Joseph Conrad- 1899

Section One:
Frame Narrative: 2 Stories in 1
Story 1: Outsider View of Marlow’s Rants
Story 2: Marlow’s Rant/Reflection

1. What is the name of the cruising yawl at the start of the text? Why is mention of the ‘anchor’ and the ‘sail’ equally important on a symbolic level? How might an audience interpret this in the context of colonialism?
2. Where does the story begin?
3. Who are the individuals introduced on page 16? Why is their introduction important? [Hint: Consider and explore why Marlow is allotted a name and the others are allotted titles.]
4. What does the concept ‘follow[ing] the sea’ encompass?
5. Fully describe Marlow including explicit and cited textual references.
6. Why does Marlow reflect on England during Roman times? What might this foreshadow? How does this harken the title ‘Heart of Darkness’?
7. Break. This. Down. Explain the significance of the following passage from one of Marlow’s early rants:
   ‘They were no colonists; their administration was merely a squeeze, and nothing more, I suspect. They were conquerors, and for that you want only brute force – nothing to boast of, when you have it, since your strength is just an accident arising from the weakness of others. They grabbed what they could get for the sake of what was to be got. It was just robbery with violence, aggravated murder on a great scale, and men going at it blind – as is very proper for those who tackle a darkness. The conquest of the earth, which mostly means the taking it away from those who have a difference complexion or slightly flatter noses than ourselves, is not a pretty thing when you look at it too much. What redeems it is the idea only. An idea at the back of it; not a sentimental pretense but an idea; and an unselfish belief in the idea – something you can set up, and bow down before, and offer a sacrifice to… ‘(Conrad 20).
8. Marlow discusses his fascination with maps. Which three areas encompass the ‘glories of exploration?’ Which area, above all others, entices Marlow? How does he describe it? [Hint: Consider the allusion and connotative meanings behind ‘the snake charmed me.’]
9. Postulate a deducted reason for why the men dismiss Marlow’s desire to join the company. Why is Marlow embarrassed to ask a woman for help? Yet, what happens when he does?
10. Think about the color imagery in the text. First, consider the boat’s light reflections upon the Thames. Then, consider the colors of the map. Why are the colors noted? Which color on the map represents Marlow’s destination? Why is that color significant? [Hint: Think Charlotte Perkins Gilman.]
11. How did Marlow receive his appointment?
12. As Marlow travels to the station in the Congo, what does he see along the way that makes him want to detour? On his detour, what does he see?
13. There is inherent juxtaposition between what Marlow sees as natural and unnatural. What image of the natives does Marlow conceive is natural? What encounter is unnatural?
14. Marlow mentions a man at the station who upholds Mr. Kurtz. What is the initial description of Kurtz? Why is there credibility allotted to the Company’s chief accountant? How does the chief accountant view the natives?

15. Do you think Marlow is racist? Explain thoroughly. Consider his language in articulating his story AND the ways in which he interacts with the natives.

16. On page 40, Marlow has a flashback to his conversation with the French doctor before leaving for the Congo. Which of the doctor’s comments sticks with Marlow?

17. What is the savage stereotype? On page 43, why does Marlow say he is getting savage?

18. When Marlow arrives to take over control of his steamboat, what does he learn? How long will this approximately take?

19. What is Marlow’s opinion of the manager? Why does he maintain power?

20. What big event happens before Marlow meets the bricklayer?

21. What do you make of the bricklayer of the Central Station? Why is Marlow’s allusion to Mephistopheles significant?

22. On page 50, we lead up to a break in the narration. The story begins from the narrator’s point-of-view listening to Marlow’s rant. The narration transitions into Marlow’s story and Marlow’s point-of-view. However, Marlow says, “… No, it is impossible; it is impossible to convey the life-sensation of any given epoch of existence, -- that which makes its truth, its meaning – its subtle and penetrating essence. It is impossible. We live, as we dream – alone…” (Conrad 50). After this, the frame narration is highlighted once more. Why?