

Anowa Study Guide

Anowa by Ama Ata Aidoo

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Introduction

Anowa is the second, last, and most accomplished play written by Ghanaian playwright, poet, short story writer, and novelist Ama Ata Aidoo. *Anowa* was first published in 1970 and had its British premiere in London in 1991; Aidoo had begun writing *Anowa* in the late 1960s. Aidoo based the play on regional legends and folktales, some of which were about the "disobedient daughter." In such stories, a young woman refuses to marry a suitor, resulting in disaster. Aidoo gave such stories her own twist, incorporating a more complicated portrayal of gender and drawing parallels with contemporary Ghanaian history. At the center of the play is the title character, Anowa, who finds her own husband and remains true to her own ideals, resulting in an unhappy marriage and conflict that leads to death.

Set in the 1870s, many critics believe that *Anowa* underscores the similarities between the slave trade occurring in the Gold Coast (as Ghana was then known) in that time period and the treatment of women in contemporary society. Some believe *Anowa* is feminist, while others focus on the economic aspects. Most agree that it is thoroughly modern in the dilemmas it presents. As Mildred A. Hill-Lubin writes in her essay "Ama Ata Aidoo and the African Diaspora: Things 'All Good Men and Women Try to Forget,' but I Will Not Let Them" (included in *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*, 1999), "*Anowa* . . . combines the political and the personal and demonstrates the interconnectedness of race, gender, and economic oppressions. It reveals the complicity of Africans in the slaves trade, notes the cover-up in terms of silence."



Author Biography

Aidoo was born Christina Ama Aidoo on March 23, 1940, in Aboadzi Kyiakor, what was then called the Gold Coast (later known as Ghana). She was the daughter of Nana Yaw Fama and his wife Maame Abba Abasema. Her father was a chief of Aboadzi Kyiakor (located in south central Ghana) and raised as royalty. Though women were not often educated at the time, Aidoo's father believed that for the good of Africa, both women and men should be well-educated. She attended Wesley Girls High School in Cape Coast, Ghana. By the age of fifteen, Aidoo wanted to be a writer. Aidoo later entered the University of Ghana in Legon. Before graduating in 1964, Aidoo took classes with Efua Sutherland, a famous Ghanaian dramatist with an interest in folklore. Aidoo began writing in English, though her first language is Fanti, using traditional forms.

After graduation, Aidoo spent two years (1964- 66) as a junior research fellow at her alma mater. It was here that she wrote her first drama, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*. Focusing on an African-American woman who has come to her new husband's homeland and the cultural problems that ensue, the play was performed at the University of Ghana in 1964 and published in 1965 to mixed reviews. Aidoo left Ghana for two years, 1967 to 1969, to go to the United States for a creative writing fellowship at Stanford University. While there, Aidoo began work on another play, *Anowa* (1970). This play also focused on the problems of a woman, the title character.

When Aidoo returned to Ghana, she began to teach English at the University of Cape Coast, beginning in 1970. While focusing on teaching, Aidoo also continued to write. That year she published a short story collection, *No Sweetness Here*. The collection included stories she had written as early as her days as a student. Aidoo published her first novel in 1977, *Our Sister Killjoy: or, Reflections from a Black-Eye Squint*. Combining verse with prose, the novel was regarded as innovative. Aidoo would not publish anything major for eight years. One reason for this break in her writing career was politics. From 1982 to 1983, Aidoo took a post in the Ghanaian government headed by Jerry Rawlings. She was the minister of education. However, because of her radical views, Aidoo was forced out of the position and her native country. With her daughter Kinni Likimani, Aidoo moved to Zimbabwe, which became her primary residence.

Soon after the move, Aidoo resumed publishing. In 1985, she published her first collection of poems, *Someone Talking to Sometime*. She would publish other collections of short stories, poems, and children's literature throughout the 1990s. Her second major novel, *Changes: A Love Story* (1991), shared thematic concerns with *Anowa*, though it was set in contemporary times. While Aidoo continued to write, she also occasionally was a writer-in-residence and held visiting professorships in the United States while lecturing and making other appearances throughout the world.



Plot Summary

Prologue

Anowa opens with the entrance of the Old Man and Old Woman (collectively known as The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-and-Pepper). They set up the action of the play, focusing on the oddness of a girl called Anowa. Anowa has refused to marry any of the men who asked for her hand for several years. They say that many believe Badua has spoiled her daughter, which would account for her behavior. The Old Woman thinks that Anowa is a born priestess, and Badua has denied her daughter's destiny.

Phase 1

In the village of Yebi in Ghana, some time in the 1870s, Anowa is fetching water for her mother when she sees Kofi Ako. They smile at each other. Their moment together is witnessed by a woman and her husband. As the woman stares at them, she drops her tray. Anowa and Kofi laugh.

Inside the cottage of Anowa's parents, Badua is cooking, worrying aloud about her daughter's refusal to get married. Her husband, Osam, enters, and tells her she complains too much. He is not concerned about Anowa's situation, and reminds his wife that he wanted to apprentice her to a priestess. Badua is horrified at the suggestion. She will not let her only surviving child become a priestess because they are not people. Osam points out that Anowa is not a normal person, so that might not be such a bad thing.

Anowa returns and informs them that she has agreed to be married to Kofi Ako. Badua becomes angry. She believes that Kofi Ako is a good-for-nothing man, though admittedly handsome. Badua tries to draw Osam into the conversation, but he will not take sides.

Sometime later, Anowa is packing her belongings. She and her mother argue about her marriage. Anowa insists she likes him, while Badua insults the family he comes from. Osam contradicts his wife, insisting that they have made good husbands. Anowa pledges not to return to Yebi for a long time, and that she will help her husband make something of his life. Badua points out Kofi Ako's every failure, and she and her daughter almost come to blows.

At the end of the phase, the Old Man and Old Woman return. The Old Woman believes children have become more disobedient, while the Old Man says that Badua should be happy that Anowa has married at all.



Phase 2

A few years later, Kofi and Anowa are on the highway to the coast, carrying skins to sell. They seek shelter from the rain in a thicket. Kofi Ako worries that the work might be too harsh for her. She insists that she is strong. Anowa suggests that he marry another wife who could help them out. Kofi Ako is upset by this suggestion. As the conversation continues, it becomes clear that the two have not yet had a child, a distressing fact for both of them. They do not know why. Anowa nods off to sleep, and Kofi Ako reveals that his wife is often mistaken for his sister because she works so hard with him. He believes she will settle down and act more like a proper wife.

The next day, the pair dry their skins in the sun. Kofi Ako still does not understand why his wife likes to work, and suggests they buy slaves to make their life easier. Anowa is horrified by the idea, and will not allow him to consider it. Kofi Ako does not understand his wife's position. He insists that they will do it because everyone else does it, among other reasons.

Back at the cottage of Anowa's parents, Badua and Osam discuss their daughter. Osam admits he always feared Anowa and her strangeness. He is worried that she will never come back, and that they will never know her children. Badua tells him that Anowa has not had children. They speculate on the reasons why. Badua wants to go and find her, but Osam tells her Anowa is not lost. Badua and Osam reveal that Anowa and Kofi Ako are rich because their trade has increased due to their growing number of slaves. While Osam also knows that Anowa is unhappy about their owning slaves, Badua thinks her problems with it are foolish.

Back on the highway some time later, a better dressed Kofi Ako leads several slaves carrying loads of skins. Anowa calls for him. She has no load to carry, yet is angry that she cannot keep up. He pays more attention to his slaves than her. Anowa tells him that she is unhappy not working and does not want to look after the house. She again suggests that Kofi Ako marry another wife, which upsets him. This leads to a discussion about their lack of children, which Anowa assumes is her fault. Her restlessness frightens him, and he wants to buy some female slaves to be her companions. Kofi Ako gets angry with her and wishes that she were different and had children. Anowa can only laugh.

