**Heart of Darkness: Literary Choices**

**Subject area/course**: English/Language Arts, English Literature

**Grade level/band**: 11–12

**STUDENT PROMPT SECTION**

1. **Task context**:

You are faced with making choices every day. What courses to take? What movie to see? What extracurricular activities to choose? Teachers and other educational authorities also make choices. What courses should students take? What works should be studied in those courses?

"Heart of Darkness" by Joseph Conrad is frequently included in reading requirements for any course in British literature. This novella chronicles the experiences of a British narrator as he visits Africa. Critics consider this work a significant representation of British colonialism and Victorian/Modern literature. It has been a part of British literature studies for many years. However, not everyone is a fan. Chinua Achebe, a prominent author and literary critic from Nigeria, criticized this work in an essay called "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.'" As the title indicates, Achebe strongly suggests that Conrad’s novella presents Africa in an unflattering light, and he even calls the work "racist slander" (Achebe).

What do you think? Should “Heart of Darkness” continue to be required reading for students? Before you determine your answer, consider the following questions:

* + What criteria or guidelines should teachers use when selecting works for students to read?
  + What value, if any, is there in reading works that some might find offensive?
  + Achebe asserts that the image of Africa as presented in "Heart of Darkness" is not only offensive, but also inaccurate. Is it important that fiction be accurate?

1. **The task**:

After reading and thinking about Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness,'" write a 4-page paper in which you compare the presentations of Africa and defend, qualify or refute the following statement.

*"Heart of Darkness" should be required reading in British Literature courses.*

Your paper should:

* + Contain an argument that is organized, coherent, and addresses the purpose as posed by the essential question.
  + Support your position with evidence from the texts.
  + Employ standard English grammar and usage.
  + Use in‐text citations correctly and include a Works Cited page using MLA format or another style that your teacher selects.

1. **Material/resources:**

You will need copies of both Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" and Achebe's "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's 'Heart of Darkness.'" Both texts are readily available online or you may use a print version of the book:

* + “Heart of Darkness,” <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/219/219-h/219-h.htm>
  + “An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad’s ‘Heart of Darkness’” <http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html>

1. **Time requirements:**

This task will take approximately 2 weeks to complete. Your teacher will provide you with details regarding deadlines and due dates.