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.

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Answer TWO questions:

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

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SECTION A: Unseen Poetry

Answer the question in this section.

You should spend 35 minutes on this question.

Read the following poem.

Slow Reader

He can make sculptures
And fabulous machines
Invent games, tell jokes
Give solemn, adult advice
But he is slow to read.
When I take him on my knee
With his *Ladybird* book*
He gazes into the air
Sighing and shaking his head
Like an old man
Who knows the mountains
Are impassable.

He toys with words
Letting them grow cold
As gristly* meat
Until I relent
And let him wriggle free –
A fish returning
To its element
Or a white-eyed colt*
Shying from the bit*
As if he sees
That if he takes it
In his mouth
He'll never run
Quite free again.

Vicki Feaver (1981)

Glossary
**Ladybird book* – a popular series of books for children
**gristly* – chewy or hard to digest
**colt* – a young horse
**bit* – the part of a horse's harness that fits in the mouth

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1 Explore how the writer presents a child who is slow at learning to read 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 Discuss the theme of kindness in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

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

(Total for Question 2 = 40 marks)

OR

3 In what ways is Scout important 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 memories in *Of Mice and Men*.

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

(Total for Question 4 = 40 marks)

OR

5 Which **one** character do you consider to be the happiest 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 Discuss the importance of locations in *The Whale Rider*.

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

(Total for Question 6 = 40 marks)

OR

7 In what ways is Kahu significant in the novel?

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 'Jing-mei Woo is the most important character in this novel.'

How far do you agree with this statement?

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

(Total for Question 8 = 40 marks)

OR

9 Discuss the theme of language barriers in *The Joy Luck Club*.

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 **one** character who you consider to be the most interesting in the novel.

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

(Total for Question 10 = 40 marks)

OR

11 In what ways is death significant in *Things Fall Apart*?

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:

Slow Reader by Vicki Feaver © Hodder and Stoughton

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Please check the examination details below before entering your candidate information

Candidate surname	Other names

Pearson Edexcel International GCSE (9–1)

Centre Number | Candidate Number

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 *Pearson Edexcel International GCSE English Anthology* may **not** be brought into the examination.
- 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 Question 1 = 20 marks)

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

Vicki Feaver presents the slow reader not as a failure but as a gifted, free-spirited child for whom reading feels like a threat to his freedom. Seen through the eyes of a loving adult, the boy's reluctance becomes something the speaker partly understands, and the poem ends by suggesting that learning to read may cost him something precious.

The poem opens with a celebration rather than a problem. The list "He can make sculptures / And fabulous machines / Invent games, tell jokes" builds a picture of a creative, inventive child, and the adjective "fabulous" carries the speaker's admiration. The phrase "solemn, adult advice" is gently comic, since a small boy offering grown-up wisdom suggests a mind older than his years. Only then does the conjunction "But" introduce the single weakness, "he is slow to read". By placing this short, plain statement at the end of the stanza, Feaver makes it seem a small thing set against everything he can do, and the reader is encouraged to see the label "slow" as unfair.

The second stanza moves into a specific scene. Being taken "on my knee" with a "Ladybird book" reminds us how young he is, His response is described physically: he "gazes into the air", avoiding the page, while the sibilance of "Sighing and shaking his head" creates a weary, hissing sound that conveys his frustration. The simile "Like an old man / Who knows the mountains / Are impassable" is striking because it reverses his age. The child seems prematurely aged by the task, and the hyperbole of the "mountains" shows how enormous and hopeless reading feels to him. Placing "Are impassable" alone on its own line makes the barrier feel final.

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Feaver then turns words into something physical and unpleasant. "He toys with words" suggests play, but also a lack of commitment, and the simile "Letting them grow cold / As gristly meat" makes reading feel like food a child pushes around his plate, tough and impossible to swallow. This links reading to the mouth, an idea that returns powerfully at the end.

The turning point comes with "Until I relent". The speaker, rather than forcing him, gives in, which shows sympathy. A sequence of animal images follows. "A fish returning / To its element" suggests that the boy belongs to a world of movement and play, and "element" may also mean the state in which he is happiest. The final metaphor of the "white-eyed colt / Shying from the bit" is the most significant. A colt that accepts the bit is being broken in, so the image suggests that reading is a kind of taming. The phrase "white-eyed" hints at panic, and the speaker imagines the boy instinctively sensing the danger.

The ending is built from short, mostly monosyllabic lines: "That if he takes it / In his mouth / He'll never run". The halting rhythm mirrors a child sounding out words, while the enjambment pushes us towards the final line, "Quite free again". Throughout, the free verse and very short lines create a restless, wriggling movement that matches the child himself. Ultimately, Feaver presents a child who is slow to read not because he is less able, but because some part of him resists the loss of freedom and imagination that education might bring, and the speaker's tender, uncertain tone suggests she is not sure he is wrong.

2

In To Kill a Mockingbird, Harper Lee presents kindness as the moral counterweight to the prejudice of 1930s Maycomb. Kindness in the novel is rarely loud or public; it is quiet, often unseen and frequently costly. Through Scout's gradual

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understanding of it, Lee suggests that true kindness means seeing the world from another person's point of view, and that in a segregated Southern town such empathy could be both rare and dangerous.

Atticus is the clearest model of kindness, and Lee shows that his kindness is a matter of principle rather than sentiment. His advice to Scout that "you never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view" becomes the moral centre of the novel. He lives by it in small ways: he stays courteous to Mrs Dubose despite her vicious insults, and later explains to Jem that she was fighting her morphine addiction, calling her the bravest person he knew. Here kindness is linked to understanding, as Atticus refuses to judge her by her worst behaviour. His greatest act of kindness, defending Tom Robinson, is also his most public. In a town governed by Jim Crow laws, where a black man's word counted for nothing against a white woman's, Atticus knows he will lose, yet he takes the case anyway. Lee, publishing in 1960 as the Civil Rights Movement gathered pace, presents this as a challenge to her readers: kindness that crosses the colour line is shown to be an act of courage.

