

Dante's *Divine Comedy*: An Annotated Syllabus

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Winner, 2018 [Robert M. Durling Prize](#) for excellence in the teaching of Dante's life, time, and works by educators working in North American secondary schools, awarded by the Dante Society of America

this syllabus may be freely downloaded from:

<https://www.dantesociety.org/publications/dante-notes#Pedagogy>

Dante's Divine Comedy

Dante's Divine Comedy: Grace Church School Junior/Senior Elective

First Quarter: Influences on Dante, *Inferno*, a smattering of other authors & poets; teacher starts out on micro level, leading every step of the way, but gradually fades into the background. Class meets two to three times a week for eighty minutes each time. We meet approximately 20 times each quarter. In addition to several essays and in-class exercises, the semester will culminate in a cumulative project.

<p>Day 1: Welcome Introduction Dante's Bliss</p>	<p>15 min: Names, attendance, etcetera / They will get their copies of the <i>Comedy</i> later, after background work / Briefly pep talk the <i>Comedy</i> and explain that I will be their guide who will start out on the micro level, leading them every step of the way, but gradually fading into the background. <i>Inferno</i> with fine toothed comb together; <i>Purgatorio</i> & <i>Paradiso</i> les and less so.</p> <p>15 min: Writing prompt: Think back on a time in your life when you felt complete and utter bliss (and/or happiness, oneness, meaning, rightness, the sublime, the presence of God – call it what you will). Think of the activity, and/or person, and/or landscape, and/or concrete circumstances at the time you experienced this feeling of bliss. Describe in detail the circumstances, thoughts, and emotions surrounding your experience.</p> <p>15 min: Share a few moments of bliss.</p> <p>25 min: Dante's Bliss: Tell (dramatically and with select passages read out loud) the story of the <i>Vita Nuova</i>, ending with Dante's vow to say no more about her until he can write in a more worthy fashion. (with the help of slideshow uploaded to website)</p> <p>10 min: Explain homework. Go over Italian sonnet form. Make sure they have their turnitin.com accounts</p>	<p>Nota Bene: (Pun intended.) Uploaded to the website are my detailed notes for each Canto. They succinctly and helpfully contain general plot and themes, thought questions, and interesting little details. They will be our guidelines for class discussion, but you should also feel free to use them when reading at home and gussying up your travel logs.</p> <p>Homework: Go over what you wrote in class, flesh it out and polish it if necessary, then turn it into a sonnet. Provide intro and commentary the way Dante does in the <i>Vita Nuova</i> (see PDF example). Illustrate it, add any additional quotations or ancillary materials, and submit the whole thing nicely laid out to turnitin.com</p>
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<p>Day 2: Dante's Life, Times, & Works (Lecture)</p>	<p>15 min: Read/Show off a few homework sonnets</p> <p>10 min: Free write: My vision of Hell</p> <p>30 min: Dante's life, times, & works. (Slideshow uploaded to website) (Stop to discuss and write notes along the way)</p> <p>20 min: Explain homework / Read as much of Tundale and Joyce as possible.</p>	<p>Read: Tundale's Vision & selection from James Joyce's <i>A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man</i>.</p> <p>Write: Two to three pages responding to the above visions of Hell. What do you find cool, weird, awful, interesting, ridiculous, whatever. The more specifics the better. How to they jive with your own preconceptions and with what you wrote in class today. (Submit to Turnitin)</p>
<p>Day 3: Nachekita & Ananse</p>	<p>20 min: Share thoughts from homework</p> <p>20 min: Read and discuss the story of Nachekita and Yama (India)</p> <p>20 min: Read and discuss "Ananse and the Impossible Quest" (Ghana)</p> <p>20 min: Begin homework</p>	<p>Read: "Afterlives in the Ancient World" (PDF uploaded to website)</p> <p>Write: Two to three pages responding to "Afterlives in the Ancient World." What do you find cool, weird, awful, interesting, ridiculous, whatever. The more specifics the better. Bring Nachekita and Ananse into the discussion as well (Submit to Turnitin)</p>

