

THE AFRICAN STORYTELLER

FALL SEMESTER, 2006

INSTRUCTOR: PROF. HAROLD SCHEUB

**AFRICAN 210
THE AFRICAN STORYTELLER**

This course is cross-listed in the Folklore Program
in which its designation is Folklore 210, The African Storyteller

INSTRUCTOR: PROFESSOR HAROLD SCHEUB

Office: 1408 Van Hise Hall

Office Hours: Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Friday–8 to 10 am

Telephone: 263-5919

Office hours are open hours: it is not necessary to make appointments
And feel free to drop into my office at any other time

email address: hescheub@wisc.edu

But email is not a substitute for person-to-person discussions

ATTENDANCE POLICY

**REGULAR ATTENDANCE IN THIS COURSE IS REQUIRED.
FOR EVERY FOUR ABSENCES, A FULL GRADE WILL BE DEDUCTED.**

REQUIRED TEXTS

All texts are on three-hour reserve in the Reserved Book Room in
the College Library

- 1. CHINUA ACHEBE,
THINGS FALL APART**
- 2. NAWAL EL SAADAWI,
WOMAN AT POINT ZERO**
- 3. ALEX LA GUMA,
A WALK IN THE NIGHT**
- 4. FERDINAND OYONO,
HOUSEBOY**
- 5. HAROLD SCHEUB,
THE AFRICAN STORYTELLER**
- 6. OUSMANE SEMBENE,
GOD'S BITS OF WOOD**

Note: In the text by Alex La Guma, you are responsible for reading
only the story, A Walk in the Night

CLASSROOM COURTESY

AS A COURTESY TO THE INSTRUCTOR AND TO YOUR FELLOW STUDENTS, PLEASE DO NOT ENTER THE CLASSROOM AFTER 11, AND DO NOT LEAVE CLASS EARLY.

EXAMINATION REVIEW SESSIONS

WRITING WORKSHOP

Monday, October 2, 7:15 pm

REVIEW FOR THE FIRST EXAMINATION:

Wednesday, October 4, 7:15 pm

REVIEW FOR THE SECOND EXAMINATION:

Wednesday, November 1, 7:15 pm

Attendance at review sessions is recommended but not required.

EXAMINATIONS

FIRST EXAMINATION:

Friday, October 6, 11-11:50 am

SECOND EXAMINATION:

Friday, November 3, 11-11:50

FINAL EXAMINATION:

Tuesday, December 19, 10:05-12:05

Room numbers for these review sessions will be

PAPER (OPTIONAL)

DUE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE CLASS PERIOD
ON MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20

Students taking the course for honors must write the paper.
It is optional for all other members of the class.

SUGGESTIONS FOR STUDY

LECTURES AND READINGS

Regular attendance at lectures is absolutely necessary if the course is to be comprehensible to you. And it is crucial that you do all readings before the texts are discussed in class. Novels should be read in full before the first class period in which they are discussed. Readings are more demanding during the second half of the course: you should therefore begin your reading of those texts early.

STUDY QUESTIONS

Study questions for the oral tales will be distributed before the first and second examinations. Study questions for the novels can be found in your Course Outline.

EXAMINATIONS

The multiple-choice parts of the examinations examine you on lecture material. The essays give you an opportunity to develop your own ideas, within the context of the lecture material. If you miss lectures, be prepared to have difficulties with both parts of the examinations.

COMPUTER PROGRAM

A computer program containing step-by-step analyses of a few of the stories in this course is available on the web:
<http://african.lss.wisc.edu/hscheub/>

PAST EXAMINATIONS

Copies of past examinations (first, second, and final examinations) will be distributed early in the semester.

WRITING WORKSHOPS AND EXAMINATION REVIEW SESSIONS

THERE WILL BE TWO WRITING WORKSHOPS

The first Writing Workshop will be on Monday, October 2, at 7:15 pm. The second will be an in-class Workshop on Monday, November 27

EXAMINATION REVIEW SESSIONS

For the First Examination: Wednesday, October 4 at 7:15 pm; for the Second Examination: Wednesday, November 1 at 7:15 pm. Rooms will be announced.

