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Advanced Placement in
English Literature and Composition

Teaching Unit
Individual Learning Packet

Heart of Darkness

by Joseph Conrad

Written by Dan Welch

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Heart of Darkness

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. analyze the characters of Marlowe, Kurtz and the Intended and how each relates to one another and to the themes of the book.
2. explain how minor characters reinforce the central themes of the story or act as foils for the major characters.
3. illustrate, with examples from the book, the causes, effects and moral implications of European colonialism in the late nineteenth century.
4. explain the impact of narrative distance and the multiple levels of narrative employed.
5. identify and explain Conrad's social themes as expressed in the book.
6. discuss the use of imagery to reinforce the themes of the book.
7. analyze the importance of literary elements, including irony and foreshadowing, on the development of the plot.
8. interpret characters and characterization from a variety of viewpoints.
9. discuss Conrad's use of mystery, uncertainty, and ambiguity as they are used to reinforce the themes of the story.
10. give a close reading of the text using specific examples from the text to support all assertions.
11. answer multiple choice questions similar to those that appear on the Advanced in Placement English Literature and Composition exam.
12. respond in writing to topics similar to those that appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Exam.

Joseph Conrad and His Times

Joseph Conrad was born to aristocratic Polish parents at a time when Poland was a part of the Russian empire. To avoid being drafted into the Russian army, he fled first to France and then to England. He did not learn English until he was twenty years old. He entered the Merchant Marine to continue a career at sea that he had already begun in France. He earned his certificate as a ship's officer and in a few years attained the rank of captain. His career at sea took him literally around the world, although most of his time was spent in Asia and the South Pacific. Eventually, he was forced to retire due to health problems. Friends encouraged him to become a writer. At first his novels and stories were not well received, and he was viewed as a writer of adventurous sea stories for young boys. Some important writers of his time, however, including H. G. Wells and John Galsworthy, appreciated the quality of his writing, and—with their support—he eventually found a wider and more appreciative audience.

Clearly Conrad's experience as a seafarer had a major influence on his works, but he did not write only about the sea. His major focus was the capacity of human beings to endure—under extreme conditions—the constant threat of the dissolution of human integrity and a surrender to the darkness that he saw as the essential heart of the entire universe. His works always focus on human beings under stress, and he never comes to clear conclusions about why people behave as they do. This ambiguity is one of the traits that mark him as a transitional figure between mainstream nineteenth-century novelists and the modern writers of the twentieth century who were influenced by him.

Colonialism

Joseph Conrad's career as a sailor, from approximately 1870 to 1900, coincided with the peak of the British Empire. British colonies circled the globe and it was said, correctly, that the sun never set on British soil. The powerful British navy protected the sea lanes, but it was the British merchant marine that moved people and cargo throughout the empire. Imperial governments were primarily concerned with exploiting the natural resources of their colonies while using the colonies as markets for their manufactured goods. This situation was frequently a matter of oppressing native populations and taking advantage of their relative lack of sophistication. For the British, however, there was also the feeling that it was their duty to bring the fruits of civilization to the non-white populations they governed. The contradictions between the goals of greed and bringing culture, education, and scientific enlightenment to native peoples were concepts Conrad was very aware of from his experience, but it was a problem with which many educated Europeans could not identify. Conrad's works were, at least in part, an effort to make the people back home more aware of the problems and contradictions that the colonial enterprise entailed.

The Novel's Themes

Conrad's view of the world is that there are dark, chaotic forces that continually threaten to destroy individuals and whole civilizations. The only protection from this is the resolute steadfastness of men and their stubborn reliance on each other no matter how hopeless the situation or how powerful the forces of darkness may appear. In physics this would be like the principle of entropy, which states that the tendency of all organized systems is toward dissolution and decay. People die, bodies decay, civilizations fall; and only constant effort and attention to preservation can halt these forces—and then only temporarily. In philosophy, Conrad can be seen as a precursor of the Existentialists, who likewise believed that the inevitable fate of each individual was darkness and oblivion, but that humans must not surrender to these destructive impulses.

There are some, like Kurtz's Intended, who could not face the true nature of the darkness at the center of the world; and, not only do they not comprehend it, but would be destroyed by it if they were forced to confront it. Conrad believed that to truly understand the world, people have to confront the true destructive heart of the universe, but they do so at great risk. Kurtz is destroyed by it, but Marlow sees it, partially understands it, and is able to resist the dark power of destruction. Conrad sets his story in what was still, in his time, one of the last great stretches of unknown territory in the world. His voyage is away from the bright, artificial world of civilization, into a place that is still a large unexplored area where civilization completely disappears. As his voyage progresses, we see him traveling through almost endless scenes of disintegration and decay until he at last arrives in the "heart of darkness."

Narrative Layers

Conrad learned from American novelist Henry James a new technique called the "ambiguous narrator," which permitted the novelist to better represent how uncertain we must always be about the words, actions and motivations of others. Earlier novelists had used an "omniscient narrator" who knows what each character is thinking and feeling and why they act the way they do. In *Heart of Darkness* Conrad increases the distance between the main character in the story (Kurtz) and the reader by adding several layers of narrative isolation. The first layer of isolation occurs with Conrad's use of his experiences as the fresh-water commander of a steamboat expedition up the Congo River, which is the probable basis of the character Marlow. The second layer is told from a narrator who is listening to Marlow's story. Finally, Marlow is a third layer of isolation in that he tells a story the meaning of which he himself admittedly does not fully understand. His stories are, after all, "inconclusive experiences." The reader must work his or her way through three distinct narrative layers to reach the truth about Kurtz.

The Apollonian and the Dionysian

Although the ancient Greeks never saw any conflict or contention between Apollo and Dionysus, thinkers and writers of the late nineteenth and twentieth century used the two as a metaphor for the human condition and therefore a way to analyze literary works. Apollo was the Greek god of light and is associated with the sun. In addition to being the god of music, poetry and prophecy, he was also the god of medicine, reason and self-restraint. Dionysus, on the other hand, was a god of wine. He was born each year and quickly attracted a group of ardent followers who drank wine, danced wildly and went into frenzies while Dionysus played his flute. At the end of the year, in a final wild celebration, his followers would seize him and rip him to pieces in an uncontrollable religious passion. He is associated with the moon, with loss of control and with the absence of restraint.

In the nineteenth century, the German philosopher Nietzsche used these two ancient gods as metaphors to examine works of literature, especially the genre of tragedy. His ideas, in many ways, are also found in the theories of Freud. The Apollonian impulse is for rationality, thought before action, and self-restraint. The Dionysian impulse is toward irrationality, giving in to impulse, and the removal of all boundaries.

Freud and Nietzsche both thought that these tendencies existed to a greater or lesser degree in each individual. Each of us has the capacity to understand consequences, to evaluate our potential actions, and to show self-restraint. We can respond to the music of a string quartet or to a great painting. Freud attributed this ability to the Superego's control over the powerful impulses of the subconscious. On the other hand, we also have the ability to let ourselves go, to lose all sense of self or responsibility in wild dancing, in loud music, and in orgiastic pleasure. Freud called this part of ourselves the Id.

Conrad is in no way writing a Freudian work as some later writers did, but the dichotomy described here fits very nicely with the action of *Heart of Darkness*. The Intended is clearly dominated by the Apollonian aspect of human possibilities. Her appearance at the end of the novel is restrained, controlled and intellectual. Marlow says that she (and others like her) are not capable of seeing the deeper, darker potential of human beings. Kurtz, obviously, has surrendered to the Dionysian forces of the jungle. The chanting and dancing of the natives, both on the trip up the river and in the night when Marlow pursues Kurtz, suggest this, as does the magnificent native woman they see on the shore when Kurtz leaves.

Marlow functions as a bridge between these two worlds, seeing not only the bright promise of the world suggested by the promise of civilization and progress, but also its fragility as symbolized by the Intended. At the same time he has an uneasy sense that he, like Kurtz, is not immune to the temptation to give in to the pursuit of pleasure, power, and wealth without restraint.

Questions for Research and Discussion

1. The setting for the beginning of the book—on a small sailing craft on a river as night falls—and Marlow’s comparison, by implication, of the dark heart of Africa (the Belgian Congo) and the barbarian darkness on the northern fringes of the Roman Empire, both are examples of irony and foreshadowing. Discuss how one or both of these devices are developed and expanded as Marlow’s adventure progresses.

Irony: This story takes place at the height of the British Empire’s economic and military power, but when the Roman Empire was at the height of its power, Britain was as “dark,” ignorant and uncivilized as any part of Africa. The story also begins on a ship that is temporarily unable to move until the tide turns and it is positioned right at the end of the Thames Channel on the edge of what appears to be trackless darkness.

Foreshadowing: Almost all of the elements that make the setting ironic can also be seen as foreshadowing what Marlow will relate in his story, especially about how the Roman sailors/soldiers must have felt and the reasons they might be there, as well as the risks they faced in a hostile, barbaric environment.

2. In the preface to his novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad wrote that a novelist “speaks to our capacity for delight, for wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts; to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hopes, in fear, which binds men to each other.” Which parts of this description of the role of the novelist applies most appropriately to this novel? Which do not? Explain.

Which do not: This particular work includes very few examples of beauty, except perhaps for the description of the Intended, and even that is undercut by her total inability to handle or accept the truth about Kurtz, a judgment Marlow does not seem to question. There is little in the way of dreams or aspirations except those that are false, hollow, or unobtainable. Hope also seems futile in the world of this novel with Kurtz being the best example of defeated hope when he writes, “Exterminate all the brutes!” (p. 49)

Which apply most appropriately: There is a strong sense of pity for Kurtz, but also for the plight of the native prisoners. Marlow shows several instances when he feels solidarity with the natives, especially with the fireman, but also with the prisoners who are doing meaningless work or have gone under the tree to die. Sorrow and pity are also continuous themes in the book. Above all, there is a sense of mystery about human motivation, behaviors, and reactions to outcomes as well as the loneliness of those who have lost all contact with others of their kind.

3. Each of the three main characters in this story—Marlow, Kurtz and the Intended—represents a clearly different point of view on the nature of the world and perhaps even on the meaning of life. How can each of these views be described? To what extent are they mutually exclusive?

The Intended represents the safe world that cannot know, much less understand, the dark, destructive forces that exist beyond the safe havens of civilized society and also in the dark impulses of the human heart. Marlow realizes that if he attempts to give the Intended even a partial glimpse into the truth about Kurtz, she will be horrified, she will not gain anything from the knowledge and, in fact, she won't believe him. Her ignorance is total and permanent.

Kurtz is clearly the exemplar of the good man with great ability and the highest ideals who, when he finds himself cut off from the mutual support of other civilized people, succumbs to the worst temptations of undisciplined, selfish, and greedy behavior. He has no companions to reinforce his better instincts, and the temptations of darkness are irresistible. He is destroyed by what he has learned, but no one has gained from the experience.