Kindness is also shown to be complicated by Maycomb's social codes. On her first day at school, Scout tries to explain to Miss Caroline that Walter Cunningham will not accept a quarter because the Cunninghams never take anything they cannot pay back. In the poverty of the Great Depression, accepting charity meant shame, and Scout's clumsy attempt to protect Walter shows a kindness rooted in local knowledge. Yet when Walter comes to lunch and pours syrup over his food, Scout mocks him, and it is Calpurnia who takes her into the kitchen and scolds her that a guest must be treated properly, however he eats. Calpurnia, a black woman working in a white household, teaches the white child a lesson in manners and respect, which subtly reverses the racial hierarchy of the period. Lee implies that

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kindness must be learned, and that Scout learns it from those Maycomb considers beneath her.

One of the most powerful moments of kindness comes at the jail. A lynch mob arrives to take Tom, and Scout, unaware of the danger, starts talking politely to Mr Cunningham about his son and his entailment. Her innocent friendliness reminds him that he is a father and a neighbour, and the mob disperses. Lee shows here that kindness, even unintended, can restore individual humanity to a crowd that has lost it. This also links to Atticus's later remark that Mr Cunningham was basically a good man with blind spots.

Tom Robinson's kindness is the most tragic in the novel. He helped Mayella Ewell with her chores because, as he says in court, he felt sorry for her. This simple statement shocks the courtroom, because in the racial order of 1930s Alabama a black man was not permitted to pity a white woman. Lee exposes how kindness itself becomes a crime when it crosses racial boundaries, and Tom's death shows the brutal price of a society that cannot accept compassion from below. Mayella, isolated and abused, is perhaps the loneliest person in Maycomb, and the irony is that the only person who was kind to her is the one she destroys.

Boo Radley's kindness runs secretly through the whole novel. The gifts left in the knothole, including the soap figures carved to look like the children, the mended trousers left folded on the fence and the blanket placed around Scout during Miss Maudie's fire all show a hidden watcher who cares for them. The children's early games, which turn him into a monster, show how the town's gossip and superstition distort the truth. When Boo finally saves Jem and Scout from Bob Ewell, his kindness becomes heroic. Heck Tate's decision to say that Ewell fell on his knife, and Scout's understanding that exposing Boo would be "sort of like

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shootin' a mockingbird", show the town at last returning kindness to him.

Lee uses the mockingbird symbol to tie kindness to innocence. Miss Maudie explains that mockingbirds "don't do one thing but make music for us to enjoy", so to harm them is a sin. Tom and Boo are both mockingbirds, and their contrasting fates reveal that Maycomb can protect a harmless white recluse but not a harmless black man. This, I think, is Lee's sharpest criticism of her society: kindness exists, but it is unevenly shared.

The novel ends with Scout standing on the Radley porch and seeing her street from Boo's point of view. Having walked him home, arm in arm so he looks like a gentleman escorting a lady, she realises that Atticus was right about standing in another person's shoes. The structure is therefore circular, closing with the lesson that opened it. When Scout says Boo was "real nice", Atticus replies that most people are when you finally see them. Lee leaves the reader with a hopeful but demanding message: kindness depends on the willingness to see others clearly, and the injustices of the segregated South were the result of a failure to do so.

3 Scout Finch is the most important figure in To Kill a Mockingbird because she is both its narrator and its moral pupil. Through her eyes Harper Lee lets the reader experience the racism and hypocrisy of 1930s Maycomb as a child first encounters them, while the voice of the adult Jean Louise looking back gives those experiences meaning. Scout's journey from innocence to understanding is, in many ways, the journey Lee hoped her readers in 1960 would make too.

Scout matters first because of the narrative perspective. The novel is told by an older Scout remembering events from the summer when she was nearly six to the

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autumn when she was eight. This dual voice allows Lee to combine a child's honesty with an adult's insight. Young Scout reports things she does not fully understand, such as the mob at the jail or the reaction to Tom's testimony, so the reader often grasps the danger or injustice before she does. This dramatic irony makes the prejudice of Maycomb more shocking, because it is seen through eyes that have not yet learned to accept it. Scout's innocence works as a lens that strips away the excuses adults make for racism.

Scout is also important as a character who challenges the expectations of her society. She is a fierce tomboy who wears overalls, fights boys like Walter Cunningham and her cousin Francis, and resists Aunt Alexandra's efforts to turn her into a Southern lady. Alexandra's arrival brings the values of the old Southern gentry, family pride, "Fine Folks" and proper dress, into the Finch house. Atticus, in contrast, has raised Scout to think for herself. Lee, who was herself a tomboy growing up in Monroeville, Alabama, uses Scout to question the narrow role expected of women in the South. Scout's discomfort at Aunt Alexandra's missionary tea, where the ladies pity distant Africans while ignoring the suffering of black people in their own town, reveals both the hypocrisy of white society and the limited, decorative role it offers women. Interestingly, it is at this tea that Scout begins to admire Alexandra and Miss Maudie for keeping their composure after news of Tom's death, suggesting that she starts to see a different kind of female strength.

Scout's importance also lies in her moral growth. At the start she is quick-tempered and judgemental: she rubs Walter's nose in the dirt and mocks his table manners. Calpurnia's rebuke that anyone who comes to the house is company teaches her that respect is owed regardless of class. Atticus's advice to consider things from another person's point of view is something she struggles to follow,

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and Lee structures the novel so that Scout repeatedly learns this lesson in new forms. Through Mrs Dubose she learns what courage really is, and through her visit to Calpurnia's church she discovers, along with the reader, that black people in Maycomb live a separate life, and that some, like Lula, resent white children being there. Calpurnia's "double life", speaking differently in each community, opens Scout's eyes to the divisions of a segregated town.

At the jail Scout becomes important to the plot as well as the theme. Her innocent conversation with Mr Cunningham about his son and his entailment shames him and breaks up the lynch mob. Lee suggests that a child's simple decency can achieve what an adult's arguments cannot, though she is careful to show that Scout does not understand what she has done. This scene echoes the real lynchings and mob violence that were common in the 1930s South, and Tom's trial itself recalls the case of the Scottsboro Boys in 1931, nine black youths falsely accused of raping two white women.

