

Heart of Darkness

Curriculum Unit



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Joseph Conrad

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Patrice Benson

Mary Anne Kovacs

Contributor

Christine W. West



Curriculum Unit Authors

Patrice Benson, who received her Ph.D. in post-Victorian literature and her diploma in librarianship from the National University of Ireland, has taught at the high school level and is a professor of literature. She is also the coauthor of The Center for Learning's curriculum units *American Literature, Volume 2: Civil War to the Present*, *A Farewell to Arms*, and *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

Mary Anne Kovacs, who earned her M.A. at the Bread Loaf School of English at Middlebury College, Vermont, is a secondary English teacher and department head. She is also an author and coauthor of numerous curriculum units in The Center for Learning's language arts and novel/drama series, including *Nectar in a Sieve/The Woman Warrior*, *Anna Karenina*, and *Emma*.

Editorial Team

Mary Louise Haag, M.A.

Rose Schaffer, M.A.

Mary Jane Simmons, M.A.

Bernadette Vetter, M.A.

Cover Design

Susan Chowanetz Thornton, B.S.

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ISBN-13: 978-1-56077-827-1

ISBN-10: 1-56077-827-X

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Introduction

Joseph Conrad's personal history makes him one of a kind—a celebrated author who wrote his masterpieces in a language other than his native tongue. It is certainly remarkable that this Polish seaman, whose second language was French, went on to write works such as *Heart of Darkness* and *Lord Jim* in English—and not simple English, either. Readers who have spoken English all their lives can be daunted by Conrad's complex diction and syntax.

Heart of Darkness is, of course, more than just a language marvel. Marlow's story of his journey to the Belgian Congo works on many levels. It is an adventure story, a travelogue of sorts, documenting an exotic experience. More importantly, it is a story of enlightenment, revealing the transformation of Marlow from work-oriented seaman to sage. Its journey motif echoes experiences in *Inferno* and *The Odyssey*. The novel also takes a social stand, indicting both racism and imperialism.

Conrad's meticulous style presents a story that can both awe and confound audiences. Even after many readings, one is likely to be struck abruptly by yet another insight, connection, or question. Where is this "heart of darkness"? What was "the horror" that appalled Kurtz on his death bed? There are no simple answers. What is true of Marlow's stories is also true of Conrad's. *Heart of Darkness* cannot be captured in a nutshell. It exudes an aura and has a plethora of implications, which is one of the reasons it has become recognized as a classic.

Chinua Achebe's scathing indictment of the text raises interesting questions, though. Achebe's background, professional experiences, education, and literary accomplishments make him an authority one cannot lightly disregard. He makes a strong case that *Heart of Darkness* is inherently racist and therefore should not be taught, especially not in cultures where racism is endemic. The debate that Achebe generated continues unabated; Conrad's short novel remains a subject of controversy.

Perhaps this is part of its greatness. A century after it was written, the novel can evoke thought, admiration, self-examination, and passionate discussion.

Teacher Notes

Heart of Darkness is such a rich text that it is impossible to exhaust it after many readings, let alone on a first reading. The following lessons and handouts are intended to help honors and advanced placement classes to explore many facets of the novel, but they do not pretend to be all-inclusive.

The unit emphasizes Joseph Conrad's treatment of the two main characters, Marlow and Kurtz, as well as Conrad's/Marlow's indictment of imperialism. It also focuses attention on Conrad's vivid imagery and figurative language. Background information is included, along with attention to basics such as plot development and point of view. The concluding lesson emphasizes that great literary texts often occasion rigorous debate and includes an examination of Chinua Achebe's famous condemnation of the text.

Several cautions are in order for the teacher presenting this text to high school students. First, Conrad's style is far from simple; his diction and syntax can befuddle even advanced students. Second, as the novel itself points out early in the first chapter, the story is enigmatic, impossible to pin down to a solitary theme. Third, until they are teased into the text, students may complain that the novel is "boring." Compared to today's action thrillers, it may seem that nothing happens. In fact, so much happens, as the novel is about the desire for adventure, the nature of the human heart, big business at work exploiting everyone, the potential for corruption, and the complexities of interracial relations. After one study of *Heart of Darkness*, the teacher may well feel that the class should begin it again, but few groups have the stamina for such an endeavor.

If the class is an advanced placement group, it is important to keep in mind that *Heart of Darkness* is often suitable as a basis to respond to the open-ended question in the essay section of the yearly examination. It may be useful to present past essay questions as examples for practice. Past essay questions can be found in printed materials and on the Web site of the College Board (<http://apcentral.collegeboard.com>).

Quizzes and vocabulary selections are presented in the supplementary materials section and may be incorporated into the lessons as needed. Teachers should consider the necessity of making an appropriate statement about the time period and the language, particularly the use of the word *nigger*, which students will encounter in the novel and in Lesson 10 materials.

Reading assignments are as follows:

The first few pages of chapter 1 during Lesson 1

Chapter 1 for Lessons 3 and 4

Chapter 2 for Lessons 5 and 6

Chapter 3 for Lessons 7 and 8

Answers will vary unless otherwise indicated. Students may need additional paper to complete some handouts.

Lesson 1

Introducing *Heart of Darkness*

Objectives

- To become acquainted with basic information about Joseph Conrad
- To appreciate the accomplishment of writing well in a language other than one's native tongue
- To analyze the opening pages of the novel

Notes to the Teacher

One of the truly remarkable facts about Joseph Conrad is that he wrote in English, a language that he did not learn until he was an adult. Anyone who has struggled to learn a second or third language will recognize the challenges involved—the sheer difficulty of becoming reasonably fluent. Conrad did not just become proficient; he was a master stylist, a fact that is amply evidenced in *Heart of Darkness*. Like his other works, this short novel reflects his personal experiences with life on shipboard. Although it has elements of an adventure story, it goes far beyond to encompass profound symbolic, sociological, and psychological dimensions.

The opening pages of the first chapter set the scene of the novel's time present—a tranquil gathering of five old friends on a boat on the Thames River. Conrad introduces Marlow, prepares us for his enigmatic story, and suggests several themes that permeate the work as a whole.

This lesson begins with an entertaining activity of having students attempt to write a short story in a language other than English. Often this will be French, Spanish, Latin, or German—a language which they have studied for several years in high school. If there are students whose native language is not English, their perspectives on the ease with which they can write in another language will enhance class discussion. Students then examine basic facts about the life of Joseph Conrad, whose accomplishments in the English language are legendary. Finally, students orient themselves to *Heart of Darkness* by examining the first few pages of the novel.

If you wish to emphasize vocabulary study, you may want to distribute handouts of materials in the supplementary section at the back of this curriculum unit.

Procedure

1. Ask students to identify languages other than English with which they have had some experience. Encourage the class to share experiences. Then ask students to take ten or fifteen minutes to begin a short story in a language other than English.
2. Have volunteers read stories aloud, and invite them to provide brief translations.
3. Conduct a discussion about factors that make writing in a language other than one's native tongue challenging, even if one has studied that language for two or three years (*limited diction and syntax; inability to think in the other language*).
4. Distribute **Handout 1**, and have students read the information about Joseph Conrad. Then discuss the questions.

Suggested Responses:

1. *He wrote not in Polish, his native language, but in English, a language he learned as an adult.*
2. *He might write about the dangers of gun-running, about sea adventures, or about the difficulty of life as an immigrant.*
5. Point out that writers' choices of titles often have great significance. Cite examples from students' shared experience.
6. Distribute **Handout 2**, and have students complete the web.
7. Ask each student to call out one or two words or phrases he or she included in the web, and record responses on the board. (*Responses may include center, love, blood, gloom, evil, confusion, and death.*)
8. Conduct a brief discussion of what the title suggests about the story to come. Lead students to see that Conrad is probably not presenting a cheerful, upbeat view of life.

9. Direct students to read the first few pages of the novel, stopping right after the narrator's complicated metaphor/simile contrasting Marlow's stories with ordinary sailor stories.

10. Have small groups complete **Handout 3**.

Suggested Responses:

Part A.

1. *a boat on the Thames River near the ocean; late afternoon and evening; peaceful, thoughtful, but also somewhat ominous*
2. *five men (the narrator, the Director of Companies, the Lawyer, the Accountant, and Marlow) who have been friends for many years; at one time all seamen*
3. *The description seems to compare Marlow to the Buddha, an icon of serenity and wisdom in the face of suffering and death.*
4. *The history of seamanship is inextricably linked to the desire for adventure, treasure, and fame. The narrator also links it to empire building.*
5. *Most sailors are usually at home and settled, both mentally and physically, on a ship. Marlow, on the other hand, seems to have a questing spirit.*
6. *Most sea stories are the simple, "what you see is what you get" type.*
7. *Marlow's stories are complicated, enigmatic, impossible to pin down to simple summary.*

Part B.

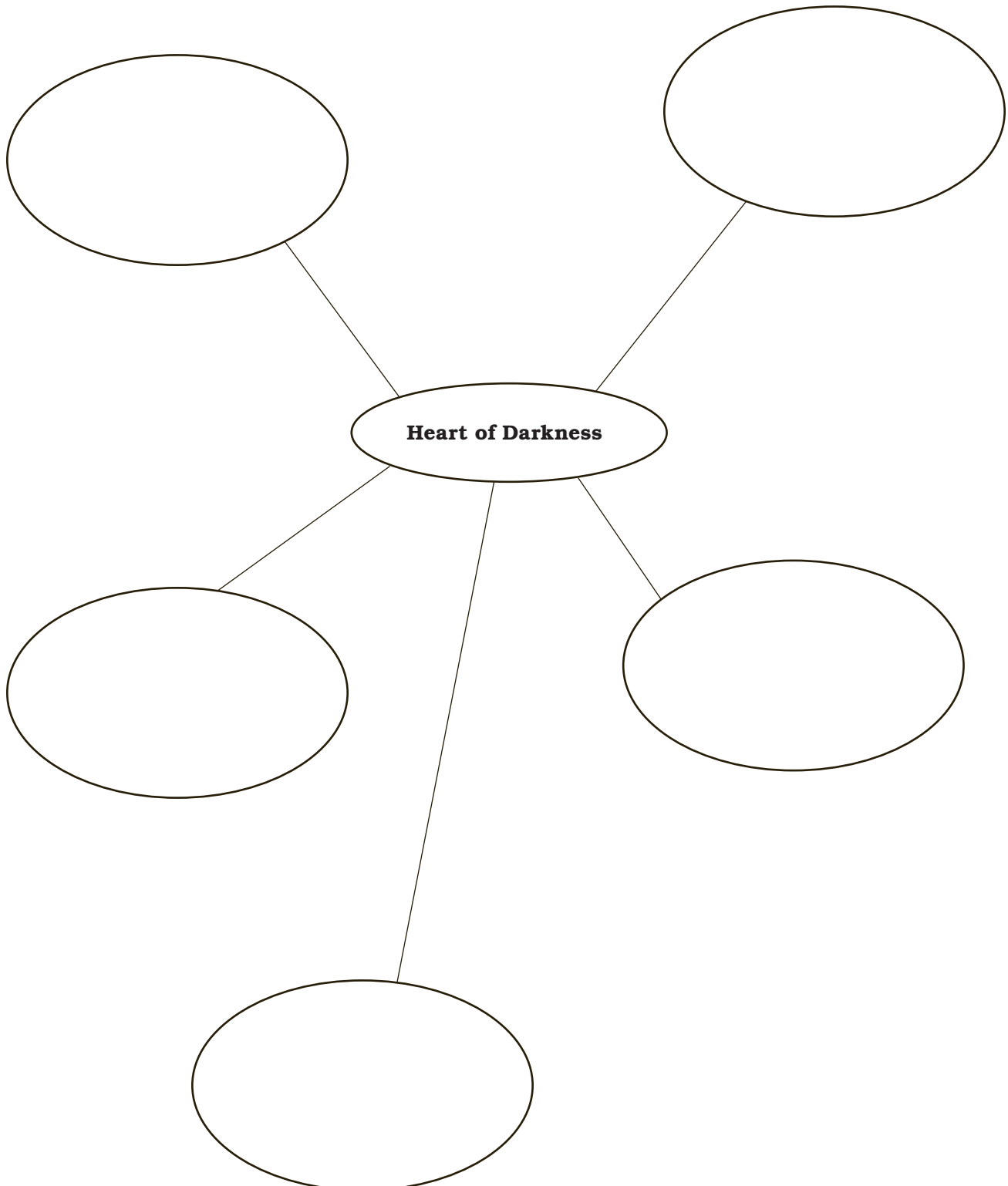
Darkness—*haze, dark, gloom, brooding, dull, death, dusk, monstrous, ominously, spectral*

Light—*luminous, sun, light, gleams, shone, brilliance, radiant, diaphanous, glowing, torch, spark, fire, glow, halos, illumination*

11. Point out that Conrad has already established one of the motifs of the novel—patterns of light and darkness. Encourage students to watch for continuations of this image pattern as they proceed through the novel.
12. Also point out Conrad's diction and syntax, and emphasize that this Polish-born writer has much to teach us about writing elegant English.
13. Assign the reading of the rest of the first chapter, which is the basis of Lessons 3 and 4.

