The Thing Around Your Neck

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Adichie was born in Enugu, Nigeria, but grew up in Nsukka. Her father was the first professor of statistics in Nigeria, and her mother was the first female registrar at the University of Nigeria. Adichie studied medicine and pharmacy at the University of Nigeria, where she also edited the student magazine *The Compass*. When Adichie was 19, she received a scholarship to study communications at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She remained in America and attended Eastern Connecticut University, where she completed a degree in communication and political science. Following graduation, she completed a master's degree in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. Adichie began writing her first novel, *Purple Hibiscus*, while completing her final year at Eastern Connecticut University. In 2005-2006, Adichie was a Hodder Fellow at Princeton University and two years later, she completed a second master's degree in African Studies at Yale. Her novels have won a number of prizes. She's spoken at several TED events and regularly teaches writing workshops. Adichie is married and has a daughter, and her family divides their time between the United States and Nigeria.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Adichie's stories touch on a number of historical events. In "The Headstrong Historian," the characters mention the Royal Niger Company, which was a mercantile company chartered by the British government. It was formed under another name and became the Royal Niger Company in 1886. The Company helped the British Empire gain control over areas along the Niger River and eventually formally colonize the area in 1914. The resulting Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria gained independence and became the Federal Republic of Nigeria in 1960. As a British colony, Nigeria was divided into the Northern Nigeria Protectorate, which had a primarily Muslim population, and the Southern Nigeria Protectorate, the population of which was mostly Christian. This religious breakdown, which didn't end with independence, is partially responsible for the violent riots like Chika experiences in "A Private Experience."

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Much of Adichie's writing tackles the same or similar themes that she addresses in *The Thing Around Your Neck*. *Half of a Yellow Sun* takes place directly following the Biafran War, while *Americanah* considers what it means to be black in Nigeria and in the West, as well as the immigrant experience. The immigrant experience in Western countries is one that has been explored by a number of authors from many different countries. Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* follows the story of a Bangladeshi immigrant who travels to London for an arranged marriage, while Junot Díaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* explores the experience of Dominican-American youth. Critics have compared *The Thing Around Your Neck* specifically to Jhumpa Lahiri's story collection *Interpreter of Maladies*, which examines the experience of Indians in America.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** The Thing Around Your Neck
- **When Written:** Many of the stories in the collection had previously been published as standalone works or in other publications from 2003-2008.
- **Where Written:** United States and Nigeria
- **When Published:** April 2009
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary African Diaspora
- **Genre:** Short Story Sequence; Semi-autobiographical Fiction
- **Setting:** United States (Philadelphia, New York); Nigeria; South Africa
- **Antagonist:** Many of the stories' antagonists are some combination of colonialism, racism, and sexism. The characters also battle the corrupt Nigerian government and the American immigration system.
- **Point of View:** Various

EXTRA CREDIT

A Single Story. In 2009, Adichie gave a TED talk titled "The Danger of a Single Story," about underrepresentation and reducing complex people and conflicts to one single aspect. It's since become one of the most popular TED talks of all time, with over five million views.

Feminism and Beyoncé. Though Adichie has expressed disappointment when people suggest that Adichie owes her fame to Beyoncé (Beyoncé sampled one of Adichie's TED talks on feminism in her 2013 song "Flawless"), Adichie has consistently defended Beyoncé against critics claiming that Beyoncé isn't actually a feminist.

PLOT SUMMARY

The Thing Around Your Neck is arranged as a series of short

stories. In the first story, "Cell One," the Cell One narrator tells the story of her brother's time in prison. Nnamabia is a handsome and charming teenager who steals and pawns his mother's jewelry when he's 17. Three years later, the Nsukka university campus where the siblings' Mother and Father teach is embroiled in cult wars. The cults began as fraternities, but soon became exceptionally violent. Nnamabia is arrested after three boys are shot on campus. When Mother, Father, and the narrator visit him in jail, he seems to enjoy dramatizing what he's going through in jail. Mother maintains that Nnamabia is innocent. Nnamabia is in jail for several weeks and his defenses begin to break down, particularly as he's threatened with transfer to the dangerous Cell One. Eventually, an innocent old man joins his cell. Nnamabia watches the police taunt the old man for being poor and sick. Finally, on the day that the superintendent calls for Nnamabia's release, Nnamabia stands up for the old man. He's transferred to Cell One and then another prison, where he's beaten. When his parents and the narrator come to get him, he doesn't dramatize his retelling of what happened.

In "Imitation," Nkem studies the **Benin mask** on her mantel and listens to her friend say that Nkem's husband, Obiora, has a girlfriend in Lagos, Nigeria. (Nkem is living in Philadelphia.) When Nkem first came to America, Obiora stayed in Philadelphia for a few months, but soon returned to Nigeria. Nkem had two children and now Obiora only visits once per year. Nkem goes upstairs and cuts her hair short. She thinks about how her relationship with Obiora began. Later, Nkem watches her housegirl Amaechi makes dinner. Nkem brings up Obiora's girlfriend, and Amaechi says all men "are like that" and counsels Nkem that it's best to not know things like that. Nkem calls Nigeria later, and the houseboy won't tell her if anyone is at home. The next week Obiora visits. Obiora asks Nkem to shower with him, and she agrees. In the shower, she says she'd like to move back to Lagos.

In "A Private Experience," Chika hides from the violence of a riot in an abandoned shop with a Hausa Muslim woman. Chika fears that her sister Nnedi is lost in the riot, and the woman tells Chika about her eldest daughter, who also went missing in the fray. Chika says that she's a medical student, and the woman asks Chika to examine her burning nipples, which are cracked and dry from nursing her baby. Chika and the woman spend the night in the store and part ways in the morning, each telling the other to greet their loved ones. Chika knows that she won't find Nnedi.

In "Ghosts," Professor James Nwoye runs into Ikenna Okaro on the Nsukka campus. He had previously believed that Ikenna died when the Nigerian army invaded Nsukka in 1967. Ikenna explains that he moved to Sweden and organized pro-Biafra rallies all over Europe. When Ikenna asks about Ebere, James' wife, James explains that Ebere has been dead for three years but that she "visits." James explains to the reader that Ebere's ghost visits regularly and massages lotion into his skin. James invites Ikenna to come to his house, but Ikenna refuses. When James gets home, he waits for his daughter to call and for Ebere to visit later that night.

In "On Monday of Last Week," Kamara comes to Philadelphia after five years apart from her husband Tobechi. Upon her arrival in America, Kamara becomes depressed and extremely disillusioned with Tobechi, who has adopted a troubling American accent. Kamara takes a job as a nanny for Josh, a seven-year-old biracial boy. Josh's father, Neil, worries constantly about trans fats and high fructose corn syrup in his son's diet, and pushes Josh to be as successful as possible. When Kamara meets Tracy, Josh's African-American artist mother, Tracy asks Kamara to model for her. Kamara begins to come out of her depression and experience attraction to Tracy. She learns after a week, though, that Tracy habitually asks women to model for her, and Tracy's request didn't come from sexual attraction.

In "Jumping Monkey Hill," Ujunwa, a young Nigerian writer, attends a writers' workshop at the Jumping Monkey Hill resort. From the outset she doesn't like Edward, the British organizer of the workshop. He stares at Ujunwa's body and makes suggestive comments to her. Ujunwa writes a story about a woman who gets a job at a bank. Her job is to bring in new clients, which she soon learns means using sexual means to bring in the clients. As the writers at the workshop begin the process of reading and critiquing each others' stories, Edward says that many of them aren't representations of the "real Africa," including the Senegalese woman's true story about coming out to her parents. When Ujunwa reads her own story, Edward deems it implausible. Ujunwa says that every word of it is true; it happened to her.

In "The Thing Around Your Neck, Akunna wins the "American visa lottery" and travels to live with her uncle in America. When her uncle tries to abuse her sexually, Akunna takes a bus to a small town in Connecticut and gets a job in a restaurant. A white boy begins visiting and tries to talk to Akunna about Africa. They soon begin a relationship, but the boy is rich and condescending. He doesn't understand why Akunna is upset that he doesn't correct waiters who assume that she's not his girlfriend. Akunna finally writes home and learns that her father has died. She flies home alone.

In "The American Embassy," the embassy narrator stands in line to get an asylum visa. The man behind her tries to engage her in conversation, but the narrator can only think of her son, Ugonna, who was killed the day before. After the narrator's husband, a reporter, published an article that angered the head of state, he'd received a call that he was going to be arrested and killed. The narrator smuggled her husband out of the country, but three men came looking for him and shot Ugonna. The woman and the man behind her are let into the embassy for their interviews. As she sits, the narrator thinks that she'd

rather stay in Nigeria and plant flowers on Ugonna's grave than use his death to get a visa. She leaves the embassy.

"The Shivering" takes place in Princeton, New Jersey. Ukamaka refreshes web pages, checking Nigerian news sources for news of a plane crash in Nigeria. She worries that her ex-boyfriend, Udenna, was on the plane. Chinedu, another Nigerian man from her building, knocks on her door and asks to pray with her for Nigeria. Ukamaka learns that Udenna wasn't on the flight. Over the next several weeks, Chinedu and Ukamaka become friends and Ukamaka talks at length about her relationship with Udenna. They shop together and she drives him to his Pentecostal church on Sundays before attending her own Catholic church. They argue one day when Chinedu shares that he dated a controlling man and Ukamaka says that Chinedu's partner sounds like Udenna. The next Sunday Chinedu admits that he's not a student; he's hiding from the government to avoid a deportation notice, as his visa expired three years ago. Chinedu accompanies Ukamaka to Mass.

In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Chinaza arrives in New York with her new husband, Ofodile. Her aunt and uncle arranged the marriage and thought it was a good thing: Ofodile is a doctor. Chinaza is immediately disillusioned, as Ofodile's "house" is a sparsely furnished apartment. Ofodile shows her around New York and corrects her every time she uses an Igbo or British English word instead of its American counterpart. He tells her that in America, he goes by "Dave Bell" instead of his Nigerian name. He fills out her application for a social security card with the name "Agatha Bell," and buys Chinaza an American cookbook so she can learn to cook American food. Chinaza later meets Nia, a young woman who lives in the apartment building. Chinaza thinks that Nia looks like a prostitute, but she likes listening to Nia talk. One night, Ofodile admits that he married an American woman to get his green card and the woman is refusing to divorce him. Chinaza goes to Nia's apartment, where Nia admits that she slept with Ofodile two years ago. She encourages Chinaza to stick with Ofodile until her papers come through, and Chinaza goes back to her husband the next night.

In "Tomorrow is Too Far," the tomorrow narrator returns to Nigeria for the first time in 18 years. She remembers her childhood summers in Nigeria when her Grandmama only praised the narrator's brother, Nonso, and ignored the narrator and her cousin, Dozie. Dozie was the "wrong grandson" and the narrator was female. One day Nonso fell out of the avocado tree and died. Three months after Nonso's funeral, the narrator told her mother that Grandmama played a trick on Nonso and he fell out of the tree. The narrator then explains what really happened: the narrator felt that something had to happen to Nonso so that the narrator could get some of her mother's love. She tricked Nonso into climbing the tree, and yelled that a poisonous snake was near him when he reached the top. He died instantly. The narrator's mother never gave the narrator the love she hoped for after Nonso's death, however. In the present, the narrator asks Dozie what he wanted that summer, and he says he only cared about what the narrator wanted.

In "The Headstrong Historian," Nwambga marries Obierika and has one son, Anikwenwa, after several miscarriages. Following Obierika's murder by his two cousins, Nwambga decides to put Anikwenwa in a Catholic mission school so he can learn English and take his father's cousins to court. Anikwenwa hates school at first, but soon becomes very devout. He becomes a teacher and refuses to eat his mother's **food**, though he does win Nwambga's land case for her. He marries a woman named Mgbeke, who cries often and doesn't stand up for herself. They have two children and Nwambga sees that their second child, Grace, possesses the soul of Obierika. Though Grace attends Catholic school and receives a Western education, she remains fascinated by her grandmother's culture. She returns from school to sit with her grandmother on her deathbed. Later, as she matures, Grace begins to question her own education. She attends college, writes books about Nigerian history, and divorces her husband because he doesn't think her interests in the native peoples of Nigeria are worthy. In her old age, Grace changes her name to Afemefuna, the name given to her by Nwambga.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Nnamabia – In "Cell One," Nnamabia is the handsome, endlessly charming, but troubled 20-year-old son of Mother and Father, and the older brother to the Cell One narrator. He becomes involved in violent cult activity on the Nsukka campus, but denies being a cult member. When he's arrested, he continues to deny any wrongdoing and delights in telling his parents and sister about the indignities he's made to suffer in prison. He does, however, fear going to "Cell One" after watching police drag a corpse out of the cell. When an innocent old man is put in Nnamabia's cell, Nnamabia is shaken by the injustices the poor man is forced to endure. He finally stands up for the old man, and when he tells his parents what happened, Nnamabia doesn't embellish or dramatize his story.

Nkem – In "Imitation," Nkem is a Nigerian woman living in Philadelphia with her children and her housegirl, Amaechi. Her husband, Obiora, is a "Big Man" in Nigeria. When Nkem and Obiora first got married, Nkem was so thrilled to marry him that she never questioned him or advocated for anything she wanted, and she continues to do this throughout their marriage. She begins to find her voice when she learns that Obiora has a girlfriend living in their home in Lagos, though she realizes she's always known that Obiora has lovers. She loves the optimism of America and wants her children to grow up not knowing the poverty that she experienced as a child in Nigeria.

Chika – In "A Private Experience," Chika is a young Igbo Christian medical student. She and her sister, Nnedi, end up in the middle of a violent riot between Hausa Muslims and Igbo Christians while visiting their aunt in Kano. Chika feels as though riots aren't supposed to affect Nnedi and herself, given their high socioeconomic status. As she waits with a Hausa Muslim woman for the danger to pass, Chika feels guilty for thinking that the woman is less intelligent. Chika later realizes that the portrait the media paints of the Hausa Muslims is exaggerated to make them seem exceptionally violent, as the woman is very kind to Chika.

Professor James Nwoye – In "Ghosts," James is an elderly retired Nsukka professor. His wife, Ebere, died as a result of "fake drugs," which are expired medications that don't work. In the 1960s, James fought for the state of Biafra and believed that it would emerge victorious. Now, as an old man, James doesn't speak about the horrors of the war or the death of his first daughter during the war. He takes comfort in the fact that Ebere's ghost visits him, and he worries that his American grandson hasn't learned Igbo. When he encounters Ikenna, an old friend he believed was dead, he remembers Ikenna's passion for fighting for what was right, though James now seems content with simply living his life and not fighting corruption.

Kamara – In "On Monday of Last Week," Kamara is Tobechi's young wife. After five years of marriage, during which Kamara stayed in Nigeria while Tobechi drove a taxi in Philadelphia, she was able to join him in the United States. Upon her arrival in the United States, Kamara becomes depressed and disillusioned with her husband. She takes a job as a nanny for Josh at Tobechi's suggestion, and she marvels at the anxiety Neil, Josh's father, feels about being a parent. Being out of her own house and having someone to care for gives her a sense of purpose, and her life gains new meaning when she meets Josh's mysterious artist mother, Tracy. Receiving attention from Tracy makes Kamara want to wear makeup and lose weight, and it begins to pull her out of her depression.

Ujunwa – In "Jumping Monkey Hill," Ujunwa is a Nigerian woman who attends the writers' conference at Jumping Monkey Hill. She is annoyed when Edward and Isabel make assumptions about her family or her beliefs, and deals with Isabel's assumptions in particular by agreeing with Isabel and then making the assumptions sound ridiculous. Though Edward's constant leering and inappropriate comments make her uncomfortable, Ujunwa struggles to say anything or call him out on his behavior. She writes an autobiographical story about working in a bank, and storms out of the workshop when Edward says that women in Nigeria don't experience sexism like the protagonist of her story does.

Akunna – In "The Thing Around Your Neck," Akunna wins the "American visa lottery" and gets a green card to go to America. She's very independent and refuses her uncle's sexual advances, instead taking a job in a restaurant to support herself. She finds that most Americans are condescending and know nothing about Africa, and she similarly becomes disillusioned with the boy, her American boyfriend. Akunna sends money to her parents monthly, though she doesn't write letters to tell them about how strange America is.

The American Embassy Narrator – This unnamed narrator of the story "The American Embassy" is a grieving mother attempting to obtain an asylum visa from the American embassy. She's overcome with grief for her son, Ugonna, who was shot the day before by government officials looking for her husband. Ugonna gave the narrator a sense of purpose and an identity that she loved. The narrator decides that she loves Ugonna too much to use his story to get a visa, and elects to stay in Nigeria.

Ukamaka – In "The Shivering," Ukamaka is a graduate student at Princeton who's trying to piece her life back together after a sudden breakup with her boyfriend, Udenna. Ukamaka spent the three years she and Udenna were together shaping her life around his; she planned to live in the city he preferred after she finished school, and she cooked with hot peppers even though she doesn't like them. Udenna insisted that Ukamaka think and behave in ways that met his standards and disregard her own desires, and as such, Ukamaka is lost and alone without his forceful presence in her life. She returns to the Catholic Church following the breakup and struggles to understand how and why God does what he does. She thinks of God as a person with human reasoning.

Chinaza – In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Chinaza's aunt and uncle arrange her marriage to Ofodile, a doctor in America. Their marriage is supposed to be a good thing, but Chinaza soon becomes homesick and disillusioned with her husband. She speaks Igbo to herself when Ofodile is at work, since he requires her to speak English when he's home. She misses **Nigerian food** and is generally unhappy in New York, though she doesn't believe she can return to Nigeria. Chinaza wants to remain connected to her Nigerian past and doesn't understand Ofodile's desire to entirely assimilate into American culture. Ofodile changes her name to Agatha Bell on her social security card.

Nwamgba – Nwamgba's story in "The Headstrong Historian" begins in the late 19th century, when she marries Obierika for love. She's headstrong and loyal to her husband, and fears his greedy cousins. She adores her son, Anikwenwa. When Obierika's cousins murder Obierika, Nwamgba learns that she can beat them by putting Anikwenwa in Catholic school so he can learn English and win her case in a British court of law. She sees that learning English gives a person power, though she understands that as Anikwenwa becomes more Westernized and rejects his native culture that power can blind a person to their history and their community.

Grace / Afamefuna – In "The Headstrong Historian," Grace/Afamefuna is the daughter of Anikwenwa and Mgbeke, and she seems to possess her grandfather Obierika's soul. Though Anikwenwa insists that Grace receive a Western and Christian education, Grace is very close to her grandmother Nwamgba and loves her grandmother's poetry and stories. As she grows up, Grace comes to resent her father for rejecting tradition so strongly. She makes it her life project to write about Nigerian history and connect with her roots. As an old woman, Grace legally changes her name to Afamefuna, the name her grandmother called her.

Cell One Narrator – This unnamed female narrator of the story "Cell One" is the younger sister of Nnamabia. She watches Nnamabia get away with all manner of minor crimes and doesn't trust that he's not a cult member. Nnamabia's habit of dramatizing his stories annoys her, as does Mother's habit of babying him. She's proud when Nnamabia doesn't dramatize the retelling of his final day in jail.

Mother – In "Cell One," The unnamed mother of Nnamabia and the Cell One narrator, Mother is beautiful, light-skinned, and believes her son can do no wrong. When Nnamabia was a child, she either covered up or made excuses for his indiscretions. Even when Nnamabia is arrested for cult activity and it seems very likely that he is indeed involved, she maintains that he did nothing wrong. Mother consistently bribes policemen and simultaneously criticizes their corruption.

Father – In "Cell One," The unnamed father of Nnamabia and the Cell One narrator, Father is a professor at Nsukka campus. Though he knows that his son is a thief and involved in gang activity, Father doesn't ever punish Nnamabia with more than writing reports about his wrongdoings. He also doesn't call out other professors when their sons steal. When Nnamabia is jailed, Father seems pleased that Nnamabia is shaken and appears to be learning a lesson.

Obiora – In "Imitation," Obiora is Nkem's husband and a "Big Man" in Nigeria, as well as an avid collector of imitation tribal **masks**. He visits Nkem and their children in the summer and spends Christmas with them in Nigeria. He loves the status conferred upon him because he can afford to keep his family in the United States, but he refuses to work there. He maintains extramarital relationships and treats Nkem herself as a status symbol.

The Woman – In "A Private Experience," the woman is an unnamed Hausa Muslim woman who sells onions in the market in Kano. She helps Chika find safety when a riot breaks out between Hausa Muslims and Igbo Christians. When Chika gets hurt, the woman cares for Chika's wound and demonstrates her generosity. She states that the riots are evil, and it seems as though riots are a regular part of her life.

Ikenna Okoro – In "Ghosts," Ikenna was an activist and a friend of James Nwoye at Nsukka in the 1960s. He fought for progressive issues and was extremely passionate about his work. He was, however, disappointingly unattractive. James believed that Ikenna died when the Nigerian army invaded Nsukka, but Ikenna escaped to Sweden and remained politically active in Europe. He seems somewhat tempered in his old age, but still cares about tackling government corruption.

Neil – In "On Monday of Last Week," Neil is Josh's father, Tracy's husband, and Kamara's employer. He's obsessive about Josh's diet and spends most of his time worrying about strangers in the neighborhood or protecting Josh from becoming depressed later in life. Neil is Jewish and wants to make sure his son stays in touch with his Jewish roots.

Josh – In "On Monday of Last Week," Josh is Neil and Tracy's seven-year-old biracial son. He's precocious and academically advanced for his age. Though he obviously adores Tracy when he sees her, he is fully aware that he should never bother his mother while she's working. Similarly, while he loves both his parents, his bond with his nanny Kamara is especially strong—he makes her a Shabbat card that is supposed to be for family only.

Tracy – In "On Monday of Last Week," Tracy is an African-American artist. She works alone in the basement of the home she shares with her husband Neil, and seldom sees her son Josh. She has a magnetic personality and habitually asks women that she meets, including Kamara and Josh's French teacher, to model for her. She tells Kamara that "the motherland" (Africa) informs her art.

The Senegalese – In "Jumping Monkey Hill," the Senegalese is a young francophone woman attending the writers' conference at Jumping Monkey Hill. She's the youngest attendee and writes an autobiographical story about coming out to her parents as lesbian. She's astounded and offended when Edward says the story is implausible and not representative of Africa, but she doesn't think it's worth saying anything about Edward's inappropriate comments.

Edward – In "Jumping Monkey Hill," Edward is a British man who received a degree from Oxford in African Literature. He runs the writers' conference at Jumping Monkey Hill and seeks to discover stories that speak to the "real Africa." He's pretentious, insists on European dining customs that offend the African attendees, and makes suggestive comments to the female writers.

The boy – In "The Thing Around Your Neck," The boy is an wealthy university student who pursues Akunna. He loves to travel and see the "real people" of different countries, which to him means the poor. He likes occasionally passing for African and doesn't correct waiters when they think that Akunna isn't his girlfriend. The boy is privileged and romanticizes the experiences of immigrants and of the poor in other countries.

The man behind her – In "The American Embassy," this man stands behind the embassy narrator in line at the American

embassy. He attempts, unsuccessfully, to engage her in conversation. Though he praises the editors of the democratic press (and unknowingly, the narrator's husband), he seems unwilling to do any hard and dangerous reporting himself.