These are optional, but students have found them very helpful in preparing for examinations.

OFFICE HOURS

Regular office hours: 8-10, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, and Friday. These hours will be extended as we near the examinations in the course. If you have any problems with the course, these should be discussed at the earliest opportunity. I shall be happy to discuss any aspect of the course with you, whether you are having difficulties with it or not.

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 6, 2006

INTRODUCTION TO THE COURSE

THE ORAL TRADITION

Storytellers have always been innovative, and they have always been imitative. This need not be seen as a contradiction. Oral performers have routinely relied on tradition, as they have typically worked within two realms, the world of the immediately perceptible and the world of the imagination. The latter is the link to the past—a grandly mythicized past, the journey to its essence essayed by generations of estimable artists. The genius of the storyteller is to be discovered in her ability to work within the tradition (the imitative part of her art) as she simultaneously gives her audiences new insights into ancient images by using them to give form to their contemporary world (the innovative part of her performances).

Every age has surely produced its masters, storytellers who have moved the tradition into new areas, always within contexts inherited from those who have come before. The materials and methods of composition have remained constant through the centuries—images from past and present, representations of fantasy and reality, worked together and artfully crafted into rich metaphorical parallels in performances that enlist the emotions of the members of audiences. The storytelling tradition has kept the members of the society in harmony with an antiquity that only vaguely resembles fact. That past, the paradigm of the culture, continues to exert its influence on the present, giving it a mythic heart, a traditional context, and a nascent form.

As a Xhosa storyteller commented, “THESE ARE THE STORYTELLER’S MATERIALS: THE WORLD AND THE WORD.”

THE ART OF THE STORYTELLER

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 8, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

Handouts:

“The Bird with the Beautiful Song” Mbuti/Congo (page 14 of the course outline)

“The Fifi Bird” Mbuti/Congo (page 14 of the course outline)

In *The African Storyteller*:

“The Art of the Storyteller,” pp. 1-4

“The Beauty of the Partridge” Kabyle/Algeria, pp. 5-7

“The Unborn Child” Lenje/Zambia, pp. 8-13

“The Blue Crane” San/Southern Africa, pp. 14-17

“The Python’s Shining Stone” Ekoi/Nigeria, pp. 18-24

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 11, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In *The African Storyteller*:

“The Weight before the Door” Arabic/Morocco, pp. 26-29

“Salamone the Orphan” Tswana/Botswana, pp. 30-33

“The Head of a Masai Woman” Kikuyu/Kenya, pp. 34-38

“The Gamboler-of-the-Plain” Ronga/Mozambique, pp. 39-47

MYTH

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 13, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“Origins,” pp. 49-52
“The Creation” Ganda/Uganda, pp. 53-61
“God Creates Man and Woman” Anuak/Sudan, pp. 62-65
“Isis and Osiris” Egyptian, pp. 66-71
“God Moves to the Heavens” Lozi/Zambia, pp. 110-113

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 15, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“The Parting of the Waters” Khoikhoi/South Africa, pp. 72-75
“kaggen and the All-devourer” San/Southern Africa, pp. 76-88
“kaggen Creates an Eland” San/Southern Africa, pp. 90-95
“How Death Came into the World: Five Myths,” pp. 96-104
“Two Stories about Primal Choices,” pp. 106-109

THE TRICKSTER

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“Tricksters,” pp. 115-119
“Abunawas and the Goat’s Horns” Tigre/Ethiopia, pp. 120-123
“Beiho Tricks His Uncles” Tigre/Ethiopia, pp. 144-149
“Two Tar Baby Stories,” pp. 150-157

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“Turning the Tables on Trickster” Nuer/Sudan, pp. 159-162
“The Magic Drum” Benga/Gabon, pp. 163-171
“Mohammed with the Magic Finger” Arabic/Libya, pp. 180-195

