto the whale's back and leads it out to sea, fulfilling the Paikea legend in female form. Afterwards, Koro goes to her hospital bed and asks "the Gods to forgive him", and when she wakes he tells her that he loves her. The image of him cradling her while hiding his tears from the "big ears" outside shows a leader humbled into wisdom. In this moment, he finally becomes the successful leader the tribe needs, because he accepts that salvation can come through a girl.

Overall, Koro is successful as a keeper of tradition but unsuccessful, for most of the novel, as a leader who can read the future. Ihimaera's message, shaped by the changing role of women and the revival of Maori identity in the 1980s, is that tradition survives only when it is allowed to grow. Koro's greatest achievement is not anything he does as chief, but his final willingness to recognise that he was wrong.

7 Family is at the heart of The Whale Rider, but Ihimaera presents it as much more

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than a household. For the Maori of Whangara, family means whakapapa, the line of descent that connects the living to their ancestors, to the land and even to the whales. The novel begins with a family divided by grief, distance and Koro Apirana's rejection of his granddaughter, and it ends with a family reunited through Kahu's courage. Ihimaera mirrors this human story in the herd of whales, so that the importance of family becomes a question of the survival of a whole people.

The family is fractured from the start. When Porourangi tells his grandparents that his first child is a girl, Nanny Flowers is overjoyed, but Koro is so disappointed that he "jumped into the rowboat and made out to sea". This comic but painful image shows that Koro values his granddaughter only as a failed heir. His belief that leadership must pass through the male line reflects the traditional patrilineal structure of the tribe and the legend of Paikea, from whom they descend. Even naming the baby causes conflict: she is named Kahutia Te Rangi, after the ancestor himself, which angers Koro because he believes the name belongs to a male heir. Ihimaera suggests that a family obsessed with the past can fail to value the person in front of it.

Further loss scatters the family. Rehua dies when Kahu is a baby, and Kahu goes to live with her mother's family while Porourangi grieves and later remarries. Kahu does not return permanently to Whangara until she is six. Rawiri, the narrator, leaves too, travelling to Australia and then to Papua New Guinea. Ihimaera uses his travels to explore Maori identity away from home: in Australia he encounters prejudice, and in Papua New Guinea he sees another family's ties to its land. Eventually he realises he must go home. In the 1980s, many young Maori moved to cities or abroad, and Ihimaera, writing in 1987 during a revival of Maori culture, suggests that family and place are what give identity its meaning.

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Nanny Flowers is the force that holds the family together. She insists on keeping Kahu's afterbirth so that it can be buried at the marae, and she and Rawiri carry out the ritual, binding Kahu to the land of her ancestors. This custom shows that, for Maori, belonging to a family is also belonging to a place. Nanny constantly defends Kahu against Koro, reminding him that she herself descends from Muriwai, a woman ancestor who, in tribal tradition, dared to take on a man's role to save a canoe. Her nickname for Koro, "Paka", and her repeated threats to leave him are comic, yet beneath them is a strong, loving marriage. She also keeps the secret of the carved stone that Kahu retrieves from the sea, trusting that the right moment will come. Through Nanny, Ihimaera shows that women have always carried the family's strength, even when men have claimed its leadership.

Kahu's love for Koro is the emotional centre of the novel. Despite his coldness, she adores him, listens to his teaching in secret and longs for his approval. Her speech at the school ceremony, which honours her grandfather, is painful because Koro does not come, and Porourangi cannot bring himself to tell her that he will not attend. Ihimaera makes the reader feel how much damage a family's rejection can do, but also how Kahu's loyalty refuses to give up. Her dive for the stone proves her worth, yet she does not tell Koro. She wants to be loved, not merely recognised.

The whales provide a parallel family. Ihimaera anthropomorphises the herd, describing the ancient bull whale as a leader burdened by memory and by his love for his long-dead master, Paikea. The female whales care for him, and the herd mourns calves lost to nuclear testing in the Pacific, a real threat in the 1970s and 1980s that links the whales' suffering to human damage to the ocean. When two hundred whales strand at Wainui, the tribe's failure to save them suggests that

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the bond between people and nature has been broken. The bull whale, like Koro, is a leader who fears for his line, which makes the parallel especially striking.

The climax brings both families together. When the bull whale strands at Whangara and Koro cannot return it to the sea, Kahu climbs onto its back and leads it, and the herd, back into the ocean. In doing so, she saves the whales' family and her own. Koro's prayer at her hospital bed, asking "the Gods to forgive him", and his declaration that he loves her show that he has finally accepted her. The image of the old man cradling Kahu restores the "oneness" that was missing from the family at the start.