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<p>Day 4:</p> <p>Afterlives in the Ancient World</p> <p>Dante's Virgil</p>	<p>25 min: Share thoughts from homework. Read selections from "Afterlives."</p> <p>15 min: Give them an overview of the "Dante's Virgil" PDF (uploaded to website)</p> <p>40 min: Begin homework. They can work in pairs if they like.</p>	<p>Read & Answer: Read the "Dante's Virgil" PDF with a fine toothed comb, thoughtfully and fully answering the 17 questions (uploaded to the website) as you go. Submit your answers to Turnitin. (If you were working with a partner in class, the two of you can submit just once, but include both names and make sure you both pull your weight.)</p>
<p>Day 5:</p> <p>Dante's Virgil</p> <p>Reading Dante</p> <p>Getting Lost in a Dark Wood</p>	<p>20 min: Share findings from Dante's Virgil homework</p> <p>10 min: Read aloud "How to Read Dante in the 21st Century" / Review Dante's four levels of reading</p> <p>25 min: Get Lost: Without any preview, notes, or guidance, slowly read the printout of <i>Inferno</i> Canto 1, underlining and making as many notes in the margin as possible. Say as much, as possible, without worrying about what you're supposed to be saying. Make it real. You can do this exercise with a partner, but include both your names on the document before handing it in for a grade.</p> <p>20 min: Share findings</p> <p>5 min: Explain the Travel Log Project / Hand out artist's notebooks and explain that they will keep a creative, multifaceted log of their journey through the <i>Comedy</i> that will receive a hefty grade – see PDF of instructions uploaded to website.</p>	<p>Note: Make a big deal out of the Travel Log Project!</p> <p>Read: <i>Inferno</i> 1 through 3, marking up your book and making preliminary entries in your travel log.</p> <p>Memorize: At least the first six lines of Canto 1; If you're really good also memorize first nine lines of Canto 3!!!</p>

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<p>Day 5: <i>Inferno 1-3</i> The Epic Simile</p>	<p>10 min: First few recitations of first six lines.</p> <p>40 min: Go through <i>Inferno</i> 1-3 with a fine-toothed comb, reading key bits. (With help of slideshow) (Focus on Paul and Aeneas / leaves & birds similes)</p> <p>20 min: Discuss “Leaves Assignment”</p>	<p>Short Paper: “Leaves Assignment” In a two to three page paper, compare and contrast Dante’s and Virgil’s famous similes. We will have discussed this in class, but the full instructions are uploaded to the right (see PDF) (submit to Turnitin)</p>
<p>Day 5: Leaves</p>	<p>25 min: Share “Leaves Assignment” Findings (lecturing where appropriate on the differences between Virgil & Dante / Tragedy & Comedy)</p> <p>30 min: “Leaves Assignment II” together (other poets on the same simile) (see PDF) (assign specific poems in pairs?)</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading together 4-5 together</p>	<p>Note: I’m a big fan of reading out loud in class, and try to do as much of it as possible. It trains the students’ ear, it makes the poetry more memorable, and you can stop and discuss as you go.</p> <p>Read: Read <i>Inferno</i> 4-5, marking up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook</p>
<p>Day 6: <i>Inferno 4-5</i> (Limbo & lust)</p>	<p>30 min: Discuss Canto IV (Limbo) & Canto V (Lust), with slideshow</p> <p>20 min: Explain and discuss Francesca (“Seduced”) paper.</p> <p>30 min: Begin working on “Seduced” paper</p>	<p>Paper: Finish & Hand in “Seduced” Paper. (See uploaded PDF for instructions) (Submit to Turnitin)</p>

