

Arrow of God (1964)

Chinua Achebe (1930-2013)

OVERVIEW

Auteur Chinua Achebe is widely regarded as one of Africa's most important literary voices, known for his ability to portray the complexities of Nigerian life. Born in 1930 in Ogidi, he died in 2013, in Massachusetts. Achebe studied at University College Ibadan, where his interest in literature and storytelling took shape. Over the course of his career, he received major national and international accolades, including the Nigerian National Order of Merit and the Man Booker International Prize, which recognized the global impact of his work. His novels include *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966), and *Anthills of the Savannah* (1987). In universities around the world, Achebe's writing is treated as essential reading, valued for its insight into colonialism, cultural identity, and the challenges of modern African societies.

Book *Arrow of God* is a novel that explores the tension between tradition, colonial intrusion, spiritual authority, and the fragile unity of a community facing change. Achebe examines themes such as leadership, ritual, masculinity, religious conflict, and the struggle to preserve identity in a shifting world. The book follows Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, whose devotion to ritual places him at the center of political rivalry and cultural transformation. At home, the novel was praised for its depth, linguistic richness, and its portrayal of Igbo cosmology. Abroad, critics admired Achebe's ability to present African societies with complexity and dignity, challenging simplistic colonial narratives. Although *Arrow of God* did not receive a formal literary award, it strengthened Achebe's international reputation and is widely considered one of his finest achievements. Its reception confirmed Achebe as a major voice in world literature and a central figure in African storytelling.

Background The novel appears during a period marked by intense political and cultural change in Nigeria. Achebe wrote *Arrow of God* in the early 1960s, when the country had just gained independence and was confronting the legacy of colonial rule. The story's setting in the early twentieth century allows Achebe to examine the roots of these tensions, showing how colonial administration disrupted indigenous systems of governance and reshaped spiritual life. The British introduction of Warrant Chiefs, the spread of Christianity, and the imposition of foreign legal structures created confusion in communities that relied on ritual, consensus, and ancestral authority. Achebe uses Umuaro as a microcosm of this larger historical moment, revealing how internal rivalries and external pressures combine to weaken traditional institutions. Culturally, the novel highlights the richness of Igbo cosmology, the importance of festivals, and the role of priests in maintaining social balance. It also reflects debates about modernity, identity, and the future of African societies. Readers and scholars have discussed how Achebe portrays the collision between spiritual systems, the vulnerability of ritual, and the consequences of leadership shaped by pride and isolation. The book generated conversations about the nature of authority, the impact of colonial misunderstanding, and the ways communities negotiate change. It remains central to discussions of African literature because it captures a moment when history, culture, and politics intersect, revealing the complexity of a society navigating profound transformation.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Ezeulu: The Grand Priest of the six villages of Umuaro
Obika: Ezeulu's son known for his drunkenness and short temper
Udoche: Ezeulu's son, who converts to Christianity
Nwaka: A wealthy man who challenges Ezeulu's spiritual leadership
Winterbottom: The white District Officer

SYNOPSIS

Arrow of God follows Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, who serves as the spiritual guide for the six villages of Umuaro. His life revolves around ritual duties that regulate farming seasons, festivals, and the moral order of the community. Ezeulu sees himself as the guardian of tradition, and he approaches his role with strict discipline and deep pride. Around him, Umuaro faces growing internal tensions as ambitious leaders challenge his authority and push the villages toward conflict with their neighbors. At the same time, British colonial administrators expand their influence, introducing new laws and new expectations that disturb the balance of local power. Ezeulu tries to protect the integrity of his office, but his refusal to compromise places him at odds with both his community and the colonial government. When he rejects the British offer to serve as a “native chief,” he is detained for weeks. His absence disrupts the ritual calendar, and upon his release, he insists that the New Yam Festival cannot take place until he completes the required sacred steps. His decision delays planting and threatens the food supply. As hunger grows, many villagers turn to the Christian mission, which offers support and a new spiritual path. The story closes with Ezeulu isolated and overwhelmed as his authority collapses. The community he once guided moves toward a different future.

CHAPTER 1: Ezeulu Watches the Moon

Watching the New Moon: Ezeulu, the Chief Priest of Ulu, keeps his ritual watch for the new moon. He begins looking three days early because he must never risk missing it. The moon governs the sacred calendar, and Ezeulu’s duty is absolute. His hut is built so he can see the sky clearly from a special second threshold. As he peers upward, he worries about his aging eyes, though he reassures himself that he still sees as sharply as any young man. When the thin crescent finally appears, “as thin as an orphan fed grudgingly,” he strikes his *ogene* (bell) to announce it. Children echo the news across the compound, chanting, and the women step outside to greet the moon with blessings. Ezeulu’s senior wife, Matefi, exclaimed, “*Moon, may your face meeting mine bring good fortune*” (2) while Ugoye, his younger wife, worries that the moon “*sits awkwardly ... like an evil moon.*”

The Sacred Yam and the Burden of Power: After announcing the moon, Ezeulu enters his barn to take down one of the twelve sacred yams. He counts them carefully, even though he knows how many remain. He roasts the yam over the fire, treating it like an offering. As he waits, he reflects on the immense authority of his function. He names the days for the great feasts like the feast of the Pumpkin leaves and the feast of the New Yam, but he does not choose them. He is only the watchman of Ulu’s calendar. This troubles him. He wonders what kind of power it is if it can never be used. His frustration rises until he rebukes an imagined challenger: “*Take away that word ‘dare’ ... No man in all Umuaro can stand up and say that I dare not*” (3). The anger fades quickly, replaced by the uneasy knowledge that his authority is both revered and constrained. His youngest son, Nwafo, joins him, already drawn to ritual life. Ezeulu notices his precocity, “*as though the deity had already marked him out as his future Chief Priest.*” But Ezeulu reminds himself that Ulu may choose any son, even the least likely.

Family Tensions and Household Ritual: Ezeulu summons his eldest son, Edogo, and confronts him about carving a deity figure for a man in another village. Ezeulu forbids such work. When Edogo tries to explain, Ezeulu cuts him off sharply: “*I have finished with you.*” The tension unsettles Nwafo, who cannot understand his father’s anger. Soon Edogo’s sister Obiageli enters, hoping for a piece of the roasted yam, but Ezeulu never shares the sacred meal. After eating, he moves to the household shrine and prays. He asks Ulu for prosperity, safety, male children, and unity among the six villages. However, anger rises in him when he thinks of the political divisions between the six villages of Umuaro and the accusations against him for speaking truth before the white man. He remembers that the white man, “Wintabota” (Captain Winterbottom), once called him “*the only witness of truth,*” a praise that enraged his enemies.

Evening Voices and the Memory of Spirits: As night deepens, women return from the stream, and Ezeulu complains that supper always arrives late. His son Obika approaches, singing loudly. Ezeulu calls him “the night bird,” and Nwafo jokes that Obika will soon see the spirit Eru again. This leads into a remembered episode: Years earlier, Obika had rushed home terrified after seeing a tall, wealthy spirit during a storm. Ezeulu had recognized it immediately and reassured him, saying, “*You have seen Eru, the Magnificent.*”

Supper arrives late again, and Ezeulu scolds Matefi, his second wife, harshly, comparing her disregard for his wishes to *“the fart a dog breaks to put out a fire.”*

Strength, Flaws, and the Shadow of Violence: Obika is one of the most striking young men in Umuaro. His beauty and strength are legendary, but he is marred by heavy drinking and sudden anger. Ezeulu often warns him that *“sometimes it is better to be a coward,”* yet he still prefers Obika’s fiery energy to Edogo’s quiet caution. A troubling incident is recalled: Obika nearly killed his brother-in-law after seeing his sister beaten. He dragged the man home tied to a bed and placed him under a tree whose heavy fruit could have crushed him. Only Ezeulu’s intervention prevented murder. Later, the in-laws came seeking explanation, and Ezeulu used all his skill to pacify them.

A Family Council and a Clash of Duties: After finishing his meal, Obika joins his brothers in their father’s hut. As always, Edogo speaks on behalf of the group. They have come to ask Ezeulu what work he expects them to do the next day. Ezeulu turns to Obika to ask how much remains unfinished on his new homestead. Obika replies that only his wife’s barn is left, and that it can wait until harvest since there is nothing yet to store. Ezeulu rejects the idea immediately. Nothing, he insists, should be left undone. A new wife must not enter an unfinished home, even if the younger generation no longer cares for such customs. He orders Edogo to take his brothers and the women to complete the barn. If Obika feels no shame, Ezeulu says, the rest of the family must still uphold proper standards.

The Christians Have Overstepped: Oduche asks to speak. He hesitates, clearing his throat, and Obika mocks him, suggesting perhaps the Christians forbid him from helping build a barn. Edogo snaps at Obika, reminding him that Oduche has worked harder than anyone on Obika’s own homestead. Ezeulu silences the bickering, saying he wants to hear Oduche, not *“two jealous wives.”* Oduche finally explains that he has been chosen to go to Okperi the next day to help bring the loads of the new missionary teacher. Ezeulu reacts sharply. He reminds his son that he sent him to the Christians only because of his friendship with the white man, Wintabota, who had asked him to send a child to learn their ways. That decision was never meant to free Oduche from his responsibilities at home. Tomorrow is the day when Ezeulu’s sons, wives, and daughter-in-law work for him, and the Christians must learn the customs of the land. If they do not know them, Oduche must teach them.

CHAPTER 2: Umuaro Chooses War

Origins of Umuaro: Ezeulu reflects on how bewildered the ancestors of Umuaro would be if they could witness the present age. He believes they would be stunned to see the six villages preparing for war against Okperi under circumstances that violate tradition and unity. The six villages of Umuachala, Umunneora, Umuagu, Umuezeani, Umuogwugwu, and Umuisiuzo were once separate communities, each with its own deity, until the terror of Abam raiders forced them to unite under a single god, Ulu. This shared deity became the foundation of Umuaro’s strength. For Ezeulu, the current disregard for Ulu’s guidance signals a deep fracture in the moral order.

The Disputed Farmland: Five years earlier, Umuaro’s leaders gathered to decide whether to send a peace offering or a war challenge to Okperi over a piece of farmland. Ezeulu warned them that Ulu would refuse to support an unjust conflict. He reminded them that the land originally belonged to Okperi and that Umuaro’s ancestors had been granted permission to settle there. His testimony came from his father: *“my father told me that ... it was Okperi who gave us a piece of their land to live in”* (15). but his words were dismissed. The assembly was swayed by Nwaka, a wealthy and influential man who challenged Ezeulu’s authority and questioned the accuracy of his ancestral knowledge.

Nwaka’s Counterstory: Nwaka offered a competing narrative: *“My father told me a different story.”* Nwaka claimed that Okperi people were wanderers who had drifted from place to place, driven out repeatedly by stronger neighbors. He maintained that Okperi had no legitimate claim to the disputed land and that Umuaro should not retreat out of fear of conflict. And if they abandoned their land to Okperi, they should have the courage to later tell their children that they did it out of cowardice. His speech stirred the crowd, and he used subtle mockery to undermine Ezeulu, including a pointed reference to Ezeulu’s mother being from

Okperi. The assembly shifted decisively toward war. The elders selected Akukalia, a fiery and aggressive man, to carry the symbols of peace or war to Okperi. The oldest man in his village reminded him of the delicate nature of such missions. He urged Akukalia to restrain his temper and avoid provoking the hosts: *"I saw that [Akukalia] was in great anger ... we are not sending him to his motherland to fight. We are sending you, Akukalia, to place the choice of war or peace them ... whatever they say, you are not to dispute with them"* (17). The village approved and Akukalia agreed outwardly, but his pride and anger simmered beneath the surface.

