The Art of Discourse
“The essential nature of Socrates’ art lay in the fact that he did not appear to want to instruct people. On the contrary he gave the impression of one desiring to learn from those he spoke with. So instead of lecturing like a traditional schoolmaster, he discussed.”

King Leopold’s Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa
Adam Hochschild (1998); Socratic Seminar Preparation Guide

King Leopold’s Ghost – At the turn of the century, as the European powers were carving up Africa, King Leopold II of Belgium carried out a brutal plundering of the territory surrounding the Congo River. Ultimately slashing the area’s population by ten million, he still managed to shrewdly cultivate his reputation as a great humanitarian. A tale far richer than any novelist could invent, King Leopold’s Ghost is the horrifying account of a megalomaniac of monstrous proportions. It is also the deeply moving portrait of those who defied Leopold: African rebel leaders who fought against hopeless odds and a brave handful of missionaries, travelers, and young idealists who went to Africa for work or adventure but unexpectedly found themselves witnesses to a holocaust and participants in the twentieth century’s first great human rights movement.

After you read the text, answer the following questions in complete sentences, and in your own words. The questions below are the basis for some of the topics and issues we will discuss in our seminar in class. The more you have thought about these questions, the more prepared you will be for the discussion.

1. Define “philanthropic.” What evidence is provided in the introduction to apply this label to King Leopold II? (Introduction)

2. What statistics are provided in the introduction concerning lives lost in the Congo? Express your thoughts about this figure. Is it believable? What would you compare it to? Is this history new to you? Why or why not? (Introduction)
3. From what artifacts does the author base his writing? Are his sources credible? Whose account is missing from this story? Is this problematic? Explain. (Introduction)

4. Discuss the Berlin Conference; who was present, who was notably absent? Describe your impressions of this scene. (From Florida to Berlin)

5. For a geographical perspective, briefly discuss your impression regarding the size of the Belgian colony. What do you perceive are consequences of the Congo geography? (From Florida to Berlin)

6. Briefly discuss the allegations brought against King Leopold by the “London Committee....” (Under the Yacht Club Flag)

7. How would you characterize King Leopold’s relationship with his family according to the account written by Hochschild? (Under the Yacht Club Flag)
8. Discuss the “tools” of this empire-builder, and analyze the reasons for their use and ultimately Leopold’s success. (Under the Yacht Club Flag)

9. Analyze Leopold’s hypocrisy regarding his hosting of the “anti-slavery” conference. (Under the Yacht Club Flag)
   
   a. How did Leopold finally manage to finance his “infrastructure” in the Congo?

10. Analyze the following quote by Stanley: [The new gun would be] “of valuable service in helping civilization to overcome barbarism.” (Under the Yacht Club Flag)

11. How did Leopold propose to rescue Emin Pasha? (Under the Yacht Club Flag)

12. Discuss Stanley’s methods in advancing his expedition. (Under the Yacht Club Flag)

13. Describe Senator John Tyler Morgan’s plan for Africa. How would you characterize this event in terms of American history? (The Wood that Weeps)
   
   a. Describe William Sheppard
14. Discuss Sheppard’s expedition into the Kuba capital and what he learned while staying there. (The Wood that Weeps)

15. Discuss the Congo’s most profitable commodity; specifically, “the wood that weeps.” How is it harvested? How were laborers “compelled” to work? (The Wood that Weeps)

16. Discuss and analyze the policy of “severing of hands” in Leopold’s Congo. (The Wood that Weeps)

17. Describe Leopold’s grand idea for colonization in Africa. (A Secret Society of Murderers)

18. Discuss how money from bonds, which were issued by Leopold, and the profits from Congolese rubber were spent. (A Secret Society of Murderers)

19. Explain Leopold’s obsession with Chinese laborers and discuss the metaphor “each [railway] tie cost one African life and each telegraph pole one European life.” What does this mean in real figures? (A Secret Society of Murderers)
20. At one point, Leopold has some of the Congolese brought back to Belgium and put on display. Discuss this event. How would this be interpreted by society today? (A Secret Society of Murderers)

21. Discuss how Hochschild attempts to estimate the death toll in Leopold’s Congo. What methods does he utilize to reach a hypothesis of the actual number of Africans and others who died in the Congo? (A Reckoning)

22. Do you think the Belgian government has a responsibility to be more forthcoming in the Royal Museum of Central Africa, considering the atrocities that occurred there? Explain. (The Great Forgetting)

   a. By failing to honestly acknowledge this history, is the Belgian government excusing it? Explain your position.

   b. Would this treatment of the history have been acceptable concerning the Holocaust of WWII? Explain your position.

23. Describe how Belgium became the “victim” of World War I. How did this contribute to “the great forgetting?” (The Great Forgetting)

   a. Describe the propaganda used to lend sympathy to “brave little Belgium.”
24. Discuss Jules Marchal’s search for the truth; where did this search take him and how does he eventually arrive at the source he needs to record the true history? (The Great Forgetting)

25. “In all of Africa, the colonizers wrote the school textbooks.” Respond to this quote; what are the consequences? (The Great Forgetting)

26. Briefly discuss and analyze Africa’s situation in the world today as it relates to European colonization. (The Great Forgetting)

   a. Discuss the U.S. role in the affairs of an independent Congo.

   “Those who are conquered always want to imitate the conqueror.” –Ibn Khaldun