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 Booklet with your answer booklet.

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Answer TWO questions:

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

	Page
SECTION A: Unseen Poetry	4
SECTION B: Modern Prose	
To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee	6
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.

Power Failure

Somewhere the storm has severed* a cable, and we
are in darkness. Emergency lines are busy
and the night screams *This will last some time*

so we scrabble in the cupboards for candles,
woollen jumpers, settle down to weather it out.
I try to read by soft flame but it's no use:

words flicker in and out of shadows at random
and, in any case, the mounting screech of wind
delivering echoes of distant crashes, shatters

my concentration, crams my head with disasters.
I prowl the floor, snatch aside the curtain,
peer into shifting blackness to check the car

is still there. You smile at my agitation
and cross to the kitchen for a glass of water.
The sultry* dance of the candle's flame

abandons your face, but as you bend once more
into the spill of light, you are revealed again
in fragments, with a fresh perspective:

a new angle to your jaw, golden sheen
on your cheek, the red in the brown of your hair.
These things about you I haven't seen before.

Ten years are built around us, but each
ordeal we face you surprise me, as new facets
of you, new depths, rise to the light.

Andrew Forster (2007)

**has severed* – has cut or has broken
**sultry* – passionate, sensual or attractive

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1 Explore how the writer presents the experience of a power failure 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 Mrs Dubose in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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

(Total for Question 2 = 40 marks)

OR

3 'I said I would like it very much, which was a lie, but one must lie in certain circumstances…' (Scout)

In what ways are lies significant 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 Explore the theme of love in *Of Mice and Men*.

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

(Total for Question 4 = 40 marks)

OR

5 'Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys.'

Discuss the character of Curley 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 In what ways are hopes and fears for the future significant in the novel?

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

(Total for Question 6 = 40 marks)

OR

7 Discuss the relationship between Kahu and Nanny (Nani) Flowers 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 Explore the significance of Suyuan Woo in *The Joy Luck Club*.

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

(Total for Question 8 = 40 marks)

OR

9 In an interview, Amy Tan said: 'There was something about this country [China] that I belonged to'.

How is the theme of belonging to places or people important in the novel?

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

(Total for Question 9 = 40 marks)

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

EITHER

10 Explore the relationship between Okonkwo and Obierika in *Things Fall Apart*.

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

(Total for Question 10 = 40 marks)

OR

11 'You sound as if you question the authority and decision of the Oracle…' (Okonkwo)

Examine the importance of authority 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:

Source: 'Power Failure', Andrew Forster, Flambard Press 2007

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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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TOTAL FOR SECTION A = 20 MARKS

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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

Forster presents a power failure as an experience that begins in threat and ends in revelation. The storm outside is violent and noisy, and the speaker's response is restless anxiety, yet the darkness it causes becomes the means by which he sees his partner afresh. The poem moves from what is lost when the lights go out to what is unexpectedly gained.

The opening establishes danger through sound. The sibilance of "Somewhere the storm has severed" hisses like wind, and the violent verb "severed" makes the storm sound almost deliberate, as if it has attacked the house. The personified night "screams This will last some time", and the absence of speech marks makes the storm's voice intrude directly into the speaker's thoughts, suggesting how completely it dominates the scene. Even the enjambment of "and we / are in darkness" leaves the couple suspended at the line break, plunging the reader into blackness with them.

Forster then captures the practical, slightly comic reality of a blackout. The couple "scrabble in the cupboards for candles", where the harsh verb and the alliteration convey clumsy haste in the dark. Yet the idiom "settle down to weather it out" introduces a calmer, domestic patience, and the pun on "weather" quietly reminds us that the storm is what they must endure. Even reading fails as "words flicker in and out of shadows". Sound returns in "the mounting screech of wind", and the onomatopoeia of "crashes" and "shatters" is reinforced by enjambment across the stanza break, so that "shatters / my concentration" breaks the line just as his thoughts are broken.

Question number

The speaker's agitation is shown through a sequence of predatory verbs: "I prowl the floor, snatch aside the curtain, / peer into shifting blackness". He resembles a caged animal, and the anxious checking that "the car / is still there" is almost bathetic, revealing how a small worry swells in the dark. The turning point arrives with the simple sentence "You smile at my agitation". The partner's calm contrasts with his panic, and from here the focus shifts from the storm to her.

Light becomes gentle and sensual. The "sultry dance of the candle's flame" personifies the candle as a dancer, and the glossed adjective "sultry" gives the moment warmth and attraction. The candle "abandons your face", but she is "revealed again / in fragments, with a fresh perspective". Forster's colour imagery, "golden sheen" and "the red in the brown of your hair", brings rich warmth into a poem that has been dominated by "blackness". The end-stopped, plain line "These things about you I haven't seen before" stands out in a poem full of enjambment, giving the discovery a quiet certainty.

Structurally, the eight three-line stanzas of free verse keep a steady shape while sentences spill across them, mirroring a calm framework holding restless feeling. The final stanza widens out from one night to a whole relationship: "Ten years are built around us", a metaphor that presents their marriage as a house sturdier than the one under attack. The power failure becomes one "ordeal" among many, and the closing image of "new depths" that "rise to the light" reverses the opening darkness. Forster suggests that crisis, rather than diminishing us, can illuminate the people we love.

2 Mrs Dubose is one of the most unsettling characters in To Kill a Mockingbird because Lee refuses to let the reader settle on a single judgement of her. Through

Question number

Scout's eyes she first appears as a monster, a bitter, racist old woman who embodies the worst of Maycomb. Yet by the end of Part One, Atticus calls her "the bravest person I ever knew". Lee uses her to teach Jem and Scout, and the reader, that a person can hold vile views and still possess genuine courage, and that understanding someone is not the same as excusing them.

Scout's introduction is coloured by a child's fear. She tells us that "Jem and I hated her", and her account of Mrs Dubose is almost grotesque: an invalid in a wheelchair on her porch, wrapped in shawls, with saliva collecting on her lips. The rumour that she keeps a Confederate pistol hidden among her wraps turns her into a figure out of a ghost story, rather like the children's early image of Boo Radley. Lee's choice of a child narrator allows us to experience Mrs Dubose as frightening and hateful before the adult perspective of the older Scout, and of Atticus, complicates that view. She is the first neighbour whose true nature the children misjudge, preparing for Boo's final appearance.

