

# **Anthills of the Savannah Study Guide**

## **Anthills of the Savannah by Chinua Achebe**

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## Plot Summary

*Anthills of the Savannah* is a novel nominee for the 1987 Booker McConnell Prize by well-known author Chinua Achebe. In this novel, Chris Oriko is the Commissioner of Information as a cabinet member in Africa, which is a role appointed to him by the President of the country, who is also a childhood friend of Chris's. Chris finds himself struggling with Ikem, who is also a childhood friend, and the person Chris has appointed as the editor of the area's newspaper, the *Gazette*. In addition to Chris's struggle with Ikem on a professional level, there also seems to be a personal conflict pertaining to Ikem's friendship with Chris's girlfriend, Beatrice.

Two years prior to the novel beginning, there was a coup in Africa that put the current President, His Excellency into power. At the time and throughout the novel, it appears his Excellency is running the country as a democratic dictatorship. This form of government, however, is challenged throughout the novel and results in a conflict between the politicians, the friends and the country as a whole.

Once Chris realizes the political unrest in the country is about to cause a problem and he sees the signs of trouble on the horizon, he jumps into action to undercut His Excellency and remove him from power, but in an indirect way. Chris uses the power of the written word and news stories, rather than attacking and murdering the President to get him out of office so things can change for the better in the country.

Ultimately, the coup occurs, but not without the loss of life of several of the characters in the novel in the process.



# Chapters 1-2

## Summary

Chapter 1: Chapter One opens as if it is in the middle of some sort of a court hearing, however it never specifically states what the court hearing or meeting is about. By the end of trial, when His Excellency is about to leave the meeting, the rumble of an uproar can be heard that the people in the room think is an approaching storm, but instead is a crowd of people that has gathered outside of the Presidential Palace.

Chapter 2: The crowd of people surrounding the Presidential Palace are the residents of Abazon, who have come to show their loyalty to the President, but also to discuss a drought issue in their village. The President tells Professor Okong if he agrees to see the people from Abazon, then that action will open the floor for everyone coming from anywhere around the country to discuss their problems and issues with him. Instead, he delegates the professor to tell them he is wrapped up on an important call, but to accept their petition and to take a journalist and a photographer with him. It appears as if all of the committee members and appointed cabinet members are intimidated by the President.

The President questions the Attorney General as to whether or not the Commissioner of Information, Christopher Oriko, is or is not on the President's side.

## Analysis

The first chapter foreshadows a political situation and how it may unfold as the story progresses. This first chapter introduces some of the characters involved in the novel, although their roles are not fully defined yet. There is also some foreshadowing of a political uprising in what appears to be some part of Africa.

Politically, the President is concerned about the outward appearance of his leadership. This is why he delegates duties to people like Professor Okong, but insists the actions are publicly documented with a journalist and photographer—proving the President and his committee support the people.

Ironically, the country is being run by civilians. Typically, a country is run by people with some military background. In this case, when the President came into power, he rid the political party of anyone in the military and replaced them all with civilians—most having an idea how to run a country. It appears as if the President feels there is some dissent among the ranks of the President's committee members and commissioners. There is also a biblical reference to Christopher Oriko feeling about the President the way Jesus was regarded by his own people, since Christopher and the President grew up together and went to the same college.



## Vocabulary

capitulation, sanguine, inertia, disenchantment, propitious, assuaged, delegation, gauge, audacity, calibre



# Chapters 3-4

## Summary

Chapter 3: Christopher calls the editor, Ike, of the newspaper, the Gazette, to tell him Christopher will be sending him a story shortly that must be printed in the newspaper.

Chapter 4: Ikem describes the gathering of a crowd to witness the killing of four citizens as punishment for their crimes. Ikem writes an editorial voicing his strong disapproval of public executions, which His Excellency then turns into a law that bans public executions. Ikem also introduces a schoolmate by the name of Sam.

## Analysis

Ikem talks about the risky driving conditions in Africa. He says it is the car behind you rather than in front of you to which you have to pay attention. This foreshadows an ambush of some sort in a latter part of the novel that involves vehicles. Ikem writes a hymn that explains what has happened to the country under different leaders. The hymn is a testament to the survival of the fittest, such as how the village of Ose was destroyed by fellow compatriots who renamed the village Abazon.

