

June 2019

Dear Christ College Reading Alums:

The love of good books and stimulating conversation is a Christ College legacy that lives on in the CC Alumni Reading groups found across the country. I'm happy to be contributing to this practice with this syllabus, and I hope to visit your book discussion group at some point during the next few years. Please let me know if you would like to set up such a visit.

During the past twenty years of my scholarly life, I've done a lot of work in the area of African literature, and I thought I would share some of my favorite texts with you. Besides, after last year's social and political theory, it's time for some fiction! In good CC fashion, I've included a contextual and historical framework for each work, which you can consult as much or as little as you wish. While you and your reading group can determine how you want to use this syllabus, here are two possible structures. A number of other possible combinations could also be put together, based on your preferences.

Books:

Things Fall Apart, by Chinua Achebe

Purple Hibiscus, by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie

Cry, the Beloved Country, by Alan Paton

Waiting for the Barbarians, by J.M. Coetzee

A Human Being Died that Night, by Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

The traditional five-meeting structure:

Meeting 1:

Read "Introduction," "Jesus of the Deep Forest," "A Thumbnail History of Africa," "The Father of African Literature," and *Things Fall Apart*. Reflection and Discussion Questions.

Meeting 2:

Read "The Granddaughter of Achebe," and *Purple Hibiscus*. Reflection and Discussion Questions.

Meeting 3:

Read "The Development of Apartheid in South Africa," "Alan Paton's Lament," and *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Reflection and Discussion Questions

Meeting 4:

Read "The Long Struggle Against Apartheid," and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Reflection and Discussion Questions

Meeting 5: Read "Change, Confession, and Reconciliation" and *A Human Being Died that Night*. Reflection and Discussion Questions. Conclude by talking about how you view Nigeria and South Africa after reading, reflecting, and discussing all the works on the syllabus.

An eight-meeting structure, with films:

Meeting 1:

Read "Introduction," "*Jesus of the Deep Forest*," and "A Thumbnail History of Africa." Discuss what you know about Africa, describe your experiences if you've travelled there, and your reactions to Madam Kuma and her poem.

Meeting 2:

Read "The Father of African Literature" and *Things Fall Apart*. Reflection and Discussion Questions.

Meeting 3:

Read "The Granddaughter of Achebe" and *Purple Hibiscus*. Reflection and Discussion Questions.

Meeting 4:

Read "The Development of Apartheid in South Africa," "Alan Paton's Lament," and *Cry, the Beloved Country*. Reflection and Discussion Questions

Meeting 5:

Watch the film *Cry, the Beloved Country* and discuss it in relationship to the novel.

Meeting 6:

Read "The Long Struggle Against Apartheid" and *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Reflection and Discussion Questions

Meeting 7:

Read "Change, Confession, and Reconciliation" and *A Human Being Died that Night*. Reflection and Discussion Questions.

Meeting 8:

Watch and discuss the film *Long Night's Journey into Day*. Conclude by talking about how you view Nigeria and South Africa after reading, reflecting, and discussing all the works from the syllabus.

Happy reading!



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Literature from Africa: 2019-20 Christ College Alumni Reading Group Syllabus
 Compiled by Susan VanZanten, Dean of Christ College and Professor of Humanities and Literature

Introduction:

Although I am sometimes introduced as an academic specialist in African literature, there actually is no such thing as “African literature.” Africa is not a country, but a continent, a huge continent of remarkable diversity and complexity. Its 11.73 million square miles cover the same surface as the combined continental United States, China, India, and all of Eastern Europe. Its 1.2 billion people (in 2016) speak over a thousand languages and have an estimated 3000 ethnic identities. Its colonial history includes incursions by English, French, Portuguese, German, Dutch, Belgian, and Middle Eastern peoples, all of whom have left their mark, including the drawing of arbitrary borders creating modern African nations based upon European political and economic interests rather than a shared language, culture, and identity. See <https://www.vox.com/2015/11/10/9698574/africa-diversity-map> for a color-coded map of the contemporary complexities of ethnicity, language, and state.

So this syllabus does not pretend to introduce African literature but rather merely presents some outstanding examples of the rich body of literature that has emerged from two locations on the African continent: the nation-states we now call Nigeria and South Africa. These countries’ relatively healthy economies, histories of colonization, British educational systems, and large urban centers have resulted in an outpouring of outstanding literary works written in English during the post WWII era.

The term *literature* comes from the Latin *littera*, which means “letter,” but the people who lived in Sub-Saharan Africa did not produce written texts with literal letters until the arrival of European colonists and missionaries. However, this does not mean that the various African peoples did not have verbal art forms. These pre-literate societies—just like the early Greeks or Anglo-Saxons—were oral societies, relaying long historical or epic narratives, mythic creation accounts, simple folk tales, resonant proverbs, elaborate praise poems, and other forms of literary art in spoken communal performances. From the West African *griots*, who were responsible for maintaining an oral record of tribal history, to the official Akan praise singer, to countless women telling stories around a fire at night, African culture has long been full of creative artists working with words, metaphors, and narratives.