Journey to Okperi: Akukalia and two companions set out at dawn. Along the way, they passed crowds of women heading to the famous Eke Okperi market. Akukalia spoke proudly of his mother's people and their powerful market deity, Nwanyieke, who was believed to sweep the world with her broom before dawn. The men also discussed the disputed farmland, recalling memories of cutting grass there in earlier years. Akukalia insisted that their mission was not to debate ownership but to deliver Umuaro's ultimatum.

Arrival and Rising Tension: Upon reaching Okperi, the emissaries went first to Uduezue, a relative of Akukalia's mother. Uduezue welcomed them warmly, but Akukalia refused to share the kolanut of hospitality, insisting that their message must be delivered immediately. Uduezue led them to Otikpo, the town-crier, who also attempted to offer kolanut. Akukalia again refused, signaling the gravity of their mission. Otikpo explained that the elders could not gather on a market day and suggested they return the next morning. Akukalia grew impatient, and the conversation grew tense.

Insults and the Fatal Blow: Ebo, a neighbor, entered the *obi* (the hut) and attempted to greet the visitors. Akukalia refused his handshake. When Ebo questioned the urgency of the mission, Akukalia responded with anger. Ebo retorted sharply, and in the exchange he called Akukalia a castrated bull and alluded to the fact that Akukalia was *"an impotent man ... whose two wives were secretly given to other men to bear his children"* (23). This insult struck at Akukalia's deepest wound. Rage overtook him. A violent fight erupted. Ebo fled to fetch a machete, and Akukalia pursued him.

Akukalia's Blasphemy and Death: In a moment of fury, Akukalia seized Ebo's *ikenga* (carved totem) from the shrine and split it in two. The crowd gasped. Destroying a man's *ikenga* was an unforgivable act, a violation of his personal spirit and ancestral strength. Ebo, overwhelmed by grief and shame, fetched his gun. He knelt at the threshold, aimed, and fired. The bullet struck Akukalia in the chest. Akukalia still tried to charge forward with his machete raised, but he collapsed at the doorway and died.

Umuaro's Shock and Unease: When Akukalia's body was returned to Umuaro, the villagers were stunned. No emissary had ever been killed abroad. After the initial shock, many admitted that Akukalia had committed a grave offense. They understood why Ebo had acted as he did. But one troubling detail remained: Okperi sent no explanation, no message, no gesture of condolence. They simply returned the corpse. This silence was interpreted as contempt. Four days later, Umuaro gathered again. Many elders urged restraint, arguing that Akukalia's actions had brought misfortune upon himself. Others, led by Nwaka, demanded vengeance. They claimed that Umuaro could not allow itself to be dishonored. The assembly split into two factions.

Ezeulu's Final Warning: Ezeulu spoke last. His voice was calm but filled with sorrow. He told a story of a great wrestler who defeated every opponent until he challenged his own personal god, who crushed him instantly. He addressed Ogbuefi Egonwanne, the oldest man in the crowd and blamed him for not having used his wisdom to prevent this tragedy: *"I told him that he should have spoken up against what we were planning, instead of which he put a piece of live coal into a child's palm and asked him to carry it with care"* (25). Ezeulu warned that Umuaro was now challenging its own chi. He insisted that Ulu would refuse to fight in a cause stained by blame. Some villagers gathered around him in support, while others followed Nwaka.

The Path toward Conflict: That night, Nwaka held a private meeting and ensured that no one from Ezeulu's village attended. He argued that Umuaro must reject Ezeulu's influence and prepare for war. He

accused Ezeulu of ambition and claimed that the priest sought to rule the six villages. The meeting ended with a resolution: Several Okperi heads must fall to settle the matter.

CHAPTER 3: Winterbottom Breaks the Guns

The Storm Breaks Over Government Hill: Captain T. K. Winterbottom, the District Commissioner, is standing on the veranda of his bungalow, watching the first rain of the year arrive with violent force. Winterbottom has been worn down by the heat, the sleepless nights, and the oppressive atmosphere of the dry season. His body feels drained, his gums pale, his nights haunted by the pulse of distant drums, a sound he fears may be "*the heartbeat of the African darkness*." When the storm finally erupts, the landscape transforms and is full of fresh energy. Winterbottom watches children run naked in the rain, singing for its arrival. Their joy stirs something like envy in him. The rain cleanses the land and briefly revives his spirits.

Life on a Small Colonial Outpost: Okperi is described as a modest station with only five Europeans living on Government Hill. Winterbottom, the District Officer, presides over the area with the authority of the King's representative. His assistant, Tony Clarke, has recently arrived to replace a predecessor who died of cerebral malaria. The other Europeans, Roberts, Wade, and Wright, oversee, respectively, the police, the prison, and the public works. Winterbottom has already reprimanded Wright for his proclivity to sleep with local women, threatening to bar him from the European bar and lounge (the Club), and insisting that Europeans "*must not lower themselves in the eyes of the natives*" (32).

Tony Clarke and the Burden of Colonial Ritual: Clarke prepares for dinner early, following the strict colonial habit of dressing formally despite the heat, which he dreads. Today, luckily, the rain has subdued the heat, and he is tolerating his formal starched shirt and tie better. Because he is an hour early, Clarke is reading *The Pacification of the Primitive Tribes of the Lower Niger*, a book Winterbottom lent him. Though he finds it dull, the final chapter, "*THE CALL*," awakens him with its imperial language. Clarke murmurs "*That's rather good*" as he reads the passage urging British sons to leave home and "*lead the backward races into line*" (33). Clarke's memory drifts to an awkward dinner at Government House, where he arrived too early and endured a humiliating evening among senior officials who barely acknowledged him.

Winterbottom's Philosophy: When Clarke arrives for dinner, Winterbottom offers drinks and conversation. Their discussion turns to George Allen's book, prompting Winterbottom to defend the colonial mission with a mixture of irritation and paternal certainty. He recounts witnessing brutal local punishments, using them to justify British intervention. Winterbottom contrasts British indecision with French colonial precision, lamenting that the British both preserve "savage tyrants" and invent chiefs where none existed. His frustration reveals his belief that the British approach lacks firmness and coherence. Whereas "*the French are not ashamed to teach their culture to the backward races under their charge, ... we [British] flounder from one expedient to its opposite*" (35). Clarke, eager to please, shifts the conversation to Winterbottom's collection of old guns displayed in the bungalow. This delights Winterbottom, who launches into the story of the feud between Okperi and Umuaro, a conflict he claims to have resolved.

Winterbottom, the Breaker of Guns: Winterbottom explains that the war began when a drunken visitor from Umuaro, after chugging a gallon of palm-wine, as is the habit of the natives, reached for his host's *ikenga* and split it in two. He describes the *ikenga* as "*the most important fetish in the Ibo man's arsenal*," representing ancestors and personal destiny. Splitting it is an act reserved for death, when one half is buried with the owner and the other discarded. Thus, the visitor's gesture was a profound sacrilege. The host responded by shooting him, and the killing ignited a full-scale conflict between the villages. Winterbottom intervened, investigated the disputed land, and concluded that Okperi was the rightful owner. He destroyed all firearms in Umuaro, earning the name *Otiji-Egbe*, Breaker of Guns. Winterbottom notes that every witness lied except one: a priest-king from Umuaro who testified against his own people. Winterbottom speculates that the man was driven by a powerful taboo and remarks on his unusual reddish complexion, weaving in a dubious theory about the Ibos assimilating an ancient non-Negroid tribes, as the "*red Indians*."

CHAPTER 4: Nwaka Defies Ulu

The Ezeulu-Nwaka Rivalry: Five years after Captain Winterbottom shattered Umuaro's guns, the tension between Ezeulu and Nwaka has hardened into a dangerous feud. What began as a quarrel between two men has now spread through their villages, darkening everyday life. Families refuse to drink palm wine or touch kolanut that has passed through the hands of anyone associated with the opposing side. Suspicion has become a habit.

Nwaka is Arrogant: Nwaka, always bold, pushes the conflict to a new extreme. In public, he hints that Ulu, the central deity of Umuaro, might one day suffer the same fate as another god who was burned by his own people. Many villagers think he has crossed a line, but nothing happens to him. His survival becomes a kind of performance. At the Idemili festival, Nwaka appears wearing the great Ogalanya Mask. In a dramatic monologue, he boasts that he has entered a forbidden realm and returned untouched. The crowd half-awed and half-fearful, answers with the line *"His arm is indeed very strong"* (40).

The Hidden Force behind Nwaka's Courage: People begin to wonder how a man can defy Ulu and live. The answer lies in the priest of Idemili, Ezidemili, who has long been Nwaka's mentor. Their friendship began in youth, and although they differ in appearance and temperament, Ezidemili has always guided Nwaka. The priest resents Ulu's supremacy over the older deities and encourages Nwaka's hostility toward Ezeulu. Ezidemili claims that Ulu's priest is an impostor who has usurped ancient privileges.

Ezeulu's Unease About the New Religion: While Ezeulu sits in his obi thinking about the coming Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, he hears the church bell ringing nearby. He reflects on his decision to send Oduche to learn the white man's ways. At first, he believed it wise to have someone in his household who understood the newcomers. Now he fears the new religion behaves like a leper: *"... allow him a handshake and he wants to embrace"* (43). Oduche has begun to act strangely, and Ezeulu wonders whether it is time to pull him back.

Udoche's Box Moves on Its Own: Oduche leaves for church wearing his prized singlet and towel. Soon after, loud voices erupt in the compound. Nwafo rushes to tell Ezeulu that *"Oduche's box is moving."* The box, made by the mission carpenter and locked, seems to contain something struggling violently inside. Ezeulu carries it outside, refusing to show fear. He wedges a spear under the lid and forces it open. Inside lies a royal python, exhausted but alive. The sight horrifies everyone. The python is sacred to Idemili, and its presence in the box is an abomination. Ezeulu demands to know where Oduche is and declares, *"Today I shall kill the boy with my own hands"* (45). The python slips away into the bush, and the women cry as Ezeulu returns to his obi with a machete. Neighbors advise Ugoye, Oduche's mother, to send her son away before he returns home. Before midday, the story spreads throughout all the villages.

How Oduche Joined the Christians: Ezeulu had promised Winterbottom years earlier to send a son to church but waited until he was sure the white man intended to stay. He spoke to Oduche with unusual intimacy, telling him that the world was changing and that a wise man must learn to move like the bird Eneke-nti-oba who flies without perching. Oduche's mother opposed the idea, but Ezeulu dismissed her concerns, insisting that a great household must contain all kinds of people. Once Oduche began attending church, he grew proud of his ability to learn quickly. He admired the West Indian missionary Blackett and dreamed of mastering the white man's language.

The Python Debate among the Converts: The new catechist, Mr Goodcountry, urges converts to reject old customs and even kill the sacred python, comparing it to the serpent that deceived Eve: *"You address the python as father. It is nothing but a snake, the snake that deceived our first mother, Eve. If you are afraid to kill it, do not count yourself a Christian"* (47). Moses Unachukwu, the first convert of Umuaro and a respected carpenter, challenges him. Moses argues that neither the Bible nor the catechism commands such a thing and recounts the old story of Umuama, the seventh village destroyed after its people killed a python. Goodcountry dismisses the tale as foolishness. When he asks for someone to defend the Lord,

Oduche unexpectedly speaks up, claiming that God told Adam to crush the serpent's head. The catechist praises him and declares that he will be named Peter at baptism.

Oduche's Thoughtless Decision: Moses warns Goodcountry to leave the python alone, but the catechist's challenge stirs something in Oduche. He decides to kill one of the two pythons that live in his mother's hut. Fear weakens his resolve, so he chooses a smaller one. He pushes it down from the wall but cannot strike it. When he hears footsteps, he panics, grabs the snake, and hides it in his locked box. He convinces himself that the python will die from lack of air and that he will be responsible without being guilty. This is when Ezeulu opens the box and discovers the sacred creature inside.

