

R.15

Literature – Short stories, fables and fairy tales

Ch. N. Adichie: “The Thing Around Your Neck” – Analysing a short story

Xenia Riedl



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Die Unterrichtseinheit erkundet moderne nigerianische Literatur anhand von Ch. N. Adichies Kurzgeschichte „The Thing Around Your Neck“. Sie untersucht Nigerias gesellschaftliche Situation, das Thema Auswanderung, den amerikanischen Traum und kulturelle Auseinandersetzungen. Durch vielfältige Methoden und Aktivitäten wird die Einheit abwechslungsreich und ansprechend gestaltet. Die Schülerinnen und Schüler entwickeln ihre Leseverstehenskompetenz und Kommunikations- und Recherchefähigkeiten, während sie ihr interkulturelles Verständnis und ihre Medienkompetenz ausbauen.

COMPETENCES

Competences:	1. Reading: understanding literary texts and analysing their linguistic and stylistic features; 2. Speaking: participating in complex conversations and discussions; 3. Writing: writing argumentative and analytical texts; mediating between German and English; 4. Listening: understanding authentic listening materials
Methods:	discussion, listening/viewing comprehension, mediation, reading comprehension, research, role play, text analysis, (creative) writing
Themes:	analysis of a short story, Nigeria and its special situation, immigration, the American Dream, intercultural aspects, modern Nigerian literature

Facts

Nigeria is famous for its diverse literary scene, which reflects the country's cultural heritage, complex history and social reality. Among the many authors of Nigerian descent, three names are often mentioned: Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka have competed for the title of being "the greatest African writer". Achebe (1930–2013), whose novel "Things Fall Apart" (1958) depicts the effects of British colonial rule on Nigeria, can be called "the father of modern African literature" (Nadine Gordimer). Soyinka (1934), winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1986, is a dramatist and poet as well as a political activist, who combines satire and criticism of post-colonial African governments and politics.

Nigerian American Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie is the most prominent of a younger generation of writers. Born on 15 September 1977, she grew up in the university town of Nsukka, where her father worked as a professor of statistics and her mother as the first female registrar. Adichie began to study medicine and pharmacy in Nigeria, but then moved to the USA to concentrate on writing. Her first novel, "Purple Hibiscus", about a girl growing up in a disintegrating family was nominated for the Booker Prize in 2004 and won her instant recognition. The first sentence of the novel ("Things started to fall apart at home.") is an

Overview

Topic 1: From Nigeria to the USA

M 1 Worksheet – Discovering Nigeria

Topic 2: Ch. N. Adichie: "The Thing Around Your Neck"

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M 3 Worksheet – Immigrant life in the USA

M 4 Worksheet – A different type of American?

M 5 Worksheet – Cultural and social differences

M 6 Worksheet – The end of the relationship?

Topic 3: Nigerian literature

M 7 Worksheet – Ch. N. Adichie: "The Danger of a Single Story"

M 8 Worksheet – Mediation

Topic 1: From Nigeria to the USA

Worksheet – Discovering Nigeria

M 1

These three photos capture the spirit of Lagos – Nigeria’s megacity.



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Working with the pictures



3. Describe the pictures from Lagos, an African city of more than 20 million inhabitants. Imagine what life is like in a megacity like this.

Research



4. Work in small groups. Choose one of the following aspects of Nigerian society:
 - different ethnic groups
 - religious conflicts
 - economy
 - political issues

Do Internet research on the topic. Make notes and then report back to the class.

Organising your findings



5. Using the information you have learned about Nigeria, identify reasons why people might choose to leave for the USA or Europe. Consider push and pull factors.

Key: M 1 Worksheet – Discovering Nigeria

Working with the pictures

1. *Describe the pictures from Lagos, an African city of more than 20 million inhabitants. Imagine what life is like in a megacity like this.*

The first picture shows an aerial view of the city centre of Lagos. On the left there is the business district with office blocks and high-rise buildings among low houses. On the right, one can see a river or a lagoon. A highway running alongside connects the city with the sea, which can be seen in the background. An oil platform in the bay, containers and a crane on the bank indicate that Lagos has a busy port.