Marlow is between the two. He knows that to truly understand oneself, one must look into the dark, destructive forces within oneself and in the world as it is. This involves great risk, but Marlow has learned that he must take that risk if he is to understand what life is about. It is perhaps significant that on his journey into the heart of darkness, he has companions, no matter how unsavory or unpleasant they may be.

4. During Marlow's physical examination before he leaves for Africa, the doctor takes certain measurements, which he says are for scientific research. Marlow asks him whether he examines his subjects when they return. The doctor says that he does not because the changes are on the inside. Discuss ways in which Kurtz and Marlow are both changed internally by their experiences in the jungle.

The change in Kurtz is painfully obvious. It is suggested in the text that, removed from the restraints of civilization, he loses all sense of moral boundaries and succumbs to his baser instincts and desires. He apparently comes to think of himself as some sort of god and clearly exercises total control over the natives of the tribe he has adopted. They clearly mourn his departure, although they do not do anything effective to prevent it. In his final confrontation with Marlow in the jungle at night, it seems clear that Kurtz hates and despises what he has become but finds the desire to return to the tribe irresistible.

The change in Marlow is more subtle. He seems to have entered into his new job as steamboat captain with some awareness of the darkness that lies in the hearts of men and in the natural world as well. His experiences in Africa, however, sharpen his awareness of how dark and destructive these forces can be since he alone confronts its chief victim (Kurtz) and he alone seems to appreciate the full meaning of Kurtz's last words. He has, after all, looked into the very "heart of darkness," and it is this knowledge that he is trying to impart to his listeners as well as to us, the readers.

5. There are two prominent female figures in the story—the Intended and the magnificent African woman who appears twice on the shore—but women are also represented by the two women knitting at the Company headquarters and by Marlow’s aunt. How can these women be analyzed in order to further develop the themes of the novel?

The Intended and the aunt clearly represent an idealistic (and therefore unrealistic) view of the world. Both believe that the role of Kurtz and Marlow is to civilize the savages and bring them the benefits of civilization. They are oblivious to the potential for evil, selfishness and greed to transform men and to the potentially devastating effects of social isolation. Neither is shown to be in any way able to handle even a glimpse of the truth that Marlow comes to realize; and therefore, they must be protected.

The native woman, on the other hand, can be seen, perhaps, as a realist who gives herself over totally to the rhythms of her culture, to wild dancing and body decoration, and presumably to hedonistic pleasure. She may represent life in contact with life as opposed to life in contact with artificial rules and expectations. She certainly seems free to express her emotions in a public and demonstrative fashion. She can be seen positively as a figure who attempts to liberate Kurtz, but she also can be the source of his downfall.

The two women knitting are more problematic. Is the older one indifferent to the comings and goings of the young men who are venturing out into the wilderness? She seems—to Marlow—to possess a certain wisdom. He sees her as aware of the fate of those who go out, and he even thinks it appropriate to salute her with the phrase “We who are about to die salute you.” Does she represent a view of the world similar to the one with which Marlow will return? Does she stand somewhere between the two extremes discussed above? Does the younger woman represent a simpler version of the aunt and the Intended in that she seems unaware of what these young men are actually facing and simply offers a friendly and social introduction to the Company?

Note: A useful discussion could ensue over the concepts of the Appollonian and Dionysian views of life. This would be particularly useful if anyone in the class wishes to take issue with Conrad’s whole view of the world. The Intended clearly represents the Appollonian world of light, reason, logic, and formality, while the native woman represents the vital, emotional, intuitive side of human experience. In this light both are a viable part of human experience and the tragedy of Kurtz is that he cannot find a way to balance the two ways of looking at human existence.

6. Marlow spends little time describing the jungle except that it seems timeless, prehistoric, and vast. What are his main concerns and activities as the steamboat proceeds up the river?

Because Marlow is primarily concerned with the boat he is commanding, he is too busy to watch the forest once he has gotten used to it. He has to watch for snags and shoals in the river, he is worried about the depth of the water, and he is not sure where the channel is. He also has to watch for sunken stones, and he watches for dead wood that can be collected to keep the steam engine running. The engine is not in good repair, and he mentions patching the pipes with white-lead and strips of blanket. He also must keep a careful eye on his helmsman and worry about his hungry crew who have no food.

7. There is a group of men Marlow meets and travels with whom he describes as “pilgrims.” Since they are never explicitly defined or described, what can be inferred about them and their goals? Start with what little we are told about them.

Pilgrims are usually travelers on a religious quest, but these “pilgrims” only god seems to be the ivory they seek.. Marlow is emphasizing wanderers with an unclear purpose or only a vague goal but inspired by some idealized suggestion of what they may accomplish. They are regularly described as carrying long staves, like long walking sticks, which would be appropriate for pilgrims of the Middle Ages. These pilgrims are always described in disparaging ways and appear to be fools. Their goal is ivory and wealth and perhaps a trading post of their own, but they do not have a clear plan as to how to achieve any of this. The reference to Eldorado underscores this since the search for the “City of Gold” was also a hopeless quest that diverted adventurers from useful employment.

8. The helmsman is a minor character who helps the reader see some of the subtlety in Marlow’s character. Marlow often starts with a description that seems objective although often negative, but then comes to find a common human bond with the person he is describing. How does this work with the helmsman? How is he first described and how does the reader first realize Marlow’s feeling of compassion for him?

The helmsman is from the coast and has been partially trained by Marlow’s predecessor, but Marlow does not think he was trained well. The helmsman does a good job steering when he is being watched, but when he is by himself, he loses his concentration. He also appears to be quite proud of himself, although during the attack on the boat he is not only useless but actually behaves foolishly by opening the shutter that was keeping him safe. After the helmsman is struck by the spear, Marlow’s description of him becomes kinder, more attentive to detail and indicates appreciation—at least—for the fact that a human being is dying at his feet. The hasty discarding of his shoes may indicate a desire to be rid of the mess, but it also may indicate that Marlow would like to forget what he has just seen. He says he quickly pushes the body overboard to prevent anything “startling” happening with the crew, but he also indicates, in a kind of honoring the dead, that if anything was going to eat him, it would be fishes and not the cannibals he suspects are among his crew.

9. The Russian at the Inner Station is clearly a foil to Kurtz. Discuss how these two characters add meaning to the story that otherwise would be lacking.

The Russian is a comic character. The very first impression we have of him is his ridiculous clothing. He is also extraordinarily naïve and apparently unaware or unconcerned about the dangerous situation he is in. Kurtz has threatened to shoot him, and although the Russian says the natives are simple people, they also are a threat to him. He has gone deep into the interior of Africa without any companions and without even the inadequate support of an organization like the Company. Kurtz, on the other hand is very aware of both the dangers and the temptations of the unbridled wilderness. He is a tragic character because he has been overcome by the wilderness and by unexpected weaknesses in his own character. The Russian seems impervious to the very forces that have brought about Kurtz’s self-destruction.

10. The expansion of the British Empire in the last half of the nineteenth century was driven by three distinct forces: corporations who wished to exploit the resources of newly opened territories, idealistic missionary groups who wanted to civilize and Christianize the native populations, and the Royal Navy, the most powerful navy in the world. How did these three forces interact, who went first, and how did this result in situations like that of Kurtz?

In general, the Royal Navy was the last on the scene. In some places the traders began their activities, and in others it was missionaries who led the way. Having established their outposts, however, both groups then asked the Navy for protection leading to both a military and political takeover of native areas. In many places, these artificial Imperial divisions were arbitrary and paid no attention to natural tribal or cultural divisions. Kurtz's trading station has obviously outstripped, at least for the time of the story, the ability of any European government or navy to offer protection that would have regularized trade to some extent.

11. One of the obvious decisions Conrad has made in this story is to keep people, places, and events as anonymous and ambiguous as possible. Most places and characters in the story are unnamed, and the few who are named are given only one name. What effect does this have on the story and what effect does it have on the reader?

Only four characters are named: Marlow, Kurtz, the captain who preceded Marlow, and the Dutch trader who helped the Russian. Even the Intended, most noticeably, is not given a name. The effect of this is to focus the attention of the reader on what Conrad surely sees as the heart of the story. By the time we hear Kurtz's name, we have been accustomed to not knowing the names of the narrator, the men listening to this story, the station manager, and others. This indicates the central importance that Kurtz will have in the story. The lack of place names (the places are clearly the Congo River, the Belgian Congo, Belgium and probably Brussels) tends to make the story universal in its meaning. The effects of the wilderness, Conrad implies, would be the same on the Amazon, and one might even conjecture that the Mississippi was once an entrance into the heart of darkness as the Thames once was. The intent is to focus the reader's attention on Kurtz (who is present for only a relatively small part of the story) and on what the risks are when one is isolated from the civilized world.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions (1-5)

Read the following passage from Chapter 1 of *Heart of Darkness* before selecting your answers.

“And this also,” said Marlow suddenly, “has been one of the dark places of the earth.”

He was the only man of us who still “followed the sea.” The worst that could be said of him was that he did not represent his class. He was a seaman, but he was a wanderer, too, while most seamen lead, if one may so express it, a sedentary life. Their minds are of the stay-at-home order, and their home is always with them—the ship; and so is their country—the sea. One ship is very much like another, and the sea is always the same. In the immutability of their surroundings the foreign shores, the foreign faces, the changing immensity of life, glide past, veiled not by a sense of mystery but by a slightly disdainful ignorance; for there is nothing mysterious to a seaman unless it be the sea itself, which is the mistress of his existence and as inscrutable as Destiny. For the rest, after his hours of work, a casual stroll or a casual spree on shore suffices to unfold for him the secret of a whole continent, and generally he finds the secret not worth knowing. The yarns of seamen have a direct simplicity, the whole meaning of which lies within the shell of a cracked nut. But Marlow was not typical (if his propensity to spin yarns be excepted), and to him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.

