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**IRP Notes Package**

**First 30-50 Pages (1-54)**

**1. What main concern or associations are suggested by the title of the novel? How does the title relate to the first 50 pages?**

The title *Half of a Yellow Sun* relates to the image of a setting sun. The significance of this image is seen in how the novel takes place in Nigeria, which was a British colony until 1960. During the colonial era, a popular saying stated that the sun never set on the British Empire. However, this novel takes place in the early 1960s, after Nigeria achieved independence from Britain. The title showcases how the novel is associated with the end of British colonial rule in Nigeria and its repercussions. However, the title also indicates that the sun has not fully set, positing that colonial ideologies still prevail and influence society. Olanna’s father illustrates this concept when he states, “the idea of Nsukka University was silly, that Nigeria was not ready for an indigenous university and that receiving support from an American university—rather than a proper university in Britain—was plain daft” (Adichie, 40). His opinion that a Nigerian university will not succeed as opposed to a “proper” British one demonstrates how the concept of colonial supremacy is still present when the novel takes place.

The title also relates to the first section of the text because Adichie depicts the sun as powerful and harmful. For example, Adichie writes, “the afternoon sun burned the back of his neck” and, “The clothes hung out to dry were still, stiff, as if desiccated by the hot afternoon sun” (3, 48). The negative connotation given to the sun in these contexts further develops the idea that the British Empire has a detrimental impact on Nigeria’s culture and government. The metaphor of the sun suggests Britain has the potential to affect the characters or setting in the text. The sun demonstrates how Britain’s continuous influence in Nigeria after Independence could lead to an unfavourable event in the novel. This relates to the first fifty pages; Odenigbo establishes that he does not approve of colonial influence. Odenigbo and his friends disapprove of white oppression and the Western perspective of Africans. Their descriptions of the injustices Britain committed in Nigeria showcases Britain’s negative influence in the country.

**2. What is the setting? Is it a vital factor to the story?**

The novel takes place in Nigeria during the 1960s. Nigeria became a British colony in 1861, after the establishment of Lagos. The country achieved independence on October 1, 1960. The Royal Niger Company controlled trade in Nigeria since its foundation in 1886, and built an economy based mostly on cash crops. Nigeria became an exploitation colony. Originally divided into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria, these two regions consolidated in 1914 to form the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. After World War II, Nigeria split into three geographic and cultural regions: the North, which was mostly Muslims of Hausa-Fulani culture, the West, inhabited by the Yoruba, and the East, whose dominant culture was Igbo.

Herbert Macaulay is an important figure in Nigeria’s colonial history. He lived and worked in Lagos as a surveyor, and rose to political prominence through his opposition to the British government in Lagos. He founded the Nigerian National Democratic Party, which was the first Nigerian political party. He was also crucial in the establishment of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). He is known in Nigerian history as the father of nationalism in Nigeria.

Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo, studied in the United States of America. He aided a revolutionary movement by creating a nationalist newspaper and also helping to found the NCNC. Azikiwe later became the party’s leader after Macaulay’s death and his leadership and nationalist actions led to the self-governance of the Nigerian regions. When Nigeria achieved independence on October 1, 1960, Azikiwe became president.

In response to the nationalist movement, the British government enacted the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954. It enabled the Western, Eastern, and Northern regions of Nigeria, as well as the Southern Cameroons and Lagos, to be better represented in a new federal government system. However, the regions had little influence and representation on a federal level. Later, when the British wrote the constitution for Nigeria’s independence, they gave more power to the North because Northern Nigeria worried about domination from the South. This led to a government composed mostly of Northerners, which later caused hostility between the two regions.

In 1966 the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, along with two other premiers, were murdered in a coup, along with two other premiers. His assassination increased tensions between the Northern and Eastern regions because Balewa was Muslim. They were in conflict because Britain granted more power to the Hausa, despite the fact that the Igbo in the East were a majority. The coup also served as a catalyst for civil war in Nigeria. Following an anti-Igbo reaction to a plan to unite the regions, military action divided Nigeria further into separate cultural groups. Eastern Nigeria seceded and became the Republic of Biafra in 1967. The Biafran army invaded Nigeria, which countered by attacking Biafra. Nigeria rapidly invaded Biafran territory and eventually blockaded the region, isolating them from important resources. Biafra relied on international aid because the population was starving and resources were shrinking. The leader of the Republic of Biafra, Lieutenant Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu, fled Nigeria in January of 1970, and Biafra surrendered on January 16, 1970.

Traditionally in Nigeria, gender roles defined work. Women cooked, processed food, and made mats or pottery. African women had power in society due to their influence at home. Though pre-colonial African tribes had a patrilineal system, women exhibited their control through their ability to influence the opinion of their husbands or children, and thus had a valid opinion in political affairs. Some cultures had titles for women, such as the queen mother. However, colonialism led to the development of a more patriarchal society, diminishing female power. This pertains the novel because two of the main characters, Olanna and Kainene, are educated women in Nigerian society. They defy cultural norms for women, whereas others in their family, such as Arize, support them. By contrasting Olanna and Kainene with their extended family, Adichie adds an element of feminism to the novel. She also accomplishes this by showing Olanna and Kainene’s parents’ expectations for them. Due to Olanna’s beauty, her parents wish for her to be “spreading her legs…in exchange for Daddy’s contract” (44). She makes society’s expectations for women an integral part of the novel, and defines Olanna’s and Kainene’s characters by demonstrating their opposition to such notions.

