

## *Things Fall Apart & Avatar* Socratic Seminar Topics and Questions

- You are expected to be able to speak knowledgeably and specifically about all of the topics/questions on this sheet.
- There will not be an opportunity for you to speak about every topic/question. However, you must be prepared to speak about all of them because there will be limited opportunities to speak, and if you are unprepared to speak when the opportunity arises, you may not get another chance.
- You should bring all research, notes, and answers to class on the day of the Seminar for Ms. Sanders to check. If I determine that you are unprepared for the Seminar, you will do the Seminar-Make Up assignment instead of participating in the Seminar, and you will receive a maximum grade of 49 out of 70 points
- You will be able to use all of your notes and your book during the Seminar.
- You are expected to use specific references and examples during the discussion.
- These questions will require thought, time, and research. Do not wait until the night before the Seminar to formulate your responses.

### Things Fall Apart Novel Discussion Guide

1. Explain the meaning of some of the proverbs and fables in the novel. Compare their use of proverbs and fables to their historical use in our own culture.
2. Research Chinua Achebe's life. How might it have affected his writing of this novel?
3. What is Achebe's purpose in writing this novel? What statement is he trying to make?
4. How might the "cultural fabric" of a community be stretched or altered when it encounters new ideas and members?
5. Why might Ezinma and Chielo be so close?
6. What parallels can we draw between TFA and our own lives?
7. How might Okonkwo's relationship with Unoka affect Okonkwo's relationship with Nwoye?
8. A foil is a character's opposite. What sets of foils do you see in TFA?
9. Is Okonkwo a sympathetic character (is he a character who evokes sympathy from the reader)? Explain.
10. Make an argument for or against colonization and the forceful integration of societies. Then, make a counterargument.
11. Read the following excerpt from Chapter 20 and decide whether it is justified. Explain. "Does the white man understand our customs about land? How can he when he does not even speak our tongue? But he says that our customs are bad; and our own brothers who have taken up his religion also say that our customs are bad. How do you think we can fight when our own brothers have turned against us? The white man is very clever. He came quietly and peaceably with his religion. We are amused at his foolishness and allowed him to stay. Now he has won our brothers, and our clan no longer act like one. He has put a knife on the things that held us together and we have fallen apart."
12. Why is Okonkwo's exile ironic, in light of his killing Ikemefuna?

13. At the beginning of the novel, we are told that Okonkwo's "fame rested on solid personal achievements," yet by the end of Part 1 he has been banished from his community, and he kills himself by the end of the novel. What do you see as his strengths and weaknesses and to what would you attribute his downfall?

14. Describe the irony of the end of the novel. What types of things might the Commissioner put in his book about Okonkwo?

*Things Fall Apart* references the poem "The Second Coming," by William Butler Yeats, and reflects Senghor's "Prayer to the Masks." Read the poems, and be able to respond to the questions indicated under "Poetic Connections."

## **Poetic Connections**

- Read closely the excerpt from Chapter 22 in *Things Fall Apart*, during which Enoch tears the mask from the *egwugwu*. It begins with "The other *egwugwu* immediately surrounded..." and ends with "It seemed as if the very soul of the tribe wept for a great evil that was coming--its own death."
- Read the poem "Prayer to the Masks" several times.
- Answer the questions below:

1. What is the symbolic meaning of the masks?

2. What similarities do you see between the poem and *Things Fall Apart*?

- Reread the poem "The Second Coming" by W.B Yeats several times.
- Answer the following questions below:

1. What kind of "anarchy loosed upon the world" do you think Yeats is talking about? How might this relate to *Things Fall Apart*?

2. How does the line, "The best lack all conviction, while the worst/ Are full of passionate intensity" relate to the characters in *Things Fall Apart*?

What do you think the title of *Things Fall Apart* means?

## **Prayer to the Masks**

Leopold Sedar Senghor

Masks! Masks!