And just as “Homer” eventually wrote down a version of *The Odyssey* and some unknown Anglo-Saxon captured a version of *Beowulf*, writers and scholars have recorded and transcribed numerous works of orature, which provide a glimpse of some of the complex literary traditions that characterized the pre-colonial African continent. Orature remains an important practice in many parts of Africa today; it’s not uncommon for a praise poet to perform in honor of a politician, for example, at the beginning of campaign rally. Nelson Mandela was accompanied by poet and traditional praise singer Zolani Mkiva for thirteen years, who performed both at his release from prison in 1990 and his presidential inauguration in 1994. When I saw Mandela in South Africa in 1996, a praise singer from the University of Natal preceded him. American rap, hip-hop, and spoken word poetry all descend from African orature.

Jesus of the Deep Forest

One of my favorite transcriptions of African orature is called *Jesus of the Deep Forest*, a praise poem composed in the 1970s by Afua Kuma, a non-literate village woman. Kuma grew up as a Presbyterian and lived in the eastern highlands of Ghana, where she and her husband raised nine children on a small

farm. Madam Kuma, as she was called, later became a member of the Church of Pentecost, an African Independent church that is the single largest Protestant denomination in Ghana. When she was seventy years old, Madam Kuma heard a sermon about giving praise to God in every circumstance, and when the minister invited congregants to pray, she spontaneously composed and performed a powerful praise song about Jesus, much to the astonishment of the congregation. For the last seventeen years of her life, Madam Kuma travelled throughout Ghana performing her poetry at Church of Pentecost retreats, conventions, Easter rallies, and evangelistic crusades.

One such performance was recorded during the late 1970s and transcribed in the Akan language in which it was performed. The poem was then translated into English by a Catholic priest, Father Jon Kirby, a respected Akan ethnographer, and published in 1981 in two editions: Akan and English. Since both texts were published, the Akan version, *Kwaebirentuw ase Iesu*, has regularly sold out; the English translation has been less popular. Within her own cultural context, Madam Kuma is recognized and celebrated as a gifted poet.

Jesus of the Deep Forest is an *apae*, a verbal genre regarded as one of the highest forms of literary expression in Ghana. *Apae* means prayer or praise, and the title page of the English translation includes the subtitle: *Prayers and praises of Afua Kuma*. Many African cultures include informal praise singing, such as when a mother celebrates her child, but also a more formal praise poetry typically performed by an official member of a royal entourage who celebrates a king or chief as he sits in state, as Mandela's praise singer did. In Ghana, the praise poet is called an *Okyeame*, which means "the royal spokesman."

A traditionally male art form, *apae* is resistant to change, making Madam Kuma's composition even more remarkable. In performing her praise-poetry-prayer, Madam Kuma presented herself as a royal spokesman in the official entourage of Jesus. A genre formerly performed by a male *Okyeame* to praise the political and spiritual leadership of a chief was employed by a female poet to celebrate Jesus as the ultimate political and spiritual ruler.

As an *apae*, *Jesus of the Deep Forest* does not follow a narrative structure, although it contains several embedded narratives. Its central element is the praise name, a laudatory title most often given to people but sometimes used to describe clans, animals, or inanimate objects. Praise names highlight the celebrant's striking qualities and notable deeds through personal names, metaphoric names, and compound epithets. Most African praise poems assemble a series of praise names, praise lines, and praise verses loosely linked into stanzas, building emotional momentum through repetition, amplification, and extension rather than through a plot. *Jesus of the Deep Forest* opens:

WE are going to praise the name of Jesus Christ.

We shall announce his many titles:

they are true and they suit him well,

so it is fitting that we do this.

The second stanza dives into the river of names and metaphors that saturate the 46-page poem:

All-powerful Jesus

who engages in marvelous deeds,

he is the one called Hero –**Okatakyi!**
 Of all earthly dominions he is the master;
 the Python not overcome with mere sticks,
 the Big Boat which cannot be sunk.

The great Rock we hide behind:
 the great forest canopy that gives cool shade:
 the Big Tree which lifts its vines
 to peep at the heavens,
 the magnificent Tree whose dripping leaves
 encourage the luxuriant growth below.

Notice Madam Kuma's skillful use of parallelism and repetition in the latter stanza. The "great forest canopy" is metonymized into the parallel "Big Tree" and "magnificent Tree," which form an incarnational link between heaven and earth, lifting upward to the heavens in the third and fourth lines and bestowing blessings on the earth below in the fifth and sixth lines.