The second picture was taken in a crowded market street. On the left and right, vendors present their goods: heaps of colourful clothes, jewellery and sunglasses. Some of the stalls are protected by corrugated iron roofs or sunshades. The customers are walking around, looking at the merchandise and talking to the sellers. Most people, especially men, are dressed in casual clothes (trousers/jeans and shirts). Many of the women are wearing dresses, some of them traditional costumes with long skirts and headdresses in bright colours and patterns. In the foreground, a woman is carrying a green plastic bowl full of bananas on her head.

The third picture shows a shantytown or slum built close to the water. The settlement consists of a cluster of primitive houses and wooden shacks with rusty red and grey tin roofs. These huts reach down to a stretch of sand, which is covered by a layer of garbage, bags and old tires. Bright blue fishing boats bob in the water. In the foreground there is a concrete pier where stairs lead down to the water. Groups of men are waiting, probably for a bigger boat to arrive.

Life in a huge city like that is certainly a challenge. Judging from the photos, Lagos is a financial and industrial centre, where qualified people might find jobs. Colourful markets sell European and African products, and the city is close to the sea. However, megacities like Lagos face challenges in accommodating their vast population and maintaining a functioning transportation system. The photo depicting the shantytown underscores the disparity between the wealthy and the poor. The wealthy enjoy the benefits of modern city life, while the poor endure overcrowded slums plagued by poverty, unsanitary conditions, environmental pollution, and likely, violence.

Research

2. *Work in small groups. Choose one of the following aspects of Nigerian society: different ethnic groups, religious conflicts, economy, political issues. Do Internet research on the topic. Make notes and then report back to the class.*

Worksheet – Immigrant life in the USA

M 3

Pre-reading activity

1. Explain your understanding of the American Dream.



Reading comprehension

2. Read the first paragraph of "The Thing Around Your Neck". Analyse the narrative perspective. Show how the author attracts the reader's attention with the first sentence.
3. Read the first part of the story (ll. 1–113). Complete the sentences giving reasons for what happens in the story. Then check your results with a partner.
 - e) Akunna can migrate to the USA because ...
 - f) Her Nigerian relatives ask her to send presents because ...
 - g) Akunna's uncle likes his life in the USA because ...
 - h) The American girls at college ask a lot of annoying questions because ...
 - i) At first, Akunna feels at home at her uncle's house because ...
 - j) But then the young woman leaves because ...
 - k) In Connecticut, she cannot go to college because ...
 - l) Akunna does not write letters to her parents because ...
4. Sum up the differences between the Nigerian and American way of life Akunna notices while living in Connecticut (ll. 63ff.).



Working with the language

5. Explain the meaning and function of the images describing Akunna's situation in Connecticut (ll. 103–113).
6. Look at the picture and make a list of words to describe Akunna's feelings. Then share your list with a partner.



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Homework: The plot of the story

7. Read the whole story and write a summary of the plot in about 100 words.



M 4 Worksheet – A different type of American?

Pre-reading activity



1. Role play – A conversation between Juan and Akunna: Choose a partner, read the role cards and act out the dialogue.



Role card: Juan

You are Juan, the manager of the restaurant Akunna works in. You think Akunna is a nice girl. As you are an immigrant yourself, you know how difficult it is to find work and to get used to life in a foreign county. You are worried when you see her bruises and notice how lonely she is. So, you want to help her and start a conversation about her problems.

Role card: Akunna

You are Akunna. You are grateful that Juan has given you a job. You are happy to work with him because he is friendly and understands the problems of immigrants. But although you are lonely, you do not want to tell Juan any details about your private life and your problems. So, when he starts a conversation about this topic, you try to evade his questions.

Reading comprehension



2. Now reread the second part of the story (ll. 114–162) and sum up what you are told about the young man Akunna gets to know at the restaurant. Use the following prompts to collect information: looks – age – occupation – hobbies/interests – behaviour (towards Akunna).
3. Explain why Akunna isolates herself after her arrival in Connecticut.
4. Explain why Akunna is fascinated and yet irritated by the young man.
5. Find out what blank strips of paper in fortune cookies are supposed to signify. In class, discuss what this could mean for Akunna's future.



Creative writing



6. Feeling lonely, Akunna has started to write down her experiences in the USA. Compose a diary entry in which she reflects on her date at Chang's. Write about 150 words.