

## Modern World History Summer Reading Assignment: *Half of a Yellow Sun*

Rising seniors taking Modern World History next year must read *Half of a Yellow Sun*, by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, and complete the assignment described here.

### About the Book<sup>1</sup>

A masterly, haunting novel from a writer heralded by The Washington Post Book World as “the 21st-century daughter of Chinua Achebe,” *Half of a Yellow Sun* recreates a seminal moment in modern African history: Biafra’s impassioned struggle to establish an independent republic in Nigeria, and the chilling violence that followed...

With astonishing empathy and the effortless grace of a natural storyteller, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie weaves together the lives of three characters swept up in the turbulence of the decade. Thirteen-year-old Ugwu is employed as a houseboy for a university professor full of revolutionary zeal. Olanna is the professor’s beautiful mistress, who has abandoned her life of privilege in Lagos for a dusty university town and the charisma of her new lover. And Richard is a shy young Englishman in thrall to Olanna’s twin sister, an enigmatic figure who refuses to belong to anyone. As Nigerian troops advance and they must run for their lives, their ideals are severely tested, as are their loyalties to one another.

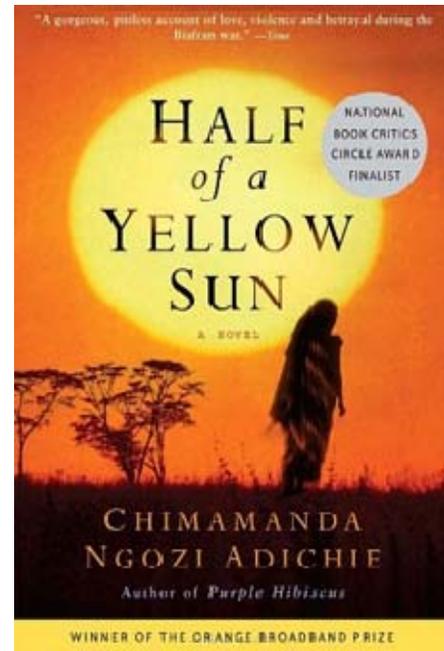
Epic, ambitious, and triumphantly realized, *Half of a Yellow Sun* is a remarkable novel about moral responsibility, about the end of colonialism, about ethnic allegiances, about class and race—and the ways in which love can complicate them all.

### The Assignment

As you read the book, you must complete five journal entries, described in detail on the opposite page. These journal entries must be typed, printed, and assembled in order, for submission on the first day of school. The journals will be graded as a minor assessment.

### A Note on the Movie

*Half of a Yellow Sun* has also been made into a movie. You are welcome to watch the movie as a supplement to this assignment, but it is not an acceptable substitute for reading the book and making specific references to the text.



<sup>1</sup> Text from the author’s website: “Half of a Yellow Sun,” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, 2007, <http://chimamanda.com/books/half-of-a-yellow-sun/>.

## Journal Requirements

As you read, you should complete four journals, one for each of the following sections:

- Part 1: The Early Sixties (chapters 1-6)
- Part 2: The Late Sixties (chapters 7-18)
- Part 3: The Early Sixties (chapters 19-24)
- Part 4: The Late Sixties (chapters 25-37)

Each of these four journal assignments should include the following components:

- Questions (three per journal)
  - Write three questions you had while reading this section of the book.
  - Clarifying questions are questions with simple, factual answers. Probing questions demand greater thought and reflection. You may write no more than one clarifying question per section; focus on probing questions.
- Context (two per journal)
  - Summarize the two most significant events in each section that help you understand the context of the Biafran War and British colonialism in Nigeria.
  - Explain how each event helps you understand the historical context of the book.
  - Each summary-explanation pair should be at least five sentences long.
- Reactions and connections (one per journal)
  - Quote an important passage from this section that struck you.
  - Explain in at least five sentences why you found this quote so compelling.

After you finish the book, you should complete a final journal entry. In the final entry, you should answer, in at least three paragraphs, the question: *Why do you think I assigned this novel as preparation for a history class? What does it have to teach us about history?*

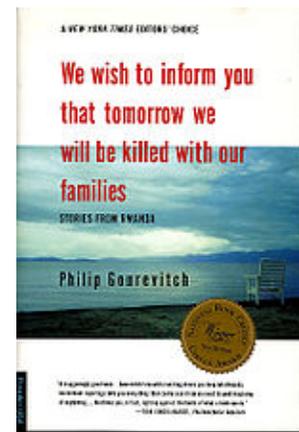
Your response must consist of three to five paragraphs and be supported by specific references to the text (these can be quoted, paraphrased, or both).

## Honors Option

To earn credit towards one honors assignment for the fall semester in Modern World History, you should complete the same assignment for Philip Gourevitch's *We Wish to Inform You that Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families*, a chronicle of the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, in addition to reading *Half of a Yellow Sun*.

The four sections for the first four journals are:

- Part 1: Chapters 1-6
- Part 2: Chapters 7-11
- Part 3: Chapters 12-17
- Part 4: Chapters 18-22



The prompt for the final journal is: *What is the purpose of reading about such horrific events in such detail? What can we gain from chronicling tragedies?*

## Useful Terms and Information

**The Biafran War** (also known as the Nigerian Civil War) lasted from July 1967 to January 1970. The war began when Biafra decided to secede (or break free) from Nigeria.

**Igbo** - There are many different ethnic groups in Nigeria and Biafra is mostly represented by the Igbo people. The Igbo adopted the Christian religion of the colonialists.

**Colonization** - Prior to the Biafran war, Nigeria was controlled (colonized) by Great Britain. Under British rule all the various ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria were linked together (even though they did not see themselves as one nation).

**Coup** - A coup is when the power is taken away from a government (usually through a military uprising).

**Blockade** - In 1968, the Nigerian government surrounded Biafra and cut off outside supplies. The Igbo claimed that blockade was deliberately starving civilians.

**Hausa-Fulani** - Mostly Muslim ethnic group which formed about 65 percent of the peoples in the northern part of Nigeria.

**Yoruba** - Mostly Christian ethnic group which formed about 75 percent of the population in the southwestern part of Nigeria.

