1. In the preface to his novel *The Nigger of the Narcissus*, Conrad wrote that a novelist “speaks to our capacity for delight, for wonder, to the sense of mystery surrounding our lives; to our sense of pity, and beauty, and pain; to the latent feeling of fellowship with all creation—and to the subtle but invincible conviction of solidarity that knits together the loneliness of innumerable hearts; to the solidarity in dreams, in joy, in sorrow, in aspirations, in illusions, in hopes, in fear, which binds men to each other.” Which parts of this description of the role of the novelist applies most appropriately to this novel? Which do not? Explain.

2. Each of the three main characters in this story—Marlow, Kurtz, and the Intended—represents a clearly different point of view on the nature of the world and perhaps even on the meaning of life. How can each of these views be described? To what extent are they mutually exclusive?

3. During Marlow’s physical examination before he leaves for Africa, the doctor takes certain measurements, which he says are for scientific research. Marlow asks him whether he examines his subjects when they return. The doctor says that he does not because the changes are in the inside. Discuss ways in which Kurtz and Marlow are both changed internally by their experiences in the jungle.

4. There are two prominent female figures in the story—the Intended and the magnificent African woman who appears twice on the shore—but women are also represented by the two women knitting at the Company headquarters and by Marlow’s aunt. How can these women be analyzed in order to further develop the themes of the novel?

5. Marlow spends little time describing the jungle except that it seems timeless, prehistoric, and vast. What are his main concerns and activities as the steamboat proceeds up the river?

6. There is a group of men Marlow meets and travels with whom he describes as “pilgrims.” Since they are never explicitly defined or described, what can be inferred about them and their goals? Start with what little we are told about them.

7. The helmsman is a minor character who helps the reader see some of the subtlety in Marlow’s character. Marlow often starts with a description that seems objective although often negative, but then comes to find a common human bond with the person he is describing. How does this work with the helmsman? How is he first described and how does the reader first realize Marlow’s feeling of compassion for him?

8. The Russian at the Inner Station is clearly a foil to Kurtz. Discuss how these two characters add meaning to the story that otherwise would be lacking.

9. One of the obvious decisions Conrad has made in this story is to keep people, places, and events as anonymous and ambiguous as possible. Most places and characters in the story are unnamed, and the few who are named are given only one name. What effect does this have on the story and what effect does it have on the reader?