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“The Story of Chakijana” Zulu/South Africa, pp. 123-143
“The Grasshopper and the Fiddle” Gogo/Tanzania, pp. 172-174
“The Fox and the Hyena” Yao/Malawi, Mozambique, Tanzania, pp. 175-179

THE HERO

MONDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

- In The African Storyteller:
“The Hero,” pp. 197-201
“Sikhuluma, the Boy Who Did Not Speak” Xhosa/South Africa, pp. 202-231
“Sudika-mbambi” Kimbundu/Angola, 232-242

WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 27, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Liongo” Swahili/Kenya, Tanzania, pp. 243-249

“Ibonia” Malagasy/Madagascar, pp. 251-259

“Nyikang and the Sun” Shilluk/Sudan, pp. 260-264

THE RITES OF PASSAGE

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Rites of Passage,” pp. 265-269

“Ngomba's Balloon” Fiote/Zaire, pp. 271-274

“Ramaitsoanala” Malagasy/Madagascar, pp. 283-290

“Konyek” Masai/Kenya, pp. 315-319

“The King's Twelve Sons and One Daughter” Ijo/Nigeria, pp. 372-384

MONDAY, OCTOBER 2, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“The Girl with One Hand” Swahili/Kenya, Tanzania, pp. 301-310

“The Girl without Legs” Somali/Somalia, pp. 311-313

“The Pregnant Boy” Swati/Swaziland, pp. 320-326

To be told in class:

“The Armless Bride” Xhosa/South Africa

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Ma'aruf the Cobbler and His Wife” Arabic/Egypt, pp. 399-440

FIRST EXAMINATION

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2006

MONDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Thakane and Her Father” Sotho/Lesotho, pp. 327-335

“The Two Brothers” Egyptian, pp. 362-371

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 11, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Umxakaza-wakogingqwayo” Zulu/South Africa, pp. 479-497

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 13, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“Yarima, Atafa, and the King” Hausa/Nigeria, pp. 336-345

“The Sky Princess and the Poor Youth” Ndaou/Mozambique, pp. 441-443

“The Pauper’s Daughter” Swahili/Kenya, pp. 444-474

“The Old Woman and the Eggs” Swahili/Kenya, pp. 475-478

“Lion-child and Cow-child” Lamba/Zambia, pp. 275-282

MONDAY, OCTOBER 16, 2006

REQUIRED READINGS

In The African Storyteller:

“The Two Hammadis” Fulbe/Gambia, pp. 385-397

“Mrile” Chaga/Tanzania, pp. 291-300

“The Romance of the Fox” Yoruba/Nigeria, pp. 346-361

THE LITERARY TRADITION: THE NOVEL

At the center of the African novel, as of the epic, is the hero, caught between past and future, forced to make decisions fateful to him- or herself and, frequently, to his or her community as well. Inaction is not possible: a movement from one state to another is urgently called for. That transformation is the metaphorical and mythic core of the storytelling tradition; it grows out of a complex mixture of images, forms, and themes, organized as fragments of history and the contemporary world are recombined and, in the process, tied to the ancient tradition of the people.

The process is poetic performance, and what makes the transformation possible is myth: it partakes of ancient images, it generates movement to the future.

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 18, 2006

INTRODUCTION TO THE AFRICAN NOVEL

BEFORE COLONIALISM

CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 20, 2006

READ: CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

MONDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 25, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: CHINUA ACHEBE'S THINGS FALL APART

THE PERIOD OF WESTERN COLONIALISM

FERDINAND OYONO'S *HOUSEBOY*

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 27, 2006

READ: FERDINAND OYONO'S HOUSEBOY

MONDAY, OCTOBER 30, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: FERDINAND OYONO'S HOUSEBOY

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 1, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: FERDINAND OYONO'S HOUSEBOY

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2006

SECOND EXAMINATION

COLONIALISM: APARTHEID

ALEX LA GUMA'S *A WALK IN THE NIGHT*

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 2006

READ: ALEX LA GUMA'S A WALK IN THE NIGHT

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: ALEX LA GUMA'S A WALK IN THE NIGHT