His remark did not seem at all surprising. It was just like Marlow. It was accepted in silence. No one took the trouble to grunt even; and presently he said, very slow—

“I was thinking of very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago—the other day...Light came out of this river since—you say Knights? Yes; but it is like a running blaze on a plain, like a flash of lightning in the clouds. We live in the flicker—may it last as long as the old earth keeps rolling! But darkness was here yesterday. Imagine the feelings of a commander of a fine—what d’ye call ’em?—trireme in the Mediterranean, ordered suddenly to the north; run overland across the Gauls in a hurry; put in charge of one of these craft the legionaries,—a wonderful lot of handy men they must have been too—used to build, apparently by the hundred, in a month or two, if we may believe what we read. Imagine him here—the very end of the world, a sea the color of lead, a sky the color of smoke, a kind of ship about as rigid as a concertina—and going up this river with stores, or orders, or what you like. Sandbanks, marshes, forests, savages,—precious little to eat fit for a civilized man, nothing but Thames water to drink. No Falernian wine here, no going ashore. Here and there a military camp lost in a wilderness, like a needle in a bundle of hay—cold, fog, tempests, disease, exile, and death,—death skulking in the air, in the water, in the bush. They must have been dying like flies here. Oh, yes—he did it. Did it very well, too, no doubt, and without thinking much about it either, except afterwards to brag of what he had gone through in his time, perhaps. They were men enough to face the darkness. And perhaps he was cheered by keeping his eye on a chance of promotion to the fleet at Ravenna by

40 and by, if he had good friends in Rome and survived the awful climate. Or think of a
decent young citizen in a toga—perhaps too much dice, you know—coming out here
in the train of some prefect, or tax-gatherer, or trader even, to mend his fortunes. Land
in a swamp, march through the woods, and in some inland post feel the savagery, the
utter savagery, had closed round him—all that mysterious life of the wilderness that
45 stirs in the forest, in the jungles, in the hearts of wild men. There's no initiation either
into such mysteries. He has to live in the midst of the incomprehensible, which is also
detestable. And it has a fascination, too, that goes to work upon him. The fascination
of the abomination—you know Imagine the growing regrets, the longing to escape, the
powerless disgust, the surrender, the hate.”

50 He paused.

“Mind,” he began again, lifting one arm from the elbow, the palm of the hand out-
wards, so that, with his legs folded before him, he had the pose of a Buddha[†] preaching
in European clothes and without a lotus-flower—“Mind, none of us would feel exactly
like this. What saves us is efficiency—the devotion to efficiency. But these chaps were
55 not much account, really. They were no colonists; their administration was merely a
squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want
only brute force—nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an
accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the
sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a
60 great scale, and men going at it blind—as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness.
The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have
a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when
you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not
a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea—something you
65 can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to...”

He broke off. Flames glided in the river, small green flames, red flames, white flames,
pursuing, overtaking, joining, crossing each other—then separating slowly or hastily.
The traffic of the great city went on in the deepening night upon the sleepless river. We
looked on, waiting patiently—there was nothing else to do till the end of the flood; but
70 it was only after a long silence, when he said, in a hesitating voice, “I suppose you fel-
lows remember I did once turn fresh-water sailor for a bit,” that we knew we were fated,
before the ebb began to run, to hear about one of Marlow's inconclusive experiences.

1. In this passage the use of the word “sedentary” (line 5) to describe the typical sailor's life is paradoxical because
 - A. most sailors do not learn much about the world.
 - B. sailors are not good storytellers.
 - C. sailors lead boring lives.
 - D. it was a mistake for Marlow to become a sailor.
 - E. the world is an easy place to understand.

2. The analogy between the British and Roman empires suggests that both
 - A. had strong, experienced armies.
 - B. had governmental systems that rewarded service based on merit.
 - C. depended on the strong religious convictions of young men sent to the frontier.
 - D. appreciated the importance of the River Thames.
 - E. penetrated barbarian darkness in an attempt to civilize native populations.

3. An insight into Marlow's character is provided by his suggestions that the exploitation of colonial people
 - A. is always justified because "might makes right."
 - B. is inevitable because native peoples do not appreciate what they have.
 - C. is inevitable because barbarians do not deserve anything better.
 - D. can only be justified if there is at least some idea that some good can be done.
 - E. can be done in a humane, kindly fashion.

4. The narrator prepares the reader for ambiguity by suggesting that Marlow's stories
 - A. raise more questions than they answer.
 - B. are usually long and boring.
 - C. are worth listening to because they always have a kernel of truth.
 - D. are confusing and hard to follow.
 - E. always have Marlow as the heroic main character.

5. The phrase "sleepless river" (line 68) is an example of
 - A. paradox.
 - B. personification.
 - C. oxymoron.
 - D. onomatopoeia.
 - E. metaphor.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions (6-10)

Read the following passage from Chapter 1 carefully before selecting your answers:

5 “They were dying slowly—it was very clear. They were not enemies, they were not criminals, they were nothing earthly now—nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation, lying confusedly in the greenish gloom. Brought from all the recesses of the coast in all the legality of time contracts, lost in uncongenial surroundings, fed
10 on unfamiliar food, they sickened, became inefficient, and were then allowed to crawl away and rest. These moribund shapes were free as air—and nearly as thin. I began to distinguish the gleam of the eyes under the trees. Then, glancing down, I saw a face near my hand. The black bones reclined at full length with one shoulder against the tree, and slowly the eyelids rose and the sunken eyes looked up at me, enormous and vacant, a kind
15 of blind, white flicker in the depths of the orbs, which died out slowly. The man seemed young—almost a boy—but you know with them it’s hard to tell. I found nothing else to do but to offer him one of my good Swede’s ship’s biscuits I had in my pocket. The fingers closed slowly on it and held—there was no other movement and no other glance. He had tied a bit of white worsted round his neck—Why? Where did he get it? Was it a badge—
20 an ornament—a charm—a propitiatory act? Was there any idea at all connected with it? It looked startling round his black neck, this bit of white thread from beyond the seas.

“Near the same tree two more bundles of acute angles sat with their legs drawn up. One, with his chin propped on his knees, stared at nothing, in an intolerable and appalling manner: his brother phantom rested its forehead, as if overcome with a great
25 weariness; and all about others were scattered in every pose of contorted collapse, as in some picture of a massacre or a pestilence. While I stood horror-struck, one of these creatures rose to his hands and knees, and went off on all fours towards the river to drink. He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.

25 “I didn’t want any more loitering in the shade, and I made haste towards the station. When near the buildings I met a white man, in such an unexpected elegance of get-up that in the first moment I took him for a sort of vision. I saw a high starched collar, white cuffs, a light alpaca jacket, snowy trousers, a clean necktie, and varnished boots. No hat. Hair parted, brushed, oiled, under a green-lined parasol held in a big white hand. He
30 was amazing, and had a penholder behind his ear.

“I shook hands with this miracle, and I learned he was the Company’s chief accountant, and that all the book-keeping was done at this station. He had come out for a moment, he said, ‘to get a breath of fresh air.’ The expression sounded wonderfully
35 odd, with its suggestion of sedentary desk-life. I wouldn’t have mentioned the fellow to you at all, only it was from his lips that I first heard the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time. Moreover, I respected the fellow. Yes; I respected his collars, his vast cuffs, his brushed hair. His appearance was certainly that of a hairdresser’s dummy; but in the great demoralization of the land he kept up his appearance. That’s backbone. His starched collars and got-up shirtfronts
40 were achievements of character. He had been out nearly three years; and, later, I could not help asking him how he managed to sport such linen. He had just the faintest blush, and said modestly, ‘I’ve been teaching one of the native women about the station. It was difficult. She had a distaste for the work.’ Thus this man had verily accomplished something. And he was devoted to his books, which were in apple-pie order.

6. In this passage Conrad employs concrete imagery of physical details to contrast at its most extreme the gap between
 - A. criminals and accountants.
 - B. education and manual labor.
 - C. the very poor and the very rich.
 - D. African natives and civilized Europeans.
 - E. Marlow and other people.

7. It is ironic that the poor condition of the native workers brought from the coastal areas is caused primarily by
 - A. overwork
 - B. poor supervision
 - C. bad planning
 - D. intentional cruelty
 - E. unfamiliar living conditions.

8. The “bit of white worsted round his neck” (line 14) suggests
 - A. another mystery that cannot be explained.
 - B. a symbol of social status.
 - C. a sign of punishment.
 - D. a valued personal adornment.
 - E. magical protection against disease.

9. The chief accountant provides comic relief in contrast to the pathos of the dying workers primarily through his
 - A. devotion to his work.
 - B. concern for the natives.
 - C. cultivated conversation.
 - D. wide experience of the world.
 - E. incongruous attire.

10. Marlow claims to admire the accountant because he represents
 - A. the finest things in European culture.
 - B. the ability of humans to resist the effect of their environment.
 - C. the ability to adapt to native customs.
 - D. careful concern for others.
 - E. a refreshing lack of greed.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions (11-15)

Carefully read the following passage from Chapter 2 before selecting your answers to the questions below:

“The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly
5 to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being
10 a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But
15 he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won’t do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row—is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that can
20 not be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who’s that grunting? You wonder I didn’t go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no—I didn’t. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes—I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those
25 snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man. And between whiles I had to look after the savage who was fireman. He was an improved specimen; he could fire up a vertical boiler. He was there below me, and, upon my word, to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind-legs. A few months of
30 training had done for that really fine chap. He squinted at the steam-gauge and at the water-gauge with an evident effort of intrepidity—and he had filed teeth too, the poor devil, and the wool of his pate shaved into queer patterns, and three ornamental scars on each of his cheeks. He ought to have been clapping his hands and stamping his feet on the bank, instead of which he was hard at work, a thrall to strange witchcraft,
35 full of improving knowledge. He was useful because he had been instructed; and what he knew was this—that should the water in that transparent thing disappear, the evil spirit inside the boiler would get angry through the greatness of his thirst, and take a terrible vengeance. So he sweated and fired up and watched the glass fearfully (with an impromptu charm, made of rags, tied to his arm, and a piece of polished bone, as big as

40 a watch, stuck flatways through his lower lip), while the wooded banks slipped past us slowly, the short noise was left behind, the interminable miles of silence—and we crept on, towards Kurtz. But the snags were thick, the water was treacherous and shallow, the boiler seemed indeed to have a sulky devil in it, and thus neither that fireman nor I had any time to peer into our creepy thoughts.

11. An insight into Marlow's character revealed in this passage is that he
 - A. feels superior to the natives around him.
 - B. is curious about what he will find in the interior.
 - C. misses the comforts of life at home.
 - D. ignores what is going on around him.
 - E. senses an uneasy connection with the savages on the shore.

12. Marlow says that the only defense people have against the destructive power of darkness is
 - A. their character.
 - B. their education.
 - C. their experiences.
 - D. their friends and associates.
 - E. their principles.

13. The fireman is "an improved specimen" because he
 - A. has converted to Christianity.
 - B. is learning to read.
 - C. wears Western clothing.
 - D. has learned how to operate a simple machine.
 - E. treats Marlow as an equal.

14. The "shackled form of a conquered monster" (lines 1-2) refers to
 - A. the taming of nature by civilized man.
 - B. the river in the grip of the jungle.
 - C. the mental state of the fireman.
 - D. Marlow's inner turmoil over his kinship with the natives.
 - E. the unearthly appearance of the jungle.

15. Marlow feels a certain bond with the fireman because they both
 - A. believe in magic.
 - B. want to join the dancing on shore.
 - C. are concerned about the engine.
 - D. feel the river is a timeless place.
 - E. want to find Kurtz.

