

***Heart of Darkness:***  
**Discovery Channel Great Books Series**  
**Discussion Questions**

1. Some critics believe that in *Heart of Darkness* Conrad illustrates how “the darkness of the landscape can lead to the darkness of social corruption.” What does this statement mean? How can one’s environment affect one’s actions, feelings, and morals? Is this statement believable or not? Have you ever experienced a change in yourself that resulted from a change in your environment? What kind of change was it?

2. *Heart of Darkness* seems to blur the line between the so-called “advanced” society of Europe and the “primitive” society of Africa. What makes one culture “civilized” and another “savage” in the eyes of the world? Are these distinctions valid? Do you think that the culture you live in is “advanced” or “civilized”? Why?

3. In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz is depicted as an upstanding European who has been transformed by his time in the jungle—away from his home, away from familiar people and food, and away from any community moral support that might have helped prevent him from becoming such a tyrant. There was nothing and no one, in essence, to keep him on the straight and narrow. Have you ever found yourself in a similar situation? Was there ever a time in which you felt alone, in a strange environment, or different from everyone else around you? How did that experience affect you or change you? Did you find yourself pulled toward base, cruel instincts as Kurtz was? What did you do to cope with those feelings?

4. Kurtz’s dying words are a cryptic whisper: “The horror, the horror.” What “horror” could Kurtz have been talking about? Is there more than one possibility? Why do you think Conrad made this scene so ambiguous?

5. Some readers claim that *Heart of Darkness* is strictly a political novella. Others, however, say it’s really a story about the human condition. Can a work of fiction be interpreted in different ways? Should readers consider the author’s intent when analyzing a story?

6. *Heart of Darkness* can sometimes seem to readers like an incredibly dark, depressing story that paints civilizations in a very negative light. Did it seem this way to you, or did the story contain any positive moments? If so, what were they? Why did they seem positive?