

Why you should read Heart of Darkness...

1. Conrad is considered one of the fathers of Modernism – find out why!
2. Conrad’s use of imagery is exquisite.
3. He is considered one of the best English novelists, yet didn’t learn to speak English until he was in his 20’s.
4. This work has inspired writers – from Graham Greene to Ernest Hemingway – and captivated many other artists, including Francis Ford Coppola who wrote Apocalypse Now based on Heart of Darkness.
5. Find out why the popular series Lost has alluded to this novel and why this novella is still relevant.
6. This novella is a great choice for book clubs short on time!

Why you may struggle with Heart of Darkness ...

1. A disorienting, nightmarish mood engulfs the novella.
2. His portrayal of the “natives” and of women have many critics.
3. A pervasive sense of doom and foreboding colors the narrative.
4. Some consider this novella so racist that it should no longer be in the canon of great literature.

Still interested? A little information about Conrad...

Download novella for free:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/110>

<http://www.pku.edu.cn/study/novel/tess/eindex.htm>

Fast Facts – Heart of Darkness

Pages – 77 (Bedford/St. Martin's Press Paperback Edition)

Author – Joseph Conrad

Date Published -- 1902

Setting – Zaire (“Congo”)

Point of view – Frame story: 2 first person narrators (unnamed sailor and Marlow)

Genre – Frame story; Novella

Issues/Conflicts – Imperialism / Greed / Human Nature / Race

Beyond the Basics...

Wikipedia lists the numerous works of literature, film, music and video games that have been influenced by Heart of Darkness, including Apocalypse Now, A Confederacy of Dunces, a song by the Hoodoo Gurus, the television series Lost, Golding's Lord of the Flies, and many, many more:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heart_of_Darkness

Download the BBC's podcast discussion of the novel:

http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/inourtime/inourtime_20070215.shtml

Quotes by Conrad:

http://www.quotationspage.com/quotes/Joseph_Conrad/

Heart of Darkness -- Author Information

“I am more English than you are because I chose it.” – Joseph Conrad

Joseph Conrad, one of the foremost English modernists, was born Jozef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski in Berdichev, Poland on December 3, 1857. His father was a writer, translator (of Shakespeare and Hugo into French), and patriot. In 1861 he was arrested for his involvement in a Polish uprising against Russia. He was exiled to Vologda (300 miles north of Moscow). His wife and son joined him, but his wife died of tuberculosis four years later. After the death of his mother, Jozef was sent to live with his uncle. At the age of sixteen, he began his life-long career as a seaman, which allowed him to travel the world.

In 1878, after a failed suicide attempt, Jozef changed his name to Joseph Conrad, set sail on a British ship to Constantinople and started to learn English. Soon after, he gained British citizenship and eventually lived in London and Kent. Much of his writing was based on his travels, including Heart of Darkness, which closely follows his journey on a steamship to the “Congo.” Conrad wrote the novella ten years after his journey, but many of the events and characters closely parallel his journals of that voyage.

On August 3, 1924, Conrad died of heart attack. He is the author of over twenty novels and novellas, numerous short stories, essays and memoirs. Although English was his third language, Conrad is considered to be “among the very greatest novelists in the language – or any language” (FR Leavis).

More information on Conrad's life and works:

The Joseph Conrad Society (UK)

<http://www.josephconradsociety.org/>

Photos of Conrad:

http://www.geh.org/ar/strip29/htmlsrc/coburn_sld00019.html#79:3725:0006

<http://digitalgallery.nypl.org/nypldigital/dgkeysearchresult.cfm?word=Conrad%2C%20Joseph%2C%201857-1924&s=3¬word=&f=2>

Portraits of Conrad:

<http://www.npg.org.uk/live/search/person.asp?search=ss&sText=joseph+conrad&LinkID=mp01005>

Further biographical information:

<http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/jconrad.htm>

<http://www.online-literature.com/conrad/>

Collection of his letters:

<http://assets.cambridge.org/052156/1957/sample/0521561957ws.pdf>

Information on his grave site:

<http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=gr&GRid=20386>

A series of critical essays on Conrad and his works:

<http://www.literaryhistory.com/20thC/Conrad.htm>

Printable Bookmark! Please print and then cut to use as a reference as you read!!
Only basic information has been provided to avoid “spoilers.” The “Intro” column indicates the chapter in which each character is first introduced. Enjoy!