What Is a “Heart of Darkness”?

Directions: Use the following web diagram to consider possible associations and implications of the title of Conrad’s novel.



Introducing *Heart of Darkness*

Part A.

Directions: Use the following questions to analyze Conrad's introduction to the novel.

1. Identify the place and time setting. What is the mood?
2. What characters are present? How would you describe their relationship?
3. Reexamine the narrator's first description of Marlow. What does it suggest?
4. What does the narrator suggest in his lengthy commentary on the history of men and ships?
5. In what sense do most sailors lead sedentary lives? How is Marlow different?
6. Unpack the metaphor describing most sea stories.
7. Explain the figurative language used to describe Marlow's stories.

Lesson 2

Colonization and Colonialism in Africa

Objectives

- To review the history of exploration and colonization
- To define the term *colonialism*
- To become acquainted with the geography of Africa
- To recognize the impact of colonialism on Africa

Notes to the Teacher

Western civilization has been characterized by the desire for exploration and expansion. This is evident in the Roman Empire, in the Crusades, and, at the close of the fifteenth century, in the roots of far-flung colonialism. The Portuguese were successful in opening up trade with India. The Spaniards sent Christopher Columbus sailing west, and ultimately the English, the French, and the Spanish acquired territories in the New World.

By the end of the eighteenth century, Westerners were to be found in colonies all over the globe. The British won India, the gem of all conquests, and took possession of Australia and New Zealand. The Portuguese had long controlled the African slave trade, but sold their monopoly to the British. Exploration of the African interior did not begin in earnest until the nineteenth century.

The motives behind all of this were mixed: economics, above all, but nationalism, prestige and power issues, and even missionary efforts were also involved. Today, colonialism is seen as a nineteenth-century phenomenon, something that is largely part of history. Its legacy remains, however, in many of the problems confronting nations with histories as Western colonies. This is a major topic in postcolonial literary criticism.

The history of the Belgian Congo is of special relevance to *Heart of Darkness*. During the fifteenth century the Portuguese initiated trade with the Congo, as well as a widespread slave trade. Through most of the nineteenth century, however, Africa in general and the Congo in particular remained largely unexplored by Westerners.

Meanwhile, King Leopold II of Belgium began to focus on industrial and colonial expansion. He became deeply involved in the Congo region, defeated the Anglo-Portuguese effort to conquer the Congo basin, and finally, by 1885, gained recognition by the United States and the leading European powers as the sovereign of the Congo Free State, in which rubber and ivory were valuable commodities. Exploitation was the norm, as was violation of the most basic human rights. This is the world Marlow recounts in *Heart of Darkness*.

Most students in the United States are as uninformed about Africa as Europeans were in the eighteenth century. This lesson aims to provide basic information about African geography and political developments. Students first consider major geographical features; they then consider colonialism as it impacted the continent; finally, they conjecture about potential effects of colonialism. For this lesson, it will be helpful to have a large wall map of the world or several globes.

Procedure

1. Point out to students that, in chapter 1, they have read a passage in which Marlow describes his childhood fascination with maps. Read the paragraph aloud, beginning, "When I was a little chap . . ."
2. Suggest that most young people can probably identify with Marlow's statement, "When I grow up I will go there." The "there," of course, varies from individual to individual. Have students identify three or more places they would like to explore some day. Invite volunteers to share responses, and encourage references to such "unmapped" places as outer space and the ocean.
3. Point out that in history the desire to explore has usually become linked with a desire to control, and provide examples. (See Notes to the Teacher.) Add that Marlow in *Heart of Darkness* tells the story of his journey to and in the Congo, and that some knowledge of Africa is helpful to an understanding of the novel.

4. Distribute **Handout 4**, and have students complete the exercise. (See the Teacher Resource Page on page 9 for suggested responses.) Then point out that the map can be deceptive, since it does not indicate all of Africa's neighbors, its connections to the rest of the world. Ask students to indicate the positions of the following: Spain, Portugal, and the rest of Europe; Israel; the United States; Iraq, Iran, and Afghanistan. Use the wall map or a globe to indicate the relationship between these countries and Africa.
5. Emphasize the tendency of colonizing powers to view the rest of the world as territory to be claimed and riches to be exploited. Explain that these powers did not view indigenous people as having any prior rights. Point out that by 1914, much of the African continent had been claimed by European nations.
6. Distribute **Handout 5**, and have students complete the exercise. Point out Egypt, Libya, Algeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, etc.
7. Distribute **Handout 6**. Stress that awareness of exploitation and national independence movements have largely ended territorial colonialism, and point out examples such as the division of French West Africa and the existence of Zaire. Reemphasize that the map on **Handout 5** is the map relevant to events in *Heart of Darkness*.
8. Distribute **Handout 7**, and have students complete it.

Suggested Responses:

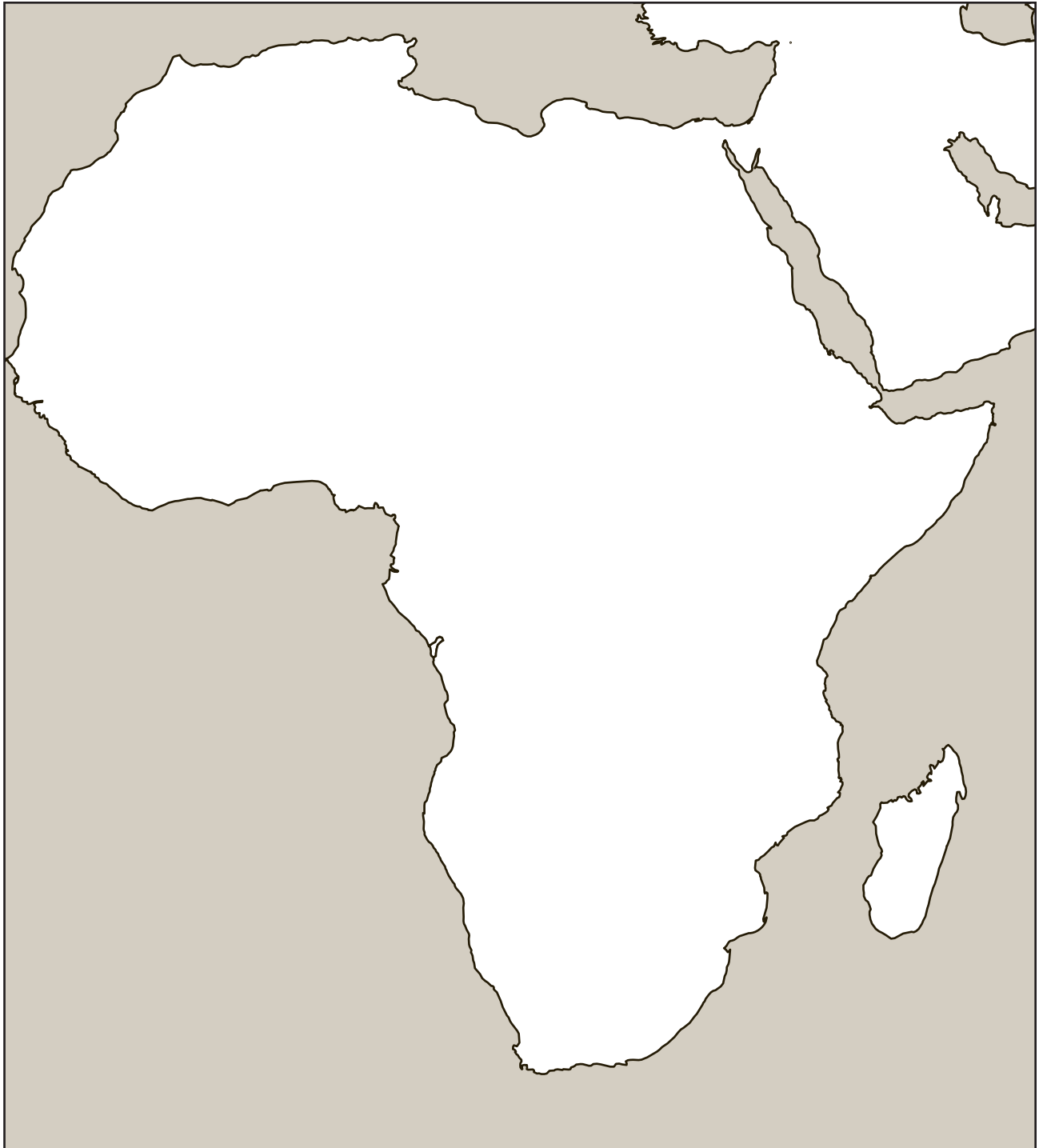
1. *good climate, fertile land, water and food supply, valuable natural resources*
2. *ivory, rubber trees, precious metals, slave trade*
3. *Indigenous people were viewed as not having prior right of ownership; they were exploited.*
4. *Racism—in this case a conviction of white European superiority—is involved.*
5. *fascination, fear, pride, superstition, alienation*
6. *fear, anger, alienation, hopelessness*
7. *lingering racism, resentment of major world powers, depleted and irreplaceable natural resources, loss of cultural roots*

Suggested Responses, Handout 4



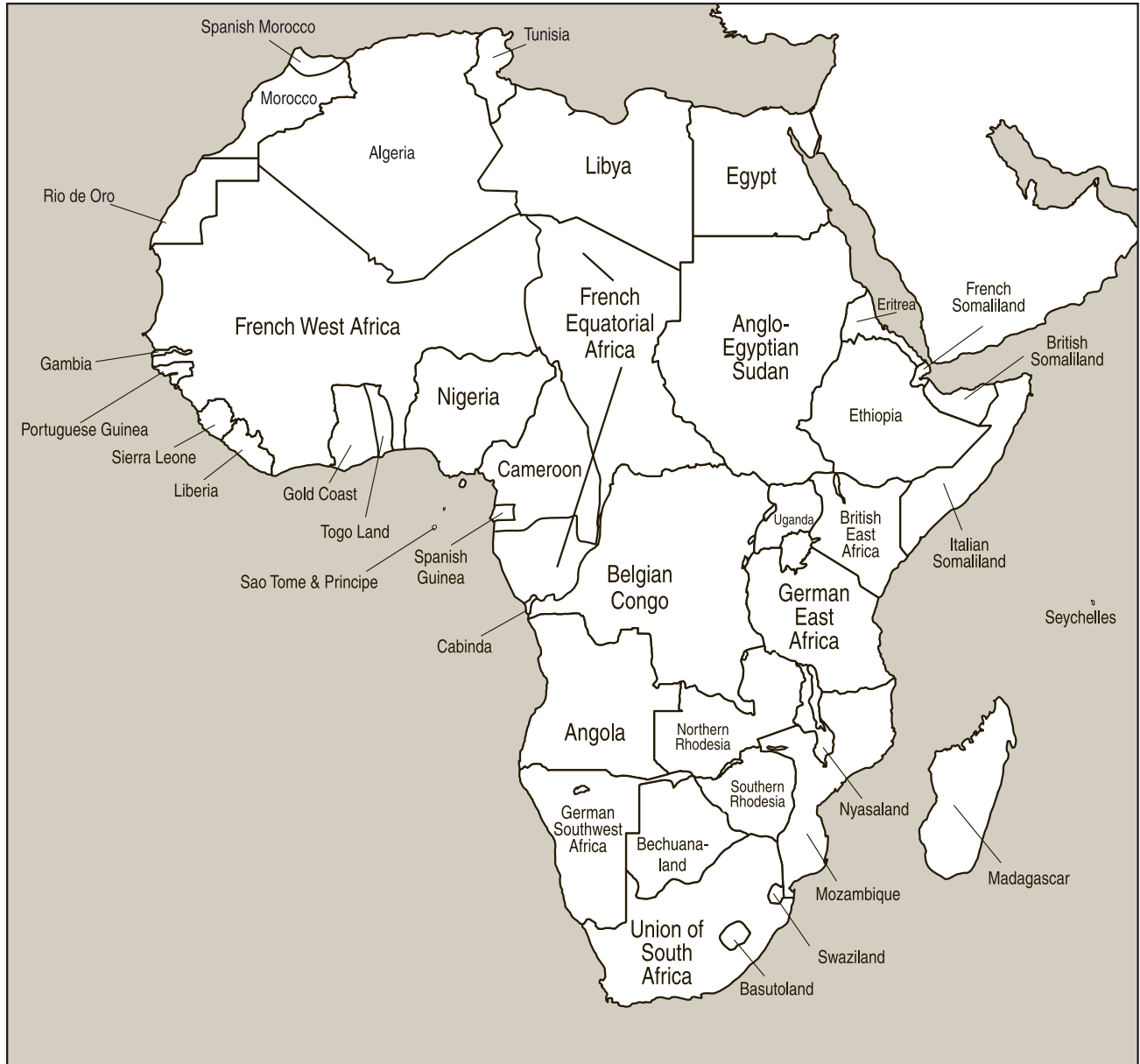
The Continent of Africa

Directions: Locate and label the following items: the equator; the Sahara Desert; the Congo River; the Cape of Good Hope; the Atlantic Ocean; the Indian Ocean; the Mediterranean Sea; Lake Victoria; Egypt; South Africa.