Practice Multiple Choice (16-20)

Read the passage below from Chapter 2 before selecting your answers to the multiple choice questions that follow:

“I laid the ghost of his gifts at last with a lie,” he began, suddenly. “Girl! What? Did I mention a girl? Oh, she is out of it—completely. They—the women, I mean—are out of it—should be out of it. We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours gets worse. Oh, she had to be out of it. You should have heard the disinterred body of Mr. Kurtz saying, ‘My Intended.’ You would have perceived directly then how completely she was out of it. And the lofty frontal bone of Mr. Kurtz! They say the hair goes on growing sometimes, but this—ah—specimen, was impressively bald. The wilderness had patted him on the head, and, behold, it was like a ball—an ivory ball; it had caressed him, and—lo!—he had withered; it had taken him, loved him, embraced him, got into his veins, consumed his flesh, and sealed his soul to its own by the inconceivable ceremonies of some devilish initiation. He was its spoiled and pampered favorite. Ivory? I should think so. Heaps of it, stacks of it. The old mud shanty was bursting with it. You would think there was not a single tusk left either above or below the ground in the whole country. ‘Mostly fossil,’ the manager had remarked, disparagingly. It was no more fossil than I am; but they call it fossil when it is dug up. It appears these niggers do bury the tusks sometimes—but evidently they couldn’t bury this parcel deep enough to save the gifted Mr. Kurtz from his fate. We filled the steamboat with it, and had to pile a lot on the deck. Thus he could see and enjoy as long as he could see, because the appreciation of this favor had remained with him to the last. You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory.’ Oh, yes, I heard him. ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station, my river, my—’ everything belonged to him. It made me hold my breath in expectation of hearing the wilderness burst into a prodigious peal of laughter that would shake the fixed stars in their places. Everything belonged to him—but that was a trifle. The thing was to know what he belonged to, how many powers of darkness claimed him for their own. That was the reflection that made you creepy all over. It was impossible—it was not good for one either—trying to imagine. He had taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land—I mean literally. You can’t understand. How could you?—with solid pavement under your feet, surrounded by kind neighbors ready to cheer you or to fall on you, stepping delicately between the butcher and the policeman, in the holy terror of scandal and gallows and lunatic asylums—how can you imagine what particular region of the first ages a man’s untrammelled feet may take him into by the way of solitude—utter solitude without a policeman—by the way of silence—utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind neighbor can be heard whispering of public opinion? These little things make all the great difference. When they are gone you must fall back upon your own innate strength, upon your own capacity for faithfulness. Of course you may be too much of a fool to go wrong—too dull even to know you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness. I take it, no fool ever made a bargain for his soul with the devil; the fool is too much of a fool, or the devil too much of a devil—I don’t know which. Or you may be such a thunderingly exalted creature as to be altogether deaf and blind to anything but heavenly sights and sounds. Then the earth for you is only a standing place—and whether to be like this is your loss or your gain I won’t pretend to say. But most of us are neither one nor the other. The earth for us is a place to live in, where we must put up with sights, with sounds, with smells, too, by Jove!—breathe dead hippo, so to speak, and not be contaminated. And there, don’t you see? Your strength comes in, the faith in your ability for the digging of unostentatious holes to bury the stuff in—your power of devotion, not to yourself, but to an obscure, back-breaking business. And that’s

45 difficult enough. Mind, I am not trying to excuse or even explain—I am trying to account
to myself for—for—Mr. Kurtz—for the shade of Mr. Kurtz. This initiated wraith from the
back of Nowhere honored me with its amazing confidence before it vanished altogether.
This was because it could speak English to me. The original Kurtz had been educated partly
50 in England, and—as he was good enough to say himself—his sympathies were in the right
place. His mother was half-English, his father was half-French. All Europe contributed to
the making of Kurtz; and by and by I learned that, most appropriately, the International
Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs had intrusted him with the making of a
report, for its future guidance. And he had written it, too. I've seen it. I've read it. It was
55 eloquent, vibrating with eloquence, but too high-strung, I think. Seventeen pages of close
writing he had found time for! But this must have been before his—let us say—nerves, went
wrong, and caused him to preside at certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites,
which—as far as I reluctantly gathered from what I heard at various times—were offered up
to him— do you understand?—to Mr. Kurtz himself. But it was a beautiful piece of writ-
60 ing. The opening paragraph, however, in the light of later information, strikes me now as
ominous. He began with the argument that we whites, from the point of development we
had arrived at, 'must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural
beings—we approach them with the might as of a deity,' and so on, and so on. 'By the
simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded,' etc., etc.
65 From that point he soared and took me with him. The peroration was magnificent, though
difficult to remember, you know. It gave me the notion of an exotic Immensity ruled by an
august Benevolence. It made me tingle with enthusiasm. This was the unbounded power of
eloquence—of words—of burning noble words. There were no practical hints to interrupt
the magic current of phrases, unless a kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled
70 evidently much later, in an unsteady hand, may be regarded as the exposition of a method.
It was very simple, and at the end of that moving appeal to every altruistic sentiment it
blazed at you, luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate
all the brutes!' The curious part was that he had apparently forgotten all about that valuable
postscriptum, because, later on, when he in a sense came to himself, he repeatedly entreated
75 me to take good care of 'my pamphlet' (he called it), as it was sure to have in the future a
good influence upon his career. I had full information about all these things, and, besides,
as it turned out, I was to have the care of his memory. I've done enough for it to give me the
indisputable right to lay it, if I choose, for an everlasting rest in the dust-bin of progress,
amongst all the sweepings and, figuratively speaking, all the dead cats of civilization. But
80 then, you see, I can't choose. He won't be forgotten. Whatever he was, he was not common.
He had the power to charm or frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance
in his honor; he could also fill the small souls of the pilgrims with bitter misgivings: he had
one devoted friend at least, and he had conquered one soul in the world that was neither
rudimentary nor tainted with self-seeking. No; I can't forget him, though I am not prepared
85 to affirm the fellow was exactly worth the life we lost in getting to him. I missed my late
helmsman awfully—I missed him even while his body was still lying in the pilot-house.
Perhaps you will think it passing strange this regret for a savage who was no more account
than a grain of sand in a black Sahara. Well, don't you see, he had done something, he
had steered; for months I had him at my back—a help—an instrument. It was a kind of
partnership. He steered for me—I had to look after him, I worried about his deficiencies, and
90 thus a subtle bond had been created, of which I only became aware when it was suddenly
broken. And the intimate profundity of that look he gave me when he received his hurt remains
to this day in my memory—like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.

16. In this passage, Marlow's view of women and their role in the world is that they
- A. are attractive but useless.
 - B. are necessary for survival.
 - C. interfere with the important work of the world.
 - D. make the world better even though they do not understand it.
 - E. caused Kurtz's downfall.
17. Kurtz's character is revealed by his attitude toward the ivory they recover because he
- A. has come to believe everything rightfully belongs to him.
 - B. is pleased he has done so well for the Company.
 - C. is happy he can finally go home.
 - D. wishes he could stay and get more ivory.
 - E. realizes he has wasted his life.
18. The personification used in the sentence "He was its spoiled and pampered favorite" (line 11) refers to
- A. the wilderness.
 - B. the river
 - C. that beautiful world.
 - D. ivory.
 - E. the native village.
19. Marlow believes the key to Kurtz's downfall is found in the first paragraph of Kurtz's pamphlet because he
- A. is unaware of any dangers around him.
 - B. expects to be treated as a god.
 - C. says he knows how to civilize the natives.
 - D. represents a powerful, well-organized movement to suppress savage customs.
 - E. is too humble and unsure of himself.
20. The phrase "Exterminate all the brutes" (lines 71-72) is startling because it occurs in context with
- A. altruistic sentiments.
 - B. a serene sky.
 - C. the magic current of phrases.
 - D. utter solitude.
 - E. a conversation with Kurtz.

Practice Multiple Choice Questions 21-25

Read the passage below, from Chapter 3, before selecting your answers to the multiple choice questions that follow:

“Mistah Kurtz—he dead.’

5 “All the pilgrims rushed out to see. I remained, and went on with my dinner. I believe I was considered brutally callous. However, I did not eat much. There was a lamp in there—light, don’t you know—and outside it was so beastly, beastly dark. I went no more near the remarkable man who had pronounced a judgment upon the adventures of his soul on this earth. The voice was gone. What else had been there? But I am of course aware that next day the pilgrims buried something in a muddy hole.

“And then they very nearly buried me.

10 “However, as you see, I did not go to join Kurtz there and then. I did not. I remained to dream the nightmare out to the end, and to show my loyalty to Kurtz once more. Destiny. My destiny! Droll thing life is—that mysterious arrangement of merciless logic for a futile purpose. The most you can hope from it is some knowledge of yourself—that comes too late—a crop of unextinguishable regrets. I have wrestled with death. It is the most unexciting contest you can imagine. It takes place in an impalpable greyness, with 15 nothing underfoot, with nothing around, without spectators, without clamor, without glory, without the great desire of victory, without the great fear of defeat, in a sickly atmosphere of tepid skepticism, without much belief in your own right, and still less in that of your adversary. If such is the form of ultimate wisdom, then life is a greater riddle than some of us think it to be. I was within a hair’s-breadth of the last opportunity 20 for pronouncement, and I found with humiliation that probably I would have nothing to say. This is the reason why I affirm that Kurtz was a remarkable man. He had something to say. He said it. Since I had peeped over the edge myself, I understand better the meaning of his stare, that could not see the flame of the candle, but was wide enough to embrace the whole universe, piercing enough to penetrate all the hearts that beat in the 25 darkness. He had summed up—he had judged. ‘The horror!’ He was a remarkable man. After all, this was the expression of some sort of belief; it had candor, it had conviction, it had a vibrating note of revolt in its whisper, it had the appalling face of a glimpsed truth—the strange commingling of desire and hate. And it is not my own extremity I remember best—a vision of grayness without form filled with physical pain, and a careless 30 contempt for the evanescence of all things—even of this pain itself. No! It is his extremity that I seem to have lived through. True, he had made that last stride, he had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot. And perhaps in this is the whole difference; perhaps all the wisdom, and all truth, and all sincerity, are just compressed into that inappreciable moment of time in which we step over the 35 threshold of the invisible. Perhaps! I like to think my summing-up would not have been a word of careless contempt. Better his cry—much better. It was an affirmation, a moral victory paid for by innumerable defeats, by abominable terrors, by abominable satisfactions. But it was a victory! That is why I have remained loyal to Kurtz to the last, and even beyond, when a long time after I heard once more, not his own voice, but the echo 40 of his magnificent eloquence thrown to me from a soul as translucently pure as a cliff of crystal.

