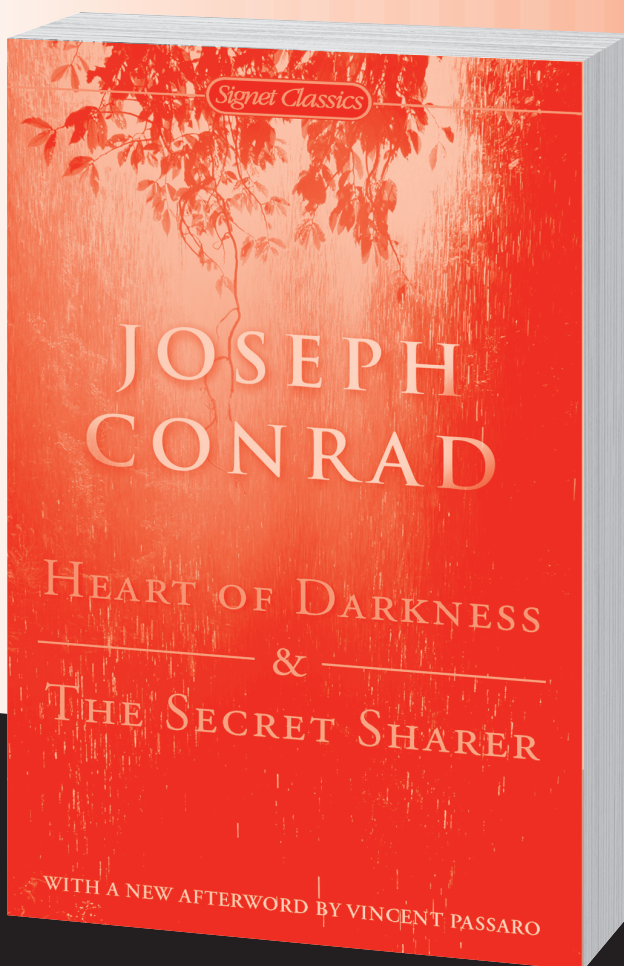


Signet Classics

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSICS EDITION OF

HEART OF DARKNESS

BY JOSEPH CONRAD



BY **ALLEN KROMER**

SERIES EDITORS: JEANNE M. McGLINN AND JAMES E. McGLINN

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	3
LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS	4
SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL	4
PREREADING ACTIVITIES.....	7
DURING READING ACTIVITIES.....	12
AFTER READING ACTIVITIES	19
ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE	25
ABOUT THE EDITORS OF THIS GUIDE	25
FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES.....	27

Copyright © 2010 by Penguin Group (USA)

For additional teacher's manuals, catalogs, or descriptive brochures,
please email academic@penguin.com or write to:

PENGUIN GROUP (USA) INC.
Academic Marketing Department
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014-3657
<http://www.penguin.com/academic>

In Canada, write to:
PENGUIN BOOKS CANADA LTD.
Academic Sales
90 Eglinton Ave. East, Ste. 700
Toronto, Ontario
Canada M4P 2Y3

Printed in the United States of America

INTRODUCTION

Based on their prevalence in popular culture, the words “The horror! The horror!” are recognizable to many individuals, even those who have not read Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. However, while the words themselves may be familiar, their significance, the weight behind them, and the events that elicit their utterance are often misunderstood or unknown. In Conrad’s novel, narrator Charlie Marlow, “who [turned] freshwater captain for a bit,” recounts his piloting a tinpot steamer up the mighty Congo River to retrieve a man named Kurtz from the Inner Station, an outpost situated for gathering ivory. At the coast, Marlow hears secondhand of Kurtz’s genius, but as he draws closer to his destination, he realizes that Kurtz, once deemed “an emissary of light,” may have immersed himself in, or even become, the heart of darkness. By tale’s end, Marlow himself has touched on that darkness and returns to England a more somber man.

The novel’s fairly straightforward plot—piloting a boat up a river—serves as a vehicle for weighty ideas; as such the book will challenge adolescent readers, for while the story seems accessible, the text’s style, ideas, and density combine to make it more difficult than most secondary school literary fare. However, with attentive guidance, supplemental activities, and collaboration between teacher and students, experiencing the novel can be a rewarding task. Students can reflect on the pithy content—man’s capacity for evil, the dangers of unfettered commerce, the weight of lies—and perhaps learn something about themselves from the novel’s characters.

Although the novel is daunting to some readers, the richness of its content will reward competent and advanced readers; the range of possible interpretations of the symbols and events in the tale will allow students to theorize, argue, and determine meaning. For those who tire of pedestrian or pedantic texts, *Heart of Darkness* is a welcome change. For those who gaze on the darkness in the world (broadcast again and again, it seems, on the nightly news), the book affords a glimpse at man’s capacity for evil and posits the question of whether or not evil must triumph. And for those who wish to prepare themselves for the greater academic challenges of college level curricula, Conrad’s novel is a suitable and accessible text.

The content and activities in this guide are resources for planning to teach the novel. Some content will inspire closer inspection of meaningful passages or events; other activities and resources will supplement the primary text. The Pre-reading activities set the foundation for appreciating the novel by establishing an awareness of the political and geographical settings and Conrad’s experiences in the Congo. The During-reading content will help students focus on specific elements and events in the text, events that when combined result in the novel’s artfulness. The Post-reading activities promote a holistic review of the novel, an elevated analysis of the sum of these great parts, and the opportunity to establish and debate meanings. The activities in this guide should be used to address curricular requirements, reinforce preferred teaching styles, and promote academic success for students. The best approach is one that is selective, adaptive, and creative.

LIST OF MAIN CHARACTERS

CHARLIE MARLOW	Main narrator, captain of steamer up the Congo River
DIRECTOR OF COMPANIES, LAWYER, AND ACCOUNTANT	captain and passengers aboard the <i>Nellie</i> , anchored on the Thames River outside of London who listen to Marlow's story
UNNAMED LISTENER	Narrator of frame story
COMPANY ACCOUNTANT	Company Bookkeeper at coastal settlement in Africa; of immaculate appearance and flawless work habits
STATION MANAGER	Company employee, manager of the Central Station
STATION MANAGER'S UNCLE	leader of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition, Station Manager's confidant
KURTZ	Manager of the Inner Station
MY INTENDED	Kurtz's beloved, who lives in Europe

SYNOPSIS OF THE NOVEL

SECTION I

Frame Story: Aboard the cruising yawl the *Nellie*, an unnamed listener describes the setting and recounts Marlow's tale. The sun is setting as Marlow begins an account of his voyage up the Congo River. Marlow reflects on the British legacy of exploration and calls London "one of the dark places of the earth." He then reflects on how the Romans explored Britain and how it felt to be sent to "the very end of the world," where the explorer found such a contrast between the civilization of Rome and that remote wilderness.

Marlow's Early Life and New Employment:

Motivated by wanderlust, Marlow pursues the captaincy of a freshwater steamer in Africa, a largely unexplored region that features a large river. Having exhausted his own leads for employment, Marlow turns to his aunt for assistance. His aunt recommends her nephew to the wife of a high-ranking company administrator, and the company hires Marlow. When Marlow travels to Europe to meet his employers, he feels uneasy because he senses that he has been let in on some

conspiracy. The company physician asks to measure Marlow's head and notes that those who voyage to Africa never return and cryptically mentions that "the changes take place inside [one's head]."

Marlow's Trip to the Mouth of the Congo and Arrival in Africa:

Marlow sails to Africa and travels up the coast, slowly passing what he calls insignificant settlements, "greyish-whitish specks...with a flag flying above them." En route, the steamer encounters a man-of-war shelling the shore but producing negligible effects. After three months, Marlow arrives at "the mouth of the big river" but immediately heads to a settlement thirty miles upriver. There he observes construction projects and equipment in disarray and indigent people suffering as project laborers. To avoid a group of convicts, Marlow steps into a shady grove and discovers a group of Africans near death from exhaustion. Afterwards, he encounters an anomaly, the Company's impeccably dressed chief accountant. The accountant mentions a Mr. Kurtz and asks Marlow to deliver the message that everything at the Outer Station is "very satisfactory."

Marlow's Time at the Middle Station:

Marlow leaves the Outer Station with sixty native porters and a single white companion. The group passes through abandoned villages, encounters a drunken white man responsible for security on the road, and finds the corpse of a recently executed native. Exasperated at his white companion's fainting and the porters' reluctance to carry the man, Marlow threatens his porters and senses he is losing control. Finally reaching the Central Station, Marlow is further exasperated to find his steamer badly damaged. He is also uneasy when he meets the Station Manager and the other whites (whom he calls "pilgrims") who are clearly inept and unproductive. The Station Manager frets about Mr. Kurtz and wishes to travel to the Inner Station to check on him. The station's brick-maker, viewed by the whites as the Station Manager's spy, speaks of Kurtz as a "prodigy" but also presses Marlow for information. Marlow realizes that his Aunt's recommendation depicted him in unreasonably glowing terms, and he feels that he is nearly telling a lie by not confessing his true qualifications. Marlow says that he "cannot bear a lie" as lies remind him of mortality. Later the mercenary Eldorado Exploring Expedition arrives at the Central Station with the Station Manager's uncle leading the group. Marlow grows increasingly curious about Kurtz, "a man who had come out equipped with moral ideas of some sort."