Edogo at the Spirit-House: Edogo begins his day in the secluded spirit-house at Nkwo market, carving a sacred mask for the upcoming Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves. Because masks cannot be shaped under ordinary eyes, he works alone in the dim hut surrounded by ancestral ceremonial objects, fierce horned spirits and the rare maiden-spirit masks whose beauty once inspired teasing from an old friend. As he carves, the familiar rhythm of the market fades, until a sudden burst of voices breaks his concentration.

Rumors of an Abomination: Edogo recognizes the voice of their neighbor, Anosi, speaking breathlessly to other men. He listens and learns that a python, an animal sacred to the priest of Idemili, has been found inside Oduche's box. The news has thrown Umuachala into turmoil, and people are already predicting disaster for Ezeulu's household. Troubled, Edogo abandons his carving and rushes home, only to find his father already furious, not just at Oduche, but at the neighbors whose pity feels like mockery.

Ezeulu's Anger and a Dangerous Message: When Edogo reports what he heard, Ezeulu rebukes him harshly for failing to defend the family's honor: "*When I was your age ... I would have come out and broken the man's head instead of hiding in the spirit-house*" (52). The day worsens when a messenger from Ezidemili arrives. He demands to know how Ezeulu intends to cleanse the "abomination" committed in his house. Ezeulu explodes, ordering the messenger to "*go back and tell Ezidemili to eat shit*" (53), warning him that in earlier times such insolence would have cost him dearly. The young man leaves, and the tension between the two priesthoods deepens.

CHAPTER 5: Winterbottom Rejects Indirect Rule

Winterbottom's Frustration with Indirect Rule: Captain Winterbottom receives a government memorandum ordering colonial officers to strengthen the policy of Indirect Rule by governing African communities through local chiefs. He becomes angry because he believes this policy does not suit every community. He is especially annoyed that Watkinson, an officer who entered the colonial service after him but has been promoted above him, criticizes his resistance to the policy. Winterbottom feels that senior officials who make these decisions do not understand local communities as well as officers working directly among them.

Clarke's Mission to Umuaro: While Winterbottom is thinking about the memorandum, Mr Clarke arrives before leaving on his first tour of the district. Winterbottom tells him to investigate what is happening in Umuaro, particularly the behavior of Wright, who is working on a new road. There have been disturbing reports that Wright has been whipping local men and mistreating people. After Clarke leaves, Winterbottom returns to the problem of Indirect Rule and remembers why he has always been suspicious of appointing powerful local chiefs.

The Failure of Chief Ikedi: Winterbottom remembers how the government had previously pressured him to appoint James Ikedi as Warrant Chief of Okperi. Ikedi soon abused his authority by creating an illegal court and prison and behaving harshly toward the people. Later, he worked with a corrupt road overseer who threatened villagers and demanded money from them. Although Winterbottom punished the overseer, he could not prove Ikedi's involvement. Ikedi eventually became even more powerful and had himself recognized as a king, despite the community's traditional dislike of kingship. The experience convinced Winterbottom that British rule was "*making a dozen mushroom kings grow where there were none before*" (59).

Ezeulu Becomes Winterbottom's Choice: Despite his objections, Winterbottom finally accepts that he must follow orders and find a chief for Umuaro. He decides not to repeat his mistake of choosing someone simply because the person has received missionary education. Instead, he remembers Ezeulu, the respected priest who had testified during the land dispute between Umuaro and Okperi. Winterbottom remembers him as an impressive man who spoke truthfully. He therefore begins to regard Ezeulu as the best person to become the British-appointed chief of Umuaro.

CHAPTER 6: Ezeulu Announces the Festival

Oduche Returns and Ezeulu Considers the Offence: After the trouble involving Oduche and the sacred python, Oduche's mother accuses her husband of being at the source of the trouble for sending him to the Christian church. She declares that Oduche must not continue his Christian education. Ezeulu insists that his son must continue attending the Christian church, declaring, *"I have said that he will go there and he will go"* (61). When Oduche returns, frightened and miserable, Ezeulu ignores him but privately thinks seriously about the religious consequences of his actions. Although the python is sacred to Idemili, Ezeulu believes that trapping it in a box is less serious than killing it. He also remembers that the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves is approaching, when he will perform the important duty of cleansing the six villages before the planting season.

Akueke's Family Seeks Reconciliation: Ezeulu is visited by Onwuzuligbo, a relative of Akueke's husband. He announces that Akueke's husband and his people want to visit Ezeulu so that the family dispute can be settled. When they arrive, they express their desire to take Akueke back home. Ezeulu reminds them that she and her child have lived under his care for almost a year and asks how they intend to compensate him. Onwuzuligbo respectfully admits their obligation, saying, *"a man's debt to his father-in-law can never be fully discharged."* Although Ezeulu appears demanding, he actually hopes for his daughter's marriage to be restored. The discussion also addresses the violence Akueke suffered in her marriage. Ezeulu's brother questions whether her husband simply wants her back because he needs someone to beat. After the husband's family promises that this will not happen again, Akueke agrees to return if her father approves. Ezeulu accepts the reconciliation but gives an important warning: *"It is not bravery for a man to beat his wife"* (64). He recognizes that husbands and wives may disagree but insists that such disagreements should not end up in physical fighting.

Ezeulu Announces the Festival: Ezeulu is grateful that the conflict over Akueke has finally moved toward reconciliation, and he believes Ulu has helped bring this about. He therefore turns his attention to preparing the community spiritually for the farming season. He sends his six assistants to announce that *"the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves will take place on the coming Nkwo."* As the village crier spreads the message, ordinary family life continues in Ezeulu's compound, where the children tell stories, tease one another, and argue playfully.

CHAPTER 7: Umuaro Celebrates Ulu and Ezeulu Cleanses the Land

The Community Gathers for the Festival: Obika, Ofoedu, and several young men from Umuagu relax together before the great community festival. Their casual gathering is interrupted when the *Ikolo*, the great drum of Umuaro, begins to sound. It calls each of the six villages in their traditional order, and the people respond enthusiastically. The ancient drum has an important connection with the history of Ulu and the whole community. Its elderly drummer, Obiozo Ezikolo, is still admired for his skill and energy. When someone comments on his performance, he replies humorously, *"An old woman is never old when it comes to the dance she knows."* Although the *Ikolo* had once accompanied warriors into conflict, on this occasion *"it sang of peace,"* announcing a religious festival that brings the villages together.

Ezeulu Makes His Ceremonial Entrance: As the ceremony begins, Ezeulu's messengers struggle to clear a space in the crowded marketplace. The women, carrying pumpkin leaves, push toward the front because they have an important role in the coming ritual. When Ezeulu finally appears, the people greet him with a tremendous shout. He is dressed ceremonially, with part of his body covered in white chalk, and he carries

sacred symbols of authority. Responding to the *Ikolo*, he commands, “*Speak on ... Ezeulu hears what you say.*” With his movements he interacts with invisible spiritual beings, causing some spectators to move away in fear.

The Story of Ulu’s First Coming: Ezeulu re-enacts the traditional story of the First Coming of Ulu. He recalls how the people selected him to carry their new deity and how he initially questioned whether he was capable of carrying such a responsibility. During the symbolic journey, the four market days, Eke, Oye, Afo, and Nkwo, appear as obstacles that must be overcome. Through sacrifices, courage, and determination, the obstacles are eventually overcome. The performance allows the people to remember the sacred history of their community while also demonstrating the importance of Ezeulu’s position as the priest responsible for maintaining the relationship between Ulu and Umuaro.

The Cleansing of Umuaro: The central ritual begins when Ezeulu runs around the marketplace while the women wave pumpkin leaves and pray. They symbolically place the sins and impurities of their households onto these leaves before throwing them toward the Chief Priest. Ugoye asks Ulu to “*cleanse my household of all defilement,*” including wrongs associated with herself, her children, friends, or relatives. Ezeulu’s six assistants follow him and collect six bunches of leaves. Ezeulu races into Ulu’s shrine, where he symbolically carries away the offences of the community. The sudden final beat of the *Ikolo* releases the tension because the people now believe that Ezeulu has successfully taken their sins away and that Umuaro has been spiritually cleansed.

Celebration After the Ritual: After Ezeulu safely enters the shrine, the atmosphere changes from tension to joyful celebration. The women of the six villages take turns running around the marketplace, stamping their feet heavily while others clap and encourage them. Their movements raise a large cloud of dust, and the pumpkin leaves scattered across the ground are crushed beneath their feet. Each village participates according to its recognized place within Umuaro.

The Festival Returns to Family Life: When the ceremony ends, the large gathering breaks into smaller groups of friends and relatives. Akueke finds her older sister Adeze, and Ugoye soon joins them. They discuss recent troubles in Ezeulu’s household, especially the controversy involving Oduche and the sacred python. Their conversation gradually becomes more humorous as they discuss Ezeulu’s age and his determination to remain physically strong despite the demanding ceremony. Akueke then reveals that her husband and his relatives have visited her family and that she is preparing to return to him.

CHAPTER 8: Wright Forces Labor and Whips Obika

Wright’s Road and the Turn to Forced Labor: Mr Wright, the Public Works overseer, races against time to complete the new road linking Okperi and Umuaro. Paid labor is too slow, and the budget is already overspent. Winterbottom refuses to increase the workforce. Wright briefly considers cutting wages but knows it will not help. He finally requests permission to use unpaid labor. Winterbottom reluctantly approves.

Umuaro’s Age Groups Are Summoned: The elders of Umuaro decide to send two age groups: Otakagu (the older, proud “Devourer Like Leopard”) and Omumawa (the younger group mocked for wearing cloths “to cover small boys’ penes”). The two groups dislike each other and arrange to work on alternate Eke days to avoid conflict. Moses Unachukwu, the carpenter and convert, becomes the interpreter and organizer because he speaks English. Wright distrusts him at first but soon finds him indispensable. Moses’s prestige rises across Umuaro, though Ezeulu resents that such honor falls to a man of Umunneora.

Obika and Ofoedu Oversleep After a Foolish Challenge: The day after the Festival of the Pumpkin Leaves, Otakagu is scheduled to work. But Obika and his friend Ofoedu are still asleep, deadened by palm wine. The previous day, they had boasted they could drink any wine without losing control. A man named Maduka challenged them to drink three hornfuls of wine from the legendary palm tree Okposalebo, known as “*Disperser of a Kindred.*” They accepted. The wine was potent, likely mixed with herbs. Both men collapsed where they sat and slept through the night. Maduka checked on them twice, amused by their

downfall. Ezeulu, exhausted from the festival, hears the commotion as the women try to wake Obika. He clenches his teeth. His son's drunkenness humiliates him. He imagines Obika's new bride arriving soon only to find a husband who cannot guard his home or rise without women's help. He blames Ofoedu, whom he considers a worthless influence.

The Road Site and the Funeral Song: Obika and Ofoedu finally set out. As they approach the new road, they hear a familiar funeral dirge transformed into a work song: *"Look! a python! Yes, it lies across the way."* Their age group has turned the solemn chant into a mischievous joke. They laugh. But when the workers see the two latecomers approaching, the singing stops. Tools freeze mid-air. Nweke Ukpaka shouts a mocking greeting. The crowd laughs.

Wright's Fury and the Whipping of Obika: Mr. Wright, already irritated, grips his whip. Moses tries to calm him, but Wright is beyond listening. He stares at Obika and Ofoedu with growing rage. Obika, noticing the posture, adds swagger to his walk, provoking more laughter. As he tries to pass Wright, the man lashes out. The first strike misses; the second wraps around Obika's ear. Obika charges in fury, but Moses leaps between them. Wright's assistants seize Obika, and Wright delivers half a dozen lashes across his bare back. Obika does not resist. He shivers. Ofoedu trembles, powerless.