The Old Man returns. He does not like the idea of slavery. The Old Woman enters. She believes Anowa is a witch, and has come from evil.

Phase 3

Several years later, Kofi Ako is a prosperous man with many slaves and a big house in Oguaa. Anowa enters, wearing old clothes without shoes. She looks old as she relates a disturbing incident from his childhood.



The scene changes slightly and two young slaves, a boy and a girl, talk about Anowa and Kofi Ako, whom they are to call Mother and Father. The girl says that others claim Anowa is a witch, but she is sympathetic to her mistress's growing unhappiness. Kofi Ako has told Anowa to leave, but will not tell her why. The girl envies the life Anowa could have, full of jewels and no work.

Anowa enters the room quietly and overhears part of their conversation. The girl says that Kofi Ako is afraid of women. The boy chases the girl out of the room. Wearing much gold, Kofi Ako enters and sits on his throne-like chair. He still wants Anowa to be like other women, while she does not like owning slaves and not working. Her habits of dressing in poor clothes and creeping around the house upset him. Because they are still without children, Anowa wants to find him another wife. Kofi Ako tells her that she has destroyed him and wants her to leave. Though Anowa presses, Kofi Ako will not tell her why. She refuses to leave because she has nowhere to go. She wants to live separately from him in the house as they have for years.

As Anowa speculates on the reasons, she has a revelation. She has the boy slave gather some elders. She asks them if they ever heard of a situation where a husband wants to divorce his wife without giving her a reason. None have, and Anowa sends them to consult with others on this question. Kofi Ako threatens to brand her a witch if she continues in this matter. He promises to give her half their wealth if she will leave. Kofi Ako calls the boy and tells him to help her pack.

Anowa will not allow him to send her away. She says she has not slept with him for years and that he has not shown interest in other women. Anowa accuses him of being like a woman, that is, impotent, in front of the boy and several other slaves. She decides to leave, as he exits. As Anowa pauses, Kofi Ako shoots himself offstage. At the end of the play, the Old Woman reports that Anowa killed herself by drowning as well. She blames Anowa for the deaths, while the Old Man believes Anowa was true to herself.



Prologue

Prologue Summary

Anowa is Ama Ata Aidoo's play about the conflicts which arise when a woman named Anowa rejects tribal conventions, marries the man of her own choice and is forced to live with the consequences due to her inherent pride.

Anowa opens in a village called Yebi on the Ghana coast of Africa in the year 1870. As the story begins, an Old Man and an Old Woman who are also identified together as Being-The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper speak to the audience. The old couple tells of the providence of the village brought by the creator and that everything is lived in moderation. The sun is hot but not so hot that it burns the crops; the mountain rises to balance out the flat lands.

There is one oddity in the village, though, and that is the girl named Anowa. Despite her parents' urging and the advice of people in the village, Anowa refuses to marry any of the young men who have asked her. The people in the village blame Anowa's mother, Badua, for the girl's odd behavior and think that Anowa was born to be a priestess, but Badua resolutely denies it.

Prologue Analysis

Aidoo sets up the premise for the story in the Prologue by having two of the tribe elders describe the situation with Anowa. The villagers like life to be in balance and do not like extremes in any way. Anowa represents a threat to this way of thinking through her strong will and independence. The only explanation that the villagers can provide is that Anowa is born to be a priestess, which is a high honor, but Badua is a devoted mother and devotee of mediocrity. She wants her daughter to marry and have children like all the other young girls.



Phase 1

Phase 1 Summary

In the first phase, the audience meets Anowa, who is dipping water to take home to her mother when she encounters a young man named Kofi Ako. The two young people are immediately smitten and cannot stop staring at each other. The scene is witnessed by another couple, who is startled by the intensity of Anowa and Kofi Ako's encounter. The woman drops her tray of vegetables, causing Anowa and Kofi Ako to break into laughter as the stage lights dim.

As the lights come up again, Badua and her husband, Osam, discuss Anowa's continuing refusal to marry any of the young men who have proposed over the years. Anowa is four years past puberty, and Badua is concerned for her daughter's future, while Osam washes his hands of the situation believing that finding husbands for daughters is the work of a girl's mother.

Osam reminds Badua that he wanted Anowa to become a priestess, and Badua becomes hysterical at the mention of such a fate. Osam reminds his wife that Anowa is not like other people, and especially not like other girls, and that being a priestess might be her destiny. Badua will not hear of it.

Suddenly, Anowa's voice is heard calling out to her mother and father, and she runs into the house declaring that she has found the man she will marry. Kofi Ako has asked her to be his wife, and she has agreed. This news does not make Badua happy because Kofi Ako has a reputation in the village for thinking himself to be too handsome and for being lazy as well.

Nothing that Badua says will dissuade Anowa from her desire to marry Kofi Ako, and the two women continue to fight about the issue despite Osam's attempts at intervention. Eventually, Anowa packs her belongings and leaves, vowing never again to return to the village of Yebi.

The Old Man and Old Woman return to the stage, and the Old Woman relays her sympathy for Badua's heartache due to Anowa's willfulness and direct disobedience. The Old Man counters that Badua has known from the beginning of Anowa's life that the girl was different from other children and destined to do greater things. The Old Man does not understand whether Badua and the other villagers are angry because Anowa has chosen Kofi Ako or because she has had the audacity to make her own choice.

Phase 1 Analysis

The author introduces the theme of tradition in this phase. Tradition is integral to survival in this African village society. Badua wills Anowa to marry an appropriate man soon, not only for Anowa's future but also because of the negative implications that



Anowa's willfulness reflects on Badua. Although Osam is not especially interested in Anowa's marriage, he does offer up the idea that Anowa apprentice to become a priestess, which would bring closure to the issue of Anowa's future as well as some mark of respectability to the family at last.

A huge communications gap exists between Anowa and Badua, who should know by this point that the surest way to make Anowa do something is to forbid it or tell Anowa that it the wrong decision. Each woman is so fixed on her own position that it is impossible to see the other's perspective, resulting in wounded pride, which will bring tragedy later in the story.

The characters of The Old Man and The Old Woman do not interact with any other characters in the play and ostensibly serve as the voice of the people in the village as a whole. On another level, they represent the differing sides of an intellectual and spiritual approach to life. It is interesting to hear their differing perspectives on the same situation, as the Old Woman is feisty and stubborn while the Old Man has an easier, more philosophical approach to the situation.

Phase 2

Phase 2 Summary

Two years pass, and Anowa and Kofi Ako are traveling the highway in their work of bringing animal skins to market. It is raining, and the couple's food and animal skins are wet. They sit to rest. Kofi Ako is concerned that Anowa is too tired and that the work is too hard for her small body, but Anowa protests that she does not mind the work. Anowa's real concern is that she has not had a child yet, and she offers up the idea that she should find another woman for Kofi Ako to marry so that he can become a father. Kofi Ako is angry at this suggestion.

As Anowa sleeps, Kofi Ako says to himself that he loves Anowa but wishes she were like other wives and stayed home to take care of the house and children. Many other people have thought Anowa is Kofi Ako's sister because she works as hard as a sister may be forced to do but as a wife is never forced to. Anowa's willfulness makes her an exceptional person, but secretly Kofi Ako wishes that Anowa will soon begin to act like a real wife should.