The setting of the novel defines the atmosphere. There are numerous instances that criticize colonialism, such as when Odenigbo states, “This is our world, although the people who drew this map decided to put their own land on top of ours” (12). The prevalence of nationalism, as opposed to colonialism, creates tension and a foundation upon which Adichie structures the text. The novel begins shortly after Nigeria achieves independence, established when Adichie references Prime Minister Balewa (37). The time period informs the reader that the novel takes place in a post-colonial society, and therefore showcases life in a newly independent Nigeria. Adichie also demonstrates the prejudice forming between the regions and cultures in Nigeria at that time, which sets up the environment in Nigeria prior to the Biafran War.

Within the first fifty pages, the story takes place in Lagos, Nsukka, and Kano. Each of these cities is in a different part of Nigeria, with Lagos in the West, Kano in the North, and Nsukka in the Igbo-dominant East. The use of these three locations provides depth to the novel by showcasing the three main cultures in Nigeria in the 1960s. Odenigbo is Igbo, whereas Olanna’s family is from Lagos, a Yoruba region (25, 38). Including Lagos is also significant because it the federal government is located there, therefore providing the perspective of government employees and supporters in order to illustrates their society. Olanna’s aunt and uncle live in Kano, and offer the point of view of Igbo people living in a Hausa region.

**3. What initial situation of unrest or conflict is established in the opening chapters? What central characters associated with this situation are introduced? How are they related?**

One source of conflict introduced at the beginning of the novel pertains to differing opinions on colonization. For example, Odenigbo’s revolutionary beliefs clash with those of Olanna’s parents, who approve and benefit from Western influence (38). The conflict of attitudes towards England’s power in Nigeria, and the dissatisfaction of African citizens indicate political unrest in the novel. This sets up the text for Nigeria’s independence. However, it may also lead to a dispute between Olanna and Odenigbo, as Olanna’s family supports England’s rule and Odenigbo opposes it.

Adichie also establishes the conflict between the Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba people. Olanna’s Uncle Mbaezi lives in the Hausa-dominated Northern Nigeria. He is Igbo, and his involvement in the Igbo Union showcases the prejudice against Igbo Africans in the North. Adichie describes a meeting in which “men and women talked about the northern schools not admitting Igbo children” (47). The exclusion of Igbo children from education, and the casual manner in which Adichie describes it, highlight how deeply rooted the divisions of the tribes are. This conflict is also demonstrated when Arize states, “Papa would kill me first of all if he knew I was even looking at a Hausa man like that” (52). To marry a man of a different culture is considered disloyal and is frowned upon in Nigeria, due to the hostility between tribes. The separation of cultures foreshadows upcoming conflict between the Eastern Igbo and Northern Hausa regions, and the difficulties that will arise from tensions between the two groups.

Odenigbo is shown to be associated with both conflicts. His opinions are depicted when he states:

…the only authentic identity for the African is the tribe … I am Nigerian because a white man created Nigeria and gave me that identity. I am black because the white man constructed *black* to be as different as possible from his *white*. But I was Igbo before the white man came” (25).

This passage highlights his association with the conflict between Africa’s colonial identity and the nationalist movement, as he opposes the identities colonists created for Africans. However, he believes the true identity for Africans is what tribe they belong to, meaning he also sees and contributes to the cultural divisions in Nigeria. Miss Adebayo, a Yoruba, defines this by declaring he is a “hopeless tribalist” (25). He is part of conflict between the separate cultural regions in Nigeria because he labels himself not as a Nigerian, but as an Igbo.

**Personal Response**

One aspect of the novel that captivated me was Adichie’s descriptions of the characters’ emotions. She conveys their emotions openly and honestly, even when they have the capacity to make the reader uncomfortable. Her extensive insight into the characters sentiments develops their personalities and provides a level of depth that draws the reader into the story. For example, Adichie writes that Ugwu “did not want Miss Adebayo—or any woman—coming in to intrude and disrupt their lives…All Ugwu needed was the deep voice, the melody of the English-inflected Igbo, the glint of the thick eyeglasses” (26). This description of his emotions informs the reader how dedicated Ugwu is to Odenigbo by portraying him as loyal and in awe of his master. Learning how he feels allows the reader to identify with his character and makes the first fifty pages captivating.

I also loved the subtle nuances in Adichie’s writing. Her attention to detail adds depth to the novel and creates a fuller image. For example, I admired how she chose the name “Odenigbo” for a character whose identity is based on their revolutionary and tribe-based ideas. “Odenigbo” translates to “great man in Igboland,” (Aroli, 14). Her use of this name for him is fitting because he cares strongly about African identity, especially of the Igbo people. Adichie’s careful consideration in her writing is also seen in her seamless use of literary devices. This element provides rich imagery for the story. For example, Ugwu describes Olanna as being “like the stone that lay right below a gushing spring, rubbed smooth by years and years of sparkling water” (Adichie, 30). She chooses her words carefully and creates vivid scenes in the novel, which engage the reader and make the story flow smoothly.

I was impressed at how naturally Adichie incorporates the political atmosphere of 1960 Nigeria into the characters’ day to day lives. She conveys the tension between colonists and native Africans, as well as the prejudice between African tribes in an underhand manner. Current events and opinions prevalent at that time are seamlessly bound into the story, so they depict Nigeria’s recent independence and foreshadow the civil war. This is seen when Odenigbo describes the map of Nigeria to Ugwu and when Olanna mentions her uncles struggle to open an Igbo school in the North (12, 47). Politics do not dominate the story, but help represent the setting and create a feeling of unrest in the novel to indicate future conflict.

