

Senior Summer Reading Assignment 2019-2020
***Things Fall Apart*, James Bond, and Postcolonialism**

Next year, we will work to look at texts through a series of critical lenses in the form of different critical literary theories. These theories allow focused analysis of the various historical and cultural forces that influence our world and the texts that emerge in reaction to it.

Over the summer, you will get to preview one: Postcolonialism. Here is a brief introduction to postcolonialism:

“History is Written by the Victors

Postcolonial criticism is similar to cultural studies, but it assumes a unique perspective on literature and politics that warrants a separate discussion. Specifically, postcolonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonized. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonizers controlling the colonized).¹

Here are a few questions to ask when exploring a text from this lens:

- What are the vestigial effects of the colonizing culture on the colonized culture? How are they reflected in the text?
- What are the cultural “scars” of colonization? How does the text reflect the impact colonization had on the indigenous culture?
- How is status in the culture affected by its history of colonization, during which the invading culture almost definitely regarded itself as “higher” or “better” than the native culture? How is this reflected in the text?
- Is the author of the text attempting to preserve native traditions and culture in rejection of the colonizers? How so? Is it effective? (Is such a thing even possible?)

You will engage two texts through this lens:

The first text is *Things Fall Apart*, a novel published in 1958 by Chinua Achebe, who is Nigerian. You read this novel last year in AP English.

Things Fall Apart, published in 1958, is the seminal African novel in English. Although there were earlier examples, notably by Achebe's fellow Nigerian, [Amos Tutuola](#), none has been so influential, not only on African literature, but on literature around the world. Its most striking feature is to create a complex and sympathetic portrait of a traditional village culture in Africa. Achebe is trying not only to inform the outside world about Ibo cultural traditions, but to remind his

¹ Brizee, Tompkins. “Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present).” *OWL*, Purdue Writing Center. 2013.

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own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value. All too many Africans in his time were ready to accept the European judgment that Africa had no history or culture worth considering.”

This description is from professor Paul Brian’s study guide on the novel, which I recommend you use as you read:

(<http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/achebe.html>)

Be careful not to read ahead in the guide. You will also want to do a little research on the Igbo people of Nigeria for further background context.

The second “text” is a James Bond film of your choosing. Note that you may choose any Bond film, including the recent *Skyfall*, but earlier films will probably be easier to analyze from a post-colonial perspective. (Excepting *Casino Royale*, the introductory scenes of which provide excellent material to analyze in this way).

As you engage the film, consider how James Bond’s *Britishness* comes into play, specifically how his prowess and importance compare to the non-European cultures and locations he visits. Are the cultures of the places he goes portrayed in a lesser or greater light than his own English culture? Is “foreignness” (here meaning “not western European”) an essential part of the identity of the villain in the film? How so?

Written Assignment:

For **each** of the texts described above, (1 novel, 1 film), you must complete one of the following: (In other words, you will submit two pieces total in any combination of the following formats)

- 1) A 2-3 page paper (500-750 words) that specifically addresses at least one of the above postcolonial questions for that text.
- 2) A 3-5 page short story (750-1250 words) from the perspective of any one character in the text. The short story should demonstrate an understanding of postcolonial forces affecting those involved.
- 3) A piece of art that specifically addresses one of the above postcolonial questions for that text. You must include a 1 page (250+words) Artist’s Statement of Purpose that explains which question(s) you addressed and what you meant to convey with the piece of art.

you may not choose this option for BOTH texts

This will constitute your first written piece for the course, and also a starting point for us to explore your writing habits and style for further refinement. Your writing will be assessed according to the NJ State Standard Holistic writing rubric with which you are already familiar.