Picking up the same train of thought the next day, Kofi Ako suggests to Anowa that the couple buy a couple of slaves to help with the work and relieve Anowa of some of the burden. The idea of buying people is outrageous to Anowa, and she does not condone buying slaves so that they can profit from the labor of others.

Kofi Ako likes that Anowa is different from other women but is getting weary of her thoughts on how they should conduct their marriage and their business. Everyone in the area buys people to help with labor, and Kofi Ako has decided as the man to make the purchase for the sake of the business.

Back in Yebi, at the home of Badua and Osam, the couple discusses the fact that Anowa has not returned home in these two years and that it is not right to deny their future children of their heritage and of knowing their grandparents. Osam admits to being afraid of Anowa's strong personality and dissuades Badua from going out in search of their daughter. Word has reached the village that Anowa and Kofi Ako are prospering in their business due to the slaves they have purchased. It is also well known that Anowa does not like slavery, and Badua does not understand disliking something that makes a life easier.

The lights dim on this scenario and come up on another part of the stage, as several slaves carrying animal skins walk by. It is obvious that several more years have passed, as Anowa and Kofi Ako appear a little bit older, and Kofi Ako is dressed more prosperously while Anowa maintains her minimalist, barefooted style.

Kofi Ako has a very light bundle, and Anowa carries only a stick, a fact that irritates her, as she wants to be involved in the work again to feel useful. Anowa is not content to



simply tend to their home, and since they have no children yet, she wants and needs to work. Kofi Ako suggests that he will buy some women slaves so that Anowa will have some female companionship, but that is not what interests Anowa.

Anowa feels useless as a woman too, and once more she offers up the idea that Kofi Ako should marry one of the local women who can bear children for him. Kofi Ako is angered at this proposition and wishes that Anowa would just settle down and enjoy the comforts their wealth provides. Kofi Ako does not understand why Anowa cannot be satisfied with their home and the prospect of one day having a family. Anowa's only response is a long hysterical laugh.

The lights dim on the couple, and The Old Man and The Old Woman reappear on stage. The Old Man reports that Kofi Ako and Anowa are buying slaves in great quantities, and while their business thrives, there must be something unwholesome about the business of buying people.

The Old Woman characteristically blames Anowa for the troubles in the marriage and even calls Anowa a witch. She begins to wonder about Badua because there must be something wrong with a woman who can bear such a child. The Old Man does not necessarily agree with this but thinks that any man would want the counsel of his own wife. The Old Woman predicts that Kofi Ako will soon show Anowa that he is a man as well as a husband.

Phase 2 Analysis

Anowa continues to defy convention, and the behavior is beginning to have a negative impact on her marriage. Kofi Ako is providing a very comfortable life for his wife, which is normally the sign of a good husband, but Anowa values other things. The issue of slavery continues to divide them, and each is fixed on his or her side of the issue.

Historically, the slave trade business is at a high point in 1870 in this part of Africa, mainly run by white nationalists from other countries. It seems unfathomable that Kofi Ako and others like him can capitalize on this horrific trade of their fellow countrymen. The other characters do not seem fazed by this behavior either and even think Kofi Ako to be industrious and someone to be admired. Only Anowa sees the wrong in buying other men, and her ability to stand up for the courage of her convictions will ultimately bring the end of her marriage.



Phase 3

Phase 3 Summary

Several years have passed, and Kofi Ako is now the wealthiest man in the region, as reflected by the interior of a home resplendent in Victorian Age opulence. Several women rush onstage announcing Kofi Ako's imminent arrival, and slaves carry bundles of skins, fabrics and precious oils. Soon Kofi Ako arrives borne by slaves carrying his regal-looking chair. Kofi Ako looks as if he could be royalty, as evidenced by the luxurious fabrics of his clothing and the sumptuous jewels which adorn his body. Kofi Ako's procession continues on as Anowa arrives at the home to await her husband. Anowa looks forlorn in her shabby dress and bare feet in stark contrast to Kofi Ako's opulent dress.

Anowa begins a monologue relating an incident when she was twelve-years-old and questioned her grandmother about the arrival of white men who began to build big houses and take away people from the villages. Anowa's grandmother told Anowa to forget such events, but it is clear that the memory still haunts Anowa after all these years.

Suddenly, a boy and girl enter the room and discuss being slaves in the home of Kofi Ako and Anowa. The girl does not understand why Anowa seems so despondent because Anowa has the money to buy anything she could ever want. She thinks Anowa's being childless could be a huge source of her problem. Anowa enters the room and hears the children discussing her and saying that Kofi Ako is afraid of women. Upon seeing Anowa, the children run from the room, and Anowa putters aimlessly while she waits for her husband.

When Kofi Ako comes in, he asks Anowa why she persists in wearing rags around the house and why she refuses to behave like other people. Anowa reminds her husband that she wants to work and have purpose to her life. Kofi Ako's request that Anowa dress better insults Anowa, who is a wife to him in no other way. It has been many years since the couple has shared a bed, and they remain childless.

Anowa again suggests that Kofi Ako take another wife so that he may have children, but he is not interested in this proposition. Kofi Ako has tired of Anowa's listless behavior and resistance to the life he has offered her, so he asks her to leave the house. Anowa has not provided the only thing he has ever wanted from her, a child, and he clearly cannot provide what she needs. There is no need to continue the marriage.

Faced with this unexpected expulsion, Anowa begs to stay in another part of the house, but Kofi Ako will not allow it. Kofi Ako is prepared to provide Anowa with a small house back in Yebi, but she is adamant about never returning to her home village. Anowa realizes that Kofi Ako has become impotent after not being a full husband to her for years and that this is the reason she is being sent away. This revelation about his



personal life in front of several slaves sends Kofi Ako out of the house, and Anowa begins to address the furnishings and articles in the room, telling them that she will soon be gone. From offstage a gunshot is heard, and Anowa begins to laugh as the lights dim.

As the lights come back up, a funeral procession is seen headed by Badua and Osam. The Old Man and The Old Woman enter and explain that Kofi Ako has shot himself and that Anowa has committed suicide by drowning. The Old Woman blames Anowa for the tragedies because she drove Kofi Ako to the point of madness. The Old Man is not so quick to judge and contends that perhaps Anowa would have been a different person if the people in the village had been better to her.

Phase 3 Analysis

The author wants the reader to understand the importance of the choices people make. Anowa stands firm on her rights to make her own decisions even though it separates her from her parents and her home forever. She is forced to live with Kofi Ako long after their love has died. Kofi Ako chooses to buy slaves to fill his life with wealth when he cannot populate a home with children. This choice to buy slaves ironically adds damage to an already compromised marriage, and the results are ultimately devastating, ending in the double suicide.

Characteristically, Anowa's sense of pride is ultimately more lethal than her willfulness. Although she is unhappy with her life as Kofi Ako's wife, Anowa is devastated when he asks her to leave their home. Anowa has nowhere to go, and her pride will not let her return to Yebi because she had vowed never to do that again after leaving her parents' house in anger many years before.

In the end, The Old Man provides the philosophical viewpoints that are the true lessons of the story. Each person should be appreciated for his or her needs and aspirations, and compassion and consideration are critical, since the impact on another person is not always fully realized until it is too late.