Her cruelty, however, is very real. She attacks Scout's appearance and behaviour, scolding her for wearing overalls instead of a dress and camisole, and she predicts a bad end for a girl who does not behave like a lady. Her attacks on Atticus are worse. As the Tom Robinson trial approaches, she insults him for defending a black man, using a racial slur, and claims he is no better than the people he works for. Jem's response, cutting the tops off every one of her camellia bushes, is the first time his self-control breaks under the pressure of the town's hostility.

In this way Mrs Dubose is a voice of the old South. Her views on race, her demand that girls be proper Southern ladies, and the Confederate pistol all link her to the traditions of the antebellum and post-war South, and to the ideal of Southern womanhood that Aunt Alexandra later tries to impose on Scout. In 1930s

Question number

Alabama, under Jim Crow segregation, her opinions would not have been eccentric but typical of many respectable white citizens, which is what makes them chilling. Lee, writing as the civil rights movement challenged segregation, presents her as the past refusing to die. The camellias may carry symbolic weight too: the flower has been associated with Alabama and with the white supremacist Knights of the White Camellia, so Jem's destruction of them could be read as an attack on the racist order she represents, even though he does not understand it that way.

The punishment Atticus enforces is revealing about him and about the novel's moral code. Atticus insists Jem make amends, so he reads Ivanhoe to her every afternoon for a month. Atticus had already told him to hold his head high and be a gentleman whatever she said, which reflects his belief that you must not answer hatred with hatred. The choice of Ivanhoe is significant: Walter Scott's romance of knights, chivalry and a divided society echoes Maycomb's own nostalgia for a romanticised past, and its themes of prejudice and an unjust trial anticipate what is to come. The children notice that the alarm clock rings a little later each day, but do not understand why.

The twist comes after her death. Atticus reveals that she was a morphine addict, taking it as a painkiller for years, and that she was determined to break free of it before she died. The reading sessions were her way of distracting herself through withdrawal, and she succeeded. Atticus tells Jem that he wanted him to see "what real courage is, instead of getting the idea that courage is a man with a gun in his hand". This line is central to the novel's structure. In the previous chapter Atticus has shot the rabid dog, and the children have been dazzled by "One-Shot Finch". Lee deliberately places Mrs Dubose's story next to this to redefine courage as moral endurance: knowing you are beaten before you begin, but beginning anyway. This is exactly what Atticus is about to do in defending Tom Robinson.

Question number

Lee does not ask us to forgive Mrs Dubose's racism. Atticus acknowledges that she had her own views, very different from his, yet still calls her "a great lady". The candy box she leaves Jem, containing a single white camellia, is deliberately ambiguous. Jem, enraged, throws it into the fire, perhaps because he cannot accept that someone so hateful could deserve admiration. Later we see him fingering the petals, which suggests he is beginning to grasp the complexity Atticus is teaching. The white camellia could be a gesture of forgiveness, a final taunt, or simply a sign of respect between two people who have both shown courage.

Ultimately, Mrs Dubose embodies the moral challenge at the heart of the novel. Atticus tells Scout that you never really understand a person until you consider things from their point of view, and Mrs Dubose tests that principle to its limit. Lee uses her to show that the South's prejudices lived in people who could also be brave, proud and dignified, and that the battle against racism would have to be fought against neighbours, not cartoon villains. In closing Part One with her death, Lee ensures that the children enter the trial with a deeper, more adult idea of what courage costs.

3

Lies run through To Kill a Mockingbird at every level, from a child's small politeness to the perjury that sends an innocent man to his death. Lee uses them to explore a central question of the novel: when does a lie protect, and when does it destroy? Scout's remark that "one must lie in certain circumstances" seems trivial at first, but by the end of the novel the reader sees that the morality of a lie depends entirely on whom it serves. In a society built on the great lie of white superiority, Lee suggests that truth is dangerous, and that even good people may

Question number

have to bend it.

Scout's lie to Aunt Alexandra is the gentlest example. When Alexandra arrives to live with the Finches, Scout says she would like it very much, which she admits was untrue, and she adds that one must lie when one cannot do anything about the situation. The adult narrator's dry tone makes this comic, but Scout is learning that Maycomb's manners require pretence. Alexandra herself represents this world of genteel appearances: her missionary circle later pities the distant Mrunas while speaking with contempt about the black people of Maycomb, a hypocrisy Scout observes without fully understanding. Through such moments Lee suggests that polite society in the 1930s South was held together by small lies that hid much uglier truths.

The children's own fibs are part of their growing up. After the raid on the Radley yard, when Jem loses his trousers on the fence, Dill invents a story about playing strip poker, an excuse which nearly lands them in more trouble. Dill is the novel's great storyteller: he boasts about his father and, when he runs away from home, spins a melodramatic tale of being bound in chains and escaping. Lee hints that his lies cover real pain, and the truth he finally tells Scout, that his parents do not really want him around, is more moving than any of his inventions. Dill is often said to be based on Lee's childhood friend Truman Capote, and the link reinforces the idea that storytelling can be a way of surviving neglect. Ironically, it is Dill who weeps at the trial at Mr Gilmer's contempt for Tom.

Some lies in the novel are acts of control. Nathan Radley fills the knothole in the oak with cement and tells Jem the tree is dying, but Atticus observes that the tree looks perfectly healthy. The lie cuts off Boo's only means of communication with the children, and Jem's silent tears show that he understands what has been

Question number

taken away. Here a lie is used to keep someone isolated, which links Boo to the novel's other mockingbird, Tom.

The most destructive lies are told by the Ewells. Bob Ewell swears that he saw Tom Robinson attacking Mayella, and Mayella accuses Tom of rape. Atticus's cross-examination exposes the lie: the injuries to Mayella's face were on the right side, most likely inflicted by a left-handed man, and Bob Ewell writes with his left hand, whereas Tom's left arm is crippled. The real crime, as Atticus explains, is that Mayella kissed a black man, and in doing so she broke a rigid code of her society. Her lie is a desperate attempt to save herself from that shame and from her violent father. Lee makes us almost pity her, even as her lie condemns Tom. The jury's verdict shows that in Maycomb a white person's lie outweighs a black man's truth. Atticus names what lies beneath this in his closing speech, condemning the assumption that all black people lie, and showing that the entire system of Jim Crow rests on a falsehood about race.