Africa in 1914

Directions: Examine the map of Africa as it looked in 1914, and as it would have looked during Marlow's journey in *Heart of Darkness*. Then answer the questions.



1. Where is the Congo River? Sketch it in.
2. Which countries do you recognize as still existing today?

Africa Today

Directions: Examine the following map of twenty-first century Africa, and contrast it with the one on **Handout 5**.



Considerations about Colonialism

Directions: Respond to each of the following questions regarding exploration, colonization, and colonialism.

1. What makes a territory attractive for colonization and colonialism?

2. What assets in Africa attracted European interest?

3. How did colonizers view indigenous peoples?

4. What assumption underlies this view of indigenous peoples?

5. If you had been a white person traveling down the Congo River in 1900, what emotions would you have experienced?

6. If you had been a black person observing a white person traveling down the Congo River in 1900, what emotions would you have experienced?

7. What might the legacies of colonialism be in today's Africa?

Lesson 3

The First Steps in Marlow's Story

Objectives

- To understand the sequence of events in chapter 1
- To analyze Marlow's attitudes toward women
- To analyze Marlow's attitudes toward native Africans

Notes to the Teacher

Chapter 1 covers events from the opening frame of five men on a ship in England to Marlow's frustrating need for rivets to repair his ship. The narrative includes his journey to Brussels to obtain employment, his long sea voyage (more than thirty days) from Belgium to the mouth of the Congo River, and his two-hundred-mile trip to the station where he hopes to acquire his ship.

The chapter also reveals some of Marlow's blind spots, issues that might lead readers to question his reliability as a narrator. The first is his attitude toward women; the second is his attitude toward the native Africans. Both of these groups seem to be utterly "other" to Marlow; his language choices and his comments reveal an innate sense of superiority and separation.

Prior to this lesson, students need to complete the reading of the first chapter. The quiz that appears in the supplementary materials section of this book may prove useful as an assessment tool or as a review sheet.

In this lesson, students describe style and events in the chapter. They then consider the topic of the "other"—Marlow's failure to connect with women and with black Africans. They also reflect on the impact this may have on his narrative.

Procedure

1. Invite students to brainstorm responses to the reading of the first chapter, and be equally receptive to both positive and negative comments. List specific items on the board.
2. Point out that one difficulty many readers have with Joseph Conrad is his style. Ask

the class to describe his diction and syntax. (*Conrad's word choices involve some fairly advanced vocabulary; some of his sentences and paragraphs are quite complex; the figurative language can be very dense, i.e., tricky to unpack. In addition, Marlow does not use strict chronological order and sometimes gets ahead of himself in his story.*)

3. Suggest that a good place to begin is with plot—events that occur in the chapter. If you plan to use the quiz, this is an appropriate time to do so.
4. Distribute **Handout 8**, and have small groups complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *The Director of Companies, Lawyer, Accountant, Marlow, and narrator are waiting for the tide to turn; Marlow begins to tell a story.*
2. *Marlow reminds the other four of a time in the past when he was between jobs and idle in London.*
3. *Marlow goes to Brussels to interview for a job; he includes a visit to the company office, including his observation of the two ominous knitting women; he also tells of his medical exam and his visit with his aunt.*
4. *Marlow takes a French steamer to the mouth of the Congo River; this would have taken him through the English Channel, down the long coast of the Iberian Peninsula, and along much of the coast of Africa. He seems to have spent most of his time watching the coast.*
5. *Marlow rides two hundred miles up the Congo River; he describes total devastation; along the way he stops at one station.*
6. *Marlow arrives at his destination only to find that his ship is at the bottom of the river. He begins to hear stories about a man named Kurtz, but he is mostly preoccupied with getting his ship in order.*

5. Point out that Marlow has emerged as the main narrator; the original narrator has mostly faded into the background. Remind students that toward the end of the chapter he mentions his loathing of lies; as none of his listeners contradict him, we can assume that he is known to be truthful. Still, we have to address the issue of his reliability as a narrator. To what extent can we believe him? Does he have blind spots in his world view?
6. Tell students that one simple way of viewing life is “us and them.” For example, at a football game, there is our side, and then there is everyone else, the enemy. For most of us there is a reality called “the other”—people with whom we cannot or will not connect. Ask students to identify some groups that people might see as “other.” Lead the class to see that these divisions often involve issues like race, ethnic group, gender, social class, age, and mode of dress.
7. Point out that Marlow’s comments reveal two important groups of “others”—women and black Africans. His blind spots may affect his reliability as a narrator.
8. Distribute **Handout 9**, and have small groups complete it.

Suggested Responses:

1. *He seems to mean that women live in an idealized world that has nothing to do with outside reality.*
2. *His view is not really negative; he sees the women’s world as beautiful. The problem is that it cannot survive reality, so it must be protected, sheltered.*
3. *Having spent most of his adult life as a sailor, he may have had only very limited contact with women.*
4. *This view may explain the difficulty some people have seeing women in positions such as mayor, governor, and president.*
5. *She is sufficiently in touch with the real world to be able to help him get a job—something he could not do for himself.*

6. *If and when the story involves female characters, we may have to question Marlow’s presentation of them.*
9. Distribute **Handout 10**, and have small groups complete it.

Suggested Responses:

1. *He uses the offensive term nigger.*
2. *The men are energetic, very much alive, noisy. Still, to him, their faces are like masks, not like the faces of human beings.*
3. *The people are inert, ill, emaciated, and near death.*
4. *This is undoubtedly a result of European exploitation.*
5. *“that complete, deathlike indifference of unhappy savages”; “black shadows of disease and starvation”; “two more bundles of acute angles”*
6. *He does not deny their humanness; still, he does not attempt to connect with them. He is with the company; they are just the natives.*
7. *Because he does not really understand the Africans, his view of them might not be accurate or complete.*

Chapter 1: A Series of Journeys

Directions: Chapter 1 can be read as a series of journeys. Complete the following chart to describe each of them.

Sequence	Events
1. On board the <i>Nellie</i>	
2. Flashback, London	
3. Brussels	
4. Lengthy sea journey	
5. Journey up the Congo River	
6. The station	

Marlow's View of Women

Directions: Consider the following quotation, in which Marlow expresses his view of women. Then answer the questions that follow.

It's queer how out of touch with truth women are. They live in a world of their own, and there has never been anything like it, and never can be. It is too beautiful altogether, and if they were to set it up it would go to pieces before the first sunset. Some confounded fact we men have been living contentedly with ever since the day of creation would start up and knock the whole thing over.

1. What exactly is Marlow saying about women?
2. Is his view negative?
3. What characteristics of Marlow's life might have led him to this view?
4. Do you think many men would agree with him? Explain.
5. Considering the role Marlow's aunt played in getting him a job, what is ironic about his comment?
6. How might his view of women affect his reliability as a narrator?

Marlow's View of Black Africans

Directions: Large sections of chapter 1 present Marlow's impressions of the black Africans he sees along his journey. Review several of these passages, and answer the questions that follow.

1. What is troubling about Marlow's diction?
2. In his voyage down the African coast, he observes people with "wild vitality." What does he mean?
3. Once he starts up the Congo, the people look very different. In what way?
4. What has caused this situation?
5. What phrases does Marlow use to describe the Africans along the Congo?
6. Does he attempt to connect with them, or does he see them as "other"? Explain.
7. How might Marlow's view of Africans affect his reliability as a narrator?

Lesson 4

Imperialism and the Phenomenal Kurtz

Objectives

- To analyze Marlow's comments on imperialism
- To trace the evolution of the mystery of Kurtz

Notes to the Teacher

This lesson builds on insights developed in Lesson 3 and focuses on two additional factors in the first chapter of the novel. One is imperialism, a topic students began to examine in Lesson 2. The other is Kurtz, a paragon of imperialistic achievement, and a man whose nature is a central mystery of the novel.

The young Marlow seems to have participated in imperialism without a qualm. The old sailor telling the story, however, voices severe criticism, alerting readers to the idea that the novel is about more than just one man's adventure. Conrad is ahead of his time in expressing views characteristic of later postcolonialist writing and criticism. It is evident that Marlow's experience in the Congo catalyzed a change in him; in a way, that is the main subject of the entire novel.

Another main subject is Kurtz, the phenomenon of the company, a nonpareil in the ivory trade. In its presentation of Kurtz, the novel can be read as part of the mystery genre, presenting clue after clue until the detective can finally solve the case.

In this lesson, students begin by analyzing Marlow's simile comparing himself to a small bird and the Congo to a snake. They go on to analyze his indictment of imperialism. Finally, they begin to trace the mystery of Kurtz by pinpointing clues presented in chapter 1.

Procedure

1. Point out that throughout chapter 1 Marlow intersperses comments about imperialism, colonialism, the force that impelled Europeans to seek economic domination in resource-rich areas like Africa and India.

2. State that the young Marlow seems to have been quite matter-of-fact about his participation in Belgium's domination in the Congo. The older and wiser storyteller Marlow, however, indicts imperialism.
3. Distribute **Handout 11**, and have small groups complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *He equates imperialism with theft based on racism; the victims are those who are seen as "other." He says it is "not a pretty thing," surely an understatement.*
 2. *His four devils are violence, greed, lust, and imperialism.*
 3. *Imperialism is lazy, arrogant, short-sighted, destructive, and cruel.*
 4. *The station reflects all of the negative characteristics of imperialism.*
 5. *Marlow, and through him Conrad, indicts imperialism. The younger Marlow seems to take imperialism for granted and participates willingly.*
 6. *The river is like a snake, he himself like "a silly little bird." The snake is fascinating, but also dangerous, even lethal. Marlow echoes this comment later in his response to the map in the office in Brussels.*
 7. *The phrase is powerful but enigmatic (like Marlow's stories). Its meaning becomes clearer as the novel goes on. It suggests that people's attention is riveted by the truly horrible.*
4. Ask students how many have enjoyed mystery or detective stories, movies, or television shows. Invite volunteers to share examples and explain why they liked them. Then ask the class to explain the popularity of this type of entertainment (*elements of danger, intrigue; analysis of clues*).

5. Point out that works that are not strictly part of the mystery genre can sometimes be read partially as mysteries. Provide examples based on students' shared experience. (*What happened to Homer Barron in "A Rose for Emily" by William Faulkner? Is Heathcliff a demon or a man in Wuthering Heights by Emily Brontë?*)
6. Have small groups complete **Handout 12**.
7. Remind students to complete the reading of chapter 2 in preparation for the next lesson.

Suggested Responses:

1. ". . . the name of the man who is so indissolubly connected with the memories of that time." This is Kurtz, and the comment asserts his importance in the story to come.
2. Kurtz is a top-notch company agent, "a very remarkable person" headed for huge success.
3. Kurtz has become ill, and his station is in danger.
4. Kurtz's problems can be seen as an advantage for other agents. This is a dog-eat-dog environment.
5. The oil sketch depicts a blindfolded woman, robed, bearing a torch against a dark background. Many symbolic interpretations can be made. Certainly a blindfolded person, even one carrying a light, is not much help as a leader in the dark. Perhaps she represents all women, all humanity, Europe, imperialism. The manager adds that Kurtz is headed for higher positions, as he also believes Marlow is.
6. Marlow says that he thought he could help Kurtz and thought of him occasionally. Paradoxically, Marlow was both not very interested and yet curious.
7. Kurtz's phenomenal success indicates superior capability and personal charisma; it also suggests a potential for ruthlessness in exerting power. The blend of business acumen and artistic ability suggests a multifaceted person. Kurtz's rumored illness may bode ill for his station and for the company's ivory trade.

Marlow on Imperialism

Directions: Sprinkled among the narration in the first chapter of *Heart of Darkness* we find Marlow's comments on European imperialism. Use the following exercise to analyze them.

1. Find the passage in which Marlow defines "the conquest of the earth." What is it? How does he assess it?
2. Marlow refers to several "devils," destructive forces of evil. Identify them.
3. How does imperialism qualify as a devil? What are its characteristics?
4. When Marlow arrives at the station where his ship lies at the bottom of the river, he again refers to this devil. What does he mean?
5. How does the older, storyteller Marlow assess imperialism? Does the young adventurer appear to have shared this perspective?
6. Reexamine the passage in which Marlow describes his youthful fascination with maps, and identify and analyze the simile he uses to describe himself and the Congo River.
7. One of the most famous phrases from this novel appears near the beginning: "the fascination of the abomination." What does it mean?