Chinedu – In "The Shivering," Chinedu is a gay Nigerian man living in Princeton student housing to evade his impending deportation notice from the US government. He's a devout Pentecostal Christian, and like Ukamaka, he dated a man who tried to control and dictate Chinedu's every move. Chinedu believes that God uses a different type of logic than people do; his faith is blind and trusting. Ukamaka thinks of him as being from the "bush" because of his poor table manners, his style of speaking English, and his unsightly facial features.

Udenna – In "The Shivering," Udenna was Ukamaka's boyfriend. He broke up with her in an ice cream shop by insisting their relationship was "staid." He was exacting and controlling; Ukamaka talks about how he constantly attacked her dreams and desires as boring or not smart enough. Udenna treated others the same way and snubs those people he feels are unworthy of his friendship.

Ofodile – In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Ofodile is Chinaza's husband. He's studying to be a doctor in New York and believes that the only way to get ahead is to fully assimilate into American culture. He goes by the name "Dave Bell" and requires Chinaza to cook American food and speak American English. He married an American woman to get his green card and had a number of girlfriends, and kept that information from Chinaza.

Nia – In "The Arrangers of Marriage," Nia is a neighbor in Ofodile and Chinaza's apartment building. Chinaza thinks she dresses like a prostitute, but Nia runs a hair salon. She tells Chinaza she changed her English name to a Swahili one as a teenager. She and Chinaza become friends, and Nia encourages Chinaza to stay with Ofodile until her papers come through and she can leave.

Tomorrow is Too Far Narrator – As a child, this unnamed narrator of the story "Tomorrow is Too Far fell in love with her cousin Dozie and was resentful of her older brother, Nonso. Because the narrator is female and Nonso is male, her family dotes on Nonso and treats the narrator as if she's disposable and doesn't exist. The narrator orchestrates a trick on Nonso to hurt him, but ends up killing him. Though she only wanted to be loved, she never gets that love.

Dozie – In "Tomorrow is Too Far," Dozie is the cousin of the tomorrow narrator and Nonso. Dozie won't carry on Grandmama's family name, so even though he's older than Nonso, Grandmama ignores Dozie. He's generally quiet and loves the tomorrow narrator. He goes along with her trick to hurt Nonso and keeps the secret of what actually happened.

Grandmama – In "Tomorrow is Too Far," Grandmama's grandchildren, Nonso, the tomorrow narrator, and Dozie visit her in Nigeria every summer. Grandmama makes sure that Nonso gets first dibs on food and gets the most attention and affection. Nonso is her favorite because he's her only grandchild who will carry on the family name.

Anikwenwa – In "The Headstrong Historian," Anikwenwa is Obierika and Nwamgba's son. He learns English at a Catholic mission school and though he hates it at first, he comes to fully embrace British culture and the teachings of the Catholic church. He then refuses to eat Nwamgba's **food** or attend tribal rituals because they're not Christian.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Amaechi – In "Imitation," Amaechi is Nkem's housegirl. She and Nkem are friends, although it's a somewhat tense and complicated friendship given their madam/housegirl relationship. Amaechi is loyal to Nkem, but she also knows that Obiora keeps girlfriends and believes that it's natural for men to conduct relationships outside their marriages.

Nnedi – In "A Private Experience," Nnedi is Chika's sister; she disappears in the riot in Kano. Nnedi is described as an activist and someone who's always willing to explain current events from a scholarly and theoretical perspective. She's dismissive of religion.

Ebere – In "Ghosts," Ebere is James Nwoye's late wife. While James never says outright what illness she had, she died after receiving "fake drugs." She visits him as a ghost to moisturize his skin.

Tobechi – In "On Monday of Last Week," Tobechi is Kamara's husband. He's a manager at Burger King and brings small gifts for Kamara when he comes home. Tobechi doesn't notice Kamara's depression or that things like his American accent make her uncomfortable.

The Ugandan – In "Jumping Monkey Hill," the Ugandan is the leader of the writers' workshop at Jumping Monkey Hill. He won the Lipton African Writers' Prize the year before the conference, and he tries to impress Edward. Ujunwa doesn't like him, and he's often excluded from the other participants' activities.

Isabel – In "Jumping Monkey Hill," Isabel accompanies her husband, Edward, to the writers' conference at Jumping Monkey Hill. She's a slight woman who runs anti-poaching campaigns. She regularly asks rude questions of Ujunwa in particular, but she doesn't understand that she's being rude.

Ugonna – In "The American Embassy," Ugonna is the dead four-year-old son of the embassy narrator. He was full of life and provided his mother with purpose and an identity as his mother. Ugonna is killed by men looking for his father, the narrator's husband.

Husband – In "The American Embassy," The embassy narrator's husband is a reporter for *The New Nigeria*, a democratic paper.

He prioritizes his work over his wife and his son, Ugonna, and writes articles that anger the government by exposing government corruption. He flees to Benin.

Nonso – In "Tomorrow is Too Far," Nonso is the tomorrow narrator's older brother. Unlike their cousin Dozie, Nonso will carry on the family name, so Grandmama and the narrator's mother give Nonso all their attention. He dies when the narrator plays a trick on him.

Obierika – In "The Headstrong Historian," Obierika is Nwamgba's husband. He's loyal to Nwamgba and is a very powerful man in the village, but his cousins murder him. His soul returns to earth in his granddaughter, Grace.

Mgbeke – In "The Headstrong Historian," Mgbeke is Anikwenwa's wife. She's a Nigerian woman, but she converts to Christianity and does her best to please her husband. Mgbeke refuses to stand up for herself and is very powerless to assert her wants and needs.

Okafo and Okoye – In "The Headstrong Historian," Okafo and Okoye are cousins of Obierika, who take advantage of him and end up poisoning him. Nwamgba hates them and brings a court case against them.

Ayaju – In "The Headstrong Historian," Ayaju is Nwamgba's friend. She is descended from slaves and goes on trading journeys. She brings news of the arrival of white men and their guns.

Father Patrick In the story "Shiver," Father Patrick is the priest at the Catholic church that Ukamaka attends. He gives Ukamaka advice after Udenna breaks up with her.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

WOMEN, MARRIAGE, AND GENDER ROLES

Many of the stories in *The Thing Around Your Neck* focus on fraught relationships between men and women. Specifically, Adichie explores the roles women are asked to play within their birth families and then in their romantic relationships. Most of the coupled female characters subsume themselves in favor of their husbands or partners and lose sight of their own identities and sense of agency in the process. The stories question how and why this happens, and then set about discovering what can be done about it.

A number of the collection's partnered women experience an epiphany in which they realize they've shaped their entire lives around the whims and desires of their husbands or boyfriends: Nkem habitually waxes her pubic hair the way her husband likes it; Ukamaka cooks with hot peppers even though she doesn't like them much herself; Chinaza learns English to comply with her husband's desire to assimilate into American culture in private as well as in public. The thought processes of the married women specifically suggest that there's safety and prestige in being the wife of a "Big Man," particularly when the Big Man sends his wife to America. This suggests that women's goals are centered on attaining marriage and financial security through that marriage, rather than personal fulfillment. The women's discontent, however, indicates that reaching these goals isn't as fulfilling as many of these women hoped it would be.

Furthermore, many of these women's husbands have other girlfriends. Though this makes the men look prestigious (the girlfriends signify that they can afford to care for multiple women at once), the wives' discontent at these situations shows that what they want on some level is to be noticed and valued as a person with feelings and desires, rather than seen only for their role in making their husbands look powerful. However, Nkem mentions that when she was young she dated married men, and she notes that it's not uncommon for young women to do so. In this way, the reader gets a sense that this kind of situation is cyclical and based on a female desire to be noticed by powerful men, as well as the obvious male desire for power.

Several of the women find purpose and a new sense of identity in their marriages as they become mothers or caregivers. While for some this is a welcome distraction from their unhappy marriages and creates a sense of purpose, for other women, like the embassy narrator, it becomes all-consuming. Because the embassy narrator's young son Ugonna provided her an outlet through which to emotionally distance herself from her difficult relationship with her husband, Ugonna's sudden and violent death leaves her completely broken. When she later gives up on immigrating to America to join her husband, she loses all hope of having a happy life as she has nobody to care for anymore.

Many of the book's women also question how they got to the point at which they subsume their lives into their husbands'. The stories of younger women answer this by showing that placing value on male lives and desires over female ones is a widespread cultural practice, and one that begins in childhood. The Cell One narrator observes that her beautiful and troubled older brother, Nnamabia, is allowed to get away with all sorts of bad behavior. He steals, cheats, and skips class, and because he's handsome and male, their parents excuse Nnamabia's behavior. This dynamic is taken to the extreme in "Tomorrow is Too Far" when the tomorrow narrator admits to accidentally killing her older brother Nonso with the hope that she might take his revered place in their parents' hearts. She's ultimately

unsuccessful, which once again supports the idea that mothers define themselves in terms of their male children, while female children are relatively ignored. Further, both the "Cell One" narrator and the "Tomorrow" narrator are unnamed in their stories, which illustrates how little they're valued as people in relation to their male family members.

Essentially, the lives of most of the women in the collection are lived in terms of their relationships to others, whether those others are family members, spouses, or children. Though the collection doesn't prescribe one remedy (or indeed, any remedies) for its female characters' discontent, it suggests that women can move closer to happiness when they begin to take control of their own lives and demand that their voices be heard by the men around them.

STORIES AND REPRESENTATION

Adichie's collection splits its time between America and Nigeria, primarily in the mid-to-late 1990s and early 2000s. As the Nigerian characters encounter white Americans, black Americans, and other Nigerians of different economic classes, they run up against differing ideas about what Nigeria is again and again. As such, many of the stories concern themselves directly with what it means to be Nigerian and the problems that arise when others have very narrow views of what Nigeria, and Africa in general, is supposed to look like.

This tension between a Western idea of Africa and what Africa truly is becomes most apparent in the story "Jumping Monkey Hill." As Ujunwa attends a writer's conference in South Africa led by Edward, a British man, she initially finds him crude and disrespectful of her because she's female. Soon, however, she finds that he also has a very narrow view of what happens in Africa. This is, of course, ironic, as the story implies that Edward was born, raised, and educated in England, not Africa. However, because Edward has a degree in African Studies, he believes himself to be more of an expert on what goes on in Africa than people who were actually born and raised there. Edward tries to tell Ujunwa and her lesbian Senegalese peer at the workshop that their true and autobiographical stories are "agenda writing" rather than representative of what actually goes on in Africa. Though Edward doesn't have lived experience as an African person, he has the power and authority to tell the women that their stories are false, as well as the power to decide what stories are "real" or truly representative of Africa. Because Edward has this power to decide what's real, he insures that the false or oversimplified representations of Africa that he deems real are rewarded and circulated, while suppressing nuanced and true stories that depict different aspects of life in Africa.

In several stories, it's evident that people like Edward have been successful in disseminating these poor representations of Africa: several American characters can't identify where Nigeria is, and others ask rude questions about Nigerian characters' hair or names. The prevalence of Western characters who question how Nigerian characters learned English illustrates the immense power of the stories like the ones Edward wishes to publish. These stories allow the Western characters to feel superior to the Nigerian characters, as all the Western characters know Edward's version of Africa—the continent as a violent and uncivilized place. As a result, many of the male Nigerian characters in particular loudly denounce their culture, adopt American names, and stop speaking their native languages. Even the Nigerian characters in Nigeria seek to separate and distance themselves from this singular story of their country. In "A Private Experience," Chika, a medical student from cosmopolitan Lagos, unexpectedly finds herself in the middle of a violent riot in rural Kano. However, because of her high socioeconomic status and education, she feels as though she shouldn't be affected by the riot or by Nigeria's conflicts at all. Her status as a well-off student allows her to disassociate from the violence and conceptualize the violence as being unique to the poor of Nigeria.

As the collection presents characters of a variety of social classes, genders, religions, and life stages, the reader is offered a vast array of different stories. Though the struggle to define their relationship to their Nigerian roots and to understand what it means to be Nigerian carries through every story, the fact that the collection doesn't come to a single conclusion on the matter suggests that there is no singular story about Nigeria. Rather, the final story, "The Headstrong Historian," suggests that one can begin to define and understand Nigeria when one seeks to tell the many different stories of its people, rather than attempting to distill the idea of Nigeria down to the singular stories of characters like Edward.

FAMILY AND LIES

For many of the book's characters, love and family are driving forces in their lives. While several of the stories are concerned specifically with romantic (and often married) relationships, Adichie also explores the inter-generational relationships between parents, children, siblings, and grandparents. Specifically, she explores the instances in which individual family members lie or tell stories in order to preserve their family, break it down, or attempt to earn the love of other family members. These lies more often than not lead to grief and disillusionment rather than happiness and fulfillment.

The prevalence of cheating spouses throughout the collection suggests that lies between romantic partners are both common and dangerous, though the way women see their husbands' infidelity shows that many of them believe lying to be typical of marriage. Taken together, the stories suggest that the types of lies that people tell often break down by gender. Men lie (either outright or by omission) about the lives they lead, including the

existence of their extramarital relationships, while women lie about whether or not they're happy. Further, while the men in question are mostly successful in pursuing their extramarital relationships, their wives have no such luck feeling happy. When Kamara experiences feelings for Tracy, the mysterious artist mother of her nannying charge, she's initially given reason to believe that the attraction is mutual. She soon finds, however, that Tracy is simply a magnetic person and habitually asks women to model nude for her. Kamara isn't special, and Tracy's modeling request didn't come from a place of sexual desire. Similarly, the tomorrow narrator lies about the particulars of her brother's death to try to earn her mother's love, but she is likewise unsuccessful in achieving happiness and the coveted role of the favorite child. For both of these women, their attempts to look outside their proscribed familial roles (wife and female second child respectively) are thwarted. This suggests that it's often impossible for women to find happiness by violating strict familial roles.

To preserve their marriages, women, particularly Nkem, tell themselves stories about their husbands that allow them to ignore infidelity and maintain a happy-looking façade despite their unhappy marriages. Though Nkem doesn't fully acknowledge that her husband is conducting extramarital relationships until a friend tells her, she realizes that she's always known about his affairs but ignored the signs. Chika uses a similar thought process to help herself believe that her sister hasn't been killed in a riot. Though she comes to realize she'll never see her sister again, the mental narrative that her sister is still alive allows Chika to keep herself alive and find her way out of the riots and back to the safety of her aunt's house. This shows that lying to oneself can be used as a method of preserving and maintaining a relationship, even when the relationship itself is broken or wholly absent. The storytellers tell the stories of these vibrant, living relationships to placate and allow themselves the opportunity to continue living. Though for characters like Chika this method of storytelling is wholly necessary to survive, for other women, the lies only trap them more tightly in their unhappy relationships.

COLONIALISM AND VIOLENCE

As a coastal region, people in what is now Nigeria experienced contact with Europeans early. Nigeria became an official British colony in 1914, and in 1960, Great Britain granted Nigeria its independence as a Commonwealth country. From 1967-1970 the country experienced a civil war, which pitted the conservative Nigerian government against the secessionist state of Biafra. The Biafran Conflict figures into a number of stories in the collection, as does the ongoing religious and ethnic violence that Nigeria still experience. These conflicts have their roots in Nigeria's colonial experience and as such, one of the book's primary concerns is to explore colonialism and its legacies, particularly the legacies of physical and cultural violence.

It's the final story in the collection, "The Headstrong Historian," that provides the reader with a starting point for all the violence of the previous stories. Because it follows three generations of a Nigerian family, beginning in the late 19th century and ending at an indeterminate point after 1972, this story gives an overarching sense of the beliefs and practices that shaped the Nigerian people's relationships with their colonizers and the West in general. Nwambga, a woman of the first generation, learns from a friend that people become rulers because they have better guns, not because they're better people. The idea that there's power in violence and in possessing better weapons repeats throughout the stories, particularly in "Cell One." Nnamabia laughs at police attempts to subdue student gang activity with their "rusty guns," since the students themselves have modern weapons with which to fight back. The cell one narrator notes that the thieves and gang members of her university neighborhood had "mastered the swagger of American rap videos," indicating that the senseless violence of the gangs was partially due to America's cultural influence over the world. This mirrors the way that Nwambga's children and grandchildren embrace the power of Europeans and use that power to violently force native people to adopt European social systems and religions.

Many characters embrace Western culture in an attempt to protect themselves from violence. Though embracing Western culture has its benefits—including education, financial success, and for some characters, the opportunity to immigrate to America—in many cases it leads the characters to reject, hide, or minimize their native culture to avoid further violence from Westerners, and in some cases, from their Nigerian peers. Though Nwambga's son Anikwenwa is able to win Nwambga's legal disputes for her because of the power afforded to him by his Western education, he also participates in forms of cultural violence against his mother and her beliefs. He refuses to attend Nwambga's funeral unless she agrees to be baptized, and treats non-Christians as though they're diseased. A hundred years later, in "The Arrangers of Marriage," Chinaza suffers at the actual hands of Americans as some of her **Nigerian foodstuffs** are seized at customs, and then suffers the humiliation of her husband's insistence that she change her name to her English middle name, speak English even at home, and cook only American foods. Though Chinaza's husband claims to want the opportunity to experience success in America and believes that this can only happen through assimilation, Chinaza feels violated and lost as she's forced to give up her culture. Other Nigerian characters feel similarly violated and isolated living in America, where their culture goes mostly unacknowledged or is rudely questioned by their white American neighbors. They experience firsthand the effects of colonization: their own culture is considered strange, primitive, or less-than, while Western culture is held up as superior and

"normal."

The third generation of "The Headstrong Historian," Grace, suggests through her actions that there is a way to combat the violence of colonialism. Though Anikwenwa insists that Grace receive her education in a Catholic school, Grace then uses her Western education to return to her roots. She writes a book about the physical violence in colonial Nigeria, advocates for Nigerian history to be taught in Nigerian schools, and in her old age, she changes her name to Afamefuna, the name given to her by her grandmother. This final act in particular suggests that the legacies of colonialism can begin to be broken down when individuals like Grace celebrate their culture and tell their stories, rather than deny and erase them.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

In the story "The Thing Around Your Neck,"" Akunna's family members in Nigeria are absolutely thrilled that she won the "visa lottery" and gets to go to America. Upon her departure they celebrate that she'll soon have a big house and a big **car**. Once in America, however, she finds these dreams to be unrealistic and unattainable. Disillusionment at the realities of life in America touches most of the characters in the book as they grapple with being immigrants and navigate the difficulties that the American government, as well as their American neighbors, put them through.

The collection defines the American dream in a variety of ways. For those who have never experienced America, like Akunna's family, America is a place of big homes, cars, and guns. Nkem notes that she admires the uniquely American belief that anyone can rise and be successful, while Kamara observes that the plentiful resources available to American parents actually creates a great deal of anxiety. Notably, none of the Nigerian characters who immigrate to America are particularly happy in their new home. This is true of women like Nkem, who lives a life of privilege in Philadelphia, as well as those like Chinaza and Akunna, who find themselves living close to poverty. Nkem's situation in particular shows that even when these women are immersed in the trappings of upper class American suburbia, they remain unfulfilled. Simply possessing a beautiful home, having access to good schools, and driving nice cars isn't enough to make them happy. What the women lack is a sense of community and camaraderie. Their relationships to their husbands or boyfriends are generally unhappy, and their neighbors treat them as interesting talking points.

The lack of fulfillment in America isn't something unique to the female characters. When Nkem runs into another Nigerian woman at a party, the woman points out that their husbands, both "Big Men" by Nigerian standards, are treated with far more respect in Nigeria than in America. This in turn justifies (in the men's eyes) keeping their wives in America but living and working in Nigeria, where they get to enjoy their high status. Male characters such as Chinaza's husband Ofodile and Kamara's husband Tobechi work hard in America to try to create a better life for themselves as well as for their wives, but their wives struggle to share their husbands' optimism. As Chinaza and Kamara attempt to adjust to life in America, they find that they're as disillusioned with their husbands as they are with the lies their husbands told them. Kamara joins Tobechi after five years to find that he gained weight, grew unattractive hair, and developed an American accent that she finds troubling. Chinaza leaves Nigeria believing that Ofodile lives in a house, but must quickly adjust her expectations when she learns that the "house" is actually a sparsely furnished apartment. The men, however, remain fixated on their own dreams of making it in America and seem not to notice their wives' depression and disillusionment. In this way, the men themselves become a representation of the failure of the American dream. Despite all evidence to the contrary, Tobechi and Ofodile remain hopeful that they'll climb the ladder and achieve success in America. Their wives, however, must contend with the evidence that the American dream they were promised is, at best, simply less fantastical than expected. At worst, their husbands' promises simply won't come true.

However, despite the widespread disillusionment the characters experience upon arriving in America, the desire to live in America and pursue the American dream is intoxicating for many characters in Nigeria. Though the embassy narrator ultimately decides to stay in Nigeria, her descriptions of the snaking line up to the American embassy and the lengths to which people will go to get an interview for a visa indicate that the pull of the American dream is impossibly strong, even if the dream itself is unattainable.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

CARS

Throughout the story collection, characters consistently take note as to what cars other characters drive. Particularly in the stories that take place in Nigeria, the cars act as a symbol of Western influence, and for some characters, a status symbol. The Cell One narrator notes that due to the influence of American rap videos, cult members on the Nsukka campus drive their parents' cars with the seats pushed all the way back. Combined with the violence of the cults, and in particular the cult members' regular habit of stealing cars, the cars themselves become a symbol of power borrowed from the West. Professor James Nwoye in "Ghosts" is very proud of his car: it's an older model, but impeccably maintained, and is therefore indicative of his status as a

(retired) professor. For those characters in America, owning a car of any type shows that they're making it in America and pursuing the American dream.

THE BENIN MASKS

In "Imitation," Nkem's husband Obiora regularly returns from his time in Nigeria with reproductions of Benin masks for their American home. As the story is about Nkem's realization that her marriage to Obiora is tenuous, compromised, and overall fake, the masks themselves become representative of the state of their marriage. Nkem delights in the masks and the history behind them, just as she muses that she once found joy in the life that Obiora allows her to lead. However, she allows that she doesn't always believe Obiora's accounts of the masks' history. When she discovers proof that Obiora is keeping a young woman in their home in Nigeria, she learns that she shouldn't necessarily trust or believe Obiora's accounts about anything.

NIGERIAN FOOD

For the characters in the United States, food is a way to connect with the life they left behind in Nigeria. Characters like Akunna derive comfort from discovering their local African foods store, while others like Chinaza attempt to bring as much food as they can from home to the United States with them. When customs seizes some of Chinaza's food items for fear that she'd attempt to plant some of the (dried and dead) seeds, it shows how unyielding the United States can be to its immigrant population. Chinaza's husband, Ofodile, joins the cause of customs by insisting that Chinaza not cook traditional Nigerian dishes, so that they won't be known as "the people who fill the building with smells of foreign food," indicating that though traditional food is undeniably comforting for people like Chinaza and Akunna, for others it's an unpleasant and unwelcome reminder of their ties to another country.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Anchor Books edition of *The Thing Around Your Neck* published in 2009.

Cell One Quotes

"They may have once been benign fraternities, but they had evolved and were now called "cults"; eighteen-year-olds who had mastered the swagger of American rap videos were undergoing secret and strange initiations that sometimes left one or two of them dead on Odim Hill.