Characters

Kofi Ako

Kofi Ako is Anowa's husband. Anowa's mother believes he is a fool and comes from a bad family, while Osam is content that his daughter is finally getting married. Anowa wants to help him make something of himself. Together, the couple builds a business trading skins. At first, Kofi Ako seems willing to accept his wife's help, though he wishes that she were more like other wives. To make this possible and improve their lives, Kofi Ako decides to buy slaves to help in the business. Anowa is vehemently opposed to owning slaves, but Kofi Ako rationalizes that because everyone else does it, it must be okay. Kofi Ako's strategy pays off in some ways. They do become very rich with a big house in Oguaa, but their marriage becomes strained. Anowa wants to work and is lost when forced to do nothing. The couple drifts apart while living under the same roof. A bigger issue between them is their lack of children, which Anowa initially blames on herself. When Kofi Ako asks her to leave without giving a reason in phase three, Anowa comes to question Kofi Ako's manhood. When she accuses him of being like a woman and implying that he is impotent in front of several slaves, Kofi Ako kills himself. Kofi Ako never really understood his wife, only what society expected a wife to be.

Anowa

As the title character, Anowa is the center of the play. She is a young Ghanaian woman who is regarded as unusual and wild by others in her village, including her parents. Before meeting Kofi Ako in phase one, Anowa has refused to marry anyone who asked her. Her parents, especially her mother Badua, worry about her and her future. Her desire to marry Kofi Ako, whom her mother regards as less-than-perfect husband material, is another unexpected twist in her life. Osam, and others in the play, believe that Anowa would have been better off being a priestess.

After marrying Kofi Ako, Anowa is happy to help him in his work and build their business. Their only problem is their lack of children, which Anowa blames on herself in the form of some unknown shortcoming. While Kofi Ako appreciates Anowa's work to some degree, he would like it better if she would act more like a traditional wife. Anowa has no desire to live a life of leisure. Over her protests, Kofi Ako buys slaves which builds their business further. As Kofi Ako's wealth grows, Anowa becomes more alienated from him. By the end of the play, Anowa is still barren and Kofi Ako wants her to leave. Anowa has a revelation that Kofi Ako is less than a man, and his impotency has made them childless. Like her husband, Anowa kills herself by the end of the play. Her free-spirited ways were never appreciated by anyone in *Anowa*.



Abena Badua

Badua is the mother of Anowa and wife of Osam. She is bewildered by her only surviving child and her attitudes. Like Kofi Ako, Badua wants Anowa to be normal. For Badua, this means to have married at an appropriate age. She rejects Osam's suggestion that Anowa would have been better off training to be a priestess. Such a woman would not have been a person. Badua is appalled when Anowa announces that she will marry Kofi Ako. This is the worst man Anowa could have married. In Badua's opinion, he is a fool. Badua and Anowa's disagreement comes to blows. When Anowa leaves, she vows not to return and says that her mother is driving her away. Despite their differences, in phase two, Badua expresses a desire to go and look for her. Badua does not understand her daughter, nor, in many ways, her husband. Badua is very set in her beliefs and has no desire to compromise them. Some villagers believe that Anowa is different because her mother spoiled her as a child.

Being-The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And- Pepper

This couple set up and comment on the action of the play. The Old Woman is very critical of Anowa and the choices she makes, while the Old Man is more sympathetic.

Boy

Boy is one of the slaves owned by Kofi Ako. He is very interested in Girl, and with her discusses Kofi Ako and Anowa in phase three. The Boy follows orders given to him, and does not gossip like Girl does.

Girl

Girl is a slave in the household of Kofi Ako and Anowa. She gossips to Boy about the couple's problems. She tells him how many believe there is something wrong with Anowa, but is also sympathetic to her mistress's lack of children. Girl can imagine what she would do in Anowa's position. She also believes that Kofi Ako is afraid of women.

Old Man

See Being-The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And- Pepper

Old Woman

See Being-The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And- Pepper



Osam

Osam is the father of Anowa and the husband of Badua. Though local custom dictates that he does not play much of a role in finding a husband for his daughter, Osam does not have a big problem with her marrying Kofi Ako. He admits that she is wild, but his wife has previously shot down his suggestion that Anowa be apprenticed to a priestess. Unlike Badua, Osam has some understanding of his daughter and her beliefs. Osam comprehends Anowa's problem with slavery. Yet he also acknowledges in phase two that he has always feared Anowa and thought her strange. Osam gets along with his wife, though he believes that she complains too much. They often disagree, but stay together.

Panyin-Na-Kakra

Panyin-Na-Kakra are a set of eight-year-old twin boys who are slaves in the house of Kofi Ako and Anowa. In phase three, the boys fan the gilded chair of Kofi Ako before his arrival. When Anowa sees them doing this task, she sends them away.



Themes

Custom and Tradition

Much of the plot of *Anowa* turns on the power of custom and tradition, and the consequences of not following such tenets of society. Anowa does not subscribe to most customs. She has refused to marry after reaching puberty, as is tradition in her area. Further, she has turned down every man who has asked for her hand for six years. Her attitude befuddles her anxious mother as well as her father to a lesser degree. Anowa has always been different—described variously as wild and strange—but her nontraditional attitudes alienate those around her.

This character trait becomes more problematic after she is finally married to Kofi Ako. She helps him start a skin-trading business and does much work for it. Traditionally women keep the home and do not do work. While Kofi Ako appreciates her support at first, he longs for a more custom-following wife. To that end, he expresses a desire to buy slaves for their business. Anowa is appalled by the prospect of owning other people, though Kofi Ako points out that it is a common practice. Despite her feelings on the matter, he does buy them and grows rich with a big house and many slaves. Anowa refuses to take on her traditional role. She will not wear rich clothes or use people as slaves. Her defiance of tradition and custom leads to an empty marriage and to her own suicide and that of Kofi Ako. While Anowa has remained true to her beliefs, her attitude has harmed those around her.

Pride

The driving force behind Anowa's actions is pride. Though her attitudes and behavior might seem wild, strange, or just bizarre to those around her, she gives *Anowa* a moral, self-respecting center. Anowa does not care much what people think. She follows her beliefs, not sharing the others characters' overriding concern with custom and tradition. She does not want to marry anyone who has asked for her hand, so she does not. When she meets someone she does want to marry, Kofi Ako, she does, despite her parents' protests. Work is important to Anowa. She wants her husband to succeed and personally contributes to his business. Kofi Ako does not understand why she wants to work so hard, but it gives Anowa pride in herself.

Anowa's pride is not just in herself, but extends to her treatment of others. When Kofi Ako proposes that they buy slaves to make their lives easier and improve their business, Anowa is dismayed. Her pride is tempered by respect for other human beings. She tells him in phase two, "Kofi, no man made a slave of his friend and came to much himself. It is wrong. It is evil." Kofi Ako ignores her insights and buys the slaves anyway. The richer they become the more unhappy Anowa becomes and the more their marriage is strained. Anowa is left with less to do, and while she retains her pride, she is increasingly alienated from the world. In some ways, her pride is her downfall. That she



sticks to her beliefs shows her strength, but it also dooms her in the end as both she and her husband take their own lives.

Choices and Consequences

Many of the choices made in *Anowa* have extreme consequences. Badua's attitude towards Anowa leads directly to Anowa's declaration that she will not return to Yebi. Anowa never returns. More implicitly, choices Kofi Ako and Anowa make seem to lead to their lack of children. At first, Anowa chooses to blame this situation on herself. She tries to remedy it by encouraging him on more than one occasion to marry another wife or two. Kofi Ako will not make this choice. Instead, slaves are his answer to this problem, which will solve it by creating wealth. Kofi Ako's choice to buy slaves has the consequence of straining his marriage to the point of breaking. Anowa ends up interpreting his choices and concluding that he is impotent, less than a man. Her public declaration leads to their double (though separate) suicide. *Anowa* shows the consequences of making hard choices and how they deeply affect lives like Anowa's.