Black masks red mask, you white-and-black masks

Masks of the four point from which the spirit blows

In silence I salute you!

Nor you the least, the Lion-headed Ancestor

You guard this place forbidden to all laughter of women, to all smiles that fade.

You distill this air of eternity in which I breathe the air of my Fathers.

Masks of unmasked faces, stripped of the marks of illness and the lines of age

You who have fashioned this portrait, this my face bent over the altar of white paper

In your own image, hear me!

The Africa of the empires is dying, see, the agony of a pitiful princess

And Europe were too where we are joined by the navel.

Fix your unchanging eyes upon your children, who are given orders

Who give away their lives like the poor their last clothes.

Let us report present at the rebirth of the World

Like the yeast which white flour needs.

For who would teach rhythm to a dead world of machines and guns?

Who would give back the memory of life to the man whose hopes are smashed?

They call us men of coffee cotton oil.

They call us men of death.

We are the men of the dance, whose feet draw new strength pounding the hardened earth.

## “Avatar” Film Discussion Guide

**Web Links: Official Movie Site:** <http://www.avatarmovie.com/>

**Film Length:** 2hrs. 40 minutes

Film Rating: PG-13

Director: James Cameron

Genre: Sci/Fi - Action/Adventure

### Synopsis:

Worlds and values collide in this visually engrossing action/sci-fi film. The main character, Jake Sully, is an identical twin who is paralyzed as a result of military service as a marine. He takes up his deceased brother’s mission and embarks on a fantastical journey to the planet, Pandora. There he must come to grips with carrying out his assigned mission, or defending the people he was sent to destroy.

Jake takes on an alternative life form as an Avatar in order to gain the trust and develop an understanding of the native Na’vi “people” of Pandora. The Na’vi enclave sits atop a vast deposit of “unobtainium.” Jake’s mission is to convince the people to leave the areas so that the corporate interests behind the mission can profit from the mineral deposits.



Jake encounters “the aliens” only to discover the deeper humanity. The film provides action, adventure and striking computer generated effects. As part morality play, part allegory the themes and underlying story are worth engaging. Director, James Cameron notes, “Filmmaking is about storytelling. It’s about human playing humans. It’s about those actors somehow saying the words and playing the moment in a way that gets in contact with the audience’s hearts. I don’t think that changes. I don’t think that’s changed in the last century.”

### Themes in the Film:

- *What does it mean to be human?*
- *The nature and essence of freedom*
- *Complex moral decision-making and ethical choices: Where is the line between right and wrong? When is an action always wrong?*
- *Do the ends justify the means?*
- *The sacredness and unity of life*
- *The use of force for material gain, profit-taking and greed*
- *The extractives industries and capitalism today*
- *Imperialism, greed, ecological disregard and corporate irresponsibility*
- *The tension between reality and identity.... being and becoming*
- *The use of military power to achieve the goals of capitalism and returns to shareholders*

## Film Connections: Questions for Discussion

Answer the following questions as you watch the film and prepare for the Socratic Seminar.



