

CHAPTER: - 12
TOPIC: - THE VOTER

CHINUA ACHEBE

SUMMARY

Character List

→Major Characters

1. Rufus Okeke (a.k.a. Roof)
2. Marcus Ibe (a.k.a. Honorable Minister)

→Minor Characters

1. Roof's Mother
2. Maduka's main election campaigner
3. OgbuefiEzenwa
4. Maduka
5. Village people

In *The Voter* by Chinua Achebe we have the theme of corruption, loyalty, guilt, power, greed and tradition. Taken from his *Girls at War and Other Stories* collection the story is narrated in the third person by an unnamed narrator and after reading the story the reader realises that Achebe may be exploring the theme of corruption. As a politician Marcus has made sure that his life has improved in comparison to those who live in Umuofia. He has built himself a new home with running water yet his constituents don't have the same access to water as Marcus does. Though it is not explicitly stated that Marcus has inappropriately obtained his property the fact that he has ready and easy access to large amounts of money suggests that he may be corrupt. Also Roof on Marcus' instructions bribe some of the local elders in order to ensure that they will vote for Marcus. At no stage in the story does Roof advise the elders as to why they should vote for Marcus or what benefit electing Marcus will be to the community. The reality being that Roof is bribing the elders in order to ensure that they vote for Marcus regardless of what Marcus might and might not do for those in the village. Roof's main concern is not the elders or those in the community but Marcus himself. There also seems to be no thought given by the elders as to what the consequences of their actions (voting for Marcus) might be. Just as Marcus and Roof are corrupt so too are the local elders who are more concerned with receiving payment for their vote than they are on improving life in the village.

It may also be a case that Achebe is exploring the theme of loyalty. Not only do the elders accept a bribe in return for their loyalty to Marcus but Roof too accepts a bribe to ensure that he will vote for Maduka. Even though he spends the entirety of the story attempting to ensure that Marcus will get re-elected Roof at the end shows Marcus no loyalty. Having being swayed by the five pounds he has received in order to vote for Maduka. Which in many ways is ironic as there is a sense that even though Roof is working for Marcus he cannot be trusted by Marcus. It is also possible that Achebe is placing a spotlight on the way that elections were held in Nigeria at the time the story was written. With the possibility that corruption was commonplace.

By bribing the elders of a village a politician was able to ensure that they got elected. Where many would expect an individual to be allowed to independently decide on who they should vote for this is not the case in the story. With constituents being instructed by the elders on which way to vote.

It is also difficult to say for certain as to why Roof begins to feel guilty about the prospect of voting for Maduka. However, it is possible that Roof feels guilty because he is loyal to Marcus and he knows that should Maduka become elected his services will no longer be needed by Marcus. The position he holds in the village will be lost and as such he will no longer have the authority that he feels he has over others. Any power that Roof does have will be gone. He will no longer be able to benefit personally as he has been able to do while Marcus has been elected. Just as Marcus may lose any comforts he has obtained from his corruption so too will Roof. There will be no need for the elders to listen to Roof should Marcus lose the election as there will no longer be any available funds to bribe the elders with. The introduction of the *iyi* may also be important as by introducing it into the story Achebe appears to be exploring the theme of tradition. Roof is very much afraid of the *iyi* and his actions at the polling station may be triggered by his fear of the *iyi* and what may happen him should he not fulfill his promise to vote for Maduka.

The end of the story is also interesting if not ironic. By ripping his ballot paper in two and placing half of the paper in each ballot box Roof feels that he has honored his commitment to vote for Maduka. However, if anything Roof has ended up spoiling his vote with neither Marcus nor Maduka getting his vote. Despite having been bribed by one of Maduka's men and having a sense of loyalty to Marcus Roof hasn't managed to vote for either man. Something that appears to be lost on Roof with Achebe describing Roof as walking out of the polling station 'jauntily.' It might also be a case that Achebe is suggesting that an individual should be allowed to freely cast their vote without the influence of others (Elders, Roof, Marcus and Maduka). Something that has not been the case throughout the story with Roof acting as an agent for corruption in order for Marcus to continue living the lifestyle he has become accustomed to. Yet at the same time he provides no benefit to his constituents. Democracy has not been allowed to play its role due to the corruption that exists in Umuofia. The reader is also aware that when the next election arrives that too will be corrupt thanks to the actions of both Marcus and Maduka. Maduka might not win the election on this occasion but he is preparing himself for the next election. Paying for votes with money and having no concern, like Marcus, for the constituents in Umuofia.