The Crowd Erupts: Moses screams at Obika: *"Are you mad to attack a white man? ... I have heard that not a person in your father's house has a right head"* (82). A man from Umuachala challenges Moses, sensing old village hostilities beneath his insult. The crowd breaks into loud threats and finger-wagging. Old quarrels flare instantly. Wright shouts: *"Shut up you black monkeys and get down to work!"* His harsh voice cuts through the chaos. The crowd falls silent. He orders Moses to translate commands: no more lateness, finish the road by June, stop "slackness." Moses translates roughly, adding his own flourishes. Nweke Ukpaka tries to ask a question, but Wright refuses: *"No questions."*

The Age Group's Meeting under the Trees: The workers resume cutting and digging, but they secretly arrange a meeting. Under the shade of *ogbu* trees, Otakagu gathers to discuss the whipping. The first dispute is whether Moses should attend the meeting. Some argue that he belongs to another age group and to the white man's religion. Others insist that they need his knowledge. Ofoedu surprises everyone by supporting Moses's presence, but only so Moses can answer whether he insulted Obika's family and encouraged Wright to whip him. The meeting erupts into chaos. Moses calls Ofoedu a "mad dog" and a "beast of the bush." Others shout that they did not come to trade insults.

Debating Resistance: Someone suggests refusing to work on the road. But Moses warns that the white man will imprison their leaders in Okperi, where Umuaro men might not survive. He reminds them that it is planting season; crops cannot grow in prison. He recounts the destruction of Abame, saying the white man's power *"burns like fire."* Opponents shout that this is not a church meeting. Moses insists the white man, the new religion, the soldiers, and the road are all connected. Nweke Ukpaka speaks next, offering a balanced, persuasive view. He says they must continue working to avoid giving the white man cause to harm them. But they should still assert dignity by asking why they are not paid when laborers from other villages are. He proposes that Moses ask Wright: *"Others are paid for this work; why are we not paid? Or is our own different?"* (86). The group agrees. The meeting ends.

News Reaches Ezeulu: Ezeulu recovers from the festival with camwood ointment and fire. His daughters dismiss Ugoye's fears; they know exhaustion is part of the ritual. The story of Obika's whipping spreads through the villages. Edogo's wife brings the news to Ezeulu's compound. Obika's mother and sister weep. Ezeulu leaps up, fearing death, then calms when he hears otherwise. He tries to understand the event. He suspects lateness or drunkenness. He imagines Obika may have struck first. Edogo decides to go to Nkwo to learn the truth. Ezeulu warns him not to be rash. As Edogo leaves, Ezeulu sits at the entrance of his obi, thinking of Wright, whom he had seen earlier: short, hairy, speaking oddly. Ezeulu had hoped the visitor would be Winterbottom, *"the Destroyer of Guns."* He concludes that if Obika is innocent, he will go to Okperi himself to report Wright to his superior.

CHAPTER 9: Edoگو Questions Succession

Edogo's Carving and His Child's Illness: Edoگو's small homestead is built beside his father Ezeulu's compound. As he works on a carved door before returning to farming, his concentration keeps breaking. The cries of his infant son, Amechi, drift from his wife's hut and pull his mind away from the chisel. The child's sickness weighs heavily on him: Their first baby died after three months, and now this second one, once full of life, has suddenly declined. His skin has taken on *"the complexion of withering cocoyam leaves,"* and rumors circulate that perhaps this is the same spirit-child returning. Edoگو and his wife refuse to speak of it aloud, fearing that naming the terror will make it real.

Edogo's Reflects on his Father's Partiality and the Priesthood: As the child quiets, Edoگو's mind drifts. He reflects bitterly on their father's rigid temperament, his inability to let go of a grievance, his habit of treating grown sons like boys, and his shifting affections. Edoگو remembers how Ezeulu once favored him, then transferred that affection to Obika, then to Oduche, and finally to Nwafo. This leads him into deeper speculation: Perhaps Ezeulu's favoritism is tied to the question of succession. Some say Nwafo resembles Ezeulu's father and may be destined for the priesthood. Edoگو suddenly wonders whether Ezeulu sent Oduche to the white man's religion *deliberately* to disqualify him from becoming Chief Priest. The thought shocks him. If true, Ezeulu is manipulating the divine succession to ensure his youngest son inherits the office. This possibility upsets Edoگو. He has never wanted the priesthood, but he realizes that Ulu could choose him regardless. The idea awakens a dark satisfaction: If he were chosen, it would thwart his father's plans.

A Conversation of Age, Authority, and Worry: Ezeulu, sits brooding in his hut after a quarrel with Obika. His youngest son Nwafo is with him when Ogbuefi Akuebue arrives, one of the few men whose words can penetrate Ezeulu's stubbornness. Their exchange begins with playful banter about age and mortality, then settles into ritual hospitality: chalk lines drawn on the floor, a kolanut broken with prayer, and palm wine shared. Their conversation gradually turns to Obika's whipping by the white man. Ezeulu laments that his son has *"nailed up his ear against my words,"* and therefore a stranger can strike him without consequence. Had Obika listened, Ezeulu says, the offender would already have learned what it means to cross the Chief Priest: *"I would have swallowed him whole and brought him up again. I would have shaved his head without wetting his hair"* (99).

A Crack in Ezeulu's Stubbornness: Akuebue tries to reason with Ezeulu, suggesting they first learn whether Obika struck the first blow. Ezeulu rejects the idea of relying on strangers for truth. The tension rises until Edoگو quietly reveals that Obika left because Ezeulu blamed him without hearing his side. This accusation stings Ezeulu deeply; he retreats into silence, leaning back and whistling softly. Akuebue recognizes the moment as a rare crack in the old man's armor.

Akuebue's Counsel: The Wisdom of Age and the Limits of Authority: Akuebe seizes the moment. He speaks to the sons and then to Ezeulu with frankness. He reminds them that a father's wisdom exceeds that of his children, not because he is infallible but because experience has broken more of his "utensils." He warns them that they think themselves wiser than their father, and that Obika's refusal to abandon Ofoedu is part of this generational blindness. Then Akuebe turns to Ezeulu. With respectful boldness, he tells the Chief Priest that he is too hard on Obika. In a great compound, he says, there must be all kinds of people, good, bad, fearless, cowardly, wise, foolish. A leader must accept this diversity: *"Whatever tune you play in the compound of a great man, there is always someone to dance to it"* (100).

CHAPTER 10: Winterbottom Plans a Chief

Clarke's Anxiety about Hosting Winterbottom: Clarke has been in Okperi for six weeks, but his belongings arrived late, delaying his ability to host Winterbottom for dinner. Now that he finally can, he feels uneasy. In a remote station with only a handful of Europeans, entertaining a superior is a heavy social burden. Clarke worries about keeping conversation alive through the long ritual of drinks, dinner, and

after-dinner talk. He wishes he could invite Wright, the Public Works Department overseer, whom he befriended during his recent tour, but such mixing of ranks would be unacceptable.

Clarke's Tour and His Friendship with Wright: Clarke recalls the night he spent with Wright at the lonely Rest House near Umuaro. Away from Government Hill's stiff formality, Clarke discovered that Wright was actually likable, honest, and interestingly simple. They drank gin together, talked freely, and Clarke realized he could match Wright drink for drink. Wright, in turn, shared candid opinions about colonial administration, Native Courts, and even Winterbottom. He also revealed personal gossip: Winterbottom's wife had left him while he was fighting the Germans in the Cameroons, a wound that shaped the captain's rigid personality. Clarke feels guilty now, knowing he has heard intimate details about his superior's life.

Winterbottom Arrives for Dinner: The dinner goes reasonably well. Winterbottom compliments Clarke's tour report, though Clarke feels awkward returning the compliment. Then Winterbottom raises a troubling point: Clarke's report claims there was no truth to rumors that Wright whipped natives, but Winterbottom's steward has just returned from Umuaro with news that Wright whipped an important man. Clarke panics internally. He never investigated the rumor; he simply assumed silence meant innocence. Winterbottom lets the matter drop, for now.

Winterbottom's New Obsession for Paramount Chiefs: Throughout dinner, Winterbottom talks about the Administration's push for Paramount Chiefs, a policy he once opposed but now must implement. He explains the failures of past appointments, especially the corrupt Chief Ikedi of Okperi, who now styles himself "His Highness Obi Ikedi the First." Winterbottom reveals his decision: He intends to appoint Ezeulu, the priest of Ulu, as Paramount Chief of Umuaro. He remembers Ezeulu as the only truthful witness in the Okperi-Umuaro land dispute years earlier. The title *Eze Ulu* even contains the word *eze* (king), which Winterbottom interprets as a sign that the role will not be entirely foreign to him. Clarke listens, surprised and slightly impressed by Winterbottom's renewed energy to implement a policy he dislikes.

CHAPTER 11: Obika Marries Okuata

A Bride Arrives and a New Life Begins: Obika's bride, Okuata, comes to Ezeulu's compound accompanied by her mother and friends, who bring cooking pots, baskets, food, cloth, and other household goods. Obika is deeply impressed by his bride's beauty. Tall and graceful, Okuata wears the fashionable *otimili* hairstyle and strings of *jigida* beads that "*clink as she moves*." The young women sing and dance around her while Ezeulu's relatives welcome her with gifts of money. A large feast continues until sunset. When Okuata's mother and companions finally leave, however, happiness gives way to homesickness, and Okuata "*cries like a child left behind*" as she prepares to begin married life away from her family.

The Marriage Ritual at the Crossroads: After dark, the diviner Aniegboka leads the group to a crossroads to perform an important marriage ceremony. At the junction between Okuata's village and Umuaro, Obika digs a hole into which symbolic objects such as yams, chalk, palm leaves, flowers, and cowries are placed. Okuata passes each object around her head before adding it to the hole. The offerings are then buried, and she washes her face, arms, and legs with water. Aniegboka warns her not to travel that road again until morning, "*even if danger strikes*." He then predicts that she will give Obika nine sons. On the journey home, however, he surprises everyone by announcing that he intends to keep the sacrificial hen and eat it.

Ezeulu Sees a Change in His Son: Before retiring with his bride, Obika asks his father whether it is normal for a diviner to keep a sacrificial hen. Ezeulu tells him that it is not customary but advises him not to worry. If Aniegboka chooses to behave "*like a vulture*," Ezeulu says, the matter is between the diviner and his *chi*, or personal spiritual guardian. What matters is that Obika has fulfilled his own responsibilities. After his son leaves, Ezeulu feels an unusual sense of satisfaction. He notices a new seriousness in Obika and sees signs of growing maturity. For the hopeful father, marriage may finally help steady his son's restless and impulsive nature.

CHAPTER 12

Okuata's new status: Okuata awakes in her new life as Obika's wife. She feels shy in her first adult woman's loincloth, but her bashfulness is filled with pride: She has been "*found at home*," the ritual confirmation of her virginity. This brings her relief, especially because she had long feared that a youthful moonlight encounter with Obiora might have compromised her: "*It was the thought of the moonlight play when Obiora had put his penis between her thighs ... he had only succeeded in playing at the entrance but she could not be sure*" (122). Now she can greet her husband's parents without shame, and Obika is already preparing the goat and gifts that tradition requires for her mother.

At the stream: a quarrel explodes: On the way to the stream, Okuata becomes curious about Oduche's white singlet and the new religion that provides such marvels. Jealous Ojiugo whispers to her that Christians "*kill and eat the python*." Unfortunately, Ojiugo cannot whisper quietly; her words reach Oduche, who reacts violently. He rushes at her and, in Nwafo's later words, "*gave her thunder on the face*." Ojiugo retaliates fiercely, using her metal bangles as weapons. The fight escalates until Oduche delivers a dangerous knee-blow to her belly. The women around them divide into two camps, those who think Ojiugo has already avenged herself, and those who condemn Oduche for striking a girl so brutally.