Overall, Ihimaera presents family as essential to identity, culture and survival. A family that rejects its members, as Koro does, weakens its people; a family that embraces them, as Nanny and finally Koro do, gives the tribe a future. By making a girl the saviour of both families, Ihimaera also suggests that the Maori family of the future must value its daughters as much as its sons.

8 Misunderstanding is arguably the engine of The Joy Luck Club. Tan builds the novel from sixteen stories told by four Chinese immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, and the fact that these voices rarely speak directly to one another is itself a form of misunderstanding: each generation explains itself to the reader rather than to the people who most need to hear it. Yet I would argue that Tan presents misunderstanding not as a final failure but as a gap caused by language, culture and history, a gap that love can eventually cross.

Tan signals this in the opening vignette, "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away". The woman who brings a swan to America dreams of a daughter who will understand

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her, yet the swan is confiscated and she is left with a single feather, which she hopes to give her daughter "in perfect American English". The daughter she actually raises "swallowed more Coca-Cola than sorrow", a witty image that suggests American comfort has made the mother's suffering unreadable to her child. The feather becomes a symbol of everything the mothers want to pass on but cannot translate. This reflects the real context of Chinese women who fled war and upheaval in the 1930s and 1940s, often arriving after the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943, carrying memories they had no shared language to explain.

The most painful example is Jing-mei and Suyuan in "Two Kinds". Suyuan believes that in America "you could be anything you wanted", and her drive to make Jing-mei a prodigy comes from hope, not cruelty. Jing-mei, however, hears only pressure and the accusation that she is not good enough. Their argument reaches a terrible climax when Suyuan insists there are "Only two kinds of daughters" and Jing-mei retaliates by wishing she were dead "Like them", referring to the twin babies her mother left in China. Tan shows how misunderstanding turns words into weapons: Jing-mei uses her mother's deepest grief without understanding it. It is only years later, when she plays the paired pieces "Pleading Child" and "Perfectly Contented", that she realises they are "two halves of the same song", a quiet structural hint that mother and daughter were never as opposed as they seemed. Context makes this more poignant, since Tan has spoken of arguing with her own mother, Daisy, who wanted her to become a doctor and concert pianist, when Tan chose to study English and linguistics instead.

Misunderstanding is also shaped by pride and competition. Lindo Jong teaches Waverly "the art of invisible strength" and tells her that the "Strongest wind cannot be seen", yet when Waverly becomes a chess champion she reads her

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mother's boasting as theft of her achievement, shouting "Why do you have to use me to show off?" Lindo's silent withdrawal leaves Waverly imagining her mother as a formidable opponent across a chessboard. Years later, in "Four Directions", Waverly fears Lindo will destroy her engagement to Rich, but she discovers that her mother is simply an old woman waiting to be let in. Tan seems to suggest that daughters often project their own fears onto their mothers. Lindo's wish that her children have "American circumstances and Chinese character" captures the cultural double bind: the very independence the mothers want for their daughters makes those daughters unable to read Chinese ways of expressing love, such as criticism of food or indirect praise.

The rivalry between Jing-mei and Waverly, fuelled by their mothers' bragging, surfaces at the crab dinner in "Best Quality". During the meal Suyuan seems to side with Waverly against her own daughter, yet afterwards she reveals that she noticed Jing-mei quietly choosing the worst crab so that others could have the best, and she praises her daughter's heart. What Jing-mei had read as humiliation was concealing pride. The jade pendant Suyuan gives her, which she first dismisses as ugly, becomes a symbol of a love Jing-mei only understands after her mother's death.

Silence produces equally damaging misunderstandings. Ying-ying St Clair, whose spirit was broken by a cruel first marriage in China, becomes ghost-like in America, and her daughter Lena cannot interpret her mother's fears. When Ying-ying predicts that the wobbly table in Lena's house will cause the vase to fall, Lena dismisses her, but the vase breaks, and the moment exposes how Lena's marriage to Harold, with its petty shared accounts, is also falling apart. Similarly, An-mei cannot understand why Rose tells her troubles to a "psyche-atricks" rather than her own mother. An-mei's mispronunciation is comic but also revealing: for a

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woman raised in a patriarchal culture where her own mother, a concubine, had no voice, a stranger replacing family seems a betrayal. Tan uses language barriers here to show that misunderstandings are not about intelligence but about different worlds of meaning.

Finally, Tan structures the novel so that misunderstanding is resolved, at least partly. Jing-mei learns at the mahjong table that the aunties fear their daughters will forget them, and she travels to China to meet the half-sisters Suyuan abandoned near Kweilin, a story Jing-mei had long treated as a fairy tale. When she sees her sisters, she concludes, "Together we look like our mother." This mirrors Tan's own journey to China in 1987, when she met her half-sisters. The ending suggests that understanding comes when the daughters stop seeing their mothers as embarrassing foreigners and start seeing their histories as their own.

