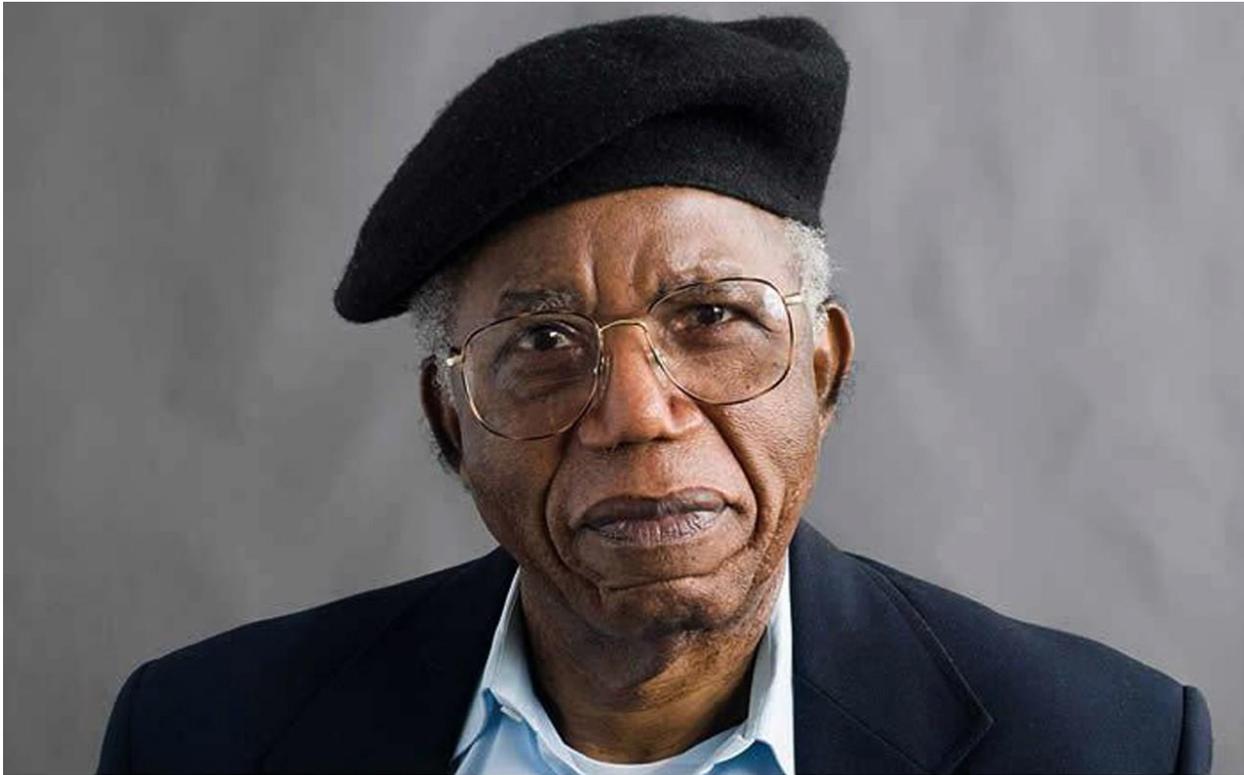


## **Black Writing: Novelist as Teacher**

**Mrs. Sridevi and L. Maggie Lavanya**

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**Chinua Achebe 1930-2013**

Courtesy: <http://www.ebony.com/entertainment-culture/remembering-chinua-achebe-495>

### **Abstract**

The lives of black characters who struggle with identity and they are poets, novelist, playwrights and scholars and together they helped capture The Voice Of Nation. Black authors who have left a mark on the literary world forever. Colonial African literature. The African Colonial works best known in the West from the period of colonization and the slave trade are primarily slave narratives, such as Olaudah Equiano's The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano 1789.

### **Introduction**

Chinua Achebe was born on 16 November 1930 – 21 March 2013 was a Nigerian novelist, poet, professor, and critic. His first novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958), often considered his best, is the most widely read book in modern African literature. He won the Man Booker International Prize in 2007. Voice of Nigeria and African Writers Series

Once he returned to Nigeria, Achebe was promoted at the NBS to the position of Director of External Broadcasting. One of his first duties was to help create the Voice of Nigeria network. The station broadcast its first transmission on New Year's Day 1962, and worked to maintain an objective perspective during the turbulent era immediately following independence. This objectivity was put to the test when Nigerian Prime Minister Abubakar Tafawa Balewa declared a state of emergency in the Western Region, responding to a series of conflicts between officials of varying parties. Achebe became saddened by the evidence of corruption and silencing of political opposition.