21. The first person point of view enables the reader to understand that Marlow does not go with the pilgrims to see Kurtz because he
- A. is hungry and it is dinnertime.
 - B. does not like to be around the pilgrims.
 - C. does not like to be around dead bodies.
 - D. thinks that Kurtz's physical body has no significance.
 - E. is sick and almost ready to die himself.
22. The recurring symbolism of light and dark is expressed in Marlow's brush with death by
- A. a cliff of crystal.
 - B. impalpable grayness.
 - C. hearts that beat in the darkness.
 - D. moral victory.
 - E. the flame of a candle.
23. The metaphor used for the act of dying is
- A. an appalling face.
 - B. the evanescence of all things.
 - C. a moral victory.
 - D. stepping over a threshold
 - E. an appreciable moment in time.
24. The final sentence of this passage is an instance of
- A. exposition.
 - B. foreshadowing.
 - C. cataloguing.
 - D. dialogue.
 - E. humor.
25. Marlow suggests that Kurtz's final words represent a victory because he
- A. confronted death without fear.
 - B. had something significant to say.
 - C. did not go quietly.
 - D. did not repent.
 - E. died bravely.

Multiple Choice Answer Key with Explanations

- In this passage the use of the word “sedentary”(line 5) to describe the typical sailor’s life is paradoxical because

 - most sailors do not learn much about the world.*
 - sailors are not good storytellers.
 - sailors lead boring lives
 - it was a mistake for Marlow to become a sailor.
 - the world is an easy place to understand.

[A. “Sedentary” means staying in one place. The typical sailor takes little interest in the places he visits. The paradox is that while the ship is covering great distances, the sailor is confined to the ship, missing the experiences of new places.]
- The analogy between the British and Roman empires suggests that both

 - had strong, experienced armies.
 - had governmental systems that rewarded service based on merit.
 - depended on the strong religious convictions of young men sent to the frontier.
 - appreciated the importance of the River Thames.
 - penetrated barbarian darkness in an attempt to civilize native populations.*

[E. Conrad frames the analogy in terms of the thoughts and behavior of the ancient Romans. The analogy is useful because it suggests the tone of what we may expect from the story in terms of the impact of the wilderness on the Europeans.]
- An insight into Marlow’s character is provided by his suggestions that the exploitation of colonial people

 - is always justified because “might makes right.”
 - is inevitable because native peoples do not appreciate what they have.
 - is inevitable because barbarians do not deserve anything better.
 - can only be justified if there is at least some idea that some good can be done*
 - can be done in a humane, kindly fashion.

[D. The key phrases are “what redeems it,” “an unselfish belief in the idea,” and “offer a sacrifice to.” We learn that Marlow has ethical standards qualified by doubts and a puzzling reference to sacrifice yet to be explained.
- The narrator prepares the reader for ambiguity by suggesting that Marlow’s stories

 - raise more questions than they answer.*
 - are usually long and boring.
 - are worth listening to because they always have a kernel of truth.
 - are confusing and hard to follow.
 - always have Marlow as the heroic main character.

[A. The metaphor used is a “nut,” which is not cracked to reveal a kernel of truth, but rather enveloped in a “misty halo” of uncertainty. The reader is thus warned not to expect a clear cut resolution to the story but rather the ambiguity of unanswered questions.

5. The phrase “sleepless river” is an example of
- A. paradox.
 - B. *personification*.
 - C. oxymoron.
 - D. onomatopoeia.
 - E. metaphor.
- [B. *A river does not sleep or wake. Conrad uses the phrase to suggest a sense of endless patient awareness.*]
6. In this passage Conrad employs concrete imagery of physical details to contrast at its most extreme the gap between
- A. criminals and accountants.
 - B. education and manual labor.
 - C. the very poor and the very rich.
 - D. *African natives and civilized Europeans*.
 - E. Marlow and other people.
- [D. *The details such as moribund shapes and sunken eyes contrast with the starched collars, brushed hair and neat cuffs of the European white man.*]
7. It is ironic that the poor condition of the native workers brought from the coastal areas is caused primarily by
- A. overwork.
 - B. poor supervision.
 - C. bad planning.
 - D. intentional cruelty.
 - E. *unfamiliar living conditions*.
- [E. *While all these answers logically apply to the natives, the irony is that they are not as far from home as the accountant and Marlow.*]
8. The “bit of white worsted round his neck” (line 14) suggests
- A. *another mystery that cannot be explained*.
 - B. a symbol of social status.
 - C. a sign of punishment.
 - D. a valued personal adornment.
 - E. magical protection against disease.
- [A. *While Conrad suggests explanations for the white thread, the reason for it is not known. The detail reinforces the gulf between Marlow and the black man, enhancing the mood of mystery and ambiguity.*]

9. The chief accountant provides comic relief in contrast to the pathos of the dying workers primarily through his
- A. devotion to his work.
 - B. concern for the natives.
 - C. cultivated conversation.
 - D. wide experience of the world.
 - E. *incongruous attire.*
- [E. In this brief passage, Conrad creates a character that is ridiculous in his inappropriate attire.]
10. Marlow claims to admire the accountant because he represents
- A. the finest things in European culture.
 - B. *the ability of humans to resist the effect of their environment.*
 - C. the ability to adapt to native customs.
 - D. careful concern for others.
 - E. a refreshing lack of greed.
- [B. While the accountant is presented as a comic figure, Marlow states that he respects the ability to withstand the demoralizing effect of an alien setting. The use of a narrator allows Conrad to present a mixture of scorn and respect at the same time, adding to the many levels of ambiguity in this story.]
11. An insight into Marlow's character revealed in this passage is that he
- A. feels superior to the natives around him.
 - B. is curious about what he will find in the interior.
 - C. misses the comforts of life at home.
 - D. ignores what is going on around him.
 - E. *senses an uneasy connection with the savages on the shore.*
- [E. While Marlow does feel superior to the natives and is curious about them, the point of this passage is that he reluctantly recognizes his kinship with the natives on the shore and with his fireman.]
12. Marlow says that the only defense people have against the destructive power of darkness is
- A. *their character.*
 - B. their education.
 - C. their experiences.
 - D. their friends and associates.
 - E. their principles.
- [A. The key phrase is "you want a deliberate belief," an inner strength as opposed to vague principles. Experience and education may contribute to inner strength but are not the focus here.]

13. The fireman is “an improved specimen” because he
- A. has converted to Christianity.
 - B. is learning to read.
 - C. wears Western clothing.
 - D. *has learned how to operate a simple machine.*
 - E. treats Marlow as an equal.
- [D. While Conrad contrasts details about the fireman with Marlow’s abstract thoughts, the question is specific to the work. Conrad has led us into the importance of the fireman’s work by a previous focus on Marlow’s own work in getting the steamboat ready to sail.]
14. The “shackled form of a conquered monster” (lines 1-2) refers to
- A. *the taming of nature by civilized man.*
 - B. the river in the grip of the jungle.
 - C. the mental state of the fireman.
 - D. Marlow’s inner turmoil over his kinship with the natives.
 - E. the unearthly appearance of the jungle.
- [A. The view of nature in Conrad’s day was of a strong force that was difficult to subdue in terms of clearing land, traveling and exploring new places. The context of the metaphor makes it clear that Conrad refers to nature or “the earth.”]
15. Marlow feels a certain bond with the fireman because they both
- A. believe in magic.
 - B. want to join the dancing on shore.
 - C. *are concerned about the engine.*
 - D. feel the river is a timeless place.
 - E. want to find Kurtz.
- [C. While Marlow refers to the “sulky devil” in the boiler, the metaphor is used to reinforce a bond for shared work and responsibility, not to suggest that Marlow believes in a magic boiler.]
16. In this passage, Marlow’s view of women and their role in the world is that they
- A. are attractive but useless.
 - B. are necessary for survival.
 - C. interfere with the important work of the world.
 - D. *make the world better even though they do not understand it.*
 - E. caused Kurtz’s downfall.
- [D. The key sentence is “We must help them to stay in that beautiful world of their own, lest ours get worse” (lines). They must be sheltered from reality.]
17. Kurtz’s character is revealed by his attitude toward the ivory they recover because he
- A. *has come to believe everything rightfully belongs to him.*
 - B. is pleased he has done so well for the Company.
 - C. is happy he can finally go home.
 - D. wishes he could stay and get more ivory.
 - E. realizes he has wasted his life.
- [A. Kurtz shows his egocentricity in claiming all the ivory in “my Intended, my ivory, my station, my river.” (lines).]

18. The personification used in the sentence “He was its spoiled and pampered favorite” (line 11) refers to
- A. *the wilderness.*
 - B. *the river*
 - C. *that beautiful world.*
 - D. *ivory.*
 - E. *the native village.*
- [A. *The wilderness is personified as “patting Kurtz on the head,” “bursting into laughter,” and “loved him, embraced him.”*]
19. Marlow believes the key to Kurtz’s downfall is found in the first paragraph of Kurtz’s pamphlet because he
- A. *is unaware of any dangers around him.*
 - B. *expects to be treated as a god.*
 - C. *says he knows how to civilize the natives.*
 - D. *represents a powerful, well-organized movement to suppress savage customs.*
 - E. *is too humble and unsure of himself.*
- [B. *Kurtz’s statement regarding appearing “in the nature of supernatural beings” is plausible as a means of obtaining power. The remainder of the passage makes it clear that in the process of being deified, Kurtz has lost touch with reality.*]
20. The phrase “Exterminate all the brutes” (line 71-72) is startling because it occurs in context with
- A. *altruistic sentiments.*
 - B. *a serene sky.*
 - C. *the magic current of phrases.*
 - D. *utter solitude.*
 - E. *a conversation with Kurtz.*
- [A. *The phrase has been preceded by Marlow’s description of Kurtz’s enthusiasm, benevolence, noble ideals, and altruistic sentiments found in the pamphlet. The bluntness of the unexpected phrase is startling even to the reader who is aware of the suggestion of irony in the pamphlet’s title and Marlow’s praise.*]
21. The first person point of view enables the reader to understand that Marlow does not go with the pilgrims to see Kurtz because he
- A. *is hungry and it is dinnertime.*
 - B. *does not like to be around the pilgrims.*
 - C. *does not like to be around dead bodies.*
 - D. *thinks that Kurtz’s physical body has no significance.*
 - E. *does not think anything matters.*
- [D. *Marlow explains that with the voice or the expression of his thoughts now gone, the physical remains are not of interest.*]

22. The recurring symbolism of light and dark is expressed in Marlow's brush with death by
- A. a cliff of crystal.
 - B. *impalpable grayness*.
 - C. hearts that beat in the darkness.
 - D. moral victory.
 - E. the flame of a candle.
- [B. *Impalpable grayness is an unusual use of the motif of light and dark but suits perfectly Marlow's lack of conviction. The candle flame is not related to his brush with death.*]
23. The metaphor used for the act of dying is
- A. an appalling face.
 - B. the evanescence of all things.
 - C. a moral victory.
 - D. *stepping over a threshold*.
 - E. an appreciable moment in time.
- [D. *"Stepping over the threshold" is the correct answer. The face metaphor refers to a glimpsed truth. The remaining phrases refer to death but are not metaphors.*]
24. The final sentence of this passage is an instance of
- A. exposition.
 - B. *foreshadowing*.
 - C. cataloguing.
 - D. dialogue.
 - E. humor.
- [B. *The final sentence foreshadows Marlow's future encounter with an untroubled, thus translucent, soul who echoes values learned from the remarkable man, Kurtz.*]
25. Marlow suggests that Kurtz's final words represent a victory because he
- A. confronted death without fear.
 - B. *had something significant to say*.
 - C. did not go quietly.
 - D. did not repent.
 - E. *died bravely*.
- [B. *Marlow admires Kurtz's final words, 'The horror!' as a summation of belief, desire and hate containing a glimpse of what Marlow is searching, the truth. His statement is the victory, not the manner of his death.*]

Practice Free Response 1

In the following passage, from Chapter 2 of *Heart of Darkness*, the narrator's complex reaction to the natives on the shore is not easily defined. Write a well-organized essay in which you examine the structure of this passage, discussing especially how Conrad manages to convey both a sense of distaste and yet an uncomfortable awareness of a bond with the natives.