The trial deepens Scout's understanding of social hierarchy. Jem tries to explain the "four kinds of folks" in Maycomb, with black people placed at the bottom despite slavery having been abolished seventy years earlier. Scout's reply, that there is "just one kind of folks. Folks", is important because it expresses the novel's moral position in a child's plain words. Her friendship with Dill, who cries at the way Mr Gilmer treats Tom, and her meeting with Dolphus Raymond show her learning that adult society is built on pretence and cruelty.

Finally, Scout is central to the novel's resolution. Her relationship with Boo Radley develops from fear to understanding. At the start Boo is a figure of gothic myth to the children, but after he saves her and Jem from Bob Ewell, Scout recognises that hiding his act would be "sort of like shootin' a mockingbird". Standing on the

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Radley porch, she sees the street from his point of view and realises Atticus was right. Lee gives Scout the final insight of the novel, which makes her the proof that Atticus's teaching can succeed.

Scout is therefore important in every sense: as the narrator who shapes how we see Maycomb, as a girl who questions the gender roles of the South, and as the conscience in which Lee's message about empathy takes root. Through her, Lee suggests that prejudice is learned, and that a child who is guided well can unlearn the injustices of her society, a hopeful message for an America on the edge of the Civil Rights era.

4 In Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck uses memories to reveal what his characters have lost and what they long for. In a world of itinerant ranch workers during the Great Depression, where men drift from job to job with nothing to show for it, the past is often the only thing a character truly owns. Memories bring comfort to some and bitterness to others, but almost all of them point to a happier time or a missed chance, which deepens Steinbeck's portrayal of loneliness and the fragility of the American Dream.

George's memories are tied to his responsibility for Lennie. He remembers Lennie's Aunt Clara, explaining to Slim that he knew her and that when she died Lennie simply came along with him. This casual detail shows how their partnership began, almost by accident, yet it has become the defining bond of George's life. Some of his memories are sources of guilt. He confesses to Slim that he once told Lennie to jump into the Sacramento River as a joke, even though Lennie could not swim, and that Lennie almost drowned and then thanked George for pulling him out. This memory marks a turning point, as George admits he stopped playing tricks on

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him afterwards. Steinbeck uses it to show that George's protectiveness grew out of shame, and to make his choice at the end more painful. When George is angry, his memories become weapons: he reminds Lennie of the trouble in Weed, where Lennie grabbed a girl's red dress and they had to hide in an irrigation ditch. In this way the past constantly threatens to repeat itself, foreshadowing the death of Curley's wife.

Lennie's relationship with memory is the most poignant. He forgets almost everything, yet he remembers the dream. His repeated pleas for George to tell him about the rabbits show that the story of the "little place" is a memory he treasures, recited so often that it has become almost a ritual. When he says "I remember about the rabbits", Steinbeck shows that what Lennie can hold onto is not facts but feelings of safety and love. His memory of Aunt Clara giving him mice and velvet to pet hints at a childhood of tenderness, but also explains his dangerous fixation with soft things. At the end, in the clearing by the river, Lennie's memory turns into hallucination. Aunt Clara appears to him as a "little fat old woman" with "thick bull's-eye glasses" and a "gingham apron with pockets", scolding him in George's words. The vivid detail shows how deeply she is fixed in his mind, but she also represents his conscience. Lennie's memories are a mixture of love and guilt, which is fitting for a character who causes harm without meaning to.

Candy's memories of his dog are full of pride and grief. He tells the men that he had him from a pup and that he was the best sheep dog he had ever seen. The dog is a living link to Candy's working past, when he was useful and whole. Carlson's insistence on shooting it shows that on the ranch there is no room for sentiment or for the old and weak. During the Depression, when workers were valued only for their labour, Candy fears that he too will be discarded, and his

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regret that he did not shoot the dog himself becomes a haunting memory that he later echoes in George's decision about Lennie.

Crooks's memories reveal the racial injustice of 1930s California. Alone in his room in the harness shed, he tells Lennie that his father owned a chicken ranch and that white children came to play at their place. His memory of childhood equality makes his present segregation more painful, since he now cannot even enter the bunkhouse. When he adds that his father did not like him playing with the white children, and that now there is only one black family in Soledad, Steinbeck suggests a past in which Crooks was already being taught his place. Memory here exposes how the social hierarchy of America has hardened into isolation.

Curley's wife's memories are bitter and full of resentment. She tells Lennie that she could have been in the movies, that a man promised to write to her, and that she believes her mother stole the letter. She married Curley, it seems, partly out of spite. Her repeated retelling of the story suggests that she needs it to make sense of her unhappy life, and that the memory has become a fantasy she uses to escape. For a young woman in the 1930s, Hollywood represented glamour and independence, so her lost chance shows how the American Dream was especially out of reach for women.

Steinbeck also includes lighter memories that build the world of the ranch, such as Whit's excitement about a letter from a former worker, Bill Tenner, appearing in a magazine, and Candy recalling the time the boss gave the men a gallon of whisky at Christmas. These small details show how desperate the men are for connection and recognition in a life where, as George says, guys like them are "the loneliest guys in the world".

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Ultimately, memories in the novel are often more real than the future. The dream of the farm is, for George, almost a memory before it happens, recited in the same words every time. At the end he tells it to Lennie one last time, turning it into a final comfort. Steinbeck seems to suggest that, for the poor and powerless of the Depression era, the past and the imagined future were all they had, and that both could be taken away in a single moment.

5

In a novel so dominated by loneliness, disappointment and violence, happiness is rare in Of Mice and Men. Yet I would argue that Lennie is the happiest character. His happiness is not based on success or security, which no worker in Depression-era California could rely on, but on his simple, unshaken faith in George and in their dream. Steinbeck presents this happiness as genuine but childlike and fragile, and its destruction at the end is what makes the novel so tragic.