Jesus is of the deep forest because he is the forest: "You are the deep forest which gives us tasty foods." He is also frequently depicted with metaphors of water, light, wind, and the moon, for the spiritual and natural world mingle in Akan culture. Madam Kuma's technological metaphors are less typical in traditional *apae*. She draws from traditional and modern Akan life to construct her metaphors: Jesus is an iron rod, elephant gun, loom, pestle, hoe-handle, string of beads, grass hut, grinding stone, sword, house, farm, lantern, city, Caterpillar (bulldozer), and the great cross-beam of a traditional hut. Most of these metaphors are uniquely local, not alluding to or resembling biblical metaphors. The relentless torrent of innovative metaphors demonstrates the abundant ways in which Jesus provides food, shelter, and protection. Names alone cannot capture his manifold nature; the world is brimming with his presence.

The name "Jesus" appears over 100 times in of the poem, which frequently names him as a "wonderworker," one who performs miracles, especially miracles of provision:

Wonderworker, you are the one
 who has carried water in a basket
 and put it by the roadside
 for the travelers to drink for three days.
 You use the kono basket to carry water to the desert,
 then you throw in your net and bring forth fish!
 You use the net to fetch water and put it into a basket.

Water is carried in a traditional basket; fish are produced out of the basket; a net holds water—the miracles appear in the daily and ordinary. Narratives of miraculous feeding occur repeatedly, and sometimes echo biblical stories of feeding:

He is the one
 who cooks his food in huge palm-oil pots.
 Thousands of people have eaten,
 yet the remnants fill twelve baskets.

Several of the mini-narratives in the text describe jubilant processions in which Jesus is celebrated as an Akan chief would be: seated on a stool, lifted high, and carried through the streets to the sounds of drumming and singing. “Young men give him welcome, / and lead him in procession.” Children and young women join the crowd, placing a necklace of gold nuggets and beads around Jesus’s neck, while cannons fire. Sometimes the procession leads to heaven, and nature joins in the celebration:

A great and shining nation belongs to Jesus;
 the rainbow protects its rampart
 while lightning marches round.
 Signs and wonders open its gates,
 for these are the keys of his kingdom.
 One does not have to take a mirror there
 to see one’s face:
 the brilliance of the city is his mirror!

 There is a wild noise,
 like that of rushing streams.
 Yet it is not the sound of streams we hear;
 it is the thunder and lightning serenading Jesus!

 The wind clutches a gold banner,
 its left arm laden with beads and bracelets of gold,
 as it dances before Jesus’ face.

With its motifs of gold and illumination, this passage is reminiscent of the heavenly city described in Revelation 21, yet its powerful imagery of the wind dancing before Jesus with the thunder and lightning singing his praises shows how Jesus is the Lord of the entire creation. *Jesus of the Deep Forest* gives us a

small taste of the wild exuberance, metaphoric beauty, and complex construction of African orature. It also introduces us to the imaginative blending of African and Western traditions that is typical of literature from Africa.

A Thumbnail History of Africa

While specific historical events played out in different ways in different locations, some general contours may serve as useful background in reading literature from Africa. Pre-encounter Africa was a continent, as we have seen, of incredible diversity, including many different kinds of social, religious, and political structures. The indigenous people groups included hunter-gatherers, small farmers, artisans, traders, and vast kingdoms.

During the 10th century, Muslim Arabs immigrated into North and East Africa, prompting religious and linguistic changes. European exploration began in the 17th century, focusing on trade and commerce but exerting little political control. However, more permanent forms of encroachment began in the mid-19th century, as colonial settlements were established and France, Britain, Germany, Portugal, and Belgium scrambled to gain power, resources, and control over various parts of the African continent.

At the infamous Berlin Conference of 1885, these European countries carved up the continent among themselves, establishing arbitrary borders and divisions that reflected European politics and greed for natural resources rather than groupings based on a common culture, language, religion, culture, or social organization. The British took control of an area in Western Africa that eventually became Nigeria, which included three different indigenous groups: the Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa. An adjacent area inhabited by many Yoruba was given to the French and eventually became Benin. By World War I, colonial occupation was complete, with a civil administration run by Europeans levying taxes, seizing land and resources, and often imposing mandatory labor on the indigenous peoples. The colonizers were also accompanied by many missionary groups, both Protestant and Catholic, who established churches, schools, and medical centers. A popular proverb found in many parts of Africa recounts, "When the missionaries came to Africa they had the Bible and we had the land. They said 'Let us pray.' We closed our eyes. When we opened them we had the Bible and they had the land."

Following World War II, the African continent experienced a wave of independence, as colonies and protectorates became self-ruled countries and broke with European control. The first independent African nation was Ghana, established in 1957. With European educated Africans taking over political and social leadership, there was a sense of euphoria and optimism that emerged in the literature, along with a new appreciation of pre-colonial traditions and cultural practices. However, a privileged minority of European settlers, many of whom had lived on the African continent for years, continued to control the economy.