But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

“The earth seemed unearthly. We are accustomed to look upon the shackled form of a conquered monster, but there—there you could look at a thing monstrous and free. It was unearthly, and the men were—No, they were not inhuman. Well, you know, that was the worst of it—this suspicion of their not being inhuman. It would come slowly to one. They howled, and leaped, and spun, and made horrid faces; but what thrilled you was just the thought of their humanity—like yours—the thought of your remote kinship with this wild and passionate uproar. Ugly. Yes, it was ugly enough; but if you were man enough you would admit to yourself that there was in you just the faintest trace of a response to the terrible frankness of that noise, a dim suspicion of there being a meaning in it which you—you so remote from the night of first ages—could comprehend. And why not? The mind of man is capable of anything—because everything is in it, all the past as well as all the future. What was there after all? Joy, fear, sorrow, devotion, valor, rage—who can tell?—but truth—truth stripped of its cloak of time. Let the fool gape and shudder—the man knows, and can look on without a wink. But he must at least be as much of a man as these on the shore. He must meet that truth with his own true stuff—with his own inborn strength. Principles? Principles won't do. Acquisitions, clothes, pretty rags—rags that would fly off at the first good shake. No; you want a deliberate belief. An appeal to me in this fiendish row—is there? Very well; I hear; I admit, but I have a voice, too, and for good or evil mine is the speech that cannot be silenced. Of course, a fool, what with sheer fright and fine sentiments, is always safe. Who's that grunting? You wonder I didn't go ashore for a howl and a dance? Well, no—I didn't. Fine sentiments, you say? Fine sentiments, be hanged! I had no time. I had to mess about with white-lead and strips of woolen blanket helping to put bandages on those leaky steam-pipes—I tell you. I had to watch the steering, and circumvent those snags, and get the tin-pot along by hook or by crook. There was surface-truth enough in these things to save a wiser man.

Practice Free Response 2

Read the following passage from Chapter 2 of *Heart of Darkness*, and write a well-organized essay in which you explain how Conrad structures the passage to create mystery. Be certain to include an examination of how narrative point of view and figurative language contribute to the mood.

“Try to be civil, Marlow,” growled a voice, and I knew there was at least one listener awake besides myself.

“I beg your pardon. I forgot the heartache which makes up the rest of the price. And indeed what does the price matter, if the trick be well done? You do your tricks very well. And I didn’t do badly either, since I managed not to sink that steamboat on my first trip. It’s a wonder to me yet. Imagine a blind-folded man set to drive a van over a bad road. I sweated and shivered over that business considerably, I can tell you. After all, for a seaman, to scrape the bottom of the thing that’s supposed to float all the time under his care is the unpardonable sin. No one may know of it, but you never forget the thump—eh? A blow on the very heart. You remember it, you dream of it, you wake up at night and think of it—years after—and go hot and cold all over. I don’t pretend to say that steamboat floated all the time. More than once she had to wade for a bit, with twenty cannibals splashing around and pushing. We had enlisted some of these chaps on the way for a crew. Fine fellows—cannibals—in their place. They were men one could work with, and I am grateful to them. And, after all, they did not eat each other before my face: they had brought along a provision of hippo-meat which went rotten, and made the mystery of the wilderness stink in my nostrils. Phoo! I can sniff it now. I had the manager on board and three or four pilgrims with their staves—all complete. Sometimes we came upon a station close by the bank, clinging to the skirts of the unknown, and the white men rushing out of a tumble-down hovel, with great gestures of joy and surprise and welcome, seemed very strange—had the appearance of being held there captive by a spell. The word ivory would ring in the air for a while—and on we went again into the silence, along empty reaches, round the still bends, between the high walls of our winding way, reverberating in hollow claps the ponderous beat of the stern-wheel. Trees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high; and at their foot, hugging the bank against the stream, crept the little begrimed steamboat, like a sluggish beetle crawling on the floor of a lofty portico. It made you feel very small, very lost, and yet it was not altogether depressing, that feeling. After all, if you were small, the grimy beetle crawled on—which was just what you wanted it to do. Where the pilgrims imagined it crawled to I don’t know. To some place where they expected to get something, I bet! For me it crawled towards Kurtz—exclusively; but when the steam-pipes started leaking we crawled very slow. The reaches opened before us and closed behind, as if the forest had stepped leisurely across the water to bar the way for our return. We penetrated deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness. It was very quiet there. At night sometimes the roll of drums behind the curtain of trees would run up the river and remain sustained faintly, as if hovering in the air high over our heads, till the first break of day. Whether it meant war, peace, or prayer we could not tell. The dawns were heralded by the descent of a chill stillness; the wood-cutters slept, their fires burned low; the snapping of a twig would make you start. We were wanderers on a prehistoric earth, on an earth that wore the aspect of an unknown planet. We could have fancied ourselves the first of men taking possession of an accursed inheritance, to be subdued at the cost of profound anguish and of excessive toil. But suddenly, as we struggled round a bend, there would be a glimpse of rush walls, of peaked grass-roofs, a burst of yells, a whirl of black limbs, a mass of hands clapping, of feet stamping, of bodies swaying, of eyes rolling, under the droop of heavy and motionless foliage. The steamer toiled along slowly on the edge of a black and incomprehensible frenzy. The prehistoric man was cursing us, praying to us, welcoming us—who could tell? We were cut off from the comprehension of our surroundings; we glided past like phantoms, wondering and secretly appalled, as sane men would be before an enthusiastic outbreak in a madhouse. We could not understand because we were too far and could not remember, because we were travelling in the night of first ages, of those ages that are gone, leaving hardly a sign—and no memories.

Practice Free Response 3

In the following conversation from Chapter 3 of *Heart of Darkness*, the two participants have totally different points of view about what has happened, each based upon his or her degree of knowledge. Write a well-organized essay showing how Marlow and the Intended manage to converse without actually communicating. Include references to the author's use of diction and analyze how it helps convey the ambiguity of the passage.

We sat down. I laid the packet gently on the little table, and she put her hand over it... 'You knew him well,' she murmured, after a moment of mourning silence.

"'Intimacy grows quickly out there,' I said. 'I knew him as well as it is possible for one man to know another.'

"'And you admired him,' she said. 'It was impossible to know him and not to admire him. Was it?'

"'He was a remarkable man,' I said, unsteadily. Then before the appealing fixity of her gaze, that seemed to watch for more words on my lips, I went on, 'It was impossible not to—'

"'Love him,' she finished eagerly, silencing me into an appalled dumbness. 'How true! how true! But when you think that no one knew him so well as I! I had all his noble confidence. I knew him best.'

"'You knew him best,' I repeated. And perhaps she did. But with every word spoken the room was growing darker, and only her forehead, smooth and white, remained illumined by the unextinguishable light of belief and love.

"'You were his friend,' she went on. 'His friend,' she repeated, a little louder. 'You must have been, if he had given you this, and sent you to me. I feel I can speak to you—and oh! I must speak. I want you—you who have heard his last words—to know I have been worthy of him... It is not pride... Yes! I am proud to know I understood him better than anyone on earth—he told me so himself. And since his mother died I have had no one—no one—to—to—'

"I listened. The darkness deepened. I was not even sure whether he had given me the right bundle. I rather suspect he wanted me to take care of another batch of his papers which, after his death, I saw the manager examining under the lamp. And the girl talked, easing her pain in the certitude of my sympathy; she talked as thirsty men drink. I had heard that her engagement with Kurtz had been disapproved by her people. He wasn't rich enough or something. And indeed I don't know whether he had not been a pauper all his life. He had given me some reason to infer that it was his impatience of comparative poverty that drove him out there.

"'...Who was not his friend who had heard him speak once?' she was saying. 'He drew men towards him by what was best in them.' She looked at me with intensity. 'It is the gift of the great,' she went on, and the sound of her low voice seemed to have the accompaniment of all the other sounds, full of mystery, desolation, and sorrow, I had ever heard—the ripple of the river, the sighing of the trees swayed by the wind, the murmurs of wild crowds, the faint ring of incomprehensible words cried from afar, the whisper of a voice speaking from beyond the threshold of an eternal darkness. 'But you have heard him! You know!' she cried.

“Yes, I know,’ I said with something like despair in my heart, but bowing my head before the faith that was in her, before that great and saving illusion that shone with an unearthly glow in the darkness, in the triumphant darkness from which I could not have defended her—from which I could not even defend myself.

“What a loss to me—to us!’—she corrected herself with beautiful generosity; then added in a murmur, ‘To the world.’ By the last gleams of twilight I could see the glitter of her eyes, full of tears—of tears that would not fall.

“I have been very happy—very fortunate—very proud,’ she went on. ‘Too fortunate. Too happy for a little while. And now I am unhappy for—for life.’

“She stood up; her fair hair seemed to catch all the remaining light in a glimmer of gold. I rose too.

“And of all this,’ she went on, mournfully, ‘of all his promise, and of all his greatness, of his generous mind, of his noble heart, nothing remains—nothing but a memory. You and I—’

“We shall always remember him,’ I said hastily.

“No!’ she cried. ‘It is impossible that all this should be lost—that such a life should be sacrificed to leave nothing—but sorrow. You know what vast plans he had. I knew of them, too—I could not perhaps understand—but others knew of them. Something must remain. His words, at least, have not died.’

“His words will remain,’ I said.

“And his example,’ she whispered to herself. ‘Men looked up to him— his goodness shone in every act. His example—’

“True,’ I said; ‘his example too. Yes, his example. I forgot that.’

“But I do not. I cannot—I cannot believe—not yet. I cannot believe that I shall never see him again, that nobody will see him again, never, never, never.’

Practice Free Response 4

One of the characteristics of great literature is that it is character-driven; that is that the events in the plot are essentially the inevitable consequences of character desire, action, and reaction. The main characters in such stories must be complex, well-rounded, and dynamic characters. Write a well-organized essay in which you discuss the complexity of either Marlow or Kurtz and how this complex character drives the plot of the novel. Do not summarize the plot or offer a mere character study.