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: ALEX LA GUMA'S A WALK IN THE NIGHT

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: ALEX LA GUMA'S A WALK IN THE NIGHT

GENDER COLONIALISM

NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S *WOMAN AT POINT ZERO*

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2006

READ: NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 17, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 20, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION : NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 22, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: NAWAL EL SAADAWI'S WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

**MONDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2006
WRITING WORKSHOP TWO**

POST-COLONIALISM

OUSMANE SEMBENE'S *GOD'S BITS OF WOOD*

WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 2006

READ: OUSMANE SEMBENE'S GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 1, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: OUSMANE SEMBENE'S GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

MONDAY, DECEMBER 4, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: OUSMANE SEMBENE'S GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 6, 2006

CONTINUATION OF DISCUSSION: OUSMANE SEMBENE'S GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 8, 2006

THE ORAL AND LITERARY TRADITIONS

MONDAY, DECEMBER 11, 2006

REVIEW OF THE NOVELS

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 2006

PREPARATION FOR THE FINAL EXAMINATION

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 15, 2006

CONCLUSIONS

TUESDAY, DECEMBER 19, 2006, 10:05AM TO 12:05 PM

FINAL EXAMINATION

WRITING THE OPTIONAL PAPER

The paper, should you choose to write it, should be eight to twelve pages long, typewritten, double-spaced. If you do not type, the paper may be hand-written—the equivalent of eight to twelve typewritten pages.

Regarding margins, etc., follow instructions for writing papers in the Modern Language Association Handbook, by Joseph Gibaldi and Walter S. Achtert. If you do not have a copy of William Strunk, Jr., and E. B. White, *The Elements of Style*, I recommend that you acquire one and read it with care. It is brief, and it contains much useful information about writing papers. Other books on writing that may prove helpful to you include William Zinsser's *On Writing Well*, and Robert Graves and Alan Hodge's *The Reader Over Your Shoulder*.

TOPIC: You are to analyze an African oral story. You should not select a tale that we have analyzed in class, but you may wish to refer to materials analyzed in class to support your argument.

SELECT THE STORY: For the text of the story that you will be analyzing, see me. Make certain that the story that you choose is sufficiently complex to provide substance for a ten-page paper. When you have selected a tale, you should discuss it with me before you begin to write the paper.

OUTLINE YOUR PAPER: Know precisely what your argument is to be. The remainder of the paper should be a systematic support of that argument.

WRITE THE FIRST DRAFT: Your argument should appear, clearly stated, in the opening paragraph. In subsequent paragraphs, you should support, logically and cohesively, the various aspects of that argument.

DO NOT RETELL THE STORY, but you must refer to the story, analyzing it, as you support the argument.

I shall work with you on your paper, especially in its early stages. If you are uncertain about a topic, if you can find no suitable narrative, or if you have not had much experience writing papers, see me as you prepare to write. I shall also be happy to read the drafts of your paper as you complete them.

REVISE YOUR PAPER. Give yourself enough time for this. Revision is at the heart of good writing.

THE FINAL DRAFT of the paper should be free of typographical and grammatical errors, with margins on all sides. As you write this final draft, concentrate on your **WRITING STYLE**, on **CLARITY** of expression, on **ECONOMY** of words.

This paper is **OPTIONAL**, unless you are taking the course for honors. It supplements your other grades. It does **NOT** substitute for an exam. **ALL** examinations must be taken.

"THE BIRD WITH THE BEAUTIFUL SONG" (Mbuti)

There was a bird that sang the most beautiful song that the great forest had ever heard. One day, a Mbuti child heard this beautiful song, and he searched for the bird that could sing so wonderfully. He found it, and praised its song. The bird flew down and perched on the boy's head, and the boy brought it back to the Mbuti camp. His father saw the bird and praised it, and when it sang he told the boy to give it some food. The bird then flew off.

The next day, the boy heard the song again, and again the boy searched until he found the bird. Once again, he brought it back to the camp. His father was more reluctant this time, because food was scarce, but he agreed that the bird should have some food.

