



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2022 Volume III: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

Things Fall Apart: Piecing it all Back Together Using Contemporary Black Art

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What do you do when things fall apart? When students read the African novel Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, they struggle to understand the Nigerian culture of Umuofia and the character of Okonkwo, but by the end and through the use of cultural context, they find value and common ground with this community. All of this is ripped away when they find out the District Commissioner reduces Okonkwo's life to just a paragraph in his book about this "primitive" tribe. Students come away from this reading feeling defeated, but understand the importance of who tells the story, and they recognize, now, that it is the colonizer who controls the dominant narrative. By analyzing art work by Kehinde Wiley, Yinka Shonibare, and Hew Locke, this unit will show students how modern Black artists are tearing apart the colonist narrative and how they are piecing back together a narrative that empowers the colonized and reclaims their story. After close reading, art analysis, and in-class writing, students will create a fictional portrait that fuses Achebe's text and the styles of the artists studied to do the very same thing for the fictional world of Umuofia -- decolonizing the narrative and putting it all back together.

(Developed for Advanced English II IB-MYP, grade 10; recommended for AP Language and Composition, grade 11)

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