Related Characters: Cell One Narrator (speaker), Nnamabia

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 7

Explanation and Analysis

The Cell One narrator describes the evolution of the cults on the Nsukka university campus. Specifically, she draws a link between the senseless violence of the Nsukka cults and the popularity of American rap videos. This suggests that the rap videos portray something cool and desirable to the teens undergoing the "initiations," and further, that the rap videos with the most currency are likely the violent ones. This shows that Western culture, particularly when it has to do with violence, can be particularly violent on colonized people and their cultures. Though there's a system at play that prioritizes those individuals who embrace Western culture, the danger and violence of the cults suggests that engaging with the culture isn't necessarily a positive thing.

The idea that the cults are partly inspired by music videos also brings up the idea of performance and representation. These young men are performing violence for the sake of image and reputation rather than engaging in necessary acts. The tension between lived experience and the representation or "story" of that experience is one that will reappear throughout the book.

"You cannot raise your children well, all of you people who feel important because you work in the university. When your children misbehave, you think they should not be punished. You are lucky, madam, very lucky that they released him."

Related Characters: Cell One Narrator, Father, Mother, Nnamabia

Related Themes:

Page Number: 19

Explanation and Analysis

When Nnamabia is released, the police officer tells Nnamabia and the narrator's parents that they're lucky he was released at all, and that he deserved these consequences for being involved in the cult activity. The university is, first and foremost, a symbol of the West and of

Western influence in Nigeria. Therefore, the narrator's parents feel like exceptions to the rules, or better than other people, because of their association with the West. This is one example of the negative effects of colonialism, as in this situation, it draws divisions between groups of Nigerian people because of their Western associations or lack thereof.

This can also be taken as a warning that the narrator's family structure is unsustainable, as it's based solely on lies and not at all on consequences. The police officer then suggests that if the narrator's family structure had been based more on reality, however harsh it might be, this wouldn't have happened.

Imitation Quotes

"And although Nkem knew many Nigerian couples who lived together, all year, she said nothing.

Related Characters: Obiora, Nkem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

Obiora laughs when Nkem tells him that their American neighbors are curious about their living arrangement, in which Obiora only visits for a few months in the summer. Throughout the story, the narrator makes it very apparent that Nkem has little power in her marriage. She relies fully on her husband to provide the comfortable life in an American suburb that she leads, and as such, she has an incentive to not question the arrangement and risk losing what she has. However, Nkem knows deep down that what Obiora is doing to her isn't normal; she sees other Nigerian couples who do cohabitate. Having this evidence feeds Nkem's disillusionment with her marriage.

"You got a great house, ma'am," he'd said, with that curious American smile that meant he believed he, too, could have something like it someday. It is one of the things she has come to love about America, the abundance of unreasonable hope.

Related Characters: Nkem

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 26

Explanation and Analysis

Nkem thinks about a delivery man who complimented her house earlier that week, and thinks that she's very taken with the idea of the American dream. However, the fact that she considers hope for the American dream to be "unreasonable" indicates that though she is, in many ways, living the dream, she also sees it as generally an unreachable goal. This is primarily because Nkem exists in America to fulfill Obiora's desire to play the part of the Big Man in Nigeria; it's a status symbol for him to be able to afford for his wife and children to live in a beautiful American suburb. Because of this, in combination with Nkem's general unhappiness with her marriage, she's come to realize that if the American dream exists, it doesn't necessarily exist for her.

"...America does not recognize Big Men. Nobody says "Sir! Sir!" to them in America. Nobody rushes to dust their seats before they sit down.

Related Characters: Nkem

Related Themes:

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Nkem remembers attending a wedding in Delaware where she met another woman from Nigeria who lives a life very similar to Nkem's. The woman notes that their husbands are treated very differently in Nigeria than they are in America. She seems acutely aware of the fact that their husbands are treated as less-than when they visit or try to work in America, and notes too that maintaining the status they enjoy in Nigeria is of the utmost importance to these men. This is, first and foremost, a result of colonialism and the racist systems of power that systematically devalue both immigrants and people of color in America. On the flipside, however, this woman notes that America still holds a great deal of power and intrigue for those in Nigeria, which explains why it's such a big deal that these Big Men's wives live in America. It shows that the men can afford to have wives and "keep" them, as well as maintain a home and a job in Nigeria.

A Private Experience Quotes

"We have only spent a week here with our aunty, we have never even been to Kano before," Chika says, and she realizes that what she feels is this: she and her sister should not be affected by the riot. Riots like this were what she read about in newspapers. Riots like this were what happened to other people.

Related Characters: Chika (speaker), The Woman, Nnedi

Related Themes:

Page Number: 47

Explanation and Analysis

Chika explains to the Hausa Muslim woman why she's in Kano in the first place, and then thinks that the riot is a very surreal experience for her. In doing so, Chika situates herself as being fully different and separate from people like the woman, who experiences riots regularly. Essentially, Chika believes that her privilege and worldliness should protect her from this kind of violence and this version of Nigeria that she's currently experiencing. This also shows that even though Chika does identify as Nigerian, she has never felt that the other riots in Nigeria really had anything to do with her. She doesn't see herself as being part of the system; she sees herself as wholly separate from it. In this way, Chika's transformation over the course of the story entails her learning that she is a part of this system, and that she cannot distance herself from real life—and furthermore, that she should not reduce real humans like the Hausa woman to mere theories or stories.

Ghosts Quotes

But I am a Western-educated man, a retired mathematics professor of seventy-one, and I am supposed to have armed myself with enough science to laugh indulgently at the ways of my people.

Related Characters: Professor James Nwoye (speaker), Ikenna Okoro

Related Themes:

Page Number: 57

Explanation and Analysis

Professor James Nwoye explains to the reader that thanks to his Western education, he should in theory think that local customs are silly and charming. However, the way he phrases this suggests that he doesn't find "the ways of his people" silly at all; rather, much of "Ghosts" is focused on James' belief in supernatural, decidedly not-Western things like the ghost of his late wife, Ebere. However, he recognizes that his Western education gives him a great deal of power and authority, and specifically, the power to decide what is or isn't important and true. This puts him in a very similar position to that of the Ugandan in "Jumping Monkey Hill," in that James has earned the respect of powerful individuals in the West, and is then expected to insist that those Western ideas are taught in Nigeria.

Perhaps... I would not need to worry about our grandson who does not speak Igbo, who, the last time he visited, did not understand why he was expected to say "Good afternoon" to strangers, because in his world one has to justify simple courtesies.

Related Characters: Professor James Nwoye (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 67

Explanation and Analysis

James wonders what would have happened if the Nigerian civil war had gone the other way and Biafra won its independence. Though it is of course speculation, he wonders if having a country of their own would allow the Biafrans the opportunities to teach their children about their culture, rather than moving to America for other opportunities. Importantly, James indicates that he believes that teaching children about their Igbo culture and language is necessary. This suggests that James has learned what Grace learns in "The Headstrong Historian." Both characters realize that happiness comes from embracing the positive aspects of the teachings of the West, while also acknowledging and celebrating their native cultures and national identity.

On Monday of Last Week Quotes

Kamara wondered where the child's mother was. Perhaps Neil had killed her and stuffed her in a trunk; Kamara had spent the past months watching Court TV and had learned how crazy these Americans were.

Related Characters: Josh, Tracy, Neil, Kamara

Related Themes:

Page Number: 77

Explanation and Analysis

As Neil interviews Kamara as a nanny for his son, Josh, Kamara wonders where Josh's mother is. Kamara has spent the last several months sitting at home and watching television, and as such, she has developed a very specific view of what America is like based on dramatized television.

Notably, unlike characters such as Edward and Isabel, Kamara is able to move past these initial misconceptions and develop a rounded view of her American employers. She has the wherewithal to question the singular stories she'd heard about America and replace them with nuance and understanding. This is, unfortunately, something that a number of the white European or American characters struggle to do regarding foreigners, which suggests that the power afforded to Europeans and Americans colors their ability to form a true sense of understanding.

> She did not remember his toes with hair. She stared at him as he spoke, his Igbo interspersed with English that had an ungainly American accent... He had not spoken like that on the phone. Or had he, and she had not noticed? Was it simply that seeing him was different and that it was the Tobechi of university that she had expected to find?

Related Characters: Tobechi, Kamara

Related Themes:

Page Number: 84

Explanation and Analysis

Kamara describes arriving in America to meet her husband, Tobechi, whom she's been married to long-distance for five years. Kamara indicates that she's recently become disillusioned with her husband; his body isn't what she remembered from the early days of their relationship, his voice is different, and he acts differently. This suggests that she spent their five years of long-distance marriage idealizing both Tobechi himself as well as the idea of America.

Interestingly, Kamara's reaction here shares a number of similarities to Chinaza's reaction to arriving in America with her husband. Though the two women married for very different reasons (love versus arranged marriage), both find themselves alone in America with men they barely know. Further, both of their husbands seem to be fully sold on the idea of the American dream; both work outside the home and believe that they'll one day "have it all." This shows that though the dream is alive and real for the men in theory, in practice, it doesn't exist for the men *or* the women. The women are unhappy because their husbands lied to them about their lives in America, while the men are simply trapped by the fact that actually making progress in America entails overcoming obstacles they never imagined would be in their way.

> She had taken to closing her eyes while Tobechi was on top of her, willing herself to become pregnant, because if that did not shake her out of her dismay at least it would give her something to care about.

Related Characters: Tobechi, Kamara

Related Themes:

Page Number: 85

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Kamara's depression, which Kamara hopes to combat by getting pregnant and becoming a mother. This thought process falls in with the trend of women in the collection who are unable to find happiness as a whole, solo person. Instead they seek someone, either a partner or a child, to structure their identities around. This in turn points to the fact that the female characters' wants and desires are generally stifled; many are encouraged to marry and start families, regardless of whether or not that's what they want to do.

Specifically, Kamara's desire to define herself in terms of her children mimics the story of the narrator in "The American Embassy." However, when considered in terms of the embassy narrator's fate, Kamara wanting to have a child for this specific reason looks especially dangerous. This shows that it's often impossible for women to find happiness when they insist on finding it only through their association with their family members.

Jumping Monkey Hill Quotes

The next day at breakfast, Isabel used just such a tone when she sat next to Ujunwa and said that surely, with that exquisite bone structure, Ujunwa had to come from Nigerian royal stock. The first thing that came to Ujunwa's mind was to ask if Isabel ever needed royal blood to explain the good looks of her friends back in London.

Related Characters: Isabel, Ujunwa

Related Themes:

Page Number: 99

Explanation and Analysis

Isabel offends Ujunwa by attributing her beauty to royal blood, rather than accepting that the presence or absence of royal blood doesn't determine someone's beauty. In asking this, Isabel demonstrates her racist misconceptions about Africa and African people, however well intentioned this "compliment" might have been. It shows that she feels Europeans are superior, and also allows her to feel like an expert on Africa, since apparently she can spot a Nigerian princess in a crowd.

Isabel is very caught up in a very singular story of Africa, in which only members of African royalty are beautiful. The collection as a whole refutes Isabel's belief, as it features a number of beautiful people (Nnamabia in "Cell One;" Chinaza in "The Arrangers of Marriage") with no mention of whether or not they're descended from royalty. By doing this, the collection provides firsthand evidence that Isabel is, first and foremost, wrong. Further, by casting Isabel as a character that's intended to read as both disturbing and funny, it offers an opportunity to show that even if she is a humorous character, her beliefs are equally as damaging as the white characters whose misconceptions aren't at all humorous.

"Which Africa?"

Related Characters: Ujunwa (speaker), The Ugandan, The Senegalese, Edward

Related Themes:

Page Number: 108

Explanation and Analysis

Edward states that the Senegalese woman's true story about coming out to her parents as lesbian isn't reflective of Africa, and Ujunwa angrily asks Edward which Africa he's talking about. Ujunwa's reply can be taken as a sort of thesis of the entire collection, which at its heart is a collection of stories that explore and celebrate the many different lives Africans (and Nigerians in particular) lead. Overall it suggests that there isn't just one story of Africa. Rather, there are many stories that are all very different, most of which don't fit a Western conception of what Africa is.

Further, Edward's devaluation of the African participants' true stories speaks to the power of colonialism. As a white European man, Edward has the power to support stories that show the kind of Africa he'd like to see, while the African participants are acutely aware of this power. As such, some of them attempt to write stories that describe Edward's vision of Africa in order to hopefully have the opportunity to make use of Edward's power. However, by only supporting those stories that meet his expectations, Edward does damage by silencing the voices of people like the Senegalese and Ujunwa. It's absolutely necessary for stories like theirs to be told, as that's one of the ways that Westerners like Edward can begin to develop a more nuanced and well-rounded view of Africa.

The Thing Around Your Neck Quotes

He laughed and said the job was good, was worth living in an all-white town even though his wife had to drive an hour to find a salon that did black hair. The trick was to understand America, to know that America was give-and-take. You gave up a lot, but you gained a lot, too.

Related Characters: Akunna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 116

Explanation and Analysis

Akunna's uncle explains to her how America works for immigrants like them. Akunna's uncle points to the common state of feeling isolated and alone, as shown by his wife having to drive an hour to get her hair done. This is illustrative of the way that America doesn't necessarily fully value the specific needs of its black and/or immigrant populations; Akunna later drives a similar distance to the African foods store. In this way, America asks that its immigrant populations give up their ties to their home countries, cultures, and customs and integrate. Akunna's uncle insists that doing so is worth the opportunities afforded to him.

You did not know that people could simply choose not to go to school, that people could dictate to life. You were used to accepting what life gave, writing down what life dictated.

Related Characters: The boy, Akunna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

The boy tells Akunna that he took time off school to travel and "find himself," something that Akunna didn't realize was even possible for one to do. This sets out a major difference between the way Akunna sees the world and the way the boy sees the world. Notably, this does break down along gender lines as well as racial and national ones; Akunna's belief that she's supposed to accept whatever comes her way is a characteristic of many of the female characters throughout the collection. The boy, like many of the male characters, particularly those who are white in America, has a sense that he's in control of his life and has the opportunity to make choices and change his life through his choices.

The American Embassy Quotes

Yes, of course. Not all of us can do it. That is the real problem with us in this country, we don't have enough brave people.

Related Characters: The man behind her (speaker), The American Embassy Narrator

Related Themes:

Page Number: 136

Explanation and Analysis

The embassy narrator finally engages the man behind her in conversation about the newspaper *The New Nigeria*, which the narrator's husband wrote for. The man boldly states that the editors of the paper are brave, and the narrator questions this line of reasoning.

The fact that the narrator questions the man's reasoning points first to gender differences. In much of the collection, men look outside their families and homes for fulfillment, while women define themselves in terms of their husbands or children. This shows, first of all, that there's a definite disconnect within the characters' marriages regarding what's important. Secondly, the narrator has watched her husband's work tear her family apart. The narrator is alone at this point—her husband escaped to Benin, and her son Ugonna is dead as a result of his father's work. For the narrator, "brave" is a poor descriptor for her husband. What he does for work might be brave, but his family suffers because of his actions in the public and political sphere.

The Shivering Quotes

Staid, and yet she had been arranging her life around his for three years... Staid, and yet she cooked her stews with hot peppers now, the way he liked.

Related Characters: Ukamaka, Udenna, Chinedu

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 147

Explanation and Analysis

Ukamaka thinks about the senseless reasoning Udenna used to justify their breakup. Ukamaka suggests that she believes that after the three years she's spent shaping her life to fit Udenna's, she's owed a lifetime of doing so (via marriage). This follows Ukamaka's habit of trying to force life to make what Chinedu terms "human sense": she gets a sense of comfort from the belief that if she arranges her life around Udenna, Udenna will stay with her. Much of Ukamaka's growing up throughout the story, and one of the ways she changes as she becomes a happier, fuller person, is by letting go of this need for things to make that kind of sense and allowing herself to be happy alone.

In Ukamaka's world, food is one of the ways that she keeps herself and Udenna connected to Nigeria, but it's also one of the primary ways in which Ukamaka suppresses herself in favor of Udenna's needs and desires. She mentions the hot peppers several times throughout the story and consistently connects them to the fact that Udenna likes them. However, she admits that she doesn't care for them, but even weeks after her breakup with Udenna, she continues to use them. This is indicative again of Ukamaka's inability to be comfortable with herself as a single person; she needs another person, preferably Udenna, to define herself in his terms.

The Arrangers of Marriage Quotes

They did not warn you about things like this when they arranged your marriage. No mention of offensive snoring, no mention of houses that turned out to be furniture-challenged flats.

Related Characters: Chinaza (speaker), Ofodile

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 168

Explanation and Analysis

Chinaza lies in bed with Ofodile on her first night in America, thinking about her disappointment in her new husband and his living arrangements. Her disillusionment stems from the way her aunt and uncle built up the idea of the American dream, as represented here by her coveted doctor husband and the hoped-for house. She'd been led to believe that America was a land of utopia, but already at less than 24 hours in the country, it's becoming clear that America isn't what Chinaza thought it would be.

In addition to the disappointment in the particulars of the American dream, Chinaza's disappointment in her husband suggests that marriage is also built up and spoken of as an ideal, but isn't actually as wonderful in practice. Ofodile did lie to Chinaza about his living arrangements, or at the very least declined to correct her misconceptions. In this way, the impossibility of the idealized American dream mirrors the impossibility of a perfect marriage. Both are promised to many, but few characters come anywhere close to achieving them.

You left your husband? Aunty Ada would shriek. Are you mad? Does one throw away a guinea fowl's egg? Do you know how many women would offer both eyes for a doctor in America? For any husband at all?

Related Characters: Chinaza (speaker), Nia, Ofodile

Related Themes:   

Page Number: 184

Explanation and Analysis

As she sits in Nia's kitchen after leaving Ofodile, Chinaza thinks of what her aunt and uncle would say if she told them what she'd done. This imagined response from her Aunty Ada makes it very clear how important marriage is for many women. In Aunty Ada's eyes, marriage is an achievement and a privilege afforded to lucky women. Placing marriage in this light is another way that women lose power and autonomy in their relationships—marriage is something that happens to women; it's not necessarily something they're active participants in.

When Aunty Ada mentions the "many women" who would sacrifice for the opportunity to marry at all, let alone marry an American doctor, she also suggests that women are replaceable. This adds a sense of tenuousness to the idea of marriage, and provides more evidence and understanding of why men in the collection conduct extramarital relationships. If their own wife isn't fully able to appreciate her husband (even if it's for perfectly understandable reasons), Aunty Ada suggests that there are always women willing to take a wife's place.

Tomorrow is Too Far Quotes

When she went into Nonso's room to say good night, she always came out laughing that laugh. Most times, you pressed your palms to your ears to keep the sound out, and kept your palms pressed to your ears even when she came into your room to say Good night, darling, sleep well. She never left your room with that laugh.

Related Characters: Tomorrow is Too Far Narrator (speaker), Nonso

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 190

Explanation and Analysis

The tomorrow narrator describes her jealousy of her brother, Nonso. Here, the narrator indicates that all she wanted was to be loved, valued, and most of all, truly seen by her family. She sees the fact that her mother laughs upon leaving Nonso's room, but not when leaving her room, as proof that her mother doesn't value her.

Nonso's value comes from the fact that he's male, and further, that he's going to carry on the family name, unlike the female narrator. While this shows how important family is, it also demonstrates how girls learn at a very young age that they're worth less to their families. In other stories, women attempt to make up for this by dating and/or marrying powerful men. However, the knowledge that women aren't valued is shown to have disastrous consequences, as married women completely subsume their own needs and desires into those of their husbands.

Maybe it was because of the way she said the divorce was not about Nonso—as though Nonso was the only one capable of being a reason, as though you were not in the running.

Related Characters: Tomorrow is Too Far Narrator (speaker), Nonso

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 193

Explanation and Analysis

The tomorrow narrator tells the reader how her mother broke the news that she and the narrator's father were getting a divorce. The narrator's mother shows here that though mothers (in the book) often define themselves by their children, they define themselves primarily in terms of their male children. This continues to illustrate the family structure that devalues females of every age.

"Tomorrow is Too Far" explores this idea in a number of ways. Though the narrator lies about the particulars of Nonso's death, it appears to be the truth that Grandmama yelled at Nonso's dead body, angry that Nonso won't be able to carry on the family name. This shows that the culture and Grandmama in particular place more importance on names and appearances than they do on individuals. Both Grandmama and the narrator's mother completely ignore that the narrator will, in theory, go on to marry and have children. Even these theoretical children, however, are devalued simply because they'll be the children of a female child.

The summer you knew that something had to happen to Nonso, so that you could survive. Even at ten you knew that some people can take up too much space by simply being, that by existing, some people can stifle others.

Related Characters: Tomorrow is Too Far Narrator (speaker), Dozie, Nonso

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 195

Explanation and Analysis

The tomorrow narrator explains to the reader that her first self-realization was that her brother, Nonso, needed to be broken somehow so that she could inhabit more space in their family's hearts.

The narrator is acutely and painfully aware that her survival hinges on being seen, heard, and valued. Though this idea threads throughout the stories in the collection, this is one of the few times that a female character voices so succinctly that it's absolutely necessary to be treated as fully human in order to live happily. As the narrator is ultimately successful in killing Nonso, but then unsuccessful in taking his place in her parents' hearts, it leaves no suggestions as to how to remedy the stifled female state. Instead, it suggests only that this kind of violence towards one's family won't be successful in giving women the attention they deserve, but only furthers the cycle of unhappiness.

The Headstrong Historian Quotes

She wanted Azuka to learn the ways of these foreigners, since people ruled over others not because they were better people but because they had better guns...

Related Characters: Anikwenwa, Nwamgba, Ayaju

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 204

Explanation and Analysis

Nwamgba's friend Ayaju is explaining to her why she's decided to send her son to a mission school. Ayaju recognizes that there's power in violence and weapons in particular, and she hopes that her son will be able to make use of this power if he attends school.

As "The Headstrong Historian" traces the origins of British colonial rule in Nigeria, it provides a starting point for understanding the violence that the Nigerian characters experience in the other stories that take place in a later time period. Though the first generation of this story (Nwamgba and her Ayaju) mention things like slavery between the tribes themselves, the way they speak about the power and the violence of the British shows how the British introduction of "better guns" disrupted local, comparatively benign power systems and replaced them with systems of oppression and violence that the reader then sees characters in other stories dealing with hundreds of years later.

> It was Grace who would read about these savages, titillated by their curious and meaningless customs, not connecting them to herself until her teacher, Sister Maureen, told her she could not refer to the call-and-response her grandmother had taught her as poetry because primitive tribes did not have poetry.

Related Characters: Nwamgba, Grace / Afamefuna

Related Themes:

Page Number: 216

Explanation and Analysis

The narrator describes Grace's changing understanding of her roots over the course of her lifetime, beginning with this early realization that she herself is related to these "savages" she reads about in her textbooks. This passage sets up first of all that Grace, who is a young African girl, initially doesn't see herself as such. Her education thus far has been a Western one, and one that teaches Grace to identify with her Western teachers and their culture rather than her Nigerian roots. Essentially, her education seeks to first deny her access to her Nigerian heritage. Then, when Grace does make the connection between herself and individuals like her grandmother, who refused to be Westernized, her teachers draw a hard line when Grace uses her Western education to put her grandmother's call-and-response into Western terms by calling it poetry. The Western teachers have the power to decide what is or isn't worthy of being called poetry.