A third time the boy brought the bird home, and this time the father took the bird from the boy and said, "Now you go off and leave me. Leave the camp, go away." The boy went off to another camp.

When he was alone, the father took the bird, the bird that sang the most beautiful song that the forest had ever heard, and he killed the bird.
And he killed the song.

And no sooner had he killed the bird than he himself dropped down dead, completely dead.

Forever dead.

"THE FIFI BIRD" (Mbuti)

There was once a poor Mbuti girl. She was crippled, and her skin was full of disease. She was only about eight years old. The Mbuti were breaking camp, and nobody was willing to carry the little cripple for fear of catching the disease. So when all the Mbuti had left the camp, the little girl was all alone, by herself. She cried, she cried and cried. And when night fell, she crawled into her empty house, and she cried herself to sleep.

At daybreak, she heard a sound---pip! pip! pip! It was the bird called the fifi bird. It had fastened a long rattan vine between two trees, and it was sitting on the vine swinging back and forth, back and forth. The little girl went to look more closely, and the bird flew away.

In the distance, there was a Bira man with his hunting trap. He saw the diseased cripple, and he came up and said, "My poor child, you have been left here all by yourself. I must kill you." And he took his knife and lifted it to kill the girl. But the knife caught his nose and cut it, and it killed him and he fell down dead. The girl caught hold of the rattan vine, and she swung herself back and forth, back and forth.

As she was swinging on the vine, another Bira, seeing the movement, came slowly into the clearing. "What is this?" he said to himself. "Why, it is a crippled little Mbuti girl. Get off your vine swing, my child, and come over here to me." The girl got down from her swing, and made her way over to where the Bira was standing. Then she sat down on the ground and held her withered little legs. "Come nearer, my child," said the Bira, reaching forward. "No, no! I can't come any nearer!" cried the girl. "My legs hurt so much, and I am all diseased."

"Very well, I shall kill you!" said the Bira.

"Oh, please don't do that. I'm only a poor deserted child!"

"But why did your father leave you all alone?" asked the Bira. "No, I must certainly kill you." And he took a piece of wood and tried to hit the crippled little Mbuti girl. But the wood flew back in his face and hit him on the nose, and the blood streamed down. With the blood still streaming down, he ran back to his village and told everyone, "There is a poor deserted Mbuti girl in the Mbuti camp. She is crippled and diseased, and she has the evil eye. She will surely kill us all!"

With some friends and relations, he hurried to the deserted camp. There was the little girl, swinging on the vine swinging herself back and forth, back and forth.

The Bira called to her, "Come here my poor child. You have killed one of our relatives, and you have wounded me. You are crippled and diseased and you have been deserted. I am going to kill you." The little girl got down from her swing, and slowly came over to where the Bira was standing. "Come nearer little one!" said the Bira.

"Oh, please don't kill me," said the Mbuti girl. "I am only a deserted cripple, and I haven't run away." But she came closer still.

The Bira raised his knife. "Now!" he said. "Now I am going to kill you!" But the knife caught in his stomach, and he fell down, he fell down dead.

The girl went back to her swing, dragging her withered little legs along the ground. She climbed on the swing, and swung herself back and forth, back and forth.

The remaining Bira all hurried back to their village. "Come! Come! Come, all of you!" they cried. "There is a crippled little Mbuti girl in the deserted camp, and she will surely kill us all unless we kill her. Get your weapons, and come!"

All the Bira seized their weapons, and came running to the deserted camp. They all came to take their revenge and kill the deserted little Mbuti girl. But the girl had gone.

The only sign of life was the fifi bird, and the fifi bird was sitting on the rattan vine, swinging itself back and forth, back and forth, back and forth....

STUDY QUESTIONS

You should begin reading the novels early in the semester. To assist you in your reading, the following study questions have been provided. These study questions are also meant to assist you in your preparation for writing the examinations.

