Organizational Patterns:
The book is arranged into three sections, each approximately thirty pages long. The first section describes how Marlow arrives at the Congo River. It also includes the long wait for the rivets, and the introduction of Kurtz, the mysterious character Marlow is anxious to meet. The second section has a lot more information about Kurtz. Marlow finds out that the Manager and others are trying to find a way to get rid of Kurtz so that he is not in the way of the promotion they hope to get. It includes Marlow finally being able to travel up the river, and his descriptions of going up the river being like going back to prehistoric times. It also describes the attack of the natives. In addition, Marlow meets a Russian who has met Kurtz, and worships him. The third section includes Marlow speaking with this Russian, and him finally meeting Kurtz. It also tells the story of the journey home, and the death of Kurtz. The book ends with Marlow delivering all of Kurtz’s papers.

The book follows the format of the Hero’s Journey. Marlow is on a mission to save Kurtz, and there are a lot of obstacles to him accomplishing that goal.

Issues Related to this Study of Literature:

Themes:
- How morals fail in the face of Greed.
- Humans come from similar roots; the humanity of all humans.

Setting:
This story takes place mostly in Africa, specifically in the Congo. Students should be somewhat familiar with the geography of the place, as well as what is historically going on in the late 1800s in that area. They definitely need to understand what imperialism is. They also need to know what ivory is, where it comes from, and what it is used for.

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some of the issues connected with the taking of ivory. Within the story, however, Conrad does not mention the Congo. This is something important to note. This fact helps Conrad emphasize that the center of Darkness changes.

The story also takes place on a boat on the Thames River. It is interesting to note the connection that Marlow makes between the Thames and the Congo. Both had conquerors sail up these rivers. These rivers have a lot of history connected to them. Marlow examines time often and how time affects everything around it.

The story also takes place on the main continent of England. This is where Marlow is interviewed for the job, where Marlow distributes the papers of Kurtz, etc.

Point of View:
The book is told by an unknown narrator. As Marlow is telling this story to the narrator and some friends, the narrator records it. This seems to enable Conrad to distance himself from the story. The book is based on an experience that Conrad had in the Congo area, but he distances himself three times from the actual story. He does this through telling the story through Marlow whose story is told through the unknown narrator. This seems to give the story more validity. Since we do not know who the narrator is, we cannot accuse him of a specific bias. He is simply recording the story. This releases Conrad/Marlow from being judged as biased.

The story format is related to the movement of Realism. Realism developed in the 1800s in opposition to the movement of Romanticism. The Realists wanted a truthful representation of reality and truth. Although bias can never be truly removed, their goal was to make it as objective as possible, and Conrad does this by having these frames.

Allusion:
There are many allusions in the novel which may or may not be well known to the students. These really help Marlow establish his tone of foreboding, darkness, etc. One such allusion occurs where Marlow describes the two ladies knitting when he goes in to speak with one of the heads of the company. These ladies allude to the Fates from Greek Mythology, Clotho and Lachesis. They are the ones who cut the thread of life. (You might make the connection with the Disney Movie Hercules, which then can help students remember who the Fates are.)

There are many allusions to the Bible as well. This is something that is important to point out. One is the metaphor of the Congo as a snake. Part of the power of this metaphor is in its allusion to Adam and Eve and the snake. In a discussion, what everyone thinks of when they think of a snake can also be discussed.

Foreshadowing:
In the Beginning of the book, Conrad does a lot of foreshadowing. For instance Marlow says that as he was looking at a map of the Congo, “it fascinated me
like a snake would a bird—a silly little bird.” (p. 9) His description of the women as the Fates is also a foreshadowing. He mentions towards the end that being with Kurtz, saving him, etc, was his fate.

Tone:

The tone throughout the novel is somewhat dark, and it has strong allusions to fate; Marlow was meant to go on this adventure, it seems. Discuss the tone of the book in the beginning. Marlow knows what is happening, and what is going to take place in the end, so some of that foreshadowing is imbedded in the tone. The ending is not the most pleasant of endings, and the tone gives you that sense from the very beginning. You can have students come up with words and phrases that portray that tone. There is a tone of mystery—we don’t know exactly what is about to happen.

Affective Issues Related to the Work:

In this book, Marlow discovers what imperialism really is. This reality is shocking to him. Teenagers are at a point in life of discovery. In some instances they discover reality and must grow up. Marlow finds that what the Europeans are saying is not the truth. He is finding his own opinion, his own truth. That is something that teenagers are after—finding their own opinions. This is the time when they really start to understand what is going on in politics. This is one place in the book where the narrator finds out what is really happening.