A theme in the novel I found interesting was the continuous value of Western customs, even by characters opposed to colonial influence. For example, Odenigbo is reluctant to serve Olanna native food when she gets back from England (27). He does not believe it is fit for someone of status, despite his avid support of Nigerian culture. This ideology is also seen in Ugwu’s belief that he must prove his abilities to speak English to Odenigbo and Olanna, in spite of their proficiency in Igbo. Adichie establishes English as a status symbol, which relates to the significance of English in developing imperialism.

I predict Kainene will play an important role in the novel. The most insight Adichie provides into Olanna’s relationship with Kainene is when she states, “…it was Kainene who now anchored herself firmly in a distant place so they could not drift back together” (46). I believe they will come closer together as the novel progresses, due to future events. Adichie may use their relationship to demonstrate contrast between the beginning and end of the text. Also, since they have a similar education and were brought up together, but have opposing personalities. I believe Adichie will use the differences between Olanna and Kainene to show two perspectives on the events that occur in Nigeria during the late 1960s.

**Middle 30-50 Pages (206-257)**

**1. Identify special techniques, such as contrast, irony, symbolism, and exaggeration; what is achieved by the use of these techniques? What are some of the more important instances of symbolism?**

In the middle section of the novel, Adichie uses many literary techniques such as repetition, personification, dramatic irony, contrast, and parallel structure. Repetition helps develop the urgency in the atmosphere, and further illustrate the setting of Nigeria just before the war. The use of personification establishes a connection between the reader and Biafra’s history. By personifying Biafra, Adichie stresses the importance of the political environment to the story and connects the plot to history. Dramatic irony showcases the contrast with the characters’ mindset with the outcome of history. Adichie also contrasts the reactions of different groups of people to the war, such as Europeans and Africans or educated Africans and villagers. Her use of parallel structure at the ends of chapters links the events of previous chapters together and creates unity between the different narratives.

Adichie uses the repetition to portray the sense of urgency and anxiety in Biafra. She describes people chanting, “Give us guns!” at a political rally at the university. Her recurring use of this phrase, and others such as, “Evacuate now!” illustrates the intensity of Biafra’s political environment (215, 224). Adichie creates a sense of pressure and shows the need for immediate action by writing politically charged phrases several times. The anxiety of the characters is seen again after the first air raid, when people are all saying, “I heard the child,” or, “I heard the cry,” (244-255). It is also repeated as a question, and the use of the phrase by multiple people highlights the collective urgency felt by Biafrans.

Adichie also uses repetition to relate phrases to war cries. The slogan “win-the-war” is successively stated on page 232, and then recurs when Ugwu states, “He longed to play a role, to act. Win the war” (249). The words “win the war” become a mantra, or a call to action. Adichie’s use of repetition is seen again when students at the university call out “Power! Power!” (214). When chanted, these phrases sound like a native war cry, and demonstrate the Biafran’s hostility towards Nigeria. Repetition is also seen in conjunction with traditional practices through the use of drum sounds (223-224, 234). Similar to the role of drums in *Heart of Darkness*, the recurring use of the sounds such as “boom” create urgency and add pressure to the events in the novel.

Biafra is personified during this section of the novel. For instance, Richard refers to the secession of Biafra as its “birth,” giving the country the qualities of a baby (211). The country’s personification is demonstrated further when Ojukwu claims, “Even the grass will fight for Biafra,” (215). Another case of personification of the land is when the land is described as “vibrating” during the bombing (254). Relating Biafra to a person makes the reader more interested its fate. Adichie turns the history of Biafra into a character’s story, therefore making its history as important as that of the main characters. She entwines the post-colonial history of Nigeria into the plot in a captivating manner, enhancing the novel. It becomes as interesting to read about the outcome of the war as it is to read about Olanna and Odenigbo’s relationship.

Adichie’s use of dramatic irony creates contrast between the beginning and end of the war. The reader is likely aware of the war’s outcome, and the hardships that occurred for Biafran citizens. However, the characters are optimistic about the war. Before it is declared, Richard states, “It was a good idea to be prepared, of course, but there would be no war. The Nigerians would let Biafra be; they would never fight a people already battered by massacres. They would be pleased to be rid of the Igbo anyway” (212). The audience knows the war occurs, so Richard’s belief of their safety emphasizes the citizen’s innocent outlook. Once the war starts, the characters are confident the war will end quickly with Biafra gaining independence. For example, Ugwu says, “…when the news that Biafra had captured the Midwest and Biafran troops were marching to Lagos came over the radio, he felt a strange mix of relief and disappointment. Victory was theirs,” (249). In the war, the march to Lagos was unsuccessful, and was countered by a Nigerian invasion. Adichie’s use of irony shows the naivety and innocence of Biafrans at the beginning of the war. Another instance of dramatic irony is when the students chant “Give us guns!” (215). The Biafran troops had little resources, so their enthusiasm beginning of the war contrasts to the war during Nigeria’s blockade of Biafra.

Adichie’s parallels to Nigeria’s previous history foreshadow the West’s role during the civil war. The article Richard writes highlights the similarities between the current and last massacres of the Igbo people, and blames the divisions between the Yoruba, Igbo, and Hausa on the colonization of Nigeria (209). In the article, he also states that the 1945 killings of Igbo people were caused by how the British “encouraged anti-Igbo sentiment” (209). This parallel of historical events indicates Europe will support Nigeria in the war. The author confirms this on page 249, when Nigerian shells are found to have “UK War Department” written on them.