The Mystery of Kurtz

Directions: The genre called “mystery” has long been a favorite of readers, television viewers, and moviegoers. It usually involves tracking down someone or something through discovering and analyzing clues. Sometimes a novel like *Heart of Darkness*, which is not technically a mystery, can be read like one. Here the mystery is Kurtz. Who is he? What is he? Chapter 1 presents the first series of clues. Identify them.

1. The first clue is so vague that most readers miss it, as it does not name Kurtz, but only alludes to his importance. What is it?
2. What does the chief accountant at the first station say about Kurtz?
3. What rumors does the manager at the next station convey?
4. What does Marlow overhear as two men talk in the dark?
5. Kurtz is not just a businessman, but also something of an artist. Describe the picture he painted. What does it suggest? What do the manager’s comments add?
6. How interested in Kurtz does Marlow seem to have been at this time?
7. As a detective, you are just beginning to track down Kurtz. What are your initial conjectures?

Lesson 5

The Perilous Journey to Kurtz's Station

Objectives

- To identify characters and events in chapter 2
- To recognize Marlow's challenges on the long journey to Kurtz's station
- To describe the changes in Marlow's attitude toward Kurtz
- To examine Joseph Conrad's use of foreshadowing

Notes to the Teacher

Chapter 2 describes the perilous journey to Kurtz's station. Marlow faces natural challenges: an unfamiliar river bottom, sometimes too shallow, sometimes littered with rocks and other debris that could severely damage his ship; a fog that makes movement impossible. On board with him are two groups with no understanding of each other: black crewmen (referred to as cannibals by Marlow) and white passengers. He also encounters an attack which results in the death of the helmsman.

Unlike chapter 1, in which his interest in the legendary Kurtz is occasional, here Marlow is riveted on the desire to get to Kurtz and to be able to listen to him. Kurtz, the ivory trader par excellence, has much to teach him. By the end of the chapter, he has reached Kurtz's station but has not yet entered it.

In this lesson, students begin by summarizing characters and events. They examine the change in Marlow's attitude toward Kurtz. Finally, they examine several examples of foreshadowing.

A brief content quiz may be found in the supplemental materials in the back of this unit.

Procedure

1. Ask students to provide a one-sentence summary of events in chapter 2. Lead them to see that it describes Marlow's journey up the Congo River toward Kurtz's station.

2. Have partners complete **Handout 13**. Then process responses in a class discussion.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Marlow has African crew members, whom he repeatedly refers to as cannibals, and white passengers, all male.*
2. *Marlow is traveling up an unfamiliar river, so he has to be on constant lookout regarding channel depth and hazards, as well as which way to go when there is a fork. During the attack, the fog is so dense that it is impossible to move safely.*
3. *The groups on board have totally different agendas; despite the hunger problem among the black crewmen, there is no conflict on the ship.*
4. *Marlow's identification of the crew as cannibals illustrates that the "other" relationship continues. In Western culture, cannibalism is taboo, seen as a violent savagelike attack of flesh. Marlow has no awareness that in some cultures cannibalism has been part of religious ceremonies or rituals of sacrifice. Sometimes it takes place because of lack of food. He does mention "this suspicion of their not being inhuman"—a tiny inkling of the connection of humanity. When the helmsman is stabbed, Marlow repeatedly refers to him as a man.*
5. *The ship is bombarded with seemingly harmless arrows; there is only one casualty, the helmsman. When Marlow blows the ship's whistle, the attack stops.*
6. *Marlow's shoes are soaked with the helmsman's blood.*
7. *Marlow understands that the crew see the body as potential food.*
8. *Marlow meets a young Russian man who seems to idolize Kurtz. His clothes have so many patches that he resembles a clown in costume. This man says that the attackers were mostly interested in preventing Kurtz from leaving.*

3. Remind students that throughout chapter 1 Marlow is only mildly interested in Kurtz, and point out that his attitude has changed dramatically in chapter 2. Ask the class to pinpoint specific passages that illustrate his change in attitude. (*He feels almost as if meeting with Kurtz was his only reason for coming to the Congo. The thought that the man might be dead is bitterly disappointing. Mostly he wants to listen to Kurtz talk. Later the Russian emphasizes that people do not talk to Kurtz; they listen to him. The detective story aspect of Heart of Darkness has sharpened as Marlow nears Kurtz's compound.*)
4. Ask students to identify reasons for this acute interest in a stranger. Lead them to see that Marlow has heard many references to Kurtz, who has emerged as a powerful and enigmatic figure. In addition, Marlow, a fledgling in a company in which Kurtz has been a phenomenal success, has a lot to learn.
5. Point out that several times in his narrative Marlow seems to go off track or get ahead of himself. Ask the class to define the term *foreshadowing*. Clarify that foreshadowing occurs when some element of the text prefigures or suggests events to come.
6. Distribute **Handout 14**, and have small groups complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Marlow is telling the story long after these events occurred. His comments here suggest that Kurtz was a mesmerizing talker. He also connects Kurtz with the novel's title and central theme, the meaning of the "heart of darkness."*
2. *The term intended means fiancée. Kurtz must have been engaged to be married. Marlow repeats that women need to be protected from reality. Marlow admits that he lied to her, so he must have met her some time after these events.*
3. *Later, Marlow reveals that the posts are topped not with carved balls, but with human skulls.*

Steaming Up the Congo

Directions: Chapter 2 describes Marlow's journey up the Congo toward Kurtz's station. Answer the following questions to clarify your understanding.

1. On the steamboat, Marlow is the person in charge. Who are the other people on board?

2. What natural challenges does he face?

3. How are his abilities to manage people challenged?

4. Has his perception of Africans as "other" changed?

5. Describe the attack on the ship. How does Marlow ward it off?

6. What causes Marlow to throw away his shoes?

7. Why does he throw the helmsman's body overboard?

8. What unlikely character does he meet? Why does Marlow describe him as a harlequin?
What reason does the man give for the attack on the ship?

Foreshadowing in *Heart of Darkness*

Directions: Several times in chapter 2, Marlow includes examples of foreshadowing. Only later, after readers have finished the book, can they fully understand the significance of these moments. Examine the following examples, and try to infer or predict their implications.

1. Marlow has not yet described his meeting with Kurtz. Still, he says, “The point was in his being a gifted creature, and that of all his gifts the one that stood out preeminently, that carried with it a sense of real presence, was his ability to talk, his words—the gift of expression, the bewildering, the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from the heart of an impenetrable darkness.”
2. Sometimes Marlow gets ahead of himself in the story. In one example he mentions Kurtz’s Intended and reiterates his attitude toward women. What do his comments suggest?
3. Outside Kurtz’s home are some decorative poles topped with balls. No fence connects them. What do you think they are?

Lesson 6

Multiple Levels of Reading

Heart of Darkness

Objectives

- To identify multiple levels of reading *Heart of Darkness*
- To describe the novel on each of those levels

Notes to the Teacher

Like many other novels, *Heart of Darkness* can be read on various levels, from simple adventure story to sociological/psychological treatise. The simplest reading presents a story of human adventure and travel. More challenging, it is a story of white imperialism's ravaging of Africa and cruel exploitation of the indigenous people. Archetypally, the novel presents Marlow's Dante-like journey into the underworld. It also explores the psychology of Marlow's growth from brash young seaman to enlightened one. Finally, it is a study of the complexities of race relationships.

By the end of chapter 2, students are prepared to begin interpreting the novel on each of these levels, a task that they will not complete until they have finished chapter 3. This lesson begins by identifying other novels that lend themselves to diverse levels of interpretation. Students then identify specific perspectives to view *Heart of Darkness*. Finally, they summarize ways the novels can be read on each of those levels.

Procedure

1. State that some works of literature can be read on various levels or from diverse perspectives. Point out examples from the class's shared experience (e.g., *Lord of the Flies*, *The Odyssey*, *Animal Farm*, *Moby Dick*). Ask volunteers to identify multiple levels of reading. (A book that some might read as a simple adventure story can also be seen as a symbolic representation of a universal experience. What some might see as a simple animal story can also be political satire.)
2. Explain that by the end of chapter 2 it is evident that *Heart of Darkness* is a multilevel text. Ask students to brainstorm

possible levels on which the book can be read, and list responses on the board.

3. Distribute **Handout 15**, and review the information with the class.
4. Distribute **Handout 16**, and direct students to complete the exercise individually. Conduct a discussion based on students' responses, and encourage volunteers to sketch symbols on the board. There will be a variety of levels and symbols, but the ones provided here are among the most frequently mentioned.

Suggested Responses:

1. Level—Adventure story (at base of pyramid)
Example—Marlow makes a perilous journey up the Congo, encountering many dangers along the way.
Symbol—steamship in fog
2. Level—Travelogue
Example—Marlow makes a sea journey from Brussels to the mouth of the Congo River.
Symbol—map of Europe and Africa; someone sitting in a chair reading
3. Level—Condemnation of imperialism
Example—Marlow describes the dying Africans near the first station.
Symbol—a fist hammering down
4. Level—Destructive effect on imperialists
Example—The story of Fresleven demonstrates how an essentially gentle man became brutal and ruthless.
Symbol—bones amid weeds
5. Level—Epic journey
Example—Marlow travels into the “heart of darkness.”
Symbol—a downward vortex to flames
6. Level—Journey to self-knowledge
Example—Marlow is learning from his experiences, but what does he learn?
Symbol—a light bulb

7. Level—*Story about race relationships (at top of pyramid)*

Example—The narrative demonstrates the ease with which we drift into stereotypical views and the difficulty of crossing cultural boundaries; the crewmen, for example, are cannibals.

Symbol—black and white hands reaching toward each other but not clasping

5. Emphasize that the outcome of each of these levels will not be clear until students have finished the novel. Direct them to do so prior to Lesson 7.

Heart of Darkness—Layers of Meaning

Directions: Joseph Conrad's novel is a rich example of the many layers of meaning often found in good literature. Read the following description of some of these levels of interpretation.

1. It is an adventure story.

This is evident in chapter 2, replete with suspense, hazards of river navigation, fog traps, armed conflict, a mysterious written warning, even intimations of cannibalism and blood-filled shoes.

2. It is a travelogue.

Like a story from *National Geographic*, it describes an exciting trip to an exotic and intriguing place.

3. It is a condemnation of European imperialism.

Marlow/Conrad presents the Belgian ivory trade as an evil and destructive force devastating to Africa and Africans.

4. It is a document about the consequences of brutal exploitation on the imperialists.

The devastation of imperialism is equally destructive to the white invaders, from Fresleven to Kurtz. Notice the ironic reference to the pilgrims; their devotion to profit is as intense as a religion.

5. It is the story of an epic journey into the underworld.

Like *The Odyssey*, *The Aeneid*, and *The Inferno*, Conrad's novel describes a kind of descent into hell, beginning with Brussels (the vestibule) and culminating in the kaleidoscope of horrors at Kurtz's station.

6. It is the story of a journey to self-knowledge. It tells the story of Marlow's growth from work-oriented seaman and adventurer to enlightened storyteller.

Read this way, the novel is less about Kurtz and more about Marlow. For him, the events he is recounting served as an epiphany, a life-changing source of insight.

7. It is a study of global race relations.

On this level the novel is a subject of substantial controversy. Here white and black are polar opposites. The white world seems to represent culture and business acumen; the black world is savage and unknowable. Marlow himself often uses derogatory language to refer to the indigenous people. Does Conrad predict a world of harmonious interracial harmony?

