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AHEAD OF DARKNESSES



Imperialism *noun* [U] / OFTEN DISAPPROVING
a system in which one country rules other countries,
or has a lot of power or influence over other countries,
especially in political and economic matters



There is general agreement on the fact that Joseph Conrad's masterpiece, *Heart of Darkness*, was "ahead of its time". On the one hand, the book is typical of late nineteenth century fiction thanks to its mixture of autobiography, travel tale, adventure story, psychological journey and political satire. The use of multiple or indirect narrators was also quite common at the time. This kind of fiction is related to the spirit of **imperialism** in many ways. On the other hand, the novel seems to prepare the ground for many concerns which become important in the following century. It is characterized by a sense of absurdity, ambiguity, human isolation, and skepticism about religion, history, civilization, and human nature, all of which are generally associated with the modernist texts which come after its publication.

At the heart of these concerns lies the author's critical stance towards certain racial attitudes, colonial practices and prejudices of Europeans about Africa. Conrad may not have been a 'champion of anti-colonial revolts', as he was once described, but he surely distrusted the 'civilizing mission' of imperialism and the methods of the great European trading companies in their 'scramble for Africa'.

- **absurdity:** quality of being silly and unreasonable
- **ambiguity:** quality of having more than one possible meaning
- **champion:** (here) person who defends an idea
- **concerns:** important issues
- **satire:** writing style which criticizes people or things in a funny way
- **scramble:** fast, difficult movement in order to get something
- **skepticism:** attitude of doubting if something is true
- **stance:** attitude



THE SCRAMBLE FOR AFRICA

The Scramble for Africa was the colonialization of Africa by European countries during the period between 1880 and 1914. This involved the division of the territory into new 'countries' and their occupation and exploitation.

HEART OF DARKNESS



Marlow



The company agents



The cannibals



Kurtz



The girl



The Congo River



The African woman

BEFORE READING


1 This story focuses on a journey along the Congo River in Africa in 1902.

Look at the pictures then use the words in the box to complete these sentences from the story. Look up any words you don't know in a dictionary.



desolate natives journey steamboat wilderness canoe

- a We followed the coast of Africa which seemed like the edge of a
- b Kurtz's station was empty and in the heart of the jungle.
- c The ' camps surrounded the place, and the chiefs came to see him every day.
- d A lone white man paddling back in his with four natives.
- e But in order to understand the effect this had on me, you need to know a number of things.
- f I got a job with the company as the captain of a river

2  What do you know about the Congo River and the jungle surrounding it? Work with a partner and do some research on the internet.

3 The main character Marlow says: 'I remembered there was a foreign company that traded on the Congo River.' Read this definition below.

trade: the action of buying and selling goods and services

In 1902 what goods were taken to Africa and what goods were brought back from Africa by traders? Fill in the lists below, choosing from these items.



BEADS



IVORY



COTTON



ALCOHOL



RUBBER



GOLD

Taken TO Africa	Brought back FROM Africa
.....
.....
.....
.....

4 Do you know what tragic form of trading once existed in Africa? Do some research on the internet if necessary.

CHAPTER 1

1 Night was falling. We were sitting on the *Nellie*, a sailing boat. We were anchored in the Thames in London, waiting for the tide to change so that we could leave. The air was dark, and there was a great gloom all over the city. All five of us were experienced sailors and old friends, and we were relaxed together. As the darkness increased, we saw more and more lights on the small boats going backwards and forwards across the river.

‘This has also been one of the dark places of the earth,’ said Marlow suddenly.

Marlow was the only one of us who was still working as a sailor.

He was a seaman, and also a wanderer. He was interested in the ships, the sea, the foreign ports that he visited and the foreign faces that he saw. And he was also very interested in understanding deeper and more complex things about the places that he visited and the people that he met. So his remark was not surprising to us, and nobody answered. Then he continued, very slowly:

‘I was thinking of the very old times, when the Romans first came here, nineteen hundred years ago. They sailed up the river Thames to a dark and wild place, with bad weather, bad food and death hiding all around them. But the Romans were strong enough to face the darkness. They were conquerors. They just took what they could get.