The contrast between Europeans and Africans demonstrates the “othering” of Nigeria by the West, as well as the prevalence of neo-colonialism. Adichie compares European news coverage of the war with the reality in Biafra, demonstrating the West’s ignorance and how they belittle Africa. She writes that *Time* magazine says, “Nigerians were so naturally prone to violence that they even wrote about the necessity of it on their passenger lorries,” and describes the editor of the *Herald* believing the “human angle” of the war should consist of stories of cannibalism and incantations (208, 210). The Western belief of Africans’ inherent violence illustrates how Europeans view Africans as savage, setting the European self-image above the African. Also, the editor’s opinion of what the human angle of the story should consist of showcases how the West believes that humanity in Africa is uncivilized and primitive. This belief is shared by Susan, who states, “These people never fight civilized wars” (228). Both are unable to separate the notion of barbarism with their image of Africa.

The author demonstrates neo-colonialism through the manner in which the war affects European or politically significant characters. For example, Susan describes the people at the British Council in Enugu as “still going off to play water polo and have cocktails at the Hotel Presidential” (228). The contrast of Europeans going about leisure activities while other people are evacuating highlights a remaining colonial hierarchy. Olanna’s parents, who are upper class citizens with European connections, are able to pay for their escape from London. The difference between how they can escape the war while others are stuck in dangerous regions highlights the benefits of upper class citizens. It demonstrates that those with colonial ties continue to benefit, though Nigeria is independent.

Many chapters throughout the novel end with an excerpt from what Adichie titles “The Book: The World Was Silent When We Died.” The middle section of the text ends with the fourth passage from The Book, detailing how the Igbo massacres in 1966 instilled patriotism in Biafrans (257). The book excerpts use parallel structure to create unity in the novel and draw connections between history and the plot. The Book brings together the different perspectives and fractured narrative Adichie uses to tell the story. The excerpts explain the events in the Biafran War, providing the reader with historical context. They add a common factor connecting each character’s story, and add unity to the narrative.

Adichie introduces the symbol of the kola nut when Nnaemeka’s father blesses it as a visiting ritual by saying, “He who brings the kola nut brings life. You and yours will live, and I and mine will live. Let the eagle perch and let the dove perch and, if either decrees that the other not perch, it will not be well for him” (206). The blessing parallels the war, as the eagle and the dove represent the tribal groups in Nigeria. In this section, the kola nut comes to symbolize this moral of Nnaemeka’s father’s blessing. When Odenigbo’s mother refuses to leave Abba, she continues to look at the kola tree, maintaining her belief that Abba will not be captured by Nigeria (245). The blessing can be applied to this scenario, in that Odenigbo’s mother believes if the Nigerians invade Abba, it will go poorly for the Nigerians and not the Biafrans. She demonstrates her faith in this concept in how she acts as though “looking for a ripening pod on the kola nut tree was more important than what Master was saying” (245). The use of the kola nut in the scene shows she upholds the traditional values of unity and the concept of “letting the eagle and the dove perch” as described in the blessing.

The symbol of Biafra was half of a yellow sun, and Adichie uses this image to represent the spirit of Biafra. Okeoma’s poem establishes the meaning of this symbol: “If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise…Clay pots fired in zeal, they will cool our feet as we climb” (219). His poem echoes the Biafran’s hope for an independent country. Adichie uses the sun to represent Okeoma’s vision of Biafra and the strength needed to achieve it. Her repeated use of this symbol illustrates the bright vision of Biafra, especially when used in contrast with darker images. For example, Okeoma’s uniform has the image of a skull-and-bones next to the sun, the enemy air raid occurs in overcast, rainy weather, and Olanna often has Dark Swoops when something drastic or unfortunate happens in connection with the war (252, 255, 239). Comparing a positive symbol with dark aspects of war demonstrates how the hope for a new future is marred by cultural divisions and fighting.

Adichie uses the motif of headlessness to represent inhumanity during the war. For instance, Olanna sees a woman carrying her child’s decapitated head in a calabash (188). This motif reoccurs when Ikejide’s head is blown off in an air raid (398). Adichie depicts the severing of one’s head as the epitome of evil, because it separates thought from emotions. Taking away the head parallels a loss of reason, because the brain represents the centre of thought. The head in the calabash and Ikejide’s death therefore illustrate how barbaric war is.

**Last 30-50 Pages (492-541)**

**1. What changes have taken place in the main characters between the opening situation and the conclusion of the novel? How has this change come about?**

Ugwu becomes more educated and less comfortable with being a villager throughout the novel. At the beginning, he has little education, and has difficulty understanding Odenigbo’s lectures (14). In Adichie’s description of him in the 1960s, he is reading *The Pickwick Papers,* and later writes his own book (218, 541). However, his education and exposure to the university’s more Western society render him uncomfortable with his village roots. During one of his visits back home, Anulika tells Ugwu, “You have forgotten where you come from, and now you have become so foolish you think you are a Big Man” (154). This quotation demonstrates how he believes he is superior to his family because he lives in Nsukka, rather than his village. His idolization of Odenigbo, and how Ugwu sees him as superior, causes this shift in perspective. Ugwu wishes to become exactly like his Master; in working towards this goal, he develops the idea of his family’s inferiority.