Captain	Director of the Company	Ch. I
The Lawyer	Former sailor; Marlow's audience	Ch. I
The Accountant	Former sailor; Marlow's audience	Ch. I
Charles Marlow	Protagonist and narrator; captain of steamer	Ch. I
Marlow's Aunt	Gets Marlow job with Company	Ch. I
Fresleven	Marlow's dead predecessor	Ch. I
Chief and son	Natives	Ch. I
Slim and fat women	Company employees	Ch. I
Company's Secretary, Clerk, and Doctor	Company employees	Ch. I
Swedish Captain	Acquaintance of Marlow	Ch. I
Chief Accountant	Efficient and neat; works for Company	Ch. I
Mr. Kurtz	Chief of the Inner Station.	Ch. I
Manager	Runs Central Station in African territory	Ch. I
Brickmaker	Spy for manager	Ch. I
The Natives	Collective presence felt throughout story	Ch. I
Uncle of Manager	Leader of Eldorado Exploring Expedition	Ch. I
Helmsman (“half caste”)	Pilots Marlow's steamboat	Ch. II
Pilgrims	Agents of Central Station	Ch. II
Cannibals	Marlow's crew	Ch. II
Russian trader	Represents a Dutch company	Ch. II
Kurtz's African mistress	Beautiful, influential woman	Ch. III
Kurtz's intended	Kurtz's fiancée	Ch. III

Menu Ideas – Heart of Darkness

Since Conrad was a product of both Poland and England, consider serving tea and a Polish delicacy.

Great sites for tea:

<http://www.choiceorganict teas.com/blackteas-order.asp>

<http://www.republicoftea.com/templates/detail.asp?navID=291>

<http://www.celestialseasonings.com/index.html>

<http://www.teafort e.com/>

A great website about Polish cuisine, including the following recipes!

<http://www.magma.ca/~pfeiffer/sharon/polish.htm>

POTATO PANCAKES (*Placki Kartoflane*)

This is a typical Polish dish. This should be served hot, preferably directly from the frying pan or you can keep them warm in the oven.

3 large potatoes
1 small onion
salt and pepper
oil for frying
300 ml sour cream

Peel potatoes and onion and grate coarsely. Mix well and squeeze out as much excess liquid as possible. Season. Pour enough oil in frying pan. When pan is hot, put in large spoonfuls of the potato mixture and immediately flatten. They should be quite thin. When the underside is brown, turn it slowly to cook the other side. Serve with sour cream. Serves 4.

PASTRY TWISTS (*Chrust/Faworki*)

Chrust means brushwood which describes the appearance of these sweet pastry twists. If properly made, they should be very thin and simply melt in the mouth.

250g plain flour
1 tbs icing sugar
25g butter
1 egg
2 egg yolks
1 tbs sour cream
1 tbs vinegar
butter or oil for deep frying
icing sugar for dredging

Mix all but the last two of the above ingredients together in a large bowl to form a dough. Roll out as thinly as possible. Cut into narrow strips and make a slit down the middle of each one. Push one end through the slit and pull gently so that you have a twist in the middle. Do this to all of the strips. Heat enough butter or oil in a pan for deep frying. Fry the pastry twists until golden on both sides. Drain on kitchen paper. Pile on plate and dredge with icing sugar.

LITTLE FINGERS (*Paluszki*)

Best served straight from the oven.

125g butter
125g cooked potato, mashed
125g flour
1 egg, beaten
1 tbs caraway seeds
salt

Preheat oven to 240C/475F. Combine butter, potato and flour to make a dough. Place on a well-floured board and knead. Refrigerate for 15 minutes, then roll out very thinly. Cut into narrow strips. Place on a well greased baking tray and brush with beaten egg. Sprinkle with salt and caraway seeds. Bake for approx 10 minutes, until golden. Serves 4.