The irony of the criminals who are killed is that the politicians and those in charge of killing the criminals are also the ones responsible for stealing from the people of Africa to begin with. It represents a vicious circle, where those in power take from the poor, the poor steal to make ends meet and then the poor are punished for their crimes, when it is those in power that have really committed the crime.

Ikem predicts that the President the Africans love so much now will turn into a dictator they will all hate. In addition, Ikem can see this coming even before those closest to the President do. Ikem says it is in the small things, such as the President saying one day that he will visit the village of Abazon, and then when that day comes, he changes his mind and doesn't go. This foreshadows the downfall of the President according to the people of his country. The introduction of Sam occurs, the name of His Excellency by which his former schoolmates know him, who goes into hiding to prepare for his position as Head of State implying the group always knew Sam was destined to be in charge.

## Vocabulary

temerity, reverie, gesticulating, obliquely, vengeance, cathartic, officialese, begat, futility, copiously, promulgate



# Chapters 5-6

## Summary

Chapter 5: Ikem, Elewa, Beatrice, Chris, Dick and Mad Medico are hanging out drinking and talking about their old times in college. They even talk about Sam's personality and demeanor, prior to his becoming president of the country.

Chapter 6: Beatrice receives a phone call from His Excellency to invite her to a small dinner party he is having on Saturday night. When the driver comes to pick up Beatrice, she finds out she won't be dining at the Palace, but instead at the country home of the president, which is a 40-mile drive each way.

## Analysis

The characters start to reveal how each of them came into their current position. This provides insight as to who each of the characters was in earlier days, how their lives intertwine and how each of them has changed and evolved since then, such as Sam turning into the President of Africa. A conversation between Chris and his girlfriend, Beatrice, reveals Sam is Chris's boss and Chris is Ikem's boss, which is ironic since when they were boys and went to school together, they were all on the same level.

When Beatrice arrives at the dinner party, she realizes she is not there to mend the fractured friendship between Chris and His Excellency. Ironically, she finds herself in a room full of various dinner guests—one being an American journalist that insists on scheduling a future interview with Beatrice to get her take as a woman on what's going on in Africa. This is when Beatrice realizes she has been invited deliberately to be used to serve the political needs of the President.

## Vocabulary

gaiety, inscribed, obligingly, abominable, lugubrious, deterioration, wan, extricate, vignettes, feeble



# Chapters 7-8

## Summary

Chapter 7: Beatrice says it took her months to be able to sit down and write the historic events taking place in Africa, which is apparently what brought her to the country initially. Beatrice remembers back to 1940 when she first learned about schools in West Africa from a headmaster of the school who was visiting her father in England. Beatrice also remembers her father was abusive to her and her sisters, and she believes behind closed doors was also abusive to their mother. She also recalls her three sisters had a tendency to shut her out, so Beatrice was somewhat of a loner.

Beatrice goes on to mention now as an adult, she is surrounded by high society, but she had met them all before they became high society. For example, Chris, her boyfriend, was only a journalist when they met and not the Commissioner of Information, as he is now. Beatrice explains she knew Ikem first from college, and even almost had a romance with him, but they ended up being more like brother and sister. It is through Ikem that Beatrice meets Chris.

Chapter 8: The chapter begins with a story of Idemili, who is the daughter of the Almighty. Idemili descends to the Earth in a Pillar of Water and creates a lake. The chapter then returns to Beatrice being escorted out of His Excellency's party and her drive home from the country home where the party was. Chris calls at 11 the next morning to tell Beatrice he is coming over and the first thing he asks about is the party. The two have an argument because Beatrice accuses Chris of waiting so late in the day to call her because he didn't want to find out Beatrice had ended up spending the night with his Boss, His Excellency, Sam.

## Analysis

The role of man versus woman seems to play a big role in African life and in history in general. Ikem confesses it was the thoughts of Beatrice that inspired him to write various pieces on feminism and look at the feminist view from a different standpoint. While Beatrice represents a bridge for Ikem to feminism and women's rights, Ikem is the bridge for Beatrice to her relationship with Chris. Ikem also draws a line between the suppression of women with the suppression of so many other groups in the world. Pointedly, Ikem says each of the suppressed groups feels the weight of oppression, but also has its own problems to deal with.

