

“Vultures” Chinua Achebe

In the grayness (1)
and drizzle of one despondent
dawn unstirred by harbingers
of sun break a vulture
perching high on broken (5)
bone of a dead tree
nestled close to his
mate his smooth
bashed-in head, a pebble
on a stem rooted in (10)
a dump of gross
feathers, inclined affectionately
to hers. Yesterday they picked
the eyes of a swollen
corpse in a water-logged (15)
trench and ate the things in its bowel.
Full
gorged they chose their roost
keeping the hollowed remnant
in easy range of cold (20)
telescopic eyes ...
Strange
indeed how love in other
ways so particular
will pick a corner (25)
in that charnel-house
tidy it and coil up there, perhaps
even fall asleep - her face
turned to the wall!
... Thus the Commandant at Belsen (30)
Camp going home for
the day with fumes of
human roast clinging
rebelliously to his hairy
nostrils will stop (35)
at the wayside sweet-shop
and pick up a chocolate
for his tender offspring
waiting at home for Daddy's return ...

Praise bounteous (40)
providence if you will
that grants even an ogre
a tiny glow-worm
tenderness encapsulated
in icy caverns of a cruel (45)
heart or else despair
for in every germ
of that kindred love is
lodged the perpetuity
of evil. (50)



**Biographical
Context**

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930 where his father worked for the Church Missionary Society. After university, he studied broadcasting at the BBC then worked in Lagos for the Nigerian Broadcasting Service.

He is one of the most admired African novelists who write in English. His novels trace Africa's transition from traditional to modern ways. He writes with a mission, and he believes that any good work of art should have a purpose - an idea that stems from the oral tradition of storytelling in Africa. He is interested in speech and his novels present a wide range of language, from the English spoken by the Ibo to different levels of formal English. He also writes poetry and essays.

He married in 1961 and has four children.

He became an honorary professor at the University of Nigeria in 1985.

Part I: “Vultures” Discussion Questions In-Class Assignment 20 pts

1. Define the following words: (6 pts)
 - a. **harbingers**
 - b. **roost**
 - c. **charnel-house**
 - d. **providence**
 - e. **ogre**
 - f. **perpetuity**
2. Identify an example of **alliteration** in the beginning of the poem
3. Identify 5 images of horror in the first 16 lines of this poem.
4. In the second section, the vultures' affection leads the poet on to muse about the nature of love. What is love **personified** as?
5. Identify the **allusion** used towards the middle of the poem.
6. In the last section, which two **metaphors** are used to describe the Commandant at Belsen?
7. Identify the **paradox** (contradiction) at the end of the poem.

Homework: TONE IN “Vultures” 20 pts due Tuesday, February 26

To decide on the tone, you need to think about the **ideas** and **attitudes** in the poem, and then decide how you would read it aloud.

Assignment: Rewrite and complete the three statements below. Use your understanding of the poem, “*Vultures*.”

Part I: Tone 10 pts

1. The poem should be read in a nightmarish tone to illustrate.... (think of what the author illustrates)
2. The poem should be read in a cold, dead tone, to emphasize... (what is the poet trying to emphasize)
3. The poem should be read in a warmer tone, to celebrate... (what does the poet celebrate in the end)

Part II: Imagery 10 pts

Find 3 images associated with the poem and write a 1 sentence description for each.

Name _____ period _____

Part II: "Vultures" Comprehension Questions (Test Prep)

due Thursday, February 28

Which word is a **term for sunrise** that emphasizes the idea of things being wrong or broken, continued in the description of the tree?

- dawn (line 3)
- sunbreak (line 4)
- tiny glow-worm (line 42)

2. Which word **does not convey tenderness**, or provide a contrast with the images of violence?

- nestled (line 7)
- affectionately (line 12)
- Strange (line 21)

3. In which line can you find a word or phrase that is a place associated with death and the horrors of dead bodies, in keeping with the imagery of the poem?

4. In which line can you find **alliteration** that emphasizes the cruelty of the Commandant?

5. In which line can you find **alliteration** that creates a gloomy feeling?

6. "Yesterday they picked
the eyes of a swollen
corpse in a water-logged
trench and ate the things in its bowel."

Pick the best analysis of this section.

- This sections illustrates the horrible nature of the vultures as they are described picking at a corpse; but it also provides a sharp contrast to the love they feel for each other.
- This section gives us an image of vultures being dirty.
- This section illustrates the violent nature of the vultures.

7. Which phrase links the **appearance** of the **vulture** with **violence**?

- high on broken bone (line 5)
- bashed-in head (line 9)
- dump of gross feathers (line 11-12)

8. Which of the following is a **metaphor** that highlights the **smallness of hope in an evil world**?

- sunbreak (line 4)
- ogre (line 43)
- tiny glow-worm (line 42)

9. In the poem, **love** is **personified** as...

- An innocent child
- A concentration camp Commandant
- A woman with human characteristics

10. In which line can you find a **description of children** that implies **young innocence** providing a stark **contrast** to all the **violent images**?