Ugwu also goes through the hero’s journey, resulting in a loss of innocence. He evolves into a more mature and aware character as a result of his experiences, such as his relationship with Eberechi and his conscription. The most defining moment in his journey is when he is ends up fighting in the war and fraternizing with soldiers, because it is “the ordeal” of his journey. Ugwu’s loss of innocence occurs when he rapes the girl in the bar. He acts against his morals and perception of himself. Ugwu realizes he is capable of violence, as are the Biafrans; he becomes questioning of himself and the war. For example, when Harrison listens to His Excellency’s speech on the radio, Ugwu asks him to turn it off. He states, “There is no such thing as greatness” (500). His disenchantment with the war, which he once wished to be a part of, demonstrates how he learns to question, instead of blindly following. Therefore, it shows his loss of innocence and how his journey has resulted in him becoming less idealistic.

Odenigbo’s change of character parallels that of Ugwu because they reverse roles at the end of the text. At the beginning, Adichie builds a high reputation for Odenigbo through Ugwu and Olanna’s adoration and praise of his character. However, as the plot progresses Odenigbo’s character falls in esteem. He becomes less reputable when he cheats on Olanna, and even more so during the war (270, 486). As Biafra loses territory and heads to defeat, Odenigbo’s dream of a free Biafra unravels. He deals with this notion, as well as other hardships, by drinking and ignoring his family and responsibilities (486). His incapability to cope with his country and ideology falling apart, causes him to become disreputable. However, while he becomes less distinguished, Ugwu establishes his credibility. When Ugwu dedicates The Book to Odenigbo using Odenigbo’s own words, “my good man,” Adichie demonstrates a role reversal (541). She highlights how the servant has risen to the master’s level, and vice versa.

Olanna becomes more independent and outspoken throughout the novel. Much of this change is due to how Odenigbo becomes less reliable as the novel progresses. Rather than depending on his constancy and outspoken nature as a source of confidence, she begins to count on her own capability. Olanna grows in independence because she must learn to cope with the war by herself. For example, she deals with the news of Ugwu’s supposed death by confronting Odenigbo about his drinking, and then gains the strength to distance herself from Odenigbo (478-479). She becomes more outspoken, as seen when she tells the Nigerian officer, “You had better tell your boy here that it will be better for him not to even think about touching me” (521). Earlier in the novel, such as when she is on the plane to Lagos, she does not voice her discomfort when men admire her (35). Her assertiveness with the soldier conveys how she becomes more forthright and bold.

Kainene changes because she learns to forgive. The war makes her realize there are far worse actions than what Olanna did, and she comes to see the value in repairing their relationship. This shift is illustrated when she says, “There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable” (435). Once she witnesses the horrors of war, her perspective alters and she is able to put aside past grudges. This realization causes a softening in her character, and she forgives Olanna. The two are finally able to have the sibling relationship Olanna wants because Kainene puts her previous judgement aside.

Unlike the other characters, Richard changes earlier in the novel, before the war. He embraces the concept of taking action and distances himself from Western society when he decides to leave Susan. With this action, he welcomes the freedom Africa symbolizes to him; he is unattached to Western society. His non-European mentality is further solidified when Biafra is created. He states, “He could be Biafran in a way he could never have been Nigerian” (211). This quotation showcases how he begins to identify as Biafran, rather than British. He frees himself from his European identity by doing so, and is able to settle more comfortably into a society than when he was in a more Eurocentric society.

**2. What is the climax of the novel, why?**

The climax of the novel occurs when Ugwu is wounded fighting in the war. The war is the background of the text; therefore the climax must occur at the point when the war is at its height. At this point in history, the Biafran army had almost no resources left, and the citizens blockaded inside Biafra were dying of starvation. It was then that the war affected the most people and was at its most critical point. This part is the climax because after Ugwu is injured, the war becomes of less importance, and instead describes how the characters recuperate after the conflict. The scene also draws a first-hand connection to the war front and leaves the reader in suspense.

Soon after Ugwu’s experience at the front, the Biafran army surrenders and the war ends. Once the war is over, the events that follow are the denouement of the story. They illustrate the repercussions of the climax, such as Ugwu’s recovery and how his actions at the war front changed his character (495-496). After this point in the novel, the characters must deal with the result of everything that occurred previously, such as how the war has left them without resources and the life they built in the early 1960s is gone (507, 523).

The novel mostly addresses the war’s effects on the cities and their inhabitants. However, this scene places the reader in the midst of the action, describing the first-hand experience of what the characters hear on the radio. When the scene ends dramatically with Ugwu being hit by a mortar, it connects the previous descriptions of the war to the characters’ lives in Biafran cities. This part also demonstrates the futility of the war, because at this point Ugwu is no longer fighting for a cause he believes in. Adichie writes, “Ugwu’s salute was slack…he was not interested in His Excellency, because he did not care for the commander. He did not care for any of the officers” (459). At the climax of the novel, she debunks the acclaim of Biafra’s leader and what the characters believed in until this point in the text. The turning point of emotions in regards to the war makes this scene the definitive moment of the novel.

Finally, this chapter leaves the audience in suspense by ending with the words, “And when he landed, it was the force of his own weight, rather than the pain firing up his whole body, that stunned him into silence” (460). This description leads the reader to believe that he has died. The author leaves the reader on a cliff-hanger by not confirming whether or not this is true. Adichie’s use of suspense brings the emotions and tensions prevalent in the novel to their greatest point. This culmination of feeling, history, and significance makes this section the climax of the text.

