



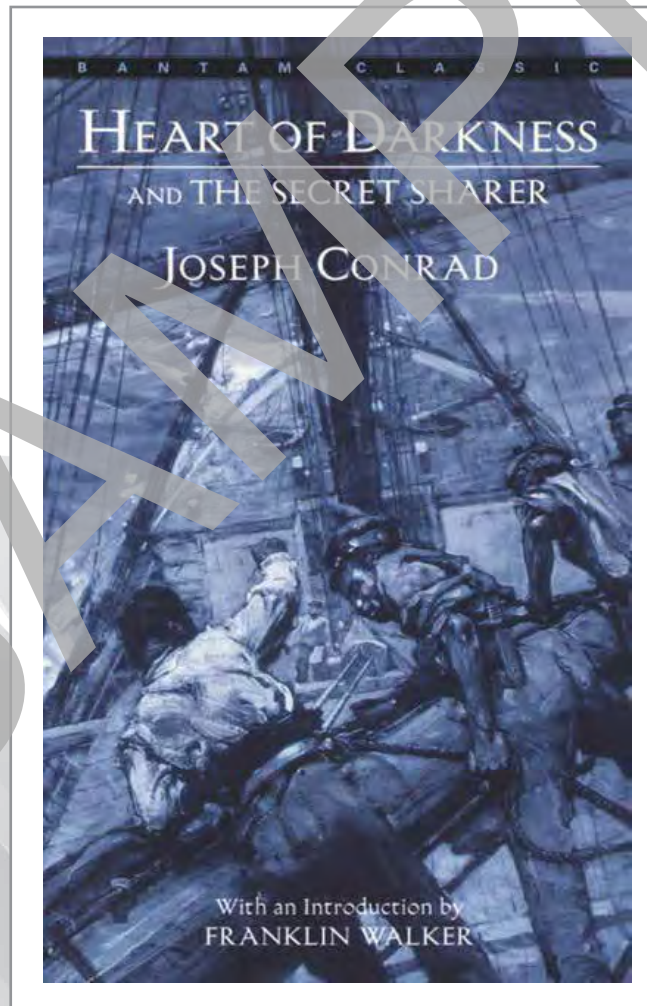
**TEACHER GUIDE**

**GRADES 9-12**

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

# **Heart of Darkness; The Secret Sharer**

Joseph Conrad



**READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT**

# Heart of Darkness; The Secret Sharer

Joseph Conrad

## TEACHER GUIDE

**NOTE:**

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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## Skills and Strategies

### **Thinking**

Identifying attributes,  
analysis, compare/contrast

### **Comprehension**

Predicting,  
summarizing,  
cause and effect, inference,  
main idea

### **Literary Elements**

Characterization, setting,  
allusion, simile, metaphor,  
personification, symbolism,  
foreshadowing

### **Listening/Speaking**

Discussion, interview,  
oral interpretation,  
dramatization

### **Writing**

Description, report,  
diamente, five-sense poem,  
narrative, screenplay

### **Other**

Art–drawing, collage,  
sketch, painting  
Current Events–newspaper  
and magazine articles;  
Social Studies–research,  
history, maps

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## *Heart of Darkness: Information about the Novel*

**Point of View:** First-person narrative

**Setting:** Begins on the River Thames; the major portion is set on the Congo River, traveling into the heart of Africa

**Date:** First published in 1902.

### **Plot Summary**

Charlie Marlow, a steamboat captain, is hired by a company dealing in ivory to travel up the Congo River and take command of a cargo boat stranded following the death of its skipper. As he makes his way through the heart of Africa, he observes the brutality inflicted on the natives by white traders and becomes intrigued by stories of Mr. Kurtz, the company's best agent. Marlow's anticipated meeting with Kurtz becomes the focal point of his journey. When Marlow arrives at Kurtz's compound, he is met with a row of shrunken, dried human heads mounted on poles. He finds a depraved, deranged, terminally ill Kurtz, whom the natives revere as a god. On the return trip back down the Congo River, Kurtz, after uttering empty explanations for his actions, cries out, "The horror! The horror!" and dies.

