



Chike and the River

By Chinua Achebe

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Chike and the River By Chinua Achebe

The more Chike saw the ferry-boats the more he wanted to make the trip to Asaba. But where would he get the money? He did not know. Still, he hoped.

Eleven-year-old Chike longs to cross the Niger River to the city of Asaba, but he doesn't have the sixpence he needs to pay for the ferry ride. With the help of his friend S.M.O.G., he embarks on a series of adventures to help him get there. Along the way, he is exposed to a range of new experiences that are both thrilling and terrifying, from eating his first skewer of *suya* under the shade of a mango tree, to visiting the village magician who promises to double the money in his pocket. Once he finally makes it across the river, Chike realizes that life on the other side is far different from his expectations, and he must find the courage within him to make it home.

Chike and the River is a magical tale of boundaries, bravery, and growth, by Chinua Achebe, one of the world's most beloved and admired storytellers.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for Chinua Achebe

“A magical writer—one of the greatest of the twentieth century.” —Margaret Atwood

“African literature is incomplete and unthinkable without the works of Chinua Achebe.” —Toni Morrison

“Chinua Achebe is gloriously gifted with the magic of an ebullient, generous, great talent.” —Nadine Gordimer

“Achebe’s influence should go on and on . . . teaching and reminding that all humankind is one.” —*The Nation*

“The father of African literature in the English language and undoubtedly one of the most important writers of the second half of the twentieth century.” —Caryl Phillips, *The Observer*

“We are indebted to Achebe for reminding us that art has social and moral dimension—a truth often obscured.” —*Chicago Tribune*

“He is one of the few writers of our time who has touched us with a code of values that will never be ironic.” —Michael Ondaatje

“For so many readers around the world, it is Chinua Achebe who opened up the magic casements of African fiction.” —Kwame Anthony Appiah

“[Achebe] is one of world literature’s great humane voices.” —*Times Literary Supplement*

“Achebe is one of the most distinguished artists to emerge from the West African cultural renaissance of the post-war world.” —*The Sunday Times* (London)

“[Achebe is] a powerful voice for cultural decolonization.” —*The Village Voice*

“Chinua Achebe has shown that a mind that observes clearly but feels deeply enough to afford laughter may be more wise than all the politicians and journalists.” —*Time*

“The power and majesty of Chinua Achebe’s work has, literally, opened the world to generations of readers. He is an ambassador of art, and a profound recorder of the human condition.” —Michael Dorris

About the Author

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930. His first novel, *Things Falls Apart*, became a classic of international literature and required reading for students worldwide. He also authored four subsequent novels, two short-story collections, and numerous other books. He was the David and Marianna Fisher

University Professor and Professor of Africana Studies at Brown University and, for over 15 years, was the Charles P. Stevenson Jr. Professor of Languages and Literature at Bard College. In 2007, Achebe was awarded the Man Booker International Prize for lifetime achievement. He died in 2013.

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Chike Leaves His Village

Chike lived with his mother and two sisters in the village of Umuofia. His father had died many years ago. His mother worked very hard to feed and clothe her three children and to send them to school. She grew most of the food they ate—yams, cassava, maize, beans, plantains, and many green vegetables. She also traded in dry fish, palm oil, kerosene, and matches.

Chike was now eleven years old, and he had never left his village. Then one day his mother told him that he would be going to Onitsha in the new year to live with his uncle who was a clerk in one of the firms there. At first Chike was full of joy. He was tired of living in a bush village and wanted to see a big city. He had heard many wonderful stories about Onitsha. His uncle's servant, Michael, had told him that there was a water tap in the very compound where they lived. Chike said this was impossible but Michael had sworn to its truth by wetting his first finger on his tongue and pointing it to the sky. Chike was too thrilled for words. So he would no longer wake up early in the morning to go to the stream. The trouble with their village stream was that the way to it was very rough and stony, and sometimes children fell and broke their water-pots. In Onitsha Chike would be free from all those worries. Also he would live in a house with an iron roof instead of his mother's poor hut of mud and thatch. It all sounded so wonderful.

But when the time actually came for Chike to leave his mother and sisters he began to cry. His sisters cried too, and even his mother had signs of tears in her eyes. She placed one hand on his head and said, "Go well, my son. Listen to whatever your uncle says and obey him. Onitsha is a big city, full of dangerous people and kidnappers. Therefore do not wander about the city. In particular do not go near the River Niger; many people get drowned there every year . . ."

She gave Chike many other words of advice. He nodded his head and sniffed because his nose was running. Chike's nose always ran when he cried.

"Stop crying," said his mother. "Remember, you are now a big boy, and big boys don't cry."

Chike wiped his eyes with the back of his hand. Then he took up his small wooden box which his mother had bought from James Okeke, the local carpenter. Inside it were his few clothes and schoolbooks.

"Let us go," said his uncle who had been waiting patiently. "If we don't hurry now, we shall miss the lorry."*

Chike set the box on his head and followed his uncle. They were going to the main road half a mile away to take the lorry that passed by their village

to Onitsha. It was a very old lorry called Slow-

and-Steady. It always had great difficulty going up any hill. Whenever it got to a steep hill the driver's mate would jump down and walk behind it with the big wooden wedge. Sometimes the passengers were asked to climb down and help push the lorry. The forty-mile journey to Onitsha took Slow-and-Steady more than

three hours. Sometimes it broke down completely; then the journey might take a whole day or more.

Chike was, however, lucky on the day he made the journey. Slow-and- Steady was in good form and did not break down at all. It only stopped after every hill to take a tin of water.

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