



Purple Hibiscus: What's in a Title?

Name _____

Hour _____

1. Without looking at the book or at any specific references, why do you think Adichie chose this as the title for her story?
2. In addition to the title, Adichie includes many references to flowers, and several that specifically allude to the purple hibiscus flower. Read the five passages below:

PAGE 16 (Enugu- Kambili and Jaja's home)

Jaja's defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma's experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one crowd the crowds waving green leaves chanted... A freedom to be, to do.

PAGE 128 (Nsukka- Aunty Ifeoma's home)

"That's a hibiscus, isn't it, Aunty?" Jaja asked, staring at a plant close to the barbed wire fencing. "I didn't know there were purple hibiscuses."

PAGE 197 (Nsukka- Aunty Ifeoma's home)

[After I showed Jaja the painting, he said he had] something to show me, too. It was wrapped in black cellophane paper, as well, and he had lodged it in the refrigerator, beneath bottle of Fanta. When he saw my puzzled look, he said they weren't just sticks; they were stalks of purple hibiscus. He would give them to the gardener. Jaja's eyes shone as he talked about the hibiscuses, as he held them out so I could touch the cold, moist sticks. He had told Papa about them, yet he quickly put them back into the fridge when we heard Papa coming.

PAGE 253 (Enugu- Kambili and Jaja's home)

The scent of fruits filled my nose when Adamu opened our compound gates. It was as if the high walls locked in the scent of the ripening cashews and mangoes and avocados. It nauseated me. "See, the purple hiscisuses are about the bloom," Jaja said, as we got out of the car. He was pointing, although I did not need him to. I could see the sleepy, oval-shaped buds in the front yard as they swayed in the morning breeze. The next day was Palm Sunday, the day Jaja did not go to communion, the day Papa threw his heavy missal across the room and broke the figurines.

PAGE 306 (The Prison Compound- Visiting Jaja in prison)

"We will take Jaja to Nsukka first, and then we'll go to America to visit Aunty Ifeoma," I say. "We'll plant new orange trees in Abba when we come back, and Jaja will plant purple hibiscuses, too, and I'll plant ixora so we can suck the juices of the flowers." I am laughing. I reach out and put my arm around Mama's shoulder and she leans toward me and smiles.

3. Based on these quotations, what does the purple hibiscus motif explain or represent?

Compose a single sentence:

For an analysis of how Nigeria's history ties in with this motif read the critical essay excerpt on reverse side of this page

“A Critical Examination of the Role of Nature and Culture in Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Purple Hibiscus” by Isabella Akinseye

Like the **purple hibiscus**, Nigeria as a country never existed. The geographical boundaries of Nigeria were established during colonial rule and as a result the country is a hybrid of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Hron argues that the purple colour is symbolic of the fusion between the colours of the “Union Jack, which stem from, and are set against, the verdant green of the Nigerian flag”. This could be interpreted as the struggle for both a physical and a cultural independence between Nigeria and her colonial master, the British. Kambili and Jaja **take a purple hibiscus plant to transplant in Enugu**. The motif of freedom in the purple hibiscus is further developed by Kambili, who sees the plant as symbolic of an inward liberation.

Jaja’s defiance seemed to me now like Aunty Ifeoma’s experimental purple hibiscus: rare, fragrant with the undertones of freedom, a different kind of freedom from the one crowd the crowds waving green leaves chanted... A freedom to be, to do (Adichie 16).

This new freedom is one of defiance and fighting back; it comes by challenging the dominant powers. Even though, Nigeria has gained its independence from the British, the influence of the coloniser is still seen in the political, economic and socio-cultural mechanisms in the country. In postcolonial theory, the concept of hybridity is defined a

“a problematic of colonial representation .. that reverses the effects of the colonial disavowal, so that other ‘denied’ knowledges enter upon the dominant discourse and estrange the basis of its authority.”

A postcolonial interpretation of the imagery of **the purple hibiscus shows a clash between the red hibiscus representing the blood of the indigenes of Nigeria and the blue, the British colonial masters**. This has formed a shade of purple where the people have to negotiate to what degree they adopt the norms and traditions of their ancestors as represented by the pagan Papa Nnukwu and their former colonial masters in the person of Catholic Father Benedict. The hybrid person is part of a third species which cannot fully connect with either identity. In the hybrid space of adolescence, Kambili moves beyond her childhood perspective of life which is grounded in the teachings and instructions of her father, Eugene Achike and the Roman Catholic Church to adulthood symbolised by an independence of thought as seen in Aunty Ifeoma’s household in Nsukka. The Achike children have been trained to be quiet and follow daily schedules unlike Aunty Ifeoma’s children. Amaka “asked many questions and did not accept many answers”, (Adichie, 2004: 79). Aunty Ifeoma’s son, Obiora is described as intelligent and articulate as evidenced in his ability to discuss “religion and oppression” (Adichie 173).

Hence, Kambili gives the reader an insight into the mind of the postcolonial hybrid. In the beginning, she accepts everything her father teaches her but after Nsukka where she is exposed to a different culture and way of thinking, she begins to question her father’s convictions and method.

Name _____

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