

LESSON NOTE ON LITERATURE-IN-ENGLISH WEEK 9

SUBJECT: Literature-In-English

TOPIC: African Prose; "Second-Class Citizen" by Buchi Emecheta

CLASS: SS1

WEEK: 9

MAJOR CHARACTERS

1. Adah Obi (nee Ofili)
2. Francis Obi

MINOR CHARACTERS

1. Babalola
2. Mr Barking
3. Big Pa (Francis' father)
4. Bill
5. Boy (Adah's younger brother)
6. Headmaster

BACKGROUND

The title of the novel has meaning beyond the ordinary understanding of the expression. The word "'second-citizen Class' in the novel pertains to girls who in African culture are less rated than boys. Hence, in this novel, Boy is encouraged to go to school whereas Adah is discouraged from doing the same. Adah is rated a second-class citizen by her husband, Francis, who considers himself a first-class sex. Adah's skin colour already classifies her as a second-class person. Being a foreigner in England, Adah does not enjoy the same privilege as those who own the place.

SUMMARY OF THE PLOT

Adah Ofili was born during Second World War. Her father was a retired soldier while her mother was an ordinary housewife. As a girl, the parents thought she had no need for Western education. While they encouraged Boy, her younger brother, to go to school, they discouraged her from doing the same. For Ma, her mother, Adah needed a year or two.....as long as she can write her name and count. Then she will learn how to sew. Adah is so determined to go to school that she sneaks off to school one day, causing her mother to get into trouble with the police. She is caned by father as a result. While this is occurring, a lawyer returns to Lagos from studying in the United Kingdom (U.K.). He is given a hero's welcome and Adah

decides that she would like to go to the U.K. someday as well.

A short time later, Adah's father passes away and her mother remarries. She is sent to live with her uncle and cousins, and they treat her like a servant. She continues to attend school, but by age 11 her family is entertaining prospective husbands for her. She steals money from her cousin to pay an entrance fee exam for Methodist Girls' School and though she is once again caned for her disobedience, she passes the exam and earns a scholarship to attend the school. All the while, Adah remains focused on her dream to someday go to the U.K. and to have a successful career-oriented life. After high school, Adah had to marry; she needs a home which she doesn't have, having lost her parents and having no kind-hearted extended family members. She chooses a man named Francis Obi who is studying to be an accountant. She moves in with her in-laws and gets a job at the American Consulate Library. Francis is uneasy about his wife earning more money than him, but his father points out that she is supporting them and he should be happy about this. Shortly after giving birth to her first child, a girl named Titi, Adah tells Francis her dream of going to the U.K. and he agrees to go with her. However, Francis' father does not approve because Adah is a woman and thinks only Francis should go. Francis leaves, and shortly after giving birth to her second child, a boy named Vicky, Adah convinces her in-laws to allow her to follow him (Francis)

When Adah arrives U.K., she is shocked at the poor condition of the neighbourhood and house Francis has chosen for them to live in. She is also bothered by the residents in the house, as they are of the Yoruba ethnic group, whereas, she and Francis are Igbo. Francis tells her that they cannot expect better conditions because they are Black and therefore "second-class citizen". Adah gets a job at the library in North Finchley and soon finds herself pregnant again. She leaves her children with a babysitter named Trudy while she works because Francis claims; he must study for his accounting exam during the day. He also refuses to get a job instead, he is not embarrassed by the fact that his wife feeds him.

Adah and Francis are evicted from their apartment because the landlady and the other tenants dislike them. It is challenging to find a new home because many advertisements feature the caveat "sorry, no coloureds". Adah finds an ad that does not say this; she disguises her accent on the phone when she speaks with the landlady. However, as soon as she and Francis arrive to look at the apartment and the landlady sees that they are Black, she sends them away. They finally find a place to live in the house of another Nigerian immigrant called Mr. Noble.

Shortly thereafter, Adah gives birth to a baby boy through a Cesarean Section. When Adah leaves the hospital, she goes to a family planning clinic to get birth control. She needs Francis' signature, so she forges it. Francis finds out and beats her mercilessly. A short time later, she discovers she is pregnant again. She tells Francis that she will no longer support him financially and he must get a job. When she delivers her fourth child, a girl, she decides to write a book while she is on maternity leave.

Adah shows the book to her friends at the library and they are supportive and recommend that she sends it to a publisher. Francis is less impressed and burns her manuscript. He has failed his accounting exams repeatedly and he does not want to have a wife who is more accomplished than he is. They quarrel again; Adah takes the children and moves in to her own apartment. Francis finds her there and beats her again. Afterwards, Adah goes to court to try to get an order of protection. Francis lies and claims her injuries are all a result of falls, but the court orders him to pay child support.

SETTING

The novel is physically set in Lagos and London.