1. Where in the film do you see critiques evident of the current state of the world in the characters, dialogue and content of the film?
2. Describe the transformation that takes place in Jake from the beginning of the movie until the end. What are some of the key turning points that you can identify in his encounter with the Na'vi people?
3. The film grapples with the issue of authentic identity and does so through the use of “virtual reality.” What is the most important thing Jake learns about himself and this true identity? About the Na'vi way of being?
4. What is Selfridge's authentic identity? [Selfridge: “This is why we're here; because this little gray rock sells for twenty million a kilo.”] Colonel Quaritch? What is their own internal motivation and what does it reveal about their characters?
5. One interesting paradox in the film is the way in which the alien Na'vi people actually display far more human tendencies than the humans in the story.
6. What is the author's point in this portrayal and what are the causes of the “dehumanization” of the humans in the first place?
7. Describe what happens when Neytiri first encounters Jake. Why is this encounter an essential touchstone in the film? What do the seeds of Eywa reveal?
8. Discuss some of the key quotes about human freedom. How ought we use our freedom and what is it ultimately for?
9. The role of choice and the act of choosing are both significant activities for the Na'vi people. Why is choice so critical and what is its significance?
10. The planet, Pandora, is a garden of Eden of sorts where aggression is unnecessary. What does this reveal about the way “humans” view the world and the resources of the planet? What must humans “unlearn” to live in harmony?
11. The Na'vi people greet one another with the designation, “I see you.” What is the significance of this greeting? What parallels and comparisons can you make to your own life?
12. In the end, what do you think about the decisions and choices Jake made? In your opinion did he fulfill his mission? If so, how? If not, why not?
13. How would you describe Colonel Quaritch and the values that he holds? Had his approach to the Na'vi people been different, how might he have gone about his mission and still succeeded? Why was the use of full force doomed to fail?
14. How was the exercise of leadership a spiritual dynamic for the Na'vi people?
15. The movie has extremely strong women characters. Explain what qualities these women have. How would you describe the key roles that women play in the film compared to TFA? What portrayals stuck out?
16. What was your favorite scene in the movie? What would you say is the main purpose or message of the film?

## Socratic Seminar Make Up Assignment

If you have an excused absence, and you missed a Socratic Seminar, here is your make up assignment.

Type a 500-word response (in MLA format) regarding the given primary source document (additional article) IN ADDITION to completing the other required material (all of the *TFA* and *Avatar* discussion guide questions).

1. Think about a sentence or paragraph from the article that made you stop and think, “wow.”
2. Write down what you thought about the author’s use of language, the author’s tone, the reason for the author to say what he/she said.
3. The 250 words do not include quotes. Type the paragraph or the sentence that you are referring to. Example: In Carnegie’s Gospel of Wealth, the second paragraph made me think of\_\_\_\_\_.
4. Type what you think about that sentence of paragraph. Do not summarize the article. “This article is about...” is the start of a summary. I will not read or grade summaries.
5. Format of response:
  - a. 12 point font size
  - b. Double spaced
  - c. Times New Roman
  - d. Correct heading: Name, Teacher’s Name, Class Name, Date. Include a header in top right corner.
  - e. Indent your paragraphs
  - f. No spelling mistakes
  - g. No first or second person pronouns. Example: “I think Carnegie is saying...” OR “You might think...”
6. This typed and printed response is due in twenty-four hours from the day of the Socratic Seminar. If it is late one day it will suffer 10%. Two days late or more equals a failing grade. You must turn in your completed discussion guide and your make up assignment together.

## 12th Grade Prepared Discussion Assessment for *Things Fall Apart* and *Avatar*

ELA.CC.9-12.SL.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

### Background

Elfie Israel defines Socratic seminars and implies their rich benefits for students: The Socratic seminar is a formal discussion, based on a text, in which the leader asks open-ended questions. Within the context of the discussion, students listen closely to the comments of others, thinking critically for themselves, and articulate their own thoughts and their responses to the thoughts of others. They learn to work cooperatively and to question intelligently and civilly (89).

The Socratic method of teaching is based on Socrates' theory that it is more important to enable students to think for themselves than to merely fill their heads with "right" answers. Therefore, he regularly engaged his pupils in dialogues by responding to their questions with questions, instead of answers. A prepared discussion is going to follow this same type of thinking.

This process encourages divergent thinking rather than convergent. Students are given opportunities to "examine" a common piece of text, whether it is in the form of a novel, poem, art print, film, or piece of music through the interaction of open-ended questions.

The goal of a prepared discussion is for students to actively engage in dialogue with the teacher(or discussion leader) as well as with one another. Open-ended questions allow students to think critically, analyze multiple meanings in text, and express ideas with clarity and confidence. After all, a certain degree of emotional safety is felt by participants when they understand that this format is based on dialogue and not discussion/debate.