The compound erupts when Ojiugo returns: Ojiugo returns home sobbing, her face marked by Oduche's fingers. Matefi, her mother, raises a loud lament so the entire neighborhood will hear. Ezeulu storms in, commanding silence: "*Shut your mouth! Are you mad?*" But Matefi continues her bitter, theatrical complaint: "*How can I shut my mouth when they bring back a corpse to me?*" (129). Ugoye joins the fray, insisting her name not be dragged into the quarrel. Ezeulu, now fully enraged, threatens the entire household: "*Let one of you open his mouth and make firm again and I will teach him ...*"

Akuebue Arrives with Urgent Concerns: Akuebue, Ezeulu's closest friend, arrives early to rejoice over Obika's marriage but also to discuss troubling rumors. He has heard that Ezeulu's enemies are using Oduche's conversion to Christianity as proof that the Chief Priest is betraying Ulu. Even Edogo, Ezeulu's eldest son, has come to Akuebue privately, worried that Ezeulu is manipulating succession so that Nwafo will become priest. Akuebue tries to speak gently, but Ezeulu's irritation is already high. He listens in cold silence, then responds with a mixture of scorn, prophecy, and wounded pride. He reminds Akuebue of past events, the war with Okperi, the clan's foolishness, the reforms of his father and grandfather, and insists that he sees further than other men: "*I can see tomorrow; that is why I can tell Umuaro: come out from this because there is death there or do this because there is profit in it*" (132). He explains, finally, why he sent Oduche to the Christians: it was a sacrifice, a strategic offering meant to confront a new kind of danger. "*A disease that has never been seen before cannot be cured with everyday herbs*" (133). Akuebue is shaken by this revelation.

A Moment of Calm, then a New Disturbance: The two men eat smoked goat meat together, dipping it in peppered palm oil. The tension eases. But just as their conversation settles, Ezeulu notices strangers approaching the compound. a messenger arrives with instructions that Ezeulu must report to the British authorities at Okperi. Rather than simply obeying, Ezeulu questions the messenger and makes it clear that, as the Chief Priest of Ulu, he does not regard himself as an ordinary man who can be casually ordered about. The exchange becomes a contest of authority: The messenger speaks for the colonial administration, while Ezeulu answers from the confidence of his religious and traditional position.

CHAPTER 13: Winterbottom Falls III

The Summons under the Ogbu Tree: Ezeulu, shaken by the colonial messenger's visit, orders the *ikolo* drum to summon all elders of Umuaro. The beating of the *ikolo*, reserved only for grave emergencies, sounds through the six villages, stirring speculation about war, sacrifice, or divine grievance. As evening settles, men gather under the ancient ogbu tree whose exposed roots have supported generations of deliberations. Ezeulu rises and salutes the clan, "*Umuaro kwenu!*", before recounting the worrying message

from the white man. He explains why he called them so hastily, even without palm wine. He wants to know whether they stand with him or whether he faces the white man's summons alone.

Nwaka's Hostility and the Clan's Divided Mind: Silence follows Ezeulu's speech until Nwaka, his long-standing rival, rises. Nwaka's words drip with mockery and insinuation. He frames Ezeulu's relationship with the colonial officer as a dangerous intimacy: *"as soon as we shake hands with a leper, he will want an embrace,"* suggesting that Ezeulu has already compromised Umuaro by befriending the white man. He argues that if Ezeulu now fears the consequences of that friendship, he alone must untie the knot he tied. His speech stirs laughter, murmurs, and subtle approval. Only a few elders speak against him, and even they do so timidly. Most agree that ignoring the white man's call would be reckless. One elder proposes sending six men to accompany Ezeulu, but Nwaka ridicules the idea. The clan's mood is clear: They will not stand between Ezeulu and the white man. They will not share the burden.

Ezeulu's Response: Ezeulu rises again. His anger is not directed at Nwaka's open hostility but at the undermining voices of those who pretend to support him. He speaks lightly, almost cheerfully, masking his bitterness. He tells them he never called them because he was confused or afraid; he merely wanted to *"test the child"* and see how Umuaro would react. Now he knows. He declares that he had already decided what to do before summoning them, and that he will go alone. That night, several men offer to accompany him, including his half-brother Okeke Onenyi, a renowned medicine-man. Ezeulu refuses every offer.

Winterbottom's Collapse: Captain Winterbottom, fatigued and irritable, prepares to make Ezeulu a Warrant Chief and has already sent messengers to summon him. When Ezeulu refuses, Winterbottom signs an arrest warrant in anger. But on the very morning the policemen set out, Winterbottom collapses into delirium, screaming for heat on his cold feet. His steward burns him unintentionally while trying to help. At the hospital, Dr. Mary Savage, usually severe and composed, breaks down in tears at the sight of him, shocking the staff.

The Failed Arrest: Meanwhile, the two policemen reach Umuaro. Villagers, wary of colonial authority, pretend ignorance. Only after a slap and the sight of handcuffs do they get directions. They reach Ezeulu's compound, but Ezeulu is already gone. He left early that morning for Okperi, choosing to face the white man on his own terms. The policemen debate whether to return empty-handed. They suspect the villagers are truthful but still threaten to handcuff two men and drag them to Okperi to verify the story.

CHAPTER 14: Ezeulu's Captivity

The Priest in Captivity: Ezeulu spends his days in the guardroom at Okperi, restless and withdrawn. Even his son Obika senses that questioning him would be useless. When Ezeulu steps outside "to urinate," his eyes instinctively search for the new moon, despite his vow not to look for it while detained. But the sky of Okperi feels strange, unfamiliar, as though it hides the moon behind a face he cannot read. This disorientation feeds a deeper anxiety.

Disturbing Vision: That night Ezeulu experiences not a dream but a vision of Umuaro's elders rejecting him. In the vision, his grandfather rises to address them, but they shout him down: *"He shall not speak; we will not listen to him."* Nwaka mocks the authority of Ulu and urges the people to cast the priest aside. The crowd seizes Ezeulu, who has now become his grandfather, and spits on him, calling him *"the priest of a dead god."* He wakes shaken to the core. Alone again, he reflects on the meaning of the vision. His quarrel with the white man is nothing compared to the deeper conflict with his own people. They have ignored his warnings, followed jealous men, and taken too much from him. Now, he thinks, a reckoning must come. His mind even toys with the idea that if the white man detained him for a year, Ulu would demand answers from Umuaro.

The White Men and the Sacrificial Florin: Mr. Clarke, following Winterbottom's instructions to "teach Ezeulu a lesson," refuses to see him for four days. On one of those mornings, Clarke and Wade encounter an unusual roadside sacrifice: two full-grown cocks, palm fronds, chalk, kolanut, and astonishingly, an

English florin. Wade, half-joking and half-indignant, picks up the coin, declaring, "*I don't like the look of it. I don't mind if they use their cowries and manillas but the head of George the Fifth! ... I won't have the King of England dragged into a disgusting juju*" (162). Clarke is troubled. Wade's irreverence reveals a dangerous lack of cultural sensitivity. Without consciously deciding, Clarke begins preparing himself for the possibility that Winterbottom might die, and that he, Clarke, would have to shoulder the burden of governing and protecting the people from such careless acts.

Anxiety in Umuaro: Back in Umuaro, Ezeulu's absence throws his household into turmoil. No one works during the planting season. Everyone waits anxiously for news. Obika finally returns. The family learns that Ezeulu is being fed by the wife of John Nwodika, a man from Umunneora, a clan hostile to Ezeulu's village. This alarms Akuebue, who insists on traveling to Okperi immediately to ensure Ezeulu is safe. After debate, it is decided that Akuebue, Edogo, and Ugoye will go, bringing yams and food so the visit appears courteous rather than accusatory. At home, young Nwafo suffers most. Edogo, resentful of his father's favoritism, pushes him out of the obi. The boy worries obsessively about the new moon: will it appear without his father? When it finally rises, thin and hesitant, he lifts the *ogene* to announce it but fear stops his hand.

Hospitality, suspicion, and the forging of a blood-tie: When the family arrives at Okperi, they find Ezeulu eating a well-prepared meal from Nwodika's son and his wife. Ezeulu jokes that perhaps the white man wants a Chief Priest sacrificed at his funeral. The visitors settle in, and Akuebue thanks Nwodika's son for his care. To formalize trust, Akuebue proposes a blood-tie between Edogo and Nwodika's son. Each man eats a lobe of kolanut smeared with the other's blood. This symbolic act binds their households and affirms that Nwodika's son bears no ill will.

How Nwodika Came to Work for the White Man: Nwodika recounts how he came to work for the white man. Once a dancer, he followed his friend Ekemezie to Government Hill, where he learned from his friend Ekemezie that the "*race for the white man's money*" had already begun, and that it "*would not wait till tomorrow or till we were ready to join*" (169-70). He explains his shame that Umuaro has no share in the new markets or opportunities.

John's Hope for the Clan: John, Nwodika's son explains that When Winterbottom asked him to fetch Ezeulu, describing him as a "wise man" who could explain the customs of his people, he was delighted. He saw the request as a rare opportunity for Ezeulu's wisdom to impress the colonial authorities and bring honor and recognition to their clan. However, the situation turned out badly, leaving John disappointed and blaming himself for his part in bringing Ezeulu before Winterbottom. Akuebue reassures him that good intentions do not always produce the expected results. Later, Ezeulu defends John against Akuebue's suspicions, insisting that the young man has a "straight mind" toward him and can be trusted.

CHAPTER 15: Ezeulu is released

Ezeulu's Reputation Shifts: Captain Winterbottom survives despite the rumors that he is gravely ill. But as soon as Ezeulu refuses the offer to become a Warrant Chief, his standing in the community rises again. No one in Igboland has ever turned down such a position, and while some people think it is foolish to reject a gift placed directly "*in one's mouth*," others admire the courage it takes to do so. A man like Ezeulu "*compelled respect*." Ezeulu himself feels deeply satisfied. He believes he has finally balanced the scales with the white man, even though the memory of his earlier humiliation still lingers.

Ezeulu Reconsiders the White Man's Intentions: As he reflects on recent events, Ezeulu almost convinces himself that Captain Winterbottom once meant well. He remembers that Winterbottom had publicly praised him as "*a man of truth*" during the Okperi-Umuaro dispute and had encouraged him to send a son to learn the white man's wisdom. Yet this goodwill has led only to shame. Ezeulu compares the situation to a man whose cloth accidentally knocks over another's goods in the market: "*in such a case the man, not his cloth, was held to repair the damage*" (176). In the same way, Winterbottom must answer for the actions of his messengers. Still, Ezeulu's dominant feeling is that he is now even with the white man.

His real struggle, he believes, is with his own people, and ironically the white man has become his temporary ally.

Umuaro Reacts to Ezeulu's Refusal: At first, many in Umuaro refuse to believe that Ezeulu rejected the chieftaincy. His enemies insist he has always schemed for such power. But Akuebue and others spread the true story, and soon it reaches neighboring villages. Nwaka of Umuonneora mocks the news, calling Ezeulu *"as proud as a lunatic"* and claiming he inherited his mother's madness. The insult has a grain of truth, since Nwanyieke did suffer from periodic madness. Yet despite Nwaka's hostility, sympathy for Ezeulu grows. People begin visiting him in Okperi, bringing yams and gifts. The clan increasingly feels he has been wronged.

Winterbottom's Illness and Clarke's Dilemma: Winterbottom's condition worsens. When Clarke is finally allowed to see him for five minutes, the captain looks *"incredibly white, almost a smiling corpse."* Clarke hurriedly reports Ezeulu's refusal. Winterbottom replies with the decisive phrase Clarke needed: *"Leave him inside until he learns to co-operate with the Administration"* (177). Clarke feels relieved. He has been troubled by the question of what offense to record in the logbook. He cannot jail a man simply *"for making an ass of the Administration."* Winterbottom's wording gives him the justification he lacked.