SECTION II

Intrigue at the Central Station: One night while Marlow is lying on the steamer's deck, he overhears the Station Manager and his uncle speaking about how Kurtz threatens the Station Manager's position. Marlow also learns that Kurtz is the only white at the Inner Station, having sent his former assistant back to the Central Station. The uncle notes that the greatest threat to his nephew is the Company administration in Europe. When the uncle says to trust that the climate will kill Kurtz, Marlow senses the land's "hidden evil." Startled, he leaps up and

frightens the two men who pretend they haven't seen him. The next day the Eldorado Expedition disappears into the wilderness.

The Early Stages of Marlow's Voyage:

Marlow relates the physical and psychological duress of traveling upriver. The river and jungle are mysterious, adversarial, and require a constant, taxing attentiveness. Midway through this section, Marlow digresses to share his philosophy about the potential impact of the wilderness. Removed from the comforts of civilization, stripped of acquisitions and principles, only a deliberate belief will serve the individual. Fifty miles below the Inner Station, the steamer arrives at a hut where Marlow and his fellows find a pile of stacked wood, a note that reads, "Wood for you. Hurry up. Approach cautiously," and a copy of a book entitled *An Inquiry into Some Points of Seamanship* with annotations in the margins. The Station Manager suspects that the book and the hut belong to an "intruder" who is stealing ivory in the region.

The Fog and the Attack: Marlow is frustrated that they must stop eight miles below the Inner Station, and so close to Kurtz, because night is falling and they have been warned to use caution. In the morning, a dense fog prevents the steamer from lifting anchor. The passengers hear a cry of immense sorrow that convinces the white passengers they are in danger of attack. However, the native crew views the people who have made the cry as a potential source of food; their leader asks to catch the people on the bank to eat them. Marlow digresses to comment on the crew's self-restraint for they are hungry and could easily overwhelm the whites aboard the vessel. Finally the steamer resumes its trip upriver until Marlow sees a crewman suddenly throw himself on the deck and realizes that the steamer is being attacked with arrows. The pilgrims open fire with their rifles, and the helmsman abandons the wheel to use his rifle. As the steamer swings dangerously in the river, smoke from the gunfire prevents Marlow from navigating. He steers close to the bank, and the helmsman is mortally wounded.

Finally, Marlow sounds the boat's steam whistle, and the attackers flee. When a pilgrim mentions that Kurtz is probably dead, too, Marlow realizes that he is sorry that he might never have a chance to hear Kurtz's voice.

Marlow's Digression and Characterization of Kurtz: When one of the listeners on the *Nellie* expresses some skepticism as Marlow speaks of his emotions, Marlow argues that the listeners on the boat cannot understand the experience. He then alludes for the first time to the object of Kurtz's affections, a woman Kurtz refers to as My Intended. After describing Kurtz's physical bearing, his philosophy of consumption (Kurtz believes that everything belongs to him), and his life before he came to Africa, Marlow tells of a report that Kurtz composed for a philanthropic society, an eloquent text that moves Marlow with its message of bringing civilizing forces to Africa. However, at the end of the report, Kurtz has scrawled, "Exterminate all the brutes!"

The Helmsman's Funeral and Arrival at the Inner Station: Marlow resumes the Congo narrative and recounts his disposal of the helmsman's corpse into the river and his profound guilt at the man's death. After the debacle of the attack, the Station Manager suggests that they return to the Central Station, but Marlow sees they have arrived at the Inner Station. An enthusiastic, young man whom Marlow characterizes as a harlequin greets the steamer. A Russian, the man had abandoned his hut and left wood for the steamer. When Marlow returns his book, the Russian rejoices; later, he tells Marlow that the boat's steam whistle will protect them from any attacks. He then recounts his past and life in Africa, concluding that Kurtz has enlarged his mind.

SECTION III

The Russian's Account of Kurtz: The Russian shares his knowledge of Mr. Kurtz and urges Marlow to take Kurtz downriver quickly. He tells of his talks with Kurtz and describes their enlightening effects on him. The Russian had nursed Kurtz through two serious illnesses; at other times, Kurtz would vanish inland for

weeks searching for ivory. When Marlow wonders what Kurtz might have traded with as his supply of goods is exhausted, the Russian says that Kurtz still possessed a good supply of cartridges. Once, to gain the Russian's small store of ivory, Kurtz threatened to shoot him and, as the Russian notes, there "was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased." Kurtz had recently returned with all the warriors of a lake tribe to stage a raid but has fallen ill. Scouting the shore through binoculars, Marlow realizes that Kurtz has surrounded his hut with human heads mounted on poles.

Marlow's Meeting With Kurtz: When the whites carry Kurtz out of his hut on a stretcher, hundreds of warriors emerge from the forest, and the Russian cautions that unless Kurtz says the right thing, the party from the steamer will be killed. Bald and emaciated, Kurtz resembles "an animated image of death carved out of old ivory." After Kurtz's words, the natives return to the forest, and the whites deposit Kurtz aboard the steamer. Upon spying Marlow, Kurtz tells him, "I am glad."

The Departure and Kurtz's Escape: After Kurtz is aboard the steamer, a striking native woman approaches the water and gestures at the steamer as if in farewell. Marlow overhears Kurtz berating the Station Manager for interfering with his plans while the manager concludes that Kurtz's district will be closed to trade for some time because of Kurtz's "unsound methods." Marlow responds that he thinks Kurtz is a remarkable man. "He was," the manager responds. The Russian asks Marlow to protect Kurtz's reputation, and after some thought, Marlow agrees. That night, Marlow awakens to find Kurtz is gone. He stalks and confronts Kurtz as he crawls towards the natives' bonfire, asking him to consider the consequences of what he is doing. After Marlow helps the weakened Kurtz return to the steamer, he feels as if he has carried half a ton down the hill.

The Downriver Trip: The next day, Marlow readies the steamer to return to the Central Station. The striking native woman returns to the river, and her words to the massed natives

seem to incite them to violence. Marlow sees the pilgrims on the vessel readying their rifles and sounds the steam whistle to drive the natives away. The pilgrims open fire, smoke obscures the shore, and the steamer embarks on its return trip. Kurtz's condition deteriorates; nonetheless, he speaks eloquently until the very end. When the steamer breaks down, Kurtz asks Marlow to keep his papers for him. That night, Kurtz says, "I am lying here in the dark waiting for death." Soon afterwards, he utters his last words: "The horror! The horror!" Marlow exits; later a native servant reports Kurtz's death.

Marlow's Return to Europe and Meeting with Kurtz's Intended: Marlow succumbs to a tropical illness which underscores for him Kurtz's remarkable nature. Near death, Marlow has nothing to say; while Kurtz was continuously talking. Marlow finds himself

back in the sepulchral city, and while his aunt tries to nurse him back to health, Marlow's mental state prevents her from succeeding. Having vowed to protect Kurtz's reputation and papers, Marlow later pays a visit to Kurtz's Intended. When the woman enters the room, her beauty and innocence affect Marlow. She still grieves for Kurtz, and as they talk, the woman becomes more convinced of Kurtz's greatness and the idea that Marlow was Kurtz's friend. While her delusion begins to anger Marlow, he finds that he pities her. To ease her sorrow, Marlow tells her he heard Kurtz's last words. She longs to know them, and, having reflected on Kurtz's true last words, Marlow tells her that Kurtz's last words were her name. At the end of Marlow's tale aboard the *Nellie*, the unnamed listener sees that the Thames seems to lead "into the heart of an immense darkness."

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

These activities present a range of content that will make *Heart of Darkness* more meaningful and accessible to readers. Instructors should choose materials based on their goals and the limits of time. Students' knowledge of Joseph Conrad's life and experiences in Africa will provide them with real world connections to the text and lend credibility to the story. Orienting students to the historical background of the Congo, particularly when the region was designated as the Congo Free State under Leopold II of Belgium's control, will help them see more clearly the effects of colonization on the land.

I. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF HISTORY AND CULTURE

A Brief History of the Belgian Congo

By the time Marlow reaches Africa, the continent has largely been parceled off into the control of European countries. Creating an

annotated timeline that details significant elements of the region's history will enable students to see more clearly the orderly and proud history of the region before Europeans arrived and the fractured and turbulent period after their arrival and control of the land.