Practice Free Response 5

An over-riding theme in this book is the contrast and conflict between light and darkness. Write a well-organized essay in which you analyze both the literal and metaphoric uses of light and darkness. Avoid plot summary.

Practice Free Response 6

The allegory of a journey is an almost universal motif in literature. Write a well-organized essay discussing the nature of the journey and its significance to the title of the novel: *Heart of Darkness*.

Heart of Darkness

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Chapter 1

1. Describe in detail the setting where the story begins.

A cruising yawl has anchored at the mouth of the River Thames at the point where the river ends, and the open sea begins. The ship is temporarily becalmed because the wind has died, and the tide is still going out. The crew must wait for the tide to turn before they can sail back up the river. It is dusk and during the first few pages of the story, darkness gradually descends except for the bright lights on shore.

2. Who is the narrator of the story?

The narrator is an unnamed sailor on the Nellie.

3. Describe Marlow's physical appearance.

He has sunken cheeks, a yellow complexion, an erect bearing, an ascetic aspect, and he looks like an idol because of the way he is sitting.

4. The narrator describes the recent history of the Thames. What are some of the activities of the men who have sailed out, from the mouth of the river?

Men have sailed off to war, they have gone on adventures and they have sought wealth. Some, like Drake and Hawkins, found wealth in raiding colonies. Some went seeking gold or ivory, and some took part in apparently questionable trading practices in the Far East. Some went as settlers, and some went seeking fame.

5. What effect does Conrad achieve by alluding to the pirates Francis Drake and John Franklin?

Conrad is calling to mind the fact that other great "adventurers," rewarded by the Crown for their exploits and for the riches they amassed for England were not so very different from the "explorers" and "traders" of Imperial Britain.

6. What are the *Golden Hind*, the *Erebus*, and the *Terror*?

The Golden Hind was Sir Francis Drake's ship. The Erebus and the Terror were two of Sir John Franklin's ships.

7. How is Marlow different from typical seamen?

He is curious about the places he visits. He is not just a seaman, but more of a wanderer seeking to learn more about the world and human nature. For Marlow, the sea is merely the means to see and learn more. His stories are often inconclusive.

8. What technique does Conrad start using once Marlow begins to speak?

Marlow becomes the narrator of a story-within-a-story. In other words, the anonymously-narrated story of the ship stuck on the Thames is merely a frame story for Marlow's tale.

9. What simile does Conrad use for the mighty river that Marlow wants to explore?

The river resembles a great snake with its mouth toward the sea and its body uncoiled deep into the continent.

10. How does Marlow's aunt help him get the appointment as river steamboat captain?

His aunt knew the wife of a high company official. He seems embarrassed by the fact that he had to turn to a woman to get the job, but he also says that one should turn to women if one wants to get something done.

11. What are the steps in the process that begins Marlow's employment with the Company?

He is interviewed briefly by a secretary and then signs some documents. He is also given a brief physical examination by a doctor, and then he says good-bye to his aunt.

12. The city and the Company are never given names in the story. How does this affect the reader's experience of the story?

By not giving specific names to places and characters, Conrad suggests that there is a universal quality to the story and that the behavior of colonialists is the same everywhere.

13. As he travels on a French steamer to his new post, Marlow observes a French warship firing at the coastline. What does this scene suggest about what the rest of the story will entail?

The scene certainly suggests futility, but it can also be seen as an example of the low regard for human life. The ship is firing at indiscriminate with apparently no effect and for unclear reasons. The intention may be killing natives, but at the same time Marlow hears that the warship is losing three men a day to fever. This scene foreshadows the inability of the Europeans to deal effectively with the wilderness and its inhabitants.

14. When he arrives, what things does Marlow see on his walk to the first station?

It is a scene of "...inhabited devastation." He sees an overturned railroad engine, animal carcasses, and broken, rusted machinery. He watches a group of chained prisoners go by. Under a large tree, he finds a group of natives who are obviously dying. He also hears explosions that do not appear to be accomplishing anything, and he sees a great hole that seems to have been dug for no purpose.

15. Why does Marlow call the chief accountant a "miracle"? (p. 21)

The chief accountant is perfectly dressed in spite of the heat and the decaying station around him. His hair is washed and combed and he even smells slightly perfumed. He is very careful and precise about his work; he shows no emotion except slight irritation over the man brought in to die in his office. It is from him that Marlow first hears something about Kurtz.

16. What does Marlow learn about Kurtz from the accountant?

He learns that Kurtz is in charge of an important trading post and sends in more ivory than all the other agents combined. He is expected to achieve an important position in the Company. He is told that Kurtz is a remarkable person.

17. How does Marlow get from the first station to the Central Station?

He joins a caravan of sixty people who walk over land for fifteen days to travel two hundred miles to the main station.

18. What does Marlow learn about his steamboat when he arrives?

He learns that his steamboat has sunk to the bottom of the river, and he will have to raise and repair it.

19. How does Marlow describe the general manager at the Central Station?

The general manager is not particularly good at his job. He has worked his way up the through the ranks mostly because he is blessed with good health. He is only effective at all because he inspires uneasiness—not fear, love, or respect.

20. What does Marlow like about his hard work repairing the steamboat?

He has learned about the reality of himself and what he can accomplish, which no other person can really understand.

21. How is the Eldorado Exploring Expedition a contrast to Marlow's mission with the steamboat?

The Expedition has fancy equipment, but no foresight or practical intentions. Marlow has a steamboat in poor condition with a difficult crew, but he has a clear purpose and he plans as well as he can to see that he completes his mission.

22. What is Conrad suggesting by calling the rival company the "Eldorado" expedition?

El Dorado is a mythical city of gold, supposedly in South America. The legend is based on an actual ancient rite in which a newly-appointed king or chief priest of the Musica Indians (in what is now Colombia) would cover his entire body in gold dust and dive into a mountain lake. So alluring were the tales of this legendary city of gold, however, that explorers from all of the European powers spent vast amounts of time and money—often sacrificing their lives and the lives of their crews—searching. Conrad is clearly suggesting that the mercenary motives of the explorers of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition will lead them to ruin.

23. What does Marlow need to complete the repairs on the steamboat and why is this so frustrating to him?

He needs rivets, and there are plenty of rivets at the station on the coast where they are not doing anybody any good, but he cannot get them delivered to him even though supplies come from the coast by caravan every week.

24. What rhetorical device is illustrated when Marlow says of the Eldorado Expedition, that they were, "reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage" (p. 32)?

This is an example of antithesis.

25. *Heart of Darkness* was originally published in three installments. On what suspenseful note does Conrad end this first installment?

The explorer-traders from the Eldorado Exploring Expedition have arrived and create a tense contrast with Marlow and his "crew." Conrad also ends with Marlow wondering—not about Kurtz's material success in the ivory trade—but about the success of Kurtz's moral crusade.

Chapter 2

1. On what suspenseful note does this second installment begin?

Marlow overhears another conversation about Kurtz.

2. What does Marlow learn when he overhears the station manager talking to his uncle?

Kurtz has been very ill. Wandering traders in his area had talked of the trading post being a center for humanizing, instructing, and improving the lives of the natives.

3. What is significant about the image Marlow begins to develop of Kurtz?

The image of Kurtz—a lone white man, sitting in the center of a canoe paddled by four Africans, turning his back on civilization and “home”—foreshadows the type of man Marlow will encounter when he finally meets Kurtz.

4. What is the prevailing metaphor Marlow uses to describe traveling up the river?

Traveling deeper and deeper into the jungle is compared to traveling back into prehistory, perhaps even before humankind—certainly civilized humankind—appeared on the planet.

5. How do the cannibals help Marlow?

They are a hard-working crew, and on several occasions, they all help push the steamboat off sandbars when it gets stuck.

6. What metaphor is used for the steamboat as it moves up the river?

The narrator compares the steamboat to a sluggish beetle.

7. How is the steamboat attacked?

By a shower of arrows that seem to be mostly harmless.

8. Who is the only person to die and how is he killed?

The helmsman is killed by a spear thrust into his side.

9. How does Marlow frighten the natives and stop the attack?

He blows the steam whistle on the boat several times.

10. Why does Marlow dispose of the helmsman's body so quickly?

He is afraid the cannibals on his crew will eat it.

11. What mysterious book does Marlow find at a station fifty miles below Kurtz's station?

A book on the finer points of seamanship with notes that seem to be written in code.

12. Describe the man who greets Marlow at the Inner Station.

He is a young Russian wearing bizarre clothes. He apparently has no sense of the possible danger he is in, he is an avid advocate of Kurtz and his ideas, and he does not seem to have any real goals except adventure.

13. Marlow thought there were notes written in code in the book he found. What was this "cipher"?

Marlow learns that the notes in the margin were written in Russian.

14. Why do the surroundings seem prehistoric to Marlow?

Marlow and his listeners are used to a countryside of towns and farms. This land has not been tamed by man, and its inhabitants behave in unfamiliar ways.

15. The steamboat anchors for the night eight miles below Kurtz's station. What troubling events happen in the morning?

The boat is surrounded by an impenetrable white fog that keeps them from moving, but they can still hear the eerie sounds of the natives.

16. What does Marlow mean when he says that women must be helped to "stay in that beautiful world of their own" (p. 47)?

Their idealism and morals will help keep the world of men from getting even worse.

17. Kurtz wrote a pamphlet for what organization?

The International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs

18. What surprising sentence did Kurtz add to his pamphlet long after he wrote it? What might have motivated him to write it?

Kurtz added, "Exterminate all the brutes." This may indicate that, while Kurtz initially tried to improve the natives through education and reforming their customs, he has come to find himself drawn into their practices and the belief that what he attempted initially was a hopeless cause.

19. On what suspenseful note does Conrad end the second installment of the novel?

This installment ends with the mystery of why the natives attacked Marlow's boat renewed, and some more vague information about how Mr. Kurtz enlarged the Russian's mind. The reader is also left wondering about the purpose of the notes in the margins of the book being written in Russian. Finally, the reader is left to speculate on what lies farther upriver.

Chapter 3

1. The Russian says, "I had gone so far that I don't know how I'll ever get back" (p. 53). What does this mean literally and symbolically?

Literally, he means that he has gone so far up the river and so far from civilization that he does not know how he can get back. Symbolically, he means that he has experienced too much of the extremities of life and adventure that he can never adjust to "normal" civilized behavior again.

2. When Marlow asks what Kurtz had traded for ivory, what does the Russian reply?

He says, "There's a lot of good cartridges left even yet," (p. 54) suggesting that Kurtz has coerced the natives into giving him ivory.

3. Why did Kurtz threaten to shoot the young Russian?

He wanted the small amount of ivory the young Russian had been given in exchange for shooting game for a nearby tribe.

