

THE INFERNO

LIVING LITERATURE SERIES

DANTE ALIGHIERI

A PERMA-BOUND PRODUCTION

TEACHER'S GUIDE GUIDE WRITTEN BY MARY ELLEN SNODGRASS

SYNOPSIS

Begun on Easter Friday, 1300, Dante's personal descent into a fictional hell opens with the 35-year-old pilgrim lost in a dark wood and menaced by a she-wolf, lion, and leopard, which symbolize the temptations of the world. He meets Virgil, dispatched by the Virgin Mary, St. Lucy, and Beatrice to guide him in his perilous descent down the nine circles of hell. Just as Aeneas, Rome's epic hero, searches for enlightenment in the underworld in Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante seeks the "true way" and passes under an inscription warning, "Abandon all hope, ye who enter here."

He advances into the dismal landscape, where the uncommitted follow after banners. Crossing Acheron, one of the four rivers of mythical hell, with the aid of Charon, the boatman, Dante confronts the five circles that precede the city of Dis or Hades, god of the underworld and husband of Proserpina. The least reprehensible of sinners—the unbaptized and the humanistic pagans, including Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan—inhabit Limbo because they died without knowing Christianity.

Entering the dire regions where the lustful suffer sweeping gales, symbolic of their uncontrolled passions, Dante and Virgil meet Minos, the judge. Below them, gluttons, guarded by Cerberus, the three-headed dog of hell, wallow in muck. Beyond, in the fourth and fifth levels, hoarders, wasters, and the greedy shove boulders at each other in never-ending battles. The bottom layers of hell—circles six through nine—in the reeking Styx marshland, reveal heretics, murderers, suicides, the latter of whom exist as pathetic trees harassed and tortured by harpies. Beyond the bloody river, Phlegethon, centaurs guard tyrants such as Alexander the Great and Attila.

Even lower, heretics are tormented in burning tombs and sodomites dwell on an arid plain beneath a rain of fire. In circles eight and nine, cheaters, squanderers of church property, panderers, fortune-tellers, hypocrites, counterfeiterers, and conspirers live in the malebolge or evil ditches. Dante approaches giants and titans, who preside over the pit of hell. Cocytus, the frozen lake, confines the traitor Lucifer—once the bright angel whose name meant "light-bringer"—whose three faces dine upon three earthly traitors, Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius. Fallen from grace because he rebelled against the Almighty, he is eternally encased in ice, symbolic of the extinction of all feeling. Cowed by his experiences, Dante eagerly follows his guide by a secret way down Satan's hairy body and up to the surface of earth, arriving on Easter morning at 7:30 A.M.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Dante Alighieri (1265-1321), has been called Italy's greatest poet and the prototype "Renaissance man." Born in Florence to an upwardly mobile burgher family, he lost both parents, first

Bella and then Alighiero, in his youth. He studied theology, classics, and philosophy in parochial schools, ending his education in 1287 at the University of Bologna. Much of his training came from associations with Brunetto Latini and Guido Cavalcanti. It is also known that he served nobly in the military at the age of 24 and that his friend, Giotto, used him as a model for a figure in the Bargello Chapel.

Dante suffered an unrequited love for Beatrice, [bā ə trē chā] daughter of Folco Portinari. She married a banker in 1287 and died three years later. In her honor in 1294 he wrote a series of symbolic poems entitled *The New Life*, detailing his idealistic love for her. Dante, who was betrothed in childhood, married Gemma Donati, a woman of influence, and fathered three children, Jacopo, Antonia, and Pietro, a lawyer who wrote a criticism of Dante's work.

A member of the apothecary's guild, Dante joined the Guelphs or papal party, which at that time controlled Florence, a city-state of great importance long before Italy was unified. He took part in community politics from 1295-1302, serving as a committeeman, prior or magistrate, and ambassador to San Gimignano and Rome. When the tide of politics turned in favor of France in 1302, Dante was found guilty of graft, exiled, and sentenced to death by burning if he returned. He abandoned politics and, virtually penniless, lived under the protection of rich lords in Verona, Lucca, Padua, and other cities. During this period he began and abandoned two works, *The Banquet* and *The Illustrious Vernacular*. In 1315, having begun his masterpiece, *The Divine Comedy*, Dante completed a third short work, *On Monarchy*.

After eleven years in exile, Florence extended a dishonorable amnesty, which Dante rejected. He realized that he would never return home. Along with Gemma and their daughter, Antonia [who took the name Beatrice when she became a nun], he moved to Ravenna in 1320 and lived at the home of Guido da Polenta. The extensive period of inactivity afforded Dante an opportunity to complete *The Divine Comedy*, which established his fame among his contemporaries.

He hoped in vain that his notoriety as a philosopher and poet would allow him to return to Florence. Probably he served as ambassador and teacher in his last years. He died of fever after returning from a diplomatic mission in Venice to avert war with Ravenna and was buried in a Franciscan monastery in Ravenna, despite efforts by fellow Florentines to bury his remains on home soil.

