

# Purple Hibiscus



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE

Adichie was born as the fifth of six children and raised in Nsukka, Nigeria. Her father was a professor at the University of Nigeria and her mother was the university's first female registrar. Adichie studied medicine at the university and then moved to the United States at age 19. She received master's degrees from Johns Hopkins and Yale, and rapidly gained critical praise and numerous prizes for her writing. She was awarded the MacArthur Fellowship "Genius Grant" in 2008. She has published poems, short stories, a play, and three novels—*Purple Hibiscus* (2003), *Half of a Yellow Sun* (2007), and *Americanah* (2013)—which have been awarded the Orange Prize among other honors. Adichie is currently married and divides her time between Nigeria and the United States.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Nigeria first gained its independence from British colonialism in 1960, but then faced a brutal civil war seven years later (described in Adichie's novel *Half of a Yellow Sun*). *Purple Hibiscus* takes place years after that, probably in the 1980s. The military leader in the novel is based on Ibrahim Babangida, who took power through a military coup in 1985. His regime was one of the most corrupt in Nigerian history, and included many human rights abuses present in the novel. The character of Ade Coker is based on real-life Nigerian journalist Dele Giwa, who was killed by a package bomb in 1986.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Adichie was first inspired to write by Chinua Achebe, the Nigerian fiction writer most popular in the West and author of *Things Fall Apart*. She was also inspired by Camara Laye, author of *Dark Child*. Both Achebe and Laye gave Adichie a "shock of recognition" that "people who looked like [her] could exist in books." Another influence is the Kenyan writer Binyavanga Wainaina, who is Adichie's contemporary and friend.

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Purple Hibiscus*
- **When Written:** 2001-2003
- **Where Written:** Eastern Connecticut State University and Johns Hopkins University
- **When Published:** 2003
- **Literary Period:** Contemporary Nigerian Literature

- **Genre:** Fiction
- **Setting:** Nigeria
- **Climax:** Papa's death
- **Point of View:** First person limited, from Kambili's perspective

### EXTRA CREDIT

**Chinua Achebe.** The great Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe was one of Adichie's most important inspirations and influences, and when she was a child Adichie's family even lived in Achebe's former house. The first line of *Purple Hibiscus* references Achebe's novel [Things Fall Apart](#).

**Flawless Feminism.** In 2012 Adichie gave a TED talk titled "We Should All Be Feminists," discussing the problems with gender roles. Part of this talk was later sampled in Beyoncé's song "Flawless."



## PLOT SUMMARY

Kambili Achike, the narrator, is a fifteen-year-old girl living in Enugu, Nigeria with her father, Eugene (Papa), mother, Beatrice (Mama), and older brother, Chukwuka (Jaja). The novel begins on Palm Sunday. Jaja refuses to receive communion at church, and Papa throws his missal, breaking Mama's beloved **figurines**. Kambili then explains the events leading up to this scene.

Papa, a wealthy factory owner, is an active philanthropist in public and an upstanding Catholic, but at home is a strict and violent authoritarian. He publishes a newspaper, the *Standard*, which is the only paper willing to criticize the new Nigerian Head of State.

Mama gets pregnant. After Mass one day the family visits Father Benedict, their white priest. Mama feels sick and doesn't want to leave the car. When they return home Papa beats Mama until she has a miscarriage. Later Kambili takes her exams and comes second in her class, disappointing Papa.

At Christmas the family goes to their home village of Abba. Papa's father, Papa-Nnukwu, lives there, but Papa doesn't speak to him because his father sticks to his traditional religion and won't become Catholic. Kambili and Jaja visit Papa-Nnukwu briefly. Auntie Ifeoma, Papa's widowed sister and a university professor, arrives in Abba as well. She seems fearless and willing to criticize both Papa and the government. Her children—Amaka, Obiora, and Chima—are precocious and outspoken.

Ifeoma takes Jaja and Kambili to an Igbo festival. On Christmas Papa feeds the whole village. The next day Papa catches

# Purple Hibiscus Chapter Summary

**Victor M. Corman**



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