Lennie's happiness begins with his companionship with George. While the other ranch workers are, in George's words, "the loneliest guys in the world", Lennie never has to be alone. He delights in reminding George that they are different because "I got you to look after me, and you got me to look after you." The joy he takes in this line shows that, for Lennie, the friendship itself is a source of security. During the Great Depression, itinerant labourers moved from ranch to ranch, rarely forming lasting bonds, so Lennie's partnership makes him unusual. Even when George shouts at him, Lennie's happiness quickly returns; he offers to go off and live in a cave, but he is soon begging to hear the dream again.

The dream is the centre of Lennie's happiness. The idea that they will "live off the fatta the lan"' reflects the American Dream of independence and land ownership, a hope that drew many migrants to California in the 1930s. For George, the dream is

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a story he half believes; for Lennie, it is a certainty. He becomes excited about tending the rabbits, imagining different colours, and his insistence on hearing it again and again suggests that the dream brings him a contentment no one else on the ranch feels. Steinbeck describes the men as almost hypnotised when they talk about it, but Lennie is the only one who never doubts it.

Lennie's simplicity also protects him from many of the harsh truths the other characters face. He does not fully understand the cruelty of the ranch, the racism Crooks suffers or the threat Curley poses. When Curley attacks him in the bunkhouse, Lennie is smiling because he is thinking about the farm. This moment is painful, because his happiness makes him vulnerable, but it also shows how deeply he lives inside his dream. His love of soft things, the mice, the puppy and the velvet he remembers from Aunt Clara, shows a capacity for simple pleasure that the hardened men around him have lost.

It could be argued that other characters are happier. George has moments of joy, especially when Candy offers his savings. Candy was given two hundred and fifty dollars in compensation for losing his hand, which was unusual for a worker at the time, and he has more saved besides. George realises that they could "swing her", and for a brief moment the "thing they had never really believed in" seems real. Candy too becomes overwhelmed with excitement and later tells Crooks that the money is in the bank. However, George's happiness is always shadowed by worry, and Candy's is driven by his fear of being thrown away like his dog. Their happiness depends on the dream coming true, whereas Lennie's exists simply in imagining it.

Slim is perhaps the most content character in a practical sense. He is respected, calm and secure in his skill; Steinbeck writes that his authority is so great that

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his word is taken on any subject. Yet Slim is not shown to be joyful so much as dignified and controlled. He has no dream and no close companion, and his kindness to George at the end comes from understanding loss. His calm is closer to acceptance than happiness. Crooks and Curley's wife, meanwhile, are defined by bitterness, and Curley himself is consumed by insecurity and jealousy.

Of course, Lennie's happiness is precarious. His uncontrollable strength repeatedly destroys what he loves: the mice, the puppy and finally Curley's wife. After each disaster his happiness collapses into fear that George will not let him tend the rabbits. Steinbeck may be suggesting that innocence of this kind cannot survive in a harsh, competitive society. In the 1930s, people with learning disabilities had little protection and were often institutionalised, so Lennie's only safety lies in George.

The ending, however, confirms Lennie as the happiest character. In the clearing by the Salinas River, George asks him to look across the river while he tells the dream one final time. Lennie is happy and excited, urging George to go and get the place now. He dies imagining the farm, never knowing what George is about to do. Steinbeck creates a heartbreaking irony: Lennie's final moments are among the happiest in the novel, while George is left in despair, and Candy and Crooks lose their brief hope. The cyclical structure, opening and closing at the same peaceful pool, suggests that nothing in the world of the ranch has changed except that Lennie has escaped it.

Ultimately, Lennie is the happiest character because his happiness depends least on reality. In a society where, as Crooks says, nobody ever gets to heaven and nobody gets land, only someone as innocent as Lennie can keep believing. Steinbeck uses him to show both the beauty of hope and the cruelty of a world

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that leaves no room for it.

6 In The Whale Rider, Witi Ihimaera uses locations to do far more than set the scene. Places in the novel carry history, belonging and spiritual power, and they connect the human world of the Whangara community with the mythical world of the ancestors and the whales. Writing in 1987, when Maori communities were working to revive their language and customs and when nuclear testing in the Pacific was a serious concern, Ihimaera uses places to explore what it means to belong to a land and to protect it.

The novel opens in a legendary, timeless landscape. In the prologue, the land and sea seem to wait for the arrival of the whale rider, and the mountains are described as being "like a stairway to heaven". This mythical setting establishes that, in the world of the novel, places are alive and responsive. When the ancestor Kahutia Te Rangi arrives on the back of the whale, the elements themselves celebrate. Ihimaera draws on the Ngati Porou legend of Paikea, who came from Hawaiki to Whangara riding a sea creature after his canoe capsized. By beginning in this way, he roots the whole story in a particular place and suggests that its people's identity begins with that arrival.

Whangara is the most important location in the novel. It is the ancestral home of the whale rider and the home of Koro Apirana, Nanny Flowers, Rawiri and Kahu. On the roof of the meeting house stands the carved figure of Paikea riding his whale, a constant visual reminder of the community's origins. For Koro, Whangara is a place whose traditions he must protect, and he worries constantly that the old ways are dying. The real Whangara is a small Maori community on the East Coast of the North Island, and Ihimaera's choice to set the novel there gives the fiction

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a strong sense of cultural authenticity. Rawiri, as narrator, explains that his people belong to the East Coast and, further back, to Hawaiki, so the village is presented as one point in a long chain of ancestral places.

Within Whangara, the meeting house is a particularly significant location. It is where Koro holds his classes to teach the boys the language, chants and lore of the tribe, while Kahu is forbidden to attend because she is a girl. Ihimaera uses this space to dramatise the conflict between tradition and change. In Maori custom, leadership passed through the male line, and Koro's insistence on excluding Kahu shows his rigid devotion to that rule. Yet the meeting house is also where Kahu's birth cord is secretly buried, in a space in front of it. Nanny Flowers arranges this against Koro's wishes, and at that moment Rawiri sees something like a spear flying through the air. The burial of the birth cord was a traditional way of binding a child to their land, so this moment suggests that Kahu is spiritually tied to Whangara and to leadership, even when Koro refuses to see it.