Style

Setting

Anowa is a drama set in the 1870s in Ghana. The action of the play takes place in three distinct places. In phase one, *Anowa's* action is confined to the village of Yebi, primarily to the cottage of Badua and Osam. There is a brief return to the cottage in phase two, which mostly takes place on a highway near the coast several years after phase one. The final phase of *Anowa* is set a few years later in Oguaa at Kofi Ako's big house built with the riches of his trade. All of the settings of *Anowa* have a domestic edge, underscoring the importance of the marital and familial relationships.

Greek Chorus

The prologue as well as the beginning and the end of nearly every phase consists of commentary given by The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper, a sort of Greek Chorus. The Old Man and Old Woman who comprise The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper (a regional expression for society's opinion) set the scene for the play, giving a little background about the main characters and conflicts. As the story unfolds, the pair gives their opinions on the action. The Old Man is somewhat sympathetic to *Anowa* and her ways, while the Old Woman is highly critical. She believes *Anowa* is a witch, among other things. They are not particularly well-developed as characters, but more of a moral compass for the play. The pair shows contrasting views of society—between men and women, perhaps—towards *Anowa* and the decisions she and others make.

Monologue

Many characters give long monologues in *Anowa*. These monologues reveal motivations and develop characters. The Old Man opens the play with a monologue that describes the local geography, gods, and conflicts. He also introduces the names of Kofi and *Anowa* and hints at their basic characteristics. At the end of phase two, he comments on the situations that have developed, sympathizing with *Anowa's* anti-slavery stance. In the same section, the Old Woman has a monologue in which she expresses hope that Kofi Ako will put *Anowa* in her place. Earlier in phase two, after *Anowa* falls asleep and Kofi Ako puts her in a leafy bed, he expresses his conflicted feelings for *Anowa*. He does not understand her, commenting that many mistake *Anowa* for his sister instead of his wife. A sister would work as hard as *Anowa* does for her brother, but not a wife. He resolves to change the situation and make her more like a wife and he like a husband. *Anowa* has several monologues in phase three in which she relates an incident from her childhood and reflects on her childless state. Monologues add depth to the characterizations in *Anowa*.



Lighting/Transitions

Within each of the three phases that comprise *Anowa*, Aidoo has transitions between smaller scenes that make up the phase. These transitions consist of the lighting going down, then rising again. The transitions denote passage of time. In phase one, the time passage is rather short, though unspecified. After Anowa announces that she will marry Kofi Ako and there is tension within the family, there is a transition and the next scene begins. In it, Anowa is packing to leave with Kofi Ako.

The transitions in phase two denote longer periods of time and different places. The phase begins by the side of the highway, with a discussion about buying slaves. After the transition, the phase shifts back to the cottage of Badua and Osam. They talk about the new wealth of Kofi Ako and the number of slaves he owns. Of more concern to them is the barrenness of their daughter. After another lighting-driven transition, the phase returns to Kofi Ako, Anowa, and their new slaves. Again, some time has passed, though how much is not clear.

There are only two transitions in phase three, placed after the main action has ended. After the confrontation between Kofi Ako and Anowa, the lights go down, and there is a funeral for the couple. After the lights go down again, the Old Man and Woman return to give their final comments. These transitions make the action of the play more continuous and make its staging simpler.



Historical Context

A country in Western Africa, Ghana is made up of different ethnic groups. While almost forty percent are Akin peoples, other ethnic groups include Ewe, Ga-Adangme, Hausa, and Mole-Dagbani. Each has their own language, customs, and traditions, though some overlap. There are more than fifty native languages in the area, though about a quarter of the population speaks English, the official language of the government.

By 1970, Ghana was politically unstable, in part because of the diverse interests of these groups. The second half of the twentieth century was marked by many political problems. Until 1957, Ghana (then known as the Gold Coast) was a colony of Great Britain. The country obtained its independence partially because of the efforts of Kwame Nkrumah.

A native of the Gold Coast, Nkrumah received a university education in the United States. Beginning in 1947, he began fighting for his native country's independence. He promoted self-rule for the Gold Coast through the political party he helped form, the Convention People's Party (CPP). When independence was gained, Nkrumah was named prime minister (later president when Ghana became a republic) and CPP, the ruling party. Ghana became the first African country south of the Sahara desert to become independent in this manner.

As a leader, Nkrumah developed Ghana's health and educational systems to some degree. But he also used money to build expensive things like a stadium, instead of building up the country's economic infrastructure. Nkrumah was essentially a dictator by the time a combination of army and police officers staged a coup d'etat in early 1966. At the time, Nkrumah was in China, and he died in exile in 1972.

Those who staged the coup formed the National Liberation Council, which drew up a new constitution for Ghana. The Council was dissolved in October 1969 when new elections were held and democracy returned. The Progress Party was put into power, led by prime minister Kofi Busai. In 1970, Edward Akufo-Addo was elected president. The tenure of the Progress Party was short-lived because of continued political instability. The Progress Party did not include all of Ghana's ethnic groups. In 1972, another coup d'etat was staged by a military leader, an army officer named Igantius K. Acheampong.

Thus, by 1970, Ghana had suffered from long-term economic instability as it tried to become more modern. The country's biggest export (seventy percent of the total) crop was cacao—the basic ingredient in chocolate. Under the Progress Party regime, the price dropped significantly, greatly affecting Ghana's rural population. While Ghana was becoming increasingly urban, only about a third of the population lived in cities. Those who lived in rural areas were mostly employed as farmers in some capacity. A significant part of the population lived in poverty. Though wealth was no longer tied to lineage, and education and better jobs were available in cities, the lack of a strong economy affected everyone.



The position of women was also undergoing a slow process of change. Women still were seen primarily as child-bearers. It was important for women in both urban and rural areas to have children, though those in rural areas generally had more children than their urban counterparts. Women who were better educated and economically independent generally had fewer children. Education had become more common and available. A 1960 law required that everyone attend elementary school until the age of twelve. Still some parents were reluctant to give their daughters any education, believing it might hurt their prospects for marriage. Though many dropped out, there were those who came to teach on the university level, like Aidoo. In 1970, Ghana was most definitely a country in transition.

Literary Heritage

Like many African countries and cultures, each ethnic group in Ghana has a tradition of oral storytelling, including myths and legends about their religious figures and the beginning of the universe. Folktales, like one Aidoo based *Anowa* on, are particularly important ways of both entertaining and imparting values. One type of folk story is the "dilemma tale," which presents social and moral issues in a way which provokes discussion of the topics raised. In many ways, *Anowa* is a dramatized dilemma tale that Aidoo modified in a modern way.

While there is an emphasis on performance in the oral transmission of folktales, Ghana has a more modern theatrical tradition. Beginning in the late nineteenth centuries, commercial theater shows and troupes traveled throughout Ghana, coming into their own after World War II. Part of so-called "concert parties," three or more comedic actors in a troupe used stock characters to comment on social and familial problems while entertaining audiences. Primarily a non-urban phenomenon, these concert parties as a whole were rather like vaudeville in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in form, and, to some degree, content.



Critical Overview

In one of the few public performances of *Anowa* - a 1991 production in London, some twenty-one years after its publication - many critics praised the play, drawing parallels between it and contemporary society. Comparing *Anowa* to a work by William Shakespeare, Malcolm Rutherford of the *Financial Times* writes, "do not go to see *Anowa* looking for something exotic. What will strike you is not how different it is from developed western culture, but how similar." Louise Kingsley of *The Independent* makes an analogous statement. She argues that "though the intimate bickerings of husband and wife are common to males and females the world over, *Anowa's* decline is, to European eyes at least, as much a consequence of her uncompromising nature as of her moral stance."