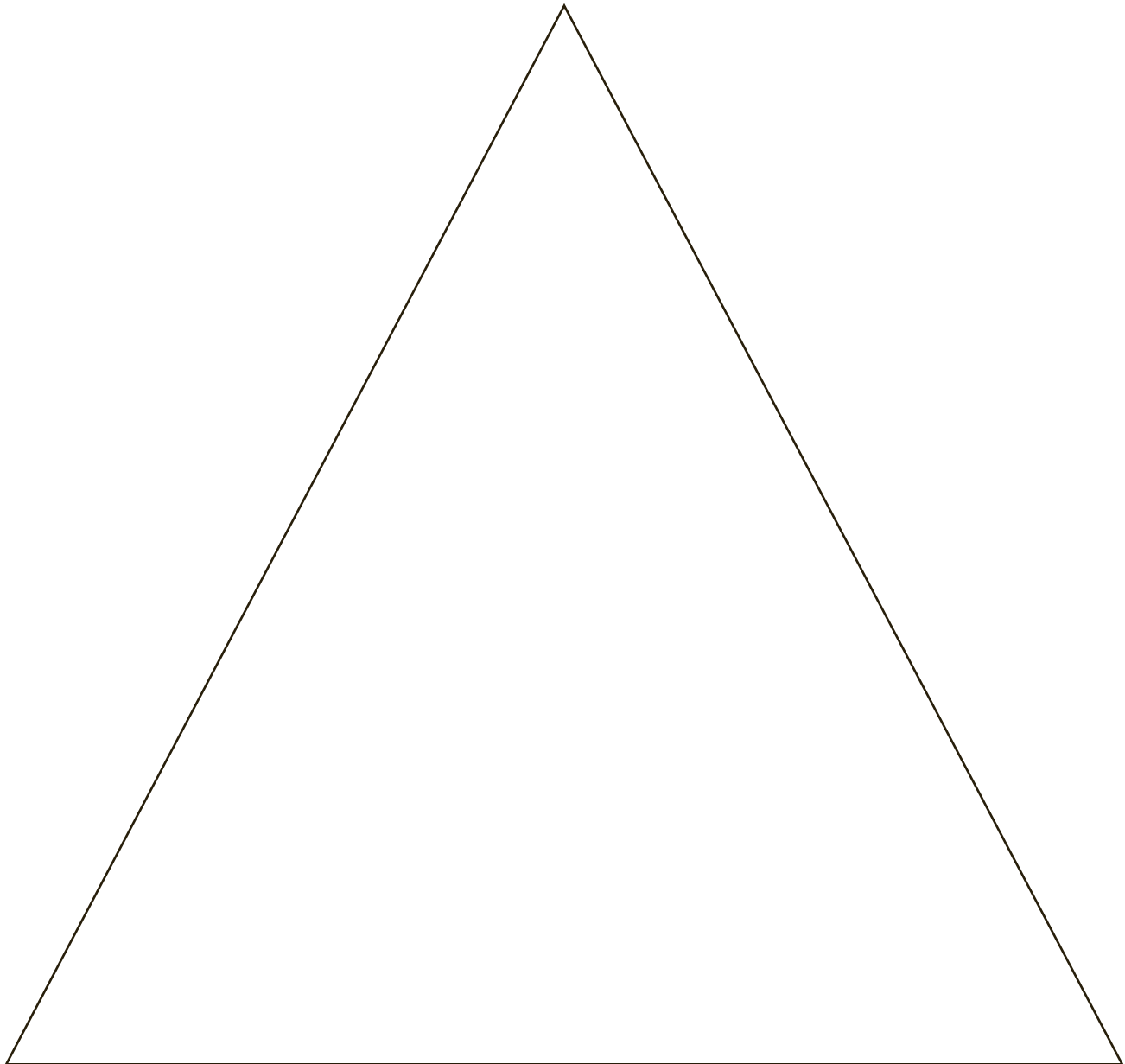
Another Look at Levels of Meaning

Directions: Refer to **Handout 15**, and use the pyramid below to identify the levels of meaning you can recognize in *Heart of Darkness*. Place the most basic level of meaning near the bottom of the pyramid and the most analytical near the top. Identify the level to the left, write an example of that level at work inside the pyramid, and describe or draw an appropriate symbol for the level on the right.

Level

Example

Symbol



Lesson 7

Meeting Kurtz

Objectives

- To understand events involving Kurtz and Marlow
- To analyze Conrad/Marlow's portrait of Kurtz

Notes to the Teacher

In chapter 3, Marlow achieves the object of his journey to the station. Kurtz, mortally ill, is taken on board the steamer. He escapes once, but Marlow follows and returns him to the ship. Marlow has the opportunity he wanted: he listens to Kurtz, whose central message is summed up in his dying words, "The horror! The horror!"

Almost from the first moment following his arrival in the Congo, Marlow has been hearing about the company's most successful ivory trader. Kurtz, however, is actually part of the action for only a few pages; he is not the novel's main character, but he can be considered its focus. He is a figure rich in meaning, a perfect example of the failure of European economic imperialism in Africa. He may have come to the Congo with the best of intentions, but he has ended up exploiting the Africans. When Kurtz finally appears on the scene in the novel, he is so frail that his strong, deep voice is all that remains. His direct influence comes entirely through his eloquent words. Marlow, for one, is profoundly affected by him.

In this lesson, students clarify events involved in Marlow's encounter with Kurtz. They retrace events involved in unraveling the mystery of Kurtz, and they consider ways that he emerges as a tragic hero. Finally, they analyze Kurtz's effect on Marlow.

Prior to this lesson, students need to have completed reading chapter 3.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 17**, and direct small groups to complete it.

Suggested Responses:

1. Setting—Kurtz's run-down station, with the ominous poles topped with human heads; an awareness of hostile forces

all around and eager to prevent Kurtz's departure

2. First view of Kurtz—on a stretcher, emaciated, but still with power to control others
 3. On board—Kurtz is placed in a cabin; Marlow describes the grieving Africans, including a majestic woman; people—the agent and the Russian—talk about Kurtz.
 4. The escape—Kurtz leaves the ship, but a determined Marlow trails him and returns him without much resistance.
 5. Back on board—Kurtz talks, indeed appears to rave, about his life and his plans.
 6. Kurtz's words—Kurtz talks about his great plans.
 7. Kurtz's personal papers—Before his death, Kurtz entrusts Marlow with letters and a photograph.
 8. Kurtz's death—Just before he dies, he whispers, "The horror! The horror!"
2. Distribute **Handout 18**. Remind students that it is possible to read *Heart of Darkness* as a mystery, and state that in chapter 3 the mystery is resolved. Direct students to complete the handout.

Suggested Responses:

Chapter 1

Clues—Marlow hears many vague rumors about a remarkable ivory trader named Kurtz. (See Lesson 4 for specifics.) At this point Marlow is vaguely interested, but mostly preoccupied with his own work.

Quotation—"Oh, he will go far, very far."

Chapter 2

Clues—Rumor has it that Kurtz is very sick, and for some other agents this is a great business opportunity. The native people have a special reverence for him. Marlow is eager to meet him and to listen to him talk.

Quotation—“... that was exactly what I had been looking forward to—a talk with Kurtz.” Marlow also speaks of “certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites.”

Chapter 3

Clues—Kurtz has become ravaged in both body and soul, a victim of the injustices in which he himself has been a master hand. He is presented mainly as a voice, one in a sense “crying in the darkness,” a kind of degraded prophet. Still, Marlow emphasizes that he was a truly remarkable person.

Quotation—“The horror! The horror!”

3. State that we often classify literature in various genres, for example, tragedy, comedy, and satire. Cite examples from students' shared experience. Then focus on the nature of tragedy. Ask students to identify tragedies they have studied in the past. List titles on the board, and ask the class to brainstorm characteristics of tragedy.
4. Distribute **Handout 19**, and review the characteristics of a tragedy, making additional comments such as the following to clarify each point:
 - The tragic hero is often of aristocratic blood. Examples include King Oedipus, who is so intelligent that he can solve the Sphinx's riddle, and Macbeth, a military hero.
 - Flaws include pride, arrogance, and ambition. Oedipus thinks that he can outwit the gods; Macbeth excuses himself from moral standards.
 - The character who seemed to “have it all” loses it all and ends up wretched (like Oedipus) or dead (like Macbeth).
 - The character learns from his or her experience. Oedipus recognizes the superiority of the gods, and Macbeth knows that he has ruined his life.
 - Aristotle said that tragedy evokes pity and fear from the audience. If these terrible things could happen to such a talented, exceptional person, what disasters could befall us?

5. Direct partners to complete the handout.

Suggested Responses:

Noble person—Kurtz is a remarkable person: a successful businessman, a powerful speaker, an artist, a musician, a writer, a magnetic personality.

Flaw—Kurtz sees himself as above the rules; he accepts the assumptions of European imperialism; he allows himself to become a kind of god to the natives.

Happiness to misery—“The horror! The horror!” These are not words one hopes to say on one's deathbed.

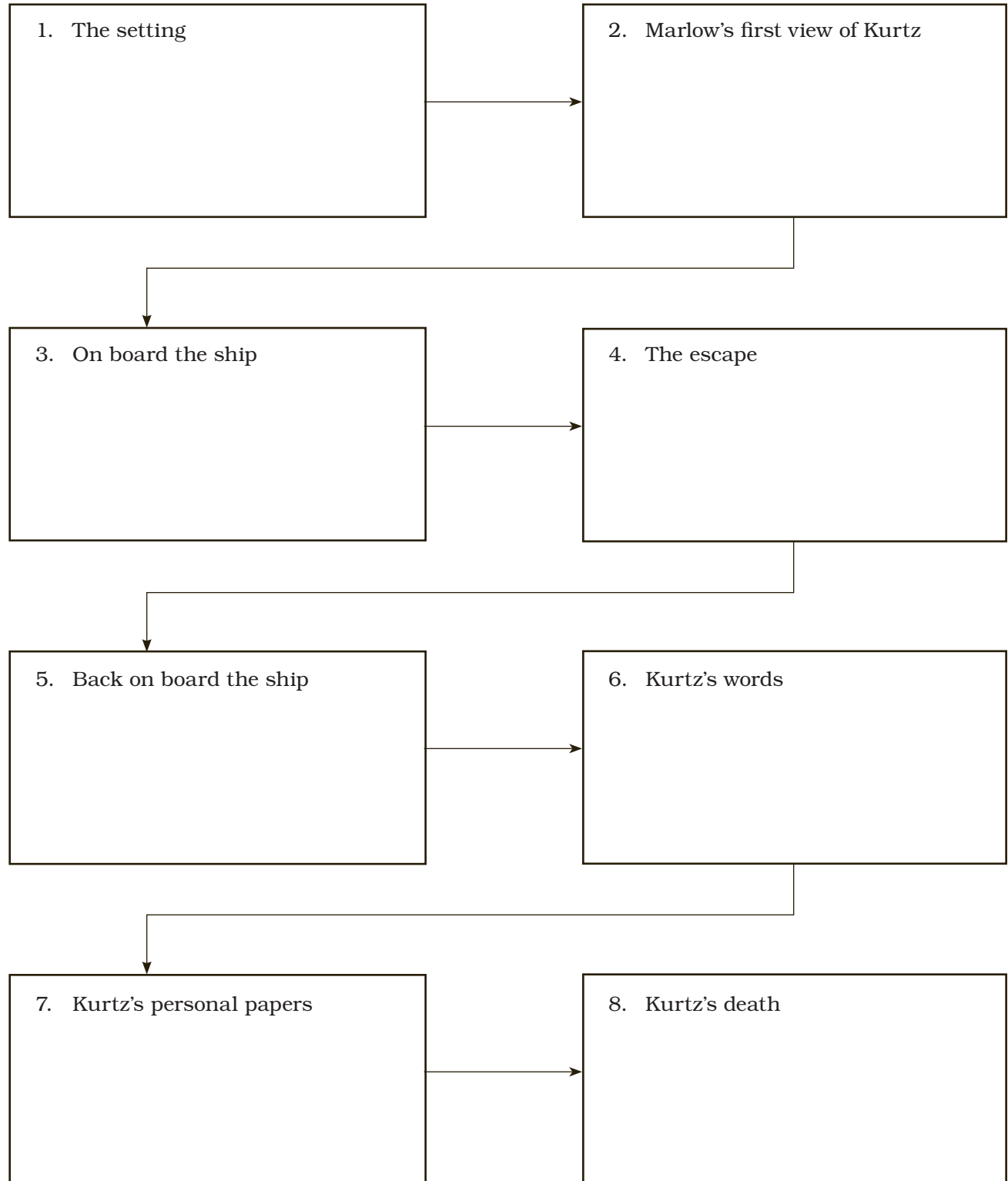
Ignorance to insight—He recognizes the corruption into which he has fallen; as he dies, he knows what he has become.

Pity and fear—Marlow, at least, is profoundly moved with pity and fear. Kurtz is not the main character in the novel we are reading, but he is the focal character in the story Marlow is telling.

6. Refer students to the passage in which Marlow reflects on Kurtz's impact on him. It appears a few paragraphs after Kurtz's death. Focus attention on the following statement: “He had stepped over the edge, while I had been permitted to draw back my hesitating foot.” Ask students to interpret that statement. (Marlow could have followed in Kurtz's footsteps, but he did not.)

A Dramatic Rescue Attempt

Directions: Use the following flow chart to provide details involved in the attempt to rescue Kurtz from his station.



Unraveling the Mystery of Kurtz

Directions: By the end of the novel, the mystery of Kurtz has been largely solved, although parts of his identity remain forever enigmatic. Identify Marlow's gradual revelation of the clues involved. Include specific quotations.

Chapter	Clues	Quotations
Hazy rumors in chapter 1		
New evidence in chapter 2		
Recognizing abomination in chapter 3		

Tragic Hero	Kurtz
A journey from happiness and success to utter misery	
A concomitant journey from blindness or ignorance to insight	
An audience response of pity and fear	

Lesson 8

Marlow's Changing Character

Objectives

- To compare and contrast the African warrior woman and Kurtz's Intended
- To analyze Marlow's meeting with the Intended
- To examine the dynamism of Marlow as a character

Notes to the Teacher

Very early in the novel Marlow expresses his belief that women live in an unreal world and need protection from reality. Chapter 3 presents two vivid portraits of women, one the African warrior, the other Kurtz's fiancée. The remarkable contrast between the two enhances Conrad's indictment of imperialism.