CRITIC'S CORNER

The Inferno is part one of a three-stage narrative poem told in first person detailing the soul's journey from the depths of hell through purgatory to paradise. Through

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allegory, Dante delineates the nine circles of hell by degree of sin—from enlightened pagans such as Homer down to the worst of sinners, Judas Iscariot and Satan, both of whom betrayed their masters. Circulated long before the other two stages were completed, *The Inferno* established Dante as one of Italy's finest authors in his lifetime. Even in exile, he gave readings, thereby gaining some notoriety, even though he failed to attain the applause of his fellow Florentines.

Composed in the people's everyday language, *The Inferno* employs *terza rima*—a tightly controlled three-line stanza rhyming aba, bcb, cdc, etc. It draws on Dante's extensive self-education in biblical lore, mythology, and classical authors as well as being a prophecy of the future of the poet, Florence, and all Christendom. Even more valuable to the student of the Middle Ages, *The Inferno* reveals Dante's great disapproval and discontent with corrupt prelates and vicious politics in fourteenth century Florence. In appreciation of Rome's epic writer, Dante depicts himself as the pupil of Virgil, who leads Dante in fatherly fashion through the horrors of the underworld and out again into the starlight.

Dante's works, especially the *Commedia* or *Divine Comedy*, as it was renamed in the sixteenth century, have earned him a place among the classic authors whom he revered. His intensity of imagery, which draws on the five senses as well as skillful poetic figures, presents a great problem for the translator, particularly in transposing the lines from the more musical Italian into English. Therefore, like his predecessors, Homer and Virgil, Dante is best read in the original.

[Note: In Dante's time, a work was designated as a **comedy** mainly because it arrived at a happy or satisfactory conclusion rather than because it made people laugh. Another aspect of medieval comedy is the use of vernacular or common language rather than the more erudite language of scholars. The term in no way implies that Dante's subject matter was not serious, as is indicated by his complete title—*The Comedy of Dante Alighieri, Florentine by Citizenship, Not by Morals.*]

GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To set the poem in realistic and metaphoric time and place
2. To comprehend the political and religious milieu of thirteenth-century Florence
3. To characterize the narrative style and the intermix of allegory, mysticism, and epic details
4. To analyze any differences between Dante the author and Dante the main character
5. To contrast the outlook and attitudes of Virgil and Dante
6. To discuss the theme of retribution
7. To analyze the role of the Church in medieval society
8. To note the importance of Dante's work in the history of the Italian language

9. To diagram the overall plan of Dante's descent and label each part
10. To define the word **comedy** in its medieval sense

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To trace the difficulties Dante encounters along the way
2. To note episodes in which Dante is sympathetic to sinners
3. To analyze how punishments fit crimes
4. To discuss why Dante is allowed to traverse the land of the dead
5. To locate examples of famous people from history, the Bible, classical literature, and mythology
6. To contrast Dante's hell with that of Homer and Virgil
7. To fit this text into the overall plan of *The Divine Comedy*
8. To relate Dante's personal life to his purpose
9. To express the relationship that exists between Virgil and Dante, both in this poem and in world literature

MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, or sentences that have a particular meaning in the poem. Explain the meaning each has in this poem. Canto and line references are provided so that you can re-read the passage from which the item is taken.

1. I was a poet and sang of old Anchises' noble son who came to Rome after the burning of Troy. (I, 71-73)
(Virgil wants to be remembered as the author of the Aeneid, a work initiated by the Emperor Augustus around 30 B.C. to establish an official history of ancient Rome. To comply with the emperor's wishes, Virgil enlarged upon a legend that connects the great Greek struggle at Troy with the founding of Rome. Aeneas, son of the mortal Anchises and the goddess Aphrodite, maintains an important role in the royal household of Troy and under the leadership of Hector.
Before the end of the war, Aeneas wanders from Troy with a boatload of refugees, makes several attempts to find a new home for Troy's ancestral gods, but is uprooted and sent onward until he locates the banks of the Tiber River. Part of his journey requires him to seek a prophecy from his father's spirit, which he locates among the blessed in the Elysian Fields of the underworld.]
2. In that quest, which your verses celebrate, he learned those mysteries from which arose his victory and Rome's apostolate. (II, 25-27)
(Dante provides the link between Roman mythology and Christianity by connecting Aeneas's founding of "Mother Rome" with the future greatness of Rome

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as *Eternal City*, seat of the Pope, whose rule dates back to Peter, Christ's chosen disciple. To strengthen this tie, Dante also mentions "the chosen vessel, Paul," the founder of Christian worship who bore "the confirmation of that Faith which is the one true door to life eternal.")

3. He took from us the shade of our first parent, of Abel, his pure son, of ancient Noah, of Moses, the bringer of law, the obedient. Father Abraham, David the King, Israel with his father and his children, Rachel, the holy vessel of his blessing, and many more He chose for elevation among the elect. (IV, 55-60)

(Virgil explains how Christ reclaims the heroes and heroines of the Old Testament, who, like the unbaptized and the enlightened pagans, reside on the outer rim of hell in Limbo. These inhabitants go unpunished in a physical sense, but are never allowed into the presence of the Almighty.)

