**Gender in Things Fall Apart**

In Umuofia, especially according to Okonkwo, there are prescribed roles and traits for both men and women. In this activity, you are going to look at some specific passages to determine what those roles and traits are. You are also going to look at some moments, and people, who break those roles.

Opening question:

* What do you think are the aspects of masculinity in our culture? What do we think of as being “manly’?
* Do you agree with those beliefs? Do you think that a man needs those qualities to be considered manly?
* What is Tony Porter’s argument about the “man box”?
* Do you agree with him?

1. Read pages 32 (starting at “After the Week of Peace every man and his family…”) through page 35 (ending with “splendor and the sands dance forever”).
   1. How does Okonkwo treat Nwoye and Ikemefuna when they are learning how to prepare the farm?
   2. Do you think that his methods are the best one in order to teach the boys? Why or why not?
   3. Consider this quote: “Yam stood for manliness…the king of crops was a very exacting king. For three or four moons it demanded hard work and constant attention from cock-crow til the chickens went back to roost. The young tendrils were protected from earth-heat with rings of sisal leaves.” Explain the symbolism shown here.
   4. Considering the symbolism of the last quote, why is it ironic that Okonkwo treats his sons so harshly?
   5. What kind of person do Nwoye and Ikemefuna seem to be? Use evidence from the story to prove your point.
2. Read page 43 (starting at “The weeping was now quite close”) through page 44 (ending with “outside their compound.”)
   1. Why do you think Obiageli was crying? What did she get out of it?
   2. Why do you think Ikemefuna stopped Nwoye’s younger brothers from telling the truth?
   3. Do you think that Ikemefuna, or the other boys, would try to do the same thing as Obiageli? Why or why not?
3. Read pages Page 39-41, starting with “The second day of the new year was the day of the great wrestling match..” through “Thank you, Ezigbo,” she said..”
   1. How did Ekwefi come to be Okonkwo’s wife?
   2. How is Ezinma different from other children?
4. Read page 67 (starting with “Ogbuefi Ndulue of Ire Village..) through page 68 (ending with “he led Umuofia…”)
5. Why did they believe that Ozoemena died?
6. What kind of man was Ndulue?
7. If a man like Ndulue “could not do anything without telling [his wife]”, then what does that suggest about how men (other than Okonkwo) viewed women?
8. Read page 114 (starting with “All this anthill activity”) through 115 (ending with “It was my husband’s…”)
9. In what ways do these women prove that they can work together?
10. What is the punishment that the women give out to the woman whose cow escaped?

Overall Gender roles

1. According to what we have read, how are boys supposed to act in this society?
2. According to what we have read, how are girls supposed to act in this society?
3. Do any of the characters go against those expectations?

1. How does the society seem to respond when people go against those expectations?
2. Can you think of any other instances that either prove these ideas of masculinity/femininity or break from these ideas?