The tale of Idemili is about the necessity for humans to have water. At the end of the story of Idemili, the author points out Beatrice is seen as two different people, depending on who is assessing her. Beatrice's father sees her as a soldier-girl he has sent out into the world. Chris sees Beatrice as a helpless damsel in distress he must protect and rescue.





Beatrice leading Chris to the bedroom after their fight and his reference to her as a priestess is a symbol of the control women truly have over men, even if it is only behind closed doors and not out in the open. Beatrice also begs Chris to make up with Ikem because she believes the political party is about to do something to harm Ikem. Beatrice is foreshadowing the silence of the journalist, which may end in his death.

## Vocabulary

propulsion, naively, calamity, premeditation, snivelling, circuitous, epaulette, assuaged, tedium, misalliance



# Chapters 9-10

## Summary

Chapter 9: Ikem sends a reporter to the Presidential Palace as Chris has instructed, to cover the story. When Ikem arrives, he does not find the crowd, but only six of the elders of the village, sitting in the courtyard of the Harmony Hotel. Ikem is honored by the elders as a titled man and given a special seat at their table. The elder then launches into a speech about each person's place in this world.

Chapter 10: As Ikem and his girlfriend Elewa are leaving to visit Mad Medico, they are visited by the cab driver that drove Elewa home about a week earlier and another man. The two men come to honor to Ikem as the editor of the Gazette.

## Analysis

Ikem is a symbol of the voice of the people that live in Bassa. The older man says the words Ikem writes are his way of fighting for the poor and this is more important than Ikem attending special events around the village. The man goes on to point out each person has a role to fill in this world and it is for a reason. He says each of the parts leading up to an event, the event itself and after facts are all important, but points out the story of the event is the most important aspect because the story lives on.

Ironically, it is the storyteller who is punished for the story. As Beatrice foreshadowed, Ikem begins being harassed by a police officer as he leaves the meeting with the elders. The police officer takes away Ikem's papers and gives him a ticket in their place. The police officers tell Ikem he'll be able to retrieve his documents when he shows up for court on Monday. In another twist of irony, Ikem uses his clout, his title as the editor of the newspaper to see the Superintendent of Police on Monday morning, retrieve his documents and get the police off his back—which is most unlike Ikem.

Ikem finds out the man accompanying the taxi cab driver is the head of taxicab union. As Ikem predicted earlier in the novel, it is the car behind you have to watch out for, and when Ikem had a road rage incident with a taxi on the road earlier in the novel, he finds out it was with the driver that took Elewa home. Ikem also finds out the head of the union was driving a taxicab that followed Ikem into the Presidential Palace, which is how the two men realized who Ikem was and the title he holds.

## Vocabulary

apprehension, blundering, vigorous, audacity, corralled, embroiled, adroitly, paradox, fulsome



# Chapters 11-12

## Summary

Chapter 11: After visiting Mad Medico and dropping Elewa off at her apartment, Ikem heads home to contemplate the visit of the taxi drivers and the meaning of it. He concludes it is his part to continue to speak for the oppressed, but not by becoming one of them, but rather by becoming their voice.

His Excellency calls Chris to his office to issue an official letter to suspend Ikem as editor of the Gazette, since he believes Ikem is siding with the agitators from Abazon. Chris refuses and tries to resign, but His Excellency does not accept his resignation. His Excellency also threatens Chris about his involvement in a debacle that took place with the presidency a few years prior. Ikem receives a letter from the chairman of the board from the Gazette that suspends him as editor of the paper. Ikem takes the letter to Chris's home to discuss the situation. Chris says he will render his resignation and that Ikem should lay low for a while, which Ikem refuses to do.

Chapter 12: Ikem decides to continue using his voice, but rather using it through the newspaper, for which he is no longer allowed to write, he arranges for a speaking engagement at the University of Bassa. Not only are all the seats in the auditorium taken, but also people are standing as well to hear what Ikem has to say.

