

**Remember: Read every word on this sheet.**

## *Heart of Darkness* Annotation Assignment

This is a difficult novella, to say the least, but it's worth the time and effort. Your assignment is to read and annotate this book. **The annotated novel will be what I grade.** (If you are using a borrowed copy or you are phobic about writing in your books, you'll need to do a journal. See me please if you are doing a journal.)

*How to annotate?* I use a pencil; highlighters bleed through the page and upset my eyes. The **most important thing is this: DO NOT just underline a passage.** Whatever you underline, make some sort of notation in the margin as to **WHY** you underlined it.

**NO CREDIT WILL BE GIVEN FOR PASSAGES UNDERLINED WITHOUT ANNOTATION.**

*What to annotate?* You are free to annotate anything you like, but **you MUST annotate for the ideas listed below.** Anything beyond that is fine, but these things are what I'll be grading for.

A final note before you begin: This book is the best example I've ever seen of the SAT vocabulary word "enigma." It's a question about a puzzle surrounded in mystery. Don't panic about "author's purpose." We'll take the voyage with Marlow together, and hopefully we'll discover with him as well. Just make notes about what you see and we'll work on putting it together in class.

### **GENERAL THINGS TO WATCH AND ANNOTATE FOR:**

- Contrasts – light/dark; life/death, good/evil – and lots more that are all inter-connected. These make great anchors for an essay.
- Images of death and their significance
- Images of evil and their significance
- Irony, Irony, Irony

## **Section 1**

**(BY JANUARY 22, 23) These "divisions" are not in the novel; I've broken up the stages of Marlow's journey to guide you.**

**A: *The Thames Setting* (Conrad assumes you know what/where the Thames River is. Look it up.)**

1. Circle the word "gloom" each time it occurs within the first few pages. **ANNOTATE** other diction/imagery/detail that establishes mood.
2. Marlow is like the setting of the river – the "brooding" nature that he describes. Underline where the narrator says he sits like an "idol." **ANNOTATE** what is suggested by his sitting position and his state of mind?
3. Isolate the passage that begins "*And this also,*" said Marlow suddenly, "*has been one of the dark places of the earth*" and ends with "*An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretence but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to. . .*" (5-6 paragraphs) I'll tell you straight up: I think this is the single most important passage in the entire novella. Use these questions to guide your **ANNOTATIONS**: Why would Marlow begin his tale of a journey to the heart of darkness with an account of London in old times. What is the connection between London in Roman times and the European colonization of Africa? Why has the

Thames been "one of the dark places?" What is the significance of the reference to the invasions of the Romans?

### ***B. Preparation for the Journey***

1. Isolate the passage that begins "*Now when I was a little chap I had a passion for maps*" down to "*The snake had charmed me.*" (2 paragraphs) Try to attach symbolic associations to the D.I.D. as you **ANNOTATE**.
2. **ANNOTATE** where you find the image of the snake repeated a few paragraphs later. Why is this significant?
3. Marlow builds a series of images to describe the Company office. Many of these details have **traditional symbolic** meanings. Try to connect these to classical mythology or Biblical allusions in your **ANNOTATION**:
  - "white sepulcher"
  - two women knitting
  - the deadly snake
  - the center of the map, of Africa, of the earth
  - the color black
  - the archetypal journey itself

### ***C. The Journey: The First Step***

1. As you read his account of the early stages of the river journey, **ANNOTATE** for D.I.D. that connects back to ideas you've already annotated, particularly ideas about prehistoric times.
2. Isolate this passage: "*They were dying slowly – it was very clear*" down to "*He lapped out of his hand, then sat up in the sunlight, crossing his shins in front of him, and after a time let his woolly head fall on his breastbone.*" (2 paragraphs) First, look up the definition of "worsted" as it related to fabrics and textiles. **ANNOTATE** the contrasts you find in these two paragraphs. How many different contrasting descriptors can you apply to these 2 paragraphs? (Like light/dark; good/evil, etc.) **ANNOTATE** how that detail (the white worsted) connects to the themes of European invasion of Africa.

### ***D. The Central Station***

1. Find and underline this sentence: "*I let him run on, this papier-mâché Mephistopheles.*" **ANNOTATE** what details we learn about the character of the brickmaker from this description. What is a "paper-mache Mephistopheles?" (Google "Mephistopheles." Allusions like this are important.)

## **Section 2**

**(BY JANUARY 24, 25) Keep annotating for those things in the "General Things" box.**

### ***A. Journey to the Inner Station/ Life on the river***

1. General **ANNOTATION**: Circle every time you see the word "restrain" or "restraint" in the entire section. How many times is it used? You need a note about WHY this might be important.

2. Isolate this huge section: "*Going up that river was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world. . .*" down to "*---truth stripped of its cloak of time*" It's a big passage. **ANNOTATE** your thoughts about the description of the natives – how this description fits other notes you've made.
3. Isolate "*Absurd! he cried*" down to "*---like a claim of distant kinship affirmed in a supreme moment.*" (2 giant paragraphs wrapped around one that's only 7 words long) **ANNOTATE** for repeated elements, for contrasting elements, for ironic situations, for mood details, and for connections to other ideas you've annotated.
4. Don't forget "restraint."

### **Section 3**

**(By JANUARY 28, 29) Keep annotating for those things in the "General Things" box.**

#### ***A. The Inner Station***

1. **ANNOTATE** your reaction to the "knobs" on the posts at Kurtz's hut. How do they connect to other elements you've annotated?
2. Look at Marlow's response to Kurtz. **ANNOTATE** connections to Marlow's emphasis on Kurtz's lack of restraint; the fact of his eloquence when he is "hollow at the core." (*While you're at it, think about what that means: "hollow at the core."*) Examine Marlow's feelings about Kurtz and about the manager. What changes in attitude is Marlow experiencing? How does he feel about each of these men by the time they begin the journey back down the river and as that journey progresses?
3. **ANNOTATE** the treatment of the native woman who reaches out to the retreating boat. How is it connected to the other elements you've annotated?
4. **ANNOTATE** anything that helps you understand "*The horror, the horror.*"

#### ***B. The Intended***

1. **ANNOTATE** how the description of the Intended relates to the description of the woman who was shot in question #3 above.
2. Ask yourself – there's not anything to annotate here – why Marlow would lie after all he's been through to discover "Truth."
3. Why is Marlow again described as a Buddha? What is meant by the comment, "We have lost the first of the ebb. . .?" **ANNOTATE** an answer: Where does the novel end?