As a whole, the Western teachers try very hard to teach Grace that her culture isn't worthy of respect or study. This idea and this legacy of colonialism echoes throughout the collection. Ujunwa encounters this when Edward insists that participants' true stories aren't truly reflective of Africa, while others like Akunna encounter Americans who ask offensive questions about her home country. The Americans' ignorance stems in part from this early devaluation of African history and culture that Grace experiences.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

CELL ONE

The unnamed Cell One narrator says that a neighbor robbed her family home the first time; the second time, it was her brother Nnamabia who broke in and stole their mother's jewelry. Their parents were out of town, and Nnamabia drove their mother's **car**, a Peugeot 504. The narrator and Nnamabia sat in church together for ten minutes before Nnamabia left. He returned right as the service ended and when the two arrived back at the house, Nnamabia exclaimed in English that they'd been robbed.

Because the narrator is unnamed, it suggests that the story isn't about her at all; it's much more about Nnamabia. This begins to develop the idea that men are seen as more important and generally have more power than women. With Nnamabia's theft, he's attempting to grab even more power by stealing valuable jewelry.

The Cell One narrator tells the reader that the mess in the house seemed staged—the windows had obviously been opened from the inside, and the thief had known exactly where the jewelry was. She knew that Nnamabia had done it, and their father knew it too. When their father confronted Nnamabia, he acted dramatically wounded about the accusation and left for two weeks. When he returned, he cried and apologized for pawning his mother's jewelry.

Nnamabia's lie is an attempt to make it seem as though their family is perfect, fully functional, and has a healthy family dynamic (though we'll soon get confirmation that none of this is remotely true). However, Nnamabia's family still provides some degree of support or safety since Nnamabia returns to them and apologizes.

Mother cried when Nnamabia said that he hadn't gotten a good price for the jewelry, making the Cell One narrator angry. Father asked Nnamabia to write a report about what he'd done, since Nnamabia was 17 and too old to be "caned" (beaten).

The narrator is angry here because Mother crying about the sale price of her jewelry shows that on some level, the family places more value on physical valuables than on trust within the family unit.

The Cell One narrator explains that the jewelry was the only thing of value in her family's home, and the other sons of professors were doing the exact same thing at the time. Theft was rampant on the Nsukka university campus, but the professors whose children were stealing complained about the "riffraff" stealing their possessions. The thieves were popular and drove their parents' **cars**. The narrator mentions the neighbor who stole from them, a handsome boy that the narrator wished would notice her. The narrator's parents never questioned the boy's parents about the theft, even though they knew who'd stolen from them.

The façade of perfection isn't unique to the narrator's family; it extends to many of the families who live on Nsukka campus. This indicates that the people who live there are extremely concerned with creating the image of the campus as an idyllic place and ignoring the fact that they're all living a lie. Notice that the narrator never suggests a reason for the widespread thefts. This suggests that the thefts themselves are largely senseless.

The Cell One narrator says that Nnamabia is beautiful with light skin. People in the market would call out to Mother and ask why she gave all the beauty to "the boy" and left the narrator dark. The narrator explains that Mother would just chuckle, as she took responsibility for Nnamabia's looks as well as his misdeeds. The narrator lists several of Nnamabia's infractions, all of which Mother either covered up or attributed to youthful experimentation.

Here, the reader begins to really develop the sense that Nnamabia is valued more than his sister because he's male. The narrator doesn't make any of this description about herself, showing again that she's seen as a purely auxiliary character to her brother. She functions only as a comparison or a counterpoint rather than a living, breathing part of the family.

The Cell One narrator says that three years later, it was the "season of cults" on the Nsukka campus. The cults began as fraternities, but the influence of American rap videos had made the cults deadly. Members consistently stabbed or shot members of other cults, and the violence soon became normal. The police tried to help, but their **cars** were rickety and their guns were rusty, and Nnamabia said that the cult boys had modern guns. Mother, Father, and the narrator all wonder if Nnamabia is in a cult, but he denies it.

It's inarguable that one of America's most prolific exports is its culture—the effects on the Nigerian fraternities here is proof of that. The fact that American culture turns the cults deadly, however, suggests early on in the collection that America and the American dream are not necessarily wholly positive. The willfully ignorant parents of the Nsukka campus also must now face the truth that their children are involved in this violence.

One Monday, four cult boys steal a professor's **car** and shoot three other cult boys outside a lecture hall. Nnamabia doesn't come home that night, and in the morning, a security man tells Mother and Father that Nnamabia has been arrested. They drive to the police station in town, where an officer tells them that Nnamabia and the other cult boys have been taken to Enugu. The Cell One narrator says that Enugu is the state capital, and the police at the prison there can kill people to produce the results they need.

The very theatrical and public nature of the cult violence recalls the narrator's note that the cults were inspired by rap music videos in the first place—they were inspired by performance. The transfer to the prison at Enugu, however, shows how seriously law enforcement is taking the cult situation, and suggests that law enforcement means to put a stop to the violence. This becomes darkly ironic, then, as the police show that they themselves are quite violent.

The Cell One narrator describes the Enugu police station. Mother bribes the officers with **food** and money, and they allow Nnamabia to sit outside with his family. Nnamabia looks like an entertainer as he eats and describes the sense of order in his cell. He says that he slipped money into his anus so he could buy the cell chief's favor. Mother looks worried. In the car on the way home, Father says that Nnamabia is shaken, though the narrator can't see it.

In this situation, food acts as currency. While everyone seems thrilled to be able to buy the favor of the guards, this also shows the widespread corruption of the Nigerian government, which will be a recurring source of conflict throughout the stories. For Nnamabia, his time in jail seems to be all a part of a fun story—continuing the idea of the cults as being based largely in the performance *of violence and crime.*

Several days later, Nnamabia is shocked to see a gang member crying. A few days after that, Nnamabia is shaken again when he watches two policemen carry a corpse out of Cell One. The Cell One narrator explains that even Nnamabia's cell chief seems afraid of Cell One. Nnamabia has nightmares about it.

Nnamabia's rosy view of prison is beginning to disintegrate as he is faced with harsh reality. The sense of order he previously praised also seems warped or absent here, as even the cell chief fears Cell One.

The Cell One narrator describes the tiny bugs that bite the inmates. She says that Nnamabia's face is covered in infected bumps. Nnamabia tells the narrator, Mother, and Father that earlier in the day, he had to defecate in a plastic bag because the toilet was too full. The narrator is annoyed; she thinks that Nnamabia enjoys this role of "sufferer of indignities" and doesn't understand how lucky he is.

The narrator obviously cares for Nnamabia, even if she finds him naïve and his attitude insufferable. She hasn't forgotten that the police could easily kill him without consequences, while her parents appear to be ignoring that fact in order to preserve the façade of Nnamabia's innocence.

For Nnamabia's first week in prison, Mother, Father, and the Cell One narrator visit daily in Father's **Volvo**. The narrator notices that her parents begin to behave differently—they don't criticize the brutal police practices like they used to. The second week, the narrator tells her parents that they're not going to visit Nnamabia. Mother and Father look scandalized. The narrator throws a rock at the Volvo's windshield and runs upstairs. Mother and Father stay home that day.

Finally, Mother and Father seem to truly understand (or accept) the gravity of Nnamabia's imprisonment. The brutal police practices are no longer abstract concepts; they watch these brutal practices daily when they visit prison. The lies they've told themselves about the way their government functions are beginning to dissolve and prove ineffective, while the truth takes on more weight.

The Cell One narrator, Mother, and Father visit the next day. Nnamabia looks sober and explains that an old man had joined his cell the day before. The man's son was wanted, but when the police couldn't find the son, they locked up the old man instead. Nnamabia says that the man did nothing wrong. Mother says that Nnamabia also did nothing wrong, but Nnamabia acts as though Mother doesn't understand. Over the next few days, Nnamabia speaks less and less, and only about the old man when he does speak.

Again, the characters' reactions to the old man's unjust imprisonment suggests that this practice is widespread. However, since the old man is in no way related to Nnamabia, Mother and Father are able to gloss over the injustice of the man's situation and focus only on what they want to believe about their own son.

Nnamabia says he wants to give the old man food, but he can't take food back into his cell. Father goes to a prison guard and asks if they'd let the old man out so they can offer him some rice, but the guard laughs and yells at him. The following day, Nnamabia cries as he tells about the indignities the guards put the old man through. The Cell One narrator feels sad for her brother.

For all his posturing, Nnamabia does show that he has a heart and cares for other people. Though his initial imprisonment didn't seem to change his attitude, seeing the guards abuse an innocent old man encourages Nnamabia to see the prison system for the corrupt system that it is, and to look beyond the story or "performance" aspect of his imprisonment.

Two days later, a cult boy attacks another boy with an axe on campus. Mother and Father spend the day at the school superintendent's office, and at the end of the day, the superintendent issues a release order for Nnamabia. The next day, Mother, Father, and the Cell One narrator leave for Enugu. Mother is especially jumpy. When they arrive at the prison, the narrator tries to ignore the policemen beating a boy she knows.

The narrator isn't exempt from telling herself stories to make life livable—she has to ignore the boy she knows in order to make it through the visit to the prison. Mother's jumpiness in particular creates tension and the sense that Nnamabia's release won't work out as simply as the narrator's family seems to hope.

Mother and Father give the policeman on duty the release note. The policeman says that there are complications. Mother grabs the policeman's shirt and asks where her son is. The policeman calls his superior to explain: Nnamabia had misbehaved yesterday and was moved to Cell One, and all of the inmates in Cell One had been transferred to another prison.

Mother's reaction here shows that even if she was previously acting as though everything was fine, she hasn't truly forgotten that Nnamabia is in an extremely dangerous situation. It's unclear whether Nnamabia is even still alive, given what the narrator has said about the brutality of the guards and police.

The Cell One narrator sits in the backseat of the **car** with the policeman. When they arrive at the prison compound, it looks neglected. The officer goes inside and returns minutes later with Nnamabia. When Mother hugs him, he flinches; his body is bruised and bloody. The policeman tells Mother that she can't raise her children to not expect consequences, and that she's lucky that Nnamabia is being released at all. Father speeds all the way home and doesn't stop at any of the police checkpoints.

The policeman says what the narrator has been thinking the entire time but couldn't say because she's female. Despite the lesson here, that there are indeed consequences for one's actions, Father immediately flouts all the rules by not stopping at the checkpoints—he behaves as though he's exempt from these rules, indicating that he still believes corruption can't truly touch his family.

When Mother, Father, the Cell One narrator, and Nnamabia arrive home, Nnamabia explains what happened. He says the guards had tried to torment the old man but Nnamabia had shouted at the officers that the old man was sick and innocent. The officers threatened to take him to Cell One if he didn't stop. Nnamabia didn't stop. The guards beat him and put him in Cell One, and what happened after that Nnamabia doesn't say. The narrator imagines how the rest of Nnamabia's transfer happened. She thinks that it would've been easy for Nnamabia to turn what happened into a "sleek drama," but he didn't.

The narrator takes pride in her brother's refusal to dramatize his transfer. Nnamabia finally stood up for what was right, which meant that he had to accept the corruption and injustice of the Nigerian prison system as fact, and, on a deeper level, see the people around him and their experiences as truly real, and not just parts of his own dramatic "story." Essentially, through his time in jail, Nnamabia learned the lessons that his parents seem unwilling to accept, and he's emerged a better and more fully rounded person for it.

IMITATION

Nkem stares at the **Benin mask** on her mantel as she listens to her friend tell her that her husband, Obiora, has a girlfriend who lives in Nkem and Obiora's house in Nigeria. When she hangs up the phone, Nkem pours herself a glass of water and continues to study the Benin mask. She imagines it being carved and remembers Obiora's story of how the mask was used. Obiora always said that the custodians of the mask were also tasked with bringing fresh human heads to bury with the king, and Nkem imagines that the custodians didn't want to behead strangers.

As Nkem gets proof that her marriage is little more than an act and a lie, she surrounds herself with physical and mental acts as well (the Benin mask is a replica, not an original, and the possibility that the custodians of the originals were unhappy with their jobs comes only from Nkem's imagination). In particular, her imaginings about the mask custodians shows how Nkem uses lies to make herself feel better about unpleasant truths.

The story jumps backwards in time to when Nkem first came to America, pregnant with her first child. The house was fresh and her neighbors were helpful. Obiora called the neighbors "plastic," but both of them wanted their children to be like the American children, who refused to eat food that had fallen on the ground.

The American dream is defined here by the desire for children to know plenty and to feel comfortable wasting food. Obiora in particular seems to despise the neighbors and their lifestyle, while simultaneously hoping to emulate them.

Obiora stayed with Nkem for a few months. After that, Nkem explained to her curious neighbors that Obiora lived in America and Nigeria. Obiora only laughed at the neighbors' curiosity, and Nkem didn't say anything even though she knew of Nigerian couples who lived together year-round.

Nkem realizes early on that there's something amiss with her marriage. However, she defers to her husband's humorous take on things rather than voice her opinions. She attempts to create a narrative, both for herself and the neighbors, that normalizes her husband's abnormal behavior.

Back in the present, Nkem touches the **Benin mask** and remembers what Obiora has said about it: the masks were called "war booty" by the British, who seized the masks in the 19th century. Nkem thinks about how Obiora makes the masks come to life when he tells her about their history, and Nkem listens quietly because Obiora speaks so passionately, even though she wonders if his facts are truly correct.

Nkem doesn't voice her thoughts or opinions in her marriage, which suggests that she's little more than a figurehead or a trophy wife for Obiora. Her marriage, essentially, is happening to her; she's not necessarily an active participant in it. She has little power if she doesn't have a voice.

Nkem wonders what Obiora will bring when he returns to her next week. She checks the time and sees that she has an hour before she has to pick up her children. She surveys her living room and thinks about a deliveryman who came the other day and complimented her on her home. Nkem thinks that she loves that in America, people unreasonably believe that they can better themselves.

At this point, Nkem identifies this unreasonable hope as being part of the American dream, but she doesn't necessarily see it as being a part of her American dream, despite having achieved a great degree of wealth and status.

When Nkem first came to America, she was excited to join the club of wives whose rich Nigerian husbands sent them to have babies in America. Obiora soon bought their house in America, and she liked being a part of the league of wives whose husbands owned property in America. Nkem stayed home with the babies and took computer courses in between her first and second child, because "Obiora said it was a good idea." Obiora enrolled the children in school, and Nkem said nothing because she never thought her children would go to school with rich white children.

Once again, Nkem never mentions her own opinions regarding what her life in America looks like. She did what Obiora wanted her to do, and the narration never suggests that Nkem even had opinions of her own. It's instead suggested that what she actually achieved was so far beyond what she had considered possible that whatever she ended up with was "good enough."

For the first two years, Obiora visited monthly and Nkem and the children went to Nigeria for Christmas. When Obiora got government contracts for work, he started visiting only in the summer. Nkem runs her hand through her hair and thinks about how she wants to have it touched up and styled like Obiora likes before he arrives, and thinks about waxing her pubic hair like he prefers as well. She walks through the house and thinks about walking through the house in Lagos. She remembers getting a suspicious call on Christmas Eve and telling herself that it was certainly a wrong number.

Nkem continues to give the sense that she arranges her life around Obiora's, first by moving to America and doing what he thought was best, and now by tailoring her personal grooming habits to meet his standards. She's also dwelling on the stories she's been telling herself about Obiora's infidelity. She's beginning to acknowledge that the infidelity has likely been happening for a long time, and she's ignored it.

Nkem walks upstairs to the bathroom and studies herself in the mirror. She thinks about how Obiora calls her eyes "mermaid eyes." Nkem starts cutting her hair and as she does, she remembers meeting a Nigerian woman at a wedding in Delaware. The woman spoke about their husbands' habit of leaving them in America with the children, **cars**, and big houses, and only visiting occasionally. The woman had said that their husbands won't move to America because America doesn't recognize or respect "Big Men." Nkem had asked the woman if she was going to move back to Nigeria, and the woman said that she's not the same anymore, and her children wouldn't blend in.

The woman at the wedding suggests that the American dream isn't attainable for everyone, not least for the women's husbands, who are important men in Nigeria but cannot maintain that status in America. Yet by living for so many years in America, the woman indicates that she's changed too much to comfortably exist in Nigerian society again. She's caught between two cultures, and it appears that she's decided that living alone in America is better than trying to move back to Nigeria.

Nkem calls her housegirl Amaechi to clean up the hair. Amaechi is distraught that Nkem cut her hair, and Nkem snaps at her. Nkem thinks that the "madam/housegirl" line is becoming blurred, and that America forces you to be egalitarian and become friends with your housegirl. Nkem apologizes to Amaechi.

Another effect of living in America is that (in this case) traditional household hierarchy dissolves. This provides even more evidence for why Obiora won't move permanently to America, as Amaechi and Nkem's friendship would possibly undermine Obiora's sense of authority and importance.

Later that night, Obiora calls. He asks Nkem about the children and then has to hang up to take a call from the minister's personal assistant. Nkem tries to think of her husband and wonders if he's alone or with his girlfriend. She wonders what this girl is like and thinks about her own experiences dating married men. They'd helped her family with medical bills, but none of them had proposed because she'd only completed secretarial school and was still a "bush girl."

Despite Nkem's shock and displeasure about Obiora's infidelity, her own experience indicates that it was likely something to be expected. The gifts from these former suitors suggest that for these men, having a girlfriend is a way to demonstrate their wealth, as they can afford to "keep" multiple women.

Obiora, though, took Nkem to dinner and told her she'd learn to love the wine. She made herself like it. Obiora enrolled Nkem's siblings in school, introduced her to his friends, and moved her into a flat in Ikeja. She thinks that when he asked her to marry him, she would've been perfectly happy if he'd just *told* her to marry him. Nkem feels possessive of her husband and goes to Walgreens to buy texturizer for her hair.

Finally the reader gets to see how Nkem lost her voice in her marriage. Obiora treated her differently than these other men, and pleasing him became a way to escape from her "bush girl" past. Marrying him has obviously allowed her a life she'd previously thought impossible, and agreeing to his wishes will presumably keep her safe and physically comfortable—but not happy.

Nkem sits in the kitchen and watches Amaechi slice potatoes. Amaechi laughs that her mother used to rub yam peel on her skin as punishment, and Nkem thinks that it's hard to find real yams at the **African grocery** in America. She thinks about how similar her own childhood was to Amaechi's, and how poor her family was. Amaechi asks Nkem her preference on an ingredient for dinner, and Nkem tells her to use what she'd like to, thinking that Amaechi is better in the kitchen than she is anyway.

American ideas of egalitarianism are coloring Nkem's thought process here; she suggests that dictating Amaechi's cooking is little more than a power play and decides that it's not worth it. Here too, the traditional Nigerian food allows Nkem to connect to Amaechi, their similar childhoods, and the nostalgia of home. However, the sense of true equality is limited, as Nkem keeps her similarities to Amaechi private.

Nkem thinks about Amaechi's arrival in America. She tells Amaechi that Obiora has a girlfriend in Lagos. Amaechi is shocked and asks how Nkem knows. Nkem explains the phone call from her friend and thinks that she knows her friend is right. Nkem thinks that it's strange to think of the Lagos house as home, as this house in Philadelphia is truly her home now.

Confiding in Amaechi does several things. First, it reinforces the growing sense of equality and friendship between Nkem and Amaechi; second, the fact that Nkem put Obiora's infidelity into words for the first time makes it real. This is the first time Nkem has ever actually expressed her discontent aloud.

Amaechi says that Nkem will discuss the matter with Obiora, and he'll ask his girlfriend to move out. She continues, saying that Nkem will forgive him, because "men are like that." Nkem asks if Amaechi thinks Obiora has always had girlfriends, but Amaechi refuses to say. At Nkem's prodding, Amaechi tells Nkem that Nkem certainly knows deep inside that Obiora has always had girlfriends, but it's better to ignore it because Obiora is a good man. Nkem wants to agree, but only tells Amaechi to check the potatoes.

Despite their similarly poor beginnings and tenuous friendship, Amaechi's reaction shows that now, there's a world of difference between these two women. Amaechi confirms that extramarital relationships are to be expected, but maintains that Nkem is still lucky to be married; the fact that her spouse is cheating is inconsequential.

After Nkem puts the children to bed, she dials the house in Lagos. A new houseboy answers the phone and insists that only the steward and cook are at home. Nkem hangs up, and Amaechi asks Nkem if she'd like a "small drink." Nkem explains to the reader that their tradition of a "small drink" began years ago to celebrate the arrival of Nkem's green card. Nkem thinks that she misses Nigeria, but her life is in America. She instructs Amaechi to grab wine and glasses.

The origins of the "small drink" tradition reinforce the idea that America means equality—this bonding ritual began only once Nkem became a legal resident of the country, and continues when Nkem finds solace in Amaechi's company after failing to reach her husband. It's implied that this tradition would never happen in Nigeria, and probably more importantly, isn't something that Nkem and Amaechi would be able to continue if they were to relocate to Nigeria.

As Nkem and the children drive to the airport, she thinks that she hasn't waxed her pubic hair. The children are quiet. At the airport, the children hug Obiora. Obiora comments that Nkem has cut her hair.

Nkem's haircut is a way for her to assert her autonomy in her relationship with Obiora. His comment suggests that this change wasn't something he expected.

That night, Nkem studies the first original piece of art Obiora has ever brought. He's excited about it, and Nkem asks Obiora if the people who had to kill to get human heads to bury the king were happy doing what they did. Obiora is confused and asks why she cut her hair. He asks if it's the newest trend in America, and begins to undress for a shower. Nkem notices how round his belly is getting and tries to remember if the married men she dated had bellies like that. She can't remember where her life went.

Notice that Obiora suggests that the only reason that Nkem would cut her hair is to follow a trend (which is something that someone else *has deemed fashionable)—he doesn't consider that she has her own independent desires. Nkem continues to become more and more disillusioned with her husband and her marriage as she studies Obiora's body. Noticing that it's not perfect indicates that she's finally becoming aware of the realities of her marriage.*

Obiora says that long hair is better on a Big Man's wife. Nkem watches him stretch and thinks about how she used to shower with him and perform oral sex in the shower. She asks if they can fit their marriage into two months in the summer and three weeks at Christmas. Obiora asks Nkem to shower with him. She tries to ignore him, but finally joins him.

Obiora confirms that he views Nkem as little more than an accessory to make him look powerful; she has to look a certain way or he won't look like a "Big Man." His image and success hinge, essentially, on Nkem's willingness to suppress her own desires and go along with his.

In the shower, Nkem says that they need to find a school for the children in Lagos. Obiora stares at her as she says that they're moving back. She wonders if Obiora liked her because she never speaks up like this. Obiora asks why, and Nkem answers that she wants to know when Obiora hires a new houseboy in her home. Obiora says they'll talk about it.

It's unclear where Nkem's newfound voice is going to get her, but finding her voice is a victory in and of itself. In doing so, Nkem begins to take control of her life and her marriage, as well as a home that she barely thinks of as home in Lagos.

A PRIVATE EXPERIENCE

Chika and an unnamed woman climb into a small store through the window. Chika is trembling and wants to thank the woman for grabbing her and leading her to this hiding place. Chika and the woman talk about how they lost things as they fled. Chika lost her Burberry purse; the woman lost a necklace of plastic beads.

