Heart of Darkness

Close Reading passages

Directions: Answer the following questions.

1. Look at the description of the oil painting by Kurtz of the blindfolded woman. What is the meaning of this painting? (30)
2. In the midst of the narrative, Marlow stops and speaks to his listeners: “Do you see him? Do you see the story? Do you see anything? It seems to me I am trying to tell you a dream…” (33) What effect is created? What is the significance of repeating the verb “to see”? Marlow seems to call special attention to the particular episode that is occurring, suggesting that it is important and especially difficult to understand. What do you think he wants us to see?
3. Study the descriptions of the river—the “hidden evil” and the “profound darkness of its heart”. What message do you think Conrad is trying to send? What other examples can you find? (ex. 43)
4. Examine pages 50-51. Marlow is very complimentary towards the cannibals. Why do you think this is? What other arguments does he seem to be making in these pages?
5. Examine Marlow’s reaction to the attack and the death of his helmsman. Why does he throw away his shoes? (57-59) (also 62-3)
6. 59-61 contain a HUGE block of text. Why do you think the author included such a long paragraph? Consider its contents and Marlow’s state of mind at the time.
7. Why do you think Marlow puts such stock in Kurtz’s voice? Why is that what he is most concerned about missing (58)? He is extremely eloquent, and yet he also declared at one point “Exterminate all the brutes!” (62)
8. Examine the “harlequin” and his greeting of Marlow. What might he symbolize? What is his function in the novel? How much credibility do you attach to his remarks? (64-66)
9. On page 67, the harlequin says that they natives attacked Marlow’s ship because “they don’t want him to go”. What effect does this have on the reader? What might this indicate about the changed nature of Kurtz?
10. Examine the situation where Kurtz almost shot the harlequin (70). What does this reveal about Kurtz? What deeper theme might this connect to?
11. On page 71-72, Marlow realizes that Kurtz did not have a broken down fence around his compound, but instead, poles with heads on them. In his reaction to this horror, Marlow remarks that these heads showed that “Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts, that there was something wanting in him—some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence.” What does this mean and how could it be tied to the novel overall?