The sea is another crucial location, and Ihimaera uses it to show Kahu's special bond with nature. When Koro throws his carved stone into the water and challenges the boys to retrieve it, none of them succeeds. Later Kahu dives and brings it back. The sea becomes a testing ground where the ancestors seem to choose their leader, and it is fitting that Kahu proves herself there rather than in the meeting house that excludes her.

Ihimaera also takes the reader far beyond New Zealand in the italicised chapters that follow the whales. The herd travels through waters such as the Valdes Peninsula in Patagonia, where the whales have their nursery, and the ancient bull whale is drawn by nostalgia towards the islands to the southwest and the trench near Hawaiki, described as the Place of the Gods and the Home of the Ancients.

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These vast ocean settings give the novel an epic scale and show the whales as ancestors with their own memories of place. One of the most disturbing moments is when a flash of light from a nuclear test kills young calves in the Pacific. This reflects real fears of the 1980s, especially about French testing at Moruroa, and suggests that the modern world is poisoning the sacred spaces of the ocean.

Rawiri's travels to Sydney and Papua New Guinea add another dimension. In Australia he experiences racism, and away from home he becomes homesick for Whangara. During his time away he grows into an understanding of himself and his destiny, and his return home suggests that identity for Ihimaera's characters is bound to their land.

The stranding of the whales brings the human and mythical worlds together on the beaches of the East Coast. First, a herd strands at Wainui, and the people's efforts to save them end in grief. Then the ancient bull whale strands at Whangara itself, and Koro sees the fate of the whale as the fate of the tribe. Kahu swims out, sits on the whale and coaxes it back to sea, becoming the whale rider of her generation. The beach, a meeting point between land and sea, becomes the place where the past is renewed.

Finally, the hospital is where Kahu lies after she is found, and where Koro at last accepts her as his successor. In this ordinary, modern setting, the old leader admits his mistake. Ihimaera seems to suggest that tradition can survive in the modern world only if it is willing to change. Across the novel, then, locations act as links between generations, between people and nature, and between myth and reality, showing that for the people of Whangara, place and identity cannot be separated.

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7

Kahu is the most significant character in The Whale Rider because she embodies the novel's central idea: that a culture survives not by refusing change but by renewing itself. As a girl in a tradition that reserves leadership for men, she is first rejected and then revealed as the true heir of the ancestral whale rider. Through her, Witi Ihimaera explores the strengths and limits of Maori tradition, the place of women within it and the deep bond between people and the natural world.

Kahu is significant from her birth because of what she is not. Koro Apirana, the chief of the Whangara community, longs for a great-grandson to inherit the leadership, and he is bitterly disappointed when Porourangi's first child is a girl. In traditional Maori society, leadership passed through the first-born male line, and Koro treats this as unbreakable. Kahu's mother, Rehua, dies while Kahu is still a baby, and the child is named Kahutia Te Rangi after the founding ancestor, which angers Koro, who feels the name is wasted on a girl. Ihimaera makes the reader see the irony at once: the child carries the name of the whale rider himself, and the novel's structure leads us to the moment when she fulfils it.

The burial of Kahu's birth cord is another sign of her importance. Koro refuses to take part, so Nanny Flowers has it buried secretly in front of the meeting house, with Rawiri present. In Maori custom this ritual ties a child to the land, and Rawiri's vision of a spear flying through the air at that moment suggests the ancestors' approval. Kahu is significant here because she exposes the gap between Koro's rigid rules and the will of the ancestors, which the novel suggests is more generous.

Much of Kahu's significance lies in her love for Koro and his rejection of her. Throughout her childhood she follows him, adores him and seeks his approval, while

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he repeatedly tells her to go away. When he holds classes in the meeting house to teach the boys the chants, history and customs of the tribe, Kahu is excluded, yet she listens and learns. Ihimaera presents her as the most devoted student of a culture that refuses to recognise her. This makes her a powerful symbol of how women in traditional societies have often carried and protected knowledge without being granted authority. Nanny Flowers, who loves Kahu fiercely and often challenges Koro, reinforces this idea, showing that strong women have always existed in the tribe even if their roles have been hidden.

Kahu's school speech is a moving example of her significance. She learns the Maori language and the traditions of her people and invites her family to hear her speak at a school ceremony. Koro does not attend, and Nanny describes how the family tried to bolster her courage by clapping loudly. Her talk shows both her pride in her heritage and her pain at Koro's absence, and the reader is made to feel that Koro's loss is greater than hers. In the context of the 1980s, when Maori language and culture were being revived through initiatives such as the Kohanga Reo language nests, Kahu represents the new generation who could keep that culture alive.

Kahu is also significant as a character with a special connection to nature. She seems able to communicate with the whales and the dolphins, and Ihimaera uses magical realism to present this as natural rather than strange. When Koro throws his carved stone into the sea and none of the boys can retrieve it, Kahu later dives and brings it back. This is a clear sign that she has the qualities of a leader, but it is kept from Koro at first, which builds tension and delays his recognition. The italicised chapters about the ancient bull whale, who mourns the loss of his rider and the damage done to the ocean, prepare us for Kahu as the answer to his longing. The whales' suffering from nuclear testing reflects real anxieties in the

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Pacific in the 1980s, and Kahu's bond with them suggests that the future leader must heal the relationship between humans and nature.

The climax confirms her significance. When the ancient bull whale strands at Whangara and the tribe cannot move it, Kahu swims out, climbs onto its back and speaks to it. The whale returns to the sea carrying her, echoing the legend of Paikea, who rode to Whangara from Hawaiki. Kahu becomes the whale rider of her generation, and the myth that opens the novel is repeated and renewed. Her disappearance into the sea is a kind of sacrifice, and her return, when she is found and taken to hospital, feels like a rebirth.

Finally, Kahu is significant because she changes Koro. At her hospital bedside, he at last accepts her and recognises her as his successor. Ihimaera does not reject tradition; instead, Kahu shows that tradition is strongest when it can adapt. Through her, the novel offers a hopeful vision of a Maori culture that honours its ancestors while making room for women and for a new generation. Kahu is therefore not only the protagonist but the meeting point of past and future, myth and reality, which is why the novel ultimately belongs to her.