Also early in the novel, Marlow asserts his abhorrence for lies, and throughout the novel he appears to be a truthful and reliable narrator. Still, in his conversation with the Intended, he lies blatantly about Kurtz's dying words. The urge to protect the woman outweighs the value of truth.

Although Marlow's focus in telling his story is the reality of his journey to the Congo and his encounter with Kurtz, the novel itself is more concerned with the impact of the experience on Marlow himself. On one level, the subject of the novel is Marlow's voyage of discovery and self-discovery. The enlightened figure on the *Nellie* is quite different from the young man who first set off to Africa.

In this lesson, students address those three topics as they culminate their study of chapter 3.

Procedure

1. Distribute **Handout 20**. Point out to students that there are several key moments in chapter 3 that they have not yet examined. Have small groups complete part A.

Suggested Responses:

Environment—*river, forest*

Clothing—*"draped in striped and fringed cloths"; "brass leggings . . . brass wire*

gauntlets"; "hair . . . in the shape of a helmet"; "the value of several elephant tusks upon her"

Gestures—*"stood still; and faced us"; "opened her bare arms and threw them up rigid above her head"; "stretched tragically her bare arms after us"*

Walk—*"measured steps"; "carried her head high"*

General description—*"a wild and gorgeous apparition of a woman"; "savage and superb; wild-eyed and magnificent . . . ominous and stately"; "barbarous and superb"*

Responses—*The Russian says, "I really think I would have tried to shoot her."*

2. Ask students if Marlow expresses fear of the woman. Lead them to see that he is amazed and awed, but not fearful. He knows that blowing the steamer's whistle will disperse the natives.
3. Remind students that Kurtz entrusted Marlow with a packet of personal papers. Time passes while Marlow recovers from a serious illness, probably malaria, but finally he delivers the papers to Kurtz's fiancée.
4. Have small groups complete part B of **Handout 20**.

Suggested Responses:

Environment—*"a lofty drawing room," with all the accoutrements of prosperity, which Marlow compares to a tomb*

Clothing—*"all in black"*

Gestures—*"took both my hands in hers"; "carried her sorrowful head as though she were proud of that sorrow"*

Walk—*"floating towards me in the dusk"*

General description—*"not girlish"; "fair hair . . . pale visage . . . pure brow"*

Responses of others—*Marlow says he felt " . . . as though I had blundered into a place of cruel and absurd mysteries not fit for a human being to behold."*

5. Lead students to understand that Marlow respects and even admires Kurtz's fiancée, but, like the African woman, she seems alien to him, as if she comes from a different world.
6. Point out that Marlow reflects that the African woman and the fiancée have in common their grief at losing Kurtz, and they make a similar gesture of reaching out, yet they are very different.
7. Have students complete part C of the handout individually.

Suggested Responses:

The women represent contrasting cultural ideals. The white woman is associated with death, the African with vitality. The white woman is refined and gentle, the African exotic and powerful. The white woman is hidden away indoors, while the African proudly walks outside.

8. Ask two students who have demonstrated dramatic ability to role-play the dialogue between Marlow and the Intended. Direct the Marlow figure to perform in a way that reflects Marlow's quiet discomfort and desire to protect the woman. Direct the person playing the fiancée to reflect her quiet, grieving confidence.
9. Use the following questions to discuss the passage.
 - What are some ironies in the Intended's comments? (*There are major discrepancies between the truth and her beliefs—her idea that she knew Kurtz better than anyone else, that he attracted the best in others, that he was thoroughly noble.*)
 - Why would she want to know Kurtz's last words? (*to feel closer to him, to sense that he was at peace, to know that his last thoughts were of her*)
 - What does Marlow tell her? (*Instead of citing Kurtz's actual last words, "The horror! The horror!," he says Kurtz died saying her name.*)
 - Why does Marlow—who hates lies—lie to her? (*He explains himself: "I could not tell her. It would have been too dark." He chooses to protect her from the truth and leave her safe in her world of illusions.*)

- Is his decision to lie a good one? (*Certainly it is understandable—no one would want to share that kind of bad news about a loved one's death. Still, the lie seals the woman in a world of false beliefs.*)
 - Does Marlow have any alternatives? (*Yes, but they would have necessitated a lot of talk and tact. For example, he could have explained that the Congo changed Kurtz, so that he was no longer the man she once knew.*)
10. If necessary, remind students that dynamic characters change in significant ways, while static characters do not. State that Marlow is highly dynamic—that he, in fact, is the main character of this novel.
 11. Distribute **Handout 21**, and direct students to complete it. While answers will vary, the following are among the most frequently cited responses.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Does most of the talking; seems less passive*
2. *Seems to have remained polite and honest*
3. *Is more reflective, philosophical*
4. *Now recognizes the evil of the enterprise (of imperialism)*
5. *Is much less self-confident; was shaken in his confidence when he saw what had happened to Kurtz*
6. *Has acquired wisdom from his experiences; says, "The most you can hope from [life] is some knowledge of yourself."*

A Study in Contrasts

Part A.

Directions: In chapter 3, Marlow describes a magnificent African warrior woman. Reread the accounts, and record the words and phrases used to present her.

Aspect	Description
Environment	
Clothing	
Gestures	
Walk	
General descriptive words and phrases	
Responses of others	

Part B.

Directions: Near the end of chapter 3, Marlow describes his meeting with Kurtz's fiancée. Reread his description of her, and record words and phrases used to present her.

Aspect	Description
Environment	
Clothing	
Gestures	
Walk	
General descriptive words and phrases	
Responses of others	

Part C.

Directions: Examine the contrasts between the two women, and brainstorm a list of ways their differences illuminate *Heart of Darkness* as a study of imperialism and race relations.

Marlow—A Dynamic Character

Directions: Examine the following characteristics of Marlow as a young man, and determine in what specific ways Marlow seems to have changed as a result of his experiences.

The Young Marlow	Marlow on the <i>Nellie</i>
1. Good at listening and observing	
2. Polite and honest	
3. Action-oriented; capable and focused on work	
4. Willing to work for the Company	
5. Self-confident	
6. Sure of his beliefs about life	

Lesson 9

Light and Darkness

Objectives

- To consider implications of the title
- To recognize Joseph Conrad's motif of light and darkness
- To formulate themes of *Heart of Darkness*

Notes to the Teacher

Joseph Conrad's choice of title immediately alerts the reader to expect imagery associated with darkness. As the novel progresses, hardly a page goes by that is not replete with images of light and/or darkness. Unlike some literary works, in which light and darkness have clear and specific symbolic associations, Conrad's symbolism is enigmatic. His story, like Marlow's stories, has an aura that cannot be pinned down.

The novel's themes operate on many levels, a reality students began to explore in Lesson 6. The novel tells the story of Marlow's growth to wisdom and insight. It illustrates the evils involved in exploitation and its destructive impact on both victim and abuser. It shows how the "fascination of the abomination" can undermine even the best of humans.

In this lesson, students begin by considering ramifications of the title. They then identify multiple examples of Conrad's subtle and not-so-subtle usage of images of light and darkness. They go on to formulate themes of the novel. Finally, they create visual images to reflect the novel itself.

You may want to provide additional copies of **Handouts 15** and **16** (Lesson 6). For the final procedure, materials such as the following will be needed: construction paper; markers, crayons, or colored pencils; magazines and newspapers; computer graphics programs.

Procedure

1. Ask students to consider Conrad's choice of title: *Heart of Darkness*. Distribute **Handout 22**, and direct students to complete it individually. Tell them responses can relate to the novel or to life in general.

2. Replicate the webs from the handout on the board or on overhead transparencies. Then have volunteers identify and explain associations. Record responses for class consideration. Answers will vary, but the following are some of the most common.

Suggested Responses:

Heart—*love, blood, life, center, core, break, compassion*

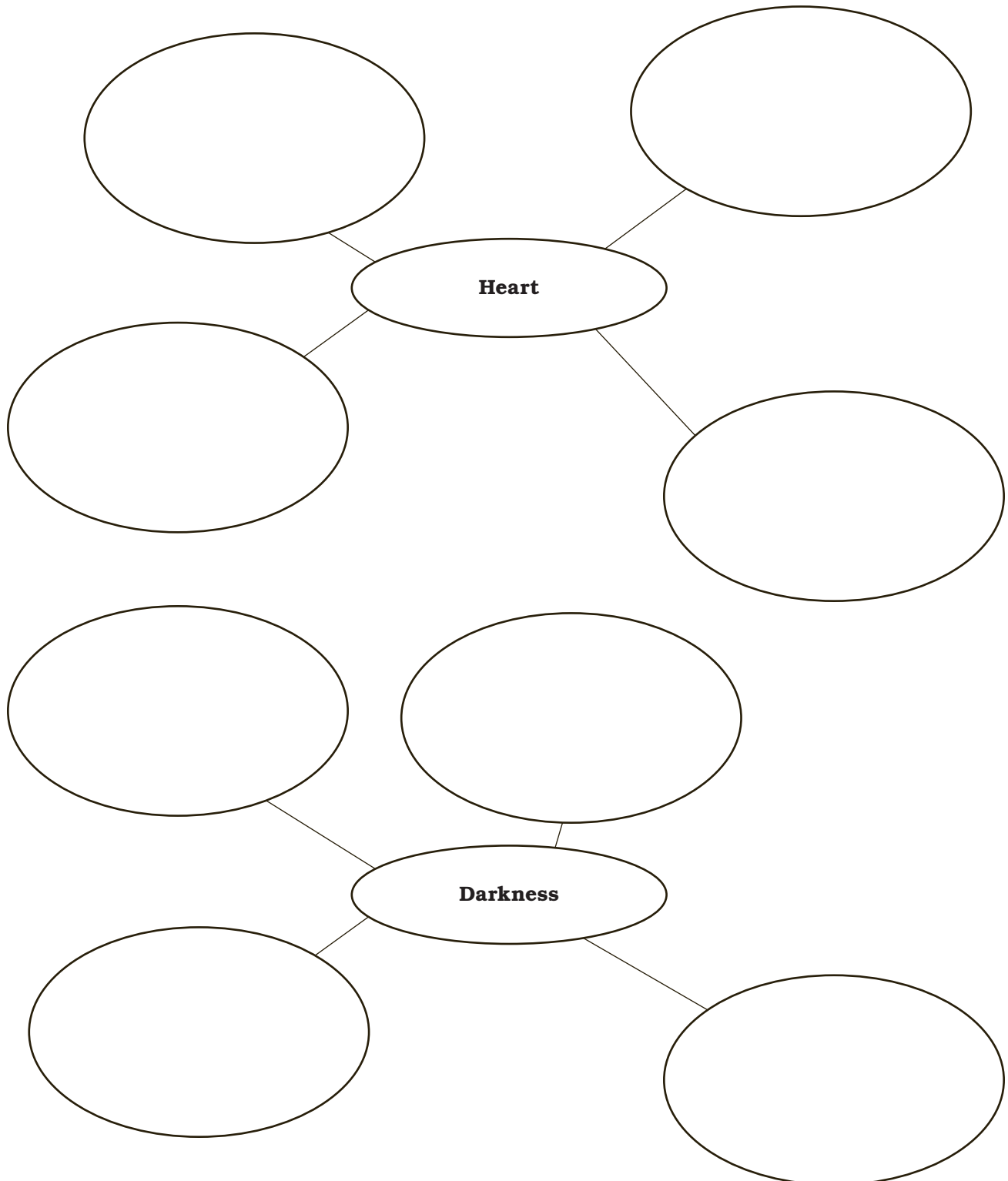
Darkness—*night, ignorance, sleep, shadows, intensity, evil, secrecy*

3. State that the novel includes numerous images of darkness, light, and states in between the two. This motif, or imagery pattern, is intrinsic to the work's artistry and meaning.
4. Divide the class into small groups, and distribute **Handout 23**. Assign each group one of the novel's chapters so that each chapter is amply covered, and direct groups to complete their section of the handout.
5. Have small groups share findings with the class as a whole so that all students can record examples for each chapter. Lead the class to see multiple associations with each type of image. Darkness and death are associated with London and with Belgium as much as with Africa. The color white is often connected with tombs and death. Marlow tells the entire story during the night.
6. Emphasize that an author's use of recurrent images connects intimately with the work's themes. Refer students back to the description of Marlow's stories in chapter 1: "To him the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside, enveloping the tale, in the likeness of one of these misty halos that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine." In other words, Marlow's stories shed light.