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<p>Day 7: Going Whole Hog Dante the Storyteller</p>	<p>20 min: Share some papers/paper theses</p> <p>40 min: Read together starting with Canto VI (Try to get through at least VII)</p> <p>20 min: Write in journals</p>	<p>Read: Sweep read <i>Inferno</i> VI through IX (Don't get bogged down in the details; rather, try to get the overall feel and idea(s) of these cantos. Also focus on the impasse before the gates of Dis</p> <p>Make preliminary notes for each Canto in your journals – but we will have time to complete these in class</p>
<p>Day 8:</p>	<p>30 min: Discussion: What is the overall feel and what are the overall ideas of 6-9? / Look closely at the impasse before the gates of Dis</p> <p>50 min: In groups of two or three share thoughts and details on 6-9. The first half hour was the macro level; this is the micro level; Write as many notes as possible in your travel logs. (Your test next time will be open notebook!)</p>	<p>Test: <i>Inferno</i> 1-9 (It will be open notebook, so make sure your notebook is up to date; I will skim them for a grade)</p>
<p>Day 9: TEST (<i>Inferno</i> 1-9)</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Inferno</i> 1-9 Test</p> <p>20 min: When you're done with your test; fill out one of the "Putting Hell in Order" sheets. (This will count as extra credit.)</p>	<p>Read: <i>Inferno</i> 10-11. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 10: What's the Big Picture? (<i>Inferno</i> 10-11)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 10-11 / Compare with your own "Putting Hell in Order" extra credit sheets from last time.</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading 12-16</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: <i>Inferno</i> 12-16. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 11: Violence! (<i>Inferno</i> 12-16)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 12-16 (violence) / Compare with your own "Putting Hell in Order" extra credit sheets from last time.</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading 17-20 (Make a big thing of the address to the reader in 16 and the description of Geryon in 17)</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Homework: <i>Inferno</i> 17-20. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 12: Fraud! (<i>Inferno</i> 17-20)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 17-20</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading 21-23</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Homework: <i>Inferno</i> 21-23. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 13:</p> <p>Gargoyle Cantos (<i>Inferno</i> 21-22)</p> <p>Hypocrites (<i>Inferno</i> 23)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 21-23</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading 24-25</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Homework: <i>Inferno</i> 24-25. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 14:</p> <p>Thieves (<i>Inferno</i> 24-25)</p> <p>Ovid</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 24-25</p> <p>20 min: Read Ovid / Begin reading 26</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Read: <i>Inferno</i> 26. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Write: Answer a series of thought questions. (Submit to Turnitin)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 15:</p> <p>Ulysses (<i>Inferno</i> 26)</p> <p>Tennyson</p>	<p>30 min: Discuss <i>Inferno</i> 26 – setting up paper as we go</p> <p>30 min: Read & discuss Tennyson's "Ulysses"</p> <p>20 min: Explain and brainstorm "Ulysses" paper.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Short Paper: Dante's Ulysses (See uploaded PDF instructions) (Submit to Turnitin)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 16:</p> <p>Guido da Montefeltro (<i>Inferno</i> 27)</p> <p>T. S. Eliot "Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"</p>	<p>30 min: Read & discuss <i>Inferno</i> 27</p> <p>30 min: Read & discuss "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"</p> <p>30 min: Brainstorm Paper: How is "Prufrock" a 20th-century answer to Dante?</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Short Paper: How is Prufrock a 20th century answer to Dante? (Submit to Turnitin)</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 17:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Opening Old Wounds (Canto 28)</p>	<p>40 min: Read & discuss <i>Inferno</i> 28 together</p> <p>40 min: Work on homework</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: <i>Inferno</i> 29-31. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 18:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Hurry Up! What Are You Looking At? (Cantos 29-31)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 29-31</p> <p>20 min: Begin reading 32-34</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: <i>Inferno</i> 32-34. Mark up your book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 19:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">What A Pit! (Cantos 32-34)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion 32-34</p> <p>20 min: Begin reviewing quotations for exam</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Perfect: Perfect your <i>Inferno</i> travel log for a grade. You will also be able to use it on the exam.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Study: Study for the <i>Inferno</i> Exam. You will be asked to identify, put into context, and discuss a series of quotations. There is a "Quotations Bank" uploaded to the website. You will be able to use your Travel Log notebook, but all information must be hand-written by you. There will be no use of electronics.</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 20: <i>Inferno</i> Exam</p>	<p>Hand out new (!) notebooks and explain how the reading and teaching of Purgatory will work. Students become the Guides with the Teacher. From here on out, everyone will have assigned Cantos that he or she will have to read and take notes on, as well as specific Cantos to teach on given days. (Save room in your notebooks for you to take notes on Cantos that will be taught to you.) (You get a big 'teaching' grade, and your notebook grade will depend on your taking notes on cantos taught to you.)</p> <p><i>Inferno</i> final quotations exam.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: Canto 1 (and Mandelbaum Notes) with a fine-toothed comb. Mark up book and make preliminary notes in your (new!) travel log notebook</p>
<p>Second Quarter: <i>Purgatory & Paradise</i>; Much sweep reading, with highlighting of key passages in class; finish up with, big January term creative project</p>		
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 1: Intro to Purgatory Proem & Invocation Ante-Purgatory</p>	<p>20 min: Purgatory 1 Quiz</p> <p>30 min: Purgatory At A Glance (PDF uploaded to website). Take notes in (new!) travel log notebook.</p> <p>20 min: Review Purgatory 1 / Begin reading Purgatory 2, if time</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Sweep Read: <i>Purgatory</i> 2-5. Mark up books and make preliminary notes in your notebook</p>