8

I largely agree that Jing-mei Woo is the most important character in The Joy Luck Club, but not because she is the most vivid or the most admirable. Her importance is structural. She is the only daughter who also sits in a mother's chair, and so she becomes the bridge on which the whole novel rests: between the living and the dead, between San Francisco and China, and between the four mothers and the four daughters. However, it could be argued that her importance is borrowed from her mother, Suyuan, whose absence drives the plot, and that Jing-mei matters mainly as the vessel through which Suyuan's story is finally completed.

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The structure of the novel immediately singles Jing-mei out. Each of the four sections opens with Jing-mei's narrative, and she is the only character who speaks in all four. In the first chapter she takes her dead mother's place at the mah jong table, sitting on "the East" where things begin. This seating is symbolic: Tan places a thirty-six-year-old American daughter in a seat that belongs to the old Chinese world, and the awkwardness of the scene, as she worries about the rules and the aunties' expectations, captures the cultural distance felt by every daughter in the novel. Through Jing-mei, Tan dramatises the experience of the second-generation Chinese American, who has inherited a culture she has never properly understood. This mirrors Tan's own life: born in 1952 to immigrant parents, she has spoken of rejecting her Chinese heritage as a teenager before coming to value her mother's stories, and Jing-mei's journey closely follows hers.

Jing-mei is also important because she voices the tension between American individualism and the Chinese expectation of filial obedience. In "Two Kinds" her mother is convinced that "you could be anything you wanted to be in America", and pushes her to become a child prodigy, first like Shirley Temple and then as a pianist. Suyuan's belief reflects the hopes of many immigrants who arrived after the war, when the repeal of the Chinese Exclusion Act in 1943 and the easing of immigration restrictions made America seem like a land of possibility. Jing-mei's rebellion, culminating in her cruel wish that she were dead like the babies her mother lost in China, shows the clash between a high-context culture, where a child's achievement belongs to the family, and an American culture which prizes the right to be oneself. Her mother's reply, that there are only two kinds of daughters, the obedient and those who follow their own mind, expresses the Confucian idea that obedience is the true form of love. Because Jing-mei feels this clash so painfully, she represents the experience of all four daughters, even though

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Waverly, Lena and Rose live it in different ways.

Yet Jing-mei's importance is inseparable from Suyuan's. Suyuan founded the original Joy Luck Club in Kweilin during the Japanese invasion, inventing a way to feast on hope while refugees starved around them, and later restarted it in San Francisco in 1949. Her secret, that she abandoned twin baby daughters by a roadside while fleeing the Japanese, is the emotional centre of the novel and gives it its final destination. In this sense, Suyuan may be more important: it is her past which explains the club, her loss which explains her ambitions for Jing-mei, and her "long-cherished wish" which shapes the ending. Tan's own mother left three daughters behind in China, and Suyuan seems to embody the historical trauma of a whole generation of Chinese women who survived war and arrived in America carrying unspoken grief.

However, Suyuan is dead before the novel begins, so she can only reach the reader through Jing-mei. This is precisely why Jing-mei is so important. In "Best Quality" the jade pendant her mother gives her, which Suyuan calls her "life's importance", becomes a symbol of the inheritance Jing-mei slowly learns to value. At first she sees it as an unfashionable piece of jewellery, but after her mother's death she notices other young Chinese men wearing similar pendants and wonders what they mean. The pendant suggests that meaning in this novel has to be translated across generations, and Jing-mei is the one character who does that translating.

Some readers might argue that Lindo Jong or Ying-ying St. Clair are more significant because their stories are more dramatic. Lindo's escape from her arranged marriage to Tyan-yu through clever deception shows a woman finding strength within a patriarchal system, while Ying-ying's loss of spirit after her first husband's betrayal shows the cost of silence. These stories are powerful, but they

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are self-contained. Only Jing-mei's story connects all the others and changes by the end.

The final chapter, "A Pair of Tickets", proves Jing-mei's importance. Travelling to China with her father, she feels herself "becoming Chinese", and when she meets her half-sisters she sees that together they look like their mother. In completing her mother's wish, Jing-mei unites Suyuan's two families and turns the novel's fragmented structure into a whole. Her name, meaning "pure essence" and "younger sister", also takes on its full significance: she is both the essence of her mother's hopes and the younger sister who brings the lost daughters home. Tan herself made a similar journey to China in 1987, and the ending suggests her belief that identity is not lost by migration but can be recovered through stories.

Ultimately, I agree with the statement with one qualification. Suyuan is the novel's emotional source, but Jing-mei is its most important character, because she is the only one who moves between both generations and both cultures, and through her the reader sees how a daughter can finally understand a mother she believed she did not know.

9 In The Joy Luck Club, language barriers are far more than a practical difficulty. Tan presents them as the visible sign of a deeper divide between generations and cultures: the mothers think in Chinese and speak in broken English, the daughters think in English and understand only fragments of Chinese, and so love, grief and history are constantly lost in translation. Yet the novel itself, written in English but full of Chinese words and stories, can be read as Tan's attempt to cross that barrier, and the final chapter suggests that understanding is possible even when language fails.

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The barrier is established in the opening vignette of "Feathers from a Thousand Li Away". The old woman carries a swan feather to America and wants to give it to her daughter with all her good intentions, but she waits for the day she can explain it in "perfect American English". The tragedy is that this day never comes. Tan uses the parable to show the position of all four mothers, who emigrated in the years during and after the Second World War, often speaking little or no English, and who found that the meaning of their sacrifices could not be expressed in the language their American children understood.

This barrier is felt most painfully by Jing-mei. She admits she never properly understood her mother's Kweilin story, which Suyuan told in Chinese, and she even thought of it as a kind of fairy tale whose ending kept changing. When she asks about her mother's first babies, Suyuan simply says, "Your father is not my first husband. You are not those babies." The abruptness reveals grief that cannot be put into words, especially into English, and the silence prevents mother and daughter from ever discussing the twins while Suyuan is alive. At the first Joy Luck Club meeting after her death, Jing-mei realises that the aunties are afraid their daughters see them as stupid because of their fractured English, while the mothers fear that their daughters will forget their heritage and that their hopes will be lost. Tan suggests that each generation misjudges the other because of language: fluency is mistaken for wisdom, and its absence for ignorance.