Using content discovered through Internet research or in the Media Center, have students collect and review information about the Congo from its earliest times to the modern day. Ask students to create a timeline that presents the region's chronology up to modern times. Ask them to focus on significant arrivals (new people or populations moving in), events (conquests, major shifts in power, economic transformations), and elements (those political systems, social beliefs, or institutions) that affected the region. Ask students to mark the arrival of Europeans and changes that occurred. Finally, after students have completed their timelines, have them write two paragraphs that summarize the region's history before and after the Europeans' arrival and conquest.

A good starting page was created as a project by Thomas Kinsella's students at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey: <http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/projects/hod/history.html>

King Leopold II of Belgium and the Congo Free State: Some Cartoons Aren't Funny

In this introductory activity, students analyze a selection of political cartoons that depict Leopold II's predations in the Congo Free State. Using cartoons (and realistic images, if desired), ask students to inspect the images. Then, have students compose brief character sketches of Leopold II using their conclusions and details from the images. Realistic images are readily available through image searches, but instructors might want to preselect images to streamline the process and limit the number of images students analyze. After students have shared or submitted their characterizations, provide additional information about Leopold or ask students to engage in additional research using the websites listed in this guide.

Cartoons depicting Leopold II:

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Punch_congo_rubber_cartoon.jpg

http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Congo_leopold_II_cartoon.gif

http://wikimediafoundation.org/wiki/File:The_Royal_Jack_in_the_Box.jpg

Alert the Press! Leopold Is Afoot!

By the time Marlow arrives in Africa, the indigenous people are already suffering under the yoke of colonization. In the novel, the main motive for their treatment is the acquisition of ivory; in reality, Africa offered a wealth of resources that Europeans desired. In the Congo timeline activity, students probably realized that the Europeans brought suffering to what was an orderly (and in some areas Christian) region. Provide students with an opportunity to research Leopold II and his Congo Free State, or provide students with sources that

detail his exploitative and unjust practices. As students work through the sources, ask them to categorize Leopold's methods, the results of his colonization, and statistical information about the plight of the indigenous people. Then, after students have generated some ideas, lead a discussion to get whole class input. Finally, have students compose a letter to the editor to voice their concerns about Leopold II to the press. Providing sample letters will model for students appropriate voice and format.

Leopold II timeline: <http://www.moreorless.au.com/killers/leopold.html>

Unscrambling the Scramble for Africa

The Scramble for Africa (1880-1900) is the name given to the period in African history where over the course of twenty years European powers carved up the continent into colonies. While raw materials were a primary motivator for these actions, other factors influenced Europe's efforts to gain colonies. In this activity, students research the factors that led to the Scramble for Africa to understand why the rush occurred. Using information gained from Internet research or Media Center resources, ask students to list the causes and briefly annotate each to demonstrate their understanding.

Sample Internet sites for Scramble information:

<http://africanhistory.about.com/od/eracolonialism/a/ScrambleWhy.htm>

This site discusses the diverse factors that caused the rapid colonization of Africa.

<http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/students/curriculum/m9/activity4.php>

This site includes a map that shows the locations of European colonies in Africa in 1914 and is a useful visual aid for teaching about the Scramble for Africa.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/africa/africasbook.html#EuropeanImperialism>

This Internet African History Sourcebook includes links to primary and secondary sources on European imperialism in Africa and other related topics.

Then, having reflected on the information, have students rank the causes from most significant to least significant based on their ideas of what motivates a country to become involved in foreign exploration and colonization. Ask students to rank the causes a second time based on their ideas of what is important. Finally, conduct a survey and class discussion to identify which factors would have been the most important reasons for international involvement based on a national perspective and personal perspective. Class results can be tabulated and formatted into bar graphs to create a visual aide for discussion by using spreadsheet software. Using the following questions may facilitate students' rankings:

- Of the causes you have found in your research, which do you think would be most influential on national interests to become involved in a foreign country's affairs? Which cause do you think would have been least influential? Briefly defend your answers.
- Based on your own personal beliefs, which cause do you feel represents the best justification for involvement in another country's affairs? Which is least important? Explain your thinking.

Virtual Voyage of the Congo River

This activity provides an understanding of the Congo River and will help students understand the magnitude of Marlow's voyage. Using Google Earth (available for download at earth.google.com), have students locate the Congo River on the globe and "navigate" upriver, identifying navigational issues, the river's size, types of villages, and other geographical elements. Students can save images that are embedded on the map; they can also use screenshots to capture river features seen in the satellite photos. For a good starting point, students might enter "Brazzaville, Congo" into the search box at the left of the screen and navigate upstream from there using the mouse to drag or keyboard arrows to move the map. For an interesting contrast to much of what students will find, look for

the "Vieille maison 'coloniale'" just downriver from Kisangani, a photo that depicts a colonial structure. Students might present their voyage logs through presentation software, on wiki pages, or other media that are appropriate. After students have completed reading the novel, they might revisit this activity to find those spots that they believe correspond with events described in the text.

In addition to the virtual voyage students can gain a deeper understanding of the river through video resources, such as <http://history.howstuffworks.com/african-history/congo-river.htm>

This site titled How the Congo River Works gives views of the river with discussion of geography, history of explorations, and modern times on the Congo River.

Two brief videos illustrate the magnitude and risk of navigating on the Congo River. The first features kayakers paddling gigantic rapids; the other documents the efforts of Africans to keep the channels clear of dangerous sandbars:

- Kayaking video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L1UrqbVlxvQ>
- Sandbar video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m9JYEgNkDzk>

Joseph Conrad's Life and Travels

Some of the inspiration for *Heart of Darkness* came from the author's experiences at sea and on the Congo River. While the biographical episodes from Conrad's early days lend authenticity to the descriptions of piloting the steamer, his memories of his experience in the Congo may have shaped the story he tells of Marlow's trip up the mighty river. For some novels, exploring the author's life produces few dividends, but with Conrad's, biographical knowledge can add an element of reality to the fictional narrative.

Students can create digital scrapbooks or biographies that recount Conrad's experiences; the final products can be posted on wikis or class Web pages, presented with presentation software, or transferred onto

poster board or into scrapbooks. Suggested content might include references to Conrad's bouts with physical and mental illnesses, his experiences in the Congo, or an overview of his writing career.

Sample Internet sites on Joseph Conrad:

<http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsell/projects/hod/incongo.html> includes excerpts from Conrad's diaries and describes the effects of the illness he suffered from his trip up the Congo.

<http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsell/projects/hod/bio.html> gives an overview of Conrad's literary career.

<http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/conrad/chron.html> gives a detailed timeline of Conrad's life and work.

<http://www.online-literature.com/conrad/> provides a brief biographical portrait of Conrad.

<http://videos.howstuffworks.com/hsw/11920-heart-of-darkness-profiling-joseph-conrad-video.htm> This biographical video of Joseph Conrad includes his experience as a navigator of a steamship up the Congo River with images of the abuse of the Africans. This video also links to other videos introducing *Heart of Darkness*. The videos include brief advertisements which cannot be avoided.

II. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE OF LITERARY ELEMENTS

Conrad's use of these literary elements empowers the narrative of *Heart of Darkness*. As a review or preparatory activity, ask students to practice identifying these elements in supplemental texts and to determine how the elements function or what effects they have on readers. This level of response requires students to analyze and draw inferences. Subsequent activities focus on these elements so ensuring that students have a working understanding of them will facilitate success.

Setting: "Twentieth Century Pops"

Most students are well versed in identifying a tale's time and place; fewer consider the social context, and while students can often identify setting components, many do not reflect on how the setting affects the characters and readers. This sample activity which asks students to convey a sense of time, place, and social context may facilitate a greater understanding of the impact of setting on a story.

Ask students to conceive a formal dance at a local landmark venue that features a fairly long history (say, from the 1940's on). Tell students that they must use the venue you have provided; it need not be local, but the venue should be recognizable to students. With the place established, randomly assign students decades from the Twentieth Century—if the venue was built in the 1940's, that should be the earliest era. So, some students will work on the 1950's, some the 1960's, and so on. Once they have the time and place, have students research the social context for the dance. As they work, ask them to look for political trends, social and aesthetic trends, musical tastes, fashion trends, and controversies of their era. Once they have arrived at a good understanding of the time, place, and the many elements that create the social context, have the students write a newspaper article, magazine review, or diary entry that conveys the gist of their setting. Once students have finished writing, the class might discuss how the attendees at their events might react if groups that were viewed negatively (Germans in America in the early Forties, interracial couples in the Fifties or Sixties) in the era showed up at the party or if the band started to play an unpopular style of music.