STUDY QUESTIONS, THINGS FALL APART

1. For whom do "things fall apart" in this novel?
2. What kind of character is Okonkwo? Do you consider him a tragic hero (keeping in mind the definition of "hero" that we have derived from the African oral tradition)?
3. Is this primarily a novel that treats the conflict of African and western cultures? Or does the conflict form the historical backdrop for another story?
4. Do you find evidence of the oral tradition in this novel? Can you be specific about this evidence?
5. To what extent does a person's chi determine one's destiny in the novel? And to what extent does one's own personal character determine that destiny? Is there a conflict between the chi and a person's unique character?
6. What is the relationship between Okonkwo and his father, Unoka, on the one hand, and Okonkwo and his son, Nwoye, on the other?
7. In what ways does Okonkwo's vision of what his society should ideally be differ from that of his fellow Igbo?
8. What is the significance of the character and fate of Ikemefuna---as far as Okonkwo is concerned?
9. Explain the significance of the relationship between Okonkwo and Ezinma, as far as the development of Okonkwo's character is concerned.
10. What are the spatial settings in this novel---i.e., the places where the action takes place? Do they help to establish the character of Okonkwo?
11. What role does religion play in the novel? Igbo customs? And what of Okonkwo's attitude toward each?
12. Explain the significance of masculinity and femininity in the novel. How do these help to define Okonkwo? What roles do his father and son and daughter play within the context of masculinity/femininity polarities? And the incident with Ikemefuna? And the crime that Okonkwo commits? And his punishment? And the settings of the novel?
13. Explain the significance of the tortoise story.
14. Explain the significance of Yeats' poem, as far as this novel is concerned.
15. How do the other characters in the novel help us to see the character of Okonkwo more clearly?
16. What is Okonkwo's attitude towards women? How does this help to define his character?

17. What role does the Christian church play in the novel? Discuss Okonkwo's attitude towards Christianity.

STUDY QUESTIONS, HOUSEBOY

1. What does Oyono's novel reveal about the French colonists in Cameroon?
2. What is the white view of the black world in this novel? the black view of the white world?
3. Explain the significance of Christianity in Houseboy. What of the role played by Father Vandermyer?
4. "No, it can't be true, I told myself, I couldn't have seen properly. A great chief like the commandant uncircumcised." Why does this discovery "kill something inside" Toundi?
5. Discuss the relationship between Toundi and the commandant's wife, Susan Decazy.
6. What use does Oyono make of humor in this novel? If the humor of the novel is to be discovered in the contrasting cultures, the skewed views that blacks and whites have of the others' culture, where is the tragedy of the novel to be found? What relationship develops between humor and tragedy? Explain how humorous misconceptions give way to serious emotional relationships in the narrative.
7. What is the importance of Moreau, the prison warden, in the contrasts between African and western cultures?
8. Explain as carefully as you can the complex set of relationships that unites Toundi, Moreau, the commandant, and the commandant's wife.
9. What is the significance of the scene in which the prison director "was busy with two Africans suspected of stealing from M. Janopolous"?
10. Who is Gullet? What is his role in the novel?
11. What happens to the whites' insistence on the moral superiority of their world?
12. What is the significance of the relationship between Sophie and Magnol?
13. Why is the headmaster of the local school considered a traitor?
14. Colonialism as a mission of enlightenment obscured the true nature of colonialism as economic exploitation of humans and resources: how is this revealed in Houseboy?
15. Why are illusions important in this novel?
16. Why does Oyono include the scenes in the church, the European club, the contraceptives, the sanitary napkins?
17. The "eternal triangle" has to do with the commandant, his wife, and Moreau. What does the "eternal triangle" have to do with the theme of the novel?

