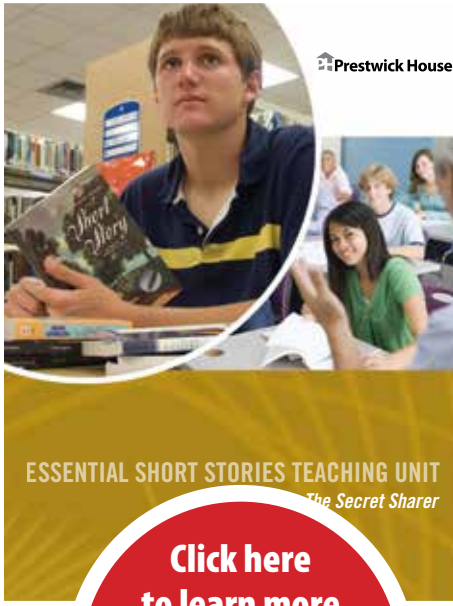




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The Secret Sharer

by Joseph Conrad

written by Halina Adams

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The Secret Sharer

Biography

Joseph Conrad (1857-1924), a Polish-born British novelist, adventurer and explorer, was most famous for writing short stories and the novel *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

Conrad was born in the Ukraine to a poor, very patriotic family of Polish intellectuals. His original name was Józef Teodor Konrad Korzeniowski. His family drew the ire of the Russian government, leading to the exile of Joseph's father. The family moved to Krakow, where both parents died before Joseph turned eleven. At sixteen, Conrad left Krakow and began his life at sea. He traveled to many foreign countries and cities—including Argentina, Marseille, Venezuela, Constantinople, and Bombay, to name a few—and worked several different jobs. Some jobs, like gunrunning and espionage, provided the basis for his later novels, while others merely paid the bills. Almost all of Conrad's sea travels made their way into his fiction, most notably in his famous novel *Heart of Darkness*, which relates Conrad's journey down the Congo.

Despite writing in English as his third language (he wrote in Polish and French first), Conrad is often considered to be one of the foremost English prose writers. His style often follows the tradition of Romanticism in that he pits awesome and sometimes terrifying depictions of nature against complex psychological dilemmas negotiated by his narrators. In each of his stories, Conrad creates a tiny world in which larger artistic and moral questions play out. Often, critics compare his vivid yet sparse descriptions to the visual artistic movement known as Impressionism.

Conrad's works came under fire in the twentieth century when writer-theorist Chinua Achebe wrote an article in 1975 entitled "An Image of Africa: Racism in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*." In the article, Achebe attacked Conrad's depictions of native people and the African continent, claiming that the story perpetuated racial stereotypes and used racially insensitive language. Because of this, Achebe argues, Conrad's story cannot be considered great literature. Proponents of Conrad's writing pointed out that Conrad used such imagery and language to highlight the problems with European colonialism and that any reading of *Heart of Darkness* requires an understanding of this irony.

Joseph Conrad died of a heart attack on August 3, 1924.

The Secret Sharer

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. identify several major concepts in Joseph Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" and point out how they are depicted:
 - the different aspects of feeling alone
 - the importance of friendship
 - the darker aspects of human nature
 - the importance of self-knowledge
 - the struggle between nature and man
 - the concept of the double
 - the contrast between what is thought to be right and what an individual thinks is right
 - how a character matures
 - the consequences of duty and class
 - using allegory to make a point about larger universal issues
2. explain how the description of a character can change in the story.
3. follow Conrad's use of foreshadowing, suspense, and description.
4. comment on the juxtaposition of man and society.
5. identify how setting plays an important role in a story.
6. explain various symbols and motifs, including:
 - the gray pajamas
 - the bathroom
 - the captain's mistrust of his crew
 - the reasons for not turning Leggatt over to the authorities
 - the contrast between land and sea
 - the scorpion and other animal imagery
 - destruction and redemption
 - the captain's hat
 - duality
7. discuss the differences between the captain and the captain of the *Sephora*.
8. point out examples of Conrad's "Impressionistic" style.

2. What point of view does Conrad use in “The Secret Sharer”?

3. What is the major theme of the story?

4. What is the primary conflict in the story?

5. What is the significance of the scorpion the chief mate finds in his cabin?

6. Identify and supply examples of two literary devices Conrad uses in “The Secret Sharer.”

7. How are perception and understanding a major part of the story?

8. How does the end of the story show the captain’s newfound authority and maturity?

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Conrad provides some names for his characters, but for others, he does not. What is the significance of each name/non-name?

2. How is nature portrayed in “The Secret Sharer”?

3. Explain some basic differences between Archbold and the captain.

4. How does the setting of the story affect the plot?

5. How does Conrad’s way of writing, his style, add to or detract from the plot?

6. How is justice depicted in this story?