Even the name of the club resists translation. Jing-mei struggles to explain what "Joy Luck" means, realising that it is not a word but an idea, and that it carries a history her mother lived through in wartime Kweilin. This shows how language contains culture: the barrier is not simply vocabulary but whole ways of seeing the world. Chinese culture, which the mothers absorbed in the 1920s and 1930s, is

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high-context, relying on shared understanding, hints and the unspoken, whereas the daughters have grown up in a direct, low-context American culture.

The section titled "American Translation" develops this idea. In it, Rose Hsu reflects that her mother uses Chinese words for which there is no real English equivalent, and that meaning and feeling seem to disappear when they are translated. An-mei's struggle to pronounce "psychiatrist" makes the word sound like something faintly ridiculous, and this mispronunciation reveals more than her accent: An-mei distrusts a Western culture that pays strangers to listen, when she believes Rose should listen to her own mother. Rose's American confidence in therapy is set against An-mei's belief, rooted in her own mother's tragic life as a concubine, that a woman must find her own voice.

Lindo and Waverly Jong show how language barriers create conflict even when a daughter speaks some Chinese. In "Double Face", when Lindo mentions her home town of Taiyuan, Waverly mishears it as Taiwan, and the small error frustrates Lindo because it shows how little her daughter knows of her past. Earlier, in "Rules of the Game", Lindo teaches Waverly the art of "invisible strength", yet Waverly is embarrassed when her mother proudly shows her off in the market. Lindo also says she wanted her children to have "American circumstances and Chinese character", but she realises she could not teach Chinese character in English. Her failure suggests that values are transmitted through language, and that the immigrant mother cannot fully pass on her culture once her child's first language has changed.

The St. Clairs present the most extreme example. Clifford St. Clair, an American, never learns Chinese, so he puts words into his wife's mouth and translates her silence into whatever he wishes to hear. At immigration he renames her Betty St.

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Clair and records the wrong year of birth, turning her from a Tiger into a Dragon. The bureaucratic change symbolises the erasure of her identity by a culture that does not listen. As a result, Ying-ying becomes a ghost in her own home, unseen and unheard. Tan links language barriers to the novel's feminist concerns: Ying-ying has spent her life in silence, and her decision at last to tell Lena about her first marriage shows a woman finally speaking up for herself and for her daughter.

The ending suggests that the barrier can be overcome. In "A Pair of Tickets", Jing-mei asks her father to tell her mother's story, and when he begins in English she insists that he tell it in Chinese, claiming she can understand. Her request shows how far she has come: the language she once resisted is now the one she wants. Meeting her half-sisters, she cannot speak fluently to them, yet she recognises their mother in their faces. Tan, whose own mother told her stories that she came to value only as an adult, suggests that storytelling is the way to preserve cultural heritage, and that recognition can pass between people where words cannot. Language barriers therefore cause much of the pain in the novel, but the novel itself becomes a kind of translation, carrying the mothers' feathers across the ocean at last.

10 For me, the most interesting character in Things Fall Apart is Okonkwo, because Achebe makes him both a great man and a deeply flawed one. He is admired by his clan, yet he is driven by a fear that the clan itself does not share, and his tragedy becomes a way for Achebe to explore the strengths and weaknesses of Igbo society just before colonialism tore it apart. Writing in 1958, two years before Nigerian independence, Achebe wanted to show Africans as complex human beings rather than the savages of European novels such as Conrad's Heart of Darkness,

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and Okonkwo's contradictions are central to that purpose.

From the opening line, Okonkwo is introduced as a public hero: "Okonkwo was well known throughout the nine villages and even beyond." He threw Amalinze the Cat in a famous wrestling match, and his fame grew "like a bush-fire in the harmattan". The simile, drawn from the Igbo landscape, suggests energy and speed, but also something destructive that burns out of control. Okonkwo has earned his status through hard work, two titles and three wives, and this shows that Umuofia was a society where a man could rise through his own achievements rather than inherit his position. Achebe's careful description of the clan's ranks and titles challenges the colonial idea that Africans had no ordered society.

What makes Okonkwo interesting rather than simply admirable is the fear beneath his strength. Achebe tells us that his whole life "was dominated by fear, the fear of failure and of weakness". This fear comes from his father, Unoka, who was lazy, in debt and called agbala, a word meaning both a woman and a man without titles. Okonkwo's hatred of his father becomes a hatred of anything he sees as feminine, including gentleness. He "ruled his household with a heavy hand", beating his wives and even breaking the Week of Peace by beating Ojiugo. His punishment by Ezeani shows that Igbo society valued balance and respect for the earth goddess Ani, and that Okonkwo's extreme masculinity is his own, not the clan's.

The killing of Ikemefuna is the moment where this flaw becomes tragic. The boy has lived in Okonkwo's household for three years and calls him father, and Okonkwo privately becomes fond of him. Ezeudu warns him, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." Yet when Ikemefuna runs to him crying "My father, they have killed me!", Okonkwo cuts him down because "He was afraid of being thought weak." The short, plain sentence is devastating. Achebe exposes

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the conflict between Okonkwo's private feelings and his public image, and the fact that he cannot eat for days afterwards shows that he does feel guilt, which makes him far more interesting than a simple brute. His friend Obierika says the Oracle's decision was not one in which Okonkwo needed to take part, suggesting that wise men in the clan question some traditions rather than follow them blindly.

Okonkwo's relationship with his children also reveals his complexity. He worries that Nwoye is lazy and too much like Unoka, and his harshness drives Nwoye away: after Ikemefuna's death, Nwoye feels something give way inside him "like the snapping of a tightened bow", and he is later drawn to the Christians' hymns, which seem to answer his questions about the twins in the Evil Forest and about Ikemefuna. In contrast, Okonkwo loves Ezinma, and when Chielo carries her off to the Oracle at night, he follows them, going back to the cave several times. Yet even this love is expressed through his gender anxieties, as he repeatedly thinks, "She should have been a boy." Achebe shows a man whose tenderness is real but who cannot allow himself to show it openly.

