**Imagine Hell: course plan**

**Spring 2014**

**WEEK ONE: Introduction**

* Disclaimer about beliefs, no judgment, etc.
* Ask students what they know (or have heard) about Dante and the Divine Comedy
* Introduction: syllabus, class expectations, ask if there are questions
* Introduction: the nine circles of hell (power point with images and handout)
  + Each hell has different punishments, and different people who reside there
    - What is so unique about each circle?
  + Ask students what they believe happens in each circle, and how they are punished and why, etc.
* **Icebreaker**: After presentation of nine circles of hell, have students break into groups and assign modern figures (both fictional and real) to each circle based on Dante’s standards of sin
  + Return as a class, and elect one person from each group to share their modern person in hell and why

**WEEK TWO: Overview of Dante’s life and context**

Questions | Objectives: What do we already know about Dante? What is interesting about the way Dante chooses to represent hell in comparison to the way we see it now? What might have driven Dante to write the Divine Comedy?

Presentation:

* Relevant life information, political strife
  + Placement of politicians in his revenge hell,
  + Says something about Dante’s person, role of writer in society?
  + Author and protagonist
    - Splitting function – places people in hell but in the text he appears as a bystander
* Ask for student questions/comments
* Importance of his love for Beatrice vs. why people go into hell now
  + Orpheus in Greek mythology
* Italian, vernacular – Dante begins the movement towards a more contemporary understanding
  + This detail is significant in our class’ context because all of the things we will discuss are based on this contemporary movement of depicting hell
* Hold for discussion

**WEEK THREE: Imagining the Gates of Hell**

Questions | Objectives: What does it mean to ‘close the gates of hell’? Are there real gates on Earth? How is Dante represented at the Gate to Hell in Divine Comedy and how is that contrasted in the things we watch/view today?

* Briefly go over readings together, to make sure that everyone is on the same page
* Show images (power point) of Auguste Rodin’s sculptures
* Show brief clip from “Supernatural”
  + Closing the gates of Hell – why do they want to close it here? What does it accomplish?
* **Group activity** (3-4 students):
  + **Choose a physical landmark** (somewhere specific like a city or a landmark, area) and write it on the white board – students will get a few minutes to do this. It will also prevent two groups from choosing the same place. I am assuming that someone will quickly write Las Vegas, and we don’t need two of those. Students could conversely choose a place like death row or prison camps.
  + **After choosing the landmark**, have one scribe document the following information:
    - What makes this place a hell on earth?
    - What do people do there that make it hellish or ‘sinful’?
    - What about punishment? Have you considered that people here may not be punished?
    - Considering all of that information, what does it mean that we believe that there may be a physical landmark on earth in western culture?
    - What does it say that we believe about these kinds of places, and our criteria and expectations of hell?
    - Why might we want to “close” this hell?
  + As a class, have students share what groups talked about
  + Physical landmark in Turkey?

**WEEK FOUR: Descending into the Inferno**

Questions | Objectives: How did we use to conceive one’s placement in Hell? How do contemporary media shape our ideas of how one ends up in Hell? How is suicide perceived in these hells versus in Dante?

* Discuss reading, outline
* (Remind students about the idea that the class is an open place for fair discussion (since we will discuss suicide, etc.))
* Show clip from “Supernatural”
* “What Dreams May Come”
  + <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HwrmILnrzbk>
    - Notions of suicide
* **Group activity**:
  + Discussion on clips
    - Who ends up where and why?
    - Sacrifice/love as a means of ending up in Hell NOT Heaven
  + Consider or think of another example in film or television where this sacrifice and love does not come up with a happy ending for the characters
  + How does this make you feel?
  + Why do you think suicides are punished in hell?
* I will bring the class together in a presentation of suicides and their punishment in hell, as well as a full explanation of the circle of hell that punishes these sins

**WEEK FIVE: Face-to-Face with Satan**

Questions | Objectives: Why do we now refer to so many people in film and news as Satan? How have we come to throw such a term around in describing so many people, including people we personally know and do not like? Re-imagining the classic devil.