This reflects the historical context closely. Lee was writing in the late 1950s, but she set the novel in the 1930s, the decade of the Scottsboro trials, when nine young black men in Alabama were falsely accused of raping two white women and convicted by all-white juries despite clear evidence of their innocence. Under segregation, the word of a white woman against a black man could be fatal, and lynching was a constant threat, as the mob at the jail makes clear. Tom's death, shot while trying to escape prison, is the final consequence of a lie the whole town chose to believe.

Against these lies, Lee sets a few that are presented as moral. Dolphus Raymond pretends to be a drunk, carrying Coca-Cola in a paper bag, so that the town has an explanation for his choice to live with black people. He tells the children that

Question number

he gives people a reason, suggesting that Maycomb prefers a comfortable lie to an uncomfortable truth. Even Atticus may soften the truth when he assures the children the Klan is gone. Most significantly, at the end Heck Tate insists that Bob Ewell fell on his own knife, deliberately hiding the fact that Boo Radley killed him to save the children. Atticus at first resists, believing that Jem must face the law. When he accepts Tate's version, he shows that justice and literal truth are not always the same. Scout understands: exposing Boo would be like shooting a mockingbird.

The pairing of the Ewells' lie and Heck Tate's lie is the key to Lee's design. Both lies concern the same man, Bob Ewell, but one destroys an innocent person and the other protects one. Lee suggests that in an unjust society, where the law has already failed Tom Robinson, moral judgement matters more than rigid rules. Lies are therefore significant not simply as plot devices but as a measure of character: Lee asks the reader, like Scout, to look beneath what people say to the purpose their words serve.

4 In Of Mice and Men, love is precious precisely because it is so rare. Steinbeck sets his novel among the itinerant workers of 1930s California, men who drift from ranch to ranch with no family, no home and nobody to care about them. Against this background, the love between George and Lennie seems almost miraculous, but Steinbeck shows that in a world shaped by the Great Depression, love is fragile and can be crushed by loneliness, poverty and violence. Each type of love in the novel, from friendship to a man's love for his dog, ends in loss, suggesting that the harsh economic world leaves little room for tenderness.

The heart of the novel is the bond between George and Lennie. From the opening

Question number

chapter by the Salinas River, Steinbeck shows George's frustration, as he complains that he could live easily if he were alone, yet the reader quickly sees that his care for Lennie is genuine. He protects Lennie, speaks for him at the ranch and remembers promising Aunt Clara to look after him. Their love is expressed through ritual, especially the repeated telling of the dream farm. Lennie's eager part in the story, "I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you", shows that what matters most is not the land itself but the fact that they have each other. Steinbeck contrasts this with George's description of ranch workers as "the loneliest guys in the world", men who belong nowhere. In the Depression, when migrant labourers competed desperately for work, two men travelling together was unusual enough to arouse the boss's suspicion.

Lennie's love is innocent but dangerous. He loves soft things: the dead mouse he carries in his pocket, the puppy Slim gives him, the velvet Aunt Clara once gave him and, fatally, Curley's wife's hair. His love is physical and childlike, and because he does not understand his own strength, it destroys what he loves. The pattern is established early, as he kills mice by petting them too hard, and it escalates through the puppy to Curley's wife. Steinbeck seems to suggest that love without understanding or control can be as harmful as cruelty. Lennie's dependence also reflects the context: in the 1930s there was little support for people with learning disabilities, and Crooks's taunt that Lennie would be locked up in a "booby hatch" if George left him exposes the cruelty of what awaited him without love.

Candy's love for his old dog is a quieter but equally moving example. He tells the men he has had the dog since it was a pup, and Carlson's insistence that it be shot because it is old and smells shows how little sentiment the ranch allows. Steinbeck uses the dog as a mirror for Candy himself, an aging, disabled worker who fears being discarded once he is no longer useful. After the shooting, Candy

Question number

lies on his bunk staring at the ceiling, and his later admission, "I ought to of shot that dog myself", foreshadows the novel's ending, when George chooses to be the one who kills Lennie rather than leave him to a stranger. Love, Steinbeck implies, may require a terrible act of mercy.

In contrast, the marriage between Curley and his wife shows love's absence. Though they have been married only two weeks, Curley seems more interested in showing off his glove "fulla vaseline" and in visiting the brothel in town than in his wife's happiness. She, in turn, admits to Lennie, "I don't like Curley. He ain't a nice fella." Now she wanders the ranch searching for someone to talk to. Steinbeck never gives her a name, which suggests she is treated as Curley's possession rather than a partner. This reflects the limited role of women in the 1930s, when marriage was often an economic necessity, and it shows how loneliness can exist even inside a relationship that ought to be loving.

Crooks shows what a life without love does to a person. Isolated in the harness room because he is black, he tells Lennie that a guy goes nuts if he has nobody. His bitterness is the product of racial segregation, which excluded him from the bunkhouse and the card games. Yet when Candy and Lennie talk about the dream, Crooks briefly asks whether he could join them, a moment that shows how deeply he longs for companionship.

Love, finally, is tested in the ending. After Lennie kills Curley's wife, George knows that Curley's lynch mob will kill him cruelly. Back at the river, George tells the story of the farm one last time, and Lennie begs him to say it again. George shoots him in the back of the head while Lennie is looking across the river, imagining the dream. The act is brutal, but Steinbeck presents it as George's final act of love, sparing Lennie fear and pain. Only Slim understands, telling George

Question number

that he had to do it, while Carlson wonders what is eating the two men. Steinbeck uses Carlson's incomprehension to show how unusual such love is in this world.

The novel's title, drawn from Burns's poem about the best-laid schemes of mice and men going awry, suggests that love and dreams are always vulnerable. Steinbeck, writing in 1937 and having worked alongside migrant labourers himself, shows love as the one thing that gives these men dignity and hope, yet also as something the economic and social conditions of the Depression make almost impossible to keep. The tragedy is not that love fails, but that it is the world, rather than the people, which cannot sustain it.