Although simple on the surface, the plot reveals unfolding levels of complexity. Conrad parallels the journey into the heart of Africa with man's journey into the dark places of his own soul. As a metaphor for the instinctive nature of man, *Heart of Darkness* traces Marlow's own spiritual voyage of self-discovery. This voyage can be considered as a "night journey" into Marlow's subconscious, a journey that involves a profound spiritual change in the voyager. The story of the night journey is found often in literature, including the story of Jonah in the *Bible*.

*Heart of Darkness* can also be interpreted as a descent into hell similar to *The Odyssey* by Homer. As a protagonist journeys into hell, he must overcome dangerous pitfalls and make important, life-changing discoveries. He makes his journey out of hell when he has recovered his own "soul."

**Themes:** symbolism of light/dark; black/white; good/evil; civilization/savagery; racism

**Protagonist:** Charlie Marlow

**Antagonist:** the natural darkness of the African interior and the darkness within Marlow

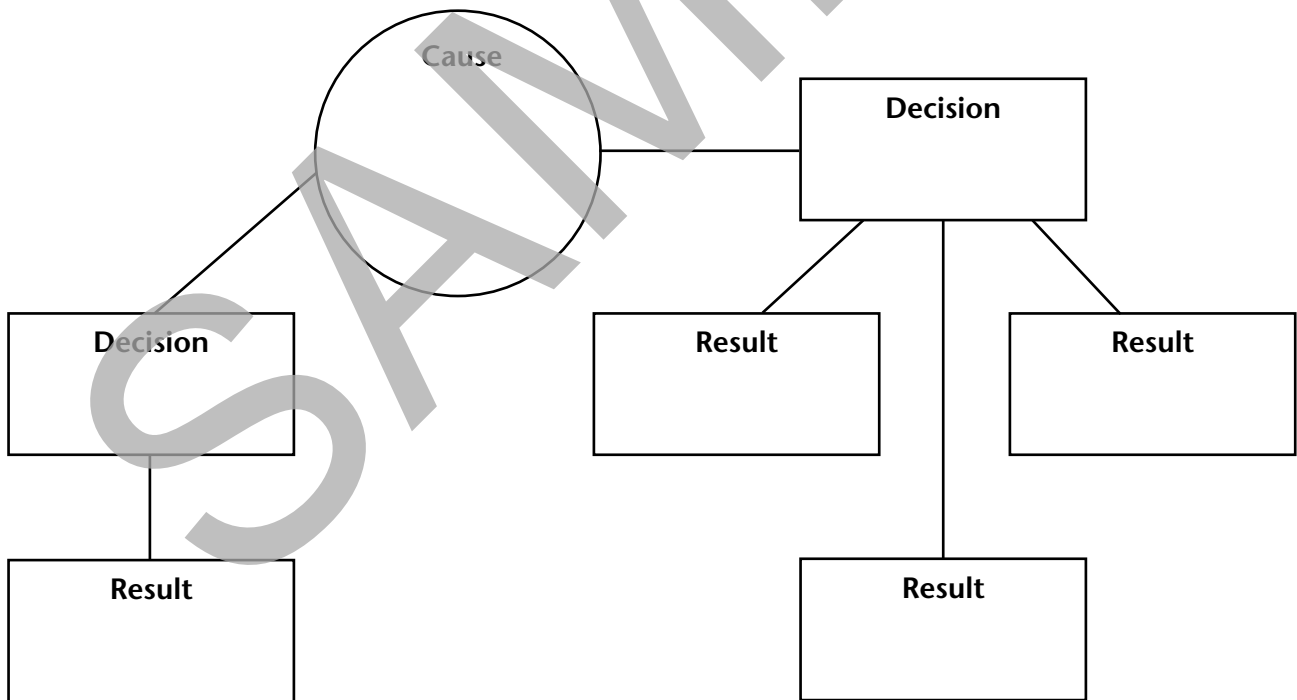
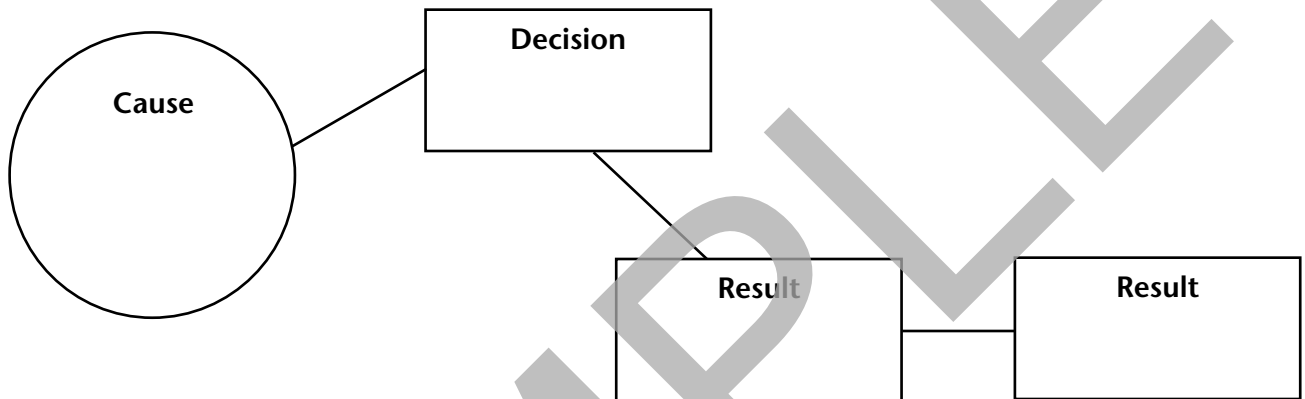
### **Conrad's Use of Pattern of Three's**