Heart of Darkness – Creating the Mood!!

Here are some ideas to set the mood and get the conversation started to help you appreciate Conrad's classic. Enjoy!

Introductory Game Ideas:

The film Apocalypse Now was inspired by and based on Heart of Darkness – consider asking members to view it beforehand, or during your book club. Another great companion film would be Blood Diamond – a 2006 film with contemporary concerns that closely echo the novella's themes.

Links to films:

Apocalypse Now:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/>

Heart of Darkness:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110002/>

Or, see if your local library has a video biography of Conrad – his life was fascinating!

Literary Terms – Heart of Darkness

Exposition – the introduction of the setting, characters, conflict(s) at the beginning of a novel. Our first impressions are so influential to our enjoyment and impressions, so after finishing a novel, skim the first chapter again to see how the author shaped and influenced your first impressions. Consider why Conrad frames Marlow’s story with an unnamed narrator.

Diction – word choice. Notice Conrad’s word choice and how that influences your reading speed as well as enjoyment level. Notice how often words like “sordid” “horrible” “terror” “irony” appear.

Syntax – style of sentence structure. Notice how the author’s crafting of syntax affects your engagement as a reader. Complexity of syntax does not determine literary merit; the pairing of syntax to meaning does. Notice how Conrad’s sentences tend to be laden with imagery.

Tone – author’s attitude toward subject. Think “tone of voice.” Tone is created through diction and can be very subtle, but is extremely important. If you misinterpret the tone, you most likely misinterpret the meaning or theme of the narrative. Consider how the tone of the unnamed narrator and Marlow’s tone contrast.

Mood – emotional atmosphere of novel. Mood is considered an aspect of the setting (time, place, *atmosphere*). When we read a novel, we “read ourselves,” so think about what type of mood your favorite novels tend to have and how different moods influence your enjoyment level.

Theme – main idea that runs throughout and unifies novel. Theme should be stated as a complete thought and not one word, which would instead be a topic of the novel: instead of “race” or “greed,” consider what the author is saying about the nature of greed or race in the novel. In classics, themes are frequently not “morals;” they may or may not represent the ideal.

Irony – the opposite of what it expected. ***Dramatic irony*** is when the reader has more information than the character does, providing the reader with an all-knowing perspective. ***Situational irony*** is when a situation turns out differently than expected. ***Verbal irony*** is when the speaker means the opposite of what is said, so correctly interpreting tone becomes crucial to the reader's understanding of the events and particularly of the themes. An example of pervasive irony in Heart of Darkness is the reality that the most “civilized” people of the Empire are the most morally corrupt.

Imagery – the use of words that engage the senses. Notice how Conrad's powerful use of imagery right from the beginning:

The sea-reach of the Thames stretched before us like the beginning of an interminable waterway. In the offing the sea and the sky were welded together without a joint, and in the luminous space the tanned sails of the barges drifting up with the tide seemed to stand still in red clusters of canvas sharply peaked, with gleams of varnished sprits. A haze rested on the low shores that ran out to sea in vanishing flatness (ch. 1).

Symbolism – when an element of the story (object, character, color, etc.) is both literally present in the novel *and* has significance or represents something beyond itself. Consider what symbolic significance the fog, Congo River, and ivory have to the meaning of the story.

Foil – when two characters contrast each other. The characters do not need to be enemies – or even be aware of one another. Marlow and the Russian are foils.

Foreshadowing – when the author provides hints to future events. The fact that Marlow's predecessor, Fresleven, committed suicide does not bode well for Marlow.

Heart of Darkness Discussion Questions

The following questions approach the novel from a number of different angles, i.e., how the novel functions as a work of art, how it reflects the time period, how it addresses fundamental questions of humanity, and how it engages the reader. A good discussion tends to start with our “heads” and end with our “hearts.” So, you may want to save subjective opinions of taste until after you have discussed the more objective elements of why this work is considered a classic. It is tempting to begin with, “What did everyone think?” But if a number of people really didn’t like the novel, their opinions may derail a discussion of the novel’s merits. On the other hand, I recommend starting with a few accessible questions and asking every member to respond to ensure that all voices are present and heard from the beginning. Just a few suggestions! Enjoy...

