

## Summer Reading Project – 2017

The summer reading for this year is Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. You will read the novella and complete the following assignments. As you read the story you should be annotating the book per the instructions below. You will want your book to be marked well for discussions such as a Socratic seminar and other activities such as writing. There will be a quiz of reading comprehension (basic facts obtained through reading) on Wednesday, Aug. 16 and a final test will follow when the class work is finished.

## Assignment:

1. Read *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad.
2. Background: **Type this out to be submitted** with the discussion questions.
  - a. Know the author and the time period
  - b. Define: colonialism, imperialism. Identify elements in the novel
3. Mark (highlight or your preferred method of notation) your book with examples of the following literary elements.
  - a. Atmosphere: gloom, isolation, madness, death
  - b. Patterns of opposites: dark and light, etc.
  - c. Phrases/ words representing: greed, hollowness, nothingness, empty
4. Answer the following discussion questions. Answer these questions thoroughly and completely to have for the discussions. (The best grades are for those who can use direct quotes effectively!) **Make a copy to submit for summer reading grade and a copy for yourself to use during discussion.** The following questions should be typed and turned in at the beginning of the new school year. *Please print a copy for yourself to have on day 2 of classes to assist in your discussion.*

\*If anyone would like to earn **+5 bonus points**, he may turn the assignment (in its entirety) in on **Tues., Aug. 16, at Open House.**

## Discussion Questions:

1. What is humanity's relationship to nature in *Heart of Darkness*? Some critics believe that 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? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
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? What does Conrad imply about this topic? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
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. Basically, what does nature represent to mankind? Does nature turn the civilized into savages? Does nature pull mankind towards base, cruel instincts as Kurtz was? What separates us from the beasts? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
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? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.

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? What is Conrad trying to teach us? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
6. Write an essay in which you show how one, two, or three inanimate objects have a purpose in this novel. How does Conrad use these objects or symbols to convey his themes? How are these objects related to one another and to the total work? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
7. The description of the jungle in *Heart of Darkness* is realistic and exact, based upon Conrad's observations of the terrain during his own trip to Africa. At the same time, however, the geography is a metaphor for abstract psychological and moral issues. Discuss ways in which the setting is a symbol for the larger themes of the novel. Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
8. Is there a lure of savagery within *Heart of Darkness*? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
9. Authors choose titles very purposefully. Analyze and explain the meaning of the title of this novel. What is the *Heart of Darkness*? Use quotes from the novel to prove your points.
10. Discuss a topic within *Heart of Darkness* that has not been mentioned here. Make sure you explain your point of view clearly, using examples from the text.