

Introduction - *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in 1977 in Nigeria the fifth of six children. At the age of 19 she moved to the United States and pursued her writing career. At the age of 21 she published a play *For Love of Biafra* and a poetry anthology, *Decisions*. She studied Creative Writing and African Studies earning a Master's Degree in both areas. Adichie enjoys writing as it makes her feel fulfilled. In her writing she explores ethnicity and what it means for Africans at home in Nigeria and those living in the United States. A common theme is the challenges faced by first-generation migrants.

Adichie has won the Orange Broadband prize for fiction and the MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. Her novels, titled *Purple Hibiscus* and *Half of a Yellow Sun* have been translated into many other languages.

In 2009, she published *The Thing Around Your Neck*, a short story collection. Most of the stories deal with Nigerian people who migrate to the United States and the conflicts and surprises that need to be faced.

“Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize.” - Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Questions

1. Create a brainstorm page about what you know about Nigeria. If you know nothing about it, what do you imagine about it? Discuss with others before putting pen to paper.
2. Find out more information about the author.



Nigerian Flag



Setting - *The Thing Around Your Neck*



Nigeria

Research Tasks and Questions

1. What may be the advantages and disadvantages of being situated where Nigeria is?
2. Find out what the population, climate, products and living conditions are like in Nigeria.
3. Looking up some websites and/or newspaper indexes in your Library; find out if Nigeria has been in the news over the last two years. If so, for what reasons?
4. As a country, what geographical challenges does Nigeria face?
5. Find the statistics relating to people who have left Nigeria. Where have they gone?

Historical Context - *The Thing Around Your Neck*

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|---------------------|---|
| 1472 - | Portuguese reach Nigerian coast. |
| 16-18th centuries - | Slave trade: Millions of Nigerians forcibly sold/sent to the Americas. |
| 1830s-1886 - | Civil Wars in the South. |
| 1861-1914 - | British colonisation – ‘indirect rule’ |
| 1922 - | Kamerun is added to Nigeria under League of Nations mandate. |
| 1960 - | Independence, with Prime Minister Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa leading. |
| 1962-63 - | Controversial census fuels regional and ethnic tensions. |
| 1966 January - | Balewa killed in coup. Major-General Johnson Aguiyi-Ironsi military rule. |
| 1966 July - | Ironsi killed in counter-coup, replaced by Lieutenant-Colonel Yakubu Gowon. |
| 1967 - | Republic of Biafra created by 3 states combining - causing a bloody civil war. |
| 1970 - | Biafran leaders surrender, former Biafran regions reintegrated into country. |
| 1975 - | Gowon overthrown, replaced by Brigadier Murtala Ramat Mohammed. |
| 1976 - | Mohammed assassinated in failed coup attempt. Replaced by deputy, Lieutenant-General Olusegun Obasanjo, who helps introduce American-Style Presidential Constitution. |
| 1979 - | Elections bring Alhaji Shehu Shagari to power. |
| 1983 | More than one million foreigners, mostly Ghanaians expelled |
| | Major-General Muhammad Buhari seizes power in bloodless coup. |
| 1985 | Ibrahim Babangida seizes power in bloodless coup, curtails political activity. |
| 1993 | Military dismisses election results due to popularity of Chief Moshood Abiola. Interim National Government. |
| 1993 November | General Sani Abacha seizes power, suppresses opposition. |
| 1994 | Abiola arrested after declaring himself President. |
| 1998 - | Abacha dies, succeeded by Major-General Abdulsalami Abubakar. Chief Abiola dies |
| 1999 | Elections. Olusegun Obasanjo sworn in as president. |