## Analysis

Ikem contemplates the ironic term of “public affairs,” when in fact all of the political decisions and issues are taken care of behind closed doors in Africa and really have nothing to do with the public or their opinions. His Excellency seems to be wielding his control by ordering Chris to send a letter of suspension to Ikem. He is also using threats as a way to lead his cabinet; ironically, in the end, His Excellency recants his request to Chris, which foreshadows that His Excellency will see to the matter himself in a way that may inflict more than a suspension.

Ikem, Beatrice and Chris come to the conclusion that appearance and disgrace are important factors to His Excellency. His Excellency is more concerned that it appears he is in control and each of the cabinet members he has appointed are also in control of their affairs. The three also predict His Excellency is holding a grudge against them for not helping His Excellency promote a “Presidency for Life” campaign two years ago, even though His Excellency fully admitted to them he did not want to be President for life, but simply as long as the people wanted him to be.

During Ikem's speech at the University, he tells the audience storytellers represent a threat to those in authority, which he refers to as “champions.” In the way he has available to him, the platform being a speech to students, Ikem puts into their heads the



idea of rebuffing and questioning the democratic dictatorship of the country in which they live and are destined to change since they are the future of the country.

## Vocabulary

exhilaration, pervasiveness, primitive, quadrangle, zealous, usurpers, solemn, bourgeois, quixotic, exploitation

# Chapters 13-14

## Summary

Chapter 13: Three actions quickly take place, back to back, which indicates the promise His Excellency made about sticking to the constitution. First, Mad Medico is interrogated and then deported from the country. Second, the Army Council, which never makes announcements, announces the promotion of Major Johnson Ossai, Director of the State Research Council, to colonel. Third, Ikem goes missing; Chris and Beatrice find out from Ikem's neighbors he was hauled off in the middle of the night in two jeeps, which may or may not have been driven by soldiers, but identified themselves as being from the State Research Council.

Before Ikem went missing, Chris spoke with Ikem about what Ikem said at the University because the paper printed a story that had the ex-editor advocating regicide. Ikem assures Chris that this is not what he said. In an effort to find out what happened to Ikem, Chris approaches his fellow cabinet members, all of whom claim ignorance. Chris decides to turn to the old rumor mill to spread the word about the abduction of Ikem to see what information he could find. Chris instructs Beatrice to carry on her life as normal, but Beatrice receives a call from the government looking for Chris. In addition, Elewa comes to stay with Beatrice after Ikem is killed and in the middle of the night, police officers come to Beatrice's flat to search it, presumably for Chris or information about his whereabouts, but they find nothing.

Chapter 14: Beatrice receives an anonymous phone call telling her they know where Chris is hiding and he should move. Beatrice doesn't know if this is a true warning or simply a ploy to get to Chris and kill him. Beatrice carries on her routine, per Chris's original instructions, but when Beatrice gets to her car to go home from work, she finds her keys are missing. During Elewa's stay with Beatrice, Elewa also reveals she is pregnant with Ikem's baby. Chris moves from his hiding place and that night is raided. Beatrice receives another anonymous call saying Chris is not safe anywhere in Bassa. Two more announcements are made from the government. The first one says Chris escaped the country on a plane dressed as a Reverend. The second was anyone involved in planning a coup would be punished.

## Analysis

Ironically, the State Research Council responds to the rumor mill by putting out a special announcement on the radio. The announcement accused Ikem of collaborating in several efforts against the government. The announcement goes on to say when Ikem was arrested, there was a struggle with one of the soldiers and Ikem was shot and killed.



Chris takes the radio announcement as a symbol to leave his home for good. While at first, Chris is not afraid for his own life, he soon realizes danger is looming in the near future, so he and Beatrice go to a hideout. Chris begins to rally support from domestic and foreign journalists and correspondents about what is happening. The secret meeting Chris has with the President of the Student Union reveals the students already support Ikem. The students symbolize this by burning the Gazette containing the article that had Ikem calling for regicide, the assassination of the king.

Chris achieves his goal of planting doubt in the minds of the people. He uses a BBC reporter to say Ikem was murdered by the government because there couldn't have been a struggle with a gun when Ikem was hauled away in handcuffs. The students at the University stage their own uproar with the authorities.