The items the two women lost indicate their relative socioeconomic status: Chika is wealthy enough to own a designer purse, while the unnamed woman's prized possession is a cheap piece of plastic jewelry. However, they both seem to mourn the loss of these items with equal emotion.

Chika can tell the woman is a Hausa Muslim, and thinks that it's obvious that she herself is an Igbo Christian. The narrator says that Chika will soon learn that as she and the woman sit in the store, Hausa Muslims are hacking and clubbing Igbo Christians outside. Chika thanks the woman for leading her to the store, and the woman says that this store is safe. Chika agrees, though she knows nothing about riots. She'd only ever attended a pro-democracy rally at the university with her sister Nnedi.

Chika primarily notices the differences between herself and this woman. Chika views herself as being wholly different than her companion; she knows little about how to insure her safety during a riot. The narrative style of this story reinforces this sense of separation and difference as it shifts from describing the experience in the store and what's happening outside. In a way, this sense of disconnection from the violent reality of one's immediate surroundings reflects "Cell One," when Nnamabia would dramatize his experiences in prison as if they were part of a story, and not happening to real people.

Chika had been in the market buying oranges while Nnedi looked at groundnuts when people suddenly started shouting in several languages that someone had been killed and a riot was starting. Chika ran into an alley and the woman grabbed her. Chika and the woman stand quietly in the store and listen to people running outside.

The description of the many languages gives the impression that moments before the riot began, people from a variety of backgrounds were coexisting without issue. At this point, with only this knowledge, the violence of the riot seems particularly senseless and tragic.

The narrator says that later, Chika will see burned **cars** and discover that the riot began when a Christian man drove over a Koran on the road. The Muslim men nearby drug the man out of his car and cut off his head. The woman invites Chika to join her in sitting on her wrapper on the ground. Chika resists, but the woman says that they'll be in the store for a long time. Chika says that she doesn't know where Nnedi is, and the woman says that she's safe.

In addition to reinforcing the differences between Chika and the woman, the narrative style continues to create a feeling of senselessness as it shifts from telling the reader what actually happened to what Chika personally experiences. The woman is a voice of reason and knowledge here; it appears as though she's done this before.

The narrator explains that later, Chika will walk around with a photo of Nnedi, but she'll never find her. In the present, Chika tells the woman that she and Nnedi are visiting their aunt on a school vacation. She says that she's studying medicine and Nnedi is studying political science. Chika wonders if the woman knows what "university" means, and wonders too if she's only talking about university so she can pretend that Nnedi is safe. She realizes that she believes the riot shouldn't affect Nnedi or herself; riots only happen to other people.

Though both Chika and the woman are Nigerian, Chika thinks of herself as wholly different from the woman. In her mind, the woman is someone who regularly experiences riots, while Chika and Nnedi are people who should be exempt from such violence. This is an act of depersonalization on Chika's part; it allows her to view people like this woman as "other," and as a homogenous group separate from herself.

The woman asks Chika what her aunt does, and says that Chika's aunt is also safe. Chika says she can't believe the riot is happening, and the woman says the riot is evil. Chika wishes Nnedi were here to explain that riots happen when religion and ethnicity are politicized. She feels guilty when she wonders if the woman is capable of understanding that.

From Chika's descriptions, Nnedi isn't necessarily knowledgeable about riots through experience; her expertise comes from studying political theory. But because of her lived *experience, the Hausa woman can conceptualize the riots much more succinctly and in a more human way.*

The woman asks Chika if she's seeing "sick people" yet, and Chika explains that she is. The woman says that she sells onions, and Chika expresses hope that the riots won't destroy the market stalls. The woman says matter-of-factly that the riots always destroy the market.

The text confirms that for the woman, riots are simply a fact of life. Chika is learning that Nnedi's theoretical descriptions allowed her to separate herself from people like the woman, even as she is supposedly understanding them.

The woman says that her nipple burns like pepper. She removes her bra and offers her breasts to Chika. Chika remembers her pediatrics rotation and how embarrassed she was last week examining a little boy with a heart murmur. Chika examines the woman's cracked nipples and asks the woman if she has a baby. The woman says her baby is a year old. Chika tells the woman to use lotion on her nipples after nursing. The woman says this is her fifth child, but her first time experiencing cracked nipples. Chika lies and says that her own mother experienced the same thing with her sixth child, but thinks that her mother only has two children and had a British doctor on call.

Here, Chika uses lies to build a sense of camaraderie and friendship with the woman. She essentially fabricates common ground to make a connection. As she does so, she's also forced to acknowledge that this woman is human, with normal human problems, not a faceless "other person" who experiences riots. This then makes Chika continue the process of humanizing the riots and learning to see them as more than Nnedi's theoretical descriptions.

Chika tells the woman to use cocoa butter, as the woman explains that her first daughter is lost in the riot. The woman starts to cry and asks Allah to keep her daughter and Nnedi safe. Chika wishes that all of them had stayed out of the market that day.

The woman uses stories in very much the same way that Chika does. Praying is an attempt to control the story in her mind of what's happened to her daughter, and by including Nnedi in her prayers, she makes a connection to Chika.

The woman finds a tap in the store and surprisingly, it runs. She washes and prays. Chika wishes she could pray and touches her finger rosary, thinking of Nnedi's dismissal of religion. The narrator says that later, Chika's family will offer Masses to pray for Nnedi, and Chika will think that they're a waste of money. When the woman gets up from praying, Chika says she's going to leave and that she can't smell any smoke. The woman says it's dangerous and sits down. Chika tells the woman that she'll come back with her aunt's driver to take the woman home, and then climbs out the window.

Though in the future she will scorn it as Nnedi did, in the present Chika is actively looking for the type of comfort that religion provides. The story again contrasts Chika and the Hausa woman, as it makes it very clear that the woman is an expert on riots while Chika only knows what Nnedi has told her from her own secondhand, theoretical knowledge.

Outside, the streets are quiet. Chika comes upon a stinking burnt body. The narrator says that later, Chika and her aunt will drive through the city and see other bodies and Chika will wonder if they were Muslim or Christian. Chika will hear on the radio that the riots were "religious with undertones of ethnic tension" and throw the radio at the wall.

Chika can't tell which side these people died for. This suggests that the violence touches both sides equally--neither group is exempt from the consequences of the riots. What Chika hears on the radio sounds like something Nnedi might say, illustrating the difference between a theoretical understanding and a more human understanding.

In the present, Chika returns to the store and crawls in through the window again. The woman remarks that Chika's leg is bleeding, wets her scarf, and wraps it around Chika's leg. The woman offers Chika a bucket to use the toilet, but Chika refuses. The woman goes to the back of the store with the bucket and returns, apologizing for the stench. The two sit quietly and later, the woman goes to sleep. Later, the narrator says, Chika will read about the “violent” Hausa Muslims and remember examining the Hausa Muslim woman's nipples.

The woman mirrors Chika's kindness and medical assistance by caring for Chika's wound. The woman's kindness makes it clear to Chika that it's impossible to truthfully say that all Hausa Muslims are violent and evil: this woman, who happens to be Hausa Muslim, has five young children and believes the riots are evil.

At dawn, the woman crawls out the window. Chika hears her speaking Hausa to someone outside, and then the woman climbs back in. She explains that the danger is over and they need to leave before the soldiers arrive. The narrator says that Chika will walk all the way to her aunt's house and her aunt will lament ever asking Chika and Nnedi to visit. Chika unties the woman's scarf from her leg, and hands it to the woman. The woman instructs Chika to wash her leg and "greet her people." Chika returns the sentiment.

In a matter of hours, the communal experience that Chika shared with the woman is over. Both of them can return to their respective lives with the knowledge that they weathered the violence of the riot with a member of the opposite religious and ethnic group—and perhaps developed a more nuanced, complex view of humanity in the process. Though the reader is only privy to Chika's thought process and development, the woman might have also gotten reinforcement that Christians can be kind.

The narrator says that as Chika walks home, she'll realize that she'll never find Nnedi. Chika turns to the woman and asks to keep the scarf. The woman agrees and they climb out the window.

The scarf will remind Chika of the kindness of the Muslim woman and remind her that riots happen to actual people with lives and families, not a faceless "other."

GHOSTS

The narrator, Professor James Nwoye, says that today he saw Ikenna Okoro, who was rumored to be dead. He says he maybe should've thrown sand at Ikenna to make sure he wasn't a ghost, but as a Western-educated retired mathematics professor, he's supposed to be able to laugh at such practices. He met Ikenna at the university, where he was visiting the bursary to ask about his pension.

In the story's setup, James introduces the idea that there's supposed to be a huge difference between traditional practices and the habits of those who are Western-educated. He suggests, though, that he doesn't see the traditional practices as silly; rather, they're just not for him.


The clerk explains to James that the money hasn't come in. James tells the reader that this is standard. Men outside talk about the education minister or the vice chancellor stealing pension money. When James approaches the men, he chats with a man who used to be his driver when he was faculty dean in the 1980s. The man asks after James' daughter and speaks at length about the youth not paying him for work.

This story takes place on the Nsukka campus, where "Cell One" took place. We see that the police corruption of "Cell One" isn't the only kind of corruption that plagues the campus. The government isn't properly paying its employees, and this has been going on for a long time. The troubles of the Nsukka campus also feature in some of Adichie's other works.

At another man's prodding, James buys some fruit and nuts from the men. He thinks they all need moisturizer, and thinks about his late wife, Ebere, teasing him about moisturizing properly. James stands and listens to the men talk about their troubles. As he leaves the men to return to his **car**, Ikenna Okoro calls out to James.

Even if he doesn't think traditional practices are silly per se, James appears to have internalized some of the superiority that he's implied comes from his Western education.


James and Ikenna shake hands and hug tentatively. James explains to the reader that he and Ikenna hadn't been close friends; rather, everyone at the university knew Ikenna because he consistently fought for a number of progressive issues.

James describes Ikenna as a prominent voice against widespread corruption, and also presumably for Biafran independence.

James asks Ikenna if he's alive. He tells the reader that he saw Ikenna on the day Ikenna "died" in 1967. Everyone was evacuating the Nsukka campus to escape the approaching federal soldiers. James' family was in their **Impala** and they saw Ikenna's car heading back towards campus. James waved at Ikenna to stop, but Ikenna said he had to get something from campus. James tells the reader that he didn't think much of it, since he figured their Biafran side would emerge victorious, but when they heard later that Nsukka had fallen and two lecturers had been killed, he knew that one of them was Ikenna.

James is describing the Nigerian invasion of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war. In James' mind, the war should've been an easy victory for his side. These flashbacks suggest that James lives with the memories of the war as though the war itself is a ghost that visits him. When taken with the ghost-like return of Ikenna, the story becomes a study of how people in the present deal with the ghosts of their pasts to inform both the present and the future.


Ikenna confirms that he's alive and explains that he left Biafra the month after the evacuation. James feels disgust for the "sabos" (saboteurs) who betrayed the Biafran cause for the opportunity to escape to Nigeria. Ikenna explains that he actually left on a Red Cross plane to Sweden. He continues, saying that his family died when Orlu was bombed, so there was no reason to return and he's been in Sweden since.

Notice that James' first reaction is to think that Ikenna betrayed the cause. This suggests that Ikenna was possibly a flighty person when James knew him in the '60s and '70s. James also still carries some anger towards the sabos, indicating that he still feels the horrors and betrayals of the war.

James explains to the reader that he and Ebere had briefly returned to Nsukka in 1970, but left quickly for America and spent six years there. James also tells this to Ikenna. Ikenna asks about James' daughter, but James explains that she died in the war. James explains that he and Ebere had another daughter after the war.

Whatever his feelings about Ikenna, James also left Nigeria in the aftermath of the war rather than stay and join the restoration effort. Though it seems like it was a healing experience for James and his family, it also makes James's feelings about Ikenna's time in Sweden more complicated.

Ikenna quickly explains that he remained politically active in support of Biafra in Europe and organized a number of rallies. James thinks that this speech sounds like one Ikenna has given to many people.

Ikenna is certainly aware that having left during the middle of the civil war makes him seem like a coward to many of those who stayed. He seems guilty for having done so.

Ikenna asks about a poet and professor who died in the war. James confirms that he died, but says that he was brave enough to fight. James hopes he hasn't offended Ikenna by saying this. He begins to recount what happened on the day he and Ebere returned to Nsukka. Soldiers shoved a wounded soldier into their **car** and the blood ran into the ripped upholstery. James says the blood reminded him of Ikenna, which is a lie.

Even if he didn't mean it, James' language confirms that he privately thinks less of Ikenna for leaving. James uses this true story with a lie thrown in to bolster his relationship with Ikenna and make up for admitting his unsavory private thought. The detail that James uses in the story shows again that the memories are visceral and have remained with him.

James asks how life is in Sweden, and Ikenna answers that he retired the year before and has returned to Nsukka "to see." Ikenna says he never remarried and asks James about Ebere. James explains that she's been gone three years, but that she "visits." Ikenna looks as though James is mad. James tells the reader that he would've thought the same until Ebere visited the first time. James was in bed and heard the door open and close and footsteps on the stairs. He then felt Ebere massage lotion into his skin.

Saying that Ebere "visits" puts James's opening line in a different light, as it makes it obvious that James doesn't just tolerate the traditional practices—he actively believes in unexplainable things like ghosts. Ikenna, however, shows the result of his own Western education when he treats James like a madman. With Ebere's visits, James gets to maintain a sense of family and community that it seems like he's otherwise lost.

James wishes he could tell his daughter that Ebere visits, but thinks that if he does, she'll make him move to America. He wonders what would've happened if they'd won the war in 1967. He wonders if their victory would make it so he wouldn't have to worry that his grandson doesn't speak Igbo. Ikenna asks again about James' daughter, and James shares that she's a doctor in Connecticut.

Again it's suggested that James lives with the weight of the civil war and what might have happened. He sees that the war robbed him of the opportunity to truly pass on his culture to his American grandson, and also of a closer relationship with his daughter (if only in a physical sense).

Ikenna says that the university's Staff Club is like an empty shell of what it once was, and James says that none of the professors are teaching and that the university has turned into a purely political place where students can buy grades. He asks Ikenna if he remembers Josephat Udeana. Ikenna remembers him as a dancer, but James says that Josephat stole money and ran the school like a dictatorship. Ikenna asks why nobody's doing anything about the corruption. James shrugs and says corruption like this exists throughout the country.

James returns to the idea of widespread corruption, which understandably offends Ikenna (who presumably stood against such things as a lecturer at Nsukka). Ikenna lives with his memories like James does, though Ikenna's memories aren't tainted by the uncomfortable truths of the present. Notice that James doesn't seem to think that there's anything he can do about the corruption; he's just resigned to living with it.

Ikenna adds that he was just reading about "fake drugs," which James explains to the reader is the practice of selling expired medicine. James is suspicious of this segue, as Ebere died as a result of fake drugs. Ikenna doesn't push the issue and asks James what he does now that he's retired.

The fake drugs are another facet of the widespread corruption. It seems that Ikenna actually knows about Ebere's death, and is trying to bring it up, but James resists talking about it.

James tells Ikenna that he's resting, and he tells the reader about the friends he visits and his housekeeper's exceptional soup. He speaks to his daughter several times every week and doesn't go to church on Sundays now that Ebere visits. James tells the reader that his daughter regularly asks him if it's a good life, and he replies that it's his.

In actuality, James is connected to his community and his family, both dead and alive. However, remember that he doesn't mention Ebere's visits to his daughter. He has to lie by omission in order to balance these connections in this life.

James asks Ikenna to come back to his house. Ikenna vaguely agrees, but James knows he won't see Ikenna again. James goes home and carefully parks his **Mercedes** in the garage. He observes his yard on his way in and turns on the TV inside. He says that he saw an interview with a man who imports fake drugs, but wasn't extremely offended by the man—because Ebere visits.

The story suggests that James would be struggling to cope with his ghostly memories if Ebere didn't "visit." Maintaining that familial connection to his wife is obviously vitally important to James's health and wellbeing. In this case, the lies he tells seem to have a net positive effect.

James wonders why he never heard that Ikenna didn't die. He says that nobody ever talks about the war and its horrors. If they do, it's in vague terms. James sits at his desk and wonders if his daughter will call. If she doesn't, he'll go to bed and wait for Ebere to come.

Though nobody talks about the war, James suggests that everyone who experienced it lives with the memories of it just like he does. People ignore or sidestep the truth around other living people, but the war lingers like a ghost.

ON MONDAY OF LAST WEEK

The narrator says that since last Monday, Kamara has started standing in front of mirrors and imagining Tracy touching her. When Kamara comes out of the bathroom, Tracy's seven-year-old son, Josh, is there. Kamara tells Josh to watch a movie while she warms chicken strips and rice for his dinner.

The bland food that Kamara makes here shows that none of these people are connected to Nigeria through their food choices. This suggests that Kamara is adrift and generally disconnected from her culture.

Kamara thinks that in Nigeria, Josh would be called "half-caste" and it would mean something positive. She remembers when Neil hired her and she learned that in America, "half-caste" is a bad word. Neil had been surprised at Kamara's fluent English and Master's degree. Neil explained that he worries that Josh is the only biracial kid in his neighborhood. When Kamara confirmed that biracial was the same as "half-caste," Neil asked her to not use that term.

Neil and Kamara's exchange over her use of "half-caste" magnifies the sense of cultural disconnect. Kamara has to adjust to the fact that in America, being biracial/half-caste isn't desirable—or it isn't appropriate to describe it as such. Neil demonstrates his narrow beliefs about Nigeria, as it's suggested that he thought Nigerians don't speak English well or earn advanced degrees.

When Neil interviewed Kamara, he said that Josh was learning about his Jewish and his African-American heritage. Kamara wondered where Josh's mother was and wondered if Neil had killed her. Neil said that he never smacks Josh, and Kamara agreed to not smack him, which was what her husband, Tobechi, told her to say. She wanted to say that smacking was different from abuse; she'd watched enough American news to learn about abuse. Kamara asks about Josh's mother, and Neil explains that she's an artist, works in the basement, and isn't to be bothered. Kamara was offended by Neil's tone and thought she didn't want the job, but she took it anyway.

Though Neil certainly has a singular view of what Nigeria is like, Kamara also demonstrates that she's developed a very narrow view of what American parents do to their children. Notice too that, like Nkem in "Imitation," Kamara has a husband who tells her how to act. This suggests that Kamara might also be lost and subsuming her own needs and desires into those of her husband.

Now, three months later, Kamara has developed a sense of affection for Neil and stopped wondering about Tracy. On Monday of last week, Kamara was looking at Josh's homework when Tracy appeared in the kitchen. When their eyes met, Kamara suddenly felt like she wanted to wear makeup and lose weight. Now she hopes only that Tracy will come upstairs again.

Kamara's instant attraction to Tracy confirms that all isn't well with Kamara's marriage (it seems as though her husband doesn't inspire these lofty aspirations in her). Because the narration keeps Tracy very mysterious, it creates a sense of tension as to what is so appealing about this woman.

As Kamara cooks Josh's dinner, she stubs her toe. Josh kisses it and Neil calls to check on Josh. Neil wonders if the "Zany Brainy" competition is too much for such a young child. He invites Kamara to come to the competition, but she declines.

Neil obviously cares very deeply for his son. He spends much of his time worrying about Josh's wellbeing and happiness. Kamara now seems to be integrated into the family.

Kamara has been realizing that parenting in America means juggling anxieties. She thinks that when food isn't an issue, parents have time to wonder if their children are ill, or try to protect them from disappointment. This used to amuse her, but it annoys her now that her period is regular.

The comment about Kamara's period implies that Kamara herself is attempting (unsuccessfully) to conceive. Mentioning the consequences of the absence of food scarcity here casts Nkem's earlier hopes that her children will have plenty into a somewhat sinister light.

As Kamara listens to Neil worry, she picks at the sticker that says "NO TO GUNS" on the phone. The sticker on the phone was what she told Tobechi about after her first day, but Tobechi only cared about the house. He said they'd live in a house like Neil's, but Kamara didn't care.

Kamara is fascinated by the little things, while Tobechi is caught up in pursuing the American dream. To him, this means having the outward markers of success, like a nice house. Kamara's apathy shows that she's already disillusioned by the American dream, however.

Kamara and Tobechi met in school at Nsukka. The way he looked at her made her like herself. They went everywhere together and married right before Tobechi got his American visa. Kamara stayed and taught in Enugu for five years while Tobechi drove a taxi in Philadelphia. His green card finally came and he sent for her.

Notice that Tobechi's presence caused Kamara to see her own worth. This suggests that Kamara is wholly dependent on others, and particularly her husband, to make her feel good and worthwhile. Her apathy in the present indicates that Tobechi no longer makes her feel this way.

When Tobechi met Kamara at the airport, he told her they would need to marry again in America. She noticed at the apartment that his toes had hair, and she didn't like his new American accent. She thought about how effortless their early relationship had been, and thinks that now things are awkward. She doesn't enjoy sex with him now. After she'd been in America a few weeks, Kamara started spending her days watching TV and eating everything in the fridge. Her clothes became uncomfortably tight.

Kamara and Tobechi began their relationship and their marriage with high hopes that they'd be able to achieve the American dream and find fulfillment. However, America hasn't made Tobechi better or more attractive; in fact it's done the exact opposite. The disillusionment with both her marriage and the promises of America seemingly cause Kamara's depression.

Kamara called a friend who she thought would understand her sense of flatness and apathy about her marriage, but her friend was caught up in her own tragedy. Kamara threw away her birth control pills and willed herself to become pregnant so she'd have something to care about. Tobechi didn't seem to notice her depression.

Kamara desires something or someone else to make her like herself, since Tobechi isn't doing that. Kamara is, essentially, unable to define herself as a whole, autonomous person. She needs to define herself in terms of someone else.

Tobechi had noticed, however, that Kamara seemed "bright" on Monday of last week. When Tracy had come upstairs on that day, she grabbed Kamara's chin and complimented her teeth. Tracy asked Kamara if she'd been a model. Josh ran to his mother and hugged her, and Tracy made small talk with Kamara. Kamara suggested that Tracy show Josh her work, and all three of them went to the basement. Josh complimented the large, abstract painting leaning against the wall while Kamara took in the basement. She thought she'd love to clean it if she could stay with Tracy.

At this stage, Tracy seems equally as taken with Kamara as Kamara is with her. Notably, Tracy's compliments to Kamara make Kamara feel beautiful, which is the way that Tobechi used to make her feel. This shows again that Kamara deeply desires to feel beautiful and needed in the eyes of others. Josh seems to adore Tracy when he sees her, which indicates that Tracy's relationship with the rest of her family does indeed exist; Kamara just hasn't seen it.

Tracy mentioned that she spent time in Ghana and offers that "the motherland" informs her work. She questioned Kamara about her roots in Nigeria. Josh grabbed a paintbrush and ran with it while Tracy approached Kamara again. She asked Kamara if she'd take her clothes off so Tracy could paint her. Kamara could barely breathe, and agreed to think about it before shepherding Josh back upstairs.

Though Tracy is African-American, her comments about "the motherland" suggest that she holds a distinctly privileged and Western view of Africa. For her, it's something inspiring and a place to visit; it's not necessarily home or intimately known to her like it is to Kamara.

