

AP English Literature and Composition

***Heart of Darkness* close reading and analysis activities**

Directions: For each topic, compose a paragraph that begins with a focused topic sentence. Make sure to include accurate citations for all supporting quotations. For questions that require multiple quotations, you may create a bulleted list; however, your analysis must be in the form of a paragraph.

1. Discuss how the novel highlights the futility of the European presence in Africa and identify nine specific details that reinforce this idea (three in each chapter).
2. *Heart of Darkness* is a frame story. An unnamed narrator begins the story on the deck of the *Nellie* in London on the Thames River and listens to Marlow recount his journey. Explain the significance and impact of the frame narrative to the story. Identify every time there is a shift between this narrator and Marlow who narrates most of the story. Why are these particular points of change significant?
3. *Chiaroscuro* is the contrasting of light and shade. From Italian, meaning "bright dark," it is a term referring to the effect obtained in a painting or literary work when light and dark images or patterns of imagery are contrasted or emphasized. Conrad repeatedly utilizes *chiaroscuro* and often uses reverses of the traditional symbolism of black and white in *Heart of Darkness*. Analyze why he chooses this technique. Locate two examples where he uses traditional symbolism and four examples where symbolic value is inverted.
4. Conrad often employs impressionism to depict how scenes appear—or what they seem to be. Discuss the impact of literary impressionism on Conrad's message. Find three examples where he refers to a person, place, or object using this conflict—the conflict of illusion versus reality. (*seems, appears, looks like*)
5. What does Conrad suggest about the concept of work in *Heart of Darkness*? Find four references to work in the novella; these will be explicit references to work or labor, usually by Marlow. What conclusions can you draw from these references? In your analysis, consider that most of the novel's characters are given only descriptive titles of their jobs—not actual names (doctor, brickmaker, accountant, manager, or helmsman, for example).

6. Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe (author of *Things Fall Apart*), in a lecture at the University of Massachusetts, attacked *Heart of Darkness* as “racist”:
[Conrad] projects the image of Africa as “the other world,” the antithesis of Europe and therefore of civilization, a place where man’s vaulted intelligence and refinement are finally mocked by triumphant bestiality Conrad is a purveyor of comforting myths (and) a bloody racist That this simple truth is glossed over in criticisms of his work is due to the fact that white racism against Africa is such a normal way of thinking that its manifestations go completely undetected.

Find three specific points that you would use to defend this statement and three specific references that you would use to refute this statement.

7. Invent titles for each of the three chapters, and provide a brief defense for each of your titles. Make sure that you explain how these titles relate to the novella title and provide specific textual support.
8. Freud divided the human psyche (mind, personality, self, or soul) into three parts: the superego, the ego, and the id. As Marlow travels to Africa and down the Congo River, he also travels psychologically from superego to id.
- Superego:
 - externally imposed standards and regulations that humans live by (customs, laws, mores, standards, taboos)
 - creates the social image or self by inhibiting the instinctual impulses that produce antisocial behavior
 - Ego:
 - the conscious mind and central part of the psyche that functions as a mediator
 - modifies behavior by controlling socially unacceptable impulses
 - Id:
 - instinctual needs and biological urges (sex drive, hunger, and aggression)
 - dominated by the pleasure principle to achieve immediate gratification of desires

Make connections between the stations (inner, outer, central) and characters (the manager, the accountant, and Kurtz) and the superego, ego, and id. In other words, what part of the psyche would identify each of the stations and characters? Identify quotations in the novel to support your assertions.