- Three primary characters: the 1st narrator, Marlow, Kurtz
- Three women: Marlow's aunt, Kurtz's mistress, Kurtz's Intended
- Three chapters
- Three company stations: first station in interior (79), Central Station, 200 miles into interior (85), and Kurtz's station (126)
- Three times Marlow begins his narration; note beginning (70); break back to 1st narrator (95); break (120).
- Marlow embarks on a journey: physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

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## Cause/Effect Chart

**Directions:** Make a flow chart to show decisions a character made, the decisions s/he could have made, and the result(s) of each. (Use your imagination to speculate on the results of decisions the character could have made.)



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## Chapter I, pp. 65-99

estuary (65)	placid (66)	diaphanous (66)	venerable (66)
sedentary (67)	sepulchre (73)	somnambulist (73)	ominous (74)
joviality (75)	emissary (76)	lugubrious (78)	alacrity (81)
insidious (81)	moribund (82)	uncouth (84)	trenchant (87)
indefatigable (93)	servile (93)	primeval (93)	ostentation (99)

### Discussion Questions

1. After reading the first few pages, discuss various ways in which Conrad sets the stage for the “darkness” of the book. (*Haze on shores; air: dark, condensed into a mournful gloom and brooding motionlessly, p. 65; gloom p. 66; Marlow’s statement, “And this, also, has been one of the dark places of the earth.” p. 67; savagery, abomination, regrets, disgust, surrender, hate, p. 69*)
2. Give the name of the boat Marlow is on and identify his companions. (*Nellie; Director of Companies, Narrator [not named], Lawyer, and Accountant. pp. 65-66*)
3. Note change of narrator (p. 70). Discuss Conrad’s technique of beginning with one first-person narration, then switching to another. (*The first narrator establishes Marlow’s identity and describes him, gives the setting for first part of story, and creates the mood of darkness. This causes the reader’s anticipation for the tale Marlow is about to relate. pp. 65-70*)
4. Identify colonialism. Discuss Marlow’s view of colonialism, based on his statement, “The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look into it too much. What redeems it is the idea only ... something you can set up, and bow down before and offer a sacrifice to ...” (p. 69) (*Colonialism: the policy of a nation which holds colonies in subordination and often exploits them economically. Belgium colonized the Congo. Responses to Marlow’s statement will vary but will probably include those who believe Marlow views colonization as a necessary evil and those who believe he thinks it is totally evil.*)
5. Display a map of the Congo; trace the pattern of the Congo River. Discuss the metaphor, “The snake has charmed me.” Why is the river referred to as a snake? Discuss other literary references to the snake. (*Responses will vary. Possible responses: The river meanders in the form of a snake; snakes represent evil, which is a form of darkness; Marlow may find evil on the journey. Other literary references to snake: the snake that killed Cleopatra, the devil [in the form of a snake] in the Garden of Eden, etc. p. 71*)
6. Discuss how Marlow gets his appointment as captain of a steamboat and the circumstances surrounding his predecessor’s death. (*Through his aunt’s influence. This can lead to discussion of Marlow’s merits as a captain if he must rely on a woman’s influence to get him the job and what his inexperience may lead to. The death of Fresleven, his predecessor, is graphically described and should lead to a discussion about what Marlow may face. pp. 71-72*)