**3. Re-evaluate the title, compare your initial response. Is the title effective, yes or no, why?**

Prior to reading the novel, the title seemed to associate itself with the British Empire. However, it is later revealed the title *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a direct reference to Biafra because the country’s symbol was a rising sun. Adichie clarifies this connection when she mentions how the newspaper is renamed the *Biafran Sun*, and later describes the soldiers as looking “distinguished in their khaki uniforms, boots shining, half of a yellow sun sewn on their sleeves” (219, 225). Originally, the title suggested the image of a setting sun. However, through conveying the spirit of the Biafra, Adichie shows the title describes a rising sun. The characters’ belief in an alternative and brighter future for the East demonstrates the image of the sun parallels the optimism that comes with a new day. It is the association of the title with the idea of a rising sun that makes it effective.

The image of a rising sun invokes emotions often related to new beginnings: hope, excitement, optimism, and expectation. When used in the historical context of the novel, half of a yellow sun encompasses the spirit of Biafra. These emotions are predominantly shown when the East secedes, such as when Adichie writes, “This was a new start, a new country, *their* new country. It was not only because the secession was just, considering all the Igbo had endured, but because of the possibility Biafra held for him” (211). The continuous faith in Biafra is showcased later when a reporter asks a woman if she wants the war to end, and the woman replies saying, “Yes, Biafra will win very soon” (465). For the Igbo, seceding from Nigeria meant the possibility of a country free of persecution and Hausa dominance, provided Biafra could win the war. The belief in this idea is a recurring theme in the novel, and the title embodies this faith. The image and emotions associated with a rising sun are displayed repeatedly throughout the text. The title is effective because it conveys the heart of Biafra and what its creation represents to the characters.

The title is also effective because the bright image of a sun is contrasted with the dark imagery Adichie uses in connection with the horrors of war. For example, after Olanna sees her extended family’s bodies and the child’s head in the calabash, she begins to experience what the author refers to as “Dark Swoops” (196). The Dark Swoops are the antithesis of the hope Biafra brings because they contrast reality with expectation. A similar occurrence is seen at the end of the novel, when Richards says that without Kainene, “he would see things only in shadow” (537). Through showing the difference between the title and war through imagery, Adichie is able to demonstrate how war effects the characters and plot. Since the contrast is built into the structure of the novel she is able to display this theme on a more microscopic level, making the title an integral part of the text.

**4. What are some of the major topics of the novel? Which is the most prominent one? How do these topics transform into a theme statement?**

One prominent topic in *Half of a Yellow Sun* is the role of literature in a post-colonial society. Adichie develops this through Okeoma’s poetry and the book excerpts dispersed throughout the novel. According to Odenigbo, Okeoma is “The voice of [their] generation,” because of his politically charged poetry, such as his poem about “Africans getting buttocks rashes from defecating in imported metal buckets” (23, 141). This poem mocks imported items and criticizes how Africans continue to suffer from the after-effects of colonialism. Adichie demonstrates how language is used as a means of criticism and education in a post-colonial society. His poetry also serves as inspiration to the characters. His most important poem reads, “If the sun refuses to rise, we will make it rise…Clay pots fired in zeal, they will cool our feet as we climb” (219). Not only does this poem embody the spirit of Biafra and depicts the hardships it faces, it is also a source of hope. Ugwu describes feeling “buoyed” by the poem, and later Olanna remembers the poem in a moment of weakness (513). This demonstrates literature’s ability to strengthen beliefs and instill faith in people, especially during times of need.

Throughout the novel, Adichie adds excerpts from a book called *The World Was Silent When We Died* at the end of chapters. She makes the reader believe “The Book” is written by Richard, however it is revealed at the end that Ugwu is the author. The Book tells of the Biafran War, and explains how Britain’s colonial actions led to the conflict. Adichie ends the novel with the last chapter of The Book, illustrating the concept that it is through literature that beliefs are instilled in people and history is recounted. Therefore, Adichie develops the notion that language is a medium through which a post-colonial society can influence others.

Another topic in the novel is the othering of Africans. In *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Adichie demonstrates that othering is subconsciously ingrained in European culture. This notion is seen in how Susan does not feel her relationship with Richard is threatened by African women, and how Richard is unknowingly condescending to African art. Richard explains, “It was, he realized, simply that black women were not threatening to [Susan], were not equal rivals” (68). Susan’s unconscious belief that an African woman would not romantically interest Richard exemplifies the belittling of Nigerians. Since she cannot see African women as her equals, she does not get angry when Richard talks to them. Adichie further develops this idea when Okeoma highlights Richard’s involuntary disbelief at African art’s complexity (141). When Richard expresses his indignation, Kainene tells him “It’s possible to love something and still condescend to it” (145). Okeoma highlights how Richard subconsciously believes in the inferiority of Africans. Kainene further develops this idea by showing that despite Richard’s respect for Africans and their art, he cannot help but to associate African people with a lower intelligence. Though Richard is the most objective European voice in the novel, he still displays pre-misconceptions in relation to Africans, which unconsciously influence how he views them.

In *Half of a Yellow Sun,* Adichie illustrates that the inhumanity of war is shared equally by both parties. She accomplishes this by showing how Biafra is not morally superior to Nigeria. Adichie describes how the Nigerian soldiers rape and beat Ugwu’s sister, but also shows Biafran soldiers are capable of such action. When Ugwu bombs the Nigerians during a raid, the soldiers strip the dead and then celebrate by going to a bar and raping the female bartender (454-458). Their violent manner demonstrates the Biafrans are not above carrying out the same monstrosities for which the Nigerians are known. Adichie sums this topic up in a conversation between Odenigbo and Kainene: “‘It is always easier to conquer a more humane people.’ ‘So when we conquer Nigeria we will be the less humane?’” (503-504). Kainene demonstrates neither group is more humane, because both sides are fighting to overpower the other. She questions the validity of Biafra fighting against Nigeria’s persecution of them, when the action of fighting makes them equally as barbaric.