It seems as if it is fate that causes Beatrice to lose her keys, which she eventually sees she has locked in her car. Locking her keys in the car forces Beatrice to take a taxi home to get her spare key. During the ride, she learns from the cab driver about the death of Ikem, about Chris being missing and that the taxi cab drivers intend to revolt against the death of Ikem.

## Vocabulary

regicide, indefatigability, scanty, morale, ingenious, beguiled, rapport, belittled, declaiming, benefactor



# Chapters 15-16

## Summary

Chapter 15: Chris is taking refuge where he can—holing up in friends' spare bedrooms, attics or wherever else they can house him. His next move is to make his way out of Bassa altogether, but this has to be a careful undertaking. Emmanuel, which is the head of the Students' Union, joins Chris in refuge, because the government and police are also after Emmanuel. The taxi cab driver that came to know Ikem is now helping Chris get from hiding place to hiding place. As they try to take Chris out of the city to northern parts, they successfully make it through several checkpoints.

Chris's last hideout before heading to Abazon is Emmanuel's house. Beatrice comes to spend one last night with Chris. The next morning Chris decides it is best for Chris and his companions, Braimoh and Emmanuel, to travel by bus than by taxi to attract less attention at checkpoints.

Chapter 16: Five days later, Chris continues his journey to the north of the country, in the Abazon region. The three companions decide to take a bus to the region of Abazon and so they board a bus by the name of Luxurious. The three companions sit separately, as if they are not fellow travelers.

## Analysis

Chris believes he has turned the tables on the government, so that he is no longer their prey and the government is the hunter. Instead, Chris believes his departure and the actions he has taken have made him the hunter and the African government his prey. Ironically, at one of the checkpoints to cross the bridge, there are military jeeps rather than police, so Chris and one of the other taxicab passengers proceed on foot. A soldier approaches and questions them, but ironically the soldier doesn't recognize Chris, or because Chris shares some kola nuts with the soldier, he allows Chris to escape, because the soldier mentions the government doesn't care if the soldiers stand out all day in the sun without eating because the government officials' bellies are full.

It's ironic for Chris to take refuge in Abazon, which is the region where the residents begged the President to come and see their drought situation. As another point of irony, Abazon is where Ikem was born. In addition, the wife of the taxi cab driver, Braimoh, is also from Abazon. Abazon seems to represent the beginning and ending of things.

## Vocabulary

impingement, impish, ambiguity, gallantry, jauntiness, pilgrimage, provocative, intrepidity, tantalizing, ignite



# Chapters 17-18

## Summary

Chapter 17: Chris describes his bus journey out of Bassa up the Great North Road that leads out of town. He describes the differences in terrain and surroundings as the bus moves along. As the bus reaches the countryside, the checkpoints become fewer and farther between. The purpose of the checkpoints also seems to change. Rather than look for the fugitives, the guards at the checkpoints are more interested in receiving compensation from the bus driver. Eventually, the bus simply stops at checkpoints and the bus driver hands over money without the disembarking of the passengers or the searching of the bus. When the bus reaches the respite town of Agbata, the passengers get out to stretch their legs and get some food. By this point, the three companions pretending as if they don't know each other drop the pretense and eat together at one table.

As the bus drives over a bridge, the river below is completely dry. The sign welcomes the bus passengers to South Abazon. At this point, the country has not had rain in two years and is a virtual desert. As the bus continues on, it eventually comes to what appears to be a street party, with the people drinking out of bottles of beer and the word "coup" travels into the bus windows. When Chris tries to obtain more information from a police officer drinking in the streets, he says that someone went into the Presidential Palace and kidnapped the President. Chris tells Emmanuel and Braimoh they must return to Bassa immediately.

Chapter 18: In the face of Chris's death, Beatrice decides to hold the traditional naming ceremony for Elewa's baby girl. Beatrice also learns the last thing Chris says before he dies is "the last green," which is a private joke among Chris, Ikem and Beatrice.

## Analysis

As the bus takes the Great Road North, Chris see this is as the transformation of the man he was to the man he is to become. Ironically, as the bus reaches Abazon, the president is overthrown in a coup. In another twist of fate, Chris is shot in the chest by a police officer when Chris tries to save a schoolgirl that was a fellow passenger on the bus from being raped by the police officer. After all of his hiding to save his life from being killed by a government official, Chris ends up dying at the hands of a police officer after the government has fallen.