Imagery

Conrad's images in *Heart of Darkness* resonate with some readers long after they have completed the book. Two stories comparable to the novel that offer good practice with imagery are: "Araby" by James Joyce at <http://fiction.eserver.org/short/araby.html>

and “A Worn Path” by Eudora Welty (available in many anthologies). Ask student to identify the key images and discuss their impact on the reader. How do the images contribute to the sense of the characters?

What associations and ideas do they create in the reader?

Verbal, Situational, and Dramatic Irony

Generally, irony might be defined as a reversal of expectation. In *Heart of Darkness*, Conrad employs different types of irony. Simply put, verbal irony is saying one thing and meaning another. Situational irony occurs when an event or reaction seems contrary to what is expected to occur. And dramatic irony is a technique wherein the reader (and perhaps some characters) has an understanding that the characters in the story do not. Practicing with students to recognize and identify irony and to understand its effects on readers will help them appreciate the novel more fully. Two works that contain accessible and effectively applied examples of irony are: “Carnal Knowledge” by T. Coraghessan Boyle (readily available in anthologies) and “The Story of an Hour” by Kate Chopin (<http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/>).

Frame Story

An accessible and entertaining example of a film that features a frame story is Rob Reiner’s 1987 film *The Princess Bride* (Act III Communications [Buttercup Films Ltd., The Princess Bride Ltd.]; screenplay by William Goldman; produced by Andrew Scheinman and Rob Reiner). While the tone and narrative are very different from Conrad’s novel, the format is similar, and students can analyze the frame story structure, its effects on characters and viewers, and possible reasons why an artist would employ the frame story after watching a short excerpt.

III. BUILDING BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH INITIAL EXPLORATION OF THEMES

One of the novel’s strengths is its complexity. Conrad comments on a range of themes that resonate with most readers, such as:

1. The corrupting influence of power
2. Man’s inhumanity to man
3. Racial inequality
4. Gender inequality
5. Nature as adversary

Students can practice identifying and communicating convincingly about theme, using shorter works of fiction. Many times students will identify the main thematic content in a work of literature, but rather than working to understand an author’s statement about that content, they allow the identification to suffice. For example, Ralph Ellison’s “Battle Royal,” an excerpt out of *Invisible Man*, depicts racism. However, the statement that Ellison makes about racism is more complex: “Institutional racism dehumanizes both the oppressed and the oppressors.” By working with short stories, students can work to identify the general thematic content as well as reflect on possible statements authors might make about that content.

After discussing the themes above, have students read three or four short stories that contain thematic content similar to Conrad’s. Then, have students work individually to identify each story’s thematic content and compose a statement that accurately interprets the writer’s message. They should note and record those textual elements that contribute to the story’s theme. While different credible answers are possible, remind students that acceptable answers must be textually supported. Once students have completed their statements of theme, collect them and lead a discussion that requires students to evaluate which statements best convey a story’s theme. A small group might arrange the statements of theme for a particular story at the front of the room according to effective-

ness as a starting point for the discussion; if opinions differ, subsequent groups might rearrange the statements.

The following texts are well suited as resources because they convey themes similar to Conrad's:

- Naidoo, Beverley. *Out of Bounds: Seven Stories of Conflict and Hope*. HarperCollins, 2003.
- William Faulkner's "Barn Burning"
- Krakauer, Jon. "Into Thin Air" *Outside* Sept. 1996. Electronic version. http://outsideonline.com/outside/destinations/199609/199609_into_thin_air_1.html Note: This article

recounts a tragic ascent up Mount Everest but can still be evaluated for thematic content.

- Colette's "The Hand"
- Jack London's "To Build a Fire"
- Gish Jen's "In the American Society"
- Raymond Carver's "Popular Mechanics"
- Ralph Ellison's "Battle Royal"

The stories cited as examples in the Literary Elements section are also suitable for this activity.

DURING READING ACTIVITIES

I. WHOLE TEXT ACTIVITIES

These activities, designed to deepen understanding of the novel, are best completed as students read the novel. Instructors might collect works in progress to gauge students' understanding, monitor appropriate completion, and provide feedback to reinforce comprehension and encourage learners.

A *Heart of Darkness* Travelogue: Physical and Psychological Journeys

The novel is an account of Marlow's two journeys—the physical trip up the river and the psychological development that trip elicits. The travelogue will allow students to record story elements in timely fashion to better understand how each of the journeys affects the other.

For each section of the novel, have students fold a sheet of typing paper in half vertically. On one half of the sheet, students should record details of the story and their realizations about the physical journey—places, plot events, characters encountered, and so on. On the other half, students should record Marlow's psychological realizations as they occur. Instruct students to record the elements approximately as they occur. For

instance, if a realization comes halfway through a section, that realization should appear on the psychological side about halfway down the page. If the Russian Sailor's coming aboard the steamer at the Inner Station is the last physical event that occurs in the section, it should appear at the bottom of the page. Remind students to allot one sheet per section. At activity's end, students can align their sheets vertically for a fairly detailed review of the entire novel. Visual elements and illustrations can reinforce understanding in this activity by providing cues and addressing a broader range of learning styles. Many times students will bisect the paper vertically with a top-down illustration of the river replete with snags, fog banks, natives on the banks, and so on.

Kurtz and Marlow Characterizations

Giving students the responsibility of gaining a refined understanding of each character will allow them to understand the book more fully. This activity works well as a sort of annotated quotation journal that is based on the Cornell notes format (For an example, see <http://www.montgomerycollege.edu/Departments/enreadtp/Cornell.html>). In the left column, have students record quo-

tations that illustrate character traits about Marlow and, on a second sheet, Kurtz. Next to each entry in the right column, ask students to record the realizations that new information elicited. In some cases, new information may contradict earlier content; in others, the realization may be a reader response, such as “Marlow seems sexist here because...” or “Kurtz seems to act without any concern for conventional morality.” In the case of Kurtz, students can also use the right hand column to consider the source, for an enemy of Kurtz like the Brickmaker will speak poorly of him while a disciple like the Russian Sailor will sing his praises. In the template’s bottom section, have the students write a brief character sketch that synthesizes the information in the two columns. The synthesis might include inferences, predictions, personal responses or evaluations, or other ideas that move beyond the textual content.

Note: Instructors who choose to assign the travelogues presented above might ask students to complete only the Kurtz characterization to eliminate redundancy, for the travelogue activity typically results in a solid understanding of Marlow’s character.

Hearts and Hell

Conrad’s use of imagery constitutes one of the novel’s strengths. Images of hearts and images of hell along with related inferno or devil images are thematically significant. Another annotated quotation journal, this activity will allow readers to grasp the scope of each type of imagery and begin to understand the allegorical elements in the text. Before students begin reading the novel, ask them to choose either heart or hell imagery as the basis for their journal; then, instruct them to record all allusions to either hearts or hell that they encounter as they read the novel as well as the page numbers for each reference. Next to each textual reference, have students briefly explain the function of the image. While some functions will recur, each type of imagery conveys many meanings and significances. On occasion, hosting a “volume challenge” to see who has recorded

the most valid entries by a certain page works to facilitate understanding, gauge progress, and foster enjoyable competition among readers (especially if prizes like small boxes of conversation hearts candies or Red Hots candies are offered as prizes to the winners).

II. SECTION ACTIVITIES: DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND SNAPSHOTS

Discussion questions build understanding and strengthen comprehension of the novel and its literary elements. Teachers can draw from section questions to create journal prompts, to use as a foundation for whole class discussion, or to focus on and review those parts of the novel that seem most elusive to students. Students can work in groups to answer a series of questions to refine their understanding of a section, or one student can work exclusively on a single question to become the class expert who then shares his/her expertise with peers. Given the density of Conrad’s prose, encouraging students to return to the novel is an effective approach to ensure accuracy and get students to re-immense themselves in the text.

The Section Snapshots afford students the chance to explore passages that are central to each respective section as well as to the novel as a whole. The activity for a particular passage can be adapted to use with other passages in *Heart of Darkness*.