The most significant topic in the novel is how war affects one’s relationships with their loved ones. Adichie posits that the horrors of war highlight one’s underlying attributes, and thus change their connection with another person. Throughout the novel, she explores how this shift can occur using two opposing examples: Olanna and Odenigbo’s relationship, as well as Kainene and Olanna’s. Olanna and Odenigbo’s marriage loses its integrity because of how Odenigbo copes with the war. At the beginning, they are deeply in love. However, at the end of the text Olanna tells Kainene:

He has become somebody else…He just drinks and drinks cheap *kai-kai*. The few times they pay him, the money goes quickly. I think he slept with Alice, that Ashaba woman in our yard. I can’t stand him. I can’t stand him close to me. (486)

Her sentiments at this point are a far cry from the beginning, when Olanna would wish for the guests to leave so she could be alone with him (62). Her disenchantment with Odenigbo is a result of how he changed during the war, exposing his faults. His inability to manage the falling of Biafra, and his dreams for the East, leads into him losing his morals and strength of character. Odenigbo caves into his underlying vulnerability, and it is this change which causes their relationship to weaken.

On the other hand, Adichie demonstrates how the war’s effects can also lead to the strengthening of relationship. Kainene and Olanna’s connection becomes closer because Kainene learns about forgiveness, and Olanna begins to draw strength from her sister’s bravery. When Kainene tells her she believes the war will turn around, Adichie writes, “Olanna believed it more because Kainene said it” (489). Her faith in her twin’s confidence brings them together, and gives Olanna reassurance and strength to cope with the war. For example, Kainene keeps Olanna connected to reality when she hears of Ugwu’s supposed death (477). The war also brings out forgiveness in Kainene, which allows the two to overcome past quarrels. She tells Olanna, “There are some things that are so unforgivable that they make other things easily forgivable” (435). Her exposure to the horrors of war brings to light her benevolent nature, and leads her to understand that Olanna’s actions can be pardoned. The twins are able to reconcile, leading to a strong bond between them.

**Personal Response**

I found *Half of a Yellow Sun* a captivating and a worthwhile read. Adichie's lyrical and descriptive writing style adds fluidity to the novel and absorbs the reader into the story. However, I did find the ending of the novel lacks the careful planning of the beginning. At the start of the novel, Adichie spends a great deal of time developing the characters and setting up the plot for the fourth part of the story. However, during the last section so much happens, it is difficult to follow the storyline and new developments. While this shift in pace reflects how quickly events must have seemed to the characters, Adichie spends so little time on them that they seem insignificant, or detached from the rest of the novel. For example, Ugwu's time as a conscript in the army is told in less than a chapter (448-460). Ugwu's experience seems isolated from the story because Adichie does little to expand on it. Incidents such as this cause a lack of fluidity in the storyline.

Adichie's also chose to divide the narrative by character, write the novel with a fractured narrative. I believe both were well made choices and added to the text by providing depth and suspense. Having multiple points of view acquainted the reader with different sides of the story. This allowed Adichie to incorporate more themes effectively, as she was able to represent several groups and their opinions and experiences.

While I believe the novel would not be as effective without the fractured timeline, I did not enjoy it while reading. The second section raised several questions, and though Adichie later addressed these questions, it was frustrating not to understand what happened between 1960 and the late 60s. For example, I was confused as to why Richard had to restart his manuscript, and why Baby's birth was so divisive to Olanna and Odenigbo (213, 219). It made me want to read more to resolve my questions, but it was vexing and confusing to read about relationships that had clearly been affected by unclarified past events.

Despite the rushed ending and fractured narrative, I still loved *Half of a Yellow Sun.* Adichie drew me into the story and made everything seem real, in that I felt the character's triumphs and hardships as if I was experiencing them. The author did this by carefully investing in character development, forming relationships between the characters and the reader. For example, I found I empathized with Olanna, because of the way Adichie looks past her beautiful facade and creates depth to a seemingly perfect character. When Olanna loses Kainene at the end, I was equally as affected because I understood Olanna’s personality and what her loss meant to her.

The novel was rich in themes and was beautifully interwoven with history. Adichie's objective and truthful portrayal of Nigeria’s past makes the novel worth studying. She demonstrates multiple perspectives and acknowledges alternative sides to her argument, such as how the Biafran soldiers were no less barbarous than the Nigerians. Her writing style seamlessly binds the history of the Biafran War to an interesting narrative, and she does not shy away from uncomfortable topics. For example, she blatantly states the Biafran conflict was due to Nigeria's colonization, and also addresses disagreeable aspects of love through her characters' experiences. While the love stories between Odenigbo and Olanna, and Kainene and Richard draw the reader into the novel, Adichie’s forthright portrayal of history is what makes it an important read.