Virgil names "our first parent" or Adam; his "pure son," Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain; Noah, the builder of the ark; Moses, through whom God instructed the Hebrews in biblical law; Abraham, the great patriarch of the Hebrews; David, founder of the capital at Jerusalem; and Jacob, who tricked Isaac, his aged father, and escaped to his uncle's land, where he married Rachel, his cousin. Jacob later changes his name to Israel and is known as the father of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.)

4. There, pride, avarice, and envy are the tongues men know and heed, a Babel of despair. (VI, 70-72)

(In the third circle of hell, Ciaccio, one of the souls tormented for gluttony, prophesies that Dante shall suffer from the split of the Guelf party when "Black shall ride on White for many years, loading it down with burdens and oppressions and humbling of proud names and helpless tears." The upheaval shall be so entangled that it will resemble Babel, the tower mentioned in Genesis 11:1-9 which led to the scattering of peoples on the earth. The factor that divides them is language, which is no longer unified. From this root word comes the English word babble meaning gibberish.)

5. The latter mode seems only to deny the bond of love which all men have from Nature; therefore within the second circle lie simoniacs, sycophants, and hypocrites, falsifiers, thieves, and sorcerers, grafters, pimps, and all such filthy cheats. (XI, 55-60)

(The sixth circle, which is divided into minute differentiations of crime, contains simoniacs or sellers of church property or powers. In Acts 8:13-24, Simon the Magus offers to buy the power of the Holy Spirit that Peter and John impart to converts.)

Peter replies, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of

God." Under ecclesiastical law, simoniacs are punished by excommunication, suspension from the clergy, and forced restitution of misappropriated funds.)

6. The one in the middle staring at his chest is the mighty Chiron, he who nursed Achilles: the other is Pholus, fiercer than all the rest. (XII, 70-72)

(Pholus, the centaur, is a mythological figure who served wine to Hercules while Hercules was pursuing his fourth labor. The other centaurs caused an uproar by trying to steal the wine. During the ensuing battle, Pholus drops one of Hercules's poisoned arrows on his foot and dies. In other tellings of this story, Chiron is named in place of Pholus.)

7. Just so the Romans, because of the great throng in the year of the Jubilee, divide the bridge in order that the crowds may pass along, so that all face the Castle as they go on one side toward St. Peter's while on the other all move along facing toward Mount Giordano. (XVIII, 28-33)

(Jubilee, a Catholic custom adopted from the Jewish observance named for the shofar or ram's horn, occurs four times a century. During the period from one Christmas to the next, the pope requires the sin of all who repent and make restitution.)

The first jubilee was instituted by Boniface VIII on February 22, 1300. It began after rumor of plenary indulgences lured a throng of pilgrims to St. Peter's Basilica. At first the period between jubilees was fifty years, as mentioned in Leviticus. Then, because the influx of the faithful proved profitable to the Church, the span dropped to 33 and, by 1470, to 25 years.)

To symbolize the celebration of a jubilee, a front entrance of St. Peter's Basilica is sealed. On the day of jubilee, the pope breaks down the barricade with an ax, symbolizing Christ's triumph over sin.)

8. And were it not that I am still constrained by the reverence I owe to the Great Keys you held in life, I should not have refrained from using other words and sharper still; for this avarice of yours grieves all the world, tramples the virtuous, and exalts the evil. (XIX, 94-99)

(The Great Keys symbolize the papacy. Because Simon Peter correctly identifies Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus blesses him. Making a play upon the word Peter, which means rock, he promises "upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." [Matthew 16: 15-19])

This famous verse, known in the Catholic world as the Petrine Supremacy, is written in gilt letters in Latin on the dome of St. Peter's above the altar. From

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this verse comes the power of the pope, successor to Peter, over the faithful.)

9. "Front and center here, Grizzly and Hellken," he began to order them. "You too, Deaddog. Curlybeard, take charge of a squad of ten. Take Grafter and Dragotooth along with you. Pigtusk, Catclaw, Cramper, and Crazyred." (XXI, 118-122)

(Dante gives to the demons playful names which emphasize physical grotesqueness. It is impossible for a translation to capture the poetry of these names, but John Ciardi uses poetry of his own by emphasizing cacophonous sound combinations, i.e. d, g, z, k, c. The hard sounds leave little doubt that these are grim, dangerous demons.)

10. It lives on tears of balsam and of incense; in all its life it eats no herb or grain, and nard and precious myrrh sweeten its cerements. (XXIV, 109-111.)

(The myth of the phoenix, which appears in varying form in many cultures, features a unique creature that lives for half a millennium, builds a nest of fragrant spices, is consumed by fire, and reemerges as a worm, which evolves into the succeeding phoenix. According to Dante's version, the phoenix does not eat the usual avian diet. Rather, it subsists on the fragrant resin of the balsam tree, which oozes from the trunk in "tears." Likewise, it takes nourishment from incense, nard or spiknard, and myrrh, a pungent gum resin from an Arabian plant that is used in funereal or embalming spices. Dante concludes that these redolent spices "sweeten its cerements" or shroud.)

COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the poem.