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7. Examine hints of foreboding when Marlow leaves the first steamer and begins his trek into the "heart of darkness." (*The Swede relates a suicide; the decay of the first Company station; chain gang of prisoners; the black workers who had withdrawn to die and had become "black shadows of disease and starvation."* pp. 79-83)
  8. Why does Marlow call the Company's chief accountant a miracle? Contrast him with the workers. (*After three years in the brush, he still dresses impeccably and keeps his books in perfect order. The workers seem hopeless and doomed to nothing but slavery and death. The overseer is despondent and disheveled.* pp. 82-83)
  9. The chief accountant is the first to mention Kurtz to Marlow. Discuss his description of Kurtz. (*First-class agent, remarkable person in charge of a very important trading post in the ivory country, predicts he will attain an important place in the company's administration.* pp. 84-85)
  10. When Marlow arrives at the Central Station, what does he find? (*His steamer is at the bottom of the river; he hears rumors that Kurtz is ill and his station in jeopardy; men at the station wander aimlessly; a "bricklayer" who has been waiting for a year for materials and who tells him more about Kurtz; the word "ivory" rings in the air.* pp. 86-96)
  11. **Prediction:** What effect will the arrival of the Eldorado Exploring Expedition have on Marlow's journey into the inner Congo? (pp. 98-99) (*Responses will vary.*)

### Supplementary Activities

#### 1. Literary devices

- Allusion: Sir Francis Drake and other knights of the sea; great sea battles (p. 67)
- Metaphor: "the sea itself, which is the mistress ..." (p. 68)
- Personification: "as inscrutable as Destiny" (p. 68)
- Metaphor: "The snake (river) had charmed me." (p. 71)
- Simile: "dress as plain as an umbrella cover" (p. 73)
- Allusion: Plato (p. 75)
- Simile: "river ... like a snake" (p. 75)
- Allusion: Biblical, "... the laborer is worthy of his hire" Luke, 10:7 (p. 76)
- Personification: coast ... smiling, frowning ... (p. 77)
- Simile: "faces like grotesque masks" (p. 78)
- Personification: "Nature herself" (p. 79)
- Simile: "people ... moved about like ants" (p. 79)
- Simile: "The thing (boiler) looked as dead as the carcass of some animal." (p. 80)
- Simile: "... joints of their limbs were like knots in a rope" (p. 80)
- Metaphor: men ... "black shadows of disease and starvation" (p. 82)
- Allusion: Mephistopheles (p. 93)
- Personification: steamboat (She) — his friend (pp. 96-97)



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2. Analyze the symbolism and foreshadowing in Marlow's visit to the Company's offices.

**Symbolism:** Marlow encounters both as he enters and as he leaves the doors of the Company, two women, one fat, the other slim, sitting on chairs and knitting black wool. Symbolically, the women are "guarding the doors of Darkness;" he senses something ominous.

**Foreshadowing:** He meets the secretary, who is full of desolation and sympathy. A map with locations marked in rainbow colors shows the river, deadly like a snake, and his destination, dead in the center. He visits the doctor who adds to his eerie feeling by measuring his head, asking if there is madness in his family, and referring to changes that take place when men go "out there" (pp. 73-75).

3. **Map of Congo:** Working in small groups, students make a map of the Congo. They should trace the route Marlow is taking and draw on it the first Company Station and the Central Station with identifying graphics of what he found there. By using a map legend and observing the miles Marlow travels, students can closely approximate the spacing of key locations.

SAMPLE