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Honors World Literature 10

Dante's

# INFERNO

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## INTRODUCTION:

1. How many cantos are in the Divine Comedy as a whole?
2. How many in each subsection--the *Inferno*, the *Purgatorio*, and the *Paradiso*?
3. What happened in 1302 that ensured Dante would never get to see his hometown of Florence again?

## CANTO I:

4. At what point in Dante's life does he "lose his way" on the path of righteousness?
5. When Dante tries to travel upward toward the beautiful mountain and leave the dark valley behind, what animal blocks his path at first?
6. When Dante tries to go around that beast, what second animal appears and blocks his path?

7. When he tries yet again to get around that second beast, what third animal blocks his path?
  
8. Dante then sees a spirit in the desert, and asks this spirit for help. This spirit offers to guide him through Hell. Who is Dante's guide through hell? Why does he make a suitable guide for Dante?
  
9. Where have we seen this spirit-guide character before as a historical figure?
  
10. Virgil claims that he has been exiled in this location because he was rebellious to the laws of "That Emperor who reigns above." Of whom is Virgil speaking?

**CANTO IV:**

11. Why is Virgil's face pale after he tells Dante they must go onward down into Hell?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
12. Who is the Mighty One mentioned by Virgil who descended into Hell and who was the first to bring human souls to salvation?

13. Virgil, and those like him, can get no closer to Heaven than this first circle of Hell (called Limbo.) Do you think that is fair? How far do you think Human Reason can take you in life and beyond?

#### **CANTO V:**

14. Virgil and Dante enter the first level of Hell, dedicated to the sins of *incontinence*. What is the definition of *incontinence*?

15. In Canto V, they meet the judge who assigns sinners to various places in Hell. What is this judge's name? What does this judge do with his tail to indicate how far down in Hell the sinner must go?

16. What does Virgil tell to Minos in order to convince him to let Virgil and Dante pass?

17. How are illicit lovers ("carnal malefactors") punished in their ring of Hell? Who are some of these famous lovers?

18. When Dante wants to speak to some of the lovers, Virgil says he can call them down by imploring them "by [XXX]." By what force or name does Dante implore the lovers to come down? Why is that appropriate, given the nature of their sins?
19. Dante talk to a couple swept up in their punishment in the second circle of Hell. What explanation does she give for the temptation that caused them to commit their sin (adultery) in the first place?
20. The lover that speaks with Dante in Canto V says she has "stained the world incarnadine" through her sins. What does she mean, and how does this relate to Christian beliefs about the forgiveness of sins?
21. According to Francesca, what was she reading when she first gave into desire?

#### **CANTO VI:**

22. At the end of the Canto, Virgil and Dante discuss a Second Coming, when each one in Hell will be judged and hear "the edict of Eternity." Dante asks if the final judgment will be the same, more, or less than what it is now (i.e. the punishments will the same, more sever, or lighter than the ones that the sinners suffer now in Hell.) What do you think of Virgil's answer?

## **CANTO VII:**

23. Who are the unexpected type of people that Dante finds among the greedy sinners (hoarders)? Why do you think it surprises him to see such people guilty of such a sin?
24. Prior to reading this, had you ever thought of Dame Fortune (Lady Luck) as someone associated with God to be "officially" in charge of change? How do you view the idea of luck as it touches on your life?
25. What does *sullen* mean? Why are the sullen people considered sinful? What is their punishment for their sin?

## **CANTO VIII:**

26. Up to this time Virgil has always been able to talk his way through obstacles and gatekeepers (i.e. Charon, Minos, Phlegyas). Since he represents Human Reason, his "voice of reason" appears to persuade the three to let him continue on with Dante. Why do you think Human Reason cannot talk his way past the gates of the City of Dis?

## **CANTO IX:**

27. How do Virgil and Dante get through the gates of the City of Dis?
  
28. In Canto 9, Dante and Virgil approach the city of Dis at the center of hell. They encounter the Three Furies or Erinyes here. What are these three beings? (Consult a mythological dictionary, encyclopedia, or look online for this information.)
  
29. What physical actions do the Three Furies take as they confront the two pilgrims Virgil and Dante?  
What do those gestures and actions suggest about their state of mind?
  