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<p>Day 2: Ante-Purgatory (ctd.)</p>	<p>30 min: Journal exercise: In groups of two to three, share journal findings and work on filling out your own</p> <p>30 min: Discussion Purgatory 2-5</p> <p>20 min: Begin Homework</p>	<p>Teach: Canto 6: STUDENT Canto 7: STUDENT Canto 8: STUDENT</p> <p>Everyone: Read <i>Purgatory</i> Canto 9 (It's a beautiful, transitional Canto; read it slowly and carefully and with appreciation!) Mark up book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p>
<p>Day 3: Ante-Purgatory (ctd.)</p>	<p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 6</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 7</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 8</p> <p>30 min: Canto 9</p> <p>20 min: <i>Purgatory</i> 9 Quiz</p>	<p>Teach: Canto 10: Student Canto 13: Student Canto 15: Student Canto 16: Student</p> <p>Everyone: Cantos 17 & 18. Mark up book and make preliminary notes in your notebook</p>
<p>Day 4: First Terrace (The Proudful) Second Terrace (The Envious) Third Terrace (The Wrathful)</p>	<p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 10</p> <p>10 min: Student teacher Canto 13</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 15</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 16</p> <p>20 min: "Enlightening" exercise (see PDF) on Cantos 17 & 18 in pairs</p> <p>20 min: Share</p>	<p>Everyone: Canto 21. Mark book and make preliminary notes in your notebook.</p> <p>Teach: Canto 22: Student Canto 25: Student Canto 27: Student</p>