5 Candy's warning that "Curley's like a lot of little guys. He hates big guys" captures the insecurity at the core of Curley's character. Steinbeck presents him as a small man who compensates for his size and his lack of respect with aggression, swagger and the borrowed power of his father's position. Yet beneath the bullying, Curley is a hollow figure, and Steinbeck uses him to expose the abuse of power in 1930s ranch society, the fragility of masculine pride, and the violence that destroys the novel's dream.

Curley's first appearance is carefully staged. He enters the bunkhouse as George and Lennie are settling in, described as a thin young man with a brown face and tightly curled hair. Steinbeck notes that, like the boss, he wears high-heeled boots, a detail that marks him out as someone who does not do the manual work of the ranch hands and who aligns himself with authority. His "glance was at once calculating and pugnacious", and his hands close into fists as soon as he sees Lennie. Unprovoked, he demands that Lennie speak for himself. Steinbeck shows

Question number

immediately that Curley looks for conflict, and his hostility towards Lennie, the biggest man on the ranch, confirms Candy's analysis.

Candy fills in the rest of the portrait through gossip. Curley is a lightweight boxer who is "handy" with his fists, and since his marriage he has become even "cockier'n ever". The most telling detail is the glove "fulla vaseline" that he wears on his left hand, supposedly to keep it soft for his wife. The image is both comic and slightly grotesque: Curley advertises his sexual relationship to the men to assert his masculinity, but the boasting suggests insecurity rather than confidence. Candy's description of him picking fights with big men because he wins either way, since everyone criticises the big man if he hits back, explains Curley's tactics. He relies on a system in which he cannot really lose.

That system is economic. Curley is the boss's son, and in the context of the Great Depression, when ranch hands had no security and could be fired at any moment, his position makes him almost untouchable. George is acutely aware of this and warns Lennie to stay away from him, fearing that they will be "canned" if Lennie fights. Steinbeck uses Curley to show how power on the ranch depends on wealth and family, not merit. In contrast, Slim, the skilled jerkline skinner, earns genuine respect through his calm authority and fairness. When Curley storms in looking for his wife and suspects Slim, he is forced to back down and apologise, and Carlson mocks him as "yella as a frog belly". This shows that Curley's power is only formal: the men obey him because they must, not because they admire him.

His marriage reveals his possessiveness and lack of real affection. Curley constantly searches for his wife, and she in turn wanders the ranch looking for him, which ironically means that we almost never see them together. He treats her as property to be guarded rather than a person to be loved, and the mark of his

Question number

indifference is that he is ready to join the men's Saturday night visits to the brothel in town despite having been married only a couple of weeks. His wife tells Lennie that she does not like Curley and that he is not a nice fella, and her loneliness is partly his creation. Steinbeck's refusal to give her a name, calling her only "Curley's wife", reinforces how Curley's ownership defines her. This reflects the narrow roles available to women in the 1930s.

The fight in Chapter 3 is the climax of Curley's bullying and the moment his weakness is exposed. Humiliated by the men's laughter after the confrontation with Slim, he turns on Lennie, who is still smiling at the thought of the dream farm. Curley chooses the safest target, a big man who will not fight back, and hits him repeatedly while Lennie cries out for George. Only when George tells him to fight does Lennie seize Curley's fist and crush it. Steinbeck describes Curley flopping like a fish on a line, an image that reduces the aggressive boxer to helpless prey. Slim then pressures him into saying his hand got caught in a machine; his pride, not any sense of fairness, saves Lennie for now.

Curley's response to his wife's death confirms his emptiness. When he sees her body in the barn, there is no grief. Instead he is consumed by the desire for revenge, declaring that he will shoot Lennie himself, and he organises the posse with a shotgun. The posse recalls the lynch mob that chased George and Lennie out of Weed, and it reflects a culture in which rough justice was common and outsiders, particularly the vulnerable, had little protection. Curley's hunger for violence is the force that pushes George to shoot Lennie himself, rather than allow him to suffer at Curley's hands.

Steinbeck does not give Curley any redemption. At the end, it is Slim who comforts George, while Carlson, at Curley's side, cannot understand what is eating

Question number

the two men. Curley represents the destructive side of masculine pride and inherited power: insecure, jealous and quick to hurt those beneath him. Yet perhaps Steinbeck invites a flicker of pity too, since Curley is himself lonely, trapped in a loveless marriage and desperate for respect he will never earn. In a novel about the loneliness of the Depression, even the boss's son, who seems to have everything, has nothing of real value.

6 Hopes and fears for the future drive almost every strand of The Whale Rider. Koro Apirana fears that the Maori traditions of Whangara will die without a male heir; Kahu hopes to win the love of the great-grandfather who rejects her; and in the whale chapters, the ancient bull whale and his herd face a future poisoned by human greed. Ihimaera weaves these personal, cultural and environmental anxieties together, and the novel's resolution suggests that hope lies in the "oneness" between people, tradition and nature, though only if the old are willing to change.

Koro's fears are the most visible. As chief, he believes the line of leadership descending from Paikea, the ancestor who rode a whale to Whangara, must pass to a firstborn male. When his eldest grandson Porourangi's first child is a girl, he is bitterly disappointed, and he resents the fact that she has been named Kahu, after the founding ancestor Kahutia Te Rangi. His fear is understandable in context. By the 1980s, many Maori communities had seen their language decline and their young people move to the cities, and the novel reflects the anxieties of a generation of elders who felt that their culture was slipping away. Koro's response is to establish a school for the boys of the village, teaching them the language, chants and traditions. However, Ihimaera makes clear that his fear blinds him. Kahu shows every sign of being the leader he is searching for: she is drawn to him from infancy, responds instinctively to his chanting and absorbs the lessons she

Question number

secretly overhears. Koro's attachment to the past threatens the very future he wants to protect.