Questions 1-5 Literal Level

1. Why does Dante set out on this journey?

(The speaker of the poem, who is 35 years old at the time of the narrative, has strayed from the "True Way into the Dark Wood of Error," an allegorical reference to the human frailty that often besets people his age. He looks ahead with hope to the Mount of Joy, but cannot circumvent the leopard, lion, and she-wolf that block his path. Forced back into the ruinous wood, he sees a vision "on the discolored air"—his guide, Virgil, the Mantuan poet of classical Rome.

Ecstatic to have found "my true master and first author," Dante begs for protection. Virgil informs him that he must take an alternate route, because the she-wolf will not be bypassed until the "Greyhound comes to hunt her down." Virgil promises to lead the

way until he is supplanted by a "worthier spirit," who will guide Dante to God's city and throne. Dante, understanding that he must enter the "sad halls of Hell" before attaining "Peter's gate" follows the silent leader.)

2. Describe the sufferings of the suicides.

(In Round Two of the seventh circle of hell, Nessus carries Dante and Virgil across the river of boiling blood and into a forest. The foliage in this pathless wood is warped—"unhealthy branches, gnarled and warped and tangled, bore poison thorns instead of fruit." Among these unnatural growths nest the Harpies, which plagued Aeneas, hero of Virgil's poem.

Dante hears "cries of lamentation" all about, yet sees no one in pain. Virgil, reading Dante's incorrect assumptions, suggests that he break off a twig to learn the nature of this dismal forest. The immediate result does, indeed, answer Dante's question—the tree is the incarnation of a suicide, who begs that Dante "speak for me, to vindicate in the memory of men." Assigned by Minos to the seventh circle of hell, each spirit grows into a tree which is perpetually fed on by Harpies.

The suicide notes that this painful state of affairs will continue until Judgment Day, "for it is not just that a man be given what he throws away." Just as the suicide ceases to speak, Dante witnesses the horror of eternal damnation—black bitches crash through the underbrush in pursuit of two wraiths, one of whom hides in a bush. His ruse fails to protect him from the ravaging fangs, which tear his limbs asunder. Dante pities the unnamed suicide, who claims, "I am one who has no tale to tell: I made myself a gibbet of my own lintel.")

3. How are fortune tellers punished?

(In Bolgia Four of Circle Eight, Dante observes a grievous parade of twisted souls who move "at about the pace of a litany procession." Silently weeping, the contorted bodies with heads facing backwards, march backwards. Dante, addressing the reader in his consternation at so cruel a penalty, asks "how could I check my tears, when near at hand I saw the image of our humanity distorted so that the tears that burst from their eyes ran down the cleft of their buttocks."

Virgil, quick to chastise Dante for his errant compassion, names the diviners who broke God's law by looking into the future: Amphiaraus of the "seven against Thebes," Tiresias, the blind seer of Greek mythology, Aruns, and Manto. The others, equally guilty of taking godlike powers into their hands and daring to read future events, rue their sins. Virgil concludes that all soothsayers, including those who cast "spells with herbs, and dolls, and rags," must suffer the same penalty.)

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4. What sinners inhabit Limbo?

(Awakened from a swoon, Dante follows his guide through tremulous sighing—the “dim and endless congress” of the unbaptized. Virgil divulges that he, too, dwells among the spirits who never attained God’s grace because he lived before the time of Christianity. He recalls that Christ himself entered Limbo and rescued the worthy Old Testament heroes—Adam, Abel, Noah, Moses, Abraham, David, Jacob, Rachel, and others.)

In the distance Dante sees other souls dwelling in light. Virgil explains that “The signature of honor they left on earth is recognized in Heaven and wins them ease in Hell out of God’s favor.” Dante thrills at the sight of master poets Homer, Horace, Ovid, and Lucan. Dante is accepted into the group, which discusses “things as well omitted here as it was sweet to touch on there.”

Beyond, through seven gates and into a green meadow, the six poets meet notables from the ancient world—Electra, Hector, Aeneas, Caesar, Camilla, Penthesilea, Latinus, and his daughter, Lavinia. From Roman history come Brutus—the one who ejected the last king from Rome—Lucrezia, Julia, Marcia, and Cornelia. Apart from them stands Saladin, ruler of Egypt and Syria during the twelfth century, who helped unite Muslim states during the Crusades.

On a higher plane the philosophers congregate—Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, and other great thinkers, including mathematicians, naturalists, physicians, poets, orators, and astronomers. Dante, enthralled by the illustrious company, can scarcely encompass it all. Too soon, however, his guide leads him from “that serenity to the roar and trembling air of Hell.”)

5. In what condition does Dante find Caiaphas, the unnamed man dwelling among the hypocrites?

(Caiaphas, who is not named, dwells in Circle Eight, Bolgia Six, among the hypocrites. Because he urged the Pharisees to crucify Christ “for the public good,” he lies crucified on the road, naked and tortured, enduring the weight of all the hypocrites who walk that path. Friar Catalano adds, “His father-in-law and the others of the Council which was a seed of wrath to all the Jews, are similarly staked for the same evil.” Even Virgil marvels at the severity of Caiaphas’s punishment.)

Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. Describe Virgil’s relationship to Dante.

