

UPCOMING

DISCUSSIONS

Bring a
lunch

Louisa May Alcott

Documentary

*Louisa May Alcott:
The Woman Behind
Little Women*

10-8-11 1-3 pm

Book Discussions

The Inheritance

10-29-11 12-2pm

Hospital Sketches

11-19-11 12-2pm

Little Women

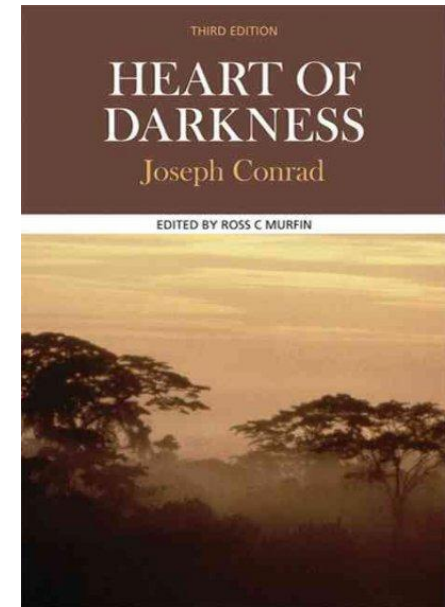
12-10-11 1-3pm

Brown Bag Book Club



Digs in & Discusses

The Academic Decathlon Literature
Selection



Sat., Sept. 17, 2011

Noon – 2pm

Community Room
Lodi Public Library
201 W. Locust St.

Call 333-5503 for details

Discussion Questions courtesy of
www.pinkmonkey.com and
www.sparknotes.com

Discussion Guide designed by
Sandy Smith, Lodi Public Library



Discussion Questions

1. The novel has two basic settings. Where does the frame narrative take place? Where does the main story take place? What affect does the frame narrative have on the main plot?
2. Why does Marlow go to Africa? What does he learn while he is there?
3. How do rivets interrupt Marlow's journey? Why is this significant to the plot?
4. How does Marlow imagine Kurtz to be as a man? How is Kurtz different than Marlow imagined?
5. List five incidents from the book of the white man's cruelty to his fellow Africans. Which do you consider to the cruelest and why?
6. What is the mood of the entire novel? How is it developed in the book?
7. Briefly describes what Marlow finds out at each station (Outer, Central, and Inner).
8. Compare and contrast Kurtz and Marlow.
9. Does the story end in tragedy or comedy? Why?
10. Explain the image of the snake that is woven throughout the novel.
11. The Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe has claimed that *Heart of Darkness* is an "offensive and deplorable book" that "set[s] Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe's own state of spiritual grace will be manifest." Achebe says that Conrad does not provide enough of an outside frame of reference to enable the novel to be read as ironic or critical of imperialism. Based on the evidence in the text, argue for or against Achebe's assertion.
12. Discuss the importance of the Congo River in this narrative. Why does Marlow travel primarily by boat and seldom on land?
13. Marlow constantly uses vague and often redundant phrases like "unspeakable secrets" and "inconceivable mystery." At other times, however, he is capable of powerful imagery and considerable eloquence. 16. Why does Marlow use vague and "inconclusive" language so frequently?
14. Why does *Heart of Darkness* have two competing heroes? Make the case for either Marlow or Kurtz as the true "hero" of the book.
15. Interpret Kurtz's dying words ("The horror! The horror!"). What do they mean? What are the possible "horrors" to which he is referring? Why is Marlow the recipient of Kurtz's last words?
16. Why does Marlow lie to Kurtz's fiancée about Kurtz's last words? Why not tell her the truth, or tell her that Kurtz had no last words, rather than affirming her sentimental and mundane ideas?
17. Contrast Kurtz's African mistress with his Intended. Are both negative portrayals of women? Describe how each functions in the narrative. Does it make any difference in your interpretation to know that Conrad supported the women's suffrage movement?
18. Describe the use of "darkness" both in the book's title and as a symbol throughout the text. What does darkness represent? Is its meaning constant or does it change?
19. How does physical illness relate to madness? How does one's environment relate to one's mental state in this book?