

Approved for use in English IV

Summary of the Work:

Heart of Darkness is a frame narrative in which a ship captain named Charlie Marlow tells a story about his journey up the Congo River to transport ivory from the Congo Free State downriver for return to Europe. In the course of the journey, he encounters “the horror” of European colonialism and suffers a growing sense of personal madness as his beliefs and values come into question as he draws closer to the mystery of Kurtz.

Rationale:

Heart of Darkness is a complex, rich text that weaves social commentary, psychological insight and historical observation in a dense, yet accessible prose. Seniors reading *Heart of Darkness* will need to critically examine the text, unpack its layered prose and identify Conrad’s use of literary devices to construct meaning.

The novel also offers a powerful look into the ideologies and personal ambitions that motivated European colonialism and forces the reader to confront the legacy of those beliefs today.

Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

Harold Bloom, ed., *Joseph Conrad’s Heart of Darkness* (New York: Chelsea House, 1987)

Rita A. Bergenholtz, "Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*," *Explicator* 53.2 (1995): 102

Ross C Murfin, ed., *Conrad Revisited: Essays for the Eighties* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1985)

* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.

* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

Noted Distinction:

- Harold Bloom’s *The Western Canon*
- Modern Library’s 100 Best Novels

Readability:

- Lexile Score: 1150L
- Readability Level: 9.0

Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption: 2000

Notes on the Text:

(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

Heart of Darkness is a complex work. While Nobel prize winner Chinua Achebe condemned the novel as the work of “a thoroughgoing racist” and the novel does contain a number of racial epithets, a deep reading of the text will force the reader to confront the Western legacy of colonialism and racism in Africa.

Connection to the Curriculum:

Heart of Darkness fits well into the senior curriculum, as it allows students to explore the use of allusion, complex symbolism, motif and diction in a literary context.

Additional Connections:

(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)

Heart of Darkness is ideally paired with Chinua Achebe’s *Heart of Darkness* for contrasting points of view about the colonial experience. *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most alluded to texts in Western literature in film, literature, and music.