In conclusion, misunderstanding is significant because it gives the novel both its conflict and its emotional power. Tan shows how war, migration, patriarchy and language create barriers between generations, yet the circular journey from the swan feather to the reunion in China implies that those barriers, however painful, can be crossed.

9

Rose Hsu Jordan is perhaps the most passive of the four daughters in The Joy Luck Club, a woman who lets others make her choices for her. Through her, Tan explores what happens when a daughter caught between Chinese and American expectations loses her own voice. However, Rose's story is ultimately one of recovery: by the end she learns, partly through her mother An-mei, to speak up, so her character becomes Tan's clearest argument that women grow strong only when they refuse to be silenced.

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Tan introduces Rose through guilt. In "Half and Half" Rose recalls the family trip to the beach when she was asked to watch her four-year-old brother, Bing, who drowned while she was distracted. Although nobody blames her, Rose carries the belief that she failed in her one responsibility, and this seems to shape her reluctance to make decisions as an adult. The title is significant: Rose sees herself as divided, half Chinese and half American, but also half responsible and half innocent. Tan contrasts Rose's fatalism with An-mei's "nengkan", her faith that she could change fate. An-mei prays and even throws her precious sapphire ring into the sea as an offering, refusing to accept that Bing is gone. The image that closes the chapter is quietly devastating: the white Bible is later wedged under the short leg of the kitchen table, faith reduced to a prop. Rose concludes that her mother lost her faith that day, and her own sense that nothing can be controlled grows from that loss.

Rose's marriage to Ted Jordan is presented as the adult form of this passivity. She is drawn to Ted because he is so unlike the Chinese boys she has dated, and his confidence makes her feel rescued. The picnic scene with Ted's mother exposes the racism of 1960s and 1970s America: Mrs Jordan assumes Rose is Vietnamese and warns that Ted's future as a doctor would be harmed by marrying someone from a minority, while insisting she is not "against minorities". This mixture of politeness and prejudice reflects the casual racism faced by Asian Americans, often seen as permanent foreigners. Interestingly, it is this prejudice that briefly brings Ted and Rose together, and Rose admits she liked the roles it gave them, with Ted as hero and herself as victim. Tan suggests that Rose's identity becomes dependent on being saved.

In marriage this becomes damaging. Ted makes every decision, from holidays to

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furniture, until he grows tired of her inability to choose and demands that she decide. After a malpractice suit damages his confidence, he turns on her and eventually asks for a divorce, having found another woman. Rose collapses into indecision, sleeping for days and telling her psychiatrist and friends conflicting stories. Tan's portrayal of Rose's depression shows how female subservience, which An-mei experienced in China, can reappear in a modern American suburb. The context is pointed: although the novel was published in 1989, after second-wave feminism had argued for women's independence, Rose has absorbed a role that is in many ways as limiting as her grandmother's.

An-mei's response is central to Rose's development. She is hurt that Rose confides in a "psyche-atricks" rather than her mother, and her mispronunciation reveals her distrust of strangers handling family pain. More importantly, she insists Rose must speak for herself. In "Without Wood" Rose remembers her mother's warning that a girl is like a young tree who must stand tall and listen to her mother, because if she bends to listen to other people she will "grow crooked and weak". As a child Rose found this easier to ignore than to obey, choosing to listen to the competing American voices around her. The tree image gives the chapter its title, as An-mei believes her daughter lacks the "wood", the backbone, of a strong character. Tan's use of this Chinese elemental belief roots Rose's crisis in her mother's culture while suggesting that culture holds the answer.

The structure of Rose's story also links her to An-mei's own past in "Magpies", where An-mei watched her mother, a concubine, destroyed by a household that gave her no power, until her suicide gave An-mei a voice. An-mei reflects that she was raised the Chinese way, taught to "desire nothing" and swallow other people's misery, until her mother's death taught her to shout. By placing these stories side by side, Tan makes Rose's silence the legacy of generations of women in a

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patriarchal society, and her eventual resistance a break in that pattern.

That break arrives when Ted sends the divorce papers with a cheque and wants the house. Rose refuses to sign, telling him that she is staying and that he cannot simply pull her out of his life and throw her away. His shocked reaction shows how far she has changed, and she reflects, "The power of my words was that strong." The proud, simple sentence contrasts sharply with the earlier image of Rose sleeping through her days. Finally, she dreams of Old Mr Chou, the guardian of the door to dreams whom she feared as a child, and her mother appears in the dream tending the garden. The overgrown garden Rose has neglected during her collapse can now be cared for, suggesting renewal.

