HEART OF DARKNESS

Close Reading Envelope Activity

Marcie Belgard

Directions:

Each of you will be given an envelope with one close reading topic on it. Throughout your reading of the novella, you are to copy passages onto index cards and put them in your envelope.

You will meet periodically in groups to share the contents of your envelope and discuss why the passage was selected and the effect of the quoted passage on the meaning of the work as a whole.  Some days you will be placed into groups of students with the same topic and on others you will be placed with a group with different topics.  Envelope contents may also be used to guide discussion in Socratic seminar and/or as quiz grades.  Write legibly on the cards as some days the envelopes will be swapped and your classmates might write an analysis of the excerpts in your envelope.

**Envelope 1.**  Describe Marlow. His role as the narrator of this novel is very important. Is he reliable? Is he judgmental? How does he get his information? What is his attitude toward ancient England and the England he is living in? Towards Brussels? Towards Kurtz? Find passages that define his role.

**Envelope 2:** What does the general manager at the Central Station symbolize? How did he get and hold his job? What feeling does he inspire in Marlow? What do his actions reveal about him? Find passages that illustrate his character.

**Envelope 3**:  Conrad has other characters talk a great deal about Kurtz before we meet him? Who are they and what do they say? What about Kurtz arouses Marlow’s curiosity? Cite passages that show what others think about Kurtz.

**Envelope 4**:  Conrad frequently juxtaposes dark and light symbolism frequently in the novel? Look for quotes/passages that stress light and/ or dark. What is the effect of the use of black and white imagery in the description of Africa? What stylistic techniques did Conrad use to highlight his theme? What features of the landscape convey symbolic meaning? Find examples in the text.

**Envelope 5:** Compare Kurtz’s fiancée and his native mistress. What kind of social commentary is Conrad or Marlow making about Europe and Africa?

**Envelope 6**: Compare the Europeans to the natives. Cite passages that show this comparison and infer what Conrad might be illustrating.

**Envelope 7**:  What is the heart of darkness? What is the literal and figurative meaning of heart of darkness? What is the origin of evil or darkness in the novel? Why is Kurtz reluctant to leave it? What kind of social commentary is Conrad or Marlow making about Europe and Africa? What passages to illustrate this symbolism.

**Envelope 8**: Kurtz's famous last words are "The horror! The horror!" How should these words be interpreted? How does Marlow interpret them?

**Envelope 9**: What might the Congo symbolize? How is this river different from the sea? the Thames? Look for quotes that show what the river might symbolize.

**Envelope 10:** How is the novel allegorical? How is the archetypical? What is the journey? What is the quest? Find passages to illustrate this allegory.