By the 1980s, the euphoria had evaporated, as one after another African countries become one-party states in attempts to overcome tribalism or embrace communism. Such states were riddled with corruption, coups, human rights abuses, and dictators, while frequent wars, droughts, and famines further decimated African life. Commentators variously call this era, which continues to this day in many parts of Africa, either the neocolonial or postcolonial period.

Literature in Africa is irremediably bound up in this history of encounter, colonialism, independence, and postcolonialism, for a variety of reasons. First, European missionaries were responsible for bringing literacy to Africa due to the need to speak and write indigenous languages for evangelical work.

Mission schools educated those African people who eventually became political as well as cultural leaders: poets, novelists, and playwrights. While European myths and stereotypes about Africa conveyed through literary texts provided subtle and not-so-subtle justifications for imperialism and colonialism, potent works of African literature also served to write people out of oppression, to claim an identity as a human being, to reveal the riches of indigenous cultures, and to advocate for justice.

The Father of African Literature: *Things Fall Apart*, by Chinua Achebe

Although a handful of earlier African novels do exist, *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe is the first work of African literature to gain an international readership. First published in Africa in 1958, at the cusp of the Nigerian independence movement, it has become the most widely read work of African literature, appearing in over 30 languages, and selling over 8 million copies. It is required reading in schools throughout Africa, and Achebe is often hailed as “The Father of African Literature” because of his immense influence on subsequent African writers.

Achebe was born in 1930 “at the crossroads of cultures,” as he says. An Igbo, one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, Achebe was educated at mission schools. The Igbo were a politically and linguistically fragmented group before colonization, with clusters of small villages primarily inhabited by farmers and traders. Achebe’s father was a Christian minister, but other family members were deemed “pagans,” and Achebe enjoyed visiting them, hearing their stories, and learning their folk lore. At the British-created University College, Ibadan, Achebe studied Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, and Yeats, while becoming increasingly disturbed by the superficial depiction of Africans in English novels by Joseph Conrad and Joyce Cary. These works depicted Africans as brutal savages in need of western civilization. Achebe resolved to write another kind of account, one that would “help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement.” After all, “we in Africa did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans.” One of the many ironies of *Things Fall Apart* is that Achebe employs a classical European literary form—the novel—with echoes of Greek tragedy to represent and celebrate an oral culture in written form.

Reflection and discussion questions:

1. How do the three parts of the novel function? If you were going to give each part a title, what would you call it? How might it be significant that each part gets progressively shorter?
2. What kind of man is Okonkwo? What are his major characteristics? Is he likable? Considered in terms of Greek drama, what is his tragic flaw? Is he an ideal man, according to Igbo cultural norms?
3. What are some the different elements of Igbo culture that the novel chronicles (courtship, community law enforcement, religion, etc.)? How do gender roles function in this society?
4. Why do you think the Ekwefi and Ezinma stories are included?
5. Can you see the influence of orature in this novel? How?
6. What changes occur when the Europeans appear? What distinctions does the novel draw between the government and the church? Between different missionaries?
7. The narration changes suddenly in the final chapter in terms of its point of view. How? Why?
8. Consider the significance of the title of the novel (and epigraph, from Yeats). Why do things fall apart?
9. Is this an individual tragedy or a social tragedy, or both?

The “Granddaughter” of Achebe: Adichie’s *Purple Hibiscus*

One of the most heralded new voices in African literature today is that of the gifted Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. The winner of numerous literary prizes and recipient of a MacArthur “genius” fellowship, Adichie has delivered two popular TED talks, “The Danger of a Single Story” (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story?language=en) and “We Should All Be Feminists” (https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_we_should_all_be_feminists?language=en).

A profile in *The New Yorker* in 2018 considers how she has “come to terms with global fame.” Adichie is often described as the literary heir of Chinua Achebe, and she even grew up in same house at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where Achebe once lived (her father was a university professor).

Adichie has spoken frequently of her appreciation for and indebtedness to Achebe. In an interview with me, she related, “Growing up an Igbo child, I was fortunate to be educated, but my education didn’t teach me anything about my past. But when I read *Things Fall Apart*, it became my great-grandfather’s life. It became more than literature for me. It became my story. I am quite protective of Achebe’s novels in a way that I don’t think I am with any other book that I love.” In her introduction to a collection of Achebe’s novels, Adichie elaborates on her initial response to *Things Fall Apart*: “It was a glorious shock of discovery.... I did not know in a concrete way until then that people like me could exist in literature. Here was a book that was unapologetically African, that was achingly familiar, but that was, also, exotic because it detailed the life of my people a hundred years before.” For Adichie, *Things Fall Apart* resonated culturally and personally; it spoke of Igbo history and family history, “my people” and “my great-grandfather’s life.”