7. Have students retrieve **Handouts 15** and **16** from their notes. Review the levels of interpretation. If necessary, review the term *theme* (a statement or implication about life, human nature, reality, etc.).
8. Have partners collaborate to articulate the novel's themes at various interpretation levels. Then have the class share results. Lead students to relate ideas to the title. Ask students to identify the heart of darkness to which the title refers (*source of evil and savage destruction, unknowability, danger, blindness to reality, the Congo itself, etc.*).
9. Direct students to use available materials to create visual representations of the heart of darkness—either the reality or the novel. When they have finished, have them share their work, and post results in the classroom.

Implications of Conrad's Title

Directions: Brainstorm images and ideas you associate with the two key words in the novel's title, *heart* and *darkness*. Write them in the web bubbles below.



Images of Darkness and Light

Directions: Reexamine *Heart of Darkness*, looking for specific examples of Conrad's references to darkness and light. Record additional direct quotations from the text in the chart.

Chapter	Examples
1	"And this also has been one of the dark places of the earth." "nothing but black shadows of disease and starvation"
2	"you are being assaulted by the powers of darkness" "certain midnight dances ending with unspeakable rites"
3	"His was an impenetrable darkness." "It would have been too dark—too dark altogether."

Lesson 10

Is *Heart of Darkness* Racist?

Objectives

- To understand Chinua Achebe's critical commentary on Joseph Conrad's novel
- To use Achebe's discourse as a basis of discussion

Notes to the Teacher

Heart of Darkness is a staple in many advanced and honors level courses, partly because the novel lends itself to many analytical approaches. One can focus on and derive great insight from considerations of rich and complex imagery, figurative language, symbolism, characterization, point of view, and thematic implications. In most classes, as well as in the first nine lessons of this unit, the assumption is that this is a great novel, a classic, and that, while students may find it daunting, it is beyond criticism.

In 1975, when Chinua Achebe delivered his famous speech decrying Joseph Conrad's essential racism in the novel, the celebrated Nigerian writer flew boldly in the face of the conventional view. As an African, a novelist, a person well acquainted with both England and America, a college professor, and a former diplomat, Achebe presents impressive credentials. His problems with Conrad are not literary in nature, but rather political and ethical. In considering Achebe's comments, students are invited to reflect on a legitimate perspective, to recognize its merits, and to synthesize it with their own views.

Achebe's entire lecture, "An Image of Africa," is available on several Web sites, and it also appears in the Norton Critical Edition of the novel. Prior to this lesson, students need to access the speech and read it; encourage students to bring copies of the entire speech to class. They should also have completed the reading and basic discussion of *Heart of Darkness*.

In this lesson, students analyze Achebe's speech. They then learn some basic facts about Achebe and consider his credentials as a critic. Finally, they focus on one vivid section of the speech and use it as a basis to articulate their own responses.

Procedure

1. Ask students to summarize Chinua Achebe's assessment of *Heart of Darkness*. (*He condemns the novel for its inherent racism.*) Ask students what they think of his ideas. Encourage a broad range of reasoning.
2. Distribute **Handout 24**, and have small groups complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *Both anecdotes reflect an essential and culturally accepted ignorance about Africa.*
 2. *Westerners seem to view Africa as a foil or opposite to Europe—as a negation rather than as a positive entity.*
 3. *Achebe admits Conrad's fine style and gift at storytelling, and later says that *Heart of Darkness* has some fine moments.*
 4. *The passages demonstrate how Conrad's descriptions dehumanize Africans.*
 5. *Achebe recognizes the complex layering of voices: Conrad, Marlow, an anonymous middleman.*
 6. *He says that the novel propounds an untrue and unfair view of African people.*
 7. *The reference leads to the realization that Africa was and is, in fact, culturally rich.*
 8. *The complex comparison suggests a kind of scapegoating.*
 9. *He condemns the novel because it espouses an essentially racist view, one which is especially dangerous because its myths tend to be basic to much Western thinking.*
3. Distribute **Handout 25**, and have students complete the exercise.

Suggested Responses:

1. *A novelist would be well acquainted with the challenges and responsibilities involved in writing. A college professor would be trained in critical thinking and*

scholarly discourse. A diplomat must be politically aware and astute.

2. *First, as a Nigerian, Achebe would have a very different view of Africa and Africans than Conrad did. His travels in England and the United States would also give him familiarity with Western perspectives and, possibly, with experiences of essential racism at work.*
4. Distribute **Handout 26**, and read the excerpt aloud to the class as if you were delivering the lecture, or ask a student with dramatic flair to read it. Then lead a discussion of the questions.

Suggested Responses:

1. *The novel is not a great work of literature because it is fundamentally racist, essentially unjust in its perspectives.*
2. *The novel's language and content consistently dehumanize Africa and Africans.*
3. *Achebe presents clear points of view, along with textual evidence to support them. He exhibits cultural knowledge. The emotional appeal comes through powerful diction and syntax, as well as through well-chosen figures of speech.*
4. *The reader should consider both Achebe's compelling perspective and previously considered literary concerns such as Conrad's stunning use of imagery and figurative language, as well as his clear denunciation of political and economic imperialism.*

Chinua Achebe's Indictment of *Heart of Darkness*

Directions: Read "An Image of Africa," Achebe's comments about *Heart of Darkness*, and use the following questions to consider his ideas.

1. The lecture begins with two anecdotes. What is their purpose?
2. How does Achebe think Westerners view Africa?
3. What good things does he acknowledge about Conrad?
4. Achebe cites a number of passages from the novel. Why?
5. How does Achebe describe the novel's point of view?
6. According to Achebe, what is essentially wrong with the novel?
7. Why does he refer to Paul Gauguin?
8. Explain the reference to Dorian Gray.
9. What are Achebe's main points in the speech?

Chinua Achebe

Directions: Read the information about the celebrated Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe. Then answer the questions that follow.

Chinua Achebe was born in Nigeria in 1930. He attended university there, studying English, history, and theology; he also went to college in England. His career has included work in broadcasting, as a diplomat, as a college professor, and, probably most notably, as a writer. He is most widely known as the author of *Things Fall Apart*, a highly acclaimed and frequently assigned novel about the effects of colonialism and change on traditional African culture. Achebe is considered a major voice in postcolonial literature, which focuses on ways imperialism affects all of the persons and cultures involved.

In 1990, he was seriously injured in a car accident in Nigeria; as a result, he was partially paralyzed and became wheelchair-bound. He and his family came to the United States for medical care, and he subsequently joined the faculty at Bard College in New York. A combination of factors, including his health needs and the precarious political situation in Nigeria, caused him to remain a somewhat reluctant exile from his home country.

In 1975, Achebe delivered a lecture about Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*; his comments ignited a storm of discussion and controversy about the novel in particular and postcolonialism in general. The lecture, which was later published, is available on several Internet sites and in critical editions of the novel. In the lecture, Achebe addresses head-on issues of race and racism in the text specifically and in Western culture generally. His passionate repudiation of Conrad's novel can catalyze new insights and revisionist views among today's readers of a work long considered a classic and frequently suggested as an option for writing in the third, open-ended question in the Advanced Placement Examination in Literature.

1. Identify Achebe's credentials as a critic of *Heart of Darkness*.
2. What perspectives would he bring to his comments?

An Excerpt from Chinua Achebe's Speech

Directions: Read the following excerpts from Chinua Achebe's famous lecture on Joseph Conrad's novel. Then respond to the items that follow.

. . . Joseph Conrad was a thoroughgoing racist. That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely unremarked. . . .

. . . The real question is the dehumanization of Africa and Africans which this age-long attitude has fostered and continues to foster in the world. And the question is whether a novel which celebrates this dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race, can be called a great work of art. My answer is: No, it cannot. . . .

Certainly Conrad had a problem with niggers. His inordinate love of that word itself should be of interest to psychoanalysts. Sometimes his fixation on blackness is equally interesting. . . .

. . . I am talking about a book which parades in the most vulgar fashion prejudices and insults from which a section of mankind has suffered untold agonies and atrocities in the past and continues to do so in many ways and many places today. I am talking about a story in which the very humanity of black people is called in question. . . .

Although the work of redressing which needs to be done may appear too daunting, I believe it is not one day too soon to begin. Conrad saw and condemned the evil of imperial exploitation but was strangely unaware of the racism on which it sharpened its iron tooth. . . .¹

1. Identify Achebe's verdict on Conrad and *Heart of Darkness*.
2. Summarize his reasons for this position.
3. Show how Achebe uses both logic and emotion in dealing with his topic.
4. How do his observations affect your reading of *Heart of Darkness*?

¹Chinua Achebe, "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," in *Heart of Darkness: An Authoritative Text, Backgrounds and Sources, Criticism*, ed. Robert Kimbrough (New York: Norton, 1988), 257–59, 262.

Vocabulary—Chapter 1

Directions: Use a dictionary to define the following words as Joseph Conrad uses them in *Heart of Darkness*.

alacrity

assegais

beguiled

diaphanous

emissary

enigma

ichthyosaurus

immutability

indefatigable

inscrutable

interminable

lugubrious

prevaricator

primeval

propensity

rapacity

recrudescence

sententiously

sepulchre

wanton

Vocabulary—Chapter 2

Directions: Use a dictionary to define the following words as Joseph Conrad uses them in *Heart of Darkness*.

altruistic

evanescent

fortitude

fusillade

harlequin

imbecility

impalpable

implacable

incontinently

inscrutable

intrepidity

peroration

pestiferous

preeminently

prodigious

recondite

rudimentary

sagacious

serried

wraith

Vocabulary—Chapter 3

Directions: Use a dictionary to define the following words as Joseph Conrad uses them in *Heart of Darkness*.

aspiration

atrocious

aversion

decorous

degradation

discretion

eloquent

fecund

guileless

incantation

inexorable

insatiable

irresolutely

languor

odious

placid

ponderous

senile

tenebrous

voracious

Quiz—Chapter 1

Directions: Indicate the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. *Heart of Darkness* begins in
 - a. Belgium.
 - b. England.
 - c. Africa.
 - d. France.
- _____ 2. According to the narrator, Marlow's stories are
 - a. amusing.
 - b. enigmatic.
 - c. frightening.
 - d. simple.
- _____ 3. Marlow says that he was finally able to get employment through the intervention of
 - a. his aunt.
 - b. his uncle.
 - c. his sister.
 - d. a former commanding officer.
- _____ 4. In his description of the office in Belgium, Marlow describes two women who are
 - a. eating lunch.
 - b. writing letters.
 - c. sleeping.
 - d. knitting.
- _____ 5. Marlow says that as a child, he had a special interest in
 - a. maps.
 - b. old coins.
 - c. toy ships.
 - d. puzzles.
- _____ 6. Marlow says that he found Fresleven's
 - a. diary.
 - b. bones.
 - c. portrait.
 - d. daughter.
- _____ 7. Marlow hears several people talking about a man named
 - a. Heinz.
 - b. Livingston.
 - c. Kurtz.
 - d. Werner.
- _____ 8. The company seems to trade mostly in
 - a. copper.
 - b. rubber.
 - c. ivory.
 - d. diamonds.

- _____9. Marlow is interested in a sketch that depicts
- a. a lion eating its prey.
 - b. a dead African princess.
 - c. a blindfolded woman.
 - d. an African mask.
- _____10. In order to get his ship in working order, Marlow needs
- a. sails.
 - b. rivets.
 - c. more crewmen.
 - d. fuel.

Quiz—Chapter 2

Directions: Indicate the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. Throughout the chapter, Marlow is most eager to
 - a. return to England.
 - b. acquire a big shipment of ivory.
 - c. find food and clean water.
 - d. meet Kurtz.
- _____ 2. Marlow says that most of the crew were
 - a. cannibals.
 - b. vegetarians.
 - c. women.
 - d. white men.
- _____ 3. What food does the crew bring on board?
 - a. wheat and oats
 - b. hippo meat
 - c. rhino meat
 - d. dried fish
- _____ 4. Who is killed with a spear?
 - a. the station manager
 - b. a man wearing pink pajamas
 - c. Kurtz
 - d. the helmsman
- _____ 5. Marlow finds a book about
 - a. seamanship.
 - b. African animals.
 - c. tribal masks.
 - d. the creation of the world.
- _____ 6. What does Marlow throw away?
 - a. his hat
 - b. rotten hippo meat
 - c. his shoes
 - d. a book
- _____ 7. What makes it impossible for Marlow to move his ship away from an attack?
 - a. dense fog
 - b. surrounding alligators
 - c. logs in the water
 - d. a big hole in the ship
- _____ 8. Marlow meets a young white man dressed like
 - a. a woman.
 - b. a clown.
 - c. an African warrior.
 - d. a priest.

- _____9. Outside Kurtz's station Marlow sees
- a. a white picket fence.
 - b. cages full of snakes.
 - c. many ivory carvings.
 - d. decorated poles.
- _____10. Marlow hears that the purpose of the attack was to
- a. drive all white men out of Africa.
 - b. obtain food for starving people.
 - c. protect Kurtz.
 - d. entertain visiting tribesmen.