One London critic echoes the sentiments of many scholars who have commented on *Anowa*. Anne Karpf in *The Guardian* writes, "Lyrical and eloquent . . . *Anowa* brings us a typical Aidoo heroine, strong and nonconformist, but ultimately felled by conservative forces." Many scholars compare *Anowa* with Aidoo's previous play, *The Dilemma of a Ghost*, as well as her novels, looking at how she has handled certain themes and her development of characters.

For example, Eldred Durosimi Jones in *African Literature Today* writes, "Like the earlier play, it [*Anowa*] preserves something of the representative nature of the folk-tale. It keeps in touch with social reality but does not become totally absorbed in realistic detail. The impact of particularities is dulled. . . . This eschewing of too much inconsequential realism gives the play its archetypal quality." Vincent O. Odamtten makes a similar point in his book *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo*. He believes Aidoo's second play is more honest in its confrontation of history. He argues, "*Anowa* enables us to better see how, as social beings, as both producers and products, we are implicated in the transmission and perpetuation of our past in our present and possible futures."

Several scholars have found the dream that *Anowa* describes near the beginning of phase three particularly important. Comparing Aidoo's writing with several other African women authors, Maggi Phillips in *Research in African Literatures* believes "*Anowa's* bleak tones present the breakdown of human relationships, a breakdown that may not be salvaged unless we listen, as the Old Man advises, to the cries and dreams of the embattled heart." In Maureen N. Eke's essay in *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*, "Diasporic Ruptures and (Re)membering History: Africa as Home and Exile in *Anowa* and *Dilemma of a Ghost*," she also analyzes the dream. Eke believes the dream accounts for *Anowa's* oddness and also that it raised questions she has needed to be answered her whole life. *Anowa* is on a quest for the truth. However, Eke writes, "Like her community, *Anowa* is encouraged to sleep the sleep of silence and forgetfulness" over slavery.

Other critical scholars look at *Anowa* in terms of motherhood. Naana Banyiwah Horne, in "The Politics of Mothering: Multiple Subjectivity and Gendered Discourse in Aidoo's Plays" (also included in *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*), focuses on the



Anowa's failed quest to become a mother. She then examines motives of each of the female characters in the play, focusing on Anowa, as well as matrilineal kinship in Ghanaian society. Horne blames Kofi Ako for the situation at the end of the play.

Horne writes, "through *Anowa*, Aidoo pays tribute to the industry and ingenuity of our foremothers. In fact, the story of *Anowa*, symbolically, mirrors patriarchy's maneuvers to erode women's effective participation in the global economy. . . . Even though *Anowa* is the brains behind the business, Kofi Ako eventually runs her out, vetoing her participation so that he can freely exploit slave labor to build an economic empire."

In his *The Art of Ama Ata Aidoo*, Odamtten makes a similar point. He argues, "What comes through in Aidoo's play is that the issues of gender oppression are materially based, that the dominant social relations that arise and are part of the economic production relations of a given society, at a particular historical moment, produce specific modes of behavior or cultural practices. These practices may not be the result of deliberate or malicious intent by individuals in that society. But neither is it one's destiny to accept cultural practices that one finds abhorrent or counterproductive."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2



Critical Essay #1

In this essay, Petrusso analyzes how Aidoo depicts male-female relationships of different generations in Anowa.

Many critics have commented on the fact that though *Anowa* is set in what later became Ghana in the 1870s, some of the issues and ideas Aidoo has woven into the story are thoroughly modern. Anowa's individuality and complex, often problematic relationship with both her parents and husband are often mentioned. Another is the depiction of several generations and how they handle conflict in different ways. The play is built around male-female relationships, implicitly contrasting different generations.

In *Anowa* there are three main couplings: The Old Man and Old Woman (also known as Being- The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper), the elder generation; Badua and Osam, the parental generation; and Anowa and Kofi Ako, the younger generation. This essay discusses these relationships and how they form the core of the play.

The oldest couple in *Anowa* are the Old Man and the Old Woman. They are not part of the main action of the play, but more of a chorus commenting on the choices and attitudes displayed by the "real" characters. The name "Being-The-Mouth-That-Eats-Salt-And-Pepper" is a local euphemism for a gossip, further underlining how they represent society's opinion. While it is unclear from the play whether the Old Man and Old Woman are married, they represent their genders in their age group. Aidoo presents them as a couple, implying they function as a unit.

The Old Man and Old Woman are supposed to live in the village of Yebi, where Anowa lives with her parents until the end of phase one. Thus, it is a specific segment of a society close to Anowa that is providing what should be knowledgeable commentary. From the beginning, Aidoo sets up a contrast with the pair. In the stage descriptions at the beginning of the prologue, Aidoo writes, "She is never still and very often speaks with agitation, waving her stick. . . . He is serene and everything about him is more orderly." The Old Man and Old Woman rarely agree.

The Old Man is more sympathetic to Anowa and her troubles than the Old Woman from the first. The Old Woman disagrees with his every opinion. At the end of phase two, for example, the Old Man shares Anowa's horror at Kofi Ako's acquisition of slaves. He states, "there must be something unwholesome about making slaves of other men, something that is against the natural state of man and the purity of his worship of the gods." The Old Woman is only concerned that Anowa has not had any children and will not act as a proper wife to Kofi Ako. Her only indirect comment on the slavery matter is "she would rather be poor than prospering."

At the end of *Anowa*, the Old Woman blames Anowa for Kofi Ako's demise. She shows no compassion towards Anowa or her situation. The Old Man does. He gets the final lines of the play, which include one insightful statement: "She [Anowa] was true to herself." The Old Man seems to understand Anowa's motivations better than the Old



Woman. She is more concerned with Anowa's every transgression. The Old Woman is quick to blame Anowa's mother, Badua, for bringing up her daughter in an incorrect manner. The Old Man examines how the action reflects changes in social trends, while the Old Woman is only concerned with judging the wrongs of individuals, with no thought to the big picture.

Badua and Osam, Anowa's parents, share many characteristics with the Old Man and Old Woman. Badua is as quick to judge as the Old Woman, while her husband is depicted as more thoughtful, like the Old Man. Badua and Osam are definitely a longtime married couple, as their more personal troubles and manner of fighting indicate. Underneath the disagreements, however, is a partnered core. Both Osam and Badua stay within their defined roles as man and woman, husband and wife.

In phase one, where Osam and Badua are the primary characters, Osam tries to offer solutions to their problem with Anowa, but Badua does not want to hear them. Osam has wanted to apprentice their daughter to a priestess, but Badua wants her to be married in the socially accepted fashion and "normal." Indeed most of Badua's mental energy is spent on wanting her daughter to be a different kind of person, one that accepts her societal role and lives the kind of life her mother wants her to live.

On page twelve in phase one, for example, Badua lists all she wants for her daughter, some of which she does not even have for herself. Osam is more realistic. He tells Badua, "My wife, people with better vision than yours or mine have seen that Anowa is not like you or me." Later in the phase, Badua cannot accept that Anowa, against all social norms, has found her own husband and will live a different kind of life. Osam stays out of the manner, accepting that his daughter has made a decision. He only becomes critical when the bickering between Badua and Anowa turns nasty, and Anowa is mean to her mother's face.

After Anowa leaves with Kofi Ako, there is a scene in phase two which shows Osam and Badua's reactions to their married daughter's choices. Badua still only thinks in terms of what she wants Anowa to be and the socially acceptable role in her village. For a moment, Badua expresses a desire to look for her, while Osam realizes that Anowa probably does not want to be found. Later in the scene, Osam, like the Old Man, expresses understanding about Anowa's opinions on slavery. Badua can only see that her daughter, though barren, is living a wealthy life that many women would envy. Badua cannot see beyond her own life and values. Osam is not particularly worldly either, but he is more understanding of opinions that are different than his own. This duality has much in common with the Old Man and Old Woman.