The birth of Elewa's baby in the aftermath of Chris's death represents the circle of life. While one dies another is born.

Chris referring to the last green when he is dying symbolizes his understanding of the world at his death, even if he didn't quite have a full understanding of it on his lifetime.



## Vocabulary

impinged, hordes, vacuous, grotesque, lorry, abeyance, deprivation, blithely, parody, optimistic



# Characters

## Christopher Oriko

Christopher Oriko is the Commissioner for Information for Africa. He seems to be a defense attorney for 12 Commissioners of the State. .

## His Excellency

His Excellency is the President. As the President, he fires all of his chiefs of staff that are military and replaces them with civilians. His Excellency then adds President to each one of their titles. The President seems to be very moody, so he makes decisions and his cabinet reacts according to the mood the President is in at the moment.

## Professor Okong

Professor Okong was once a columnist for the local paper. It now seems as if Professor Okong is one of the advisors to His Excellency, the President.

## Ikem Osodi

Ikem Osodi is the editor of the newspaper. The newspaper name is the Gazette.

## John Kent

John Kent is known by the name of Mad Medico. Mad Medico is a white hospital administrator who refused surgery to a man until he could pay for his services, which is what earned John Kent the nickname. It is the friendship between His Excellency and John Kent that brought Christopher, Sam and Ikem to Africa in the first place.

## Beatrice Okoh

Beatrice Okoh is the girlfriend of Christopher. The two have dated for about a year. Beatrice is the Senior Assistant Secretary to the Ministry of Finance. She graduated from the University of London.

## Elewa

Elewa is the girlfriend of Ikem. After Ikem is killed, Elewa gives birth to their baby girl. Elewa also becomes very close to Beatrice.

## **Raimoh**

Raimoh is a taxi cab driver. He is the driver that has a street altercation with Ikem in the beginning of the novel. He is the same taxi cab driver than picks up Elewa from Ikem's apartment one night to drive her to her own home. Raimoh is ultimately the taxi cab driver who smuggles Chris out of Bassa.

## **Emmanuel**

Emmanuel is a friend of Raimoh's. Emmanuel is also the head of the Students' Union. Emmanuel takes Chris's side in the coup, which makes Emmanuel a target of the government as well. Emmanuel goes into hiding with Chris. Emmanuel and Raimoh are with Chris when they reach Abazon and Chris is ultimately killed by the police officer.



## Objects/Places

### **Bassa**

Bassa is the city in which most of the novel takes place. It is also the location of the Presidential Palace and the University.

### **Gazette**

The Gazette is the newspaper of Bassa. Ikem is the editor of the paper.

### **Taxi Cabs**

Taxicabs play a vital role in the book as transportation for almost all of the characters in the book. Ultimately, it is the taxicabs and their drivers that smuggle Chris and his companions to safety.

### **Presidential Palace**

The Presidential Palace is where the President lives. It is also the place where the political meetings are held for the cabinet members of the government.

### **Abazon**

Abazon is a region in the northern part of Africa that has not had rain in two years. It is a desert and the people are petitioning the President to help them to get water in the region. It is also the region that Chris, Emmanuel and Raimoh flock to take refuge when fleeing the political problems in Bassa.



# Themes

## Political Unrest

The novel is set in western part of Africa. It never specifically says what year the novel takes place, but the story unfolds two years after a political coup has made the president of the country a young military officer. Two years later, there are signs of political unrest rearing its ugly head once again, so each of the characters in the novel find themselves living with another coup hanging over their heads. Some of the cabinet members of the government or officials that hold titles in the country are boyhood friends of the president, which also seems to cause some friction and push the political environment toward that of another coup.

The novel begins with one of the cabinet members, the Commissioner of Information, Christopher Oriko, in what appears to be a meeting with the president of Africa, as well as other cabinet members. While it appears as if Chris will be the narrator throughout the book, the narrator changes, depending on the chapter and the story that is being told.