Quiz—Chapter 3

Directions: Indicate the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. The Russian's main attitude toward Kurtz seems to be one of
 - a. admiration.
 - b. pity.
 - c. anger.
 - d. possessiveness.
- _____ 2. The posts at Kurtz's station are topped by
 - a. ivory carvings.
 - b. elephant heads.
 - c. human heads.
 - d. maps of Africa.
- _____ 3. Of all the Africans Marlow sees on shore, he is most impressed by
 - a. a little boy crying under a tree.
 - b. an old man playing a drum.
 - c. an elaborately dressed woman.
 - d. a tribal chief in full native dress.
- _____ 4. How many times does Kurtz escape from Marlow's steamer?
 - a. never
 - b. once
 - c. twice
 - d. three times
- _____ 5. Marlow is most impressed by Kurtz's
 - a. ability to listen.
 - b. business success.
 - c. confidence in the natives.
 - d. voice.
- _____ 6. What does Kurtz entrust to Marlow's care?
 - a. his business records
 - b. personal papers
 - c. his paintings
 - d. the location of the tribes who gave him ivory
- _____ 7. What are Kurtz's last words?
 - a. "The horror! The horror!"
 - b. "My love!"
 - c. "More ivory!"
 - d. "I'm sorry."
- _____ 8. Kurtz's body is
 - a. thrown into the river.
 - b. buried in Africa.
 - c. cremated.
 - d. returned to Europe for burial.

- _____9. After his job in the Congo, Marlow
- a. gets another job back on the ocean.
 - b. decides to settle down to shore life.
 - c. must recover from a serious illness.
 - d. moves into Kurtz's house to continue his work as an ivory trader.
- _____10. When Marlow visits with Kurtz's fiancée, he
- a. tells her the whole story of Kurtz's death.
 - b. tells her that Kurtz is alive and well in Africa.
 - c. tells her that she deserves someone much better than Kurtz.
 - d. lies to her about Kurtz's dying words.

Objective Test

Directions: Indicate the letter of the best answer.

- _____ 1. By birth Joseph Conrad was
 - a. English.
 - b. French.
 - c. Belgian.
 - d. Polish.
- _____ 2. *Heart of Darkness* begins in
 - a. England.
 - b. France.
 - c. Belgium.
 - d. Africa.
- _____ 3. Opening descriptions of Marlow compare him to
 - a. Jesus.
 - b. an angel.
 - c. the Buddha.
 - d. Neptune.
- _____ 4. Marlow's stories are
 - a. similar to most sea tales.
 - b. simpler than most sea tales.
 - c. more complex than most sea tales.
 - d. totally unlike other sailors' stories.
- _____ 5. How long does it take Marlow to tell this story?
 - a. one evening
 - b. several evenings
 - c. one whole day
 - d. several weeks
- _____ 6. Marlow compares the Congo to a snake and himself to a
 - a. bird.
 - b. rat.
 - c. rabbit.
 - d. fish.
- _____ 7. Who helped Marlow get a job with the ivory company?
 - a. his sister
 - b. his aunt
 - c. a fellow seaman
 - d. a Russian
- _____ 8. Marlow says that Brussels reminds him of
 - a. a tomb.
 - b. heaven.
 - c. hell.
 - d. food.

- _____ 9. Whose bones were found among weeds?
- a. Kurtz's
 - b. an elephant's
 - c. the helmsman's
 - d. Fresleven's
- _____ 10. When Marlow visits a doctor, the doctor wants to measure his
- a. wrist.
 - b. head.
 - c. chest span.
 - d. IQ.
- _____ 11. When Marlow finally arrives at his station, where is his ship?
- a. on its way to Kurtz's station
 - b. at the bottom of the river
 - c. up in dry dock
 - d. in pieces on the shore
- _____ 12. Marlow views a painting of
- a. an African chief.
 - b. a herd of wild elephants.
 - c. a blindfolded woman.
 - d. an African princess.
- _____ 13. Marlow has trouble repairing his ship because he lacks
- a. caulking material.
 - b. hauling equipment.
 - c. rivets.
 - d. assistants.
- _____ 14. Marlow hears rumors that Kurtz
- a. has married an African woman.
 - b. has run away from his station.
 - c. is seriously ill.
 - d. has died.
- _____ 15. Marlow keeps describing one man on his ship as wearing
- a. pink pajamas.
 - b. a white suit.
 - c. clothes with many colored patches.
 - d. a bowtie.
- _____ 16. What do the white passengers throw overboard?
- a. the helmsman
 - b. hippo meat
 - c. one of the black crewmen
 - d. their hats
- _____ 17. How does Marlow scare off his attackers?
- a. He fires a cannon.
 - b. He threatens to kill the helmsman.
 - c. He blows the whistle.
 - d. He threatens to kill Kurtz.

- _____ 18. What does Marlow find by the woodpile?
- a. a rifle
 - b. a map
 - c. a box of rivets
 - d. a book
- _____ 19. What are on top of the posts at Kurtz's station?
- a. lights
 - b. human heads
 - c. ivory carvings
 - d. arrows
- _____ 20. Descriptions of Kurtz stress his
- a. powerful body.
 - b. incredible intelligence.
 - c. compelling voice.
 - d. accumulation of riches.
- _____ 21. Marlow's attitude toward the African woman he sees on shore is
- a. pity.
 - b. awe.
 - c. anger.
 - d. envy.
- _____ 22. Kurtz's last words are
- a. "Why me?"
 - b. "The horror! The horror!"
 - c. "My darling! My Intended!"
 - d. "The fascination of the abomination!"
- _____ 23. On Marlow's trip back down the Congo, he
- a. has a broken leg.
 - b. has a nervous breakdown.
 - c. is very ill.
 - d. stays drunk.
- _____ 24. Marlow lies to the Intended because he
- a. pities her.
 - b. is a habitual liar.
 - c. does not know what else to do.
 - d. hates her.
- _____ 25. Where does the novel end?
- a. in the Congo
 - b. in England
 - c. in Belgium
 - d. in France
- _____ 26. Kurtz has dimensions of a tragic hero in
- a. his exceptional personal talents.
 - b. his flaw of arrogance.
 - c. the end of his life.
 - d. all of these.

- _____ 27. The novel is dominated by imagery of
- a. flora and fauna.
 - b. blood and bones.
 - c. light and darkness.
 - d. red, yellow, and blue.
- _____ 28. Where is the “heart of darkness”?
- a. in Africa
 - b. in England
 - c. in Kurtz
 - d. everywhere
- _____ 29. Chinua Achebe criticized the novel for its
- a. racism.
 - b. bias against women.
 - c. artistic flaws.
 - d. outdated themes.
- _____ 30. Conrad’s personal life experiences are most clearly reflected in
- a. the first, unnamed narrator.
 - b. Marlow.
 - c. Kurtz.
 - d. none of these.

Answer Key

Quiz—Chapter 1

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. b |
| 2. b | 7. c |
| 3. a | 8. c |
| 4. d | 9. c |
| 5. a | 10. b |

Quiz—Chapter 2

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. d | 6. c |
| 2. a | 7. a |
| 3. b | 8. b |
| 4. d | 9. d |
| 5. a | 10. c |

Quiz—Chapter 3

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. a | 6. b |
| 2. c | 7. a |
| 3. c | 8. b |
| 4. b | 9. c |
| 5. d | 10. d |

Objective Test

- | | |
|-------|-------|
| 1. d | 16. b |
| 2. a | 17. c |
| 3. c | 18. d |
| 4. c | 19. b |
| 5. a | 20. c |
| 6. a | 21. b |
| 7. b | 22. b |
| 8. a | 23. c |
| 9. d | 24. a |
| 10. b | 25. b |
| 11. b | 26. d |
| 12. c | 27. c |
| 13. c | 28. d |
| 14. c | 29. a |
| 15. a | 30. b |

Follow-Up Activities

Directions: Complete the following activities as directed.

Reading

1. Read and report on another work by Joseph Conrad: *Lord Jim*, “The Secret Sharer,” *Almayer’s Folly*, “Youth,” or “The Lagoon.”
2. Read E. M. Forster’s *A Passage to India*, and compare its perspectives to those in *Heart of Darkness*.
3. Read William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies*, and compare its view of human nature with Joseph Conrad’s.
4. Read Dante’s *Inferno*, and compare his journey to Marlow’s.
5. Read Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, and compare his perspectives to Joseph Conrad’s.
6. Read Barbara Kingsolver’s *The Poisonwood Bible*, and compare her views with Joseph Conrad’s.

Critical Writing

7. Discuss the absence and the presence of women in *Heart of Darkness*.
8. Respond to Chinua Achebe’s criticisms of the novel.
9. Discuss Joseph Conrad’s use of light and dark imagery.
10. Show how Joseph Conrad presents Marlow as a man of wisdom.
11. Analyze Joseph Conrad’s presentation of the company’s representatives.
12. Discuss the effectiveness of the novel’s presentation as a frame story.
13. Discuss multiple significances of the title *Heart of Darkness*.
14. Describe Joseph Conrad’s writing style, including diction, syntax, imagery, and figurative language.

Other Writing Topics

15. How civilized is civilization today? Relate your ideas to those of Joseph Conrad.
16. Is a lie ever justified? In your discussion, include references to Marlow’s lie.
17. Create a story about a contemporary Marlow or Kurtz.
18. Adopt Kurtz’s perspective, and write a series of journal entries reflecting his experiences in the Congo.
19. Write a story about a contemporary journey into the “heart of darkness.”

Performance

20. Adopt the role of Marlow, and deliver a speech intended for a group of high school seniors and juniors.
21. Rewrite a portion of the novel as a stage play, and present it to the class.
22. Dramatize Kurtz speaking to Marlow on the steamer.

Research

23. Research Joseph Conrad’s life to discover how *Heart of Darkness* reflects his experiences.
24. Research the historical exploitation of the Belgian Congo, and compare your findings with Joseph Conrad’s depiction.
25. Research and report on the social, political, and economic realities of life along the Congo today.

Viewing

26. View the film *Apocalypse Now*, and compare/contrast it with *Heart of Darkness*.
27. View the film *Deliverance*, and compare/contrast it with *Heart of Darkness*.

Visual Interpretations

28. Paint or draw a series of key scenes in the novel.
29. Paint or draw images depicting contemporary hearts of darkness.
30. Use computer graphics to create an effective Web site for *Heart of Darkness*.

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Heart of Darkness

ISBN 978-1-56077-827-1

Entire Unit

RL.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
RL.11-12.3	Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).
RL.11-12.5	Analyze how an author's choices concerning how to structure specific parts of a text (e.g., the choice of where to begin or end a story, the choice to provide a comedic or tragic resolution) contribute to its overall structure and meaning as well as its aesthetic impact.
RL.11-12.6	Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant (e.g., satire, sarcasm, irony, or understatement).
RI.11-12.1	Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
RI.11-12.3	Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text.
RI.11-12.5	Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes points clear, convincing, and engaging.
W.11-12.1a	Introduce precise, knowledgeable claim(s), establish the significance of the claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that logically sequences claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
W.11-12.1b	Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly and thoroughly, supplying the most relevant evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level, concerns, values, and possible biases.
W.11-12.1d	Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.

- W.11-12.1e Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- W.11-12.2a Introduce a topic; organize complex ideas, concepts, and information so that each new element builds on that which precedes it to create a unified whole; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., figures, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
- W.11-12.2b Develop the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience's knowledge of the topic.
- W.11-12.2d Use precise language, domain-specific vocabulary, and techniques such as metaphor, simile, and analogy to manage the complexity of the topic.
- W.11-12.2e Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
- W.11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1–3 above.)
- W.11-12.6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.
- SL.11-12.1a Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.
- SL.11-12.1b Work with peers to promote civil, democratic discussions and decision-making, set clear goals and deadlines, and establish individual roles as needed.
- SL.11-12.1c Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that probe reasoning and evidence; ensure a hearing for a full range of positions on a topic or issue; clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions; and promote divergent and creative perspectives.
- SL.11-12.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.
- SL.11-12.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed, and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and a range of formal and informal tasks.
- L.11-12.1a Apply the understanding that usage is a matter of convention, can change over time, and is sometimes contested.

- L.11-12.2b Spell correctly.
- L.11-12.3a Vary syntax for effect, consulting references (e.g., Tufte's *Artful Sentences*) for guidance as needed; apply an understanding of syntax to the study of complex texts when reading.
- L.11-12.4a Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.
- L.11-12.4b Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate different meanings or parts of speech (e.g., *conceive*, *conception*, *conceivable*).
- L.11-12.4c Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, its etymology, or its standard usage.
- L.11-12.5a Interpret figures of speech (e.g., hyperbole, paradox) in context and analyze their role in the text.

Source

Common Core State Standards (Washington, D.C.: National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010)



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ISBN-13: 978-1-56077-827-1

ISBN-10: 1-56077-827-X

ISBN 978-1-56077-827-1



9 781560 778271