Kahu's hopes are more personal. Her mother Rehua dies soon after her birth, and Kahu longs for Koro's acceptance. The novel's most painful scene comes when she performs at her school break-up ceremony, giving a speech in Maori in which she honours her great-grandfather and his genealogy, and he is not there to hear it. Rawiri, our narrator, describes how the family tried to bolster her courage by clapping loudly, but her disappointment is clear. Ihimaera uses Rawiri's affectionate, sometimes humorous first-person voice to make us feel the injustice of Koro's rejection, so that the reader shares Kahu's hope and wills Koro to recognise her. The scene where the boys fail to retrieve the carved stone Koro throws into the sea, and Kahu later dives and brings it back while Nanny Flowers and Rawiri watch, is the turning point of that hope. Yet Nanny wisely decides they must keep it secret, waiting for the right moment, which suggests that hope requires patience as well as courage.

Nanny Flowers represents a different kind of hope: that tradition can adapt. She argues with Koro constantly, telling him that "Girls can do anything these days", and she reminds him of the powerful women in her own ancestry, such as Muriwai, who saved her people in a crisis by taking on a role reserved for men. Her mockery of her husband is affectionate, but her point is serious. In the context of the 1970s and 1980s, as feminism influenced both Pakeha and Maori society, Ihimaera uses Nanny to suggest that Maori culture could remain authentic while giving women greater authority. Her hope is ultimately fulfilled when she gives Koro the stone and he understands that Kahu is his successor.

Fear for the natural world is equally significant. The whale chapters, set apart in a

Question number

mythic, poetic voice, follow the old bull whale as he mourns his rider and swims through seas damaged by humanity. Ihimaera describes the "contamination" of the ocean and "the effects of the undersea radiation", a clear reference to the nuclear testing carried out by France in the Pacific during the period. The novel was published in 1987, just after the international moratorium on commercial whaling and only two years after French agents bombed the Rainbow Warrior in Auckland harbour, so these fears would have been sharply relevant to readers in New Zealand. Rawiri's travels add to this sense of threat. In Papua New Guinea he witnesses the destruction of the land, yet he also finds hope, reflecting that once man stops being vigilant, "Nature will take back what man had once achieved". Ihimaera suggests that nature has its own resilience.

The climax brings all these hopes and fears together. When the herd strands on the beach at Whangara, Koro sees it as a terrible omen, declaring that if the whale dies, "we die, I die". The beaching symbolises the possible death of the tribe's link with its ancestors and with the sea. The community's desperate efforts to save the whales show a renewed partnership between humans and nature, but it is Kahu who rides the bull whale back out to sea, fulfilling the legend of Paikea and giving the herd, and her people, a future. Her near death and recovery in hospital, with Koro finally at her side, transforms fear into hope.

The Maori phrase Hui e, haumi e, taiki e, meaning join everything together, bind it together, let it be done, captures the novel's answer. Ihimaera suggests that the future can only be secured when the generations, the genders and humanity and nature are bound together. Koro's fears were real, but his greatest mistake was looking for the future in the wrong place. Through Kahu, Ihimaera presents a hopeful vision of a Maori culture that honours the past while embracing change.

Question number

7

The relationship between Kahu and Nanny Flowers is the emotional counterweight to Koro's rejection in The Whale Rider. Where Koro sees only that Kahu is a girl, Nanny sees her worth from the beginning, and their bond is warm, protective and quietly subversive. Ihimaera uses Nanny not only as Kahu's champion but as a link to a tradition of strong Maori women, so that their relationship becomes a way of exploring how a patriarchal culture might change without losing itself.

Nanny's support begins at Kahu's birth. Koro, bitterly disappointed that Porourangi's first child is a daughter, wants nothing to do with her and is angry that she has been named after Kahutia Te Rangi, the ancestor also known as Paikea. It is Nanny who allows the name, defying her husband's wishes. She also ensures that the proper rituals are observed: when Koro refuses, she sees to it that Kahu's afterbirth is buried at the marae, in keeping with Maori custom that binds a child to the land of her people. Rawiri, the narrator, believes he glimpses something like a spear falling nearby, which may be read as a sign that the ancestors have accepted Kahu. Ihimaera thus suggests that Nanny's actions are spiritually right, even when they go against the chief. Her faith in Kahu is aligned with the ancestors, not opposed to them.

When Kahu comes to stay at Whangara, the bond between them deepens. Nanny looks after her and becomes, in effect, a mother figure, which matters especially because Kahu's own mother, Rehua, died soon after she was born. Rawiri's narration conveys the domestic warmth of Nanny's household, and her affectionate teasing contrasts with Koro's coldness. Yet Kahu's love is directed above all at Koro, and Nanny's role is often to soften the pain this causes. At the school break-up ceremony, when Kahu gives her speech in Maori and Koro fails to attend, it is Nanny and the family who tried to bolster her courage by clapping loudly. Ihimaera shows Nanny's tenderness here, but also her anger at a husband who

Question number

cannot see what is in front of him.

Nanny is Koro's equal in argument, and much of the novel's humour comes from their quarrels. She mocks him and reminds him that "Girls can do anything these days". Her challenge goes beyond domestic bickering. She compares his treatment of Kahu to racism, suggesting that discrimination by gender is as unjust as discrimination by race, a pointed argument in New Zealand in the 1980s, when Maori were themselves campaigning against prejudice and for recognition of their rights. Nanny also draws on her own ancestry, reminding Koro of women such as Mihi, who asserted her seniority over a chief, and Muriwai, who took the place of a man to save her people from drowning. Ihimaera uses this genealogy to show that female leadership is not a modern invention imposed on Maori culture but part of its history. Nanny's real name, Putiputi, meaning flowers, may suggest growth and renewal, and she helps to nurture the new leader.

The episode of the stone is the most important moment in their relationship. Koro throws a carved stone into the sea and challenges the boys of his school to retrieve it as a test of leadership, but none of them can. Later, Kahu dives into the water and brings it back, watched by Nanny and Rawiri. Nanny's reaction is wise and restrained: she tells Rawiri they must keep the secret for now. She understands that Koro is not ready to accept the truth, and that it must come at the right time. This patience shows the depth of her understanding of both her husband and her great-granddaughter. When the whales strand on the beach and Kahu rides the bull whale out to sea, Nanny finally gives Koro the stone, and he realises that the leader he has been searching for has been with him all along. Nanny becomes the bridge between Kahu and Koro, making reconciliation possible.