**Quotation Analysis**

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| **Quotation** | **Analysis** |
| “But you became aware that you were Igbo because of the white man. The pan-Igbo idea itself came only in the face of white domination. You must see that tribe as it is today is as colonial a product as nation and race.” (25) | This quotation establishes the concept that colonialism shapes the identity of the colony. Adichie illustrates how a colonial power’s treatment of a suppressed group manipulates their self-image. Their absorption of this idea leads to an identity shaped by their colonial experience. |
| “It is only women that know too much Book like you who can say that, Sister. If people like me who don’t know Book wait too long, we will expire…I want a husband today and tomorrow, oh! My mates have all left me and gone to husbands’ houses.” (52) | This passage addresses traditional gender roles in Nigerian society. Women in villages are expected to grow up, marry young, and not seek higher education. Arize’s belief that women can “know too much Book” demonstrates how society believed females did not need education. Also, her unquestioning following of societal gender roles illustrates a complacency with female expectations. |
| “They display slabs of meat on tables, and you are supposed to grope and feel and then decide what you want. My sister and I are meat. We are here so that suitable bachelors will make the kill.” (73) | While not expected to marry young and uneducated, this quotation highlights how Olanna and Kainene are viewed as men’s objects. Adichie compares Kainene and Olanna to slabs of meat, which already denigrates them. Furthermore, the notion that they are to be married off to people of wealth without a say shows how females are not considered to be men’s equals and are valued for superficial traits.  |
| “Olanna looked into the bowl. She saw the little girl’s head with the ashy-gray skin and the braided hair and rolled-back eyes and open mouth…She thought about the plaited hair resting in the calabash. She visualized the mother braiding it, her fingers oiling it with pomade before dividing it into sections with a wooden comb.” (188) | Adichie introduces the symbol of headless people with Olanna’s experience seeing a child’s head on the train. It serves as a transition to the horrors of the civil war. The image of a decapitated head symbolizes inhumanity, as it depicts separating one’s mind from their body. Also, Olanna later compares Baby’s hair on the head in the calabash. While Baby’s hair is turning yellow-brown and falling out because of malnutrition, the little girl’s hair is thick and can be braided. |
| “If this is hatred, then it is very young. It has been caused, simply, by the informal divide-and-rule policies of the British colonial exercise. These policies manipulated the differences between the tribes and ensured that unity would not exist” (209) | Adichie clearly states her opinion that the Biafran conflict was due to Britain’s colonization of Africa. She implies harmony existed prior to the British colonization, and how resulting tensions were due to British influence. Adichie demonstrates the lasting impact colonial hegemony has on the conquered group’s politics and cultural harmony. |
| “Of course I asked you because you are white. They will take what you write more seriously because you are white. Look, the truth is that this is not your war. This is not your cause…If you really want to contribute, this is the way that you can. The world has to know the truth of what is happening because they simply cannot remain silent while we die.” (383) | In this quotation, Adichie addresses two key points of the novel: the othering of Africans and how Biafra’s hardships were largely ignored by major world powers. The notion that people will take news into consideration more if the author is white demonstrates how Western society value the word of a white man over an African. Also, this is the first instance in which Adichie reveals the significance behind The Book’s title. She shows how it is a statement on the lack of action in favour of Biafra and how people failed to intervene while Nigeria starved a country. |
| “‘You should join the Biafran Writers League,” she said. “You should be one of those going abroad to publicize our cause.” Okeoma started to shake his head while Olanna was still talking. “I am a soldier,” he said. “Do you still write?” Olanna asked. He shook his head again.’ (407) | This passage contrasts the description of Okeoma at the beginning, and how he was called the “voice of their generation” because of his poetry. When he stops writing because of the war, Adichie shows that the voice of a generation has been silenced. Okeoma’s dismissal of writing illustrates how the war changes people. His former outspoken nature is curbed by his role in the war, and he no longer uses literature to voice his opinions. |
| “He did not look at her face, or at the man pinning her down, or at anything at all as he moved quickly and felt his own climax, the rush of fluids to the tips of himself: a self-loathing release. He zipped up his trousers while some soldiers clapped. Finally he looked at the girl. She stared back at him with a calm hate.” (458) | This quotation serves two functions: it is a turning point for Ugwu, and highlights the inhumanity the Biafran soldiers were capable of. When Ugwu rapes the bartender, he loses his morals and innocence. As well, the notion that the Biafran soldiers have the capacity to do such horrible actions while fighting for a just cause showcases how both sides were equally barbarous. Despite believing they are better than the Nigerians, the soldiers’ actions in this scene dispute their claim for superiority over their enemy. |
| “Thousands of Biafrans were dead, and this man wanted to know if there was anything new about one dead white man. Richard would write about this, the rule of Western journalism: One hundred dead black people equal one dead white person.” (462) | Here, Adichie displays the subconscious othering of Africans in Western media. She satirizes the idea that the West would prefer to hear about a single white man’s death over the death of hundreds of Biafrans by exposing how ridiculous it seems to value one life over many others. In demonstrating how othering is present in journalism, the author depicts the perpetuation of this ideology, and provides a reason for why this concept of superiority persists. |
| “Ugwu writes his dedication last: *For Master, my good man*.” (541) | In this excerpt at the end of *Half of a Yellow Sun*, Adichie reveals that Ugwu is the author of The Book. The significance of Ugwu being the author lies in how it relates to the concept of post-colonial literature, and how it is used as a medium to educate people about history from the perspective of one affected by the conflict. In ending the novel with an excerpt from Ugwu’s book, Adichie gives the last word to the character that was, at the beginning, the quintessential poor African servant, thus concluding on a positive note for the future. The Book proves that alternate stories exist other than that of the Western view. Ugwu also uses Odenigbo’s own words to describe him, showing how the servant can rise up to the same level as the master. |

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