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<p>Day 5:</p> <p>Fourth Terrace (The Slothful)</p> <p>Fifth Terrace (The Avaricious & the Prodigal)</p> <p>Sixth Terrace (The Gluttonous)</p> <p>Seventh Terrace (The Lustful)</p> <p>Threshold of the Earthly Paradise</p>	<p>20 min: Quiz on Purgatory 21 in pairs</p> <p>20 min: Discuss Purgatory 21</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 22</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 25</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 27</p>	<p>Everyone: Canto 30 and Canto 33. Mark up books and make preliminary notes in your notebook</p> <p>Teach: Canto 29: Student Canto 31: Student Canto 32: Student</p>
<p>Day 6:</p> <p>Divine Forest</p> <p>Lethe</p> <p>Golden Age</p> <p>The Earthly Paradise</p>	<p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 29</p> <p>20 min: Quiz on Purgatory 30 in pairs</p> <p>10 min: Discuss Purgatory 30</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 31</p> <p>10 min: Student teaches Canto 32</p> <p>20 min: Purgatory 33 together</p>	<p>Notebooks: Make your Purgatory travel notes perfect and amazing; I will be giving them a grade</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 7:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Paradise Intro</p>	<p>20 min: Everyone skim through “Paradise At A Glance” while I come around and give everyone a notebook grade.</p> <p>20 min: Paradise At A Glance</p> <p>10 min: Explain New Approach: In the third Canticle you will be your own guides almost exclusively. You will be assigned only certain cantos (there is a PDF document uploaded to the website that has canto synopses and a list of which cantos to read), for which you will be keeping up your travel log notebook. In class, you will be completing on your own in pairs as I hover around elaborate close reading and thought questions on sweeps of Cantos.</p> <p>30 min: Begin reading Paradise 1-3</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Read:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Paradise</i> Cantos 1-3. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Your group extravaganza next time will be on Cantos 1-5, if you want to sweep read the last two cantos.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 8:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Ascent</p> <p style="text-align: center;">First Heaven: the Sphere of the Moon</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Paradise</i> 1-5 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Read:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Paradise</i> Cantos 6-8. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 9:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Second Heaven: the Sphere of Mercury</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Third Heaven: the Sphere of Venus</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Paradise</i> 6-8 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Read:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Paradise</i> Cantos 10, 11, & 13. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 10:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Fourth Heaven: the Sphere of the Sun</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Paradise</i> 10, 11, & 13 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Read:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Paradise</i> Cantos 15-17. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook</p>

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<p style="text-align: center;">Day 11:</p> <p>Fifth Heaven: the Sphere of Mars</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Paradise</i> 15-17 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: <i>Paradise</i> Cantos 28-30. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 12:</p> <p>Sixth through Eighth Heavens Redux</p> <p>Ninth Heaven: the Primum Mobile</p>	<p>10 min: A quick word or two about the Eighth Heaven and Canto 25</p> <p>50 min: <i>Paradise</i> 28-30 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Read: <i>Paradise</i> Cantos 31-33. Mark up your book and make notes in your notebook</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 13:</p> <p>Tenth Heaven: the Empyrean</p>	<p>60 min: <i>Paradise</i> 31-33 extravaganza. Typed up. (Submit to Turnitin)</p> <p>20 min: Share highlights</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Polish & Perfect: Your <i>Purgatory/Paradise</i> travel log notebook</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Study: For a final exam. You will be able to use your notebook, but everything in it must be hand-written. Going over your <i>Paradise</i> extravaganzas would also help.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Day 14:</p> <p>Cumulative Test</p>	<p>10 min: Explain January Project. (see PDF uploaded to website) (They will have four classes after Winter Break to work on it.)</p> <p>60 min: Cumulative Test</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">Homework: From here on out you will be working on your January Projects. You are more than welcome to work on them over the Winter Break, but you will have four classes to work on them when we get back. You will present to the rest of the class on the last day of the Term.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Project Form: Please fill out the uploaded prospectus form to show me next class</p>

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Day 15: Work on Projects		Homework: Work on Projects
Day 16: Work on Projects		Homework: Work on Projects
Day 17: Work on Projects		Homework: Work on Projects
Day 18: Work on Projects		Homework: Work on Projects
Day 19: Work on Projects		Homework: Work on Projects
Day 20: Present Projects		<p style="text-align: center;">Homework: Projects Due / Project Forms Outlining what you did every day are also due</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Note: The number of class periods in any given year fluctuates from as few as 16 per quarter to as much as 20 per quarter, and this schedule is to be adjusted accordingly.</p>