The strength of her love is seen most powerfully at the climax. When Kahu

Question number

disappears beneath the waves with the whale, Nanny collapses with shock and has to be taken to hospital. Her physical collapse shows that, beneath her teasing and her toughness, Kahu is at the centre of her life. Her relief when Kahu is found alive brings the relationship to an emotional resolution, and the family gathers around Kahu as Koro at last accepts her.

Ihimaera wrote the novel in 1987, during a period of Maori cultural revival, when language nests and schools were being set up to restore te reo Maori and traditions were being reclaimed. Koro's school belongs to this movement, but Nanny and Kahu show that revival does not have to mean rigid repetition of the past. In a patriarchal society where tradition dictated that a boy should lead the tribe, Nanny's support allows Kahu to claim her inheritance.

Overall, their relationship is one of love, loyalty and quiet resistance. Nanny protects Kahu from Koro's rejection, nurtures her identity and strategically guides events towards recognition. Through them, Ihimaera suggests that the future of the tribe depends on the courage of its women, and that the old ways survive best when they are flexible enough to include everyone.

8

Suyuan Woo is arguably the most significant character in The Joy Luck Club, even though she is dead before the novel begins. Her absence is the novel's starting point and its organising force: she founded the club, she leaves behind the empty seat that Jing-mei must fill, and her lost twin daughters give the book its final journey back to China. Through Suyuan, Amy Tan explores the gap between immigrant mothers and their American-born daughters, and suggests that a mother's story, even when it is only half understood, can still be inherited.

Question number

Suyuan's significance begins with the club itself. Jing-mei tells us that her mother first created the Joy Luck Club in Kweilin during the Japanese invasion, gathering four women to play mahjong, eat what food they could find and tell stories so that they would not give in to despair. The name is almost defiant: these women chose to call their meetings lucky when they were surrounded by war and refugees. When Suyuan recreated the club in San Francisco in 1949, she gave a group of newly arrived immigrant women a place to belong. Tan's own context matters here, because the novel grew out of her mother's stories of wartime China, and the Second World War and the Communist victory of 1949 meant that many emigrants could not return or even contact the families they had left behind. Suyuan's club is therefore presented as an act of survival and of community building in a foreign country.

Structurally, Suyuan is unique because she is the only mother who never narrates her own story. Her life is told by Jing-mei, by the aunties and finally by Canning Woo. This is significant: Tan makes Suyuan both central and unknowable, which mirrors Jing-mei's admission that she does not really know her mother. When she says this, the aunties are horrified, and An-mei insists, "Your mother is in your bones!" The line suggests that identity is passed down physically, through blood and ancestry, even when language and culture seem to separate mother and daughter. Tan seems to be warning her own generation of Chinese Americans that dismissing their mothers' pasts is a kind of self-denial.

The Kweilin story reveals the trauma at the centre of Suyuan's life. Jing-mei says her mother told the story with different endings over the years, and only later learns the truth: fleeing Kweilin, Suyuan was forced to leave her twin baby daughters by the roadside, with money and jewellery, hoping someone would care for them. Her endless search for them, and her letters to China, show that her

Question number

hope was never extinguished. In a Chinese culture that placed great value on family continuity and duty to ancestors, losing her children would have been an unbearable failure, which may explain why she later pushes so hard for Jing-mei to become something extraordinary.

This is clearest in "Two Kinds", where Suyuan believes that "you could be anything you wanted to be in America". Her faith in the American Dream reflects the optimism of many post-war immigrants, who saw the United States as a land of opportunity after the losses of war. After watching a Chinese girl play the piano on television, she arranges lessons for Jing-mei with the deaf Old Chong. Tan presents Suyuan sympathetically but critically: her ambition becomes pressure, and the disastrous recital and the cruel argument afterwards, when Jing-mei wishes she were dead "like them", show how a mother's hopes can wound. Yet years later Suyuan offers her daughter the piano as a gift, and Jing-mei realises that "Pleading Child" and "Perfectly Contented" are two halves of the same song. Tan uses this image to suggest that the conflict between mother and daughter was part of a single, larger harmony that Jing-mei only hears once her mother is gone.

Suyuan's significance is also symbolic. In "Best Quality" she gives Jing-mei a jade pendant, her "life's importance", after the tense New Year dinner where Jing-mei chooses the worst crab so that others can have the best. Suyuan praises this choice as a sign of good character, in contrast to Waverly's competitive cleverness. Jade, which is traditionally prized in Chinese culture and believed to deepen in colour as it ages, suggests that Suyuan's values will grow in her daughter over time. Jing-mei notices that young Chinese men wear similar pendants without knowing their meaning, which shows Tan's interest in how second generation immigrants keep the forms of their heritage but lose its significance.

Question number

Finally, Suyuan's significance is completed in "A Pair of Tickets". Her name, Canning explains, means "Long-Cherished Wish", and the novel fulfils that wish when Jing-mei travels to Shanghai to meet her half-sisters. This journey was only possible because China had reopened to the West in the late 1970s and 1980s, and Tan made a similar trip in 1987. When the sisters embrace, Jing-mei sees that together they look like their mother. Suyuan is symbolically reunited with her lost children, and Jing-mei finally recognises the Chinese part of herself.

In conclusion, Suyuan Woo is significant because she connects every strand of the novel: the club, the generations, and the two countries. Tan uses her absence to show that understanding often comes too late, but also that a mother's hopes and suffering can still shape a daughter's identity. Suyuan's story, told by others, becomes the story that holds all the other stories together.

9

Belonging is at the heart of The Joy Luck Club because every character in the novel is caught between two places and two sets of people. The mothers have left China but never fully belong to America; their daughters are American by birth but feel uneasy about the Chinese heritage that shapes them. Tan's own words, "There was something about this country that I belonged to", show that belonging for her was not simply about where she lived but about recognising a part of herself she had denied. The novel moves towards this same recognition, suggesting that true belonging comes from accepting both cultures and the people who connect them.

