

# Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad (Published by Penguin)

Approved for use in Advanced Placement Communication Arts IV

## Summary

*Heart of Darkness* is Joseph Conrad's account of Marlow's literal journey into the jungles of the Congo and his figurative journey into the heart of man's humanity and potential for inhumanity. Marlow and the narrator search for meaning in a troubling and complex world as they seek Kurtz, a man whose intentions have gone horribly awry.

## Connection to the Curriculum

*Heart of Darkness* is a novella of great literary merit that explores the European imperialism that leads to the ivory trade and the horrors that ensued from it. The exploitation and devastation exacted upon the African continent and its people are exposed through this brief tale that is based on the diary accounts of Joseph Conrad's own journey into the Congo. *Heart of Darkness* is a multi-layered piece, and students can explore a wide variety of topics and themes throughout the reading of the story: European imperialism, the ivory trade, exploitation of natural resources, human exploitation, integrity, man's potential for inhumanity, and finding meaning in a brutal world. Furthermore, Joseph Conrad uses a wide variety of rich literary devices through which students can critically analyze and evaluate his writing style. Students can also discuss the past, present, and future potential of these topics and themes in light of Conrad's presentation of them. Numerous opportunities for deep literary analysis through writing and discussion are possible.

## Standards

### Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

**Reading:** 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- The students comprehend a variety of texts.

**Literature:** 2.1-The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to text. 2.2- The students understand the significance of literature and its contributions to various cultures.

**Writing:** 3.4- The students use organization that enhances the reader's understanding. 3.9- The students use a variety of modes or writing for different purposes and audiences.

### Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)

#### Reading:

1.3.5- The student identifies, interprets, and analyzes the use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, imagery and symbolism.

1.4.7- The student identifies characteristics of narrative, expository, technical, and persuasive texts.

1.4.10- The student generates and responds logically to literal, inferential, evaluative, and critical thinking questions before, during, and after reading the text.

1.4.11- The student uses information from the text to make inferences and draw conclusions.

1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style and use of literary devices work together to achieve his or her purpose for writing text.

#### Literature:

2.1.4- The student analyzes themes, tone, and the author's point of view across a variety of literary works and genres using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.

2.2.6- The student recognizes ways that literature from different cultures presents similar themes differently across genres.

**A Note on the Text:** (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

*In its exploration of both British colonialism and the human psyche, Heart of Darkness examines the cruelties perpetrated on the natives of the African Congo at the end of the nineteenth century, cruelties perpetrated by not only the European colonists, but also their own corrupt native monarchy. While overt scenes of violence are rare in the text, violence, disease, extreme prejudice, and the barbarism of both the slave trade and ivory trade result in death for some, business as usual for others, and enlightenment for two men...Marlowe and Kurtz...and, most importantly, the reader. Immersion into the primitive and wild world of the unexplored Congo allow many of the characters in this novel to engage in actions that none would have considered possible in the very formal and conservative environment of 19th century England in which they were raised and educated. The "n" word is used to reference the African natives and slaves. While this usage is distasteful and abhorrent in the 21st century, it was a common usage for the time and place. It further emphasizes the degraded, dehumanized conditions of the African people as they were used and discarded by the whites, especially Europeans. Cannibalism is referenced but not evidenced in the novel. Sexual misconduct is implied briefly but never referenced directly or explicitly.*

## AP Connections

*Heart of Darkness* has been referenced many times on the Advanced Placement Literature exam, and for most local and national colleges and universities, it is considered essential college-preparatory reading.

**Additional Unit Design Connections**  
Coming soon