Overall, Rose is a complex character whose timidity is rooted in guilt, racism and inherited female subservience, but Tan does not leave her as a victim. Her journey from silence to speech reflects the novel's wider message that daughters must listen to their mothers' stories in order to find their own voices.

10

Conflict runs through every level of Things Fall Apart, from the private war inside Okonkwo's mind to the violent collision between Igbo society and British colonialism. Achebe's achievement, I would argue, is to show that the final, destructive conflict with the colonisers succeeds partly because of the smaller conflicts already present within Umuofia. Writing in 1958, two years before Nigerian independence, Achebe wanted to present a complex African society with its own tensions and values, answering European writers such as Joseph Conrad who had portrayed Africa as a place without history.

The novel opens with Okonkwo's fame resting on physical conflict: he threw

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Amalinze the Cat in a wrestling match and is "well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond". Yet Achebe quickly reveals that this outward strength comes from inner conflict. Okonkwo is ashamed of his father, Unoka, a gentle debtor who loved music and died without a title, and so "His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness." This internal battle explains his harshness towards his wives and children, especially his son Nwoye, whom he beats for seeming lazy and too much like his grandfather. Achebe uses Okonkwo to explore Igbo ideas of masculinity, in which titles and yams were measures of a man's worth, but he suggests that Okonkwo misreads his culture by valuing aggression above everything else.

Conflict between villages is also central, but Achebe shows that Umuofia has ways of managing it. When a Umuofian woman is killed in Mbaino, war is avoided because Mbaino hands over a young virgin and a boy, Ikemefuna, as compensation. Similarly, the egwugwu, masked ancestral spirits, settle disputes publicly, as when they hear the case of Uzowulu, who beats his wife. This scene suggests that the clan values justice and balance, and it challenges the colonial stereotype of "primitive" disorder. Even religious rules such as the Week of Peace exist to restrain violence, which makes Okonkwo's beating of Ojiugo during that sacred week a serious offence against the earth goddess, Ani.

The most tragic conflict within the clan is the killing of Ikemefuna. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves decrees his death, and Ogbuefi Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to take part because the boy calls him father. Okonkwo, "afraid of being thought weak", cuts him down anyway, and Ikemefuna's cry "My father, they have killed me!" is one of the most painful moments in the novel. Here the conflict between Okonkwo's fear and his affection is resolved in the worst possible way. Obierika's criticism, "What you have done will not please the Earth", shows that not everyone

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in Umuofia shares Okonkwo's view, and Nwoye's horror plants the seed of his later rebellion. Achebe suggests that some customs, like the casting away of twins, already create doubts that the missionaries will later exploit.

Okonkwo's accidental shooting of Ezeudu's son at the funeral leads to seven years of exile in Mbanta, his mother's village. This is a female crime, and the punishment reflects the clan's attempt to restore balance rather than to take revenge. Uchendu's lesson that "Mother is Supreme" challenges Okonkwo's disdain for anything feminine, but he never fully accepts it, and the inner conflict remains.

During the exile, the larger conflict arrives. Obierika brings news that Abame has been wiped out after its people killed a white man on a bicycle, an episode based on the real massacre at Ahiara in 1905. The missionaries then come to Mbanta and Umuofia, and the church attracts the outcasts, the osu and the mothers of twins, as well as Nwoye, who is drawn by the poetry of the hymns and renamed Isaac. Achebe presents this as a conflict of values rather than simply of weapons. The tolerant Mr Brown discusses religion with Akunna and avoids confrontation, but his successor, the rigid Mr Smith, sees everything in black and white. When the zealous convert Enoch unmasks an egwugwu, the clan burns his compound and destroys the church, and the District Commissioner tricks and imprisons six leaders, including Okonkwo, until a fine is paid. The humiliation of having their heads shaved shows that colonial power works through law and courts as much as through guns.

Obierika's image that the white man "has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart" explains why the clan cannot resist. Conflict now divides Umuofia from within, brother against brother. Achebe's title, from

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Yeats's poem "The Second Coming", in which "Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world", reflects this collapse of the centre.

The climax brings conflict back to Okonkwo alone. At the meeting he beheads the head messenger, but instead of rising to war the men break into "tumult instead of action" and ask why he did it. Realising Umuofia will not fight, Okonkwo hangs himself, an abomination which means his own clansmen cannot touch his body. The novel ends with the District Commissioner planning a book called "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger", in which Okonkwo might fill a reasonable paragraph. This bitter irony exposes how colonial writing turned real human conflict into a story of civilising "primitives".