## Competition

His Excellency, Chris and Ikem all seem to be in competition with one another. This is primarily because the three, who are now men, knew each other as boys. They grew up together and went to school with other—all the way until His Excellency became a military officer. While each of the men holds a position important to the African government or editor of the newspaper, there is a struggle between the three as to who is truly in control. Ultimately, His Excellency is the President of the country and outranks all of the other men. This does not, however, keep the others from challenging him.

His Excellency sees Chris and Ikem as competitive, which causes him to compete with them politically in order to feel equal in their relationship. When Chris and Ikem realize that His Excellency is competing with them, they come up with their own ways to rise up against him. If not for the struggle of competition, none of them men may have ended up dead.

## Friendship

Ikem, His Excellency and Chris were all boyhood friends, which is what brought them all to Africa in the first place. It is the friendship between His Excellency and Chris that landed Chris his position as the Commissioner of Information. It is the friendship between Chris and Ikem that landed Ikem the editor position for the country's newspaper, the Gazette. In reality, each of the men is intimidated by the other, which turns them into rivals rather than adversaries.

There are few true friendships in this book, which seem to be between the women in the novel. Friendship plays an important role in the novel because it is Elewa and Beatrice's friendship that withstands all of the tragedy that befalls on the characters, such as the deaths of Ikem and Chris.

# Style

## Point of View

The novel is written in the first person point of view, depending on which character is speaking at the time. For example, the first chapter is about Christopher Oriko, so he is speaking in the first person. When the chapter is about Ikem, then it is Ikem that is speaking. In some chapters of the novel, it is a combination of a third-party point of view and a first person narration.

The point of view of this novel is an intimate point of view that allows a reader to connect closely with each of the characters. The reader cares what happens to each of the characters because they can hear the thoughts and feelings of each character as they tell their story. The point of view also allows the author to inject his own opinions into the narration and to expand on the events taking place around the characters without having to interrupt the flow of the narration. For these reasons, the point of view works well with this novel and the author's writing style.

## Setting

The novel is set primarily in the city of Bassa, which is in West Africa. The setting of this novel is important because the country is experiencing political unrest. The main characters of the novel are a mixture of Africans and British leftover from the time when Britain occupied the country. For this reason, the setting of the novel has a strong impact on the characters because they live constantly in fear of dying in the face of another political coup.

The setting of this novel works well with the plot. At first, the reader is not aware that the threat of a coup is a major motivator to the characters. However, as events unfold, the political unrest continuously leaks into the consciousness of the characteristics. Even though the primary plot of the novel focuses on the characters' involvement in the coup, the reader soon realizes it is fear of the coup motivating most all the characters in the novel.

## Language and Meaning

The language of this novel is somewhat stiffer than the language readers of modern novels. The novel also possesses a lot of the dialect of the African residents. While the Africans are speaking English, the dialect makes it difficult at times to understand what they are saying. The language is a mixture of formal and informal English, as well as the African version of English. The regular English language is educated, strong and descriptive enough that it creates a flow leaving the reader impressed with the words as much as the plot.



The language of the novel is appropriate to the plot because it is accurate to the characters in the novel and the education level of the writer. The novel is not in love with its own words, but it is descriptive enough that the reader finds enjoyment in the words as well as the plot. The language is sometimes difficult to understand, however, overall everything is clear in its context. For this reason, the language of the novel fits well with the plot of the novel.

## Structure

The novel is divided into eighteen chapters. Each chapter is ten to twenty pages long. The chapters tell the story both in exposition and in dialogue. The author also injects his own voice at the beginning of several chapters, giving his opinion of the events surrounding the setting of the novel as well as the actions taking place within the plot.

The novel contains one main plot and several subplots. The main plot follows the political unrest in the country. One subplot follows the competition between His Excellency, Ikem and Chris, as each attempt to find the truth in the political situation of the country and who is truly in control of it. Another subplot follows the friendship between the three men and how it evolved as their personal relationships mix with their professional relationships. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.