### Themes

Achebe's novels approach a variety of themes. In his early writing, a depiction of the Igbo culture itself is paramount. Critic Nahem Yourself highlights the importance of these depictions: "Around the tragic stories of Okonkwo and Ezeulu, Achebe sets about textualising Igbo cultural identity". The portrayal of indigenous life is not simply a matter of literary background, he adds: "Achebe seeks to produce the effect of a precolonial reality as an Igbo-centric response to a Eurocentrically constructed imperial 'reality' " Certain elements of Achebe's depiction of Igbo life in *Things Fall Apart* match those in Olaudah Equiano's autobiographical Narrative. Responding to charges that Equiano was not actually born in Africa, Achebe wrote in 1975: "Equiano was an Igbo, I believe, from the village of Iseke in the Orlu division of Nigeria". A 1901 Stamp from Southern Colonial Nigeria.

### Chinua Achebe Work: Novelist as Teacher

Theme in "Novelist as Teacher" World Literature Achebe educates us on how, in Igbo society, loud calls. ... cue from the premise of social intention projected by Achebe. Almost all critics and scholars appreciate *Things fall apart* text of the speech delivered by African novelist Chinua Achebe. Achebe truly believed in representing his culture and his country in his way. Africa had been represented by outsiders for so long that it was important to show the rest of the world an authentic, unfiltered, unbiased perspective. With this, he taught the world, flaws and all, about his culture and the influence of British Colonization.

Write a one-page minimum summary of the text below titled, "The Novelist as a Teacher" by Chinua Achebe. As you summarize, consider the following questions:

- What are his unique goals as an African writer?
- What are the unique expectations that readers have of him as an African writer?
- What is the responsibility of a novelist and the role of a novel?
- How does he approach the conflict of modern outside influence versus local tradition?

### Placed into the Role of a Teacher

Chinua Achebe's stance on the novelist as a teacher is a curious one. He mentions towards the beginning of the essay that he is placed into the role of a teacher – whether he

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Black Writing: Novelist as Teacher

desires the position or not – because his works are read mostly by children of school age. Although Achebe accepts that “it is part of [his] business as a writer to teach” (71), he does not believe that it is his role to undertake the lessons others wish he would teach. When faced with criticism for squandering “a rare opportunity for education” (69), Achebe is adamant that “no self-respecting writer will take dictation from his audience” (69). Even though he seems to have very little regard for what society expects of him (both as an author and as a teacher), Achebe sees the value of being looked at as an educator – he has taken advantage of this inadvertent role of teacher in order to impress certain lessons upon his readers. Within the essay, “The Novelist as Teacher,” Achebe defines his prerogative as an educator to be helping “[his] society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement” (71).

He then moves on to explain why this is the most important lesson to be learned from his novels, but that he would still be satisfied if his works did nothing more than show his people (his readers) that they have a past before the Europeans came. Throughout the essay, Achebe both disputes and accepts his role as a teacher, creating a somewhat confusing message. He does not agree that as a teacher he is obligated to listen to society, but that instead he is obligated to send his own message. In the end, he describes his novels as “applied art” (72), or a work of art that is also useful, saying that “art is important, but so is the education of the kind I have in mind” (72). Achebe describes an interesting dynamic between author, text, and reader that is hard to define. It is clear already from Achebe’s essay that the expectations of author and reader do not always line up, but how does one determine for what an author is truly responsible? Or to what extent is it the readers’ responsibility to derive meaning from a text?

## Conclusion

Achebe later restated this position in "The Novelist as Teacher": “Here then is an adequate revolution for me to espouse to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self-abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word I would be quite satisfied if my novels did no more than teach my readers that their past with all its imperfections was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them.” Given Achebe's outlook, it is not surprising that his vision of the rehabilitation of Nigerian society should extend to the entire population, not just to adults.

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