(From the beginning, Virgil is a willing guide and mentor to Dante. Himself a resident of the upper circle of hell, he has an insider’s knowledge of the path to come and commands respect from the demons that guard the way. In Circle Five, when Dante quails in fear of permanent entrapment among the lost, it is Virgil who encourages his failing

strength. “Take heart,” he says, “Nothing can take our passage from us when such a power has given warrant for it.” Like a father, Virgil promises, “I will not leave you to wander in this underworld alone.”

In Circle Eight, Bolgia Four, as Dante weeps for the pitiable state of the fortune tellers, Virgil asserts his role as father figure and rebukes his protégé. “There is no place for pity here,” he remarks. “Who is more arrogant within his soul, who is more impious than one who dares to sorrow at God’s judgment?”

When Dante moves too near the brink of Bolgia Five and risks falling into the “viscid pitch,” it is Virgil who pulls him away from danger. The fervent action of demon against sinner threatens Dante’s safety. Again, Virgil, like a kindly parent, warns, “You had best not be seen by these Fiends till I am ready. Crouch down here. One of these rocks will serve you as a screen.” In the next Bolgia, Virgil, to protect his charge from flying fiends, lifts him in his arms “like a mother awakened by a midnight noise” and carries him to safety.

Again, in Bolgia Ten, Virgil assumes a chastising tone after Dante stands too long in awe of the falsifiers’ punishment. Dante, too shamed to reply, receives immediate pardon, for Virgil understands his feelings. Again the fatherly guide, Virgil commands, “put back all sorrow from your mind; and never forget that I am always by you . . .” To the last of their journey, Virgil encourages Dante’s flagging steps, especially where the climb is difficult. All the way to the exit, Virgil leads the way, taking dangers upon himself until the two reach safety.)

7. What is Dante’s reaction to the pit of hell?

(The relentless Virgil leads straight into the Ninth Circle, toward the frozen lake of Cocytus, where he directs Dante’s attention toward the “core of the frozen shell.” The icy wind given off from Satan’s whirling wings causes Dante to cower at Virgil’s back, there being no other windbreak. Before them lie the most treacherous of hell’s denizens—those who betrayed their masters. In varying postures, they suffer the misery of eternal cold.)

Virgil directs Dante’s gaze toward the dreaded Dis. Dante admits to the reader that “my blood ran cold and my voice choked up with fear.” His pen falters; he cannot write of his terror. Awed by the sight of the fallen angel, each face of his tripartite head flanked by pairs of wings, Dante is aghast at the “rake-like teeth” that chew three sinners—Judas Iscariot, Brutus, and Cassius.)

Exiting the atavistic scene, Dante clasps his guide about the neck as Virgil climbs the hairy body of Satan himself. Dante looks back in perplexity at the inverted form of the great demon. Virgil, however, allows no opportunity for riddling, but urges Dante toward the climb that lies ahead. Still, Dante begs to know, “where is the ice? and Lucifer—how has he

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been turned from top to bottom: and how can the sun have gone from night to day so suddenly?" Dante explains that they have passed the "point to which all gravities are drawn" and are now under the hemisphere toward the sky.)

8. How does Dante bring comic relief to Cantos XXI-XXII? (In Circle Eight, Bolgia Five, Dante allots two cantos to the assorted demons, which, with grappling hooks and claws, dismember the grafters who flounder in boiling tar. From his vantage point, Dante observes the arrival of a sinner, who bobs to the surface with "backside arched and his face and both his feet glued to the pitch, almost as if in prayer." Over a hundred hooks dip the grafter into the pitch "as a chef makes scullery boys dip meat in a boiler.")

While Virgil makes the way safe for Dante, the molling of demons continues, with Malacoda holding back the over-eager demons from giving Dante a taste of the hook. The names of the characters fit their duties—Snatcher, Grizzly, Hellken, Deaddog, Curlybeard, Grafter, Dragontooth, Pigtusk, Catclaw, Cramper, and Crazyred. Occasional glimpses of the doomed sinners result in quick thrusts of the demons' hooks.

Dante requests a word with one grafter. While Curlybeard holds him in an armlock, Dante asks if any of the tormented are Italians. The grafter no sooner replies than Grafter rips off part of the man's arm. Curlybeard rescues him from further molestation while Dante learns how Friar Gomita took graft. Again Curlybeard wards off a demon, this time Cramper.

During the melee, an unnamed Navarrese escapes. The guardian fiends, in pursuit of their man, fall into the soup, squabbling and ripping at each other. By the time Curlybeard reestablishes order, the demons' wings are "smeared with pitch." Dante and Virgil take this opportunity to slip away to safer ground.)

Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. How does Dante create a classic from his imaginary journey through hell?
(Despite his emphasis on Florentine criminals of his day, Dante presents a terrifying view of sin as it applies to all people. From the beginning of his journey, the allegorical figures of the lion, leopard, and she-wolf leave enough to the imagination for the reader to picture any danger along the road of life. The rank on rank of suicides, murderers, warlords, thieves, and traitors are a recognizable mix of mythological, biblical, and historical figures that create a lurid cast of characters. As the wretched, foul-smelling atmosphere leads from one horror to another, the reader perceives the overall view of a place of infinite punishments, each suited to the perpetrator.)