I. Answer the following questions in a word, a phrase or a sentence each: -

1. How many years did Roof spent as a bicycle repairer's apprentice in Port Harcourt?

Or

How long had Roof been a bicycling repairer's apprentice?
March – 2015

Or

How long had Roof worked as a bicycle repairer's apprentice in 'The Voter'?
March – 2016

Ans: Two years

2. Who did Roof campaign for in 'The Voter'?

Ans: Marcus Ibe

3. Who was the minister of culture in the outgoing government?

Ans: Marcus Ibe

4. What is the name of Marcus Ibe's new house?

Ans: Umuofia Mansions.

5. What was the warning given by Roof to the Minister before two months of the election?

Ans: Roof had warned him about the radical change that had come into the thinking of Umuofia.

6. How many shillings Ibe offered to his voters?

Ans: Two shillings.

7. Which are the two political parties mentioned in "The Voter"?

Ans: PAP (People's Alliance Party and POP (Progressive Organization Party).

8. Who is the opponent of Marcus Ibe in the election?

Ans: Maduka.

9. How much money POP campaign team offered to Roof?

Ans: Five pounds.

10. What is the name of the band which Ibe had hired from Umuru?

Ans: Highlife Band.

11. What is the symbol of PAP for the election?

Ans: Motor Car.

12. What had Roof become a real expert in?

Ans: Election campaigning.

13. What was Marcus Ibe in the outgoing Government in 'The Voter'?

March – 2017

Ans: Minister of Culture.

14. What does PAP Stand for in 'The Voter'?

March – 2018

Ans: People Alliance Party.

15. How much money did the leader of the POP campaign team offer Roof?

March – 2019

Ans: Five Pounds.

16. Expand POP.

March – 2020

Ans: Progressive Organization Party

II. Answer the following questions in a paragraph of 80 – 100 words each:

III. Answer the following questions in about 200 words:

1. What was the justification for the formation of the POP?

Ans: POP stands for Progressive Organization Party. This party was formed by the tribes down the cast to save themselves as the founders of the party proclaimed, from "total, political, cultural, social and religious annihilation. The POP was a complete non entity in the first election. When tribal people understood that there was no opposition to the ruling party they decided to come to power. In the story, there was no hint about the objectives of the PAP, but the organizers of POP claimed that they wanted to save the people from all aspects.

2. Roof is an intelligent manipulator. Justify with reference to the story.

Or

'Roof is an intelligent Manipulator'. Justify with reference to the story 'The Voter'.
March – 2017

Or

How does the lesson 'The Voter' show that Roof is an intelligent manipulator?
March - 2020

Ans: Roof was the most trusted servant of Marcus. He was also popular with the villages of Umuofia. He had become an expert in election campaigning. He could tell the mood of the electorate. After conducting the whispering campaign successfully, he warned the minister that the villagers had become more intelligent in the last five years, wondering how quickly politics had brought wealth, titles and doctorate degrees to the elected leader.

Meanwhile the opposition party 'Progressive Organization Party (POP) with considerable money power plunges into election campaigning. One night, the local camp leader pays a visit to 'Roof' and bribes him with five pounds' money and asks for his vote. When 'Roof' tells them he could not deceive Marcus, they assure him that they would not reveal his treachery to any one and after 'Roof' takes the bribe of five pounds he is asked to swear on the 'iyi' that he will vote for 'Maduka' the opposition leader.

Even on the election day 'Roof' campaigns for Marcus and when he goes into the voting booth to cast his vote he was torn between his loyalty and the wrath of 'iyi'. So he tears up his ballot paper into two pieces and casts one piece each to both 'Marcus' and 'Maduka'. Hence he resolves the issue diplomatically.

3. Describe the significance of meeting between Roof and POP campaign team in The Voter.

Ans: The meeting between Roof and POP campaign team highlights how voters are easily bought and voters are induced to vote for monetary considerations, one night, the local camp leaders pay a visit to Roof and bribes him with five pounds' money and asks for his vote. When Roof tells them that he can't deceive Marcus, they assure him that they would not reveal his treachery to anyone. After taking

the bribe of five pounds, Roof is made to swear on the 'iyi' that he will vote for 'Maduka', the position leader. This meeting leaves him in confusion. So when he goes into the voting booth to cast his vote, he finds himself torn between his loyalty and wrath of 'iyi'.

4. Describe Roof's role as an election campaigner in Chinua Achebe's story 'The Voter'?

Or

Give an account of Roof's role as an election campaigner.