Although her second book, *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2006), is an epic historical novel about the Biafran War, most of Adichie’s fiction concerns the lives of contemporary Nigerian women—both in Africa and the United States. In that respect, she is truly a global author. *Purple Hibiscus* (2003) is her first novel, and it opens with a verbal homage to Achebe: “Things started to fall apart at home when my brother, Jaja, did not go to communion and Papa flung his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines on the étagère.” As you read *Purple Hibiscus*, consider the thematic continuities between Adichie’s account of the breakdown of a contemporary, postcolonial Nigerian family and Achebe’s story about the destruction of Okonkwo and his clan.

Reflection and discussion questions:

1. What did you most notice about the historical, cultural, or social setting of this novel?
2. The first-person narrator, Kambili, initially has an ironic inability to speak (see pp. 48-49) into her life. Find evidence of her beginning to wake up or find her voice and discuss what causes this change.
3. How does Eugene view Igbo culture? Why? How does his attitude compare with that of Auntie Ifeoma?
4. Is Eugene a complete monster? Does he have any positive qualities?
5. Like Okonkwo, Eugene has a complicated relationship with his father. How are these relationships similar?
6. The structure of the novel overtly follows the liturgical calendar, and the Catholic church plays an important role in all of the characters’ lives. Yet some readers have seen *Purple Hibiscus* as an anti-Christian novel. Do you agree?

7. How does the Ade Coker subplot function? What meaning does it add?
8. The novel uses many effective symbols. Discuss the significance of the purple hibiscus, Mama's figurines, and music. Are there other symbols that you noticed?
9. This novel is a *bildungsroman*, a novel about the main character growing up, moving from being a child to taking her place in the world. What does Kambili learn, in what ways does she grow up over the course of the novel?

The Development of Apartheid in South Africa

We now turn to the southern tip of the African continent to the country with the longest and most convoluted history of encounter, encroachment, colonialism, nationalism, and postcolonialism: South Africa. With its abundance of natural resources, the southern part of Africa has been at the heart of many a political struggle. It has also produced some of the most notable and globally respected literature of the twentieth century.

The Cape Town area of South Africa was settled in 1652 by Dutch traders who established a small "refreshment station" at which the Dutch East India Company ships could stop on their arduous journey around the Cape. The Dutch encountered numerous indigenous groups, including the Xhosa (Kaffir), Khoikhoi (Hottentot), and San (Bushmen), who were subsequently decimated by European diseases, pushed out of the Cape area, or incorporated into the Dutch community by means of slavery and sexual abuse. (The names in parentheses are the more derogatory terms that the settlers used.)

Over the next 300 years, these Dutch settlers gradually spread over more of the Cape area and developed their own language and cultural identity. As cattle farmers, they constantly sought new lands for their massive herds. Their language, which evolved from Dutch, German, French, and several indigenous languages, became known as Afrikaans, and they themselves were called Afrikaners or Boers. Their mixed race offspring, who also spoke Afrikaans, were labeled "coloureds." In the 1800s, as the Afrikaners moved away from the coasts and into the interior, they came into increasing conflict with Bantu speakers of both Xhosa and Zulu ethnic groups.

In 1815, as part of the Napoleonic War settlement, Great Britain gained political control over southern Africa, and quickly moved to abolish slavery and make English the official language. Outraged, the Boers embarked on "The Great Trek," a massive movement of cattle, ox-wagon trains, and people into the interior. The Afrikaner myth of a heroic people, chosen by God to establish a Christian society in the midst of the wilderness, became their dominating narrative. Political and physical conflict among the British, the Boers, and indigenous peoples continued throughout the nineteenth century.

When gold and diamonds were discovered in the interior of South Africa, Britain again expanded its geographical and political claims. The Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) produced a nominal British victory, but the widespread mistreatment and death of Afrikaans women and children held in wretched concentration camps created more resistance, as the British again tried to impose their language and culture on the Boers. Defining themselves in opposition both to the British as well as the people of various colors inhabiting the land with them, the Afrikaners continued to promote a nationalistic mythology premised on their uniqueness.

In 1910, the Union of South Africa was created as a segregated state within the British Empire. Subsequently, the African National Congress (ANC) was founded in 1912 to protest the exclusion of black people from power, but discriminatory legislation, including the segregation of land based on race,

increased. Afrikaner nationalism continued to rise, and in 1932, South Africa declared its independence from the United Kingdom. As non-whites could not vote and those of British descent were in the minority, in 1948, the pro-Afrikaner National Party (NP) came to power advocating the authoritarian ideology of apartheid, a system based on white supremacy and racial separation.