Tan introduces the theme in the opening fable of the woman and the swan. The woman sails to America hoping her daughter will be fully accepted there, but at immigration the swan is taken away and she is left with a single feather. The

Question number

feather symbolises everything the mothers bring with them: a fragile remnant of a homeland, and good intentions they struggle to put into English. This reflects the historical reality of Chinese immigration in the 1940s, when restrictions were eased during and after the Second World War because China and America were allies against Japan, but immigrants still faced suspicion and pressure to assimilate.

For the mothers, the Joy Luck Club itself is a place of belonging. Suyuan began it in Kweilin during the war and restarted it in San Francisco in 1949, and in America it becomes a small community where the women play mahjong, eat traditional food and speak their own language. Tan presents the club as a substitute homeland: the women cannot return to China, especially after the Communist victory of 1949, so they recreate a piece of it. Even the investment the club makes in the stock market shows them combining Chinese tradition with American ambition, belonging to both worlds at once.

However, belonging is also shown to be painful and divided. Ying-ying St. Clair's story is perhaps the bleakest. Married to an American, she is renamed Betty and given a new birth date on her papers, so that her identity is literally rewritten. She describes herself as having lost her spirit, and her daughter Lena sees her as a ghost in her own home. Tan uses Ying-ying to show the cost of assimilation: belonging to America on paper can mean being invisible as a person.

Lindo Jong, by contrast, belongs to herself. In "The Red Candle" she escapes her arranged marriage to Tyan-yu through cleverness while still honouring her promise to her parents, and she vows never to forget who she is. In "Double Face", she explains that she has a Chinese face and an American face, using whichever helps her. Yet she also admits that in China she now looks American, so she no longer fully belongs anywhere. The motif of the face suggests that identity is something

Question number

performed and negotiated rather than fixed.

The daughters' struggle with belonging is different but equally strong. As a child, Lena walks around with her "eyes wide open to make them look European", a painful image of a girl trying to erase her Chinese appearance to fit in. This closely echoes Tan's own adolescence: she said she felt ashamed of being different. Waverly, Rose and Lena all have white American partners, and they often treat their mothers' customs as embarrassing. Rose's marriage to Ted collapses partly because she has absorbed the American idea that her own wishes do not matter, and An-mei must teach her to speak up. Tan suggests that by rejecting their mothers, the daughters also lose confidence in themselves.

Language barriers deepen this sense of separation. When Waverly mishears "Taiyuan" as "Taiwan", Lindo corrects her sharply with "Now listen". The small mistake represents a larger failure of understanding: the daughters do not know their mothers' geography, history or losses. Waverly even worries that if she goes to China on her honeymoon, people will think she is one of them and not let her return. Her anxiety shows that she fears belonging to China as much as she longs for it.

The novel resolves the theme in "A Pair of Tickets". As the train crosses into Shenzhen, Jing-mei feels that she is "becoming Chinese", fulfilling her mother's claim that once you are born Chinese you cannot help feeling it. Tan adds irony when the family's first meal in China is hamburgers and apple pie, reminding us that belonging is never simple. But when Jing-mei meets her half-sisters and sees that together they look like their mother, she finally belongs to a family and a country at once. This scene draws directly on Tan's 1987 visit to her own half-sisters, which she described as giving her a sense of completeness.

Question number

In conclusion, belonging is important because it drives both the mothers' memories and the daughters' growth. Tan shows that belonging to a place is inseparable from belonging to people: the club, the family, the mother. The novel ends not by choosing China or America, but by suggesting that belonging comes from embracing both, and from understanding the stories that connect the generations.

10 The friendship between Okonkwo and Obierika is one of the most important relationships in Things Fall Apart because it is built on contrast. Obierika is loyal, generous and constant, yet he is also thoughtful and willing to question custom, while Okonkwo is impulsive and clings rigidly to tradition. Achebe uses Obierika as a foil to expose Okonkwo's flaws, but also as a voice of balance within Igbo society, showing that the culture Okonkwo believes he is defending was never as rigid as he imagines.

From the start, the friendship is shown to be close and practical. Okonkwo attends the ceremony when Obierika's daughter Akueke's suitor comes to negotiate her bride price, and the scene allows Achebe to present the dignity and order of Igbo customs: the bundles of sticks used to bargain, the palm wine, and the courteous exchange between families. Achebe wrote the novel in 1958 partly to answer European writers who had portrayed Africa as without culture, and Obierika's household is presented as civilised, sociable and governed by clear rules. Okonkwo's ease in this setting shows that he too belongs to a rich community.

The most important early moment is the killing of Ikemefuna. Obierika refuses to take part, and when Okonkwo visits him afterwards, unable to eat or sleep, Obierika tells him that he should not have been involved. He says that if the

Question number

Oracle ordered the death of his own son, he would neither dispute it nor be the one to do it. Okonkwo replies, "You sound as if you question the authority and decision of the Oracle". Obierika answers that the deed "will not please the Earth", warning that it is the kind of action for which the goddess destroys whole families. This dialogue is central: Obierika obeys the Oracle but uses his own moral judgement, while Okonkwo confuses obedience with violence because he fears appearing weak like his father Unoka. Tellingly, it is only after talking with his friend that Okonkwo begins to recover. The relationship offers him a kind of comfort he cannot show in his own household.

Their friendship survives disagreement. In their discussion of titles, Obierika's remark that in some clans the ozo title is so cheap that "every beggar takes it" offends Okonkwo, for whom titles are the measure of a man. Their argument shows the difference between them: Obierika is curious about how other villages live and recognises that customs vary, while Okonkwo treats his own values as absolute. Achebe suggests that Igbo society contained open debate and diverse practices, challenging any idea of a single, fixed "primitive" culture.

When Okonkwo accidentally kills Ezeudu's son and is exiled for seven years, Obierika is among the men who destroy his compound, because custom demands that the earth be cleansed. Afterwards he sits in his obi and mourns his friend's misfortune, asking why a man should suffer so grievously for an offence he had committed inadvertently. He also remembers the twins he was made to throw away. This is perhaps the most significant passage for Obierika, because it shows a man who carries out tradition while privately questioning it. Achebe uses him to show that doubts about some customs, such as the treatment of twins, already existed inside Igbo society, which helps explain why the missionaries later find converts among the outcasts.