Neil arrives home and greets Josh. Neil tells Josh he'll win the Zany Brainy competition as Josh digs for his shoelaces in his backpack. He pulls out a Shabbat card that he made in school and tells Kamara in a serious tone that he forgot to give it to her last Friday, and he'll give it to her tomorrow. Neil tries to tell Josh that Kamara is a nanny and a friend and not a family member who should get a Shabbat card, but Josh says that his teacher said he could make it for Kamara. Josh and Neil leave in Neil's **Jaguar**.

Josh defines family very differently than his father would like him to. Kamara also doesn't correct Josh, which indicates that she's not bothered by his belief that she's worthy of a Shabbat card. In this way, the text suggests that Kamara and Josh need each other: Josh needs a more present mother figure, and Kamara needs someone to care about.

Kamara touches up her makeup and knocks on the basement door. Tracy opens the door, looking distant. Tracy and Kamara talk about Josh's certain win at the Zany Brainy competition, and Kamara asks if Tracy needs anything. Tracy smiles, confirms that Kamara will allow Tracy to paint her, and says that today isn't a good day.

Tracy's absentmindedness here calls her prior interest into question, which begins to create a sense of doubt as to whether or not anything will come of the apparent spark between her and Kamara. For now, though, Kamara continues to feel special and desired.

The next afternoon, Kamara can tell that Josh didn't win the competition. Neil stands with a blond woman and explains that the woman is Josh's French tutor, and she'll be giving Josh his lesson at the house today. Kamara thinks that while Josh has his lesson, she'll go downstairs. She thinks of her new bra.

Kamara dressed to impress Tracy, and came to work with the intention of looking for fulfillment outside of her marriage. The attention from Tracy has made it clear to her that in order to be happy, she'll have to look somewhere other than to her husband.

Neil whispers to Kamara about Josh's sugar intake, and Kamara reassures him and agrees to make Josh's dinner later. Kamara hears the basement door open and Tracy appears. She greets Josh affectionately and Neil as though he's a sibling and not her husband. Neil introduces Tracy to Josh's French teacher. Tracy fixes the French teacher with an intense gaze and compliments her eyes. Tracy asks if she's ever been a model, and the teacher giggles. Kamara sits down next to Josh and takes one of his cookies.

When Tracy greets Neil more like a friend than a lover, it gives the sense that they're not really in love. But when Tracy turns to the French teacher and speaks to her the same way she spoke to Kamara, Kamara realizes that she's not special to Tracy. Further, when Kamara takes one of Josh's cookies, it indicates that Kamara isn't going to continue the diet that she's presumably started to impress Tracy. This moment of small but potent disillusionment ends the story on a somewhat bitter note.

JUMPING MONKEY HILL

Ujunwa thinks it's odd that the African Writers Workshop is being held at Jumping Monkey Hill, a resort outside Cape Town. It's the kind of resort that attracts foreign tourists, with maids and fine teas and cobblestone paths. She'll learn later that the organizer, an elderly British man named Edward Campbell, spent time there when he was a lecturer at the University of Cape Town.

Ujunwa is an extremely perceptive character. She notices outright that Jumping Monkey Hill gives non-African tourists a very specific and curated image of Africa. The fact that Edward chose this resort for the workshop thus brings Edward's own views of Africa into question early on.

Edward picks Ujunwa up at the airport. He offers pleasantries about Ujunwa's flight and asks if she minds waiting for a Ugandan attendee whose flight is coming soon. Ujunwa thinks his British accent is "posh" and wishes he'd stop asking her about her job. She yawns and tries to look uninterested. She's relieved when the Ugandan approaches them.

Ujunwa dislikes Edward outright because his interest seems misguided. His line of questioning about her job suggests that he has definite ideas about her, but Ujunwa doesn't feel comfortable asking Edward to stop, setting up an uncomfortable power dynamic.

The Ugandan sits in the front of the **car** and Ujunwa worries that Edward is driving too fast. At the resort, Ujunwa and the other participants learn that there are no jumping monkeys at Jumping Monkey Hill. Edward introduces the eight participants. Ujunwa studies them and decides the young Senegalese woman is probably her best bet for a friend, and thinks that she doesn't like the Ugandan man. He won the Lipton African Writers' Prize the year before, speaks only to Edward, and the other participants exclude them from their conversations.

The fact that there are no actual monkeys develops the idea that Jumping Monkey Hill is carefully curated to fit the expectations of a clientele that isn't necessarily African. The Lipton Prize is likely modeled after the Caine Prize, a prize created by Europeans to honor English language short stories written by African writers. It's received criticism for rewarding stories that appeal only to a Western audience.

After the participants eat dinner, Edward addresses them. He mentions the British foundation funding the workshop and lays out the structure: writing the first week, workshopping the participants' short stories the second week, and that the Ugandan will lead the workshops. He introduces his wife, Isabel, and talks about his passion for African literature.

The Ugandan is given the honor of leading the workshops because he's earned the respect of Western organizations already. This defines the value of stories in terms of whether or not the stories appeal to a Western audience—and here, that means Edward himself.

At breakfast the next day, Isabel asks Ujunwa if she comes from Nigerian royalty. Ujunwa wants to ask if Isabel ever asks such things of people in London, but instead says that she indeed came from royal stock and is actually a princess. Isabel says she can always spot royalty, and asks Ujunwa to support her anti-poaching campaign, adding that the Africans don't even eat the "bush meat."

Ujunwa's true intention goes way over Isabel's head, which shows how fully Isabel buys into her (mis)conceptions about Africa. The way Isabel speaks about her poaching campaign is also extremely Eurocentric, and doesn't take into account local traditions and reasoning.

Ujunwa calls her mother and relates her conversation with Isabel. Her mother laughs. Ujunwa sits at her laptop and begins to write her story about a young woman named Chioma. Chioma is unemployed and desperately looking for work. She helps in her mother's boutique, has several bad job interviews, and finally asks her father for help. Chioma's father gives her money, makes a few phone calls, and Chioma notices the photograph of the "Yellow Woman" on his desk.

Chioma's father is evidently a very powerful man with money to spare and connections, while it seems that her mother struggles to make ends meet. The photograph on her father's desk suggests that he has a girlfriend, which continues the book's trend of cheating spouses. It's also important that Chioma is a young, single woman—exactly the kind of woman the reader has been told is likely to date married men.

At dinner that night, Edward tells all the participants to try the ostrich dish. Ujunwa says that she didn't know people even ate ostrich, and Edward laughs and explains that it's an African staple. Ujunwa drinks two glasses of wine, chats with the Senegalese woman, and doesn't enjoy her orange chicken.

Adichie makes the irony of the European Edward explaining African food to an African person very apparent here. Given the cultivated nature of Jumping Monkey Hill, the ostrich dish raises the question of whether ostrich is truly an African staple, or if it's what Europeans would like to think *is an African staple.*

All the participants gather under the gazebo and good-naturedly poke fun at different African stereotypes. They discuss African literature and the racism they experience at the hands of Europeans. The Senegalese woman says she's writing her own story about coming out to her parents as lesbian, and other participants talk about their (mostly absent) fathers. When Ujunwa realizes it's her turn to talk about her father, she says her father bought her books as a child and read all her early work. The Kenyan asks Ujunwa if she's writing about her father. When Ujunwa says she isn't and she doesn't believe in fiction as therapy, the Tanzanian says that all fiction is therapy.

This good-natured bonding experience works to make it very clear to the reader that not all Africans or African countries are the same. Though this seems obvious, Edward has already demonstrated to the participants that he has very particular ideas about what Africa and being African means, and these ideas don't necessarily allow for nuance. Ujunwa had a dedicated and supportive father, an anomaly for the majority of the collection's female characters.

The next day, Ujunwa continues writing Chioma's story. Chioma gets a call from Merchant Trust Bank. She knows people who work there; they all drive nice **cars** and live in apartments. The manager tells Chioma that if she can bring in a certain amount of money during her trial period, she'll be offered a permanent position. Two weeks later, Chioma goes with a woman named Yinka to bring in a new account. They visit an alhaji (a rich older Muslim man), who asks Yinka to sit on his lap and explain the particulars of a high-interest savings account. Chioma thinks that Yinka reminds her of the "Yellow Woman."

The cars that Merchant Trust Bank employees drive are indicative of their relatively high status, and therefore show that the job is a good one. However, the realities of the job tell a different story. The bank is using its female employees for their bodies instead of for any other skills, which continues the book's project of demonstrating how women are often held in low regard. It's also notable that Chioma wasn't informed that this would be required of her; she had no say in the matter.

According to Chioma's mother, the Yellow Woman had been seeing Chioma's father for a year. One day, the Yellow Woman came into Chioma's mother's boutique to look at shoes, and Chioma's mother accused her of being a husband snatcher and chased her out of the shop. Chioma's father left after this, and Chioma's mother declined to chase after him. The boutique began to slide downhill without the help of Chioma's father. Chioma thinks about this as she watches Yinka talk with the alhaji.

Even in fiction within fiction, the prevalence of cheating spouses remains high. Further, this series of events reinforces the idea that cheating is expected and should be put up with. When Chioma's mother refuses to chase after her husband, she asserts her independence and prioritizes her own happiness over the outward appearance her marriage.

Over the course of the workshop, Ujunwa tries not to notice that Edward never looks at her face; instead he concentrates on the rest of her body. One day when Edward is handing out copies of someone's story to talk about, he makes a suggestive comment at her. The Ugandan laughs, and Ujunwa tries to laugh along, telling herself that Edward's comment was actually funny.

Even though Edward's behavior is wholly inappropriate and not at all funny, the power dynamic between him and Ujunwa makes it very difficult for her to see the point in calling him out on his behavior. By laughing, the Ugandan becomes complicit in Edward's harassment of Ujunwa.

Ujunwa reads the Zimbabwean's story and the participants talk about it the next day. Edward deems the story passé, and Ujunwa wonders how he can think that when the story itself is so very true. The next day, they workshop the Senegalese's story. Edward says that homosexual stories aren't reflective of Africa. Ujunwa asks "which Africa?" Edward explains that he's trying to find the "real Africa" and not impose Western ideas on African values. The Senegalese is distraught, and Edward suggests that she had too much wine.

The question of "which Africa?" is one that the collection as a whole seeks to answer. Edward has a very specific view of what Africa is, and he's not open to hearing the stories of those who don't fit his very specific mold. Further, suggesting that the Senegalese is upset because she's had too much to drink allows Edward to maintain his power and suggest that she has no real right to be upset.

As Ujunwa heads back to her cabin, the Kenyan, the Zimbabwean, and the white South African woman invite her to go to the bar with them. At the bar, they talk about how the white guests at Jumping Monkey Hill look at the black participants with suspicion. Ujunwa feels angry at the way that Edward leers at her, and she bursts out that Edward is always looking at her. The others voice their agreement that it's in poor taste, and Ujunwa feels betrayed that they noticed and said nothing.

Like so many other women in the collection, Ujunwa has felt throughout the workshop that she has no choice but to keep silent in order to keep the peace and stay safe. The other participants confirm that Jumping Monkey Hill is carefully curated to make white tourists feel comfortable. This mirrors the kind of stories Edward is looking for: those that appeal to a white, presumably European or American, audience.

Ujunwa tries to call her mother later that night, but the call won't go through. The Tanzanian reads his story the next day. It's about the killings in the Congo, and Edward exclaims that it is urgent, relevant, and will be the selected story from the workshop. Ujunwa feels sick.

Edward's praise indicates that he wants to view Africa as an inherently violent and tragic place. He seeks stories that are sensational and exciting, not ones about normal (and non-violent) day-to-day life in Africa.

Ujunwa returns to her cabin and sits down to finish Chioma's story. As Chioma sits and watches Yinka on the alhaji's lap, she thinks of being in a play. She thinks about her father's early support for her writing, but his later pivot to suggesting she study something practical. The alhaji gets Chioma's attention and asks her to be his personal contact for his new account. When the alhaji offers the women gifts, Chioma walks out of his house, gets in a taxi, and returns to the bank to clear out her desk.

By situating this experience in terms of a play, Chioma suggests that women act the way they do in order to receive praise for their performance. It suggests that women don't necessarily want to behave in this way, but they must in order to achieve success. Chioma breaks this cycle by leaving the alhaji's house and her job, just as her mother did.

Ujunwa wakes the next morning, nervous about having to read her story out loud later. At breakfast, Edward makes suggestive remarks to the Senegalese. Later, Ujunwa asks the Senegalese how she handled Edward's remarks, and she shrugs and says she's a happy lesbian and didn't need to say anything. Ujunwa raises her voice and asks why they always say nothing. The participants begin to interrogate the waiters about the style of food, and they discuss Edward's rude and distinctly European habits.

Ujunwa is upset by the colonial power structure that gives Edward permission to treat the female participants as objects, insist that European food be served, and demand that the participants observe European customs. The food in particular shows how far removed the resort is from the rest of Africa; the food described thus far is distinctly Western, and the "African" food served is highly stereotypical.

The South African says that Edward means no harm, and Ujunwa attacks his attitude, saying that that kind of attitude is what allowed Europeans to take African land in the first place. The South African tells Ujunwa that she's angry about more than Edward. Several of the participants go to a souvenir shop, where the Tanzanian says that Edward can get the writers connected with agents and antagonizing him isn't the right course.

Edward is performing cultural violence by devaluing the writers' true stories as passé. Because of the power he has as a Western man, he has the power to decide which stories are "true," and, as the Tanzanian points out, which writers get published, which makes calling him out especially risky.

Ujunwa buys a faux ivory necklace and wears it to dinner. Isabel compliments the faux ivory, and Ujunwa tells Isabel that the necklace is real. Ujunwa reads her story, and the Ugandan deems it strong. The South African compliments the realistic portrayal of women's lives in Nigeria, but Edward says that the story can't possibly be real since the most powerful Nigerian cabinet minister is female. The Kenyan says the ending isn't plausible, and Edward says the entire thing isn't plausible; it's "agenda writing."

Notice that Edward doesn't even listen to the workshop leader that he himself appointed. He knows and is willing to demonstrate that he has more sway than the Ugandan does, and most ironically, suggests that he knows more about the state of gender equality in Nigeria than an actual Nigerian woman does.

Angry, Ujunwa stands up, crying and laughing, and says the only thing she left out was that after she left the alhaji's house, she insisted the driver take her home. She leaves the table and goes to her cabin to call her mother. She wonders if the ending she's currently experiencing would be considered plausible.

Despite Ujunwa's insistence that she wasn't writing about her father, the story was entirely true. Ujunwa's closing thought shows how European misconceptions color even absolute truth, and cause the people who experience these truths to question the believability of their own stories. This also fits into the book's overarching theme of perceiving one's real, lived experience in terms of a story or a performance.

THE THING AROUND YOUR NECK

The narrator, Akunna, says she thought that everyone in America had a car and a gun. She wins the visa "lottery," and her family members tell her that she'll soon have a big **car** and a house, but not to buy a gun. They gather to say goodbye and ask her to send them purses and perfumes.

Akunna's family and friends define the American dream as cars, houses, guns, and plenty of luxuries. Terming the "visa lottery" as such shows how coveted American visas are; they're something won, not just something one gets.

Akunna's uncle picks her up from the airport. He buys her a hot dog and takes her to his house in Maine. He enrolls her in community college and helps her apply for a cashier job, and says that his wife has to drive an hour to find a salon that does black hair. When the girls at the community college ask Akunna about her hair and how she speaks English so well, her uncle says to expect treatment like that. America is give and take; it provides opportunities but you give up a lot to get them.

Even if her uncle's house and life seem idyllic from the outside, America shows itself to be not exactly hospitable to black people, and this lack of hospitality is expected and seen as normal. It's not easy to fulfill needs like a knowledgeable hair salon, and most white Americans obviously know very little about black people or Africa.

One day, Akunna's uncle comes into the basement, grabs her buttocks, and sits on her bed. He says that all the smart girls let men like him "help" them. Akunna locks herself in the bathroom until he leaves and gets on a Greyhound bus the next morning.

Akunna's uncle's horrifying behavior adds a grim perspective to his statement about American "give and take." He expects her to give up her autonomy to maintain the relatively comfortable life she has at his home.

The last bus stop is a small town in Connecticut. Akunna enters a restaurant and asks the manager for work, saying she'll work for less than the other waitresses. He hires her, under the table, for a dollar less, because "all immigrants work hard." Akunna tries to continue studying at the library since she can't afford to attend classes. She thinks of home and her friends' envy that Akunna won the American visa lottery, and sends money home to her family every month without an accompanying letter.

Akunna is already disillusioned with the American dream, and her disillusionment silences her voice—she can't write anything to her parents, because what she experiences isn't the American dream they hoped for. Though her employer agrees to hire her, he makes very broad assumptions about her based only on the fact that she's an immigrant.

After a few months, Akunna wants to write to her family and friends about the openness of the Americans and how the poor Americans are fat while the rich are thin. She can't afford to send the requested purses and perfumes, though, so she doesn't send letters. At night, Akunna feels invisible and tries to walk through her walls, and when she's about to fall asleep she feels like something wraps itself around her neck and almost chokes her.

Again, Akunna stays silent and lonely as a result of her disillusionment with the American dream. This silence also make her feel invisible, as nobody sees her as a full, rounded person. The loneliness and depression she experiences is the "thing around her neck" and, notably, it comes from her silence. Adichie writes about depression in other works as well—and particularly depression among immigrants coming to America—and the image she creates here is particularly vivid and powerful.

At the restaurant, customers ask Akunna if she's from Jamaica. One day, a boy asks what African country she's from, and then asks if she's Yoruba or Igbo. Akunna thinks he must be a professor, but he says he's traveled in Africa and enjoys studying sub-Saharan Africa. Akunna tries to show disdain to the boy because white people are all condescending.

The boy seems as though he can likely identify Nigeria on a map and is aware of some of the Nigerian ethnic groups. However, Akunna's distrust stems from her prior experiences with Americans fetishizing and romanticizing Africa.

The boy shows up at the restaurant for the next few days and tries to talk to Akunna about Lagos. He tells her about his travels to Bombay and how he likes to visit the "real people" in the shantytowns rather than doing tourist activities. That night, he's waiting outside for Akunna after her shift, and he asks her out. He tells her he's a senior at the university and gives his age. When Akunna asks why he hasn't graduated yet at his age, he says he left school to travel and find himself. Akunna thinks she didn't know that people could choose to not attend school. She tells him no for four days. On the fifth day, he's not waiting for Akunna after work. When he finally shows up, she says she'd love to go out with him. He takes her to Chang's and her fortune cookie fortune is blank.

The boy obviously romanticizes the life of poor people in foreign countries. His ability to choose to leave school and travel indicates that this boy comes from a wealthy privileged family, which indicates that he has the ability to visit these countries, experience the "romance" of poverty, and then return home to his comfortable life. Akunna's inability to understand how he can do that is indicative of her own lack of choices and resources. However, the boy is the first person in America to really pay any attention to Akunna, which at least begins to remedy her loneliness.

Akunna feels that she and the boy are becoming close when she tells him that she never roots for white men on Jeopardy. She tells him about the time her father hit a Big Man's **car** in rainy Lagos traffic and laid out in the road in shame. The Big Man's driver eventually let her father go, and Akunna told her father that he looked like shit. The boy grabs Akunna's hand and says he understands, but Akunna feels annoyed and says there's nothing to understand.

Akunna's story shows that women aren't the only ones that suffer at the hands of Big Men in Nigeria—poor men like her father are humiliated too. Though the boy is trying to be comforting, it's obvious that he finds the story exciting and, primarily, a story. Like other characters in the collection, he doesn't understand that this "story" is someone else's everyday reality.

The boy finds an African store and drives Akunna there. The storeowner asks the boy if he's African, and the boy says he is, and then is pleased he fooled the owner. Akunna cooks **onugbu soup** and the boy vomits later. Akunna doesn't mind, because the boy is vegetarian, and now she can put meat in the soup. She doesn't tell the boy that her mother cooks with cubes that are pure MSG, because the boy believes MSG causes cancer.

Passing for African is a status marker for the boy, while for Akunna, being African in America is a detriment. For all the boy's talk about how poor people are the "real" people of a country, Akunna realizes that he would think very poorly of her family because the boy is truly upper class, no matter how much he tries to deny it.

At Chang's one night, the boy tells the waiter he speaks some Mandarin. The waiter asks the boy if he has a girlfriend in Shanghai, and Akunna loses her appetite when the boy says nothing. She doesn't enjoy sex later and finally tells the boy that she's hurt that he didn't correct the waiter at Chang's. He apologizes, but Akunna realizes he doesn't understand.

The boy doesn't understand that it's hurtful for Akunna to watch him confirm the waiter's unspoken belief that the boy, as a white person, couldn't possibly be dating Akunna. Again, the boy sees that his travels make him seem mysterious and doesn't understand the power that his wealth and whiteness affords him as he moves through the world.

The boy buys Akunna gifts, and Akunna finally tells him to stop buying her things that aren't useful. Akunna keeps the gifts of clothes and shoes to give to her family. The boy offers to fly both of them to Nigeria, but Akunna doesn't want him to be able to check Nigeria off his list of countries he's visited. Akunna confronts him about his belief that the poor people of a country are the "real" people of a country, and asks if he's a real American since he's not poor. They make up later, and the thing around Akunna's neck starts to loosen.

Despite Akunna's confrontations, the boy remains ignorant of his own power and privilege. He has the financial power to buy gifts and plane tickets, things that Akunna will never be able to afford because the American dream is not available to her. Even if the boy isn't a "real" American by his own (misguided) standards, Akunna is aware that he's living the American dream.

Akunna knows that her relationship with the boy seems abnormal to many people, but the boy's parents make everything seem normal when they go to dinner one night. Akunna doesn't understand why the boy is so stiff, and feels thankful that they don't treat her like she's exotic. The boy tells her later that his parents ration their love, and they'd love him better if he agreed to go to law school. Akunna is angry and thinks of two weeks ago when he'd refused to take Akunna on a trip to Canada with his parents. Akunna cries in the shower and doesn't know why.

Because Akunna comes from so little and has been taught to be thankful for any good thing, she's acutely aware that the fact that the boy can say no to trips or free school is indicative of a blind sense of privilege. She sees those things as things she couldn't say no to, as they'd allow her to come closer to the American dream. For him, however, it's important that he's able to decline these offers.

Akunna writes home and receives a letter that her father died five months ago. Her family had used the money from Akunna to give him a good funeral. Akunna curls up in bed and thinks of her father. The boy holds her and offers to fly them both to Nigeria. Akunna insists on going alone, and the boy asks if she'll "come back." Akunna mentions that she has to return in a year to maintain her green card. The boy drops her off at the airport and Akunna hugs him tightly before letting go.

Returning home is absolutely necessary for Akunna in order to keep with her role as a daughter. The boy uses "come back" to mean Akunna returning to him and their relationship, not just to the country. By letting the boy go, the story suggests that Akunna won't truly return to the boy and his particular brand of Americanism.

THE AMERICAN EMBASSY

The embassy narrator stands outside the American embassy in Lagos. She's the 48th person in line and holds a file of her documents. She stares straight ahead and ignores the newspaper and food vendors. The man behind her asks if she has change, and she tries to focus and tell him no. She tries to keep her mind blank like her doctor told her to—she needs to be alert for her visa interview. She tries to keep her mind blank, but the image of her four-year-old son, Ugonna, falling bloody to the floor keeps popping up.

