Characterisation

Characters are presented to us in a variety of ways:

- a portrayal of their actions, thoughts and feelings
- direct description (of appearance, personality)
- through what they say (dialogue)
- through contrasts with other characters
- symbolic detail
- telling the story from their point of view (first person narrative)

Look at the adjectives below and choose ones to describe:

(a) Michael
(b) Nancy
(c) the village priest

For each adjective you choose, find a quotation to prove it. For example:

Michael Obi: ambitious “Michael’s hopes were fulfilled much earlier than he had expected”

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>adjective</th>
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<td>ambitious</td>
<td>foolish</td>
<td>image conscious</td>
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<td>stubborn</td>
<td>old fashioned</td>
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<td>uncompromising</td>
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<td>proud</td>
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USE A DICTIONARY TO CHECK WORDS YOU DON’T UNDERSTAND
Who is to Blame? Pie Chart

At the end of the story Michael gets a bad report from the inspector and the villagers have wrecked the display and some of the school itself has been destroyed. The inspector thinks that there are the beginnings of tribal warfare!

So who is to blame for this situation?

Allocate parts of the pie to who you think is most to blame and why. Choose from:

- **Nancy**: Concerned with looking good in front of others and being the queen of the school. More concerned with flowers and pushing her husband on than the feelings of others?
- **Michael**: Obsessed with things that are modern and new. Too stubborn to compromise? Doesn’t realise that the school is part of the community?
- **The Missionary School Board**: Should have appointed someone less obsessed with modern ways? Should realise that the path was a sensitive issue from before and worked around it or warned Michael to let the villagers use it?
- **The Priest**: Should he have encouraged the villagers to wreck the school? Is he too concerned with the past and needs to be more modern? Should he have agreed to a new path being built?

Make a firm decision about who is most to blame and why!
Questions

Answer in full sentences and use quotations where appropriate.

1. What hopes were fulfilled for Michael Obi? (lines 1 – 2)
2. Why did the Mission authorities decide to send in a new head teacher (lines 3 – 5) 
3. What impression of Michael is created in paragraph 1? (lines 1 – 11)
4. What does Michael’s wife want to achieve when Michael starts at his new job? (lines 14 - 15)
5. The story says, “In their two years of married life she had become completely infected by his passion for 'modern methods'”.
   (a) What connotations (associations) do you get from the word “infected”? 
   (b) Why do you think the writer chose this word? Do you think he agrees with Michael’s passion?
6. What does Nancy (Michael’s wife) think being a head master’s wife will be like? (lines 19 – 23)
7. How does the writer suggest that Michael is hard working and cares a lot about his work? Choose a quotation as evidence. (lines 26 – 46)
8. What were Michael’s two aims? (lines 46 – 47)
9. Why do you think Michael was “scandalised” to see an old woman walking through the gardens? (line 52 – 54)
10. What is Michael’s attitude towards the path? (lines 57 – 59 and 68 - 72)
11. What does Michael do to stop the villagers using the path? (lines 73 – 75)
12. How does the description of the fence suggest that Michael is trying to keep the villagers and their old fashioned ways out? (line 73 – 75)
13. According to the priest, why is the path important? (lines 84 – 88)
14. How would you describe Michael’s attitude towards the priest? (a) friendly (b) respectful (c) rude (d) smug (e) uncaring (lines 90 – 93)
15. According to Michael, what is the school’s purpose? (lines 90 – 93)
16. What advice does the priest give to Michael? (lines 95 – 97)
17. What solution does Michael suggest? (lines 100 – 102)
18. In your own words, describe what happened two days later. (lines 104 – 106)
19. What happened when the Supervisor came? (lines 110 – 114)
20. What do you think is the message behind the story? Put these statements in order, the 1st one being the one you most agree with and number 6 the one you least agree with.
   - Michael was unfortunate to work in such a superstitious, primitive place
   - Pride comes before a fall
   - Progress is always bad
   - Young head teachers aren’t a good idea
   - It is vital to respect the beliefs, ideas, cultures and traditions of others
   - A good head teacher realises that a school has a responsibility to the community too
Read the notes and circle the correct answer

The writer was born in England / Chile / Nigeria and was a lawyer / teacher / farmer. He was educated in Christian schools and was the son of a missionary school teacher. It seems he does / does not draw on his own background in this story. Achebe knows a lot about the effects of European / African / Indian customs and beliefs on modern / traditional African society. The story, “Dead Men’s Path” is about this clash / harmony of society / cultures / people.

