Guided Imagery Strategy
for Things Fall Apart

PURPOSE OF THE STRATEGY
Guided imagery is a pre-writing technique that will allow the students to visualize in depth before they actually put a pen to paper. This strategy will enable students to tap into their creative energy. It builds a foundation for other projects and will help the students individually to stretch their minds. It encourages them, as well, to enjoy their class experience, to have a rewarding and relaxing time in school. It will also help students to empathize with one of the main characters, Ekwefi, who may seem "other" or distant to the students because of cultural or gender difference. Part of the motivation to teaching this strategy is that students may learn to identify with someone of another culture; this is one of the main goals of multicultural education. If students can learn to find commonalities in Ekwefi rather than differences, then this has been an effective learning experience.

DIRECTIONS

STEP 1: Reading. The students must complete the first half of the book until page 103. If at all possible, discourage reading the rest of the chapter so that you can guide them through some imagery connected with the plot in that part of the chapter.

STEP 2: Music. Turn on your copy of King Sunny Ade’s “Odu,” which features a type of music from Nigeria called “juju.” It has dense instrumental and percussion, so you will need to turn it down low.

STEP 3: Building the dream. You will begin by having the students get into the most comfortable position they can within the room. If this means that they must get out of their seats and sit on the floor, that is OK, as long as you take special cautions to remind them that this is a learning exercise. Dim the lights in the classroom and have the students close their eyes. Invite them to stretch, relax, inhale, and exhale slowly. Allow them to feel completely at ease before you begin reading. Invite them to listen closely and visualize what they hear. See the prompts on the following page.

STEP 4: Reading. Read the selected passage on the following page, giving the students time to adjust and visualize each image. Pause in between ellipses, counting five to ten seconds between each.

STEP 5: Writing. Ask the students to open their eyes and write down the most vivid images in their minds. At this point, ask them to close their eyes again, listen to the music, and relive the experience. Ask specific questions about the feelings that Ekwefi experiences. They should have two parts to their blank paper now: the vivid images and Ekwefi’s feelings. Ask the students to combine these two parts into a longer, more focused response answering the question: “What was it about Ekwefi’s surroundings that contributed to the way that she felt on her journey?” To relate this to the novel, see the assessment questions below.

ASSESSMENT
In a class discussion, ask students to share their responses to these three questions. What did they feel, and how did they relate to Ekwefi? How was her experience significant to them? What made them empathize or not with her? Also, ask them to give interpretations as to why Achebe included this part in the novel. What was the purpose of Ekwefi’s experience in this part of the plot? What do you learn about her and Ezinma?
Guided Imagery Text

READING
“You are Ekwefi in this exercise…. Imagine that you have been following you daughter and the priestess Chielo throughout the night…. Your feet are tired… You are constantly aware of the fear of discovery…. You have strained your eyes for hours, trying to make out the shape of your daughter on the priestess’s back…. “[You] [have] prayed for the moon to rise. But now [you] [find] that half-light of the incipient moon more terrifying than darkness. The world [is] now peopled with vague, fantastic figures that [dissolve] under your steady gaze and then [form] again in new shapes”…. You listen to the priestess chant in the far distance and you wonder about the pounding heart of your young daughter…. Soon you reach the hills…. You wonder about Ezinma…. Is she in danger? If she is, do you have the power to save her?…. You don’t “dare enter the underground caves”…. You see the priestess and your daughter enter into a small opening in the hills, and you start to run…. You are choked by your tears and your fear…. You decide against all reason that you will enter the caves and save your daughter if you hear her call for help…. Your “fear [has] [vanished]”…. You sit “down on a stony ledge and [wait].”” (All quotes and paraphrases from the text, pages 106-108)

PROMPTS
1. Please describe in words the most visual images in your mind as you first open your eyes. Write down the colors, noises, smells, textures, etc. of your surroundings.
2. After you have visualized this for the second time, write down Ekwefi’s deepest feelings and fears as you imagined them.
3. What was it about Ekwefi’s surroundings that contributed to the way she felt on her journey?

Michelle Kim, 2001