Winterbottom's Setback: Winterbottom soon suffers a setback, and rumors spread among Africans on Government Hill that he is insane or paralyzed. Ezeulu's reputation rises again. People say he has done no harm and can justifiably hold up his *ofo* against the white man. John Nwodika compares him to a puff adder that warns before striking. Ezeulu, held for thirty-two days, is seen as having given ample warning.

Ezeulu's Release and Renewed Resolve: Unexpectedly, on the eighth Eke market day since his arrest, Ezeulu is told he is free. He bursts into a rare, deep laugh. *"So the white man is tired?"* he asks. He mocks the Administration for lacking the courage to finish a fight it started. When Nwodika arrives, Ezeulu recounts how his enemies accuse him of bringing the white man to Umuaro. He wonders aloud why he is telling these things to strangers. He then declares that he has not yet wrestled with the white man; they have only *"studied each other's hand."* His next battle will be with his own people. He vows to challenge those who have insulted him, saying that whoever throws the other down *"will strip him of his anklet."* Nwodika responds with excitement.

Clarke's Growing Confidence: Ezeulu's release is his first major independent decision. A letter from the Resident authorizes him to take day-to-day decisions, and he feels newly initiated into the inner circle of colonial authority. He receives a report criticizing Indirect Rule in Eastern Nigeria, especially the Warrant Chief system. The Lieutenant-Governor advises caution and warns against confusing the natives. When Clarke later informs Winterbottom, the captain shows little interest, muttering only, *"Shit on the Lieutenant-Governor."*

CHAPTER 16: Ezeulu is revealed as the God's Arrow

The Long Road Home: Ezeulu begins his journey back from Okperi during the wet season. He wants to travel alone, but John Nwodika insists on accompanying him, refusing to let the old priest walk such a long distance by himself. Ezeulu jokes that he feels like a tortoise trapped in filth for too long. He cannot bear one more day away from home. Dressed in full ceremonial clothing, he sets out with dignity and determination.

Rain, Anger, and Resolve: Halfway through the journey, the sky suddenly opens and unleashes a violent storm. The rain is so heavy that it feels almost personal, as if it waited for the moment when shelter was impossible. Nwodika suggests stopping under a tree, but Ezeulu refuses, saying, *"We are not salt."* They push forward through the downpour, their clothes sticking to their bodies and the road turning into a red swamp. The storm feeds Ezeulu's bitterness and sense of injustice, but it also gives him a strange thrill, an almost childlike excitement at being swallowed by nature's fury.

Homecoming and Hard Truths: By the time Ezeulu reaches home, he is shaking from cold and exhaustion. His family rushes to warm him with fire, ointment, and hot soup. Visitors quickly fill his hut, eager to welcome him back. As he listens to their conversations about politics, betrayal, and the white man's offer of chieftaincy, Ezeulu begins to see his village differently. In exile, he imagined Umuaro as one united force against him. Now, seeing dozens of people come to greet him, he realizes the community is more complicated, full of ordinary people with goodwill and a few ambitious men who stir trouble.

The Voice of Ulu: A turning point comes when Ogbuefi Ofoka, a respected elder, speaks honestly about why the leaders once supported sending Ezeulu to the white man. His words cut through Ezeulu's confusion and remind him of the ancient duty of the Chief Priest: to confront danger before it reaches the people. Later, as domestic life resumes around him, Ezeulu reflects on his role, until Ulu's voice interrupts his thoughts. The deity rebukes him for thinking the conflict is personal. Ulu reveals a larger spiritual battle at play, with Ezeulu serving as the *god's arrow*. This revelation fills Ezeulu with discernment. Ezeulu stands between the human world and the spirit world, prepared to act as Ulu's chosen instrument.

CHAPTER 17: Obika Confronts Otakekpele

Life Goes on: The people have a proverb that even the loudest event "*must begin to die down by the second market week*" (193), and indeed, daily life resumes its familiar course. In Ezeulu's compound, routines re-form: Obika's new wife is pregnant; Ugoye and Matefi continue their rivalry; Edogo returns to carving; Oduche deepens his Christian learning; and Obika, relieved of the need for sexual restraint, plunges again into palm wine. Ezeulu himself appears outwardly restored. He carries on enthusiastically with his rituals of offering kolanut and palm wine to his ancestors and greeting each new moon. His youngest wife resumes sleeping in his hut, which worsens tensions with Matefi, now past childbearing.

The Approach of Akwu Nro: As the agricultural season advances, minor festivals unfold across the six villages. One of these, *Akwu Nro*, belongs to Umuachala. It is a memorial feast in which widows prepare food for their departed husbands, who are believed to rise to eat during the night. This year's *Akwu Nro* carries special anticipation: Obika's age group, the Otakagu, will unveil a new ancestral Mask, an Agaba of high rank. Preparations are secretive, and the elders have recently tightened the rules to preserve the mystery of the Masks. To prevent women from guessing the identity of the wearer, the group must choose a man from outside their village. They select Amumegbu from Umuogwugwu, who is kept hidden during the preparations. Both Obika and Edogo are deeply involved: Obika will slaughter the ceremonial rams, and Edogo has carved the Mask itself. Edogo worries that the nose looks too delicate, "*a certain fineness*," but the group praises his work.

The Village Gathers: On the day of the unveiling, Obika sharpens his machete with obsessive care, using salt and lime until the blade flashes "*like a mirror in the sun*." His wife, Okuata, heavily pregnant, jokes with him: "*If you know what you did to me you should come and undo it*" (195). Soon the village erupts with the metallic clatter of *ogene* as young men search for the Mask's emergence point. By late afternoon, the *ilo* is packed. The sacred *udala* tree looms behind the *okwolo* house, its ripe fruit tempting children who dare not pick them for fear of ancestral punishment. A sudden commotion flows through the crowd: Otakekpele, a feared medicine-man, is sitting alone in a corner. His presence signals danger. He sits in the defensive posture of a boar facing a leopard, legs folded, testicles hidden in the earth. People whisper that he has twice sworn innocence over a dead man's kolanut, surviving each oath only because he rushed home to drink counter-magic.

Obika Confronts Otakekpele: Obika arrives amid loud cheers. Women call him *Ugonachomma*, "*the eagle that loves beauty*." But his triumph turns instantly to confrontation. He spots Otakekpele and charges at him, shouting for the man to leave. The medicine-man only smiles. Ezeulu bites his lips, thinking that his rash son will be the one to provoke disaster. But Obika acts with lightning speed: He drops his machete, lifts Otakekpele bodily, and hurls him into the nearby bush. The crowd explodes in a "high-vaulting cheer." Otakekpele rises, pointing an impotent finger at Obika, who has already turned away. Okuata, overwhelmed, closes her eyes until the dizziness passes.

The Agaba Appears: The Mask arrives at the height of excitement. The crowd scatters in half-real terror. The Agaba advances in heavy, measured steps, bells and rattles clanging. Its cloths blaze red and yellow; its face is monstrous, with thumb-sized teeth, fist-sized eye sockets, and inward-curving horns. It sings in a harsh metallic voice: *"Ko-ko-ko-ko-ko-oh!"* Its attendants answer with a deep groan: *"Hum-hum-hum."* The Agaba is not a Mask of dance but of raw youthful power. When it grows too wild, attendants yank the rope around its waist. Once, enraged, it nearly attacked them.

The Mask Salutes Ezeulu: The Agaba approaches the elders seated in the *okwolo*. It salutes Ezeulu: *"Ezeulu de-de-de-de-dei."* *"My hand is on the ground,"* replies the Chief Priest. *"How can a man know you who are beyond human knowledge?"* he answers when asked if he recognizes the spirit. The Mask then breaks off and charges forward, scattering the crowd. Edego, who has been watching from different vantage points, feels relieved: The fineness of the nose seems to enhance the Mask's fierceness in motion. Yet he is disappointed that no one compares his carving to the famous Agaba of Umuagu. He had hoped someone would link their names, even critically.

The Slaughter of the Rams: The climax arrives. A chair is placed in the center of the *ilo*. The Mask sits. Silence falls except for the flute. Obika steps forward to slaughter the first ram. He throws his machete twice into the air, catching it perfectly each time. With one clean stroke, he severs the ram's head. The crowd erupts. The second ram is brought. Obikwelu throws his machete three times and catches it. But when he strikes, the ram moves its head; he hits the horn. The crowd roars with laughter. His second attempt succeeds, but the moment is lost. The Mask watches everything.

CHAPTER 18: Ezeulu Refuses to Call the New Yam

The Sacred Calendar and Ezeulu's Decision: the Feast of the New Yam is the most important ritual in Umuaro. It marks the end of the old year and the beginning of the new, and no titled man may taste new yam before the festival. The feast also re-enacts the ancient unity of the six villages and their debt to Ulu, who once saved them from the Abam. Every man brings a seed yam to Ulu's shrine, circles it around his head, places it on the village heap, and marks his face with chalk. From these heaps, the elders count the men of each village. From these yams, Ezeulu selects thirteen to mark the moons of the year. This year, however, Ezeulu has decided to strike Umuaro at its most vulnerable point: He will not call the New Yam Feast. Ezeulu has prepared silently for a long time before revealing this intention.

The Assistants Confront Ezeulu: Ezeulu's six assistants come to his obi. They are uneasy. They remind him that the new moon has already grown large and he has not announced the feast. Obiesili adds that this is the twelfth moon since the last festival. Ezeulu responds with irritation. He reminds them that only the Chief Priest reckons the year. When Chukwulobe suggests he may have lost count because of his recent absence, Ezeulu explodes: *"What! Are you out of your senses, young man?"* He then calms himself and dismisses them, telling them to wait for his message. When they leave, he is visibly pleased: *"The old priest's face glowed with happiness and some of his youth and handsomeness returned temporarily from across the years"* (204).

The Crisis Spreads: News of Ezeulu's refusal spread through Umuaro. People are stunned. Ten titled men, including Ezekwesili Ezukanma, one of only three men with the highest title, come to plead with him. Each plants his iron staff outside and places his red cap on it. They perform chalk rituals and kolanut prayers before Ezekwesili speaks. He says fear is spreading in Umuaro, and they must know the truth. Ezeulu replies that his assistants came earlier, but he told them it was not their place to remind him. Then he states the core of the crisis: He still has three sacred yams left. Custom dictates he cannot call the feast until only one remains.

The Elders beg Ezeulu to Bend Tradition: Nnanyelugo argues that the harvest is ripe and will rot if not gathered. The white man caused the delay by taking Ezeulu to Okperi; Therefore, they must adapt. He says he would eat the remaining yams himself if he could. The elders urge Ezeulu to eat the yams today and announce the feast. Anichebe Udeozo presses him harder. He tells Ezeulu to look around: The ten titled

men are Umuaro: “... go and eat those yams today, not tomorrow; and if Ulu says we have committed an abomination let it be on the heads of the ten of us here” (204). Again, Ezeulu refuses, saying this is Ulu’s will, not his. When asked what Ulu’s grievance is, Ezeulu answers: “Two new moons came and went and there was no one to break kolanut to him.” The elders propose a sacrifice to appease Ulu. Ezeulu warns that a god who demands a chick may demand a goat if approached twice.

Ezeulu consults Ulu: The next morning, Ezeulu enters the shrine. The skulls of past priests look down from the rafters. The underground river chills the air, and ancient trees drip water year-round. As he casts his cowries, the bell of Oduche’s Christian group rings nearby, sounding strangely close. Ezeulu returns with a grim message: Ulu has given no answer. The villages must remain in the old year for two more moons. Panic spreads. The rains thin out; harmattan arrives early; the earth hardens. The harvest will be ruined.

Hostility rises; Ezeulu’s family suffers: The crisis reaches even children. Nwafo fights his friend Obielue after the boy mocks Ezeulu in a song normally used to tease Udo rams. Ezeulu’s wives face hostility in the market. Matefi is insulted by Ojinika, who sneers that she should wait until the yams rot and then buy cassava cheaply. At home, Matefi fears someone will pay dearly for this crisis. She urges her son Obika to speak to his father. Obika refuses: To disobey Ulu would be to put his head in a cooking pot.

