



Ascent Classical Academy of Douglas County

12th Grade Summer Reading Assignment 2025-2026

Required Reading, Annotations, and Writing

To prepare for **Modern Literature**, students are required to read and annotate *Heart of Darkness* by **Joseph Conrad**, and then compose a response to the provided prompt (see attached instructions). For a guide to annotating, please consult page 2-3 of this assignment. Please purchase the specific edition indicated by the ISBN.

Book: *Heart of Darkness*

Author: Joseph Conrad

ISBN: [ISBN 13: 978-0375753770](#)

Deadline

The students will be expected to turn in their annotated copy of the book on **Thursday, August 21** at the beginning of class. Students will receive an annotation score based on the attached rubric (page 3) from their teacher. Students must bring their books everyday to class and be prepared to discuss and write on the text in class.

Students are also required to submit their **4-5 page response paper** on the first day of class, as detailed on page 4 of this packet.

Response Paper Rough Draft Due Date: Thursday, August 21, 2025
at the beginning of class

Response Paper Final Draft Due Date: September 12, 2025
at the beginning of class

Please email Mr. Southwick at aaron.southwick@dc.ascentcolorado.org with questions.

A quick guide to annotating

Annotating means 'to note' or 'to make notes.' The purpose of annotating is to *notice* what's present in the text, and, if possible, make a connection with it. Annotations are a record of your thinking as you read the text. Annotation helps us become intentional readers by compelling us to think about and converse with the text we are reading. Annotations also provide footholds into difficult texts. As a method of condensing complex parts of a text into simple statements, annotating encourages you to take your time to understand confusing passages. Annotations help prepare you to discuss the text with your classmates and instructor. Therefore, annotations should not be a burdensome task! They are designed to help and serve the student. Annotations prepare students for success in Socratic discussions by helping them recall and locate key passages quickly.

Annotating can be broken down into three steps:

1. As you read the page, ask yourself: What stands out about the passage? What seems important? What do you *notice* about the passage?
2. Mark (i.e. circle, highlight, underline, etc) line(s), phrase(s), or word(s) on the page that stood out or caught your eye.
3. Write a note in the margin next to your mark. The note should express why you marked those lines or phrases. Examples include commenting on ...
 - **character** ("Achilles is full of himself here"),
 - **plot** ("Achilles challenges Hector to a duel"),
 - **reader response or question** ("Oh no! Frodo fails the test!" or "Why are Odysseus' travels so famous?"),
 - **literary device** ("This simile compares Achilles to a lion - he is bloodthirsty" or "This metaphor shows how angry Achilles is at Agamemnon")
 - **pattern** ("The poet repeated these same lines on page 82 - I wonder why?"),
 - **a connection with another text or story** ("Achilles and Patroclus's friendship reminds me of Frodo and Sam's friendship in *Fellowship of the Ring*.").

As a general rule, anytime you make a mark on the page, write a note about why that word or line stood out to you. Be judicious with your annotations: you need not comment on every idea, but you should show intentionality in your comments.

Annotation Grade Scale

Summer Reading Annotations are due at the beginning of the period on Thursday, August 21, 2025. If a student turns in the annotations later in the day of the deadline, it will be subject to late deductions.

Grade Categories

Completion means there are neither too few, nor too many, annotations. Practically speaking, an annotation should appear every 1-2 pages. Not every page needs to be annotated, but the student's annotations should show frequent and widespread enough throughout the assigned reading to demonstrate the student completed the reading. On occasion or if desired, students can have more than one annotation on a page. Sustaining this frequency may result in the student spending more time than is required on the reading.

Thoughtfulness means annotations are intentional. While the student is not required to analyze the text in his or her annotations, the student's notes demonstrate genuine engagement with the text in writing on the margins, such as by asking incisive questions or making apt observations.

If a student has only made a mark (i.e. highlight, circle, underline), but no writing accompanies that mark, then it is not considered an annotation.

Annotations are graded on completion and thoughtfulness, using the following rubric:

- **A:** Clear evidence that you completed the reading, engaged with the text in writing.
- **B:** Evidence that you completed the reading, but need more engagement with the text in writing.
- **C:** Some evidence that you completed the reading, but not a lot of engagement with the text or writing.
- **F:** No evidence that you completed the reading.

***Heart of Darkness* Written Response**

Directions: Write a well-developed 4-5 page response to the prompt below by exploring key passages and quotations from *Heart of Darkness*. Your response must be typed, double-spaced in Times New Roman, 12 point font. It must follow APA style and citation guidelines.

