

The African Palimpsest

SUMMARY:

- Saro-Wiwa sometimes uses African words, phrases and sentences that describe ‘culturally bound objects or occurrences’ (pg 157) in a book that is mainly “rotten English (pg 157).
- He uses methods of “cushioning and contextualization” (pg 158).
- One reason that writers like Ken Saro-Wiwa write in English with African words and phrases is to help break the barrier between English and African people. However, even with book like this out, the same gap still exists (pg 159).
- Many words in the African language don’t translate correctly into English- that’s why they want to use African words to describe African objects or places (hut or obi) (pg 160).
- Drawback to cushioning- it gives a lot for a reader to take in- and do they remember it?
- Cultural differences make it hard to assume the correct word in English (pg 159).
- On page 160, Chantal Zabus brings up the point that it just might be better that you leave an African word alone then trying to define it in English because it just doesn’t mean the same thing.
- The levels on page 175: Sozaboy is supposed to be around level 3 or 4
- Page 177: Sometimes us as readers define or assume words incorrectly.
- Some ways to help the non-African reader which authors have used before:
 - Using a ‘glossary of terms’
 - Defining the words in footnotes
 - Defining words within the story (in parenthesis after the word)
 - Giving contextual clues so that you can figure it out on your own

Question 1: Why do you think Ken Saro-Wiwa uses the form (contextualization) he does to get his point across? Did it help you understand the book more or less?

Question 2: Do you think his form of contextualization was effective? Why?

Question 3: If Sozaboy (or any other literary work) was written in “normal” English (versus accented English or English mixed with another language), do you think it would help the reader understand the culture the author writes about more or less?

Question 4: Explain how the language barrier (if you even consider there to be one) affects your understanding of the novel.