Section I Questions

1. Conrad structures *Heart of Darkness* as a frame story. For a writer, what benefits does this structure provide?
2. In the frame story section of the book, what details does Conrad include to create a sense of comfort and peacefulness? What elements contrast the serenity?
3. The unnamed narrator comments that Marlow is “not typical” of seamen. In what ways is he different?
4. As Marlow recounts his boyhood experiences, he says that he was like “a silly little

- bird.” What perceptions do you think this image might have for most readers?
5. Marlow notes that he “tried the women” in his attempts to become a steamer captain. In the novel, what is Marlow’s attitude towards this strategy? How do you react to his attitude?
 6. As part of the employment process, Marlow visits an old doctor who works for the company. What measurements does the doctor take and why? How does this meeting affect Marlow?
 7. How does Marlow’s aunt, “the excellent woman,” depict him to the wife of the high dignitary? What problems might this pose for Marlow? Why?
 8. How does Marlow describe the African coast (beginning on p. 66)?
 9. On occasion, “black fellows” in boats visit the ship that Marlow is aboard. Do you think that the description of these fellows is mostly positive or mostly negative? And, how do these descriptions compare to most depictions of whites in the novel?
 10. When he reaches shore, Marlow encounters a chain gang of Africans. What impression does the encounter make on Marlow?
 11. To allow the convicts to proceed up the trail, Marlow steps into a grove of trees. How does his impression of the Africans there compare to his attitude towards the convicts?
 12. What impression does the Accountant make on Marlow? How does Marlow’s description of the Accountant contrast with his descriptions of the Africans he has encountered? What effect does this contrast have on readers?
 13. How does the Accountant maintain his appearance? What does the Accountant insinuate (or communicate without actually stating it)?
 14. What is the Accountant’s attitude towards Kurtz?
 15. How does the Accountant’s attitude towards the man who is dying in his hut affect readers’ impressions of him?
 16. What feeling does the Station Manager inspire in Marlow? To Marlow, what seems to be the Station Manager’s best qualification for his job?
 17. During his talk with the Brickmaker, Marlow realizes that the man is pumping him for information about Company politics. What aspects of characterization (details, images, diction) does Conrad use to make Marlow’s skepticism believable?
 18. How does the Brickmaker characterize Kurtz? How does this characterization compare to what others have said about Kurtz?
 19. On occasion, a night-roaming hippo comes ashore and the pilgrims empty their rifles into it to no effect. What do their actions convey about the pilgrims? What could the hippo symbolize?
 20. Perhaps the closest companion Marlow makes at the Central Station is the foreman of the mechanics. Is the foreman a sympathetic character? Why?
 21. What is Marlow’s reaction to the arrival of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition? How does Marlow react to the Station Manager’s Uncle?

Section I Snapshots

Marlow’s Account of Early Explorers: In the text section starting with “Forthwith a change came over the waters” (p. 54) to “offer a sacrifice to...” (p. 58), Marlow recalls great British explorers, their ships, and their exploits. He then characterizes the Romans, explorers who predated the British seamen, as men who faced the darkness and brought civilization to the savages. Finally, he talks of the predatory nature of explorers, men who “grabbed what they could get.” He reflects that the motives for exploration range from noble to shameful.

Have students divide a sheet of notebook paper into two vertical columns; then, label one as “Positive Exploration/Benefits” and the other

“Negative Exploration/Crimes.” Then, using the text describing the acts and accomplishments of explorers as a basis, have students identify and list content that they consider appropriate for one of the columns. For instance, one might consider “building empires” (p. 55) as a benefit while another might consider it a crime. After students have worked through the passage, use the charts as a basis for a discussion on what constitutes “good” or “bad” exploration. Providing students with an opportunity to consider the complexities of exploration may allow them to see more clearly the two poles that Kurtz occupies by the end of the book—he starts as an emissary of light but dies as a murdering despot.

The scope of this activity can be broadened by having students use the Internet or Media Center resources to find out more about prominent real-life explorers. Using Web pages that feature lists of explorers like <http://africanhistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa062501a.htm> can serve as a starting point for research.

Marlow's Experience in the Grove of Death:

Reread the text section starting with “At last I got under the trees” (p. 71) to “I made haste towards the station” (p. 73). When Marlow stumbles into the shade of trees to allow the convicts to proceed farther up the trail, he unknowingly enters into what he calls “the gloomy circle of some Inferno,” a dark place where exhausted workers have crawled to die. Marlow provides detailed descriptions of the plight of these dying men; however, rarely does he use words that underscore their humanity.

Have students create a catalog of the many ways Marlow describes the men. Typically students will respond with images and diction. Some will describe the actions of the men or Marlow's actions towards them. When students have compiled the body of evidence, have them reflect on or discuss the reasons why a person might describe something so unsettling in such impersonal terms. Then, have students write a brief passage to communicate their opinions of whether or not Marlow's descriptions of the Africans are reasonable given his emotional state. The

activity can be broadened to allow students to argue whether or not Conrad's figurative language is successful or not in affecting readers.

Section II Questions

1. In the conversation between the Station Manager and the Station Manager's Uncle, what details does Conrad include that create a sense of mystery about Kurtz?
2. What do the Station Manager and the Station Manager's Uncle hope will happen to Kurtz? Why do they want to be rid of Kurtz?
3. Towards the end of their conversation, what affects Marlow so much that he leaps to his feet and startles the two speakers?
4. What causes one of the listeners on the Nellie to say, “Try to be civil...”?
5. According to Marlow, what for sailors is “the unpardonable sin”? How does this detail lend tension to the journey upriver?
6. In the paragraph that begins, “The earth seemed unearthly,” (p. 97), what elements does Conrad include to reinforce the sense of alienation Marlow feels?
7. Marlow provides a lengthy description of his fireman, a native that he trusts to perform his duties of firing and monitoring the steamer's boiler. While he feels positively towards the man, does Marlow's description contain elements that are negative or patronizing? If so, what are some of the most significant ones?
8. What are some of the reasons Marlow calls the Russian Sailor's hut “an extravagant mystery”?
9. Why does the Station Manager feel enmity towards the Russian Sailor?
10. Eight miles downstream from Kurtz's camp, Marlow feels particularly anxious. What elements in the story contribute the most to his feeling this way?
11. How do the pilgrims react when they hear what Marlow calls a cry “of infinite desolation”? Given the circumstances, is the pilgrims' reaction reasonable?

12. What reasons does Marlow give for the crew's head man wanting to eat the Africans on the shore?
13. What does Marlow ironically call "the playful paw-strokes of the wilderness"?
14. As the steamer sits anchored in the fog, Marlow says that the idea of an attack is inconceivable to him because of the nature of the noise. The pilgrims fear an attack. In Section II, what are some other ways Conrad depicts Marlow's differences from the other whites on the steamer?
15. Characterize Marlow's description of his helmsman. What elements in the description best convey his skepticism?
16. In what ways do the helmsman and whites aboard jeopardize the steamer when it comes under attack from the shore?
17. After the attack, Marlow suspects that Kurtz might be dead. What about this loss creates a sense of extreme disappointment in Marlow? What will he now be unable to do?
18. During Marlow's retelling of this section, one of the *Nellie* listeners criticizes the narrative as "absurd." What major differences does Marlow cite to distinguish himself in the Congo from the listeners aboard the *Nellie*?
19. Marlow realizes that everything at the Inner Station belongs to Kurtz. Then, he wonders to what Kurtz might belong. Based on your understanding of Kurtz and Marlow's story thus far, what do you think motivates Kurtz? To what beliefs does he subscribe?
20. To what does Marlow attribute the helmsman's death? What did he lack?
21. As Marlow releases the corpse of his helmsman into the river's current, he says that the helmsman was "heavier than any man on earth." What elicits such a profound response for a man Marlow thought so little of in life?
22. What elements in the characterization of the Russian Sailor at the end of Sec-

tion II make him seem out of place in such a foreboding setting?

Section II Snapshots

Marlow's Account of Navigation: One recurring element in the novel is Marlow's account of the physical and psychological difficulties he encounters as he pilots the steamer up the great river. The text section, beginning "Going up that river was like traveling..." (p. 94) to "leaving hardly a sign—and no memories" (p. 97), gives some insight into the logistics of getting an unreliable steamer with an unqualified crew up a very dangerous river. Discuss with students: How does this section afford readers the opportunity to understand Marlow's character more fully?

Parts Working Towards a Whole: This activity will require students to review the passage, cited above, to identify and classify elements that help readers understand the ardors of the trip. Using a graphic organizer template like a bubble map or thematic web, have students classify into groups the types of elements that Conrad uses. Students will often include types of images (forest, river, animal species), groups of words (hugging, lost, small), physical challenges, psychological burdens, and other elements on their organizers. Once the students have generated some organizer content, work as a class to understand how the disparate elements function as a whole to convey meaning. Gauge the elements' effects on readers, their effectiveness, and the emotions they help create. Students can submit their organizers for assessment, or they can write brief paragraphs to demonstrate their understanding.

Just the Facts, Ma'am: Many students remember the attack on the steamer best, for the event represents probably the greatest physical action in the novel, text section "I was looking down at the sounding-pole..." (p. 109) to "...he said, glaring at the wounded man" (p. 112). While they remember "little sticks" flying out of the jungle and the helmsman's death, some will overlook the motives behind the attack.

As fans of crime dramas and similarly themed movies, many students have a working understanding of how to recreate a scene based on evidence and eyewitness accounts. Using the passage as a basis, have students create elements that might be found in a crime scene report—an account with a principal witness (a fictionalized interview with Marlow), a timeline (summary of plot events), a schematic drawing that illustrates the steamer layout and location, interviews with bystanders/minor participants, and the like. Student products might be presented as crime files that peers or the instructor might explore. By working to record specifics about the attack, students build knowledge that they can reference later in Section III when the Russian Sailor shares his knowledge of the attack on the steamer.

