

Heart of Darkness Close Reading Guide

Page references are to the Penguin edition

PART 1

Page 15

1. How is [imagery](#) used to compare the Thames to the Congo?
2. Comment on the adjectives used.
3. What assonance occurs on p. 15? Effect?

Page 16

4. Comment on the symbolic meaning suggested by the sunset.
5. Comment on the [symbolism](#) attached to rivers.

Page 17

6. What role does the river play in "the dreams of men"?

Pages 18/19/20

7. How has the Thames "been one of the dark places of the earth"? Quote.
8. Why are seamen less aware of their surroundings?
9. What vocabulary choices does Conrad make to describe the "hearts of wild men"?
10. Comment on [imagery](#) associated with the actions of "conquerors."

Page 21

11. Comment on Marlow's justification for telling about "one of (his) inconclusive experiences."

Page 22

12. Comment on the use and effect of Biblical imagery.

Pages 24 & 26

13. Describe the allusion in, and the effect of Conrad's description of the entrance to the Company's offices and the old women who sit there.

Page 27

14. What warnings are implicit in the Doctor's examination of Marlow. Quote.

Page 30/31

15. What is significant in Marlow's description of his first encounter with "black fellows."
16. How are the ship's attacks on the "enemies" futile? How does Conrad's choice of vocabulary emphasise this?

Page 33

17. How are the colonisers shown to be more barbaric than the "criminals"?

Pages 34/35/36

18. Explain Conrad's references to "devils."
19. Evaluate the description of the shady area and its contents. How is this significant?
20. How does Conrad juxtapose his description of the white man?

Page 37/38

21. Comment on the introduction of Mr Kurtz.
22. Why is this interspersed with descriptions of the sick man?

Page 42

23. Why must a white man in Africa "have no entrails"?

Page 44

24. Explain the image of "faithless pilgrims bewitched inside a rotten fence."

Page 46/47/48

25. What does Mr. Kurtz' painting suggest about his character?
26. How does the brickmaker's description contrast with this?
27. Why does Marlow call the brickmaker a "papier-mâché Mephistopheles"?

Page 50

28. Why is Marlow worried about the clarity of his story?

Page 52

29. What does Marlow like about work? Significance?

PART 2

Page 57

1. Comment on significant aspects of imagery and vocab choice in the introduction of Kurtz.

Pages 59/60

2. Comment on the ways in which Conrad creates the tone of the extract: "Going up that river . . . half-a-crown a tumble."

Pages 62/63

3. Comment on the imagery and vocab choices made in the description of the earth and its inhabitants

Page 64

4. Explain the irony in "to look at him was as edifying as seeing a dog in a parody of breeches and a feather hat, walking on his hind legs. A few months of training had done for that really fine chap."
5. How is this juxtaposed with the **description** of the fireman?

Page 69

6. Comment on the parallel aspects of humanity described in the line: "Eat 'im!" he said, curtly, and, leaning his elbow on the rail, looked into the fog in a dignified and profoundly pensive attitude."

Page 71

7. Comment on the use and effect of animal imagery.

Pages 75/76

8. Describe and analyse the effect of the changing [syntax](#) in Conrad's description of the attack on the boat. How does he increase the pace?

Page 79

9. How does Conrad use opposed images to describe Kurtz' gifts?
10. How is the river's dual presence described? Why?

Page 80

11. Discuss significant aspects of the extract: "'Absurd!' . . . Voices, voices - even the girl herself - now -"

Page 81/82

12. How has Kurtz "taken a high seat amongst the devils of the land?"

Page 83

13. What is the irony implicit in the name of the society for whom Kurtz is writing his report?
14. How is it that white men can appear as "supernatural beings?"

Page 84

15. How does Kurtz' attitude change? How do you know that Marlow wasn't expecting it?

Page 86

16. Identify and explain the effect of the vocab in the description of Marlow's first sighting of Kurtz' compound.

Page 87

17. How is the harlequin out of place?

Page 89

18. Explain: "...had started for the interior with a light heart, and had no more idea of what would happen to him than a baby."

PART 3

Page 90

1. Explain Marlow's astonishment at the sight of the harlequin.

Page 92

2. How does the lawlessness of his situation affect Kurtz?

Page 94

3. How does Conrad delay the description of the "knobs" on the stakes?
4. What do they symbolise?

Pages 95/96

5. Why can Marlow accept the sight of the heads?
6. What does Marlow find absurd about them?

Pages 97/98

7. What does Marlow find most shocking about his first physical sighting of Kurtz? Comment on vocab and imagery.

Pages 104/5

8. How are the images of nightmare/shadow/darkness significant in this context?
9. What flashbacks does Marlow insert? Why?
10. Explain: "He rose...like a vapour exhaled by the earth," and compare to references to earth on page 107.

Page 108

11. How is this a "satanic litany?"

Pages 110 - 112

12. Identify and explain significant quotes in Marlow's final conversations with Kurtz.

13. How is the insignificance of Kurtz' body after his death emphasised?

Pages 113/4

14. Explain the important facets of Kurtz' message to Marlow.

Pages 117/8

15. How does Kurtz' memory torment Marlow?

Pages 123/4

16. Why would this "have been too dark - too dark altogether . . .?"

17. Explain how the imagery and vocab of the last paragraph summarises the ideas of the story.