

Heart of Darkness

Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition Teaching Unit

Study Guide Student Copy

Chapter 1

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

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

7. How is Marlow different from typical seamen?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Chapter 2

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14. Why do the surroundings seem prehistoric to Marlow?

Chapter 3

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

16. What does Kurtz entrust to Marlow?

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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