

## 5 long assignment questions on "The Power of a Plate of Rice" by Ifeoma Okoye : UNIT 1

### Question 1:

Discuss the significance of the protagonist's relationship with her mother as depicted in the narrative. How do the mother's teachings influence Cheta's actions?

### Answer:

Cheta's relationship with her mother is foundational to her character and actions throughout the narrative. The mother serves as a moral compass for Cheta, embodying the qualities of resilience, wisdom, and sacrifice. Cheta recalls her mother's advice to "Do nothing in anger. Wait till your anger melts like thick palm oil placed under the sun." This guidance illustrates her mother's emphasis on patience and emotional control, which Cheta struggles to adhere to in the face of her mounting frustrations with Mr. Aziza. The mother's sacrifices, including forgoing comfort for Cheta's education and managing financial burdens during family crises, create a backdrop of selflessness and determination that Cheta aspires to emulate.

Despite her efforts, Cheta finds herself overwhelmed and angry as she faces systemic injustices at school, particularly from Mr. Aziza. Ultimately, the mother's teachings motivate Cheta to advocate for herself and her family, adding depth to her character as she tries to balance her values with the harsh realities of her life as a widow and provider. This relationship illustrates the theme of maternal influence and the enduring impact of guidance on one's life decisions, serving as both a source of strength and internal conflict for Cheta.

### Question 2:

Analyze the theme of authority and defiance in the relationship between Cheta and Mr. Aziza. How does Cheta navigate her position in relation to authority throughout the text?

### Answer:

The theme of authority and defiance is a central conflict in the narrative, illustrated through Cheta's interactions with Mr. Aziza, who embodies the oppressive nature of institutional authority. Cheta initially approaches Mr. Aziza with a sense of desperation, seeking to understand why her salary was withdrawn after months of dedicated service. However, Mr. Aziza represents an inflexible authority figure, dismissing her pleas and displaying disdain for her personal struggles.

Cheta navigates her vulnerable position by leveraging her past experiences with his authority, recalling the first time she faced his discrimination as a married female teacher. Her past tactics of silent persistence—visiting Mr. Aziza's office daily to change his mind about her position—insightfully capture the struggle against authority. However, unlike her earlier encounter, where perseverance led to acceptance, this situation escalates to a point of ultimate defiance.

In an act of desperation and rebellion, Cheta follows Mr. Aziza to his house and begins to eat his jollof rice, a moment laden with symbolism. This unprecedented action represents her reclaiming agency in an oppressive environment, challenging the power dynamics at play. Cheta's refusal to leave without her salary demonstrates her willingness to confront authority directly, even in an unfamiliar and unorthodox manner. This conflict emphasizes themes of power, inequality, and the strength required to navigate and resist systemic injustices.

### Question 3:

Examine the role of socioeconomic status in Cheta's life and the larger context of the community portrayed in the story. How does economic hardship affect the characters' decisions and relationships?

### Answer:

Socioeconomic status is a crucial theme in "The Power of a Plate of Rice," reflecting the precarious circumstances of teachers like Cheta and their families. The narrative highlights the severe financial challenges faced by Cheta, who is depicted as a widow and the sole provider for her children. Her situation speaks to the broader context of economic instability that plagues both the educational

sector and society at large, where teachers often receive irregular salaries, leaving them in a state of financial uncertainty.

Cheta's economic hardship fuels her decisions and interactions with others. She emphasizes her identity as a widow and the sacrifices she makes for her children, which elicits sympathy and recognition of her vulnerability. The mounting pressure of unpaid salaries culminates in her desperation, compelling her to confront Mr. Aziza in a bold act of defiance.

Additionally, Cheta's financial struggles create friction within her family dynamics. Her mother-in-law is depicted as an additional source of support, yet also as a figure burdened by her own struggles. This mutual dependence underlines the intricate relationships shaped by poverty and the shared responsibility among family members to navigate economic hardships. Economic instability not only affects personal choices but also reinforces societal hierarchies, illustrating how limited financial resources lead to a cycle of struggle and strain in relationships.

**Question 4:**

Explore the narrative techniques used by Ifeoma Okoye to convey the emotional struggles of the protagonist. How do her choices in perspective and style enhance the reader's understanding of Cheta's situation?