Section III Questions

1. What useful information does the Russian Sailor provide about Kurtz and the situation at the Inner Station?
2. Based on the Russian Sailor's ramblings, characterize Kurtz's methods of maintaining order and acquiring ivory.
3. In sections II and III, Marlow often recounts sights he viewed through binoculars. Does using this technique provide Conrad with any benefits in telling Marlow's story? How do the binoculars change Marlow's perspective of the events on the shore?
4. Using your own words, describe as fully as you can the "rounded knobs" that Kurtz has mounted around his hut. Upon reviewing the section, do you think that your reaction to the sight was stronger than Marlow's? Why or why not?
5. Marlow says that the heads only show Kurtz's lack of restraint. Do you think this is true? At this point, do you think that Marlow is a reliable narrator? What biases might he have that readers probably do not?
6. Marlow refers to the "symbolic row of stakes" that circle Kurtz's hut. What might the stakes symbolize?
7. When the whites bear Kurtz away from his hut on a stretcher, how is he dangerous even though illness has decimated his strength?
8. What apparently does Kurtz tell the natives to do as he is being carried to the steamer? Is this command consistent with your understanding of the man and his motivations?
9. When Kurtz encounters Marlow for the first time, he says, "I am glad." What impression does Kurtz have of Marlow before he has even met him? What has he based this impression on?
10. What is Kurtz's attitude towards the Station Manager?
11. Marlow says he is "Mr. Kurtz's friend—in a way." In what ways do you think Marlow is Mr. Kurtz's friend?
12. When Kurtz escapes from the steamer, Marlow pursues him. In what ways does Marlow act differently when he is ashore? In what ways does he become like Kurtz?
13. Marlow says, "There was nothing either above or below [Kurtz]....He had kicked himself loose of the earth." Using your understanding of the story, what do you think this represents? What is Kurtz free from or not subject to?
14. When the steamer leaves, Marlow describes the natives, especially the three men "plastered with bright red earth." What elements of the description convey how little Marlow understands about the natives' culture?
15. During their trip downriver, Marlow says that Kurtz's was "an impenetrable darkness." What do you think this darkness represents?
16. After Kurtz's death, Marlow falls deathly ill. As he compares his near-death experience with Kurtz's, Marlow recognizes

a key difference—in his opinion, what makes him inferior to Kurtz?

17. What is Marlow's attitude towards the Company representative who visits Marlow in Europe to gather Kurtz's documents? Do you think Marlow's attitude is justified?
18. A man calling himself Kurtz's cousin visits Marlow and calls Kurtz "a universal genius." Do you think the cousin has biases about Kurtz? Does Kurtz possess any elements of genius?
19. How does the journalist's description of Kurtz succeed as a summary of Kurtz's exploits in Africa?
20. What are the most significant and/or effective details Conrad uses to characterize Kurtz's Intended?
21. Characterize the Intended's beliefs about Kurtz. In the context of the novel, are these views accurate? What does she base her beliefs on?
22. Why doesn't Marlow tell Kurtz's Intended the truth about Kurtz's last words?
23. After Marlow ends his tale, the frame story also concludes after only a brief paragraph. What effects does this structure have on readers? Do you think that the ending is effective?

Section III Snapshots

The Encounter with the Tribal Woman:

The appearance of the "wild and gorgeous" native woman is atypical of the novel—most of the depictions of women in the novel portray them as weak or deluded. Here is a woman with power, and teachers can sometimes generate curiosity and discussion working with students to identify what exactly that power is.

Using the passage, "Dark human shapes could be made out" (p. 131) to "dusk of the thickets before she disappeared" (p. 133), have students identify and catalog the different techniques that Conrad uses to depict the impressive woman. Students typically gravi-

tate towards diction, imagery, her actions, and how others react to her. Once students have explored the characterization, have them record the ideas they associate with the different elements—some will comment on her regal nature, others will see her as some shaman or witch, still others will view her as a beautiful, heartbroken woman.

Students can also use Conrad's detailed discussion to create a visual representation of the woman. Drawing and collage both work well, but remind students that they can only use the details Conrad provides to create her image.

Marlow's Conversation with the Intended:

As a focus for literary study, this passage, "You knew him well..." (p. 151) to "The last words he pronounced was—your name" (154), provides a great example of dramatic irony, the literary technique where the audience possesses understanding that the characters do not. Here, the reader knows more about Kurtz than the Intended who bases her affection and beliefs on Kurtz as a suitor, a man very different from the voracious ivory hunter. To underscore this, the following activity may prove useful.

Have students explicate the passage to see the two versions of Kurtz that Conrad presents. This process may be as simple as having students highlight Marlow's ideas and statements in one color and the Intended's ideas and statements in another. Or, students might divide a sheet of notebook paper into two columns and enter each character's ideas into the respective column. With a refined understanding of each characterization, students can then summarize Marlow and the Intended's respective accounts and see how two individuals can have very different ideas about the same person. Advanced students might write their summaries using the voices of the two characters.

AFTER READING ACTIVITIES

After students have finished reading *Heart of Darkness*, many will have a competent understanding of the novel, its themes, and its artfulness. These activities provide opportunities for students to deepen their understanding of the text, to apply their learning to elements and concepts that supplement the novel, and to draw from their beliefs and life experiences to appreciate the novel more fully. Most can be adapted for completion by individual students or small groups of students.

I. TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND ESSAYS

1. Although technology has tamed the wilderness in many ways, breakdowns and miscalculations can still prove disastrous to man's efforts to explore the Earth and reap its benefits. Reflect on the presence of technology in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, and recall those instances where Marlow comments on machines or technology. Then, using support from Conrad's book, argue whether or not you believe that the power and promise of technology have surpassed the power of the natural world.
2. At the Central Station Marlow notices "a small sketch of oils, on a panel, representing a woman, draped and blindfolded, carrying a lighted torch" (p. 83). Using your book, review the entire description. Then, using the description as a basis for your ideas, explain how the painting might represent the views Marlow expresses in the book about women.
3. Early in the novel, Marlow says, "...I hate, detest, and can't bear a lie..." (p. 85). However, his final act in the African narrative is lying to Kurtz's Intended about the dying man's last words. Using your understanding of Marlow's character, identify and discuss what you consider to be the main reasons Marlow violates one of his core beliefs.
4. All of the listeners on the *Nellie* are Company men—the Director, an Accountant, a Lawyer. As such, their biases probably lie with the Company. But by the end of Marlow's story of his trip to meet Mr. Kurtz, all of the listeners have been so absorbed that they have missed the turn of the tide. Using your understanding of the novel, select three or four elements or events of the story that you feel speak most effectively against unrestrained commerce. Then, share your ideas about why those elements are most convincing.
5. In his narrative, Marlow gives detailed descriptions of his encounters with Africans. Some critics have used these descriptions to condemn *Heart of Darkness* as a racist book. Using the book as a guide, decide whether you think that the book is more critical of the Africans or the white characters. Then, share three or four reasons to support your decision.
6. Marlow asserts, "The mind of man is capable of anything" (p. 98). Using Kurtz's life and actions as a foundation for your response, identify some of the main reasons that Marlow believes what he says. As you reflect, consider morals, ethics, faith, love, and other elements that lend some restraint to most individuals' actions and beliefs. And, think about how most characters in the book feel that Kurtz's methods are "unsound."
7. On his voyage upriver, Marlow describes his African crew as "big powerful men, with not much capacity to weigh the consequences," (p. 105), which underscores Marlow's general perception of Africans as irrational, prehistoric men. By reviewing the text, locate events and passages that contradict the idea that the Africans cannot foresee consequences or think clearly. As you search, consider ideas such as self-preservation, the relationship between whites and blacks in the novel, and those instances

where Africans are depicted as powerful. Then, create a response that illustrates that despite stereotypes, there are exceptions in the novel to the idea that Africans are inferior.

8. Throughout the novel, Marlow comments that women are, and should be, sheltered from the world of men: “We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse,” (p. 115) he tells his audience aboard the *Nellie*. Given what you understand about the modern world, do you think that most readers today would find that assertion correct?
9. Even in the scenes that occur in Europe, Conrad uses the settings in the book to affect his characters on psychological or physical levels. After reviewing the text, identify some of the ways Conrad uses setting as an obstacle to the human characters’ progress or success. As you plan and respond, remember that setting includes time, place, and social mindset.
10. Much is made in the book of civilized and uncivilized people and actions. Typically, the whites are viewed as civilized, but many of their beliefs and actions contradict this classification. Although Marlow consistently tries to depict the Africans as mysterious savages, do you think that his efforts fully succeed? Using your understanding of the book as a basis for your response, argue to prove which group in the book is most savage.