30. Why does Virgil turn Dante away and cover his eyes as the Medusa approaches? Why is he so afraid of her?
  
31. Who opens the gates to Dis so that Virgil and Dante can enter? What tool does he use to push open the doors?
  
32. How does the Angelic messenger react to the air in Hell as he breathes?

33. In lines 110-120 of Canto 9, we hear what structures make up the city of Hell. What structures are visible everywhere with flame scattered between them?

#### **CANTO X:**

34. Why can the heretic see the future but not see the present?

#### **CANTO XI:**

35. Of the two sins of malice, why does God loathe fraud more than violence?

36. If we took the sin of usury and put it in modern terms, what type of people from our society might we find being punished in the third part of Circle 7 of Dante's Hell? Give a few examples and explain why you think they would be there.

#### **CANTO XII:**

37. What is a centaur?

38. Who is Chiron?

39.

**CANTO XIII:**

40. Describe in detail how the suicides are punished.

**CANTO XIV:**

41. Describe a symbol used in this Canto by Dante (i.e. the burning plain, the giant Old Man of Crete, the wood, the river, or one you find on your own).

42. In what three ways were the naked souls located in relation to the burning sands? (You can quote the exact lines from the text of the poem if you can locate them.)

**CANTO XV:**



43. Ser Brunetto Latino is one of the sinners on the burning plain doomed to roam without pause. Dante wants him to sit and chat for a while. Why does Ser Brunetto refuse to stop?

44. Write the dictionary definition of *sodomy*.

#### **CANTO XVI:**

45. What do you think of the various sinners who talk to Dante and demand to be remembered in the world above? Why do you think this is a repeated request by the sinners in the Hell that Dante created?

46. What does Dante write about truth and lies just before he describes the monster that is flying up towards them? Why does he mention truth and lies?

## **CANTO XVII:**

47. In this Canto, Dante uses several similes (i.e. (1) Life is like (2) a box of chocolates (3) you never know what you're going to get.) Select two or more of the similes in this Canto and rewrite them in the following format, using the above example as a model: (1) the actual action/thing in *The Inferno* is like (2) the action/thing taken from the educated Italian reader's experience (3) what the two have in common

## **CANTO XVIII:**

48. What is the punishment for pimps?

49. Towards the end of the Canto, Dante uses very explicit language toward a sinner. Why do you think he changes his writing style at this point?

## **CANTO XIX:**

50. Write the dictionary definition of *simony* and *avarice*.

51. Why do you think Dante is so angry and appalled that even a Pope is guilty of such a sin?

## **CANTO XX:**

52. Why is Tiresias in this bolgia in Circle 8 of Dante's Hell?

53. Name at least two other pieces of world literature in which Tiresias appears as a character.

## **CANTO XXXIII:**

54. In Canto 33, Dante and Virgil encounter Ugolino frozen in ice. What is Ugolino eating?

55. How did Ugolino and his sons die in Pisa?

56. How does Ugolino spend all eternity? What is his food?

57. What does Dante promise to Friar Alberigo in hell? How does he fulfill his promise? (trick question!)

58. What is Friar Alberigo's body and Ser Branca d'Oria's body doing while their souls are in hell?

59. Who or what does Alberigo claim is controlling these bodies?

**CANTO XXXIV:**

60. What is the temperature like in the center of hell?

61. When they cross over past the fog of freezing mist, Dante sees something he first thinks is a giant windmill. What is this windmill in actuality?

62. What is the source of the cold winds in hell that rhythmically blow outward from the center ring?

63. Describe Satan's body and appearance. What are some of his distinctive features in *The Inferno*?

64. What three things does Satan snack on?

65. When Virgil and Dante run between Satan's beating wings, Virgil stops and puts his feet on the *ceiling* and appears to turn upside down. What happened that allowed him to do this astonishing feat, and how is this connected to their location at the center of the earth?

66. When Dante looks upward/downward to gaze at Satan, what does he see that horrifies him? Why is this funny?

**Sample Quotations for Identification:** Be able to identify what work these quotations come from, what the author is, what character (if any) is speaking, and briefly comment upon the quotations significance or importance in the work:

**A:** Midway upon the journey of our life / I found myself within a forest dark, / For the straightforward pathway had been lost. / . . . I cannot repeat how there I entered, So full was I of slumber at the moment / In which I had abandoned the true way."