Dialogue is exploratory and involves the suspension of biases and prejudices. Discussion/debate is a transfer of information designed to win an argument and bring closure. Americans are great at discussion/debate. We do not dialogue well. However, one teachers and students learn to dialogue, they find that the ability to ask meaningful questions that stimulate thoughtful interchanges of ideas is more important than "the answer."

Participants in a prepared discussion respond to one another with respect by carefully listening instead of interrupting. Students are encouraged to “paraphrase” essential elements of another’s ideas before responding, either in support of or in disagreement. Members of the dialogue look each other in the eyes and use each other’s names. This simple act of socialization reinforces appropriate behaviors and promotes team building.

## **Prepared Discussion Rubric: *Things Fall Apart* and *Avatar***

Person Assessed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Coach: \_\_\_\_\_

Discussion Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **1. PRE-SEMINAR OBSERVATION**

**Evaluate the notes/questions/preparation your classmate has made for the seminar according to the ratings listed: 1--Very Little; 2--Sufficient; 3--Impressive**

\_\_\_ Answers direct group to specific passages

\_\_\_ Seminar discussion questions have been answered appropriately and thoughtfully

\_\_\_ Extent of preparation

### **2. SEMINAR OBSERVATION**

- **Jot notes on the comments your classmate offers to...**

- i. Adds new information and builds on the conversation:*

- ii. Offers clarifying and/or asks questions that extend the conversation:*

- iii. Responds to a question with appropriate information:*



**3. EVALUATE the points your classmate makes (highlight the appropriate description):**

- Through comments, shows active listening to other participants.
- Remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text/film.
- Offers no commentary to further the discussion.
- Does not listen to others; ignores the discussion and its participants.

**4. POST SEMINAR EVALUATION: Using the language of the Common Core standards listed in the box below, describe the participation level of your classmate in the space provided.**

ELA.CC.L9-12.SL1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.

c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others in the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.

d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.

ELA.CC.9-12.AL.2. Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally), evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

ELA.CC.9-12.SL.3: Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

**5. Evaluate your classmate's performance. Indicate the level of participation using the checkboxes below. Then, circle the corresponding grade on the left.**

<p><b>A Level Participation</b></p> <p><b>A+ 100</b></p> <p><b>A 95</b></p> <p><b>A- 90</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adds new information and builds on conversation</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Speaks 3 times (with articulate responses that are well-explained)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Written participation (typed/neatly handwritten), questions are thoroughly and in-depth. If multiple choice they focus on rhetoric analysis.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comes to the seminar prepared, with notes, text, marks/annotations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Through comments, shows active listening to other participants.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers clarification and/or asks questions that extend the conversation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text.</li> </ul>
<p><b>B Level Participation</b></p> <p><b>B+ 89</b></p> <p><b>B 85</b></p> <p><b>B- 80</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Adds new information and builds on conversation.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Speaks 2 times (with articulate responses that are well-explained)</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Written participation (typed/neatly handwritten), answers are thorough and in-depth. If multiple choice they focus on rhetoric analysis.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Comes to the seminar prepared, with notes, text, marks/annotations.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Through comments, shows active listening to other participants.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Remarks often refer back to specific parts of the text.</li> </ul>

# DISCUSSION GUIDE

<p><b>C Level Participation</b></p> <p>C+ 79 C 76 C- 73</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Speaks 1 time (with an articulate response that is well-explained).</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Written participation (typed/neatly handwritten), answers are somewhat thorough and in-depth. If multiple choice they focus on rhetoric analysis.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Through comments, shows active listening to other participants.</li></ul>
<p><b>D of F Level Participation</b></p> <p>D 72 F 69 and below</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><input type="checkbox"/> Offers little commentary.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Comes to the seminar ill-prepared with little understanding of the text and discussion questions.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Does not listen to others, offers no commentary to further the discussion.</li><li><input type="checkbox"/> Ignores the discussion and its participants.</li></ul>