- **anchored:** (of a boat) fixed in one place with a heavy chain and object
- **gloom:** darkness
- **remark:** spoken observation

- **this:** (here) London
- **tide:** rise and fall of the sea that happens twice a day
- **wanderer:** person who likes to travel and explore new places

Conquest is not a nice thing when you look at it too closely: it is robbery and murder on a large scale. Conquerors of course have the idea that conquest is something noble, that has real meaning'

Marlow broke off•. We watched the lights on the river, waiting patiently for him to continue. After a long silence, Marlow went on•, 'I once sailed up a big river,' and we knew that he wanted to tell us one of his long inconclusive• stories.

Marlow began his story.

I don't want to bother• you too much with what happened to me personally. But in order to understand the effect this journey had on me, you need to know a number of things: how I got there, what I saw, and how I went up that river to the place where I first met Kurtz.

A GOOD STORY

Which of these elements are important for you in a story?

Tick (✓).

- Background and description.
- Good plot with lots of action.
- Satisfactory ending.
- Hidden meaning and moral.
- Convincing characters.

- **bother:** annoy; tell
- **broke off:** (here) stopped speaking

- **inconclusive:** without a satisfactory end
- **went on:** continued

I was hanging around London, resting before looking for my next job. At first I wanted to go back to sea, but I couldn't find a ship. Then one day I saw a map in a shop window that I had seen as a boy. It was a map of a big dark area near the equator with a huge river in its centre. I decided that I wanted to go there: to Africa. I remembered there was a foreign company that traded• on the Congo River, and that I had an aunt who knew one of the bosses of that same company. And so thanks to my aunt I got a job with the company as the captain of a river steamboat•.

Within forty-eight hours I was crossing the Channel• to meet my employers in Belgium and sign the contract. While I was there I was also asked to have a medical• in which a little old doctor took my pulse• and measured my head. I thought this was strange and I asked him why this was important.

'The biggest change to the men who go to Africa happens inside their heads,' he said mysteriously. He then asked me if there was a history of madness in my family. This annoyed me greatly and I told him so.

'Just remember to avoid getting angry when you are out there. In the tropics•, anger can be more dangerous than the sun. Keep calm. Calm. Goodbye,' he said before signalling for me to leave.

Before starting my job I went to thank my aunt. She was very kind to me and she seemed to think I was some kind of 'taker of light', going out to Africa to help 'those ignorant millions change their horrible ways and bring them civilisation'. I reminded her, however, that I was actually going to work for a company that was interested in profit.

- **Channel:** sea between England and France
- **medical:** examination by a doctor to check you are healthy before you start a job

- **steamboat:** boat which moves by steam power
- **took my pulse:** counted my heartbeats
- **traded:** bought and sold things
- **tropics:** area near the equator

I felt that I was going not to the centre of a continent, but to the centre of the earth.

CONQUEST/COLONISATION

Where is Marlow going?


What nationality is the company he now works for?