Or

To what extent was Roof the most trusted of the whispering campaigners in 'The Voter'? March – 2015

Or

'Roof was the most trusted of the whispering campaigners.' To what extent is this true in 'The Voter'?

Or

Give an account of Roof's role as an election campaigner. March – 2019

Ans:Roof was a popular man in his village. He was an energetic young man who wanted to guide the people of his village in difficult times. Marcus Ibe, the leader of People's Alliance Party was the minister of culture and he wanted to win the election, the second time. He knew that the people were unhappy with him. So he wanted to make use of Roof's popularity and service. Roof was intelligent and he understood that people would not vote for Marcus if he did not give them enough gifts. He assured the villagers that Marcus would bring water and electricity to the village if they elect him. He tempted the villagers with money for their votes. On the day of election, he ran around goading the villagers to vote for Marcus. He informs the minister about the radical change in voter's attitude. He also assured Marcus that he would get a landslide victory in the election. All that proved that he was a loyal and trusted whispering campaigner.

Or

Ans:Roof, as expected, was in service of honorable minister and had become an expert in election campaigning. He knew the mood of the electorate and had warned the minister that the villagers had become more intelligent in the last five years, wondering how quickly politics had brought wealth, titles and doctorate degrees to the elected leader.

Meanwhile the opposition party 'Progressive Organization Party (POP) with considerable money power plunges into election campaigning. One night, the local camp leader pays a visit to 'Roof' and bribes him with five pounds' money and asks for his vote. When 'Roof' tells them he could not deceive Marcus, they assure him that they would not reveal his treachery to any one and after Roof takes the bribe of five pounds he is asked to swear on the 'iyi' that he will vote for 'Maduka' the opposition leader.

Even on the election day 'Roof' campaigns for Marcus and when he goes into the voting booth to cast his vote he was torn between his loyalty and the wrath of 'iyi'. So he tears up his ballot paper into two pieces and casts one piece each to both 'Marcus' and 'Maduka'. He comes out of the voting booth relieved.

Roof was the most trusted servant of Marcus. He was also popular with the villages of Umuofia. Being a popular person 'Roof' could judge the villagers, mood and inform Marcus accordingly. Before bribing two shillings to a group of elders, he asks them that the people of Umuofia should be honoured to have a leader like Marcus in their midst and the leaders of PAP also favoured their village.

He, then, increases it to three shillings and proclaims that if it is not enough for them, then they are free to vote for the opposition. The elders agree to cast their vote in favour of Marcus.

5. How did Roof make the villagers agree to vote for PAP's Marcus Ibe?

Ans:Roof was a very popular man in his village. The people of Umuofia village had a lot of trust in him. He was an expert in election campaigning. Marcus Ibe, the Minister, wanted Roof to work for him in the upcoming elections. Roof had understood that people were not happy with Marcus and they might not vote for him this time. He met a few villagers and explained to them that Marcus Ibe would bring a lot of developments to their village.

He made them believe that every honour that the village received was due to the hard work of Marcus and they were favoured all the time by PAP, the People's Alliance Party to which Marcus belonged. Finally, Roof tempted the villagers with money. He promised them two shillings each if they along with their family members would vote for Marcus Ibe in the elections.

6. Why did the villagers change their attitude towards Marcus Ibe before the second election in the lesson 'The Voter'?

Or

Trace the changes in the attitude of the villagers, before the coming Election in the lesson 'The Voter'

March - 2020

Ans:Marcus Ibe was the Minister of Culture in the outgoing government and he belonged to PAP, the People's Alliance Party. Roof was the election campaigner for Marcus Ibe. He had already warned Marcus about the change in the people's attitude. Though the villagers were innocent, they had seen that Marcus had made a lot of money and acquired car and bungalow in those five years. He also had a private power plant to supply power to his house, then the village had no running water or electricity. The villagers realized that Marcus had made his life luxurious instead of taking care of the welfare of the people. So they decided not to give free votes to him in the forthcoming elections.

7. Rufus Okeke was truly skilled in politics. Explain with reference to the voter.

Ans: Rufus Okeke was popular in his village as a knowledgeable person. He was in the service of Marcus Ibe, the minister for culture. He was a real expert in election campaigning at all levels, the village, local and national. He could even tell the mood and temper of the electorate. The way he deals with the elders of the village and convinces them to vote for Marcus is appreciable. He makes use of his powers and gets expensive gifts from

Marcus, much against the wishes of Marcus' wife. But later, when he is approached by the leader of the POP, he makes use of the opportunity skillfully. He tries to be very normal on the election-day, even influences people to vote for Marcus but tears his ballot paper and votes for both Marcus and Maduka. This shows that he was truly skilled in politics.