Akuehue and Ofoka debate Ezeulu’s motives: Ofoka claims Ezeulu is punishing Umuaro for allowing the white man to take him away. Akuehue, Ezeulu’s closest friend, counters that Ezeulu is proud and stubborn but would never falsify Ulu’s will. Still, he admits he does not fully understand. Ofoka insists Ezeulu wants revenge. Akuehue suggests perhaps Ulu is leading the priest to ruin himself.

John Jaja Goodcountry Seizes the Christian opportunity: John Jaja Goodcountry, catechist of St. Mark’s Church, sees the crisis as divine opportunity. Coming from the Niger Delta, he brings a more militant Christianity. His church has grown rapidly, partly because he challenged the worship of the royal python, though Moses Unachukwu blocked him and even petitioned the Bishop. The Bishop, wary after a violent incident elsewhere, orders Goodcountry not to touch the python. Ironically, this strengthens Unachukwu’s prestige and encourages more villagers to send their children to school. Even Nwaka, Ezeulu’s political enemy, sends a child. As Ulu’s authority falters, Christianity gains ground.

CHAPTER 19: Obika Dies

The Famine Deepens: The clan’s suffering becomes acute. The first to feel the full weight of the postponed harvest is the wealthy family of Ogbuefi Amalu, who died during the rainy season. His death was *badly timed*, a death in famine, and therefore his second burial cannot be performed with the dignity his status demands. Before dying, he had whispered instructions to his son Aneto, insisting that the feast must include a bull and must not be delayed beyond four moons. But he also knew the impossibility of holding a burial feast without yams: “*I cannot ask you to arrange my burial feast with your saliva*” (217).

Enriching Other Clans: Aneto and his kin had planned the feast for the New Yam Festival, but Ezeulu’s refusal to call the feast has trapped the entire clan in ritual paralysis. They consult the oracle, hoping for permission to delay the rites. Instead, Amalu’s spirit refuses: he has “*stood too long in the rain and sun*” and must be brought indoors. The family must buy yams at exorbitant prices from neighboring clans, enriching outsiders while Umuaro starves.

Umuaro’s Resentment Turns Towards Ezeulu: As famine worsens, titled men secretly bend customs to survive, harvesting homestead yams or eating foreign yams in secret. But Ezeulu’s household cannot cheat. As the priest of Ulu, he must obey ritual purity. His family’s old yams have shriveled into fibrous strands that must be beaten apart before cooking. Even these soon run out. The clan’s silence toward Ezeulu becomes a torment. He is used to walking alone, but always with the sound of Umuaro behind him. Now the silence is total, “*the kind of silence which burnt a man’s inside like the blue, quiet, razor-edge flame of burning palm nut shells*” (219). He longs to shout at the clan, but pride and ritual dignity restrain him.

When Brothers Fight ...: Only Akuebue, Ezeulu's loyal friend, still visits him. Akuebue hints at a dangerous development: The Christians are offering sanctuary to anyone who wants to harvest new yams without fear of Ulu's vengeance. *"When brothers fight to death a stranger inherits their father's estate"* (220). Ezeulu confronts his son Oduche, whom he had sent to the Christians as his "eye and ear." Oduche has failed him. Ezeulu's grief turns into bitter disappointment: *"I did not know at that time that I was sending a goat's skull."*

The Twelfth Yam is Eaten, and the New Yam Feast is Finally Announced: A new moon appears. Ezeulu eats the twelfth sacred yam and announces that the New Yam Feast will take place in twenty-eight days. The clan erupts in preparation for Amalu's long-delayed burial feast. Drums echo through all six villages. That night, Ezeulu dreams a terrifying, symbolic dream. Mourners pass behind his compound where no path exists. His family huts appear abandoned, collapsing, sprouting grass. A solitary singer chants a lament that blends the python's voice with the madness of Ezeulu's mother. He wakes sweating, shaken by the dream's omen.

Obika Agrees to Run Ogbazulobodo: Preparations intensify for the night spirit Ogbazulobodo, who must run before Amalu's burial. Only Obika, Ezeulu's vigorous son, can carry the spirit properly. Aneto begs him to run, but Obika hesitates. He has fever. Still, he fears that refusal will be seen as another insult from Ezeulu's family. He agrees. The ritual is physically demanding. Obika dons the rattling *ekpili* skirt, takes the iron staff, and receives the sacred necklace as Ozumba chants: *"The speed of the deer is seen on the hill."* The spirit takes him. He becomes a creature of darkness, running paths without seeing them, speaking in proverbs that pour from him like fire. But the fever inside him grows. He feels split in two, one body running above another. When he returns, he collapses at the foot of the *okwolo*. The men rush to revive him, but Obika is dead.

Obika's Death Shatters Ezeulu and Breaks his Mind: Before dawn, Ozumba brings the body to Ezeulu's hut. The priest's reaction is devastating. He drops his machete, falls to his knees, and cries over his son: *"Ulu, were you there when this happened to me?"* Umuaro is shaken to its roots. Obika was a rare man, a force of nature. Even Ezidemili, Ezeulu's rival, does not rejoice. He only murmurs, *"This should teach him how far he could dare next time."* But for Ezeulu, there is no next time. His son's death is humiliation. He feels abandoned by Ulu, betrayed by the very deity he has served with absolute fidelity. Ezeulu's mind cracks. The blow is too great, and the humiliation too deep. He begins to drift into dementia.

The Clan Interprets the Disaster, and Ulu's Authority Collapses: Winterbottom returns from England where he went for treatment, oblivious to all that has happened. Only Umuaro witnesses the final outcome. The clan concludes that Ulu has sided with them against his obstinate priest. Their ancestral wisdom is confirmed: *"no man is greater than his people."* But in destroying Ezeulu, Ulu has also destroyed himself. The clan begins to turn away from the deity, just as the Christians rise to harvest the spiritual vacuum.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Ezeulu (*unyielding, haunted, visionary*)

Ezeulu is unyielding in his devotion to ritual, haunted by the weight of divine expectation, and visionary enough to sense the world shifting around him.

Unyielding Ezeulu's unyielding nature defines his leadership. He follows ritual law with absolute conviction, even when the community grows restless. His refusal to bend the sacred calendar shows a man who believes that duty must stand firm, regardless of pressure or consequence.

Haunted Beneath Ezeulu's authority lies a haunted inner life. Memories of humiliation, rivalry, and divine warning linger in his thoughts. He carries the weight of Ulu's expectations, and this burden shapes his decisions, often isolating him from those he hopes to guide.

Visionary Ezeulu is a visionary. He sees the world changing and sends Oduche to learn the ways of the newcomers. He understands that tradition must observe the future, even if he cannot fully embrace it. His insight reveals a leader who tries to prepare his people for a shifting world.

Nwaka (*ambitious, defiant, strategic*)

Nwaka is ambitious in his pursuit of influence, defiant toward spiritual authority, and strategic in every alliance he builds.

Ambitious Nwaka's ambition fuels his influence in Umuaro. He speaks boldly, challenges established authority and positions himself as a voice of strength. His drive shapes public opinion and pushes the community toward choices that reflect his confidence rather than caution.

Defiant Nwaka is defiant in spirit. Nwaka questions Ulu's supremacy and encourages others to believe that the priesthood has grown too powerful. His willingness to provoke sacred boundaries gives him a reputation for fearlessness, which many admire and others distrust.

Strategic Nwaka's strategic mind strengthens his political reach. His alliance with Ezidemili is not incidental. He understands how spiritual authority can support his public stance. Through careful relationships, he builds a network that challenges Ezeulu's influence and reshapes village dynamics.

Obika (*fiery, vulnerable, loyal*)

Obika is fiery in temperament, vulnerable beneath his strength, and loyal to his family.

Fiery Obika's fiery temperament makes him unforgettable. His strength and beauty draw admiration, but his sudden anger creates danger. He reacts intensely to injustice, especially when his family is threatened, and his passion often leads him into conflict.

Vulnerable Despite his power, Obika carries a vulnerable side. He drinks heavily and struggles to control his impulses. His moments of fear, such as his encounter with the spirit Eru, reveal a young man who feels deeply and responds with raw emotion.

Loyal Loyalty defines Obika's relationship with his family. He protects his sister with fierce devotion and works tirelessly on his homestead. His commitment to those he loves shows a heart that values connection, even when his actions become reckless.

Oduche (*impressionable, conflicted, aspiring*)

Oduche is impressionable in his eagerness to learn, conflicted between two belief systems, and aspiring toward a new future.

Impressionable Oduche is impressionable, eager to absorb new teachings and please authority figures. The Christian mission shapes his thinking quickly, and he adopts its lessons with enthusiasm, even when they conflict with the values of his household.

Conflicted Oduche is conflicted as he moves between two spiritual worlds. His decision to trap the python reveals a boy torn between loyalty to tradition and the desire to prove himself within the new faith. His confusion becomes a symbol of cultural transition.

Aspiring Oduche is aspiring. He dreams of mastering the white man's language and imagines a future shaped by new opportunities. His ambition reflects the curiosity of a younger generation that sees change not as threat but as possibility.

Winterbottom (*authoritative, misguided, weary*)

Winterbottom is authoritative in his role, misguided in his reading of local structures, and weary from the strain of colonial duty.

Authoritative Winterbottom's authoritative presence shapes colonial life in Okperi. He enforces rules, manages officers, and believes firmly in the order he represents. His confidence gives him a commanding role in the district.

Misguided Winterbottom is misguided in his understanding of local structures. Winterbottom assumes that leadership can be assigned by decree and fails to grasp the complexity of Umuaro's spiritual and political systems. His attempt to appoint a Warrant Chief reveals this misunderstanding.

Weary Winterbottom is also weary. The climate, the isolation, and the constant demands of administration drain him. His reflections show a man who feels the strain of his position and struggles to reconcile duty with personal fatigue.

THEMES

Society

Religion

The Collision of Religions The arrival of Christianity creates a clash between two spiritual worlds. Achebe shows how the new religion enters Umuaro with confidence and a sense of mission, while the traditional faith of Ulu stands rooted in centuries of ritual, memory, and communal identity. This collision does not unfold through open warfare. It grows through small choices, misunderstandings, and moments of pressure that slowly reshape the village. Oduche's story is characteristic. Ezeulu sends him to the Christian mission because he believes a wise household must understand the newcomers. He imagines that knowledge will protect the community. Instead, Oduche becomes caught between two systems of belief. The church teaches him to reject the symbols of his own culture. Mr Goodcountry encourages converts to treat the sacred python as nothing more than a snake. Oduche listens, absorbs the message, and acts without thinking. He traps the python in his box, hoping it will die peacefully. The act shocks the entire village. The python carries spiritual meaning, and harming it threatens the balance of the community. Here, Achebe shows how religious conversion can create confusion when new teachings collide with old obligations.

The Christian mission grows stronger because it offers certainty. Its leaders speak with confidence, and its rituals feel simple compared to the complex duties of Ulu's priesthood. The converts admire the discipline of the church and the promise of a new identity. They begin to see themselves as part of a larger world. At the same time, the traditional religion depends on careful timing, sacred objects, and the authority of priests who must follow strict rules. When Ezeulu is detained, the ritual calendar falters. People worry about hunger, and the church becomes a place where they can find support and a sense of direction.

Achebe does not portray Christianity as purely destructive or Ulu's worship as purely fragile. Instead, he shows how both systems struggle to coexist. The villagers must choose between loyalty to ancestral customs and the appeal of a new faith that seems to offer stability during crisis. The collision of religions becomes a story of identity, fear, hope, and change. It reveals how spiritual beliefs shape everyday life and how a community responds when two worlds meet and neither can fully contain the other.