Alan Paton's Lament: *Cry, the Beloved Country*

It is at this historical moment that Alan Paton's famous novel, *Cry, the Beloved Country*, was published, ten years before *Things Fall Apart*. While it appeared in 1948, it was actually written before the NP took control of the country and instituted apartheid as the official national agenda. Paton was a South African of British descent, and the novel quickly became well known among Anglo-American readers as it was published by Scribner's under the direction of the acclaimed editor Maxwell Perkins, who had previously worked with Hemingway and Fitzgerald. As apartheid expanded in the 1960s and 70s, and the anti-apartheid movement grew stronger throughout the 1970s and 1980s, *Cry, the Beloved Country* served to educate and outrage American readers about South African apartheid. The obvious parallels with American race relations sadly sometimes were sometimes lost amidst self-congratulatory rhetoric in the US press.

As a historical event, the publication of *Cry, the Beloved Country* was groundbreaking: it was the first critically and popularly successful work in South African literature to have a black protagonist, to depict township life in realistic detail, and to protest against the social injustice rampant in South Africa. It initiated a new era in South African writing. Nobel Prize winner Nadine Gordimer, another South African novelist of British descent, says, "[South African literature in English] made a new beginning with Alan Paton's *Cry, the Beloved Country* which suggested the need of a Christian solution to the political problem of racialism. It was a book of lyrical beauty and power that moved the conscience of the outside world over racialism and what's more, that of white South Africa as no book had done before."

Paton had served as superintendent of a youth reformatory much like the one Absalom Kumalo is incarcerated in for a time before he wrote this, his first novel. The novel accurately depicts many historical events and people, but it focuses on African and English South African perspectives, with little insight into the Afrikaner mind. The 1995 film version starring James Earl Jones and Richard Harris was one of the first movies filmed in South Africa following the fall of apartheid in 1994. Visually capturing the immense beauty of South Africa, the film is well worth seeing. (An earlier 1951 version starring Sidney Poitier is a less successful adaptation.)

Reflection and discussion questions:

1. This is a story about two fathers—in what ways are Kumalo and Jarvis similar and/or different?
2. Why do so many Zulus leave Natal (in southeastern South Africa) and travel to Johannesburg? How is city life different from country life?
3. Chapter 9 is an instance of what I call a "voices" chapter. What's the effect of these kinds of chapters? Why do you think Paton included them?
4. Kumalo is a flawed man, not a saint; where are some instances that we see this?
5. One of the major themes of the novel concerns restoration. How does this appear in different areas of life? To what extent does Christianity inform this idea?
6. Near the end of the novel, the agricultural demonstrator argues with Kumalo about the way African people should achieve freedom. What are the two sides of this argument? How might

some of the other characters, such as John Kumalo, Arthur Jarvis, or Mr. Harrison, react to this argument?

7. In chapter 36, Jarvis says to Kumalo, "I have seen a man who was in darkness till you found him. If that is what you do, I give it willingly." What does this mean?
8. One of the most famous lines of *Cry, the Beloved Country* comes from Msimangu, who says, "I have one great fear in my heart, that one day when they [whites] are turned to loving, they will find we [Africans] are turned to hating." Was his fear realized in subsequent South African history?
9. Do the poetic passages add to the novel's effectiveness for you? Why or why not? Are there examples that you found especially moving?
10. Compare and contrast *Cry, the Beloved Country* with *Things Fall Apart*.

The Long Struggle against Apartheid

Cry, the Beloved Country is set before the formal institution of apartheid, but in its depiction of the townships and shantytowns outside of Johannesburg, it depicts a social system that became even more widespread in the 1950s and 1960s. Under apartheid, all non-European South Africans were categorized by race and required to carry a passbook that assigned where they were to live and work. The Afrikaners' master plan was to create separate homelands for each officially designated "race," and move everyone to a designated "homeland." But the need for cheap labor in urban areas and the mines meant that many families were broken up as men and women moved to the cities.

Under the shadow of the Cold War, most Western countries initially recognized the National Party and accepted apartheid as a necessary ugly bulwark against the spread of communism. ANC campaigns at first were non-violent, but following the Sharpeville Massacre in 1960, when 70 black Africans were shot by police at a peaceful protest, violence on both sides grew more common. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned in 1964 and eventually became an internationally respected figure for his steadfast and dignified resistance to apartheid. Throughout the 1970s, thousands of black Africans were uprooted from land on which they had lived for decades and moved to "tribal homelands." The Soweto uprising began in 1976, protesting mandatory Afrikaans language instruction in black African schools through boycotts and demonstrations.