The bulk of *Anowa* concerns the relationship between Anowa and Kofi Ako. In many ways, it is the exact opposite of the previous couples discussed. While Anowa is outspoken in her opinions, as Badua and the Old Woman are, she has a certain strength and independence that they do not. Anowa does not have regard for social norms, as she shows over and over again. She did not marry when most girls in her culture did, and turned down many suitors. Anowa chose to marry Kofi Ako, over her mother's protests. Anowa also enjoys working and helping her husband with his trade in



direct fashion. Indeed one of her goals upon marrying him was to make him a success. Early in phase two, Anowa is carrying skins like her husband.

Kofi Ako, on the other hand, shares more of the values of Badua and the Old Woman. While these older women do not exactly respect him, at least in the first part of *Anowa*, they change their opinions when he becomes very rich from his trade. When Kofi Ako marries Anowa, he knows she is different from other women, and appreciates this to some degree. However, as the play goes, he wants her to become a more socially acceptable wife who keeps house and does not do the kind of hard labor Anowa favors. As Kofi Ako becomes more wealthy, his tolerance for Anowa's "strange" ways lessens.

One major difference between Kofi Ako and Anowa as a couple and Anowa's parents is how they argue and treat each other. The bulk of Badua and Osam's problems are discussed between them. While they disagree, they seem basically supportive of the other. No one leaves or throws the other out. Kofi Ako and Anowa never compromise on their beliefs. Kofi Ako never accepts that his wife is different and will remain that way. Anowa never accepts what Kofi Ako wants for her. The biggest argument between them is over slaves. Anowa is appalled that Kofi Ako wants to build their wealth by buying men and women. She never accepts this, even when they grow wealthy on slave labor. Anowa wants to work herself. Kofi Ako never understands her problem with slavery. When she first learns of his plan and vehemently protests, Kofi Ako replies, "Everyone does it . . . does not everyone do it? And things would be easier for us."

Because the couple's communication is so poor and they are so unhappy with each other by phase three, Kofi Ako wants Anowa to leave, though he will not give her a specific reason. This is the point of contention for Anowa. By this time, the couple is wealthy with a big house in Oguaa. While Kofi Ako dresses well, Anowa wears what she has worn from the beginning of the play. The couple has never been able to produce a child, a fact that Anowa blames on herself until the end of the play. When Kofi Ako and Anowa have their final argument over the reason why Kofi wants her to leave, it is bitter and drawn out. The couple has lived in separate parts of the house and slept in separate beds for some time. Their verbal tug of war is mean and bitter. It ends with Anowa accusing Kofi Ako of being less than a man. She blames him for their lack of children because he must be impotent, with some slaves present. He kills himself moments later, though Anowa finally agrees to leave. She never finds out his reason and kills herself by drowning later on.

Aidoo portrays male-female relationships in a complex, thought-provoking manner. Each of these three couples has a different kind of relationship, in part because of their different ages, experiences, and life expectations. The only true failure among the three, Kofi Ako and Anowa's relationship falters when their duality grows unbalanced. Neither will let go of their fundamental beliefs in any manner, constructive or otherwise. Aidoo could also be interpreted as condemning the inverted roles Kofi Ako and Anowa take versus the Old Man and Old Woman and Osam and Badua. Anowa remains true to herself but pays a harsh price. The many possible interpretations of *Anowa* make it a very interesting play.

Source: Annette Petrusso, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.



Critical Essay #2

Brent has a Ph.D. in American culture with a specialization in film studies from the University of Michigan. She is a freelance writer and teaches courses in the history of American cinema. In the following essay, Brent discusses folk proverbs in Aidoo's play Anowa .

Aidoo's play *Anowa* concerns a young woman, Anowa, who marries a young man, Kofi Ako, against her parents' wishes. The young couple leave their home village of Yebi in order to strike out on their own, making their own way in the world. At first, Anowa works along with her husband, but he soon purchases slaves to do their work for them, and the couple prospers. From the beginning, Anowa is against the purchase of slaves, but Kofi acts against her wishes. As the years go on, their material wealth increases with the increasing number of slaves Kofi buys, but their marriage deteriorates. Throughout the play, scenes between Anowa and her husband are interspersed with conversations between Badua and Osam, Anowa's parents, and an Old Woman and Old Man. In much of the dialogue, characters refer to traditional proverbs and folk sayings in order to argue their point or convince another person of their opinion. Although these proverbs and sayings are probably not familiar to the non-African reader, one may figure out their meaning by the context in which they are used. In the following essay, I quote several of the proverbs uttered by these characters, and discuss their meaning in the context of the play.

The sapling breaks with the bending that will not grow straight.

This proverb is spoken by the Old Woman about Anowa's refusal to obey her parents' wishes to marry. In this context, it means that the child ("sapling") who deviates ("bends") from her parents' rules will not grow to be an upstanding ("straight") adult.

A prophet with a locked mouth is neither a prophet nor a man.

This statement is made by Osam, Anowa's father, to Badua, Anowa's mother. Osam is arguing that their daughter was meant to be a priestess (or "prophet"), and that not allowing her to express her spiritual calling ("with a locked mouth") will prevent her from becoming a priestess, but will not make it possible for her to lead a normal life as a woman (to be "a man").

The yam that will burn, shall burn, boiled or roasted.

Osam also evokes this proverb in arguing with his wife that Anowa is meant to be a priestess ("a yam that will burn"), and so no matter what she is made to do by her parents (be "boiled or roasted"), she will still fulfill her destiny in the end. Another interpretation may be that a child who is destined to turn out bad ("burn") will do so no matter how her parents rear ("cook") her.



Marriage is like a piece of cloth. . . . And like cloth, its beauty passes with wear and tear.

Anowa's mother, Badua, says this to Anowa in attempting to convince her not to marry Kofi. Badua feels that Anowa is taken in by Kofi's physical beauty, and is trying to explain to her that a marriage based on physical beauty, or attraction, will not last in the long run.

Some of us feel that the best way to sharpen a knife is not to whet one side of it only.

This is spoken by the Old Man to the Old Woman. He is arguing that she must consider both "sides" of the situation between Anowa and her parents in order to make a clear judgment ("sharpen a knife") on it.

Is she the best potter who knows her clay and how it breathes?

The Old Man continues to point out that, just because a man and woman have given birth to a child, that does not necessarily mean that they know what is best for her. He is suggesting that perhaps Anowa knows herself ("her clay") and what she needs from life ("how it breathes") better than her parents do.

Some people babble as though they borrowed their grey hairs and did not grow them on their own heads.

The Old Woman says this to the Old Man, implying that what he is saying is without wisdom, and so he sounds as if he were really a young man (without grey hair) who has only put on the guise of an old man ("borrowed their grey hairs"), rather than gaining the true wisdom which comes with age.

The infant which tries its milk teeth on every bone and stone, grows up with nothing to eat dried meat with.

The Old Woman says this to the Old Man, in arguing that Anowa should be made to behave her parents' wishes, as she is too young to make wise decisions. The saying means that a baby who is teething and tries to chew the most difficult items ("tries its milk teeth on every bone and stone") will ruin its teeth by the time it is an adult ("with nothing to eat dried meat with"). In other words, allowing a young girl, such as Anowa, to make her own □ unwise □ decisions about her life will only leave her without wisdom or resources as an adult.

The man who hates you does not care if you wait in the sun for your clothes to dry before you can go and join the dance.

