The Headstrong Historian
By Mieca, Jessica and Jennifer
Summary

The Headstrong Historian follows the life of a Nigerian woman by the name of Nwamgba. The story tells of her arranged marriage with Obierika and the many miscarriages that followed, until their first son was born; Anikwanwa. Shortly after Anikwanwa was born, Obierika was poisoned, and Nwamgba was convinced that it was Obierika’s cousins who poisoned him in order to claim the land that he owned, and was certain that they would soon kill her son Anikwanwa. To try and prevent this, Nwamgba wanted her son to be educated. Nwamgba went to school and grew up learning the Christian faith. Meanwhile “white men” were building churches and court houses in nearby villages and eventually in Nwambga’s village. When Anikwanwa grew up he married a Christian woman called Mgbeke, who Nwamgba dislikes due to her stroppiness and her ability to cry her way onto getting what she wants. Anikwanwa developed his Christian name Michael and had three children; two sons and a daughter called grace, however Nwamgba calls her Afamefuna. Anikwanwa would not let Nwamgba see her grandchildren unless she gave over to the Christian faith, however Grace visited her on her deathbed as she was dying from Malaria. Grace grew up to teach Nigerian history and told of her grandmothers life and faith.
List the characters in the story and describe their strengths.

- Nwamgba – main character
- Obierika – Nwamgba’s husband
- Ayaju – Nwamgba’s best friend
- Okafo & Okoye (Obierika’s cousins)
- Anikwenwa (Michael) – Nwamgba’s and Obierika’s son
- Father Shanhan
- Mgbeke – Anikwenwa’s wife
- Father O’Donnell
- Peter (Nnamdi) – Anikwenwa and Mgbeke’s son
- Grace (Afamefuna) - Anikwenwa and Mgbeke’s daughter
- George Chikadibia – Grace’s husband
This story is about empowerment and change, but also about loss and grief. Is it possible to move forward and be educated without losing one's cultural roots?

Anikwenwa is an example of how being educated can separate one from their cultural roots. As Anikwenwa became educated, he became Christian, and lost all spiritual and cultural connections with his mother. He grew up trying to convert his mother to Christianity.
The story shows us the superiority ascribed to men in Nigerian culture, yet it is the women in this story who are outstanding. To what extent do you agree.

To the extent of what the Nigerian women go through e.g. high maternal mortality rates, high rates of miscarriage, physical abuse they still try to uphold their beliefs. Nwamgba shows how after facing her difficulties i.e. her multiple miscarriages, the murder of her husband after the birth of her only child, her son being taken from her by christians, and then being denied the right to see her grandchildren; she can build the strength to face her murderous cousins in law and stay true to her religion despite the rest of her families change in beliefs.
Throughout its history, African countries have been inundated with Christian Missionaries who offered education and some support, as long as the ‘natives’ converted to their faith, learned English and to a certain extent left behind their cultural roots. This has been greatly criticised today for ethical reasons. What do you think?

Christians are offering resources and education in return for leaving their beliefs behind, and not out of their own good faith. This is unethical as it promotes nationalism and forcefully preaching their beliefs, resulting in the loss of spiritual and cultural roots.
Why are people so eager to leave behind their old culture to embrace a newer, different culture such as American culture?

- American culture has more freedom
- Interest
- Escape from emotional and physical distress
- To give future generations a better chance educationally and occupationally
- May lead longer and healthier lives
- Western culture’s are more accepted in the world.
Theme 1: Acceptance

Nwamgba initially shows acceptance towards the beginning of the story.

Nwamgba had been determined to marry Obierika; they seemed the perfect match. Only, her family had concerns because his family was not known for their fertility. Obierika was an only child as was his father. Nwamgba was stubborn, however, and demanded that her family accept Obierika's family's offer of marriage. His family was a good family, after all. Generous and successful.
Nwamgba and Obierika suffer through many miscarriages before giving birth to their only son. Anikwenwa is a quick learner and a good child. Tragedy strikes when Obierika dies of suspicious circumstances, or so Nwamgba believes. She fears for the life of her son, as Obierika's two good for nothing cousins look on, their greed clear on their faces.

Word comes that white men are visiting villages, sometimes resorting to violence when the clans will not cooperate. There are the missionaries who preach about their god and establish a school, and then there are the bureaucrats who set up courthouses and deal out their own law and justice.
What is the significance of the title of the story?

The Headstrong Historian is the title of the story. The Historian in the story is Nwambga’s granddaughter Grace, who becomes a history teacher who teaches the history of Nigeria, and goes on to peruse story writing about Nigeria. THE HEADSTRONG HISTORIAN IS CHIMAMANDA NGOZI ADICHIE.