

**Senior Summer Reading Assignment 2024-2025**  
***Things Fall Apart, Nervous Conditions, James Bond, and***  
**Postcolonialism**

Next year, we will examine texts through a series of critical lenses in the form of different critical literary theories. These theories allow focused analysis of the various historical and cultural forces that influence our world and the texts that emerge in reaction to it.

Over the summer, you will get to preview one: Postcolonialism. Here is a brief introduction to postcolonialism:

**“History is Written by the Victors”**

Postcolonial criticism is similar to cultural studies, but it assumes a unique perspective on literature and politics that warrants a separate discussion. Specifically, postcolonial critics are concerned with literature produced by colonial powers and works produced by those who were/are colonized. Postcolonial theory looks at issues of power, economics, politics, religion, and culture and how these elements work in relation to colonial hegemony (western colonizers controlling the colonized).<sup>1</sup>

Here are a few questions to ask when exploring a text from this lens:

- What are the vestigial effects of the colonizing culture on the colonized culture? How are they reflected in the text?
- What are the cultural “scars” of colonization? How does the text reflect the impact colonization had on the indigenous culture?
- How is status in the culture affected by its history of colonization, during which the invading culture almost definitely regarded itself as “higher” or “better” than the native culture? How is this reflected in the text?
- Is the author of the text attempting to preserve native traditions and culture in rejection of the colonizers? How so? Is it effective? (Is such a thing even possible?)

You will engage several texts through this lens:

**The first text is *Things Fall Apart*, a novel published in 1958 by Chinua Achebe, who is Nigerian. You read this novel last year in AP English but should review it for the assignments below.**

“*Things Fall Apart*, published in 1958, is the seminal African novel in English. Although there were earlier examples, notably by Achebe's fellow Nigerian, [Amos Tutuola](#), none has been so influential, not only on African literature, but on literature around the world. Its most striking feature is to create a complex and

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<sup>1</sup> Brizee, Tompkins. “Post-Colonial Criticism (1990s-present).” *OWL*, Purdue Writing Center. 2013.

sympathetic portrait of a traditional village culture in Africa. Achebe is trying not only to inform the outside world about Ibo cultural traditions, but to remind his own people of their past and to assert that it had contained much of value. All too many Africans in his time were ready to accept the European judgment that Africa had no history or culture worth considering.”

This description is from professor Paul Brian’s study guide on the novel, which I recommend you use as you read:

(<http://public.wsu.edu/~brians/anglophone/achebe.html>)

**The second “text” is any James Bond film of your choosing.** Note that you may choose any Bond film, including the recent *No Time to Die*, but earlier films will probably be easier to analyze from a post-colonial perspective. (Excepting *Casino Royale*, the introductory scenes of which provide excellent material to analyze in this way).

As you engage the film, consider how James Bond’s *Britishness* comes into play, specifically how his prowess and importance compare to the non-European cultures and locations he visits. Are the cultures of the places he goes portrayed in a lesser or greater light than his own English culture? Is “foreignness” (here meaning “not western European”) an essential part of the identity of the villain in the film? How so?

**The third text is the novel *Nervous Conditions*, written by Zimbabwean author Tsitsi Dangarembga, and published in 1988.**

Grey Wolf Press describes the book as: “The groundbreaking first novel in Tsitsi Dangarembga’s award-winning trilogy, *Nervous Conditions* won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and has been “hailed as one of the 20th century’s most significant works of African literature” (*The New York Times*). Two decades before Zimbabwe would win independence and end white minority rule, thirteen-year-old Tambudzai Sigauke embarks on her education. On her shoulders rest the economic hopes of her parents, siblings, and extended family, and within her burns the desire for independence. She yearns to be free of the constraints of her rural village and thinks she’s found her way out when her wealthy uncle offers to sponsor her schooling. But she soon learns that the education she receives at his mission school comes with a price.”

*Nervous Conditions* presents the story of colonialism—and post-colonialism—through the eyes of a teenage girl coming of age among different expectations and demands from different cultures and influences.

**Written Assignment:**

You will submit **two** assignments on September 6, the second day of the new school year. Between these two assignments, you will examine all three of the texts described above (2 novels, 1 film). Each assignment will be worth 50 points.

**You must complete and submit:**

- 1) A 2-3-page paper (500-750 words) that compares two of the assigned texts as representations of colonial legacies. Consider how each work engages with institutions of empires and colonization and how each makes use of storytelling to either support or subvert those institutions. You may choose to advance an evaluative thesis—comparing the two works in order to elevate the work of one artist over the other. Or you may choose an analytical thesis, advancing a claim about commonality or distinctiveness of the methods and practices each artist uses to engage with the legacies of colonialism. In either case, you must advance a thesis. (50 points)

You must examine the third text in either of the following two formats (30 points):

- 2) A 3-5-page short story (750-1250 words) from the perspective of any one character in the text. The short story should demonstrate an understanding of postcolonial forces affecting those involved. This story can take the form of a sequel, following a character after the conclusion of the official narrative, or can imagine an un-narrated moment in the novel or film
- 3) A piece of visual art (that you create yourself) that specifically addresses one of the above postcolonial questions for that text. This art may be physical or digital. You must include a 1-page (250+words) Artist's Statement of Purpose that explains which postcolonial question(s) you addressed and what ideas you intended to convey with the piece of art.

These will constitute your first written pieces for this course, and also a starting point for us to explore your writing habits and style for further refinement. Your writing will be assessed according to the NJ State Standard Holistic writing rubric with which you are already familiar.

Feel free to e-mail me over the summer with any questions about the work. I will respond within the week.