STUDY QUESTIONS, A WALK IN THE NIGHT

1. This is a novel about the effects of apartheid on South African society. The central characters are Michael Adonis, Willieboy, and Raalt. Explain the effects of apartheid on each of these characters.
2. What relationship is La Guma drawing between Adonis and Raalt?
3. In what ways are Frankie Lorenzo, Joe, and Willieboy similar?
4. Why are Frankie and Grace Lorenzo put into this novel?
5. What is Doughty's role here? Explain the significance of his speech, when he quotes from Hamlet: "I am thy father's spirit;/Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,/And for the day confined to fast in fires,/Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature/Are burnt and purged away." He adds, "That's us, Michael, my boy. Just ghosts, doomed to walk the night. Shakespeare." Why does La Guma call his novel, A Walk in the Night?
6. What is Joe's role? John Abraham's role?
7. What is the relationship between Willieboy and Doughty?
8. What do you make of the white policeman, Andries?
9. Willieboy is a victim, and the author gives considerable space, through flashbacks, to the detailing of Willieboy's past. Why?
10. Who are the three gangsters beckoning always to Adonis? What is their role?
11. This is a novel of death (Doughty, Willieboy) and life (the unborn child of the Lorenzos). How do you explain the apparent polarity?
12. Willieboy cherishes dreams of becoming an important man. He looks with envy at the flashy desperadoes; he affects a slouch; he wears gaudy shirts and peg-bottomed trousers, brushes his hair into a flamboyant peak. Why does La Guma create this character in this novel?
13. This novel is famous for its attention to detail. How does La Guma use detail?
14. In Chapter eight: "On the floors of the tenements the grime collected quickly.... And in the dampness deadly life formed in decay and bacteria and mould, and in the heat and airlessness the rot appeared too, so that things which once were whole or new withered or petrified and the smells of their decay and putrefaction pervaded the tenements of the poor." Analyze this quotation. What does it have to do with the theme of the novel?
15. Why do we learn about Raalt's marital problems?
16. What interpretation do you give to Joe's walk to the sea, "walking alone through the starlit darkness..."?
17. How do illusion and reality work in this novel

STUDY QUESTIONS, WOMAN AT POINT ZERO

1. What are the major patterns in this novel? How are the patterns worked into the parts of the story?
2. What is the significance of the eyes pattern? the pattern having to do with bodily sensations? the security pattern? the identity pattern?
3. What is the significance of the pattern having to do with Firdaus' inability to distinguish people from each other?
4. Explain why the veils pattern is among the most important patterns in the novel.
5. What kind of person is Firdaus?
6. What is the nature of Firdaus's puberty ritual?
7. Analyse Firdaus's relationships with men---her father, her uncle, Bayoumi, Sheikh Mahmoud, Di'aa, Ibrahim, Marzouk.
8. Analyse Firdaus's relationships with women---her mother, Sharifa, Miss Iqbal.
9. Why is the framing pattern of the story (spitting on pictures of men) important?
10. Explain Firdaus's argument that death for her is a liberation.
11. Analyse Firdaus's choice of prostitution as her career.

STUDY QUESTIONS, GOD'S BITS OF WOOD

1. What is the role of Ibrahim Bakayoko? He is a presence, even though he is not physically on the scene until the novel is over half finished. Explain the effect of this. Is he the hero of the novel?
2. Is there any single character in the novel who might be considered a central character or a hero? How does the author hold his novel together?
3. Who are "God's bits of wood"? What does that have to do with the theme of the novel?
4. The writer is also a film-maker. What are the elements of cinema in the novel?
5. What is the effect of moving the action back and forth, from Bamako to Thies to Dakar, etc.?
6. What is the significance of the locomotive in the story? How is the machine changing men? and the women?
7. What does the novel say about change? Explain the theme of change, of transition, in Fa Keita, in Penda, in Ramatoulaye. Through it all is the force of Bakayoko. People hate him, people love him, others are uncertain about him. What is his role in this theme of change, of transition?
8. Analyse the relationship between the Europeanized Africans, Beaugosse and N'Deye Touti. What is their attitude towards the strike?
9. This is really a book about women, involved in the transition struggle. Explain.

10. This is the story of a strike, of a political struggle. There are also love stories in it--- Bakayoko and Assitan in Bamako, Maimouna and Samba in Thies, Beaugosse and N'Deye Touti in Dakar. Explain how these love stories blend with the political themes of the novel.
11. There is symbolism in the character of Maimouna. Analyse this.
12. Analyse Ousmane Sembene's characterization of the white colonists.