10. Is there a separation between Dante the writer and Dante the main character?

(Dante the writer keeps tight rein on his main character, who, for all purposes, seems one and the same with the author. Still, the speaker Dante serves the author's purpose in assuming the proper role—cringing at just the right moment and forging ahead with his guide. Yet, at no point does the action seem contrived. Because Dante so skillfully depicts the terrors of hell, the main character's reactions are appropriate to each unfolding tragedy below.

From the beginning, his delight in a guide of the stature of Virgil suits the events that ensue. Dante the writer would naturally choose a fellow poet as his guide through the miasma of hell. At the same time as Dante the character learns from an experienced guide, Dante the writer takes the opportunity to praise one of the world's great poets who, unfortunately, is denied the goal of all Christians—a view of the Almighty.)

Questions 11 and 12 Creative Level

11. Referring to information on numerology, discuss the numbers which figure in Dante's *Inferno*, particularly the number of cantos, circles, and total lines in the poem.
12. Select a modern villain, such as Hitler, Stalin, Jack the Ripper, or Lizzie Borden, to place in one of the circles of hell. Make the punishment suit the crime.

STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

- Sketch a map of Italy and mark the places where Dante spent his exile. Outline the environs of the thirteenth-century city-states and the rivers and mountains mentioned in *The Inferno*.
- Write a report on the wars that plagued Italy during Dante's time. Point out the part played by the papacy. Discuss styles of warfare, particularly types of weapons. Describe the purpose of the Castel St. Angelo in Rome.
- Make a list of classical authors mentioned in *The Inferno*. Choose one, such as Cicero, Horace, or Virgil, and read some of his works. Lead a class discussion of its aspects that would appeal to Dante.
- Explain how you would go about educating yourself if you lived in exile. Where would you go for literature? What types would you choose in order to provide yourself a well-rounded education? How would you learn to interpret it? What people might help you in your quest for enlightenment?
- Read the poems of St. Francis of Assisi. Compare his view of salvation with that of Dante. Also, compare the biographies of the two poets.
- Draw posters of the beasts and mythological characters

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that inhabit hell, such as the centaurs and Charon. Place them among the figures that they torment.

7. Explain why literature is so often based on a journey motif. What aspects of life suggest a journey? How can you relate Dante's experience in a fictional hell to real life?
8. Read the first book of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Analyze elements of Dante's *Inferno* that might have influenced his description of Satan and hell.
9. List and describe the characteristics of an epic. Decide which of these elements, such as the invocation to the muse or the epic simile, influences Dante's style.
10. Consider Dante's commission of the sin of pride for judging people in his own time. How would he have justified placing people in particular compartments in hell? Why did the Church ban his work?
11. Analyze Hieronymus Bosch's painting "Hellmouth." What torments does he emphasize for the damned? Compare the work to Michelangelo's "The Last Judgment."

TEACHING NOTES

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THE INFERNO

VOCABULARY TEST

In the list that follows each quotation, underline a word which is **not** a synonym for the *italicized* word.

1. Down the sinner plunged, and at once the demon spun from the cliff; no mastiff ever sprang more eager from the leash to chase a *felon*.
[scofflaw, criminal, convict, benefactor, reprobate]
2. *Malice* is the sin most hated by God.
[abhorrence, spite, aversion, antipathy, sloth]
3. Voices hoarse and shrill and sounds of blows, all intermingled, raised tumult and *pandemonium* that still whirls on the air forever dirty with it as if a whirlwind sucked at sand.
[euphony, ado, confusion, babel, mayhem]
4. Because of them I lie here in this pig-pen; it was they persuaded me to stamp the florins with three carats of *alloy*.
[admixture, catalyst, amalgam, composite, concoction]
5. Woe to you *depraved* souls!
[tainted, iniquitous, immoral, undefiled, prodigal]
6. The other there, the one beside him with the skinny shanks was Michael Scott, who mastered every trick of magic fraud, a prince of *mountebanks*.
[shams, dupes, humbugs, charlatans, sharpers]
7. As one who unwill's what he wills, will stay strong purposes with feeble second thoughts until he spells all his first zeal away—so I hung back and balked on that dim coast till thinking had worn out my *enterprise*, so stout at starting and so early lost.
[inquisitiveness, undertaking, quest, expedition, venture]
8. At last we reached the base of a great *Citadel* circled by seven towering battlements and by a sweet brook flowing round them.
[bastion, cincture, entrenchment, palisade, escarpment]
9. All those illusions of being seemed to lie drowned in the slush; until one *wraith* among them sat up abruptly and called as I passed by
[verisimilitude, phantasm, specter, shade, apparition]
10. Hence, at the center point of all creation, in the smallest circle, on which Dis is founded, the traitors lie in endless *expiation*.
[recompense, scourge, reparation, propitiation, atonement]
11. Ah, how the stragglers of that long *roust* stirred their legs quick-march at the first crack of the lash!
[press, coterie, rabble, concurrence, diffraction]
12. Its middle feet sank in the sweat and grime of the wretch's *paunch*, its forefeet clamped his arms, its teeth bit through both cheeks.
[maw, craw, midriff, flank, distension]
13. The wood of misery rings it the same way the wood itself is ringed by the red *fosse*.
[gouge, channel, rampart, trough, trench]
14. . . . some were stretched *supine* upon the ground, some squatted with their arms about themselves, and others without pause roamed round and round.
[recumbent, couchant, groveling, pendulous, prone]
15. . . . On a day for *dalliance* we read the rhyme of Lancelot, how love had mastered him.
[primary, idling, loitering, dabbling, pastime]

