

Study Guide: *Heart of Darkness* Part I

I. Pre Reading

1. View the animated summary of *Heart of Darkness* (Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on view the video) <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/heart/quiz.html>
2. Read MHDAon’s “Background Notes to *Heart of Darkness*” and take notes, tell how his life affected his writing of *Heart of Darkness*:
3. Read the biography of Joseph Conrad. Note how his life affected his writing of *Heart of Darkness*: <http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/projects/hod/one.html>

II. During Reading – Part I

1. Make a Note about allusions:

Allusions: The opening frame story of *Heart of Darkness* contains references to historical figures:

- Sir Francis Drake (c. 1540–1596), English navigator and popular hero who was the first captain to sail his own ship around the world and was instrumental in defeating the Armada, a great naval fleet sent by Spain to help invade England.
- Sir John Franklin (1786–1847), English explorer of the Arctic, whose ships the *Erebus* (named after a personification of darkness in Greek mythology) and *Terror* were lost during an expedition to find the Northwest Passage, an Arctic waterway connecting the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans.
- Falernian: legendary wine of ancient Rome – *Morituri te salutant*

2. While reading **take notes/annotate on Marlow’s opinions, actions, and motives. What is Marlow like?** What are his most important traits and beliefs? Support your description with specific details from the novella.
3. While reading –read to discover and **annotate how Charlie Marlow feels about embarking on a trip to Africa.**
4. **In Part 1** the imagery is embedded with sensory details and the descriptions of the various settings create a certain atmosphere, or mood. As you read, **annotate – take notes on words and images which relate to the different settings and describe the mood created. Then create a chart based on your notes:**

Place	Words & Images	Atmosphere/ Mood
Thames River /London	e.g. “the sun sank low . . . as if stricken to death”	Dismal/gloomy
Central Station	e.g. “unreal”	surreal
Brussels/ “Sepulchre City”/ Company Offices	e.g. “a narrow and deserted street in dark shadow”	Lonely and abandoned
Outer Station	e.g. “inhabited devastation”	Horror / disbelief

5. One of the novel's strengths is its complexity. Conrad comments on a range of themes that resonate with most readers. **While reading jot down/annotate those items which refer to these themes in an annotated quotation journal.** Record all allusions (and page numbers).

- The corrupting influence of power
- Man's inhumanity to man
- Racial inequality
- Gender inequality
- Nature as adversary

6. Conrad's use of imagery constitutes one of the novel's strengths. Images of hearts and images of hell along with related inferno or devil images are thematically significant. To grasp the scope of each type of imagery and to begin to understand the allegorical elements in the text create an annotated quotation journal. Record all allusions (and page numbers) to hearts or hell that you encounter as you read the novella. Next to each textual reference, briefly explain the function of the image. While some functions will recur, each type of imagery conveys many meanings and significances.

7. **While reading view** (use this to take notes and annotate) **the hypertext annotation** in Thomas Kinsella's Project at the Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. <http://loki.stockton.edu/~kinsellt/projects/hod/one.html>

III. Post Reading: Take a review quiz: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/heart/quiz.html>

Answer these questions:

1. Conrad structures *Heart of Darkness* as a frame story. For a writer, what benefits does this structure provide?
2. In the frame story section of the book, what details does Conrad include to create a sense of comfort and peacefulness? What elements contrast the serenity?
3. The unnamed narrator comments that Marlow is "not typical" of seamen. In what ways is he different?
4. Under what circumstances did the narrator hear the story he tells?
5. Contrast the narrator's view of the empire building English with Marlow's view of the Romans.
6. As Marlow recounts his boyhood experiences, he says that he was like "a silly little bird." What perceptions do you think this image might have for most readers?
7. Marlow notes that he "tried the women" in his attempts to become a steamer captain. In the novella, what is Marlow's attitude towards this strategy? How do you react to his attitude.
8. As part of the employment process, Marlow visits an old doctor who works for the company. What measurements does the doctor take and why? How does this meeting affect Marlow?
9. How does Marlow's aunt, "the excellent woman," depict him to the wife of the high dignitary? What problems might this pose for Marlow? Why?
10. On occasion, "black fellow" in boats visit the ship that Marlow is aboard. Do you think that the description of these fellows is mostly positive or mostly negative? And, how do these descriptions compare to most depictions of whites in the novella?

11. Describe how the map of Africa changes during Marlow's lifetime. What does this change foreshadow?
12. What does Marlow mean when he says the journey down the African coast "takes him away from the truth of things"?
13. To allow the convicts to proceed up the trail, Marlow steps into a grove of trees. How does his impression of the Africans there compare to his attitude towards the convicts?
14. When he reaches shore, Marlow encounters a chain gang of Africans. What impression does the encounter make on Marlow?
15. What impression does the Accountant make on Marlow? How does Marlow's description of the Accountant contrast with his descriptions of the Africans he has encountered? What effect does this contrast have on readers?
16. How does the Accountant's attitude towards the man who is dying in his hut affect readers' impressions of him?
17. What feeling does the Station Manager inspire in Marlow? To Marlow, what seems to be the Station Manager's best qualification for his job?
18. During his talk with the Brickmaker, Marlow realizes that the man is pumping him for information about Company politics. What aspects of characterization (details, images, diction) does Conrad use to make Marlow's skepticism believable?
19. How does the Brickmaker characterize Kurtz? How does this characterization compare to what others have said about Kurtz?
20. On occasion, a night-roaming hippo comes ashore and the pilgrims empty their rifles into it to no effect. What do their actions convey about the pilgrims? What could the hippo symbolize?
21. Perhaps the closest companion Marlow makes at the Central Station is the foreman of the mechanics. Is the foreman a sympathetic character? Why?
22. What is Marlow's reaction to the arrival of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition? How does Marlow react to the Station Manager's Uncle?

Resources:

Great student resources at Joseph Conrad Society:

http://www.josephconradsociety.org/student_resources.htm

Kansas State University: Professor Lyman A. Baker – Study Guide to *Heart of Darkness* - Joseph Conrad

<http://www-personal.ksu.edu/~lyman/english320/sg-Conrad-HD.htm>

The Victorian Web: <http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/conrad/pva46.html>

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