Under frequently declared States of Emergency, South African authorities could legally seize and detain people for long periods, without charging them or informing their families of their whereabouts. Many detainees simply "disappeared," while others were brutally tortured before being released. In 1977, the activist Steve Biko mysteriously died while in police custody; the official autopsy stated that he killed himself by banging his head on the cell wall. Censorship was common in South Africa during this period, with controversial authors and works being "banned." The South African press was controlled by the government, but western press coverage, especially on television, of the protests, riots, and police brutality began to turn the tide of western opinion. The United Nations declared 1978 as "The International Anti-Apartheid Year," and western anti-apartheid movements grew stronger with protests outside of South African embassies and economic boycotts. It was at this time, during the late 1970s, that J.M. Coetzee, a white South African of both Afrikaans and British descent, was studying in the United States and writing his third novel, *Waiting for the Barbarians*, which was published in 1980.

Reflection and discussion questions:

1. Describe the setting of the novel. When in time does the story take place? What geographic location? How might the term “Empire” be significant?
2. Explain the Empire’s view of the barbarians. Is it an accurate or fair view? Why does the Empire attack the barbarians?
3. Consider the Magistrate. How might he be described as a “civilized” man? How might he be described as a “barbarian”?
4. Why does he become so obsessed with the barbarian woman? Why does he bring her back to her people?
5. Does the Magistrate change over the course of the novel? How do his dreams change? What, if anything, does he learn? Would you describe him as a hero?
6. The Magistrate dabbles in history and archeology. What does he learn from studying these areas?
7. What’s the difference between a human being and a beast, according to the Magistrate? To Joll? To you?
8. What is the role of torture in this novel? How might the novel speak to Steve Biko’s death? In 1986, Coetzee wrote a *New York Times* about the fictional depiction of torture. He says the difficulty faced by an author is twofold: 1) how to find a middle way between ignoring the obscenities performed by the state and reproducing realistic representations of those obscenities; and 2) how to represent the person of the torturer without resorting to cliché. Do you think he overcomes these difficulties in this novel?
9. One reviewer wrote, “The intelligence Coetzee brings us in *Waiting for the Barbarians* comes straight from Scripture and Dostoevsky: we possess the devil. We are all barbarians.” How does the story convey this idea?
10. Discuss the significance of the final scene. Does it contain any hope? Note that the novel is dedicated to Coetzee’s two children.

Change, Confession, and Reconciliation

The 1980s were times of continued violence and protest in South Africa, along with increasing international pressure to eliminate apartheid. No side was entirely innocent—the official South African police, clandestine state-sanctioned death squads, Boer nationalist extremists, the African National Congress’ armed wing (Umkhonto we Sizwe) and rival ethnic groups of Zulus and Xhosas all participated in acts of violence. But intensive secret negotiations, along with growing pressure from the business sector of South Africa, resulted in an unprecedented peaceful transition of power in 1990, as the State of Emergency was lifted, Nelson Mandela was released from prison, the African National Congress was legalized, and Umkhonto we Sizwe suspended its operations.

Negotiations to establish a new constitution soon followed, and on April 27, 1994, almost twenty million South Africans (some fifteen million for the first time in their lives) participated in a democratic, multiracial election that resulted in Nelson Mandela taking office as President before a crowd of 100,000 people. The theme of the day was reconciliation, an amicable union of what Mandela termed “a rainbow nation at peace with itself and the world.” But how was reconciliation to be achieved? The once unimaginable political transformation needed complementary reforms in housing, employment,

health care, and education. Questions of justice, punishment, and restitution loomed large, since the new political system had been won through negotiations and the relinquishment of power rather than through a coup or violent revolution.

The new South Africa was founded, in part, on the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC was established with the goal of facilitating national reconciliation by creating a public record of human rights violations. It held a series of public hearings of two types: in the first, victims of human rights abuses voluntarily recounted their stories at hearings held in packed courtrooms, city halls, and community centers around the country. Over 22,000 victims testified, often in graphic detail. This process had a therapeutic goal, allowing long-silenced voices a public forum, giving victims of horrendous atrocities an opportunity to lament publically, and ritually—through the concluding statements of TRC commissioners—providing an official acknowledgement of the wrongs that had been committed. I attended several of these remarkable hearings in 1996.

In the fall of 1996, the TRC Amnesty Committee began receiving and evaluating amnesty applications during a public hearing process. The committee could grant amnesty if perpetrators submitted a full confession and account of the human rights violations that they had committed and demonstrated that they were acting in pursuit of political objectives. While about two hundred applications had been expected, more than seven thousand were received, and by November of 2000, 5,392 amnesty requests had been refused and 849 granted. Faced with the massive abuses committed during apartheid and the compromises necessary to a negotiated settlement, South Africa established the TRC process rather than pursue legal prosecutions. This was a conscious and controversial choice of *truth* rather than *justice*, with a goal of *reconciliation*. The uniquely public nature of the TRC process thrust the perpetrators into the spotlight, in contrast to secret amnesty hearings conducted in several South American countries. The hearings gave the perpetrators a forum in which to attempt to heal themselves either through repentance (which was not required for amnesty) or self-justification by repudiating a former self as one formed by indoctrination.