**Answer:**

Ifeoma Okoye employs various narrative techniques to vividly illustrate Cheta's emotional landscape and struggles. The use of first-person perspective allows readers to intimately engage with Cheta's thoughts, feelings, and frustrations, creating a deep empathy for her predicament. This perspective invites readers to experience her internal conflict, especially as she wrestles with anger and desperation in confronting Mr. Aziza.

Okoye's descriptive language and imagery effectively capture the harsh realities Cheta faces. For instance, Cheta's reflections on her mother's teachings and her present troubles juxtapose moments of warmth and wisdom with stark scenes of conflict and despair, creating an emotional depth that resonates with the reader. Phrases like "breathing heavily in steadily rising anger" emphasize her escalating frustration and set an intense emotional tone.

Moreover, the juxtaposition of Cheta's earlier memories with her present struggles enhances the sense of loss and helplessness she experiences. Flashbacks to her relationship with her mother and her deceased husband enrich the context of her current situation, indicating that her challenges are not isolated but rather part of a larger narrative of personal sacrifice and ongoing hardship. This intertwined narrative structure fosters a profound understanding of Cheta's character and the complexities of her life, enabling readers to grasp the multifaceted emotional dimensions of her struggle.

**Question 5:**

Critically analyze the ending of the story, focusing on Cheta's act of eating in Mr. Aziza's home. What does this action signify in the context of her struggles, and what broader implications does it carry for themes of power and survival?

**Answer:**

The act of Cheta eating in Mr. Aziza's home serves as a potent symbol of defiance and reclamation of agency in the face of her socioeconomic challenges. This unprecedented moment signifies a turning point for Cheta, where desperation transforms into assertiveness. By choosing to eat Mr. Aziza's jollof rice, she not only confronts him directly but also disrupts the power dynamics that have long rendered her powerless.

This action reflects her emotional and psychological struggle; for Cheta, eating is both a literal and metaphorical act of survival. Set against the backdrop of her financial hardships and the care she provides for her family, her decision to consume food in a place of authority signifies reclaiming the

basic necessity of sustenance that her circumstances have made difficult to secure. It challenges the conventions of submission expected from her, especially in the face of an authoritative figure.

Moreover, this act resonates with broader implications regarding themes of power and survival within the community. Cheta's moment of eating in defiance emphasizes how individuals—especially marginalized figures—can assert their existence against oppressive systems. It illustrates that survival often necessitates acts of resistance, even when those acts might seem small or outlandish in the grand scheme of power relations. Okoye's narrative thus concludes on a note of empowerment, suggesting that reclaiming one's power, even in unconventional ways, is vital in the struggle for dignity and respect in a harsh world.

These long assignment questions and answers encourage deeper analysis of the text and engage with its complex themes, character dynamics, and narrative style.

### **Short Questions and Answers:**

1. Q: Who are the main characters in the story?

A: The main characters are Cheta Adu, who is a Maths teacher and Mr. Aziza is the principal of the school.

2. Q: What is Cheta's job?

A: Cheta is a Maths teacher at a secondary school.

3. Q: Why is Cheta angry when she goes to Mr. Aziza?

A: She is angry because her salary has been withdrawn without her knowledge. She hasn't received her salary for four months. She is unable to meet the both ends meet.

4. Q: Who is Mr. Aziza?

A: Mr. Aziza is the principal of the school where Cheta works. He is the symbol of Male domination and authority. Basically, he doesn't like female teachers in his school. He disrespects them.

5. Q: What advice did Cheta's mother give her?

A: Cheta's mother advised her to control her anger.

6. Q: Why is Cheta struggling financially?

A: Cheta is struggling financially because she is a widow and the sole breadwinner of the family. She has to take care of her two children and her mother-in-law.

7. Q: How long has Cheta gone without her salary?

A: Cheta has gone four months without her salary.

8. Q: What does Mr. Aziza think about female teachers?

A: Mr. Aziza does not want female teachers, especially married ones, in his school.

9. Q: How does Cheta feel about Mr. Aziza's response to her situation?

A: Cheta feels frustrated and helpless because Mr. Aziza dismisses her concerns.

10. Q: What does Cheta's mother-in-law do when Cheta returns home?

A: Cheta's mother-in-law is looking after her two children.