4. What does the Russian tell Marlow about Kurtz's recent activities?

Kurtz came back after being in the lake area for several months, apparently to make a raid for ivory, but he was also very ill.

5. What does Marlow suddenly realize about the knobs on the posts by the building and the symbolic meaning they may have?

They are not decorations, but symbols of power, consisting of actual human heads. They demonstrate that Kurtz has come to lack restraint after his time in the wilderness.

6. As Marlow talks with the Russian, a group of men suddenly appears with a stretcher. What happens next?

A group of natives with spears and bows appear. Kurtz, on the stretcher, is extremely thin, pale and ill. He seems to threaten the natives and they leave.

7. Describe the physical appearance of the woman who walks up along the river and describe what she does.

She walks proudly along the shore. She is wearing striped and fringed cloth and brass circlets on her forearms and lower legs. She is wearing several other pieces of jewelry, some of which Marlow thinks may be magical amulets. She stands on the shore, raises her arms as if begging for something, and then turns in great sorrow and leaves.

8. When Kurtz is very ill, Marlow says that the manager “considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful” (p. 59) What does he mean?

He is suggesting that the manager knows it is appropriate that he show some concern for the sick and possibly dying man, but he does not really mean it.

9. Who does the Russian say was responsible for the attack on the steamboat?

He says Kurtz ordered the attack, which indicates that Kurtz did not want to be removed from his station and did not think he needed rescuing.

10. What does the Russian take with him when he departs?

He asks for a pair of shoes and some cartridges for his rifle. He also wants some good English tobacco.

11. What does Marlow do when he discovers that Kurtz has left his sickbed?

He follows Kurtz’s trail through the grass and talks with him near the native’s campfire. He threatens Kurtz with physical violence and then takes him back to the steamboat.

12. Why does Marlow believe Kurtz’s soul has gone mad?

He believes that the cause is the length of time Kurtz has been in the wilderness without any external restraints on his behavior.

13. Why don’t the pilgrims want Marlow to blow the steamboat whistle as they take Kurtz and the ivory away?

They know the whistle will frighten the natives away, and they were hoping to have the chance of shooting them.

14. Marlow believes that the dark wilderness has cast a spell over Kurtz. What is the effect of this spell?

It has awakened brutal instincts and primitive passions that had been hidden under Kurtz’s civilized and moral behavior.

15. What shakes Kurtz’s confidence in returning to a glorious welcome in Europe?

The delay when the ship stops for repairs makes him realize he may not live long enough.

16. What does Kurtz entrust to Marlow?

He gives Marlow papers and a photo.

17. Why does Marlow consider Kurtz's last words a victory?

Marlow thinks they represent Kurtz's final recognition of what he has become in the wilderness. He may also believe that Kurtz has come to a final revelation of what the universe is really like.

18. In what way does Marlow come to consider Kurtz a remarkable man? How does Marlow feel he compares to Kurtz?

Marlow believes Kurtz was a remarkable man because he learned something from his life. He had a message, "something to say," and he was able to find the words to articulate it before he died. Marlow may have learned something, but when he was facing death, he did not have anything to say, and he did not know how to say it.

19. What is the significance of Kurtz' dying words?

Kurtz' dying words, "The horror! The horror!" are never fully explained, but, at the moment of his death, Kurtz is described almost like an idol—an "ivory face [with an] expression of somber pride, ruthless power, craven terror." (p. 65) Knowing that he is dying, Kurtz faces death with "an intense and hopeless despair." (p. 65)

"The horror" may reflect Kurtz' realization that there is no hope of redemption for such a one as he. He has lived wrongly, having abandoned his ideal in order to pursue vain goals. On the other hand, Kurtz may be realizing that the idealistic goals were themselves vain, that there is no higher purpose or point.

Kurtz may also be finally recognizing the depth of darkness in the human heart, that even the most idealistic and well-intentioned human, when isolated from the behavioral restraints of civilization, becomes a savage.

20. What was the nature of Kurtz' idealism that the Intended still reveres? How might this explain the significance of his final words?

Kurtz was, as were most Europeans of his day, what would today be called a white supremacist. His intentions, however, were good, believing that imposing Western values and civilization on "non-civilized" peoples was a means of saving their lives and their souls. As Kurtz delves into his own dark and primitive nature, he learns—to his horror—that even the civilized saviors are not really different from the savages they attempt to save.

21. Explain what Marlow means when he says, "I have wrestled with death" (p. 66).

He has been so sick that he was near death himself.

22. Who are the three visitors who try to get Kurtz's papers from Marlow when he returns to Europe?

A Company official, a cousin, and a journalist.

23. What are the eerie physical details associated with the Intended and her drawing room?

A cold and monumental fireplace, a piano like a sarcophagus, the ashy halo of the Intended's hair and her luminous forehead.

24. What does the Intended mean when she says, "He drew men towards him by what was best in them" (p. 71)?

She believes that Kurtz was such a good, moral man that he inspired others to be good and moral as well, appealing to their better natures.

25. When the Intended extends her arms as if after a retreating figure, what does Marlow think of and why?

He remembers the native woman who held the same pose for the same man for some of the same reasons (permanent loss of a man she loved), but for very different reasons as well (the native woman and the Intended could not be from more different worlds.)

26. When the Intended asks about Kurtz's last words, what does Marlow say and why?

Marlow says Kurtz's last words were the Intended's name because he knows that this lie will be comforting and because he realizes he cannot possibly explain the truth of the situation to her because she would not understand it much less accept it.

27. This novel was first published in serialized installments. How do the ends of Chapters One and Two leave the reader eager for the next installment?

There are two threads of the story that might make the reader eager to read more. Can Marlow get the steamboat repaired: will he get his rivets? Secondly, although he professes not to think about Kurtz, the reader's curiosity has been aroused, and even Kurtz expresses curiosity about how a man by himself would go about "civilizing" the natives.

At the end of the second chapter, the mysterious young Russian increases the reader's desire to penetrate the mystery of Kurtz. He expresses a total dedication to Kurtz, but he is still someone about whom we know almost nothing. We know the natives do not want him to leave, so he must have had a powerful effect on them. We have not met Kurtz yet, and we have no idea what has happened to him or what he is really like.

Heart of Darkness

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Student Copy

Chapter 1

1. Describe in detail the setting where the story begins.
2. Who is the narrator of the story?
3. Describe Marlow's physical appearance.
4. The narrator describes the recent history of the Thames. What are some of the activities of the men who have sailed out, from the mouth of the river?
5. What effect does Conrad achieve by alluding to the pirates Francis Drake and John Franklin?

6. What are the *Golden Hind*, the *Erebus*, and the *Terror*?

7. How is Marlow different from typical seamen?

8. What technique does Conrad start using once Marlow begins to speak?

9. What simile does Conrad use for the mighty river that Marlow wants to explore?

10. How does Marlow's aunt help him get the appointment as river steamboat captain?

11. What are the steps in the process that begins Marlow's employment with the Company?

12. The city and the Company are never given names in the story. How does this affect the reader's experience of the story?

13. As he travels on a French steamer to his new post, Marlow observes a French warship firing at the coastline. What does this scene suggest about what the rest of the story will entail?

14. When he arrives, what things does Marlow see on his walk to the first station?

15. Why does Marlow call the chief accountant a “miracle”? (p. 21)

16. What does Marlow learn about Kurtz from the accountant?

17. How does Marlow get from the first station to the Central Station?

18. What does Marlow learn about his steamboat when he arrives?

19. How does Marlow describe the general manager at the Central Station?

20. What does Marlow like about his hard work repairing the steamboat?

21. How is the Eldorado Exploring Expedition a contrast to Marlow's mission with the steamboat?

22. What is Conrad suggesting by calling the rival company the "Eldorado" expedition?

23. What does Marlow need to complete the repairs on the steamboat and why is this so frustrating to him?

24. What rhetorical device is illustrated when Marlow says of the Eldorado Expedition, that they were, "reckless without hardihood, greedy without audacity, and cruel without courage" (p. 32)?

25. *Heart of Darkness* was originally published in three installments. On what suspenseful note does Conrad end this first installment?

Chapter 2

1. On what suspenseful note does this second installment begin?
2. What does Marlow learn when he overhears the station manager talking to his uncle?
3. What is significant about the image Marlow begins to develop of Kurtz?
4. What is the prevailing metaphor Marlow uses to describe traveling up the river?
5. How do the cannibals help Marlow?
6. What metaphor is used for the steamboat as it moves up the river?
7. How is the steamboat attacked?

8. Who is the only person to die and how is he killed?

9. How does Marlow frighten the natives and stop the attack?

10. Why does Marlow dispose of the helmsman's body so quickly?

11. What mysterious book does Marlow find at a station fifty miles below Kurtz's station?

12. Describe the man who greets Marlow at the Inner Station.

13. Marlow thought there were notes written in code in the book he found. What was this "cipher"?

14. Why do the surroundings seem prehistoric to Marlow?

15. The steamboat anchors for the night eight miles below Kurtz's station. What troubling events happen in the morning?

16. What does Marlow mean when he says that women must be helped to “stay in that beautiful world of their own” (p. 47)?

17. Kurtz wrote a pamphlet for what organization?

18. What surprising sentence did Kurtz add to his pamphlet long after he wrote it? What might have motivated him to write it?

19. On what suspenseful note does Conrad end the second installment of the novel?

Chapter 3

1. The Russian says, “I had gone so far that I don’t know how I’ll ever get back” (p. 53). What does this mean literally and symbolically?
2. When Marlow asks what Kurtz had traded for ivory, what does the Russian reply?
3. Why did Kurtz threaten to shoot the young Russian?
4. What does the Russian tell Marlow about Kurtz’s recent activities?
5. What does Marlow suddenly realize about the knobs on the posts by the building and the symbolic meaning they may have?
6. As Marlow talks with the Russian, a group of men suddenly appears with a stretcher. What happens next?
7. Describe the physical appearance of the woman who walks up along the river and describe what she does.

8. When Kurtz is very ill, Marlow says that the manager “considered it necessary to sigh, but neglected to be consistently sorrowful” (p. 59) What does he mean?

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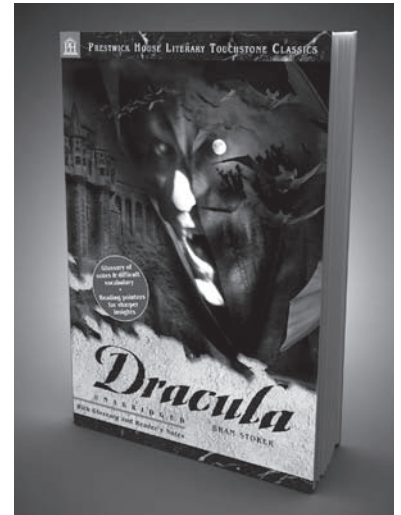
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