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COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Match each quotation with the name of a speaker. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Before going on, I would have you understand . . . we are in the second round and shall be till we reach the burning sand.
- _____ 2. After many words given and taken it shall come to blood; White shall rise over Black and rout the dark lord's force, battered and shaken.
- _____ 3. Love, which permits no loved one not to love, took me so strongly with delight in him that we are one in Hell, as we were above.
- _____ 4. Have you noticed how the one who walks behind moves what he touches? That is not how the dead go.
- _____ 5. . . . this reverend grace is the Archbishop Ruggieri: now I will tell you why I gnaw his brain.
- _____ 6. Bury here and forever all hope of Paradise: I come to lead you to the other shore, into eternal dark, into fire and ice.
- _____ 7. Poet, you who must guide me, before you trust me to that arduous passage, look to me and look through me—can I be worthy?
- _____ 8. Rafel mahee amek zabi almit
- _____ 9. If you *must* go on, follow along this ridge; there's another cliff to cross by just beyond it.
- _____ 10. . . . go on; I will walk at your hem, and then rejoin my company, which goes mourning eternal loss in eternal flame.

A. Count Ugolino

B. Nimrod

C. Malacoda

D. Virgil

E. Charon

F. Ciacco

G. Chiron

H. Dante

I. Ser Brunetto

J. Francesca

Part II: Matching (30 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. sends the "gracious Mantuan" to guide her "dearest friend" through hell.
- _____ 2. is tormented by serpents wrapped about his body and a dragon on his back.
- _____ 3. faints when he hears Francesca's story.
- _____ 4. suffers thirst for the crime of counterfeiting.
- _____ 5. are the "handmaids of the Queen of woe," Hecate.
- _____ 6. feed on the souls of the suicides.
- _____ 7. were chosen to keep peace in Florence.
- _____ 8. lies to Virgil about the bridges over the Sixth Bolgia.
- _____ 9. stole the treasure from the Sacristy.
- _____ 10. is frozen into the final hole alongside Lucifer.
- _____ 11. escapes from the Fifth Bolgia.

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- _____12. is a "gaunt and craving" animal that menaces Dante.
_____13. is a former pope who lies under a stone in hell for giving communion to Photinus, a heretic.
_____14. rises to the surface after Virgil throws Dante's waist cord into the abyss.
_____15. wallows in blood along with Dionysius.

- | | |
|---------------|------------------|
| A. Erinyes | I. Cacus |
| B. Beatrice | J. Harpies |
| C. Malacoda | K. Vanni Fucci |
| D. a She-Wolf | L. the Navarrese |
| E. Dante | M. jovial friars |
| F. Anastasius | N. Geryon |
| G. Alexander | O. Master Adam |
| H. Judas | |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Dante's journey into hell takes place before Christmas.
_____ 2. The journey ends after Virgil locates a secret passage into heaven.
_____ 3. Dante wanders from the "True Way" and is menaced by a lion and a leopard.
_____ 4. Minos sits as judge of the second circle, where the sins of passion are punished.
_____ 5. Virgil describes Dame Fortune as the "Lady of Permutations."
_____ 6. Dante is recognized as a Florentine both by his accent and his clothing.
_____ 7. Pholus and Nissus carry Virgil and Dante on their backs over the broken bridges.
_____ 8. Seducers are punished by having "their heads turned backwards on their bodies."
_____ 9. Mahomet's punishment is to be split open, his internal organs dangling between his legs.
_____10. Cocytus, the fourth great water of hell, is a frozen lake.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

In a paragraph, discuss the significance of the following passages.

1. . . . Follow your star, for if in all of the sweet life I saw one truth shine clearly, you cannot miss your glorious arrival.
2. . . . but gently he set us down inside the final hole whose ice holds Judas and Lucifer in its grip.
3. Now, therefore, will you tell that fallen one who asked about his son, that he is not dead

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COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identifying Places (20 points)

Name the circle described in each statement below.

- _____ 1. Lucifer and Judas are frozen in Lake Cocytus.
- _____ 2. Dante goes into greatest detail about types of sins and punishments.
- _____ 3. Unbaptized babies reside with pagan poets.
- _____ 4. Farinata prophesies the political changes that will lead to Dante's banishment from Florence.
- _____ 5. Storms whirl about those condemned for passion.
- _____ 6. The fraudulent and malicious are divided among evil ditches.
- _____ 7. Harpies harass suicides, who exist as misshapen trees.
- _____ 8. The three-headed dog of hell guards gluttons.
- _____ 9. Dante and Virgil catch a glimpse of the "City called Dis."
- _____ 10. Plutus is unable to stop Virgil from entering.