The main character is called Michael / Neil / Mark Obi whose job was artist / cleaner / headmaster of Ndume Central School. The school was run by the LEA / government / Mission authorities. These were set up by Christian missionaries and their mission was to teach young Africans to read and write, often in Chinese / French / English and to promote Christian values / principles / beliefs.

The learning / teaching of European / African / Asian values in these schools was often seen as an assault on African ways of life / beliefs / traditions and a way for European countries to extend their influence and power.

Michael Obi’s character is determined to do a “bad / good job”. He liked / disliked traditional / new methods and didn’t like anything modern / old / traditional. His wife is called Helen / Nancy / Amy and the story says that she too had become “infected” by his “passion for modern methods”. She seemed to want to look good / superior in front of others. The story said she imagined herself being “the king / princess / queen of the school”. It is also inferred that she is trying to be something she isn’t as she spoke to her husband “imitating the woman’s magazine she read”. This makes her sound shallow and true / false.

The story is about a hedge / garden / path that runs through the school’s grounds. The path is unimportant / important to the villagers because it connected the “village pub / shop / shrine with their place of burial.” Michael / Nancy decided to put up a fence to stop the villagers coming through the school. He and Nancy worked on the school grounds to make them attractive for a visit from the school inspector / OFSTED / government.

The village vicar / priest / bishop visits Michael and tries to persuade him to put up / take down the fence but Michael agreed / refused. The priest thought this made their relatives / ancestors angry and there should be presents / sacrifices to appease / please them again.

As a result, Michael’s school gardens were wrecked / mended and a school building pulled up / down. When the inspector came Michael got a good / bad report because he’d stirred up trouble / problems / a tribal war situation with the villagers. His modern / old methods had back fired badly!
TASK – Teacher’s version

The writer was born in Nigeria and was a teacher. He was educated in Christian schools and was the son of a missionary school teacher. It seems he draws on his own background in this story. Achebe knows a lot about the effects of European customs and beliefs on traditional African society. The story, “Dead Men’s Path” is about this clash of cultures.

The main character is called Michael Obi whose job was headmaster of Ndume Central School. The school was run by the Mission authorities. These were set up by Christian missionaries and their mission was to teach young Africans to read and write, often in English and to promote Christian values / principles / beliefs.

The teaching of European values in these schools was often seen as an assault on African ways of life / beliefs / traditions and a way for European countries to extend their influence and power.

Michael Obi’s character is determined to do a “good job”. He liked new methods and didn’t like anything old / traditional. His wife is called Nancy and the story says that she too had become “infected” by his “passion for ‘modern methods’”. She seemed to want to look good / superior in front of others. The story said she imagined herself being “the queen of the school”. It is also inferred that she is trying to be something she isn’t as she spoke to her husband “imitating the woman’s magazine she read”. This makes her sound shallow and false.

The story is about a path that runs through the school’s grounds. The path is important to the villagers because it connected the “village shrine with their place of burial.” Michael decided to put up a fence to stop the villagers coming through the school. He and Nancy worked on the school grounds to make them attractive for a visit from the school inspector.

The village priest visits Michael and tries to persuade him to take down the fence but Michael refused. The priest thought this made their ancestors angry and there should be sacrifices to appease / please them again.

As a result, Michael’s school gardens were wrecked and a school building pulled up. When the inspector came Michael got a bad report because he’d stirred up trouble / problems / a tribal war situation with the villagers. His modern methods had back fired badly!