

Global Literature
Unit: Kenya

Literary Analysis Essay on *The River Between* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o

Your essay will be a detailed, organized, supported, 5-paragraph answer to this question:

What is ONE theme of the novel *The River Between* and how does the author, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, reveal this theme?

You will need to discuss at least 3 of the following different aspects of Ngugi's writing style:

- Plot
- Characterization
- Symbolism
- Foreshadowing
- Allusions
- Figurative Language

Some guiding questions you might choose to include:

1. Tradition vs. Modernization: Is it possible for traditional communities and colonial societies to come together or does colonialism create such deep chasms within Native cultures that the future of such communities is inevitably sabotaged?

Questions to think about as you read:

1. How does the **setting** illustrate this question? Are there any **symbols** of unity? Symbols of division?
2. How does wa Thiong'o **characterize** or describe the people on both sides of this conflict? Do some seem evil and some perfect? Who? How does this influence you as the reader – which side do you sympathize with more?
3. How does the author describe the fate of Muthoni? What actual words does he use? Does this put her fate in a positive or negative light?
4. How does wa Thiong'o **characterize** Waiyaki? What is Waiyaki trying to do? Are his actions put in a positive or negative light? How can you tell? What words does the author use? What realizations does Waiyaki have? Is there any **internal dialogue** that seems to speak the mind of the author?
5. How does the author **characterize** Nyambura? What does she finally decide in the end? Does wa Thiong'o paint her as heroic, foolish, etc? How can you tell?
6. How does wa Thiong'o **characterize** the kiama? Do they seem “good” or “bad” or inbetween? What actual words does he use? How does this influence your view of them?
7. In the end, do you think wa Thiong'o portrays Waiyaki's fate as inevitable or avoidable? Does he seem more sympathetic to the kiama or more sympathetic to Waiyaki?

2. Leadership: Did Waiyaki succeed in fulfilling the prophecy? Why or why not?

Questions to think about as you read:

1. What does the prophecy predict, exactly? Does Waiyaki do any of these? All? Some? Which?
2. What gets in Waiyaki's way of having a clear path or idea of what to do as a leader? Is this his fault or not? Could he have acted differently? How?
3. How does wa Thingo'o **characterize** Waiyaki throughout the book? What is Waiyaki trying to do? Are his actions put in a positive or negative light? How can you tell? What words does the author use? What realizations does Waiyaki have? Is there any **internal dialogue** that seems to speak the mind of the author?
4. How does wa Thingo'o **characterize** Waiyaki at the end of the book? What **allusion** does the author use? How does this influence how the reader feels about Waiyaki? Is there any **internal dialogue** at the end that seems to speak the mind of the author?
5. What happens in Kenya after the time of the book is over? Based on the excerpt from "Facing Mount Kenya" what happens to the British in Kenya?

3. Community vs. Individual: Which is more important: a person's duty to his or her individual freedom, dreams, and goals or to his or her duty to your family and community?

Should people follow their dreams even if it means disobeying their parents or letting their community down?

Questions to think about as you read:

1. How does the **setting** illustrate this question? Are there any **symbols** of unity? Symbols of division?
2. How does wa Thiong'o **characterize** the different communities in the book? Do they seem worthy of sacrifice on the part of the individual?
3. How does the author **characterize** the people who are celebrating their own choices and following their individual dreams? Do they seem heroic or foolish, etc.?
8. How does the author **characterize** or describe the fate of Muthoni? What actual words does he use? Does this put her fate in a positive or negative light? How can you tell?
9. How does wa Thingo'o **characterize** Waiyaki? What is Waiyaki trying to do? Are his actions put in a positive or negative light? How can you tell? What words does the author use? What realizations does Waiyaki have? Is there any **internal dialogue** that seems to speak the mind of the author?
10. How does the author **characterize** Nyambura? What does she finally decide in the end? Does wa Thiong'o paint her as heroic, foolish, etc? How can you tell?
11. How does wa Thingo' **characterize** the kiama? Do they seem "good" or "bad" or inbetween? What actual words does he use? How does this influence your view of them?