Warm up questions:

- Which character did you empathize with the most? Which characters did you dislike the most and why?
- Did the strange, foggy atmosphere add or detract from your enjoyment?

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1. Conrad is quoted as having said, “My task is, above all, to make you see.” What do you think he wanted us to “see” by the end of this novella?

2. One of the primary themes in this novel is that **power** and **greed** corrupt men's souls and lead them to do reprehensible things. This theme has been echoed throughout the ages – why do greed and power corrupt? Is Marlow immune? Why do Marlow, the Russian, and many others find Kurtz so fascinating?
3. A recent Hollywood film Blood Diamond parallels many of themes of Heart of Darkness, but replaces the quest for ivory with the quest for diamonds. In what other ways is **Africa** still being ransacked? Although the lust for ivory is at the core of the novel's corruption, Kurtz's mistress is the only character adorned – what is the effect of this?
4. Many readers have focused on what Conrad believes happens when individuals are asked to function outside the checks and balances of **society**. William Golding was inspired by Conrad's work to write Lord of the Flies. Why do individuals need the security and restraint of society? Why do some individuals need this more than others?
5. Two of Kurtz's lines have resonated with readers since the inception of this novella: "**Exterminate the Brutes...**" and "**The Horror! The Horror!**" Which "Brutes" are Kurtz referring to? What "Horror"?
6. Why does Marlow lie to Kurtz's fiancé at the end? What is the function of "**Kurtz's Intended**" in the story?
7. Many of the characters are **nameless** or named only by their occupation. Why do you think Conrad did this? What is the effect?

8. He also refers to groups of people collectively: “The Natives” and “The Pilgrims.” What does he seem to be saying about **mob psychology**? How are these two groups similar and different? Marlow and Kurtz are two of the few individuals in the novel – who else is distinct in personality and actions?
9. Illness is pervasive throughout the story – apart from the physical illnesses of Marlow, Kurtz and others, what seems to be the **psychological illness** afflicting many of the characters?
10. Many have debated about whether the novella itself is racist, apart from the racism of its characters. What do you think?

Consider the following criticism:

One of Conrad’s greatest critics is Chinua Achebe who has been quoted in the following ways:

Conrad was **“guilty of preposterous and perverse arrogance in reducing Africa to the role of props for the break-up of one petty European mind.”**

Heart of Darkness is not **“a great work of art [because it is] a novel which celebrates... dehumanization, which depersonalizes a portion of the human race.”**

“Although he’s writing good sentences, he’s also writing about a people, and their life. And he says about these people that they are rudimentary souls... The Africans are the rudimentaries, and then on top are the good whites.”

Check out the rest of this controversial article at:

http://www.failuremag.com/arch_history_chinua_achebe.html

Wrap up Questions!

1. Which character did you relate to the most?
2. Would you recommend the book to others?
3. If you could change anything, what would it be?
4. Do you believe this should be considered a classic?
5. Do you believe this novel should be taught in high schools?

Heart of Darkness – the film

A number of film versions have been made of Heart of Darkness, including a 1994 award-winning television version starring Tim Roth and John Malkovich and Francis Ford Coppola's award-winning Apocalypse Now. Your group could watch a version of the movie together and discuss your impressions, or group members could watch a version before the meeting and then discuss impressions as a group. Time permitting, multiple versions could be viewed and then compared. Here are a few possible movie questions:

- While viewing the movie, which characters were most unlike how you pictured them while reading the novel?
- Which characters seemed “right on” in their portrayal?
- What plot elements were left out or changed in the movie?
- How was your enjoyment affected by what was left out/changed?
- If this movie were remade today, who would you cast as Marlow and Kurtz?
- In Apocalypse Now, how did you react to Martin Sheen's Marlow, Marlon Brando's Kurtz, and Dennis Hopper's “Russian”? Did the juxtaposition of Vietnam work with the themes of the novel?

More information on the film(s):

Apocalypse Now:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0078788/>

Heart of Darkness:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0110002/>

Blood Diamond:

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0450259/>