II. GROUP AND INDIVIDUAL PROJECTS

Letters Home

One way for students to explore the characters and ideas in *Heart of Darkness* is to compose letters using the voices, ideas, and philosophies of a character to communicate with another character. In the letters, students can demonstrate how plot events, character interactions, setting, or other tex-

tual elements can affect a character while also giving them an opportunity to write creatively, draw from imagination, and review the story. Letters might be evaluated on accuracy to story elements, accuracy of voice, scope of content, and creativity.

Possible letter assignments might include:

- Marlow to his Excellent Aunt to share his experiences, talk of the mystery of Kurtz, or to chastise her for depicting him to Company administrators in unrealistic terms;
- Kurtz to his Intended to reveal the philosophical changes he has experienced, to tell of his current feelings towards her, or to share his hopes or fears;
- Kurtz to the Station Manager to apprise him of his successful ivory gathering, criticize his meddling in Kurtz’s methods, or to express his reluctance to return to the Central Station;
- Marlow to Company administrators in Europe to apprise them of his progress, to criticize Company business practices, or to discuss the intrigue between the Station Manager and Kurtz.

Letters to the Author

This activity allows students to voice their appreciation or criticism of the novel by writing a letter to Joseph Conrad. In the planning stages, have students brainstorm those elements that they liked the most and those they liked the least; then, have students compose letters to the author to share their ideas. These letters can also include questions to the author about his life, novel elements, or to ask him to respond to criticism of his novel.

The Hearts of Darkness: Interpreting a Central Symbol

With all of the heart allusions and the title of the book, the meaning of the “heart of darkness” is not easily limited to one single interpretation. Using their understanding of the novel, information and ideas they have gained from assignments or discussions, and

information from criticisms they might have researched, have students identify different feasible interpretations for what the heart represents in the context of the novel. Then, have students support their interpretations with their own ideas and textual support. To extend this assignment, have students share their interpretations with the class and, working through class discussions or electronic discussions like those available in Moodle or on wikis, have the class arrive at a consensus of the best interpretation of the meaning of the heart in the novel.

The horror! The horror!?: Reflecting on Kurtz's Last Words

Are Kurtz's last words, "The horror! The horror!" summation, judgment, or realization? Like the heart in *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz's final utterance is open to interpretation. Have students draw from a variety of resources to identify textually feasible interpretations of what Kurtz meant as he died. Did he realize something about himself? The Dark Continent? His methodology? Humanity in general? Students can then submit their ideas in written form, on discussion boards, on bulletin board paper for class consideration, or other media that are available and appropriate.

Heart Goes Hollywood: An Original Film Adaptation

Many adolescents appreciate and understand modern films, and here they can draw from one area of expertise to develop a deeper understanding of the novel. Start by identifying those elements that a film must have: cast, setting, director, special effects, cinematography, and other film elements. Then, ask students to cast characters, choose a suitable director, choose an appropriate place to film, select music appropriate for a soundtrack, and the like. As they work, remind students that they must make creative decisions that are appropriate for the novel and that they must provide justification for their choices. Once the individual or group has completed the thought process, have students create and present their ideas as a publicity packet with film

information, a poster that advertises the movie, a cover letter that explains why their film would be most likely to succeed, and other suitable elements. In some cases having students create a storyboard rendition of a central scene produces good results both in improving a project and helping students understand a pivotal event in the novel more fully.

Racist or Not? Chinua Achebe versus Caryl Phillips

Some critics argue that *Heart of Darkness* is racist, and some students may recognize the book's tendency to depict Africans unfavorably. Chinua Achebe, author of *Things Fall Apart*, argues that Conrad is racist and that his book reflects that attitude. Provide students with copies (or digital access to) Achebe's lecture, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," (<http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html>) and Caryl Phillips' *Guardian* article, "Out of Africa" (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2003/feb/22/classics.chinuaachebe>). Phillips' article features a conversation between the author and Achebe about racism in Conrad's novel. Using graphic organizers, reading comprehension strategies (highlighting, sticky notes, summary strategies), class discussion, and/or teacher direction, identify the theses and central points in the two supplemental texts.

Then, ask students to analyze the central points, consider their understanding of the novel, and decide whether or not they think that racism figures heavily in *Heart of Darkness*. Then, as individuals or small groups, students should compose a response that defends Achebe's assertion of the book as racist, refutes his stance, or draws from reader opinion and *Heart of Darkness* to qualify Achebe's claims.

Women in Heart of Darkness: A Battle of the Sexes

In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow consistently depicts females as weak, deluded, or, in the case of the statuesque African woman, threat-

ening. He violates one of his central tenets in order to protect Kurtz's Intended from the truth and scoffs at having to resort to using a woman to gain employment.

Divide the class into halves by gender, females on one side, males on the other. Then, present the thesis, "In Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, sexism detracts from the overall success of the work." In larger classes, divide the halves of the class into smaller groups to ensure that more students will remain engaged and contribute to the product. Then, have the females argue that the thesis is true; males will argue that the thesis is false. Then, using their understanding of the novel and Marlow's character, have each side locate textual support, generate opinions and supplemental evidence, and use the whole of their evidence to support their perspective. In a limited timeframe, students can produce a thesis statement and outline that posits their views; with the luxury of more time, students often compose compelling opening statements and eloquent and insightful support. With sufficient time, groups can present their opinions to the whole class. The teacher can determine the most successful presentation, or, to ensure greater objectivity, outside judges like fellow teachers familiar with the novel can help determine whose presentation most successfully made its case.

Setting and Climate as Adversaries: Marlow as Survivor

Two of the greatest obstacles to European success in Africa were the setting and climate; in fact, the Station Manager correctly predicts that the climate will eliminate Kurtz as a threat to his position. While the events in the book occurred more than a century ago, Africa is no less daunting, and working to understand that continent's threats help readers realize more fully the struggles that the whites in the novel faced. In colonial times, surviving an African voyage often resulted in fame and fortune for explorers, and, through self-promotion and newspaper publicity, explorers grew rich.

In a brainstorming session, have students contribute to a list of the kinds of obstacles that Marlow and his European fellows faced in *Heart of Darkness*. Answers might include diseases, the climate's temperature, river hazards, military hostility, the sheer greatness of the land, dangerous animals, and technological limitations like the steamer's mechanical reliability or seaworthiness.

Once students have sufficient suggestions to use as a starting point, ask them to research four or five of the list's obstacles using Internet or Media Center resources. Their goal will be to locate statistics and factual information about the kinds of obstacles that Marlow would have encountered on his voyage upriver. Students might refer to biographical accounts of explorers like Mungo Park or Henry Morton Stanley and read excerpts of accounts of exploration like Stanley's *How I Found Livingstone: Travels, Adventures, and Discoveries in Central Africa* (Chapter VI is a good starting point: <http://www.archive.org/stream/howifoundlivings00stanuoft#page/104/mode/2up>).

When students have located information, have them share it with the class. For this assignment, computer presentation software, wiki postings, or posters all work well for putting the information into attractive, accessible formats. Then, have students create a promotional brochure or a similar publication that celebrates the fact that Marlow survived his voyage despite the perils he encountered. The publication's content should contain both *Heart of Darkness* specifics and research information that better illustrates the obstacles that Marlow faced and overcame.

The Mission: A Contemporary Counterpart

Roland Jaffé's *The Mission* serves as a nice supplement to *Heart of Darkness* because the film features two of the central elements of Conrad's book: the ravages of colonization on indigenous people and the transformation of individuals from one extreme to the other. Set in 18th

Century South America, the film recounts the exploits of Jesuit priests led by Father Gabriel (Jeremy Irons) who enter the jungles to bring God's word to the Indians. Rodrigo Mendoza, a slaver, hunts the same jungles to capture Indians to labor on Portuguese plantations. After he murders his brother in a jealous rage, Mendoza joins the Jesuits for redemption, and ultimately, he and Father Gabriel give their lives to protect the Indians from the Portuguese.

The film succeeds with most adolescent viewers, is rated PG, and provides elements comparable to those found in *Heart of Darkness*. Some elements students might focus on include:

- The struggles of the individual who changes drastically from his past: Kurtz changes from emissary to devil; Mendoza changes from mercenary to priest.
- The willingness of commercial interests to subordinate indigenous people: The Africans in *Heart of Darkness* and the Guaraní Indians in *The Mission* receive much the same treatment from those seeking to profit from their labor.
- The dwarfing presence of the natural world: Both works are set in awe-inspiring environs, and each setting requires considerable effort to overcome.
- The subtleties, intrigues, and politics of seemingly proper entities: The Station Manager and Brickmaker are comparable to the Portuguese diplomats Señors Cabeza and Hontar.

The film helps students understand more clearly the characters in *Heart of Darkness* and offers considerable potential for students to review the novel by making connections to the movie.