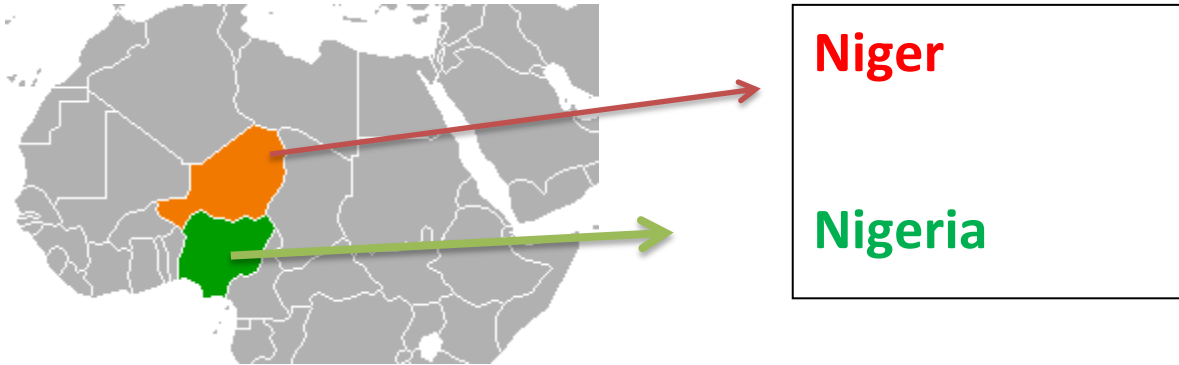
Historical Context - *The Thing Around Your Neck*

Nigerian Timeline

| | |
|------------------------|--|
| 2000 - | Adoption of Islamic, or Sharia, law by several Northern states as Christians protest. Hundreds of deaths. |
| 2001 - | Tribal war in Benue State, thousands of people displaced. |
| 2002 February - | Hundreds killed over religious clashes. |
| 2003 12 April | Controversial elections; allegations of corruption. President Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party wins parliamentary majority. |
| 2004 January | UN talks between Nigeria and Cameroon about disputed border. |
| 2004 May - | State of emergency is declared in the central Plateau State after more than 200 Muslims are killed in Yelwa by Christian militia; revenge attacks are launched by Muslim youths in Kano. |
| 2004 August- | Deadly clashes- death toll of 500 |
| 2005 July | Paris Club of Rich Lenders agrees to write off two-thirds of Nigeria's \$30bn foreign debt. |
| 2006 October | Spiritual leader of Nigeria's millions of Muslims, the Sultan of Sokoto, is killed in plane crash. |
| 2007 April | Umaru Yar'Adua - People's Democratic Party is proclaimed winner of the election. |
| 2008 November | Several hundred people are killed during clashes between Christians and Muslims |
| 2009 July | Hundreds die in Northeastern Nigeria after the Boko Haram Islamist Movement launches a campaign of violence to have Sharia law imposed on the entire country. Leader killed. |
| 2010 | At least 400 people are killed during violence between Christian and Muslim gangs. President Umaru Yar'Adua dies. Vice-president Goodluck Jonathan becomes President. |
| 2010 October | Nigeria marks 50 years of independence. Celebrations marred by bomb blasts. |
| 2010 December | Christmas Eve bomb attacks and reprisals kill about 300 people. |
| 2011 March - | Goodluck Jonathan wins presidential elections. |
| 2012 July | Nigeria signs a \$4.5bn deal with US-based Vulcan Petroleum to build six oil refineries. |
| 2013 | Massacres throughout year – hundreds killed in various occasions. |



Background Context - *The Thing Around Your Neck*



Task:

- Go to the website **FIND THE DATA** to check out the differences and similarities between Niger and Nigeria. <http://www.findthedata.org/>
- Which country is poorer and why?
- What major challenges do both countries face?

Historical Overview

As you can see from the abbreviated timeline, Nigeria has come through a tumultuous history on all levels, especially political. The past has been filled with corrupt leaders, endless political fighting and overthrows and religious battles which still continue. Parts of Nigeria have become Muslim states which of course has caused protestation from the Christians. The Muslims have fought to introduce Muslim or Shari Law throughout the country which has been strongly opposed. Whenever one side attacks there are always reprisals from the other side so it seems a never ending battle.

As it is an oil rich country, Nigeria is economically positive; at least on paper. However much of its recent history has been marred by leaders misappropriating and stealing funds. Aids is a major problem in Nigeria thanks to the level of government denial, as in most African countries. Clearly there has been a lack of stability and sense of safety for many people which has triggered migration to other countries.

- An excellent article to read online is ***AFRICA RISING A Hopeful Continent*** by Oliver James, The Economist, May 2nd 2013. <http://www.economist.com/news/special-report/21572377-african-lives-have-already-greatly-improved-over-past-decade-says-oliver-august>