Question number

During the exile, Obierika's loyalty becomes active and practical. He sells Okonkwo's yams and brings him the money, and he travels to Mbanta to bring news. It is through Obierika that Okonkwo learns of the massacre at Abame, where the white men took revenge for the killing of a single white man, and later that Nwoye has joined the missionaries. Obierika is therefore the messenger of colonial change, the link between Okonkwo and a world that is changing in his absence. He even supervises the building of new huts for Okonkwo's return.

On Okonkwo's return, Obierika's understanding of colonialism is sharper than his friend's. He observes that the white man has "put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart", a line that recalls the novel's title from Yeats's "The Second Coming". Obierika sees that many of their own people have joined the newcomers, so violence alone cannot drive them away. Okonkwo, by contrast, wants to fight, and his final killing of the court messenger is an isolated act that the clan does not follow.

The ending confirms the depth of the friendship. When the District Commissioner arrives to find Okonkwo hanged, Obierika asks him to have his men take the body down, because suicide is an abomination and the clansmen cannot touch it. Then, in a rare moment of anger, Obierika tells him, "That man was one of the greatest men in Umuofia. You drove him to kill himself". Achebe gives Obierika the last true word about Okonkwo, while the Commissioner reduces him to a paragraph in a book about pacifying "primitive" tribes. The contrast between Obierika's grief and the Commissioner's indifference exposes the arrogance of colonial rule.

In conclusion, the relationship between Okonkwo and Obierika is important because it shows Okonkwo at his most human, and because Obierika represents a flexible,

Question number

reflective side of Igbo culture that Okonkwo cannot accept. Through their friendship, Achebe suggests that Igbo society could have adapted, and that Okonkwo's tragedy lies partly in his refusal to listen to the friend who understood him best.

11 Authority is central to Things Fall Apart because the novel is ultimately about the collapse of one system of authority and its replacement by another. Okonkwo's words to Obierika, "You sound as if you question the authority and decision of the Oracle", show how seriously the clan treats divine authority, yet Achebe presents Igbo authority as shared between gods, elders and the community rather than held by one ruler. When the British arrive, they impose a single, external authority backed by force, and the clan's balance begins to break down. The importance of authority in the novel lies in this contrast, and in Okonkwo's tragic belief that authority means strength and violence.

The most powerful authority in Umuofia is religious. The Oracle of the Hills and the Caves, Agbala, decides matters of war and justice, and Achebe based it on real oracles that held great influence in Igbo regions. When the Oracle decrees that Ikemefuna must die, the decision is not openly challenged. Ezeudu warns Okonkwo not to take part because the boy calls him father, but Okonkwo strikes the final blow because he is afraid of being thought weak. Achebe shows that divine authority does not require such cruelty: Obierika obeys the Oracle but refuses to participate. The tragedy comes not from authority itself but from Okonkwo's rigid interpretation of it.

Chielo, the priestess of Agbala, shows that divine authority can overturn ordinary hierarchies. She is a widow and a friend of Ekwefi in daily life, but when she is

Question number

possessed she speaks with the god's voice and commands even Okonkwo. When she carries Ezinma to the caves at night, Okonkwo can only follow at a distance. Achebe seems to suggest that in Igbo society authority is not simply male or physical; it can belong to a woman through her sacred role, which complicates Okonkwo's belief that power is purely masculine.

The egwugwu represent the clan's judicial authority. In the trial of Uzowulu, who has beaten his wife, the masked ancestral spirits listen to both families and give a judgement aimed at restoring peace. Achebe presents this as a sophisticated and fair system of justice, which challenges colonial assumptions that Africans had no law. The scene also highlights that Igbo society was decentralised: decisions came from elders, titles and community consensus rather than from a king. The novel suggests this collective authority was a strength, but also, perhaps, a vulnerability.

Okonkwo himself seeks personal authority. Having grown up ashamed of his idle father Unoka, he gains titles, yams and wives, and rules his household through fear. He beats Ojiugo during the Week of Peace and is punished by Ezeani, the priest of the earth goddess, which shows that even a powerful man must obey a higher authority. Later, his authority is tested in exile in Mbanta, where his uncle Uchendu, as an elder, gives him land and reminds him that a man belongs to his motherland in times of sorrow. Okonkwo's need to dominate is shown as a flaw that isolates him from the gentler forms of authority within his culture.

The arrival of the white men introduces a new and hostile authority. At Abame, after the villagers kill a white man on the Oracle's advice, the colonisers destroy the village in retaliation, showing that their authority is enforced through violence. The missionaries gain authority more subtly: they build their church in the Evil Forest and survive, which makes people doubt the power of the old gods. Mr Brown

Question number

wins respect by learning about Igbo beliefs, but his successor, Reverend Smith, is intolerant and inflames conflict. When Enoch unmasks an egwugwu, a terrible offence against the clan's sacred authority, the egwugwu retaliate by destroying Enoch's compound and the church.

The District Commissioner embodies colonial authority. He imprisons the clan leaders through deception, they are humiliated, and his messengers increase the fine for their own profit. The British courts and prisons replace the egwugwu, and Achebe shows how colonial rule overrides Igbo justice entirely. When Okonkwo kills a court messenger, the clan lets the other messengers escape, and he realises that Umuofia will not go to war. His suicide marks the final loss of his authority, and the Commissioner's plan to write about him in a book titled "The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger" shows the coloniser claiming authority even over the story itself.

This final irony connects to Achebe's purpose. Writing in 1958, just before Nigerian independence in 1960, he wanted to reclaim the authority to tell African history from European writers. The title, taken from Yeats's "The Second Coming", where "the centre cannot hold", suggests that once the clan's shared authority is divided, with converts and traditionalists split, the whole society falls apart. As Obierika says, the white man has put a knife on the things that held them together.

In conclusion, authority is important because it shapes every major event in the novel, from Ikemefuna's death to Okonkwo's suicide. Achebe presents Igbo authority as complex, shared and balanced, while colonial authority is single, forceful and dismissive. Okonkwo's tragedy is that he understands authority only as strength, and so cannot survive when a stronger power arrives.