**Directions**: Read the following passage that occurs right after Okonkwo goes to live in his motherland, when he is banished for 7 years. He has been extremely depressed and despondent, and his Uncle, Uchendu, decides to talk to him and his cousins. Then, answer the questions that follow.

On the second day, Uchendu called together his sons and daughters and his nephew, Okonkwo. The men brought their goatskin mats, with which they sat on the floor, and the women sat on a sisal mat on a raised bank of earth. Uchendu pulled gently at his gray beard and gnashed his teeth. Then he began to speak, quietly and deliberately, picking his words with great care:

“It is Okonkwo that I primarily wish to speak to,” he began. “But I want all of you to note that I am going to say. I am an old man and you are all children. I know more about the world than any of you. If there is any one among you who thinks he knows more let him speak up.” He paused, but no one spoke.

“Why is Okonkwo with us today? This is not his clan. We are only his mother’s kinsmen. He does not belong here. He is an exile, condemned for seven years to live in a strange land. And so he is bowed with grief. But there is just one question I would like to ask him. Can you tell me, Okonkwo, why it is that one of the commonest names we give our children is Nneka, or “Mother Supreme”? We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not to his motherland. And yet we say Nneka—“Mother is Supreme”. Why is that?”

There was a silence. “I want Okonkwo to answer me,” said Uchendu.

“I do not know the answer,” Okonkwo replied.

“You do not know the answer? So you see that you are a child. You have many wives and many children—more children than I have. You are a great man in your clan. But you are still a child, *my* child. Listen to me and I shall tell you. But there is one more question I shall ask you. Why is it that when a woman dies she is taken home to e buried with her own kinsmen? She is not buried with her husband’s kinsmen. Why is that? Your mother was brought home to me and buried with my people. Why was that?”

Okonkwo shook his head.

“He does not know that either,” said Uchendu, “and yet he is full of sorrow because he has come to live in his motherland for a few years.” He laughed a mirthless laughter, and turned to his sons and daughters. “What about you? Can you answer my question?”

They all shook their heads.

“Then listen to me,” he said and cleared his throat. “It’s true that a child belongs to its father But when a father beats his child, it seeks sympathy in its mother’s hut. A man belongs to his fatherland when things are good and life is sweet. But when there is sorrow and bitterness he finds refuge in his motherland. Your mother is there to protect you. She is buried there. And that is why we say that mother is supreme. Is it right that you, Okonkwo, should bring to your mother a heavy face and refuse to be comforted? Be careful or you may displease the dead. Your duty is to comfort your wives and children and take them back to your fatherland after seven years. But if you allow sorrow to weigh you down and kill you, they will all die in exile.” He paused for a long while. “These are now your kinsmen.” He waved at his sons and daughters. “You think you are the greatest sufferer in the world? Do you know that men are sometimes banished for life? Do you know that men sometimes lose all their yams and even their children? I had six wives once. I have none now except that young girl who knows not her right from her left. Do you know how many children I have buried—children I begot in my youth and strength? Twenty-two. I did not hang myself, and I am still alive. If you think you are the greatest sufferer in the world, ask my daughter, Akueni, how many twins she has bourne and thrown away. Have you not heard the song they sing when a woman dies?

“’*For whom it is well, for whom is it well?*

*There is no one for whom it is well.’*

*“*I have no more to say to you.” (133-135)

1. Why does Uchendu feel like he can give Okonkwo a lecture like this?
2. Why does Uchendu say that “mother is supreme”?
3. What does this reveal about this culture? How does it counter our previous understandings of their lifestyle and beliefs?
4. Why do you think that Uchendu feels the need to say this to Okonkwo? Why is this a lesson that Okonkwo really needs to hear?
5. Do you think that Okonkwo will listen to him? Why or why not?

At the end of the 7 years, just before Okonkwo leaves to return to his fatherland, he provides a feast for his mother’s kinsmen.

* What has been happening to the tribes of Umuofia while Okonkwo was in exile?

Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow:

As the palm-wine was drunk one of the oldest members of the Umunna rose to thank Okonkwo:

“If I say that we did not expect such a big feast I will be suggesting that we did not know how openhanded our son, Okonkwo, is. We all know him, and we all expected a big feast. But it turned out to be even bigger than we expected. Thank you. May all you took out return again tenfold. It is good in these days when the younger generation consider themselves wiser than their sires to see a man doing things in the grand, old way. A man who calls his kinsmen to a feast does not do so to save them from starving. They all have food in their own homes. When we gather together in the moonlit village ground it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his own compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. You may ask why I am saying all this. I say it because I fear for the younger generation, for you people.” He waved his arm where most of the young men sat. “As for me, I have only a short while to live, and so have Uchendu and Unachukwu and Emefo. But I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong is the bond of kinship. You do not know what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can now leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan.” He turned again to Okonkwo and said, “Thank you for calling us together.” (166-7)

1. What does this old man mean when he says that Okonkwo is “openhanded”?
2. Why does he say that the tribe should come together to feast?
3. According to this old man, what is the most important thing for these tribesmen? Do you agree with him?
4. Consider the metaphor “He can curse the gods of his fathers and ancestors, like a hunter’s dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master”. What does this mean? Who is who? Do you agree with this metaphor? Why or why not?
5. Considering this passage and everything else we have read, in what ways is Okonkwo the IDEAL Umuofian man, and in what ways does he break that ideal, or go against it?

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| Ideal traits | Breaks the ideal and goes against it |
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