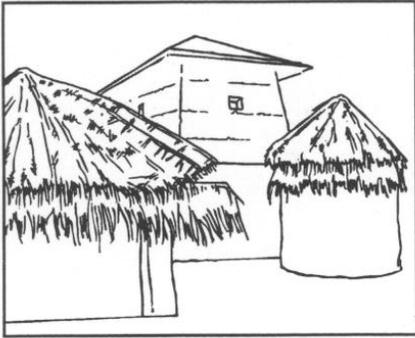


Information on the Igbo



Directions: Read the information about the Igbo carefully. Then, use the information to brainstorm ideas for your diagram. Make sure your diagram contains visuals for each of the key aspects of life.

The Igbo lived in villages in eastern Nigeria and spoke a variety of related dialects. There were no Igbo cities; the family was the basis of Igbo economy, political structure, and social organization.

Location and Environment

The Igbo lived in the southeast of present-day Nigeria. Their region was bordered by the Niger, Benue, and Cross Rivers. The Igbo region had a varied terrain, mostly covered with rainforest with a few grasslands in the north. The region was generally hot and humid, with an unpredictable rainy season that often brought flooding or drought.

Shelter, Food, and Clothing

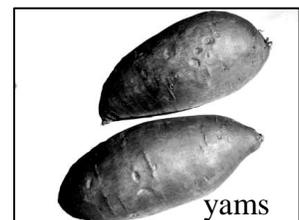
The Igbo lived inside highly-decorated walled compounds. The size of a family's compound depended on how much wealth the family had and on how much room they needed. Each compound contained an entire extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents). There were different houses inside the compound for different family members. The houses were often round, made of a frame of woven rods and twigs plastered over with clay, and had thatched palm roofs. The *obi*, or house of the head of the family, was in the center of the other houses. The other houses were around this central *obi*, and those other houses were for the wives of the family head and the married sons of the extended family. Each house was divided into two rooms, one for sleeping and the other for receiving friends and relatives. Older male children slept in the *obi*, while younger children slept in their mothers' houses.



Compound entrance

<http://www.learner.org/courses/worldlit/things-fall-apart/explore/>

The main food crops of the Igbo were yams, cassava (a root), and coco-yams. The Igbo prepared cassava by soaking it in water for several days so it would ferment, then boiled it and pounded it to a pulp. In times of plenty, the Igbo feasted on goat or chicken stews flavored with peppers and spices. Fish, beans, and com were also part of the Igbo diet.



Igbo clothing was simple. Igbo men traditionally wore skirts made of bark that was pounded to be soft like cloth. Women wore cloth skirts. Igbo women wore jewelry – beads, ivory necklaces and bracelets, and brass wires bent into spiral shapes so as to wind up their legs. Some men and women were decorated with scars. Men's scars were on the

upper and side parts of their foreheads and sides of their faces, while women's scars formed patterns on their stomachs and legs.

Political Organization

The Igbo lived in independent villages and were not united by any central government. Instead, the Igbo had a complex political structure based upon family relationships. Each village saw itself almost like a state or nation with its own laws, courts, and religious festivals.



Political power was organized around families. Family groups made the rules for behavior and set the punishments. The next higher level of power was the Village Council. To be on the Village Council, you had to be the head of a family group. The Council settled arguments when the family groups were not able to. The Council was also in charge of keeping the village safe and dealing with village concerns such as roads. There was one more level in Igbo power. That was the *Obodo*. The Obodo was a combination of all the Village Council heads. The Obodo was in charge of the huge decisions, such as when to go to war, when to declare peace, and when to reach out to other groups to set up trade or settle arguments.

Family Structure

The Igbo family included a man, his wives, their children, in-laws, uncles and aunts, nieces and nephews, cousins, and even servants. The eldest man was the head of the family, a position of great power and respect.

Most men married more than one woman, while women married only one man. This practice is called *polygamy*. For the Igbo, marriage was a family decision instead of an individual decision. Because the entire social structure of Igbo society depended on family, the choice of a new family member was crucial. In some cases, children were promised in marriage by their families while still children. When adults planned to marry, a potential wife was investigated by a man's family to make sure that the woman had good morals, a strong work ethic, was intelligent, and came from a good family. Similar checking was done on the man's character by the bride's family. If a match between a man and a woman was accepted by both families, a *dowry* (a gift of money and goods given to the bride by the groom's family) was agreed upon and the marriage was settled.

The entire village was responsible for the teaching and the correction of its children, as reflected in the Igbo proverb, "The child is the child of all." Igbo children learned through watching their parents and other adults around them. Girls were taught cleaning, marketing, trading, food preparation, gardening, and childcare from their mothers. Boys were trained as farmers by their fathers, or were trained to learn a craft. Boys and girls aged 4 to 10 were expected to take care of smaller children and babies. Age brought great honor and respect within Igbo society. When a person became too old to work, he or she was cared for by his or her sons.

Religion/Belief System

The Igbo believed in one supreme god, known as *Chuku*, as well as many lesser gods. Chuku was considered to control the universe. The Igbo also believed in local gods, often nature spirits, that were thought to rule thunder, hills, rivers, and other natural features. Ancestors and spirits of the dead were thought to watch over the behavior of the living. In addition, each person was believed to have a personal spirit, called a *chi*, that represented his or her personality and future.

As with most of Igbo life, the family was central to Igbo religious beliefs. They believed the spirits and ancestors would become unhappy if people did not do their duties to their family group.

The community also gathered for important events such as weddings and funerals. Wedding ceremonies involved the extended families of the bride and groom, and sometimes even included the entire village. Feasting and celebration took place, and gifts were given to the bride. Funeral ceremonies were also important to the Igbo, for they felt that without a proper ceremony the spirit of the one who had died would not be received into the company of its ancestors.

Economy

Families were the basis of the Igbo economy. The Igbo were agricultural people, and therefore the more wives and children in a family, the more able the family was to complete the farm work. Within the family, men and women had separate and overlapping roles. In addition to farming, women were responsible for spinning cotton, weaving, trading goods in the market, preparing food, and taking care of children.

Men and women farmed together, although some crops were considered to be "men's crops" and others were seen as "women's crops." The main crop of the Igbo was the yam, a root. The Igbo also grew corn, beans, okra, gourds, and other vegetables. They harvested a variety of products from the palm tree, including oil, nuts, and timber, and they used the palm to make candles and palm wine.



Cowrie shells

<http://www.africadirect.com/productsdesc.php?ID=32560>

The Igbo had a simple economy. The basic needs of the people were mostly taken care of within the town itself. The Igbo created weavings, baskets, leatherwork, metalwork, wood carving, and pottery to use and trade. They traded at local and inter-town markets, which were organized on four market days. The day on which villages could hold a market varied so that people could attend all of the nearby markets. Markets took place in broad, open squares with tall trees for shade. Trade was done both by barter (exchanging items) and with money. The Igbo used cowries (seashells) for money because of their strength, durability, and rareness. The markets helped to connect the various villages, providing a place for trade, communication, play, and gossip.