Please note that Francis Ford Coppola's *Apocalypse Now* parallels *Heart of Darkness* and has been used in conjunction with the book, but the film's content and R rating are viewed by most to be unacceptable fare for high school students.

The Mission. Dir. Roland Jaffé. Perf. Robert De Niro, Jeremy Irons, Aidan Quinn, and Liam Neeson. Warner Brothers Pictures, 1986. Film.

Debates

As is the case with most debates, those elements of the novel that are open to interpretation are most successful as debate topics. Working in small groups and using their books as resources to find support for their stance, ask students to compose effective opening statements that include their thesis statements and some of their support. Sides of the issue alternate when reading opening statements. Then, after the topic has been broached through the statements, open floor discussion starts, a period of free exchange of ideas to convince the class of the rightness of one side. The teacher as moderator manages the exchanges, ensures broad participation, and provides opportunities for even introverts to contribute. At the end of the open floor period, groups reconvene to reflect on the evidence, consider their stance once again, and compose closing statements that are then read to the whole class. Breaking the halves of the class into smaller groups usually works well because smaller groups of three or four ensure that more students will participate and contribute in central roles and because the students typically benefit from hearing three or four opening statements for their side of the issue.

Possible debate topics include:

- While Marlow consistently seeks to distance himself from the Station Manager and pilgrims in the novel, his work allows the whites to perpetrate crimes on the indigenous Africans. Thus, Marlow should be considered as guilty as his white peers.
- Depicted as a mystery for much of the novel, Kurtz ultimately seems like evil incarnate—his motives are dark, his methods unsound. Such a character must be considered as the antagonist in the novel, for his acts are worse than any other committed in the book. Students would argue whether or not Kurtz is the worst character in the novel based on Marlow's narration of Kurtz's behavior and his response to Kurtz.

- In *Heart of Darkness*, the old adage usually stated as “Money is the root of all evil” seems to hold true: indignities and horrors are inflicted on an indigenous people in pursuit of material gain. In the context of the novel, students could debate whether financial gain and commerce are the principal motivators of the terrible deeds that the whites commit. Some students may argue that commerce is the principal motivator; others might counter that other elements (hunger for power, madness, love for the Intended) motivate on more basic levels.
- As the main character in the novel, Marlow overcomes considerable obstacles, successfully completes his duties, and perseveres in the face of hypocrisy and double-dealing. While these achievements seem heroic, other activities and traits of Marlow can be interpreted less positively. Have students debate whether Marlow achieves or fails to achieve the status of a hero.
- Diamond Mining and Conflict—parties in power in the Democratic Republic of Congo use funds produced from diamond exports to finance brutal military operations. See <http://www1.american.edu/ted/ice/congo.htm> as a starting link.
- Hutus and Tutsis—After the Belgians withdrew in the 1950's, Hutus and Tutsis engaged in ethnic conflicts that culminated in the 1994 massacre of hundreds of thousands of Africans that subsequently sent millions of Africans fleeing to other countries for safety. See <http://www.cnn.com/EVENTS/1996/year.in.review/topten/hutu/hutu.html> as a starting link.
- Human Rights Watch hosts a page that details human rights violations in Africa. Students can use this as a starting point for research on military and social injustices on the continent: <http://www.hrw.org/en/africa>
- Wikipedia features an extensive list of countries that have experienced conflict in Africa; while some teachers are loathe to allow students to use Wikipedia as a source for research, this page works very well as a starting point as it provides many leads: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_conflicts_in_Africa

Post-European Africa: A Modern Horror

After African countries gained their independence from European countries, many have lapsed into chaotic states with turbulent histories that do not seem much brighter than the days of colonial oppression. Students may have a general understanding of African human rights issues from viewing movies like *Blood Diamond*, *The Constant Gardener*, or *The Last King of Scotland*, and researching modern history may help readers understand the lasting effects of colonialism. European withdrawal resulted in a power vacuum in some countries, and the dysfunction initiated by the Belgians and other Europeans continues today. Many of the political hotspots are located in areas formerly controlled by Belgium. As students research, advise them to look for timelines of conflicts, for such content serves as a good starting point for additional research. Possible starting points include:

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

ALLEN KROMER is a High School Media Coordinator in Asheville, North Carolina. Before becoming a librarian, he taught high school English to seniors for fourteen years and also designed an online AP Literature and Composition course and taught online classes

with LearnNC. His current interests include professional learning communities, using media center collaboration to facilitate successful classroom instruction, and helping students find quality books that they want to read.

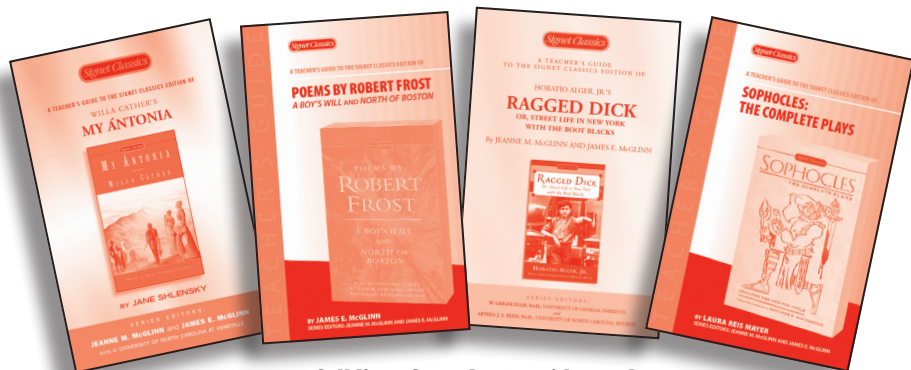
ABOUT THE EDITORS OF THIS GUIDE

JEANNE M. McGLINN, Professor in the Department of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, teaches Children's and Adolescent Literature and directs the field experiences of 9-12 English licensure candidates. She serves on various editorial and professional boards, such as the Language Experience Special Interest Group of the International Reading Association. She has written extensively in the area of adolescent literature, including a critical book on the historical fiction of adolescent writer Ann Rinaldi for Scarecrow Press Young Adult Writers series.

JAMES E. McGLINN, Professor of Education at the University of North Carolina at Asheville, teaches methods of teaching and reading courses. He has taught high school English and developmental reading at all levels, elementary through adult. His research interests currently focus on motivating and increasing the reading achievement of students in high school and college. He is the author and editor of numerous Penguin Teachers' Guides.

NOTES

FREE TEACHER'S GUIDES



A full list of *Teacher's Guides* and *Teacher's Guides for the Signet Classic Shakespeare Series* is available on Penguin's website at: us.penguin.com/tguides

TEACHER'S GUIDES

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
Animal Farm
Anthem
Beowulf
The Call of the Wild
Cannery Row
City of God
The Country of the Pointed Firs and Other Stories
The Crucible
■ Dear Zoe
Death of a Salesman
Doctor Faustus
A Doll's House
Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde
Dubliners
Ethan Frome
The Fountainhead

Frankenstein
The Grapes of Wrath
Great Expectations
■ Heart of Darkness
Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl
Jane Eyre
A Journey to the Center of the Earth
The Jungle
The Kite Runner
Listening is an Act of Love
Looking Backward
Lysistrata
Main Street
The Mousetrap and Other Plays
My Ántonia

A Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave
Nectar in a Sieve
1984
The Odyssey
Of Mice and Men
One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich
The Pearl
Persuasion
■ Poems by Robert Frost
Pride and Prejudice
The Prince and the Pauper
Pygmalion
Ragged Dick
A Raisin in the Sun
The Red Pony
The Scarlet Letter

The Scarlet Pimpernel
The Secret Life of Bees
Silas Marner
■ Sophocles: The Complete Plays
A Streetcar Named Desire
A Tale of Two Cities
■ A Thousand Splendid Suns
The Time Machine
Treasure Island
Two Years Before the Mast
Up from Slavery
■ The Wal-Mart Effect
Washington Square
■ We the Living
The Women of Brewster Place
Wuthering Heights

TEACHER'S GUIDES FOR THE SIGNET CLASSIC SHAKESPEARE SERIES

Antony and Cleopatra
As You Like It
Hamlet
Henry IV Part I
Henry V

Julius Caesar
King Lear
Macbeth
Measure for Measure

A Midsummer Night's Dream
The Merchant of Venice
Much Ado About Nothing
Othello

Richard III
Romeo and Juliet
The Taming of the Shrew
The Tempest
Twelfth Night



PENGUIN GROUP (USA) INC.
Academic Marketing Department
375 Hudson Street
New York, NY 10014-3657

Visit

www.signetclassics.com

to browse all Signet Classics
paperback editions and

<http://us.penguin.com/scessay>

for information about the Annual
Signet Classics Scholarship Essay Contest

Signet Classics