Prompt:

Marlowe narrates his time in the Belgian Congo, describing what he finds there. In particular, his work comes to center around his pursuit of the man named Mr. Kurtz. Mr. Kurtz has a reputation that Marlowe often wonders if the real man will live up to. The motif of light and darkness, visibility and no visibility emerge frequently throughout the novel, as well as Marlowe's commentary (both direct and indirect) of humanity and what defines a man as humane/of humanity.

Write a well-developed essay that analyzes and explores the meaning behind the title "Heart of Darkness," what the heart of darkness is, and how Marlowe's experiences reveal this to the reader.

Things you might consider include: what is "seen" vs. "unseen/not able to be seen," the physical descriptions of the Congo river and the area surrounding it, what Marlowe knows vs. what he shares with others when he returns home, and what Marlowe understands of the mysterious Mr. Kurtz – both before and after meeting him.

Process and requirements:

- Your essay must contain an introductory and conclusion paragraph and must include a solid thesis statement.
- Open each paragraph with a topic sentence that includes the claim that will be substantiated in that paragraph, and conclude each paragraph with a sentence or two that revisits the main idea of your paragraph. Remember, one paragraph should only contain one main idea or claim.
- Directly quote from the text in your response. Analyze at least one key quotation per paragraph.
- Properly format your quotations in APA style:

Quote introduction, "Quote" (page citation).

Tolkien observes, “Suddenly, Frodo noticed that a strange-looking weather-beaten man, sitting in the shadows near the wall, was also listening intently to the hobbit-talk” (p. 153).

Frodo states, “I think one of his spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler, if you understand” (p. 168).

- Add a statement before the quotation that helps your reader (1) understand its context and (2) focus on what you, the writer, wants the reader to notice. Here is an example:

While Sam is suspicious of Strider’s intentions, Frodo is inclined to trust him. Frodo states, “You have frightened me several tonight, but never in the way the servants of the Enemy would, or so I imagine. I think one of his spies would – well, seem fairer and feel fouler” (p. 168).

- When you discuss a quotation, address the following questions (in this order). These questions are ordered from specific → general or larger theme.
 1. What does this passage or line show about isolation and community?
 2. What details of the text give you this impression? Be specific. Share what you notice or observe here.
 3. Now, what does this example reveal about isolation and community?
- Include a descriptive or clever title for your response. Think of one after you draft it, then add it to your final draft. Have fun!
- Following the writing process gives you a chance to discover more about the text and refine your writing. I am not looking for ‘perfect’ or ‘brilliant,’ but an earnest attempt to go deeper in your thinking.
- Follow standards of written English: capitalization, spelling, grammar conventions, etc.
- Avoid first and second person references: “I,” “you,” “we,” “our,” etc.
- The purpose of this writing assignment is to analyze and interpret what Shelley's argument/message is about isolation and community in the text. Remember, *analysis* simply means 'breaking down'. Therefore, you will need to break down your evidence –

that is, argue how the details of your evidence illustrate your interpretation of Shelley's message.

- Your annotations, bellwork, notes are all fodder for revising your draft. Use them!
- Attend tutoring for more help as you revise your rough draft. Your teacher is here to help you and happy to do it.

Summer Reading | Written Response Rubric

Requirements: the writer...

- ☐ Quotes substantially from the text and explores the details of these passages in writing.
- ☐ Explains what the details of each passage reveals about isolation and community. In doing so, the writer directly answers all components of the prompt.
- ☐ Properly formats quotations and includes a statement that helps the reader understand the context of the quotation.
- ☐ Follows written formal English Standards: punctuate, capitalize, correct spelling, no abbreviations or contractions
- ☐ Avoids first and second person references.
- ☐ Opens his or her paragraphs with topic sentences and ends with a few concluding sentences that revisits the main idea of the paragraph.

Basic Grade Scale:

A: Writer thoroughly fulfills the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates a thorough analysis of the prompt that is grounded solidly in the text and its details. His or her analysis is logical and provides an insightful response to the prompt. Curiosity and effort are evident in the writer's discussion of the text.

B: Writer fulfills the requirements of the assignment and demonstrates an earnest effort to explore text and discuss its meaning. The writer may need to more fully develop his or her answer to the prompt through greater nuance or attention to detail.

C: Writer fulfills most of the requirements. The writer does not fully answer the prompt and needs more development and effort overall. However, the writer does attempt to explore the text and may offer some insight into the prompt topic.

D: Writer fulfills some of the requirements, but important requirements are missing. The writer

may not maintain focus on the prompt or may not quote from the text to support his or her answer.

F: Writer does not follow the requirements and writes an off topic response that is tangentially related to the work. A zero may be given for a completely off-topic response at the discretion of the teacher. A zero will be given for no submission. Remember, your grade can only reflect what you *turn in* to your teacher.