**B:** And lo! almost where the ascent began, / a panther light and swift exceedingly, which with a spotted skin was covered o'er! / And never moved she from my face, Nay, rather did impede so much my way, / That many times I to return had turned.

**C:** "Not man; man once I was, / And both my parents were of Lombardy, / And Mantuans by country both of them. 'Sub Julio' was I born, though it was late, And lived at Rome under the good Augustus, During the time of

false and lying gods. . . / But thou, why goest thou back to such annoyance?/ Why climb'st thou not the Mount Delectable, / Which is the source and cause of every joy?"

**D:** "Now, art thou that Virgilius and that fountain / Which spreads abroad so wide a river of speech?" / I made response to him with bashful forehead. / . . . / Thou art my master, and my author thou, / Thou art alone the one from whom I took/ The beautiful style that has done honor to me."

**E:** "There standeth Minos horribly, and snarls; Examines the transgressions at the entrance; Judges, and sends according as he girds him. / I say, that when the spirit evil-born / Cometh before him, wholly it confesses; And this discriminator of transgressions / Seeth what place in Hell is meet for it; Girds himself with his tail as many times / As grades he wishes it should be thrust down."

**F:** "I came into a place mute of all light, Which bellows as the sea does in a tempest . . . / The infernal hurricane that never rests / Hurtles the spirits onward in its rapine. . . / I understood that unto such a torment / The carnal malefactors were condemned / Who reason subjugate to appetite."

**G:** "One day we reading were for our delight / Of Launcelot, how Love did him enthral. Alone we were and without any fear. / Full many a time our eyes together drew / That reading, and drove the colour from our faces. . . / When we read of the much-longed for smile / Being by such a noble lover kissed, / This one, who ne'er from me shall be divided, / Kissed me on the mouth all palpitating. / Galeotto was the book and he who wrote it. / That day no farther did we read therein.

**H:** More than a thousand ruined souls I saw, / Thus feeling from before one who on foot / Was passing o'er the Styx with soles unwet. / From off his face he fanned that unctuous air, / Waving his left hand oft in front of him / And only with that anguish seemed he weary. / Well I perceived one sent from Heaven was he. . .

**I:** His mouth uplifted from his grim repast, / That sinner, wiping it upon the hair / Of the same head that he behind had wasted. . . Then he began . . . "If my words be seed that may bear fruit / Of infamy to the traitor whom I gnaw, / Speaking and weeping shalt thou see together. / I know not who thou art, nor by what mode / Thou hast come down here; but a Florentine / Thou seemest to me truly when I hear thee. / Thou hast to know I

was Count Ugolino, / And this one was Ruggieri the Archbishop... "When he had said this, with his eyes distorted, / The wretched skull resumed he with his teeth, / Which, as a dog's, upon the bone were strong."

**J:** And one of the wretches of the frozen crust / Cried out to us: "O souls so merciless . . . Lift from mine eyes the rigid veils, that I may vent the sorrow which impregns my heart / A little, e'er the weeping recongeal / . . . / But hitherward stretch out thy hand forthwith, / Open mine eyes;"--and open them I did not, / And to be rude to him was courtesy.

**K:** The Emperor of the kingdom dolorous / From his mid-breast forth issued from the ice; / And better with a giant I compare / Than do the giants with those arms of his/ . . . What a marvel it appeared to me, When I beheld three faces on his head!

**L:** I lifted up mine eyes and thought to see / Lucifer in the same way I had left him; / And upward I beheld him hold his legs. / And if I then became disquieted, / Let stolid people think who do not see / What the point is beyond which I had passed.



**Identify the Following Primary Characters, Monsters and Places from *The Inferno*:**

Gemma Donati (in Introduction)

Beatrice Portinari (in Introduction)

Dante the pilgrim

The three beasts on the road

Virgil

Minos

Francesca da Rimini and Paolo

The Medusa

The Three Furies

The Angelic Gatekeeper

Ugolino

Ugolino's son, Anselm

Ugolino's son, Gaddo

Satan

Brutus,

Cassius

Judas Iscariot

**Vocabulary:** Consult [https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit\\_terms.html](https://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms.html) for a full vocabulary reference cite. *Sponsored by Dr. L. Kip Wheeler.*

*terza rima*

purgatory

*contrapassio*

vernacular

canto

rhyme

fourfold interpretation