The Vulnerability of Ritual in a Changing World Ritual in *Arrow of God* shapes the farming cycle, the timing of festivals, and the moral rhythm of Umuaro. The story presents rituals as the backbone of communal life. It also shows how fragile rituals become when the world around them begins to shift. Ezeulu's role as Chief Priest depends on careful observance of sacred duties. He watches the moon, counts the yams, and names the days for ceremonies. These acts determine when people plant, harvest, and celebrate. The community trusts that the rituals will guide them safely through the year.

This trust begins to weaken when external pressures disrupt the rhythm. Ezeulu's detention is the clearest example. The British do not understand the importance of the sacred calendar, so they hold him without considering the consequences. While he waits in confinement, the rituals fall behind. The sacred yams remain unconsumed by the priest, and he cannot announce the Festival of the New Yam. The villagers grow anxious because their survival depends on timely planting. Ritual, once steady and reliable, becomes henceforth uncertain. This shows how easily a spiritual system can falter when it encounters forces that do not share its values. Internal tensions also threaten ritual stability. The rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka creates suspicion among the villages. People begin to question the priest's decisions and wonder whether his authority has weakened. The python incident involving Oduche adds another layer of confusion. When a sacred creature is trapped in a box, the community fears that spiritual order has been disturbed. Ritual depends on respect for symbols, and when those symbols are mishandled, people lose confidence in the system that protects them.

The rise of Christianity introduces a new challenge. The church offers a simpler structure that does not rely on lunar cycles or the traditional sacred artifacts. The new converts admire its simplicity and precision and begin to see traditional rituals as burdensome. As hunger grows during the delayed festival, many villagers turn to the mission for assistance. Ritual loses its power because it can no longer meet the community's immediate needs. The novel shows how spiritual practices that once held a community together can become vulnerable when confronted with political pressure, religious competition, and social change.

Gender:

The Crisis of Masculinity and Pride Many of the men in Umuaro live with a constant pressure to prove themselves. Their pride becomes a measure of their worth, and their reputation depends on how they respond to challenges. This creates a culture where anger rises quickly and restraint is difficult to maintain. Obika stands at the center of this. He is admired for his beauty and physical power, and people speak of him with excitement. His presence commands attention. At the same time, he drinks heavily and reacts with sudden violence. When he discovers that his sister has been beaten, he responds with a power that nearly leads to murder. He ties his brother-in-law to a bed, drags him home, and places him under a tree whose heavy fruit could have crushed him. The scene shows how quickly masculine pride can turn into something frightening. Ezeulu intervenes and calms the situation, but the danger remains. Obika's strength is impressive, but it is also unpredictable.

Akukalia offers another example. His pride is wounded by an insult, and he reacts with fury. He destroys Ebo's *ikenga*, an act that violates the deepest spiritual boundaries of the community. His anger blinds him to the consequences, and he is killed moments later. His death becomes the spark that pushes Umuaro toward conflict. The story uses Akukalia to show how personal pride can escalate into communal crisis. Ezeulu himself is shaped by masculine pride. His authority is spiritual, but he carries a strong sense of personal dignity. When he feels challenged, he responds sharply. His anger toward Edogo, his frustration with Oduche, and his bitterness during exile reveal a man who struggles to balance duty with emotion. He warns Obika that courage must be guided by wisdom, but he also feels the pull of pride in his own decisions. His refusal to accept the role of Warrant Chief is rooted in principle, but it also reflects a deep need to protect the meaning of his office. Here, Achebe shows how masculinity can inspire bravery and loyalty but also conflict and destruction. Masculine pride is both a source of strength and a path toward danger, shaping the destiny of individuals and the community they serve.

Womanhood and Femininity Womanhood in *Arrow of God* appears through a network of domestic roles, emotional bonds, and social expectations that shape everyday life in Umuaro. Achebe presents women as central to the stability of the household and the continuity of tradition. Their work is constant, visible, and essential. They cook, organize, raise children, manage the compound, and maintain the rhythm of family life. These tasks may seem ordinary, but they carry cultural meaning. Through them, women preserve customs, transmit knowledge, and create the environment in which the community grows.

Matefi and Ugoye illustrate two sides of domestic femininity. Matefi, Ezeulu's senior wife, speaks blessings to the new moon and keeps the household grounded in ritual. Ugoye worries about the moon's appearance and expresses the anxieties that women often carry in silence. Their reactions show how femininity includes both spiritual awareness and emotional sensitivity. Obiageli, the daughter, enters scenes with curiosity and warmth, reminding readers that girlhood is part of this continuum. She learns by watching,

listening, and participating in small ways, preparing for the responsibilities she will one day inherit. Femininity also appears through maternal strength. Ekwefi's story in *Things Fall Apart* has a parallel here in the devotion women show toward their children. Ugoye's fear for Oduche's safety after the python incident reveals how mothers navigate the tension between tradition and change. They protect their children while also respecting the authority of husbands and elders. Their love is active, practical, and profoundly rooted in community values.

Women influence society beyond the household. They gather at the stream, share news, and maintain social ties that hold the village together. Their presence in festivals, markets, and rituals reinforces the idea that femininity is woven into public life. Even when men dominate political decisions, women shape the emotional climate of the community. Their reactions to conflict, illness, or spiritual danger often guide how families respond. Womanhood is not passive. Femininity carries resilience, intelligence, and leadership. Women adapt to change, negotiate tensions, and preserve dignity in moments of uncertainty. Through their work and their relationships, they sustain the moral and cultural foundation of Umuaro.

Politics

Leadership: Colonial Interference in Indigenous Leadership Achebe shows how British administrators enter a political landscape they barely understand and begin to reshape it according to their own needs. The six villages of Umuaro have long relied on a delicate balance of authority, ritual, and communal decision making. Ezeulu's role as Chief Priest is part of that balance. His power is spiritual rather than political, and it depends on tradition, memory, and the trust of the six villages. When the British arrive, they bring a different idea of leadership, one that treats authority as something that can be assigned by decree. Captain Winterbottom embodies this misunderstanding. He believes that every community must have a single figure who can speak for the entire population. His frustration grows when he sees that Umuaro does not operate through kingship. He remembers the failure of Chief Ikedi, a man who abused the position the British created for him. That experience convinces him that the system of appointing chiefs is flawed. But he still follows orders when the government demands that he find a leader for Umuaro. His choice of Ezeulu reveals how deeply he misreads the community. Winterbottom admires Ezeulu's honesty during the land dispute and assumes that this integrity will make him a reliable colonial partner. He does not understand that Ezeulu's authority comes from Ulu and from ritual obligations that cannot be transferred to a political office.

The tension becomes sharper when Ezeulu refuses the British administration's offer. His refusal is not an act of rebellion against the British. It is a defense of the boundaries of his priesthood. Accepting the position would distort the meaning of his role and place him in conflict with the very traditions he is meant to protect. Winterbottom interprets this refusal as stubbornness and detains him. The detention disrupts the sacred calendar and places the entire community at risk. The story shows how colonial rule creates confusion by forcing foreign structures onto societies with their own systems of governance. Leadership in Umuaro is woven into ritual, history, and collective identity. When the British try to replace that structure with their own model, they weaken the community and set the stage for conflict. The interference does not strengthen order. It fractures order.

Conflict: Internal Rivalries and the Fragmentation of the Traditional Society The rivalry between Ezeulu and Nwaka reveals how a community can weaken from within long before any external force arrives. The narrative presents Umuaro as a group of villages that once united under Ulu to survive danger. That unity came from shared fear, shared ritual, and shared purpose. Over time, however, ambition and pride begin to pull the villages apart. The conflict between Ezeulu and Nwaka becomes the clearest sign of this shift. What starts as a disagreement between two influential men slowly spreads through households, markets, and festivals until it shapes the daily life of the entire community.

Nwaka's boldness feeds the tension. He challenges Ezeulu's authority in public, questions the legitimacy of Ulu, and encourages people to believe that the priesthood has grown too powerful. His confidence comes from his long friendship with Ezidemili, the priest of Idemili, who resents Ulu's dominance. Their alliance gives Nwaka the courage to speak provocatively, even during sacred ceremonies. When he appears at the Idemili festival wearing the great Ogalanya Mask and boasts about entering forbidden realms, the crowd responds with a mixture of admiration and fear. His survival after such daring acts convinces many that he carries a special protection, which strengthens his influence. Ezeulu feels the pressure of this rivalry. His authority depends on the trust of the six villages, and he senses that trust slipping. He hears whispers that he has become too rigid and too proud. The python incident involving

Oduche intensifies the strain. People begin to wonder whether Ezeulu's household has lost its spiritual balance. Even small gestures, like neighbors offering pity, feel like insults to him. The rivalry becomes personal, and personal conflict becomes political. As the tension grows, ordinary people are caught in the middle. Families refuse to share palm wine or kolanut with anyone linked to the opposing side. Suspicion becomes a habit. The unity that once protected Umuaro begins to fade. When the villages face the crisis of the disputed farmland, the rivalry shapes the outcome. Nwaka's voice carries more weight than Ezeulu's warning, and the community chooses a path that leads to violence.

Achebe uses this rivalry to show how internal division can weaken a society more effectively than any outside force. Umuaro's strength once came from collective identity. As that identity fractures, the community becomes vulnerable, and the consequences reach every corner of village life.

Past

Truth, Memory, and Competing Histories Truth in *Arrow of God* is never a simple matter. Memory is a tool. It shapes political decisions, personal loyalties, and the fate of entire communities. The disputed farmland between Umuaro and Okperi reveals how fragile truth can be when history is carried through orality rather than written records. Each man speaks from what his father told him, and each version carries emotional weight. These memories are not neutral. They reflect pride, rivalry, and the desire to defend one's lineage. Ezeulu's account of the land is confident. He believes that Okperi originally granted the farmland to Umuaro, and he presents this memory as a matter of integrity. His father's words guide him, and he trusts them completely. When he warns the elders that Ulu will not support an unjust war, he speaks from a place of moral responsibility. His version of history is meant to protect the community from a conflict that he believes is wrong. He sees truth as something sacred, something that must be honored even when it is inconvenient.

Nwaka offers a different memory. His father told him that Okperi were wanderers with no rightful claim to the land. His story supports his ambition and strengthens his challenge to Ezeulu's authority. Nwaka uses memory to stir emotion, to inspire courage, and to undermine the priest's influence. His version of history is not simple recollection. It is a political tool. When he mocks Ezeulu's maternal ties to Okperi, he turns memory into a weapon that reshapes the crowd's perception. The community is divided because each story carries its own truth for the people who believe it. Without written records, memory becomes the foundation of decision making. Achebe shows how dangerous this can be. The elders must choose between two competing histories, and their choice leads to violence. Akukalia's death is the tragic result of a conflict built on stories that cannot be verified.

Winterbottom's later investigation adds another layer. He listens to witnesses and discovers that most of them lie. Only Ezeulu tells the truth as he knows it. This moment highlights the complexity of memory in a colonial setting. The British officer believes he can uncover objective truth. But he does not understand the cultural forces that shape the stories he hears. The novel reveals how truth is shaped by memory, and how memory is shaped by desire, fear, and ambition. The struggle over history is a struggle over power, and the consequences reach far beyond the disputed land.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What does *Arrow of God* reveal about the danger of rigid leadership?
2. What does Oduche's experience with the Christian mission show about how young people get caught between old beliefs and new pressures?
3. How do personal rivalries, especially between Ezeulu and Nwaka, weaken Umuaro and make it easier for the colonial government to interfere?
4. Why do the people of Umuaro eventually turn to Christianity during the yam crisis, and what does this choice say about fear, survival, and faith?
5. How does Achebe depict the colonial officers' fascination with "order" as a form of blindness, and what does this reveal about the limits of administrative rationality in a plural society?
6. How does the novel's ending invite us to reconsider the idea of victory in a world where cultural survival, spiritual continuity, and political autonomy intersect?