His exile to Mbanta, after his gun accidentally kills Ezeudu's son, tests him further. Seven years away from his clan, he feels his chi has failed him, and his uncle Uchendu has to teach him why "Mother is Supreme" and why a man is sheltered in his motherland when things go wrong. This episode is interesting because it shows that Igbo culture values the feminine in ways Okonkwo has refused to see. Meanwhile, the missionaries arrive, and Nwoye's conversion is a bitter blow; Okonkwo wonders how he could have produced such a son.

The ending makes Okonkwo the most interesting character because his downfall is personal and historical at once. Returning to Umuofia, he finds that the church and the colonial government have weakened the clan. Obierika explains that the

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white man "has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart." When Okonkwo kills the court messenger and realises that the clan will not go to war, he hangs himself, which is an abomination in Igbo belief. The man who spent his life avoiding his father's shame dies in the same disgrace, unable to be buried by his own people. Obierika's grief, that "one of the greatest men in Umuofia" will be "buried like a dog", contrasts sharply with the District Commissioner's plan to give him only "a reasonable paragraph" in his book, The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. Achebe uses this ironic final shift in perspective to show how colonial history reduced complex African lives to footnotes.

Okonkwo is therefore the most interesting character because he embodies the novel's central question. His rigidity reflects the inflexibility that leaves him unable to adapt, but his greatness reflects the dignity of a culture that colonialism tried to erase. Achebe makes us both judge him and mourn him.

11

Death in Things Fall Apart is never simply the end of a life. Achebe uses individual deaths to reveal the beliefs that hold Igbo society together, because how a person dies and is buried shows how the clan judges them and how it understands the relationship between the living, the ancestors and the earth goddess, Ani. At the same time, the deaths across the novel build towards a larger one: the death of a traditional way of life under colonialism. The title, taken from Yeats's poem "The Second Coming", already hints that the novel is about a world collapsing, and death becomes its central symbol.

The first significant death is that of Unoka, Okonkwo's father. Unoka dies of a swelling in his stomach and limbs, a disease which was an abomination to the

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earth goddess, so he is not allowed to die in his house or be buried in the ground. Instead he is carried to the Evil Forest and left there. This shows how death in Umuofia is tied to spiritual judgement: a shameful death confirms a shameful life, since Unoka had died untitled and in debt. His fate is significant because it shapes Okonkwo's whole personality. Okonkwo's fear of being thought weak, and his determination never to resemble his father, grow from this memory. Achebe therefore places a death at the very root of his tragic hero's character.

The death of Ikemefuna is the moral turning point of the novel. Ikemefuna is given to Umuofia by Mbaino as compensation for the murder of a Umuofian woman, which shows how Igbo society used negotiation and exchange to avoid war. After three years, the Oracle of the Hills and the Caves decrees that he must die. Ezeudu warns Okonkwo, "That boy calls you father. Do not bear a hand in his death." Yet when Ikemefuna cries "My father, they have killed me!", Okonkwo kills him because "He was afraid of being thought weak." Achebe's plain, unemotional style makes the moment more shocking. This death is significant in several ways. It shows the power of the Oracle, based on the real Oracle at Awka, over Igbo life; it reveals the cruelty that Okonkwo's fear of weakness produces; and it breaks Nwoye, who feels something give way inside him "like the snapping of a tightened bow". Nwoye's later conversion to Christianity grows partly from this moment, so this single death opens the first crack through which colonial religion will enter Okonkwo's family.

Achebe also uses the deaths of children to show the parts of Igbo belief that cause suffering. Twins are thrown away in the Evil Forest, and Nwoye is haunted by the sound of babies crying there. Ekwefi has lost nine children, believed to be an ogbanje who keeps dying and returning, and her fear for Ezinma shows the grief that mothers carried. Achebe does not idealise Igbo culture: he shows that

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some of its traditions concerning death created the very people, like the osu and the mothers of twins, who would welcome a new faith.

The death of Ezeudu, the oldest man in the village, shows the opposite of Unoka's fate. Because he had taken three titles, his death is announced with drums and the firing of guns, and the whole clan gathers to honour him with a warrior's funeral, at which the ancestral egwugwu appear. Death here is a public, sacred celebration of a great life. However, at the funeral Okonkwo's gun explodes and kills Ezeudu's sixteen-year-old son. Because it was a crime against the earth goddess to kill a clansman, even accidentally, Okonkwo must flee for seven years. The men of Umuofia then burn his houses and kill his animals to cleanse the land. Achebe presents this ritual with understanding: it is not personal hatred but the clan's duty to Ani. Yet Obierika wonders why a man should suffer so much for an offence committed unknowingly, suggesting that the novel invites us to question as well as respect these customs.

The killing at Abame marks a new kind of death. When a white man appears on an iron horse, the elders consult their Oracle and kill him, and in revenge white men later surround the market and wipe out almost the whole village. This episode, based on real British reprisals in Igboland in the early twentieth century, shows death now arriving from outside, on a scale traditional society cannot control.

The most significant death is Okonkwo's own. After he kills the court messenger with his machete and realises that Umuofia will not go to war, he hangs himself. Suicide is an abomination, so his own people cannot touch his body, and strangers must take him down. The tragic irony is clear: the man who rejected everything his father stood for dies in the same disgrace, denied an honourable burial. Obierika's angry words to the District Commissioner, that Okonkwo was "one of the

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greatest men in Umuofia" who will now be "buried like a dog", hold the colonisers responsible. Okonkwo's death also represents the death of the clan's unity. Obierika has already said that the white man "has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart", and Okonkwo, who embodied the old values, cannot survive in the new order.

Finally, the shift to the District Commissioner's point of view turns Okonkwo's death into "a reasonable paragraph" in a book called The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger. This ironic ending suggests that the colonial account of Africa erased the meaning of African lives and deaths. By giving each death in the novel its proper spiritual and social weight, Achebe, writing in 1958 as Nigeria moved towards independence, restores the dignity that such colonial histories denied.