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase in answer to each of the following questions. Place your response in the blank provided at left.

- _____ 1. Who describes himself as "midway in our life's journey"?
- _____ 2. Who is a poet that sang of "old Anchises' noble son"?
- _____ 3. In what devices are simoniacs punished?
- _____ 4. By what name is the first circle of hell known?
- _____ 5. Who sends Virgil to serve as Dante's guide?
- _____ 6. How does Dante react to Francesca's story?
- _____ 7. By what nickname is Ciaccio known?
- _____ 8. In what boiling liquid are tyrants and war-makers plunged?
- _____ 9. What sight tells Dante that he is no longer in hell?
- _____ 10. Who sends Nessus to guide Virgil and Dante?

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

Supply a word or phrase from the list below to complete each of the following statements.

- _____ 1. I saw an arching _____ that was the bed of a winding river circling through the plain exactly as my Guide and Lord had said.
- _____ 2. O _____! O High Genius! Be my aid! O Memory, record of the vision, here shall your true nobility be displayed!
- _____ 3. / am not Aeneas. / am not _____. Who could believe me worthy of the vision?
- _____ 4. _____, that soul of light and foe of all cruelty, rose and came to me at once where I was sitting with the ancient Rachel

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- _____ 5. A file of _____ galloped in the space between the bank and the cliff, well armed with arrows, riding as once on earth they rode to the chase.
- _____ 6. Like the rest, we shall go for our husks on _____, but not that we may wear them, for it is not just that a man be given what he throws away.
- _____ 7. I had a _____ bound round me like a belt which I had once thought I might put to use to snare the leopard with the gaudy pelt.
- _____ 8. I examined several faces there among that sooty throng, and I saw none I knew; but I observed that from each neck there hung an enormous purse, each marked with its own beast and its own colors like a _____.
- _____ 9. I am Vanni Fucci, the beast. A mule among men, I chose the bestial life above the human. Savage _____ was my fitting den.
- _____ 10. That is _____. Time and again in the shadow of Mount Aventine he made a lake of blood upon the Roman plain.
- _____ 11. When I left _____ . . . who more than a year detained me . . . nor Penelope's claim to the joys of love, could drive out of my mind the lust to experience the far-flung world and the failings and felicities of mankind.
- _____ 12. One is the liar who charged young Joseph wrongly: the other, _____, the false Greek from Troy.
- _____ 13. His very babbling testifies the wrong he did on earth: he is _____, through whose evil mankind no longer speaks a common tongue.
- _____ 14. No soul in _____ comes ever to this crossing; therefore if Charon rages at your presence you will understand the reason for his cursing.
- _____ 15. ONLY THOSE ELEMENTS TIME CANNOT WEAR WERE MADE BEFORE ME, AND BEYOND TIME I STAND. ABANDON ALL _____ YE WHO ENTER HERE.

Cacus	fosse	Muses
Centaur	grace	Nimrod
Circe	hope	Paul
coat of arms	Judgment Day	Pistoia
cord	Lucia	Sinon

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Describe the relationship that develops between Dante and his guide.
2. Discuss characters whom Dante pities.
3. Describe Dante's criticism of the political and religious wrongs that plague Florence.

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VOCABULARY TEST ANSWER KEY

- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. benefactor | 9. verisimilitude |
| 2. sloth | 10. scourge |
| 3. euphony | 11. diffraction |
| 4. catalyst | 12. flank |
| 5. undefiled | 13. rampart |
| 6. dupes | 14. pendulous |
| 7. inquisitiveness | 15. primary |
| 8. cincture | |

COMPREHENSION TEST A ANSWER KEY

Part I: Quotation Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. D | 6. E |
| 2. F | 7. H |
| 3. J | 8. B |
| 4. G | 9. C |
| 5. A | 10. I |

Part II: Matching (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. J | 11. L |
| 2. I | 7. M | 12. D |
| 3. E | 8. C | 13. F |
| 4. O | 9. K | 14. N |
| 5. A | 10. H | 15. G |

Part III: True/False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. F |
| 3. T | 8. F |
| 4. T | 9. T |
| 5. T | 10. T |

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B ANSWER KEY

Part I: Identifying Places (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. 9 | 6. 8 |
| 2. 8 | 7. 7 |
| 3. 1 | 8. 3 |
| 4. 6 | 9. 5 |
| 5. 2 | 10. 4 |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 1. Dante | 6. faints |
| 2. Virgil | 7. The Hog |
| 3. round holes | 8. blood |
| 4. Limbo | 9. stars |
| 5. Beatrice | 10. Chiron |

Part III: Fill-in (30 points)

- | | |
|-----------------|------------|
| 1. fosse | 9. Pistoia |
| 2. Muses | 10. Cacus |
| 3. Paul | 11. Circe |
| 4. Lucia | 12. Sinon |
| 5. Centaurs | 13. Nimrod |
| 6. Judgment Day | 14. grace |
| 7. cord | 15. HOPE |
| 8. coat of arms | |

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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