8. Describe the scene on the election- day in Umuofia.

Ans: On the busy day of election, men and women in Umuofia village came to the voting booth with enthusiasm. On the way, people found a lot of posters of both POP and PAP parties. PAP leader Marcus Ibe had arranged a music band to attract the attention of the people. Marcus was sitting in his big green car watching and smiling at the villagers. The illiterate villagers shook hands with Marcus and congratulated him even before they cast their votes. Roof was reminding the people to vote for Marcus in the Motor Car symbol. He assured them that they would get rich to ride a car if they voted for Marcus. It was his turn to go into the booth to vote. When he went inside, he was in a dilemma whether to vote for Marcus or Maduka. Both the leaders had given him lots of money. So he tore his ballot paper into two and put one in each box. The election officials put a purple ink mark on his finger

9. Describe, how Marcus Ibe in 'The Voter' had managed to become a 'Successful' Politician.

March – 2016

Ans: Earlier Marcus Ibe was a not-too-successful mission school teacher. When he was almost on the verge of dismissal on the basis of a female teacher's complaint, he joined politics, got elected as a representative of Umuofia and was made minister of culture. In a period of five years Marcus became very wealthy, was given many chieftaincies titles and a doctorate degree and several other honours. He had amassed a lot of wealth and power. To win the villagers, he threw a grand party to them as he knew that it was their votes that would bring good fortune.

10. Everyone is full of praise for Marcus Ibe. What qualities and achievements attracted the people to praise him in 'The Voter'?

March – 2018

Ans: Everyone praised Marcus Ibe, elderly people considered him as their son, he earned the reputation of a good man. Earlier he was a missionary school teacher. He had wisely joined politics and acquired two cars, a big house in a very short time. But he remained devoted to his people. He had installed a private electricity plant to power his new house 'Umuofia mansions' and had entertained the people of Umuofia by feeding them five bulls and many goats on its opening ceremony. So, the people of Umuofia praised Marcus, for offering them such a feast.

KEY POINTS TO REMEMBER:

- Roof was a political campaigner in his village Umuofia. He was in the service of his village. He inspired the villagers to vote for Marcus Ibe
- Marcus Ibe was Minister of Culture in the outgoing Marcus government. He belonged to the PAP. He

would surely win the next election. He was not a successful teacher. He joined politics from a female teacher's complaint. Later he would marry her. He remained devoted to his people. Once he accused his wife for insulting Roof.

- He named his new house as Umuofia Mansions.
- The villagers had given their votes free of charge five years ago. Now they received four shillings to vote for Marcus.
- The POP gave Roof five pounds to vote for Maduka. He also swore in on 1st. At the end, Roof cut his ballot into two. He put the first half into Maduka's box (head symbol) and another half into Marcus Ibe's box (car symbol). He consoled himself that he had given justice to both.

RECAPITULATION:

- ✚ A short story
- ✚ Evils of elections
- ✚ Weaknesses for power and money
- ✚ Rufus Okeke – a young man from Umuofia
- ✚ Expert in campaigning
- ✚ Marcus Ibe- The minister for Culture-PAP party
- ✚ Former school teacher
- ✚ Amassed wealth in five years
- ✚ Maduka – POP party
- ✚ Roof takes five pounds
- ✚ Dilemma in Roof

EXERCISE:

ONE MARK

1. Where, on the election morning, did Marcus Ibe sit shaking hands with the villagers?
2. Which is the symbol of People's Alliance Party in 'The Voter'?
3. Who did Roof campaign for in 'The Voter'?
4. How long had Roof been a bicycle repairer's apprentice?
5. What is the symbol used by Marcus Ibe in the election in 'The Voter'?
6. How much money did the leader of POP campaign team offer Roof, for his vote in 'The Voter'?

FOUR MARKS

1. 'Roof is a clever manipulator.' Justify
2. Give an account of Roof's role as an election campaigner.
3. 'The Voter' ridicules the power and selfishness of Marcus Ibe. Explain
4. Describe the significance of meeting between Roof and POP Campaign team in 'The Voter'.

SIX MARKS

1. 'Roof was the most trusted of the whispering campaigners.' To what extent is this true in 'The Voter'?
2. Do you think that 'The voter' is right in demanding money to vote for Marcus Ibe? Explain.

3. 'There comes a time in every man's life to decide'.
Explain with reference to 'The Voter'.

**'The great aim of education is not knowledge but
action'.**