Kofi makes this statement to Anowa, as, early in their marriage, they are discussing their attempt to support themselves on their own, without the help of their families, and



away from their home village. The expression means that a person who does not care about you ("hates you") will take no interest in your personal problems, large or small. Kofi is suggesting to Anowa that they are truly on their own in the world, and cannot expect sympathy or aid from the families and community whom they left on a negative note.

A shrine has to be worshipped however small its size.
And a kind god angered is a thousand times more evil
than a mean god unknown.

Anowa says this to Kofi as they are arguing about the value of using "medicines and taboos" to solve their problems. Kofi thinks that there is no harm in such remedies, but Anowa feels that one cannot resort to such measures lightly. Her point is that using "medicines and taboos" requires a commitment on their part to the cure; in other words, they must "worship" the "shrine" of these "medicines and taboos," even if they only wish to use them in a "small" way. Furthermore, Anowa argues that the positive benefits of these cures ("a kind god") can be overshadowed by the possible negative consequences ("a kind god angered is a thousand times more evil. . .").

A crab never fathers a bird.

Badua says this to Osam during one of their arguments about Anowa. Osam is trying to point out to Badua that Anowa has always been an unusual child, and that the fact that she left her home and family with her husband should come as no surprise. In explaining that Anowa has always been different, Osam mentions that others in their village "fear her," and that he himself "has always feared her." Badua retorts that "a crab never fathers a bird," meaning that, if Anowa is different and to be feared, and she is Osam's daughter, then Osam, too, must be different and feared by others. In other words, the child is a reflection on the parent, since the child can only be so different from her parents (one species cannot "father" another). Badua is trying to argue that Anowa is really not so strange and different from anyone else, just as Osam is not strange or different.

One stops wearing a hat only when the head has
fallen off.Or:Our elders said that one never stops wearing hats on a
head which still stands on its shoulders.

Anowa makes these statements at two different points in arguing with Kofi that she wishes to continue working, even though they have slaves to do their work for them. Anowa's point is that she was meant to work, and that doing work (like "wearing a hat") will continue to suit her until the day she dies ("only when the head has fallen off").

Aidoo's play consists primarily of pairs of couples—Badua and Osam, Anowa and Kofi, the Old Woman and the Old Man—arguing with one another over how Anowa has chosen to conduct her life. During the course of these arguments, each character refers to traditional sayings and proverbs in order to support her or his side of the argument. Part of Aidoo's project in writing this play was to record in writing, and reproduce on



stage, elements from the oral tradition of African culture. These traditional proverbs are demonstrated to contain many universal wisdoms. At the same time, however, Aidoo plants a seed of doubt in the reader's mind as to the value of relying solely on traditional wisdom in making life decisions. At one point during an argument between Anowa and Kofi, Kofi suggests that such traditional wisdom is not always the best; he states that "proverbs do not always describe the truth of reality." This statement is important to the broader implications of the play, and the role of traditional proverbs in the dialogue. A central theme is that of tradition, and breaking with tradition. Anowa has broken with her family tradition in marrying a man of whom her mother does not approve, Kofi, and leaving their village with him, never to return. Just as tradition does not necessarily account for "the truth of reality" in Anowa's life, so, this line suggests, traditional wisdom, as expressed in these proverbs, is not always the best wisdom.

Source: Liz Brent, in an essay for *Literature of Developing Nations for Students*, Gale, 2000.

Adaptations

Anowa was produced for radio by BBC Radio 3 in September, 1995.



Topics for Further Study

Research folk stories in Ghana and/or West Africa, particularly those on "disobedient daughters." Compare them with *Anowa*, discussing how they influenced Aidoo's dramatic choices.

Compare and contrast *Anowa* with William Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (performed c. 1606; published c. 1623). Focus on the differences and similarities between *Anowa* in phase three and *Lady Macbeth*.

Discuss *Anowa* in terms of feminism. Make an argument about whether the play is feminist.

Research the history of slavery in nineteenth-century Ghana. Is the depiction of slavery accurate in *Anowa*? How does it underscore the play's themes?



Compare and Contrast

1870s: A significant part of what is now Ghana is ruled as a colony by Great Britain, with minimal input from local people. There are attacks to keep trade routes open in the interior of the future country.

1970: Ghana is politically unstable, just three years after a coup replaced President Nkrumah.

Today: Ghana is more politically stable under the long-term leadership of Jerry Rawlings. While there are accusations of governmental corruption, Rawlings remains above the fray.

1870s: The coastal areas of what would become Ghana are the most developed because they are the focus of trade. Urban areas are just developing.

1970: About twenty-eight percent of the country lives in an urban environment, with most urban areas found along the coast.

Today: More than a third of Ghanaians live in an urban environment.

1870s: Women are primarily childbearers, though they also work as farmers and sell fish and produce.

1970: As educational opportunities increase for women, the number of occupational opportunities also increase, though primarily in urban areas. Many in rural areas still work as farmers and sellers of farm-related products.

Today: More women continue to become educated and hold jobs in urban areas, which continue to attract newcomers looking for better economic opportunities.

1870s: Though missionaries convert some to Christianity, most Ghanaians follow local traditional religious beliefs.

1970: More than half the population follows a Christian faith.

Today: About 64.1 percent of Ghanaians are Christian, while 17.6 percent continue to follow traditional beliefs.

What Do I Read Next?

Efuru, a work by Flora Nwapa published in 1966, also focuses on choices an African woman makes concerning marriage and children and the societal pressures placed on her.

Changes is a novel by Aidoo published in 1991. Like *Anowa*, *Changes* focuses on the societal pressure placed on a woman over marriage, though in a modern setting.

The Joys of Motherhood, a work by Buchi Emercheta published in 1980, also focuses on values in African life and how they directly affect women.

The Dilemma of a Ghost, a play by Aidoo first performed in 1964, focuses on how an African-American woman handles familial pressure placed on her when she comes to Ghana with her husband, a native Ghanaian.

Boesman and Lena, a play by South African playwright Athol Fugard first performed in 1969, also focuses on the tense relationship between a couple.

Further Study

Hemming, Sarah, "Word of Mouth," in *The Independent*, April 3, 1991, p. 14.

This article, in part an interview with Aidoo, compares *Anowa* with Aidoo's 1991 novel *Changes*.

McGregor, Maxine, "Ama Ata Aidoo," in *African Writers Talking: A Collection of Radio Interviews*, Cosmo Pieterse and Dennis Duerden, editors, Africana Publishing Corp., 1972, pp. 18-27.

In this interview, Aidoo discusses her plays, theater in Ghana, and other writing-related issues.

Needham, Anuradha Dingwaney, "An Interview with Ama Ata Aidoo," in *The Massachusetts Review*, Spring, 1995.

In this interview, Aidoo discusses feminism, nationalism, and her writing.

Uzoamaka, Ada, and Wilentz Azodo, Gay, eds., *Emerging Perspectives on Ama Ata Aidoo*, African World Press, 1999.

This collection of critical essays covers the whole of Aidoo's canon, including several focusing on *Anowa*.



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Project Editor

David Galens

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Data Capture

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Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design

Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing

Stacy Melson

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For more information, contact

The Gale Group, Inc

27500 Drake Rd.

Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Literature of Developing Nations for Students (LDNfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, LDNfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and



undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on "classic" novels frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of LDNfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of LDNfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members "educational professionals" helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in LDNfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by LDNfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

LDNfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Literature of Developing Nations for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the LDNfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Literature of Developing Nations for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Literature of Developing Nations for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from LDNfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Literature of Developing Nations for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Literature of Developing Nations for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Literature of Developing Nations for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535