

Native Nigerian: Lake Land College instructor compares his homeland to novel 'Things Fall Apart'



By Sophie Collings
Reporter

For some Mattoon High School sophomore students, reading the book "Things Fall Apart" is just another homework assignment that takes up their free time. However, students may have gotten a different mindset after hearing what "Ike" Nwosu, Biological Sciences instructor at Lake Land College, had to say about the book and his hometown.

Lara Bacino, psychology teacher at Lake Land College, works with Nwosu and helped to contact him about speaking to the students at MHS. She saw that her daughter, Emily Bacino-Althaus, was reading a book that had Nwosu's full name, Ikemefuna, and when she mentioned it to him, he knew exactly what she was talking about.

Lara Bacino not only works with Nwosu, but also knows him on a more personal level.

"When he first came to America, he enrolled as a student and I was the counselor. When we first met, we were instant friends," Lara Bacino said.

Aside from their friendship, Lara Bacino has her own opinions about the importance of students connecting the book with Nwosu's personal experiences in Nigeria.

"To know someone from that part of the world that has experience of the culture can help MHS students understand that culture," Lara Bacino said. "Being able to ask questions helps the book come to life. It is eye-opening to see and understand other cultures."

MHS English teacher, Ashley Wiberg, said she shares similar ideas as Lara Bacino.

"Hearing Ike [Nwosu] speak would have provided an exciting enrichment opportunity for the novel 'Things Fall Apart'. A challenge that many students face when they read this novel is that they have a hard time connecting to the experiences of the Igbo people," Wiberg said. "Though class discussions help with this somewhat, hearing Ike [Nwosu] speak about his life in Nigeria would have brought a sense of reality to the tale. Ike [Nwosu] is from a very rich culture with a history that needs to be remembered."

Although Nwosu was unable to speak to MHS students directly due to a snow "ice" day, he did answer the questions that the students put to-

gether in an email for him.

"I took those answers [from Nwosu] and put them on a PowerPoint presentation. As a class, we read through them and discussed his experiences. We also bridged connections to U.S. customs. I think this helped students attach at least one voice to the culture in which we read," Wiberg said. "Overall, I was overjoyed that he took the time to answer the questions that my students brainstormed. I hope that he is willing to visit MHS in the future."

Wiberg isn't the only person that has this hope. Nwosu, son of a tribal king, also hopes that he will be able to return to MHS, after his first visit six to eight years ago, to talk to the students about the differences between the Igbo culture and the American culture. He said that the American culture is very busy and that there is a low drive for local people to see what's going on in other countries.

"I have to go out of my way to stop and look at what's going on beyond America," Nwosu said.

Although there were many topics that were discussed, Nwosu said that he felt that there were some ideas of greater importance than others.

"The most important thing is that the culture is still the same. Igbo culture is my culture and my dad's culture," Nwosu said.

ALL PHOTOS COURTESY OF IKEMEFUNA NWOSU

MAKING NIGERIA COME TO LIFE:
Students make real-life connections while studying the novel "Things Fall Apart"

Technology

Nigeria has the largest economy in Africa because of its extensive oil reserves

Source: Ike Nwosu

Religion

Despite the type of religion itself, Nigerians are passionate about their beliefs

"Many immigrants coming to the States have a very difficult time assimilating and becoming successful at what they do. I have been blessed that the struggle relative to most was not overwhelmingly difficult."

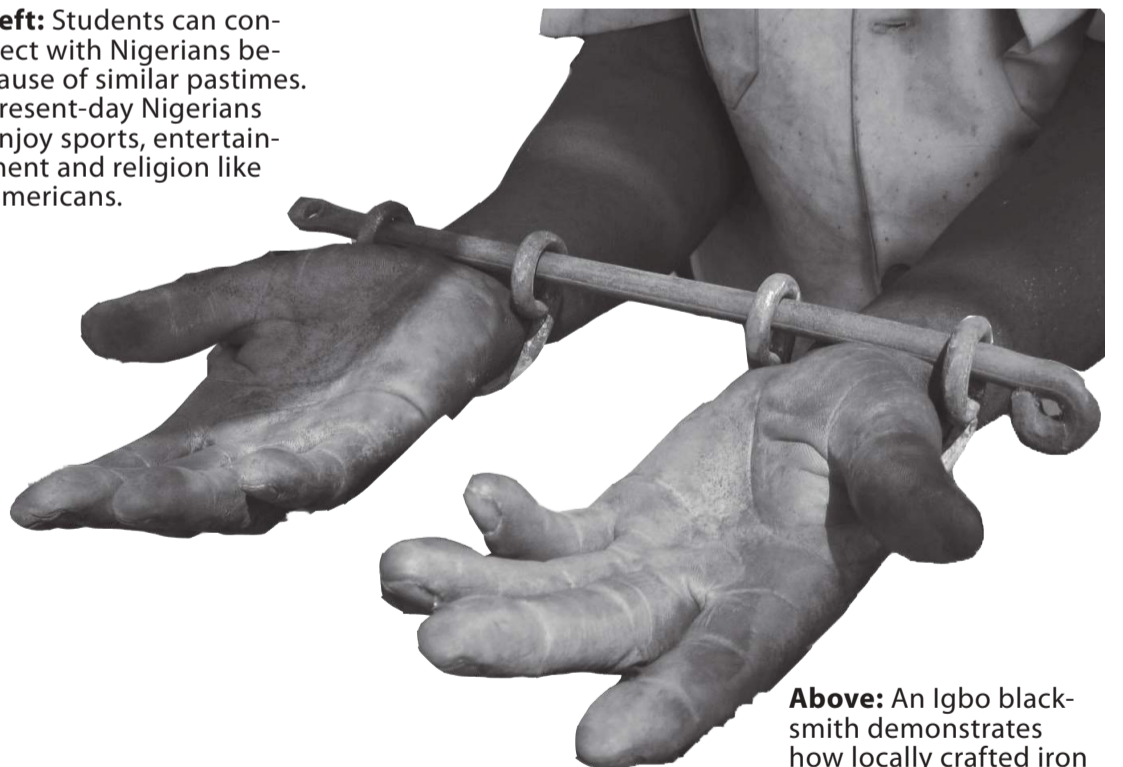
"Nigerians are fanatical about football."

"The music scene is also very strong and Nigerian hip hop and pop music dominates the airways in Nigeria and most of Africa."

"Nigeria has a booming movie industry nicknamed Nollywood."

BY SOPHIE COLLINGS

Left: Students can connect with Nigerians because of similar pastimes. Present-day Nigerians enjoy sports, entertainment and religion like Americans.



Above: An Igbo blacksmith demonstrates how locally crafted iron handcuffs are made. Although they are not police issued, the town's youth use them to help with security from the vigilante groups.



Right: According to Nwosu, "there are many large homes and mansions" in Nigeria. There is a great imbalance of wealth in Nigeria, as in America.

Left: Many houses are very large, yet more are simple houses. This house is "a simple dwelling along the roadside" in Nigeria in a photo taken by a friend about 10 years ago.



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