The narrator has obviously experienced major violence and trauma, which has forced her to seek refuge in America. The fact that it seems as though a whole market exists to sell to people waiting in line at the embassy suggests that there is a huge amount of bureaucracy and red tape involved in getting an American visa. This is indicative of the draw of the American dream.

The man behind her taps the embassy narrator and tries to draw her attention to a soldier beating a man. She turns to look and is reminded of her jump from the balcony. She says nothing to the man, who continues to be friendly. She wonders if he's curious as to why she's not joining in with the camaraderie of those in line, who all woke up early to stand in line at the American embassy and quickly became friends. The man behind her continues to speak about the soldier, but the narrator looks up the street at the market that pops up to sell food, chairs, passport photos, and newspapers to those standing in line.

The people in line form their own community based on the common goal of wanting to find a better life in America. While the woman's unwillingness to engage certainly speaks to her trauma, it also suggests that she's not as sold on the promise of the American dream as the others.

Two days earlier, the embassy narrator buried Ugonna. The day before, she helped smuggle her husband out of the country. The day before that, life had been normal. The man behind her wonders if the people in the American embassy enjoy watching the soldiers whip people. The narrator tries to keep her mind off Ugonna.

The woman is unable to keep her mind off of her son, which shows how deeply his death is affecting her. In this way, it's suggested that she defines herself in terms of her son. The man behind her implies that the Americans enjoy their positions of power and making the Nigerians suffer and jump through hoops.

Two days ago, three men had come to the embassy narrator's home looking for her husband. They put a gun to her head and asked for her husband, and she told them she didn't know where he was. They asked her about the story her husband wrote for the paper. When it seemed like the men were going to leave, Ugonna ran to the narrator, screaming and crying. The men shot him.

As in "Cell One," government violence and corruption is what's breaking the narrator's family apart. By destroying the narrator's family, the government is robbing the narrator of the only thing thus far that gives her purpose and meaning in her life.

The embassy narrator refuses an orange from the man behind her. Her head hurts and she thinks about her jump from the balcony. When she heard the gun go off and saw Ugonna fall, she told herself that it was palm oil and he was playing a game. As the three men deliberated as to what to do, she jumped off the balcony and hid in the garbage bin. After the men had left, she went back to the apartment and held Ugonna's body.

The narrator told herself stories so that she could preserve her relationship with Ugonna long enough to save herself. This mirrors the way that Chika in "A Private Experience" told herself that her sister was still alive; doing so allowed Chika to maintain her cool and find safety.

The man behind her asks the embassy narrator if she's nervous about the visa interview. He instructs her how to nail the interview. The narrator remembers all the people who told her to tell her interviewer about Ugonna so she'd get an asylum visa. The man asks the narrator what kind of visa she's getting, and she tells him she's asking for an asylum visa. She wonders if the man knows about her husband and thinks that if he reads *The New Nigeria* he probably does. Her husband had been the first to write about the coup and call it a sham. He'd been arrested for two weeks and when he was released, he and the narrator had a party to celebrate.

While the woman's story about Ugonna originally just served the purpose of getting her out of the house alive, now the narrator must use the story to influence others. The narrator is faced with the prospect of performing her grief for an audience that controls her future. This suggests that the American dream is built on the difficult and destroyed dreams of people in other countries (and even in America itself), dreams that the American dream is supposed to replace.

The man behind her tells the embassy narrator again that asylum visas are hard to obtain. She asks him if he reads *The New Nigeria*. He does, and he praises the bravery of the editors. The narrator thinks that the editors are selfish, not brave, and remembers her husband skipping a family trip to conduct an important interview. When they returned from their respective trips, they spoke to each other only about Ugonna, which is most of what they talked about anyway.

The narrator describes a family dynamic in which she puts a great deal of importance on the family itself, while her husband cares only for his work. While there's no indication that her husband is cheating, this dynamic echoes the other marriages described in the collection. Though the narrator finds comfort and a sense of identity in motherhood and her marriage, they don't necessarily make her happy.

The embassy narrator confirms with the man behind her that he thinks the editors are brave, and he looks at her suspiciously. She thinks about telling him about her own journalism, which she gave up when she finally became pregnant. She turns away and watches the beggars. She doesn't see *The New Nigeria* on the closest newspaper stand, and thinks about her husband's latest article. It hadn't worried her because it was only a compilation of the killings and failings of the government. However, a few days after it came out, someone on the radio had praised her husband.

The narrator's decision to give up her journalism job in favor of being a parent speaks to the importance of motherhood on a personal as well as a cultural level, but also shows how women are often expected to give up their careers to support their families in situations where men aren't. The narrator also shows the divide between public and private as her husband is praised on the radio for his political actions but arguably being irresponsible towards his family.

Her husband had tried to act as though he wasn't nervous, but he soon received an anonymous call saying the head of state was angry and he was going to be arrested for the last time. The embassy narrator had driven her husband to a coeditor's house and he'd made it to Benin. The plan was for him to apply for asylum in New York, and for the narrator and Ugonna to join him at the end of the school term. Ugonna had been restless that night, and the narrator let him stay up. She wished she'd sent him to bed when the three men burst in.

The narrator's husband's work has disastrous consequences for his family, even if he is doing something brave and just in the public sphere. Notably, the story never mentions how he might feel about his son's violent death; it never even states if the narrator has spoken with her husband about it.

The man behind her begins a conversation with others in line about the need for shade and the corruption of the American embassy. The embassy narrator gives money to a couple of blind beggars and they bless her with money, a husband, and a job. She thinks they didn't bless her with children. The embassy opens and asks for the first 50 in line, and the man behind remarks on their luck.

Though the narrator is at the American embassy to apply for asylum, this mention of the embassy's corruption suggests that despite the power of the American dream and the safety it promises, America itself has issues as well. Corruption is inescapable, and this reinforces that the American dream is ultimately not so rosy as it's made out to be.

The embassy narrator's interviewer asks the narrator for her story. The narrator thinks of Ugonna and looks at the man interviewing next to her. She realizes she'd rather die before talking about Ugonna in exchange for a visa. She tells the interviewer that her son was killed, but doesn't offer any other details. The interviewer asks how the narrator knows that her son was killed by the government, and asks for proof that the narrator isn't safe in Nigeria. The narrator says she buried the evidence—her son's body—the day before. The interviewer offers her condolences and says that the United States offers "a new life" but needs proof.

The narrator sees Ugonna's death as a purely personal and private tragedy. In doing so, she jeopardizes her chances of escaping Nigeria. The woman's belief that her story is private recalls Edward's search for stories of the "real Africa," and many characters' struggle with the divide between story and lived experience. Ugonna's death is a story that could easily be sensationalized, but in doing so, the story would become abstract and depersonalized, rather than meaningful and deeply human.

The embassy narrator thinks that Ugonna gave her a new life. She thinks she wants to go home and plant flowers on Ugonna's grave. The narrator looks again at the man next to her, whose interview is going badly. The interviewer tries to get the narrator's attention, but the narrator gets up and walks out of the embassy.

The narrator confirms that she built her identity around being Ugonna's mother, and wants to continue to cultivate this identity even after his death. For her, family and love are more important than sacrificing a crucial part of herself in pursuit of the American dream.

THE SHIVERING

Someone knocks on Ukamaka's door in Princeton. It startles her; she's been on edge all day, reading the Nigerian news and calling her family for information about a plane that crashed in Nigeria. She fears that her ex-boyfriend, Udenna, was on the plane. Ukamaka looks out the peephole and opens the door to a pudgy, dark man. He says that he's Nigerian and wants to pray about the crash with her. Ukamaka lets him in.

Initially, Ukamaka's concern for Udenna seems to be a perfectly normal concern for human life in general. The stories she's reading on the internet leave much to be desired, which leads her to make up her own stories in an attempt to understand what's happening. We also see the potential for camaraderie among Nigerian expatriates in America.

The man takes Ukamaka's hands and prays in the Nigerian Pentecostal fashion that mentions the blood of Jesus uncomfortably often. Ukamaka wants to stop the man, but she doesn't think she could make it sound convincing coming from her and not Father Patrick, the priest at her Catholic church. The man continues to pray. In a pause Ukamaka says "amen," but the man keeps going. Suddenly, Ukamaka's body begins to shiver. She remembers this happening once before when she was a teenager and saying her Hail Marys. She'd only ever told Udenna about it, and he said she'd created the experience herself.

Though we know little about Udenna at this point, his comment about Ukamaka's prior religious experience indicates that he puts little faith in religion or in Ukamaka's lived experiences. This particular experience of shivering while praying indicates the depths of Ukamaka's emotions about the situation, and also the potential for an unknowable, quasi-mystical aspect of life. The man in Ukamaka's apartment seems deeply religious.

The man ends the prayer and Ukamaka slips away to the bathroom. When she returns, the man is still in her kitchen. He introduces himself as Chinedu. Chinedu sits down on her couch and talks about his morning listening to the news. He mentions the Nigerian First Lady's death, which also happened that day, though she didn't die in the plane crash. Chinedu says that God is telling them something, and only He can save their country. Ukamaka takes comfort in his habit of calling Nigeria "our country" and feels close to him. Chinedu continues to talk about the ills of the government.

The quick sense of closeness between Ukamaka and Chinedu illustrates one aspect of the immigrant experience in America. Ukamaka implies that Udenna was one of her only links in America to Nigeria, and Chinedu can now fill that role for her. They're bonded, essentially, by their shared experiences of being "other" in America. The difficulty both Chinedu and Ukamaka had finding Nigerian news in America shows too how much Nigerian news isn't valued or considered important in America.

Chinedu asks Ukamaka if she knew anyone on the flight. She says that her ex-boyfriend Udenna may have been on it. Chinedu says that God is faithful. The phone rings. Ukamaka answers it, and her mother tells her that Udenna missed the flight. Ukamaka puts the phone down and cries, and Chinedu holds her and comforts her. Ukamaka feels he understands her many emotions about Udenna and their breakup.

Again, the way that Ukamaka connects so quickly to Chinedu suggests that Udenna likely wasn't just her only link to Nigeria, but possibly one of her only friends and companions in America.

Ukamaka invites Chinedu to stay for lunch. Ukamaka tries to engage him in theological conversation, but Chinedu only says that God doesn't always make a "human kind of sense." Ukamaka thinks of when Father Patrick had said the same thing, when she met him in the hours after Udenna broke up with her. Udenna broke up with her in an ice cream shop. He told her the relationship was "staid," even though Ukamaka had been planning her life to accommodate his wishes. Ukamaka cooked with **hot peppers** to please him, even though she didn't like them.

Chinedu's response to Ukamaka's religious questions suggests that she's trying to make God make sense in a more human way. This shows that Ukamaka desperately wants proof and affirmation that things happen for reasons she can understand, unlike Udenna's reason for breaking up with her. Like the other women in the collection, Ukamaka has spent the last few years building her life around Udenna's and ignoring her own desires and her happiness.

Ukamaka had wandered up and down the streets until she ran into Father Patrick, who told her people have to have faith even when things don't make sense. She'd replied that that's like telling someone to be "tall and shapely," which she's never going to be. Father Patrick laughed and said having faith means being okay with not being tall and shapely.

Ukamaka desperately wants to have faith, but she sees it as something she just can't achieve. Once again this is connected to ideas of story and representation, as Father Patrick describes faith as being inherently linked to an acceptance that some things don't fit into a coherent story or have an understandable meaning.

Ukamaka continues to ask Chinedu about his religious reasoning and she takes note of the "bush" way he eats rice with a spoon. Chinedu asks about a picture of Udenna and Ukamaka. Ukamaka lies and says she's been meaning to take the photo down. Chinedu asks where they met, and Ukamaka explains that they met in the United States at a party and had a lot in common. She says that Udenna looks like Thomas Sankara, the former president of Burkina Faso.

Even with Chinedu, Ukamaka lies in order to tell him what she thinks she should tell him, not necessarily what's actually true. This again allows her to build a relationship with Chinedu, while still holding onto her (one-sided) relationship with Udenna. However, she differentiates herself from Chinedu when she takes note of the way he eats.

Chinedu says he saw Ukamaka and Udenna in the parking lot one day and knew they were Nigerian. Hearing this makes Ukamaka feel as though the three years she spent arranging her life around Udenna's were real. She says that she remembers seeing Chinedu, but thought he was from Ghana. He reminds her of a boy whom Udenna consistently snubbed: poor and from the bush, and not worth Udenna's friendship.

Ukamaka implies that she has trouble believing the true story of the last three years of her life without outside validation that it actually happened (reflecting the thoughts of the narrator at the end of "Jumping Monkey Hill"). She continues to suggest that Udenna isn't actually a very nice person. By comparing Chinedu to the boy Udenna snubbed, Ukamaka is able to feel superior to Chinedu while also feeling charitable for engaging with him.

Ukamaka asks if the **stew** is too peppery, and explains that she only started cooking with hot peppers when she met Udenna, and that she doesn't really like it but now she's used to it. Ukamaka refreshes her web page and it reads that everyone on the plan was killed. Chinedu implies that the crash was a punishment from God.

Here, Ukamaka mirrors other female characters like Nkem and Kamara in that even when she's alone, she's still conducting herself as though her own needs and desires matter less than the needs of her male partner. She doesn't keep cooking with hot peppers because she likes them—she's just used to it.

Ukamaka explains that she used to go to Mass daily, but stopped. She says she simply stopped believing, though Chinedu deems it a crisis of faith and asks for more rice. Ukamaka explains that Udenna never told her he loved her because he thought it was a cliché, and he always made Ukamaka feel like she wasn't smart enough. Chinedu doesn't answer as Ukamaka continues and says that Udenna always minimized her happiness. Over the next few weeks, Ukamaka looks forward to Chinedu's visits so she can talk about Udenna.

Ukamaka confirms that Udenna wasn't nice to her and didn't act as though he wanted her to be happy. It seems that he never took Ukamaka's desires into account, although it's also noteworthy that Ukamaka never outright says that she wanted Udenna to say "I love you." This suggests the possibility that through her relationship with Udenna, Ukamaka truly lost her voice, though she's finding it again as she talks to Chinedu.

Ukamaka marvels at Chinedu's friendliness with the other residents of their building. She tries to ask Chinedu about his program of study, but he sidesteps her questions. He thanks God that Ukamaka has a **car**, and Ukamaka is thrilled that they're friends and that he'll keep listening to her talk about Udenna.

Something is going on with Chinedu, but Ukamaka is too involved in herself and in keeping her relationship with Udenna alive through talking about it to truly notice. Even though the stories she tells about Udenna are sad, continuing to tell them makes them seem real to her.

On Sundays, Ukamaka drives Chinedu to his Pentecostal church, attends a Catholic service, and then they go grocery shopping together. Chinedu is frugal and doesn't understand why Ukamaka would pay more for organic vegetables. Ukamaka laughs and says that Udenna cared; she doesn't really care about it. She offers to buy them lunch, but Chinedu says he's fasting for personal reasons.

Again, even now that Udenna is absent from her life, Ukamaka continues to follow his way of doing things regardless of her own desires. She thus allows Udenna to maintain power over her life even as he is absent from it. This also reinforces Ukamaka's self-absorption; she doesn't see how absurd it looks that she acts like this.

Ukamaka chatters about visiting home last Christmas and how her uncle teased Udenna about when he was going to propose. She asks Chinedu what he's going to do with his chemistry doctorate, but Chinedu says he doesn't know and changes the radio to a music station. Ukamaka pulls over at a sandwich shop and stops in to grab one for herself. When she gets back in the car, Chinedu tells her that her phone rang. Ukamaka is annoyed that it wasn't Udenna, but Chinedu suggests that maybe it's better he didn't call so that Ukamaka can move on.

From the perspective of any outsider, Chinedu's suggestion is a shining voice of reason. Listening to it, however, would require that Ukamaka reconsider the way she lives her life and think about what she wants out of it, not what Udenna *wanted her to want from it. It's easier for the women in the collection to go along with their male partners' desires than it is to advocate for their own.*

Ukamaka is even more annoyed. She wants Udenna to call, since she still has his photograph up in her room. Back at Ukamaka's apartment, she tells Chinedu that he doesn't know what it's like to "love an asshole." He replies that he does, and when Ukamaka seems surprised, he says she never asked about his love life. Chinedu begins to describe his love, a Big Man's son named Abidemi. Abidemi was possessive and vicious. The relationship went on in secret for two years until Abidemi insisted Chinedu attend a party and meet his wife. Abidemi sat between his wife and Chinedu, making jokes about both of them. Chinedu tells Ukamaka that he knew Abidemi would be fine keeping up the charade, so he ended it.

Ukamaka's self-absorption is revealed when she realizes that she knows nothing about Chinedu's tragic love story—she's been too busy dwelling on her own. The fact that Chinedu was able to make the decision to break up with Abidemi is indicative of society's view that men's desires are more important than women's. Even in a forbidden same-sex relationship, Chinedu had the wherewithal to advocate for his own needs, because he's been taught that those needs are important.

Ukamaka expresses disbelief that Abidemi could claim to love Chinedu but only expect Chinedu to do things that Abidemi wanted. She says that Udenna was the same way, and Chinedu angrily says that not everything is about Udenna. Chinedu stands up and asks Ukamaka why she put up with Udenna's abuse, and asks if she ever considered that Udenna didn't love her. Ukamaka tells him to leave her apartment.

Though Ukamaka is correct that Udenna and Abidemi share a number of similarities, by putting everything in terms of Udenna once more, she minimizes Chinedu's lived experience with Abidemi and subsumes it into her own story.

The day Ukamaka kicks Chinedu out of her apartment, she'd begun to notice that he never went to campus and didn't have his name on his mailbox. A week later, she knocks on his door and he shuts it in her face. On Sunday, Ukamaka begins to panic, thinking about someone else driving Chinedu to church. She knocks on his door and apologizes, offering to drop him off at church. He invites her in and tells her the truth: his visa expired three years ago, he's not a Princeton student, and he's waiting on a deportation notice from Immigration.

The reader has been led to believe that both Chinedu and Ukamaka are at Princeton to pursue the American dream through education. With Chinedu's admission, the reader is reminded again of the difficulties of the immigrant experience and the pursuit of the American dream for those deemed "outsiders." For Chinedu, fulfilling the dream means simply staying in America, where there are more opportunities. His dream entails only making it from one day to the next.

Ukamaka invites Chinedu to come to Catholic Mass with her. In the **car**, she tells him about her shivering experience when they prayed together the first time, and he says it was a sign from God. Father Patrick greets them outside the church and they sit down in a pew. Ukamaka teases Chinedu about liking Father Patrick, and assures him that they'll figure out his immigration issues. Chinedu confides that he also had a crush on Thomas Sankara, and notes that Abidemi looked like Thomas Sankara. They laugh.

Chinedu validates Ukamaka's religious experience, which is the first time in the story that any person Ukamaka deems important treats her thoughts and beliefs as real and worthy of attention. This will hopefully help Ukamaka begin to get over Udenna and learn to value her own thoughts and feelings.

Father Patrick walks up and down the aisle flicking holy water on the congregation. Ukamaka thinks of how this would happen in Nigeria: the priest would use a branch from a mango tree to drench the congregation, and everyone would feel blessed.

Despite the fact that Ukamaka seems to believe fully in the American dream, she admits here that she still feels a deep connection to and gets fulfillment from her Nigerian roots. Adichie ends the story on this lyrical, wistful note of nostalgia.

THE ARRANGERS OF MARRIAGE

Chinaza's husband, Ofodile, carries her suitcase up to their apartment. Chinaza tells the reader that she imagined that they'd live in a real house, not a musty apartment with only a few pieces of ugly furniture. Ofodile promises that they'll get more furniture. Chinaza is so tired from her flight from Lagos to New York, and the experience of having her **foodstuffs** confiscated at customs, that she can only agree.

Chinaza's imaginings suggest that she had a specific idea of what her life in America would look like: a beautiful house, nice furniture, and kitchen in which she could cook with her Nigerian ingredients. The confiscation of her African foodstuffs is her first introduction to the idea that America is not as welcoming as it's sometimes perceived to be.

Chinaza says she's tired and Ofodile agrees. They go to bed and Chinaza curls up and hopes that Ofodile won't want to have sex. He begins snoring almost immediately, and Chinaza thinks that when people arrange your marriage, they don't mention bare apartments or snoring husbands.

Even though Chinaza and Ofodile have only been married for less than a month, Chinaza already dreads being intimate with him. She's already disillusioned and unhappy with him, like so many of the other women in the book.

The next morning Ofodile wakes Chinaza by lying on top of her. He pulls her nightgown up and Chinaza thinks that the sex is clammy and uncomfortable. Ofodile goes to the bathroom and tells Chinaza "good morning" when he returns. He hands her the phone and instructs her to call her aunt and uncle and let them know she arrived safely.

Notice that while Chinaza is fully aware that she doesn't like having sex with her husband, it never crosses her mind to say no to him. This suggests that she doesn't feel in control of her own life or body, and further, that unwanted, uncomfortable sex like this is to be expected.

Chinaza thinks that her aunt and uncle will ask questions only to ask, not because they care about her. She thinks of her uncle's smile when he told her that they'd arranged this marriage for her to a doctor in America. Her aunt had said that they'd have plenty of time to get to know each other, which turned out to be two weeks. Chinaza had thanked them to not seem ungrateful, despite the fact that she wanted to go to university instead.

For Chinaza's aunt and uncle, arranging this marriage was seen as a gift to her and a good deed on their part. This also shows where Chinaza learned that her feelings don't matter: she didn't feel like she could say that she'd rather go to school than get married.

The phone is "engaged," and when Chinaza tells Ofodile that, he corrects her that Americans say "busy" instead of "engaged." Ofodile makes Chinaza breakfast. He defrosts pancakes and informs her that Americans don't put milk and sugar in their tea. Chinaza fears she won't be able to eat the bland meal.

Ofodile shows that he's extremely concerned with successfully performing American-ness by correcting Chinaza's language. This suggests that assimilation is Ofodile's primary goal—he's trying to be a "model minority" and avoid being discriminated against by entirely blending in and rejecting his own culture.

Ofodile's neighbor knocks at the door. Ofodile lets her in and introduces her to Chinaza. Because the neighbor is older, Chinaza uses the greeting appropriate for elders. When the neighbor leaves, Ofodile instructs Chinaza to use "hi" with everyone, regardless of age. He tells her that in America, he goes by the name “Dave Bell.” He tells Chinaza that she'll also have to go by her English name, and tells her that in America you have to be mainstream to get ahead. Ofodile fills out Chinaza's Social Security application with the name "Agatha Bell."

By telling Chinaza these things, Ofodile shows that he doesn't just value assimilation, he actively devalues maintaining contact with Nigerian culture. He also insists, as many husbands in the collection do, that his wife ignores her own needs to cater to his.

Ofodile takes Chinaza shopping so he can show her how to shop and use the bus. At the grocery store, Chinaza asks if they can get a package of Burton's Rich Tea biscuits. Ofodile says that Americans call biscuits "cookies" and says they have to buy the store brand ones. He continues, saying that once he's an attending physician they can buy name brand. Chinaza thinks that the people who arranged her marriage only told her that American doctors make a lot of money; not that that they have to complete internships and residencies first. During their flight to New York after the wedding, Ofodile explained to Chinaza that as an intern he only makes $3 an hour. She thought that was good until he said high school students make more.