The choice of truth—a full accounting of abuses—over justice has proven difficult for many South Africans and other observers. The perpetrators' detailed testimonies were highly disturbing. The extent of the state's involvement in human rights abuses and the brutal acts of torture and murder stunned many white South Africans, who had for years denied that such atrocities every took place. However, the amnesty hearings revealed many hidden truths, including the details of Steve Biko's murder in police custody and the activities of the so-called Vlakplaas Five, a notorious government-established death squad. This is the context of our final book—a memoir written by a black South African clinical psychologist who served on the TRC.

A Human Being Died that Night: Are There Limits to Forgiveness?

1. Why does Gobodo-Madikizela repeatedly visit Eugene de Kock in prison?
2. What are some of the dangers of attempting to understand the perpetrators of evil? Do you think such an attempt should be made? Why or why not?
3. How do de Kock's appearance and behavior in prison and at the TRC hearings comport with his past history?
4. On p. 32, Gobodo-Madikizela describes touching de Kock's hand. This act reverberates throughout the rest of the memoir. What are some of the impacts it has? (see also p. 42)
5. How does de Kock account for his actions? What caused him to behave in the way he did?

6. How does Gobodo-Madikizela's training in psychology affect her reactions or thinking?
7. Chapter 4 compares apartheid's abuses with those committed by the German Nazis. What kind of similarities or differences does the author see?
8. Do you think Gobodo-Madikizela ends up forgiving de Kock? Would you forgive him?
9. What does this memoir teach you about the existence of evil?
10. What is relationship between forgiveness and Christianity? (see note 26 on p. 100)

Post note:

Nelson Mandela had great difficulty in establishing a truly democratic and non-corrupt rainbow nation in his own lifetime, and many of the familiar patterns of corruption, abuse, and misuse of power found in the wake of postcolonialism have also occurred in South Africa. Most commentators would agree that the initial promise of the TRC process has not been fulfilled, despite some notable cases of revelation, contrition, and forgiveness, as in the case of the murder of American Fulbright student Amy Biehl. Ntombeko Ambrose Peni, one of the four perpetrators, testified, "When I look closely at what I did I realise that it was bad. . . . I ask Amy's parents, Amy's friends and relatives, I ask them to forgive me. Just to hear that they have forgiven me would mean a great deal to me. For me it would be starting a new life." Biehl's parents did, in fact, forgive the murderers of their child, supported their request for amnesty, and established the Amy Biehl Foundation to provide opportunities for township youth in order to discourage further violence. Two of the men who had been convicted of Biehl's murder eventually took jobs with the foundation. The Amy Biehl story is included in the outstanding Oscar-nominated documentary *Long Night's Journey into Day*, which recounts four stories from the TRC hearings.

Additional Reading

For those who wish to explore literature from Africa further beyond those books and films mentioned above. . .

A Life, by Mamphela Ramphele. A fascinating biography of a brave South African woman, who was active in the South African resistance movement, was the colleague and lover of Steve Biko, was banned to a remote homeland, and eventually became an anthropologist and university administrator in the new South Africa.

Disgrace, by J.M. Coetzee. Set in post-apartheid South Africa, Coetzee's controversial novel traces the activities of a college professor who is accused of sexual misconduct as well as the violence that continued to pervade South African life.

July's People, by Nadine Gordimer. Written before the end of apartheid, when the future looked bleak, this novel by Nobel-Prize winning South African writer, is a futuristic account of the aftermath of a South African civil war. It explores what happens when power shifts and racial relations are reversed.

Mother to Mother, by Sindiwe Magona. A fictionalized account of Amy Biehl's death from the perspective of the mother of one of Biehl's killers.

No Future without Forgiveness, by Desmond Tutu. Archbishop Tutu's personal account of the Truth and Reconciliation process and the prospects of the new South Africa.

The Fishermen, by Chigozie Obioma. Brilliantly narrated alternately by a nine-year-old boy and his older self, this novel recounts a Cain and Abel story of a Nigerian childhood. Benjamin and his brothers struggle to find their moral compass when their father moves to the city, leaving them to raise themselves.

The River Between, by Ngugi wa Thiong'o. A novel by one of the most significant Kenyan writers today that examines, through the story of star-crossed lovers, the tensions during the colonial period between those drawn to Christianity and those clinging to ancestral traditions.

The Thing Around Your Neck, by Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. A charming collection of short stories primarily about Igbo women set in Nigeria and the United States. The final story, "The Headstrong Historian," is a retelling of *Things Fall Apart* from women's perspectives.

You Can't Get Lost in Cape Town, by Zoe Wicomb. A moving group of inter-related short stories, set during apartheid in Cape Town about a young coloured woman's search for identity.