Teenagers are concerned about world issues. It would be good to discuss slavery, and how the Europeans were treating Africans at this point in time. They can look at it from the vantage point of how they would react to being treated like the Africans, and they also can look at the African reactions in the book, and compare them.

Another point that could be brought out is the fact that Africans were sold into slavery by other Africans. Europeans bought them, but it was not just a white against black problem, it was also between the tribes in Africa, black against black.

Vocabulary Issues:

There’s a lot of advanced vocabulary in this book, students are sure to find many words they do not
understand. But it contains some words used for construction (rivets, etc). It also contains words that would need to be understood in the context of Africa, etc. (Ivory, why Marlow might refer to them as prehistoric, they live in “hovels” why might he call them that? Etc) There is a bit of psychological vocabulary, for instance crania (p. 13).

There is also a lot of slang. Both sailor slang, and British slang (squirts, lounged, white-lead, confab, leggins, etc). There is also a brief instance where there is some African Dialect (“Mistah Kurtz—he dead” p 87)s. The book does expose students to new vocabulary.

**Background Knowledge:**

Students would need to know about Imperialism, why countries practiced it, how, and what the consequences were. They would also need to understand what the colonists were trying to extract from the Congo. They were after Ivory. Students need to understand the dilemma in the context of this fact. They would need to understand some of the culture of Africa. Why were there shrunken heads in the Congo? What do they mean? They would need to understand how the Europeans were treating the Africans, and how the Africans responded. It would be helpful for them to learn about the cultures of the Africans in the Congo, etc.

**Implications for Students of Diversity:**

This book needs to be approached with caution because it uses some vocabulary that will be offensive to some people. I think it would be advisable to come to a decision as a class, before the class begins the novel, on how we would treat those words. If they think while we are reading it out loud it would be appropriate to say those words, or if we should substitute another word. And if anyone does not agree with the class’ decision, they can slip a note under the door, talk to the teacher, email, or something before we begin the novel.

Conrad, and thus Marlow, do speak of the Africans in the manner that people of that time did. And there are some passages where they speak less than glowingly of the African people. Conrad speaks of them as cannibals, and as primitive people. I think it would be helpful to read the Congo Diary along with this so that we can somewhat understand the author’s intent. Conrad realized that they were being treated as slaves when he went to the Congo, and he was trying to expose that.

**Gender Issues:**

Marlow does not speak glowingly of the opposite gender. He talks about his aunt in less than flattering terms, he alludes to women as Fates, he also talks about women being in a dream world which has no touch with reality. In short, there are gender issues. It would be a good point in time to talk about women at that time, how they were viewed, etc. And perhaps talk about what was expected of women, etc.

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He also describes an African Woman as being stately, statuesque. She had a couple ivory horns worth of metal on her, etc. He describes her grieving for Kurtz as well as Kurtz’s intended grieving for him.

The Central Question or Enduring Theme:
How morals fail in the face of Greed.

Research Issues/Project Ideas:
Students could do a report on different African Tribes, or cultures. They can also report on what happened during Imperialism in Africa. Which countries were in charge of which countries, etc.

Another idea would be for the students to read the Congo Diary, which is included in many of the published texts of Heart of Darkness. This is non-fiction, a primary source, and being able to read primary documents is included in the Utah Core Requirements.

It would be important to discuss Conrad’s life. He was Polish—what does that mean? Poles were not considered the most ideal people at that time. The Germans and the Russians looked down on them. His country of birth places Conrad in a similar position to the people that he talks about in Heart of Darkness. Not to the same extent, but somewhat similar. He was born in a time when Poland technically did not exist, it was split up between Russia and the Austria-Hungarian Empire. His family was transported to Northern Russia because they were so against what was happening to their nation. Thus, his country, like the Congo, was taken over by other nations, and they had very little say on what happened to their country.

What would be a really interesting piece to read after finishing Heart of Darkness would be Chinua Achebe’s “An Image of Africa” which was written in response to Heart of Darkness. He brings up interesting viewpoints which could be helpful for the students to encounter. They can then discuss the viewpoints in his essay, and state if they agree with it or not. This can help them think more critically about texts, and enforce the idea of not taking things at face value.
Informational/Functional Texts:

Maps would be a big thing that should be included.

Joseph Conrad autobiographies, works, etc:

- [www.ablongman.com/danroschbritlit3e](http://www.ablongman.com/danroschbritlit3e) has some information on Joseph Conrad.
- [http://www.online-literature.com/conrad/](http://www.online-literature.com/conrad/) also has some information on Joseph Conrad and his works.

Colonialism and the Congo: