

Reading Literature cross-culturally

He beat his *ogene* GOME GOME GOME GOME . . . and immediately children's voices took up the news on all sides. *Onwa atuo!* . . . *onwa atuo!* . . . *onwa atuo!* . . . He put the stick back into the iron gong and leaned it on the wall.

The little children in his compound joined the rest in welcoming the moon. Obiageli's tiny voice stood out like a small *ogene* among drums and flutes. He could also make out the voice of his youngest son, Nwafo. The women too were in the open, talking.

'Moon,' said the senior wife, Matefi, 'may your face meeting mine bring good fortune.'

'Where is it?' asked Ugoye, the younger wife. 'I don't see it. Or am I blind?'

'Don't you see beyond the top of the ukwa tree? Not there. Follow my finger.'

'Oho, I see it. Moon, may your face meeting mine bring good fortune. But how is it sitting? I don't like its posture.'

'Why?' asked Matefi.

'I think it sits awkwardly – like an evil moon.'

'No,' said Matefi. 'A bad moon does not leave anyone in doubt. Like the one under which Okuata died. Its legs were up in the air.'

'Does the moon kill people?' asked Obiageli, tugging at her mother's cloth.

'What have I done to this child? Do you want to strip me naked?'

'I said does the moon kill people?'

'It kills little girls,' said Nwafo, her brother.

'I did not ask you, ant-hill nose.'

'You will soon cry, long throat.'

The moon kills little boys

The moon kills ant-hill nose

The moon kills little boys . . . Obiageli turned everything into a song

(Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*)

TASK 1:

- a) In the text you have read, are there any cultural references that puzzle you, or which do not seem clear? Are there any sections of the text that you felt you understood individual words but not their 'meaning'? Underline those sections of the text where you felt this was a problem.
- b) How would you describe your responses when reading the text? What kind of feelings did you have while reading?
- c) Can you guess what society is being described in the text?

TASK 2: The following, are some observations you may have made while reading the text:

- a) Objects or products that exist in one society, but not in another (e.g. *ogene*).
- b) Proverbs, idioms, formulaic expressions which embody cultural values (e.g. '*Moon, may your face meeting mine...*')
- c) Social structures, roles and relationships (e.g. number of wives mentioned in the text, or relationship between parents and children).