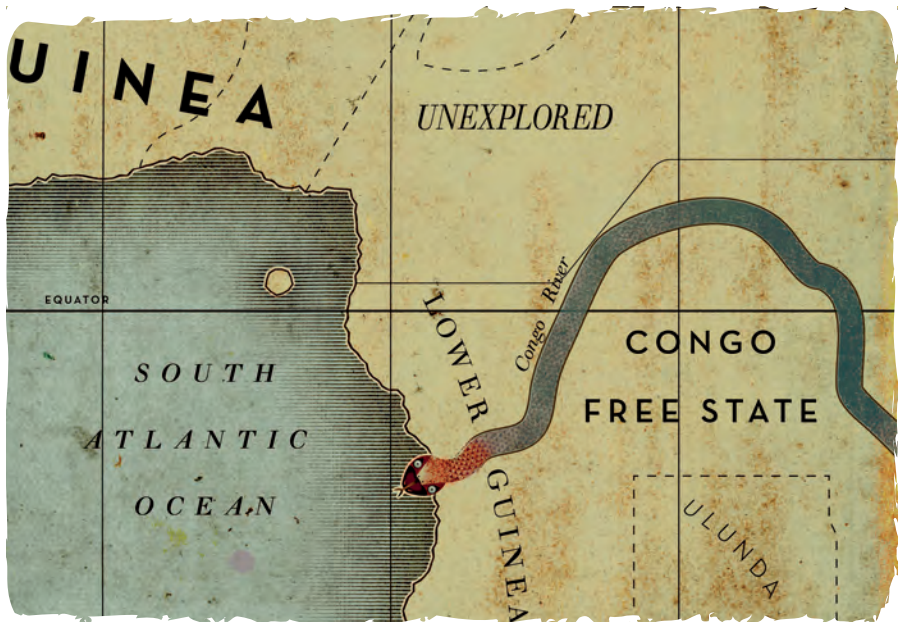
Marlow talks about the Roman conquest of Britain.

Look up the word 'conquest' in a dictionary.

Marlow decides to work for a European company that trades in Africa. What do you know about the European colonisation of Africa? Look up the word 'colonisation' in a dictionary.

What is the difference between conquest and colonisation?

 Discuss in groups.



1 Change the following sentences into indirect speech using the subject and the reporting verb in brackets.

- a** 'If anything happens to Kurtz before we get to him, I will be devastated.' (the manager/confess)
- b** 'Your success in Europe is certain, whatever happens.' (I/argue)
- c** 'I don't know why the thirty of them hadn't killed the five of us whites and eaten us!' (Marlow/admit)
- d** 'Repeat his last words. I want something to live with.' (She/beg)
- e** 'I went a little farther till I had gone so far that I don't know how to get back.' (the Russian/reveal)
- f** 'I have been doing my best to keep him alive.' (the Russian/go on to say)
- g** 'There has been no medicine or decent food here for months. Kurtz was shamefully abandoned.' (the Russian/argue)
- h** 'Do you know what you are doing?' (I/ask)
- i** 'Mr Kurtz is dead by this time'. (The manager/suppose)
- j** 'The manager is capable of looking in my boxes when I am not there.' (Kurtz/claim)
- k** 'Why did they attack us?' (I/wonder)

2 Use five of the words in the box to complete the sentences.

unsteady trail whistle railway
phantom crew edge worthy

- a** A is a device used sometimes to make high warning sounds.
- b** The people working on a boat form a
- c** means not balanced enough.
- d** Much of the American system was built by black workers.
- e** '..... of' means good enough for.

P Cambridge English: Preliminary English Test (PET) Reading Part 5**1** For each of the sentences below, choose the correct answer.

- a** I was lying flat on the deck of my steamboat when I the manager speaking to one of his colleagues.
A perceived B overheard C remarked D relieved
- b** Kurtz was not there. I realized that this meant we be attacked at any moment.
A can B had C must D might
- c** I had tried to break the spell of the wilderness that to hold Kurtz so tightly.
A seemed B was C tried D looked
- d** It seemed that there been no other news since then.
A has B have C had D having
- e** We sailed the short distance to the station where we met by a white man wearing brightly patched clothes.
A were B had C have D couldn't
- f** He started talking quickly, as if he talked to anyone for a long time.
A weren't B hasn't C had D hadn't
- g** I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint, no faith, and no fear, struggled blindly with itself.
A and B yet C only D that
- h** We arrived at a place where a lot of people were moving about ants.
A for B like C in D the
- i** asking, I was told that Kurtz was a first-class agent.
A On B If C When D By
- j** The manager had no learning or intelligence. He the routine going, that was all.
A kept B had C saw D watched