## Quotes

Gentlemen, this is my Chief of Police. He stands here gossiping while hoodlums storm the Presidential Palace. In addition, he has no clue what is going on. Sit down! Inspector General of Police! (Chapter 1)

Your greatest risk is your boyhood friend, those who grew up with you in your village. Keep them at arm's length and you will live long. (Chapter 2)

Well, that's not good enough, Mr. Commissioner for Information. Not good enough for me. You seem to be forgetting something, namely that it is my name and address which is printed at the bottom of page sixteen of the Gazette and not that of any fucking, excuse my language, any fucking Commissioner. It's me who'll be locked up by Major Samsonite if the need arises, not you. It's my funeral... (Chapter 3)

No, he means to kill you is like to kill a dog. (Chapter 4)

You know something, Dick, the most awful thing about power is not that it corrupts absolutely but that it makes people so utterly boring, so predictable and...just plain boring. (Chapter 5)

Lou, this is one of the most brilliant daughters of this country, Beatrice Okoh. She is a Senior Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Finance—the only person in the service, male or female, with a first-class honours in English. (Chapter 6)

The women are, of course, the biggest single group of oppressed people in the world and, if we are not to believe the Book of Genesis, the oldest. But they are not the only ones. There are others—rural peasants in every land, the urban poor in industrialized countries, Black people everywhere including their own continent, ethnic and religious minorities and castes in all countries. (Chapter 7)

You are asking a man who has long despaired of fighting to hold back a combatant, fanatical and in full gear. My dear, and all he'll ever get for his pains is to be knocked flat on his face. (Chapter 8)

When you hear Ikem Osodi Ikem Osodi everywhere you think his head will be touching the ceiling. But look at him, how simple he is. I am even taller than himself, a dunce like me, our people say that an animal whose name is famous does not always fill a hunter's basket. (Chapter 9)

By why you no tell me at the same time say na Editor of Gazette? (Chapter 10)

Listen. The way I see it this matter is not likely to end with mere suspension for conspiring with thugs to invade the Presidential Palace. That may only be the merest tip of the iceberg. There is some indication that Ikem might have colluded with these same people to sabotage the presidency referendum two years ago. I don't mind telling you



that your own role in that fiasco was never cleared up satisfactorily either and may well come up for further investigation. (Chapter 11)

Writers don't give prescriptions. They give headaches! (Chapter 12)

This country counts on you. Take care now. (Chapter 13)

Never mind who. I know where the horse is. But I don't want to find him. Get him moved. Before tonight. (Chapter 14)

There you go again underrating the state security. Very dangerous, you know. Better to overrate your enemy than to underrate them. (Chapter 15)

What a fellow, that Emmanuel of yours! (Chapter 16)

Change the water? You people from the South! (Chapter 17)

I can't thank you enough, Emmanuel, for being around and bringing back the message. (Chapter 18)



# Topics for Discussion

## Topic 1

Who is Chris Oriko? Why has he become the Commissioner of Information for Africa? What does he do during his position on the cabinet? Why? What does Chris recall about his childhood friendship with His Excellency? What is the most important moment in Chris's life after he reaches Abazon? Why is this important? How does it change Chris's life?

## Topic 2

Discuss the relationship between Chris and Ikem. Are they friends? Is their competition in their relationship? How does Chris feel about Ikem? How does Ikem feel about Chris? Why does Ikem think he is in competition with Chris? What does he do about it? What happens to their friendship and the competition toward the middle and end of the novel?

## Topic 3

How does Ikem die? What does this mean for the future of the other characters? How does Chris react emotionally to this change in his life? What actions does Chris take after Ikem's death?

## Topic 4

Why does Chris escape Bassa and head toward Abazon? What does Chris find out once they reach Abazon? What causes Chris to defend the schoolgirl from the bus once they reach Abazon? What happens to Chris as the result of standing up for the girl?

## Topic 5

Who is His Excellency? Why does he blame Ikem and Chris for not supporting his presidency for life with the people when he declares publicly that he only wants to be president as long as the people want him to be? Why does His Excellency think Chris and Ikem are responsible? Why does His Excellency retain a military rank, but none of his cabinet members do? What happens to His Excellency? How does the reader know this? Is Chris or Ikem responsible for His Excellency's death? Explain.



## Topic 6

Discuss the coup. What impact does the potential coup have on the characters of the novel? How does it motivate them? How does it affect the characters after the coup takes place? How does each character learn to deal with the aftereffects of the coup?