

Three suggested topics for your first essay are at the bottom of this sheet, but remember these are only *suggested* topics. If you would like to write on something else connected to both *Things Fall Apart* and *The Joys of Motherhood*, please see me during office hours, and come prepared to go into depth about your topic.

Your first essay assignment is divided into three parts. The first part is the proposal, and will consist of three paragraphs, each introducing a different topic (400-500 words total and 5% of your final grade). The second part is an outline to show how you plan to incorporate research and textual analysis into the essay, and will include an annotated bibliography of at least ten sources, as well as one or two pages in which you outline how those sources can be used to support the thesis of your essay (also 5% of your final grade). The third and last part is the final draft of the essay itself (about 6 pages, and 15% of your final grade). All parts should be double-spaced, and all are due by class time (3:00 pm) on the dates shown above, and will be submitted online at Canvas (sjsu.instructure.com). Late essays must still be turned in via Canvas, but you will have to arrange for a late submission with me. My advice is to submit your work the night before, just in case something goes wrong in the morning. Please also note that work submitted to Canvas is automatically checked for plagiarism by Turnitin.com.

Remember that the focus here is on the development of your argument, and not the position you are taking. The most important part of developing your ideas is to examine them critically yourself, either before or during the essay, identifying their weaknesses and strengths, and making sure you emphasize the latter. Therefore, focus on a limited aspect of your topic, and construct a developed thesis explaining why that aspect of it is significant; your thesis should contain a specific point to be proved, and your paragraphs should all work toward proving it. In order to support your ideas well, you will have to quote from both your primary and secondary sources – the texts themselves, and the research you have done for the essay, relying on peer-reviewed books and articles. Be sure to quote from and document those sources according to MLA style, and to cite the page number for each quotation or group of quotations parenthetically at the end of the phrase or paragraph. All such quotations should be short and integrated into your own prose, not long, indented ones. Using shorter quotations makes it easier to establish what your reading of each is, through discussion and analysis, as well as to employ that reading in supporting the thesis of your essay. Revise for content and to strengthen your thesis and transitions; proofread thoroughly, even if you use a spell-checker first; and follow MLA format, including a Works Cited list at the end (not part of the word count), even if you have only used novels in their class editions. Also remember to keep a copy of all work handed in (on disk), and to save all graded work until the end of the semester. English majors should save the graded copies of their essays in all department classes, since these may be required for their senior seminar portfolio.

Upload your essay at the course assignment page on Canvas (at sjsu.instructure.com) as a file (don't paste it in the text box) in either Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text (.rtf) format. All word processors can produce .rtf files – if you need help saving your file in .rtf in some program other than Word, please ask at the Help Desk or Peer Mentor Center on the ground floor of Clark. Corrected papers will be returned in your Canvas dropbox in pdf format. Please note that many people find it harder to proofread work on a computer screen than in printed form, so you may want to print out your final draft and make corrections to that, before submitting the finished file online. Finally, remember that I will also be keeping a copy of your marked work during the semester so that, when you submit the second part of your first essay or, later, your second essay, I will begin by reviewing the technical mistakes on earlier work, and looking to see if you have made any progress in those. You, too, should take the time to review those errors, and improve your writing.

- 1. Traditional and Transitional Societies.** Achebe and Emecheta provide contrasting examples of the collision between traditional Nigerian societies and their colonial or postcolonial counterparts. These contrasts are often quite complex, exposing both the good and the bad that is in all social systems; certainly, colonialism itself is condemned by both, but other elements of European influence (including religion, education, and technology) are not necessarily rejected; nor are all aspects of traditional society necessarily celebrated. Discuss how the use or presentation of that collision between traditional and transitional Nigerian society differs in these works, and how it relates to the larger themes of each.
- 2. Characterization.** The defining relationship for the main characters in *Things Fall Apart* and *The Joys of Motherhood* is, for better or worse, the one between parent and child. Such relationships impact each protagonist's characterization, and involve both their parents and their own children. In other words, a conflict between a father and son might be considered positive about the father if we are unsympathetic to the son, and negative about the father if we are more favorably inclined toward the son; further, we may see a similar conflict in quite different terms if it occurs between a mother and her child. Discuss the different ways that Emecheta and Achebe deal with that relativism, and how the resulting characterizations help shape each work.
- 3. Structure.** Every aspect of a literary work—narrative, plot, theme, characterization, and so on—is advanced, literally as well as figuratively, by its structure. In a novel, structure can be as straightforward as the progression between chapters, or as subtle as a shifting point of view; but structure might also be thought of as the staging of scenes and events—how shifts from one setting to another are indicated, the transitions created between different scenes, the repetition of parallel phrases or imagery, and other effects. Manipulations of time (as in flashbacks), space (as in settings), and narrative technique are all examples of structure. Compare some aspect of the structures of these two works, showing how those structures contribute to the thematic achievement of each.