Again, Chinaza shows that she had ideas about America and American success that she's now realized weren't actually true. This is indicative of the nature of the American dream; throughout the book, the American dream relies on idealized visions like this in order to draw immigrants in, but soon reveals that those idealized visions are entirely fictional. Ofodile shows here that he doesn't much care for Chinaza's comfort or desires.

Ofodile gestures to a woman speaking Spanish and says that people like her won't move forward unless they assimilate. Chinaza agrees with him, but doesn't understand.

Chinaza seems to see nothing wrong with the woman speaking Spanish. The woman likely represents a life that's connected to her home country, which Ofodile actively denies to Chinaza.

Ofodile takes Chinaza to the mall. He buys her pizza, and she thinks it's greasy and undercooked. She feels exposed and humiliated eating in the open space of the food court. Ofodile takes her to Macy's and tries to lead her up an escalator. When Chinaza asks to take the lift, he corrects her that in America, it's called an elevator. Ofodile buys Chinaza a warm winter coat. On the way home, they stop at McDonald's and Chinaza thinks Ofodile looks very unfamiliar as he chews his burger.

Ofodile continues to insist that Chinaza assimilate, refusing to take into consideration that she's experiencing major culture shock. In particular, she feels threatened by Ofodile's desire to eat American food. It makes him look and seem unfamiliar, which suggests again that Chinaza draws comfort from culinary traditions.

On Monday, Chinaza makes **coconut rice**. When Ofodile comes home and she greets him in Igbo, he tells her to speak English. The neighbor knocks on the door and asks what Chinaza's cooking, saying the smell is all over the building. Ofodile eats the rice, but the next day he brings Chinaza an American cookbook and tells her to cook American food. Chinaza thinks about the cookbook as they have sex that night, and she struggles to cook American food over the next several days.

Ofodile now denies Chinaza the opportunity to connect to her culture even in the comfort (and supposed safety) of her own home by insisting she speak English and cook American food. However, the fact that Chinaza goes along with Ofodile's wishes demonstrates her lack of power in their relationship, as she has no means with which to stand up for herself.

Chinaza meets their neighbor Nia one day when she's getting the mail. She thinks that her aunt would label Nia a prostitute, but Nia is friendly. Chinaza introduces herself as Chinaza, but corrects herself and says "Agatha." Nia compliments Chinaza on her African name and shares that she changed her own name to a Swahili name as a teenager. Chinaza marvels that Nia did that when Chinaza was forced to take an English name. Nia invites Chinaza to her apartment for a Coke.

Chinaza is in awe at the choices that are available to native-born Americans. They have the privilege to choose whether to associate with Africa or not, while Ofodile denies Chinaza the opportunity to make that choice. Though this discussion about Africa allows Nia and Chinaza to connect, it also suggests that Nia romanticizes Africa in a way she can only because of her status as a native-born American.

Nia offers to help Chinaza get a job at Macy's once her work permit goes through. Later, when Chinaza tells Ofodile about Nia, he tells her that Nia is a bad influence. Nia begins stopping in to sit and talk with Chinaza, and Chinaza likes listening to Nia speak.

Chinaza's friendship with Nia is the one thing in her life right now that she chooses to do despite the wishes of her husband, aunt, or uncle. Nia provides her a sense of community and family that she's not getting anywhere else.

When it snows for the first time, Chinaza stays home all day and watches it fall. When Ofodile comes home that night, she asks about her work permit and he slowly explains that he married a woman to get his green card, and the woman is now "making trouble." Chinaza is shocked to hear that Ofodile was married, but he says it's just what people do in America. Chinaza insists that she had the right to know before they got married.

Ofodile's admission raises the question of whether Chinaza's aunt and uncle knew about his American marriage when they arranged Chinaza's marriage. It's possible that even they were overly caught up in the idealized American dream, and this oversight or purposeful omission came as a result of that. Ofodile asserts his power by refusing to acknowledge that he's betrayed his wife's trust.

Ofodile asks why it matters, and says that Chinaza wouldn't say no to her aunt and uncle, who arranged the marriage. Chinaza asks Ofodile why he married her. He says he wanted a Nigerian wife and thought she was a virgin. He thought her light skin would help his children, since lighter black people are treated better in America.

Though Ofodile has shown throughout the story that he doesn't place much value on Nigerian culture, it evidently means something to him to have a Nigerian wife. However, it suggests more than anything that he views Chinaza as an object to show off and something that will benefit him alone.

While Ofodile showers, Chinaza packs her suitcase and goes to Nia's apartment. Nia offers to let Chinaza call home, but Chinaza says that there's nobody to talk to there. She thinks about what her aunt would say. Both her aunt and her uncle would call her stupid and ungrateful.

Again, Chinaza's aunt and uncle see the fact that they arranged this marriage for her as a generous gift that Chinaza would be stupid to refuse. Nia is the only person that Chinaza can trust at this point; she's the only one who encourages Chinaza to make her own decisions.

Nia suggests that Chinaza give her marriage more time and asks why Chinaza always refers to Ofodile as "my husband." Chinaza thinks that it's because she barely knows Ofodile. Nia asks if Chinaza has met any of Ofodile's girlfriends. Nia admits that she slept with Ofodile two years ago.

Like many of the other husbands in the book, Ofodile has had a number of girlfriends that he never told his wife about. For Ofodile, however, it's unclear if these girlfriends afforded him status or were simply illicit affairs.

Nia tells Chinaza that she should wait, get her papers in order, and then leave Ofodile. She says that it's America, and Chinaza can support herself and start fresh. Chinaza thinks that Nia is right. The next night, she goes back to her apartment and Ofodile lets her in.

Despite Chinaza's disillusionment with the American dream, Nia remains steadfast that it's still available for Chinaza. She suggests that Chinaza do to Ofodile what Ofodile did to her, and gain her own independence in the process.

TOMORROW IS TOO FAR

The unnamed tomorrow narrator begins her story during the last summer she spent in Nigeria. It is now 18 years later, but she remembers how Grandmama let her brother Nonso climb the fruit trees to shake the branches, even though the narrator was a better climber. Grandmama taught Nonso to pluck coconuts and didn't show the narrator, because "girls never pluck coconuts." Grandmama let Nonso sip the coconut milk first, even though their cousin Dozie was a year older. Grandmama explained that Nonso would carry on the family name, while Dozie wouldn't. That summer, the narrator found a molted snakeskin and Grandmama said it was from the echi eteka snake: one bite and you die in ten minutes.

The narrator's description of this summer is dripping with jealousy: the narrator is better at climbing and Dozie is older, yet Nonso is afforded opportunity and favor at his sister and cousin's expense. Grandmama's preference for Nonso shows that valuing males over females begins in childhood. The narrator, essentially, is told from a very young age that her skills don't matter and her desires don't matter; all that matters are the skills and desires of her brother.

The tomorrow narrator clarifies that it wasn't the summer she fell in love with Dozie; that happened several years earlier. It was instead the summer that both her hate for Nonso and her love for Dozie reached a fever pitch. And it was the summer that Nonso died. When Nonso died, Grandmama yelled at his body that he betrayed her, and asked who would carry on the family name. The neighbors helped Grandmama call the narrator's mother and tried to comfort Dozie and the narrator. The narrator listened to the phone conversation, and though she knew that Grandmama and her mother didn't like each other, the two were united in Dozie's death. They both seemed crazed.

The narrator implies here that if she'd died, Grandmama wouldn't have been as distraught. She suggests that Grandmama cares more about the continuation of the family lineage than she does about the family members themselves, as Grandmama refuses to realize that she has two other grandchildren besides Nonso. The narrator also indicates that Nonso is the favorite in their nuclear family as well as their extended family, which shows that the narrator likely feels this jealousy at home as well.

The tomorrow narrator spoke to her mother on the phone. The narrator said little, but when her mother started crying, the narrator thought of her mother's laugh. Her mother always laughed after she said goodnight to Nonso, but never after she said goodnight to the narrator.

The narrator confirms that her jealousy of Nonso was a continual problem for her. She felt unloved and unseen, and saw that Nonso was the reason for that. This mirrors the plight of the older female characters: unseen by their husbands or boyfriends.

18 years later, Grandmama's garden looks the same as it did then. Dozie watches the tomorrow narrator, and the narrator thinks that the secret of how Nonso died is safe with Dozie. The narrator looks at the avocado tree and thinks of her childhood love for her cousin. She wonders what he thought about being the "wrong grandson."

The narrator's musings suggest that her family, including Dozie, observes a strict familial hierarchy and certain roles within it. By taking issue with this hierarchy, the narrator steps outside of her strict role as younger, female child, which has disastrous consequences.

Dozie says he didn't think the tomorrow narrator would come back, since she hated Grandmama. The narrator thinks that when Dozie called her to tell her that Grandmama died, she thought only of Nonso, Dozie, and all the childhood things she hadn't allowed herself to think about for 18 years. The narrator remembers eating avocados, and how Grandmama said that the narrator was wrong to like salted avocados when Nonso liked his plain.

The hierarchy isn't simply a predetermined boys-are-better-than-girls hierarchy; it also extends to prioritizing male needs and desires over female ones. The narrator suggests that had Nonso liked his avocados salted and she liked hers plain, Grandmama's reaction would've been the same.

After Nonso's funeral, the tomorrow narrator's mother didn't mention him for three months. When the narrator's mother finally told the narrator she was getting a divorce, she said it had nothing to do with Nonso. The narrator wondered if only Nonso was worthy of being a reason.

Again, the narrator sees that she's unable to create change in her family like Nonso is, even in death. She's extremely aware of, and upset about, her own lack of power.

The tomorrow narrator's mother then asked how Nonso died. The narrator told her mother that Grandmama had asked Nonso to climb the avocado tree, and when Nonso was at the top, Grandmama jokingly told Nonso that the echi eketa was close to him. Nonso slipped, fell, and lay breathing on the ground while Grandmama yelled at him until he died. The narrator's mother screamed and called the narrator's father, accusing Grandmama of letting their son die. The narrator's father spoke to the narrator later, and seemed to know that the narrator lied.

The reader is told very quickly that this version of events isn't true. However, even though this is a lie that came from the narrator, it appears as though she finally is able to create change and have some power within her family by inciting anger in her mother and painting her grandmother as the bad guy. Notice too that in this version of events, the narrator even punishes Nonso by making him suffer before he dies.

Earlier that summer, the tomorrow narrator had realized that something had to happen to Nonso so that she could survive. The narrator came up with the idea of scaring Nonso, and she told Dozie that Nonso needed to get hurt so that he was less loveable. While Grandmama was inside, the narrator suggested Nonso climb the avocado tree. Nonso was heavy from eating all of Grandmama's **food**. Grandmama constantly reminded the children that she made the food for Nonso, as if the narrator wasn't there. When Nonso reached the top of the tree, the narrator screamed that there was a snake. Nonso slipped, fell, and died instantly. The narrator and Dozie looked at Nonso's body for a long time before the narrator called Grandmama.

Note that the reasoning behind narrator's plan is based on the idea that Nonso is perfect and therefore worthy of love, while she and Dozie aren't perfect and are therefore unworthy of love or attention. However, the narrator's plan means going against her family role in several ways: first, it means destroying her older brother, and second, it shows a female taking control that's not considered appropriate for her to have. The plan is too successful when Nonso dies, which shows that violating those familial roles can have disastrous consequences.

The tomorrow narrator thinks about Dozie saying that she hated Grandmama. She thinks about the months after Nonso's death, as she waited for her mother to notice her and laugh, but her mother never laughed. Dozie says he's started dreaming about Nonso, and the narrator asks Dozie what he wanted that summer.

The narrator's plan ultimately didn't work; her mother never loved her like she loved Nonso. Dozie seems to dwell on the guilt of his complicity in Nonso's death, while the narrator seems more caught up in the fact that she wasn't successful.

Dozie comes up behind the tomorrow narrator and says that he only cared what the narrator wanted. He asks the narrator if she dreams of Nonso too, and she says she doesn't. The narrator wants to tell him about the pain and emptiness she feels, but Dozie walks away and leaves the narrator crying.

Even 18 years later, the narrator's plan still hasn't achieved what she wanted it to. Dozie seems unwilling or unable to love her now, she never received love from her mother or grandmother, and now she has to live with the bitter knowledge that this is all her own doing.

THE HEADSTRONG HISTORIAN

Nwamgba mourns her husband for years after he dies. She remembers when they first met at a wrestling match and were immediately attracted to each other. A few years later, when Obierika came to ask to marry her, Nwamgba's mother was aghast because Obierika was an only child and his father was known for fertility issues. Nwamgba tells her father she'll run away from any other man but Obierika, so he agrees to allow them to marry.

As the final story, "The Headstrong Historian" actually provides a starting point for the themes and problems explored in the other stories. The story begins in a vague past in Nigeria—earlier than the other stories. Here, Nwamgba is a powerful woman who controls her own destiny. She marries her lover and seems unconcerned at this point with his family's fertility problems. Furthermore, her father supports her decisions.

Obierika comes with his cousins, Okafo and Okoye, who are like his brothers. Nwamgba hates them immediately, but tolerates them because Obierika loves them. They regularly take advantage of Obierika and tell him to marry again when Nwamgba has her third miscarriage, but Obierika tells Nwamgba that he won't marry another wife until they're old. The taunts of the villagers that Nwamgba has cursed her husband begin to get to Nwamgba, and she decides to find another wife for Obierika.

Though Nwamgba sees and accepts that Obierika's family isn't perfect, notice that she doesn't lie to herself about that fact. She simply sits with it. Obierika seems extremely devoted to Nwamgba—even though Nwamgba suggests that polygamy is a common and accepted practice in their culture, he insists on only having one wife.

One day, Nwamgba goes to the Oyi stream and meets her friend Ayaju. Ayaju is descended from slaves and goes on trading journeys. Ayaju tells the Women's Council about the newly arrived white men with big guns, and everyone respects her. Ayaju suggests a young woman to be Obierika's second wife and also suggests that Nwamgba take a lover so she can get pregnant. Nwamgba shuts down Ayaju's suggestion and feels a pain in her back that she knows means she's pregnant, but she miscarries a few weeks later. She and Obierika travel to the oracle and make a sacrifice. Nwamgba gives birth to her son about a year after.

The power structure in which Nwamgba and Ayaju exist mentions specifically that it values women and women's ideas (in contrast to the post-colonial world of the rest of the book). These female characters have autonomy, though the arrival of the white men with guns begins to bring into question whether or not that's going to last. Nwamgba is equally as loyal to Obierika as he is to her when she refuses to take a lover. Their trip to the oracle yields results, which suggests that there's real power in religion.

Nwamgba and Obierika name their son Anikwenwa. He's a happy child, but Nwamgba fears that Okafo and Okoye will try to hurt him or Obierika. Later the cousins poison Obierika, but Nwamgba can't prove it. At Obierika's funeral, his cousins take his ivory tusk. They steal Nwamgba's livestock and Nwamgba takes the issue to the Women's Council. The council warns the cousins to leave Nwamgba alone, but she knows they won't. She takes Anikwenwa on walks and tells him about his lineage, and never lets him out of her sight.

Okafo and Okoye's actions after Obierika's death suggests that Nwamgba and Obierika had power and autonomy thanks to their relationship with each other—their positive, healthy relationship was crucial to their success and happiness. Further, the Women's Council seems to have less power here, which alludes to the possibility that female power is slipping.

One day, Ayaju returns from a journey with a story that the white men tried to tell the women in Onicha how to trade, and when the people in Onicha refused, the white men destroyed the village. Ayaju explains that the white men have very big guns. The white men are also asking families to send their children to school. Ayaju sends one of her sons to learn the ways of the white men, telling Nwamgba that those with the best guns become rulers.

Ayaju asserts that there's power to be had in education, especially when that education comes from people who are already quite powerful. This early violence by white men shows that they value their beliefs and systems over those of the locals. They believe their ways are superior, and they have the weapons to make sure they spread them.

When the white men come to Nwamgba's clan, she hurries to the square and is disappointed at how ordinary the men look. One of the normal helpers of the white men explains that they're from the Holy Ghost Congregation. Nwamgba asks about their guns, and the man tells her about his god and explains that the Royal Niger Company has the guns. Nwamgba laughs when the man describes his god.

When Nwamgba describes the helper as "normal," it turns the tables on the power structures presented in most of the book. The white person here is an "other," while his black helper is "normal." The mention of the Royal Niger Company sets this story sometime between 1886-1900.

Several weeks later, Ayaju tells Nwamgba that white men set up a courthouse in Onicha and suggests that Nwamgba send Anikwenwa to school. Nwamgba thinks she never will, but changes her mind when Okafo and Okoye steal her land. She hears that a man who spoke English won a land dispute in court, even though the land wasn't his. She also hears about missionaries who save men from slave dealers and turn them into Christian missionaries. Nwamgba fears that her husband's cousins will try to sell Anikwenwa into slavery, so she takes him to the Anglican mission.

Though Nwamgba cares very deeply about making sure Anikwenwa remains connected to his culture, she can no longer deny that the white men are more powerful than the "normal" men. She sees sending Anikwenwa to school as a means to an end; she doesn't think doing so will have any lasting, negative effects. Rather, she sees an English education as being a way to beat Okafo and Oyoke at their own game.

Nwamgba pulls Anikwenwa out of school at the Anglican mission when she learns that lessons are taught in Igbo. She then takes Anikwenwa to the Catholic mission, where a missionary baptizes Anikwenwa as Michael. Nwamgba doesn't like how the missionaries beat their students, and she angrily informs them to not beat her son. She brings Anikwenwa home every weekend, and he joyfully runs naked. He hates school and the clothes he has to wear there.

Nwamgba puts the most importance on learning the English language, even though the Anglican mission seems to otherwise align better with her desires to keep Anikwenwa in touch with his culture. Nwamgba behaves as though she's still superior and more powerful than the missionaries, which shows that she still believes in her own power to create change.

Nwamgba begins to notice that Anikwenwa soon adopts strange habits. He refuses to eat "heathen food" and tells his mother that her nakedness is a sin. He refuses his coming-of-age ceremony, though Nwamgba makes him participate. She's sad at this change, but proud when he comes home with papers that say the land stolen by Okafo and Okoye belongs to Nwamgba.

Anikwenwa's religious training has the opposite effect of what Nwamgba intended, though he does win Nwamgba's land back for her. This shows that while he's somewhat loyal to his mother, he cares more about what the missionaries are teaching him is right and wrong. He places more importance on things outside his family than within it, and has internalized the colonialists' ideas of sin and superiority.

Anikwenwa soon goes to Lagos to teach. He returns and talks about "winning souls," and Nwamgba wonders if she meddled too much with his destiny. He tells her later about the woman he's going to marry, a woman named Mgbeke, though he calls her Agnes. He marries her in a church, and Nwamgba finds the ceremony strange. She decides she likes Mgbeke but comes to pity her, because Anikwenwa is impossible to please.

The narrative implies that the discontent in Mgbeke and Anikwenwa's marriage comes from their Christian religion, as it has very specific requirements for what is right and wrong. Anikwenwa seems to enjoy the power he gets from being a Christian husband, as he denies Mgbeke things that make her happy.

One day, Mgbeke goes to get water at the Oyi stream, but refuses to remove her clothes as is customary because she's a Christian. The women at the stream beat her, and Anikwenwa threatens to lock up the women. Nwamgba is ashamed of her son and thinks he treats people who aren't Christian as though they have diseases.

Nwamgba rightfully takes great offense to Anikwenwa's misguided sense of superiority. Though Anikwenwa was once Nwamgba's hope for the future, her shame indicates that she's become disillusioned with the promises made by the white men.

Nwamgba makes sacrifices so that Mgbeke can give birth to a son, believing that her grandson will be Obierika's soul returned. Mgbeke has three miscarriages before giving birth to a boy. She names him Peter, but Nwamgba calls the boy Nnamdi. Nwamgba doesn't feel Obierika's spirit in the boy. Mgbeke has several more miscarriages and then has a girl. She names her Grace, and Nwamgba calls her Afamefuna. Nwamgba knows that her granddaughter has Obierika's spirit. Grace shows great interest in her grandmother's poetry and stories, but Anikwenwa makes her attend boarding school.

Again, traditional religion has real power in this story, as it remedies (to a degree) the family's infertility. Nwamgba insists on using her family members' Nigerian names in an attempt to remind them of their Nigerian history. Even in death, Nwamgba is still very connected to Obierika, which shows that family is still a strong, guiding force in her life. Grace's interest reinforces that understanding one's history is important to happiness and fulfillment.

When Grace leaves for school, Nwamgba knows she's going to die soon. Anikwenwa wants to baptize her so she can have a Christian funeral, but Nwamgba refuses. She asks to see Afamefuna. Anikwenwa tells Nwamgba that Grace can't come, but Grace comes on her own.

Grace's mysterious arrival shows that there are powerful forces at play. Anikwenwa is selfish; he cares more that his mother dies the way he wants than that she dies in a way that makes her happy.

In Grace's schoolbag is a book about the "pacification" of Nigerian tribes. She goes on to read about the "savages" with interest, and doesn't realize she's a descendent of the "savages" until a teacher tells her that Nwamgba's poetry isn't actually poetry. Grace begins to despise Anikwenwa and tries to avoid him. She listens to stories of white men razing villages but doesn't know if she should believe them, since the people also tell stories about mermaids.

The fact that Grace didn't make the connection between the tribes in her textbook and herself shows that one of the most detrimental effects of colonization is that native peoples are entirely divorced from their culture. European culture doesn't value art forms like Nwamgba's poetry; it insists that the only art worth studying is European art.

In college in 1950, Grace changes her degree to history after hearing about a Nigerian man who resigned from an educational council after the council began talking about adding African history to the curriculum. Grace realizes that education brings dignity, and begins to rethink her own education and Anikwenwa's teachings. Grace travels to Europe and writes a book called *Pacifying with Bullets: A Reclaimed History of Southern Nigeria*. Grace realizes her marriage won't last when her husband says the subject of the book isn't worth writing about, and she divorces him in 1972. Grace receives prizes and awards for her work writing for international organizations, and thinks of her grandmother.

The actions of this Nigerian man demonstrate again the horrific effects of colonization: even though the man is Nigerian and powerful, he doesn't value Nigerian culture enough to allow it to be taught. He is more like Edward from "Jumping Monkey Hill" here than like the people he's descended from. Even Grace's husband doesn't see that her work has purpose, but unlike other female characters, Grace advocates for herself and her own happiness and ideas by divorcing him. Grace thus becomes a figure of hope for the future, a character who values Nigerian culture and sees the dark truth about colonialism, but who also receives a Western education and embraces her own independence.

As an older woman, Grace goes to the courthouse and changes her name to Afamefuna. As a child, however, sitting next to Nwamgba, she simply holds her grandmother's hand.

The story suggests that Grace is able to achieve this happiness and power because she worked hard to truly connect to her roots. In this way, the book as a whole suggests that some of the damage done by colonialism can be remedied when colonized people celebrate their cultures and advocate for their happiness. The book ends on a more optimistic note than many of the individual stories do, concluding with this small moment of intergenerational tenderness and understanding.

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