In conclusion, conflict in Things Fall Apart is personal, social and cultural. Achebe shows that Igbo society had sophisticated ways of resolving disputes, but that inner conflicts, rigid masculinity and the exclusion of the vulnerable left it open to division. The colonial conflict is therefore tragic not only because it is violent, but because it turns the clan against itself.

11 It might seem strange to choose Okonkwo as the character who deserves most sympathy, since he beats his wives, terrifies his children and kills the boy who calls him father. Ikemefuna and Nwoye are more obviously innocent victims. However, I have most sympathy for Okonkwo because Achebe presents him as a tragic hero whose flaws grow out of fear and shame, and whose world is destroyed around him by forces he cannot control. His suffering is greater because, unlike Ikemefuna, he lives long enough to watch everything he values fall apart.

From the start, Achebe invites us to understand the roots of Okonkwo's harshness.

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His father, Unoka, was a gentle, debt-ridden man who took no title and was called an "agbala", a word for a woman and for a man without a title. In Igbo society, where status came from titles, yams and achievement, this was deep humiliation, and Okonkwo grew up hearing it. Achebe tells us that "His whole life was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness." This is a key moment for the reader's sympathy: Okonkwo's violence is not simply cruelty but a desperate attempt never to be like his father. He even builds his wealth from nothing, borrowing seed yams from Nwakibie and surviving a disastrous harvest, which shows real courage and determination.

Achebe also reveals a hidden tenderness in Okonkwo that he is ashamed to show. He grows fond of Ikemefuna, but "Okonkwo never showed any emotion openly, unless it be the emotion of anger." When Ezinma is taken by Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, to the Oracle's cave, Okonkwo secretly follows and returns again and again through the night, terrified for his daughter. His wish that Ezinma "should have been a boy" may sound dismissive, yet it is his way of expressing how much he values her. These moments make us pity a man trapped inside a rigid idea of masculinity that forbids him to love openly.

Of course, the killing of Ikemefuna is the point where sympathy is hardest to give. The Oracle decrees the boy's death, and although Ezeudu warns him not to take part, Okonkwo strikes the fatal blow because "He was afraid of being thought weak." Ikemefuna's cry, "My father, they have killed me!", makes the reader suffer for him, and he is perhaps the novel's purest victim, a boy handed over by Mbaino to settle a dispute he had nothing to do with. Yet Achebe immediately shows Okonkwo unable to eat or sleep for days, asking himself when he became "a shivering old woman". His guilt is real, and his tragedy is that his fear of weakness makes him commit an act that haunts him and drives Nwoye away.

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Okonkwo's misfortunes then multiply in ways that feel unjust. When his gun explodes at Ezeudu's funeral and kills the dead man's son, the accident is classed as a female crime, and he must flee with his family to Mbanta for seven years. His compound is destroyed according to custom. Achebe presents the clan's justice fairly, but we feel Okonkwo's loss: years of work are wiped out in a moment, and he describes himself as a man whose personal god, his chi, has not been made for great things. In exile he loses his place just as the missionaries arrive.

The greatest blow is Nwoye's conversion to Christianity. Okonkwo sees it as a curse and wonders why he should have produced such a son, fearing that his ancestors will be abandoned. While we sympathise with Nwoye too, who was frightened by his father's violence and drawn to the gentle hymns of the church, Achebe makes us feel the pain of a father whose son rejects not only him but his whole culture. This mirrors the wider context of colonial Nigeria, where missionaries drew young people and outcasts away from traditional beliefs, dividing families.

When Okonkwo returns to Umuofia, he finds a changed world, with a church, a court and government messengers. His dream of a triumphant return is lost, and the clan no longer seems to share his warrior values. After the destruction of the church, he and other leaders are tricked by the District Commissioner, imprisoned, beaten and shaved. At the final meeting he kills the head messenger, but the clan breaks "into tumult instead of action", and he realises Umuofia will not go to war. His suicide is an abomination in Igbo belief, and his own people cannot even bury him. Obierika's angry words to the Commissioner that Okonkwo was "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" and that he has been driven to kill himself give the novel its most moving defence of him.

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Achebe ends with the Commissioner planning to reduce Okonkwo to a paragraph in a book on "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger". This final irony is perhaps what makes him most sympathetic. Achebe, writing in 1958 to restore dignity to precolonial Igbo life, shows that colonial history would never understand Okonkwo's greatness or his pain. Although Ikemefuna and Nwoye suffer innocently, Okonkwo's fall is the fullest tragedy, because it is both caused by his own flaws and sealed by the collapse of an entire civilisation.