

Mentor Text: Literary Analysis Sample Response

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie opens her novel *Purple Hibiscus* with descriptions of the fearful silence in Papa's home. The main character, Kambili, is afraid to speak, as she is consumed with worry about angering Papa with her words. At Auntie Ifeoma's house, Kambili and her brother Jaja experience a starkly different environment filled with speech, laughter, music, and singing. In her novel, Adichie uses the motif of music and singing to portray how Kambili grows from a reserved character who, under Papa's control, lacks connection with her Igbo cultural identity, to a culturally conscious character who has pride in her indigenous roots. The motif of music evolves over the course of the novel to ultimately convey the theme that having a relationship with one's cultural identity can be an empowering act.

Adichie first employs the motif of music in Auntie Ifeoma's house to illustrate the connection between music and indigenous identity. Amaka shows Kambili the sound system in her bedroom and describes her musical tastes. She says, "I listen to mostly indigenous musicians. They're culturally conscious; they have something real to say. Fela and Osadebe and Onyeka are my favorites. Oh, I'm sure you probably don't know who they are, I'm sure you're into American pop like other teenagers" (118). While Amaka assumes that Kambili does not listen to culturally conscious music because she likes more mainstream music, the reality is that Papa does not allow any non-Catholic music in his home. He also would never allow Kambili to listen to culturally conscious music because he believes indigenous culture is sacrilegious. Later in this chapter, when Father Amadi sings Igbo songs during the rosary, Kambili "press[es] her lips together, biting [her] lower lip, so [her] mouth would not join in the singing on its own, so [her] mouth would not betray [her]" (139). Despite her desire to sing Igbo songs, Kambili makes a concerted effort not to, knowing she would be betraying Papa's rules about participating in what he believes to be pagan

traditions. This scene, therefore, depicts Kambili's interest in her indigenous identity that she suppresses out of loyalty to her father.

Adichie later uses music to symbolize Kambili's budding connection with her Igbo cultural identity, as well her independence from Papa. When Papa catches Kambili and Jaja looking at the painting of Papa-Nnukwu, he snatches it from them and tears it up. Kambili curls herself around the painting to protect it as Papa ruthlessly beats her. As the tempo of his kicks increases, Kambili thinks about "Amaka's music, her culturally conscious music that sometimes started off with a calm saxophone and then whirled into lusty singing" (211). In this scene, Amaka's music represents Kambili's developing cultural consciousness, as she protects her Igbo heritage by curling her body about the painting of Papa-Nnukwu, a character who was proud of his indigenous identity. Additionally, this scene is a turning point for Kambili, representing the beginning of her independence from Papa's control. In the hospital, Mama minimizes Papa's violence by telling her how he has been so worried that he "has not slept a wink" (214). Kambili narrates, "It was hard to turn my head, but I did it and looked away," revealing how Kambili is no longer tolerating Papa's abuse or excuses for it (214).

At the end of the novel, Adichie uses the motif of music and singing to portray Kambili as an empowered character who finds a sense of belonging and pride in her cultural identity. As she and Amaka rinse rice in preparation for dinner, Kambili smiles and reflects, "I had never felt the companionship I felt sitting next to her, listening to her Fela and Onyeka cassettes on the tiny tape-player-radio...I had never felt the comfortable silence we shared as we cleaned the rice..." (247). While silence in Papa's house is fearful and tense, the silence she has with Amaka as the music plays in the background is peaceful, as Kambili feels a sense of belonging with her as they enjoy music together. In a later scene, Amaka notices Kambili singing: "'You are singing along,' she said after a while...'You were just singing along with Fela.' 'I was? I looked at Amaka and

wondered if she was imagining things" (277). Unlike the earlier scene with Father Amadi, Kambili now sings uninhibitedly, no longer worrying about what Papa would think, illustrating how she has broken free from his control. Finally, when she and Mama are in the car on the way to visit Jaja in prison, Kambili asks their driver to play Fela (297). Her musical request is significant, as it depicts Kambili as someone who actively chooses culturally conscious music to listen to, rather than being a passive listener of the music. Kambili, therefore, has grown from someone who avoided indigenous culture because her father claimed it as heathen, to someone whose indigenous identity gives her a sense of belonging and pride.

Through the evolution of the motif of music and singing, Adichie conveys how having a connection with your cultural identity can be empowering because it helps you better understand who you are. At the beginning of the novel, Kambili did not know who she was because she blindly accepted whatever Papa believed. Consequently, she was disconnected from her Igbo heritage, having been taught that this part of her identity is shameful and sinful. As she listens to, and eventually sings culturally conscious music, she develops a pride in her Igbo heritage, as well as an independence from Papa's tyranny. Sometimes it is difficult to feel proud of one's cultural heritage in a society that expects you to assimilate to a dominant culture. The motif of music and singing in *Purple Hibiscus* conveys the importance of celebrating our unique cultural identities.