* **Group activity #1**:
  + Split class up into groups/partners
  + Pass out copies of readings
  + Have students mark up places where there is physical description of Satan
    - AS A CLASS: document these details on the white board in a list
  + Draw a picture of Satan according to these descriptions and details
    - Have one student from each group quickly draw their sketch on the board OR use tape to attach to the board
* Power point: Lucifer in Dante’s *Inferno* and the Ninth Circle
  + Images of different representations of Lucifer
    - All of them have three heads, just like in the text
    - Renaissance vs. other
* **Group activity #2**: Ask students which political figures do they see as devil-like or have seen represented as such. i.e. Hitler, Saddam Hussein
  + Photos that they brought of political figures / people
  + film Satans? Lord of the Rings – Mordor and Sauron
  + Why? What did they do? How has this changed? Our values?
    - Theme of treachery towards benefactors / bonds of love and trust
  + Return to class

**WEEK SIX: Quest to defeat the King of Hell**

Questions | Objectives: Is our interest in representing the King of Hell as someone to defeat/kill in media an indication of our generation’s own egotism? How is this compared to Dante’s visit/journey in Hell, rather than his need to defeat Lucifer? What does that say about our idea of our own governmental infrastructure? Is Satan necessary in keeping an order in our morality so to speak?

* Power point overview on Dante’s purpose in entering Hell
  + Power point will include pictures of film versions of the king of hell
* **Group work**: Have students break up into groups and discuss these questions and then return to class and share ideas
  + Paradigm shift?
* Sign-up for presentation groups and time slots
  + I will hand out a sheet with time slots and allow students to write their names underneath the time they like best; this will also allow students to choose who they work with
  + Presentation will be in groups of 3-4 students (depending on class preference)
  + Presentation is meant to allow students to demonstrate what they have learned in the class (goals, objectives, etc.) and show what their personal hell may look like
    - This can take the form of skits, diagrams, power points, video presentations – they can get creative, hopefully!
  + Give students handouts that itemize instructions and what I am looking for in their presentations

**WEEK SEVEN: The plains of Purgatory**

Questions | Objectives: How do we imagine purgatory? What is the purpose of purgatory?

* Ask students what they think of when they imagine purgatory? What do they believe the purpose of purgatory is?
* Power point presentation: “Purgatorio” in Dante
* Clip from “Pirates of the Caribbean” (http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iGy-QISVhTE)
* Ask students about the different ways they have seen purgatory *physically* represented
  + Possible ideas that may come up:
  + Flat, dry
  + An ascension (to paradise?)
  + A place off the edge of the world (as represented in the film)
* Power point presentation: Seven deadly sins
* **Group activity**: in groups of four, have students describe which one they believe they are most guilty of (possible drawing activity? Depends on make up of students…)
  + While students are discussing, put the purgatory mountain on the board
    - At the end of the conversation, place name on the board (on diagram of purgatory mountain)

**WEEK EIGHT: “Like Hell”: World Politics and History**

Questions | Objectives: How can we imagine the Holocaust as the circles of Hell?

* Opening conversation: usages of “like hell”; when and where do we most often say this phrase?
  + Why do we so often throw it around easily now? Is it *really* like hell?
* Power point that will outline the article that we will discuss below
* Discussion on “Circles of Hell: Jewish and Non-Jewish Victims of the Nazis” by Mary Johnson
* **Group activity #1**:
  + In small groups, come up with another historical event that mimics the circles of hell (such as colonization or other imperialism…Japanese interment camps?)
    - Students do not have to come up with all nine circles…a basic metaphorical representation of hell works, too
  + Make a list of some circles of hell people have been confined to and describe what makes this a fit metaphor
* **Group activity #2 (same groups):** 
  + Share this quote: *“The darkest places in Hell are reserved for those who maintain their neutrality in times of moral crisis.”*

*- Inferno*, Dan Brown

* + What does this mean to students?

**WEEK NINE: Personal Hell**

Questions | Objectives: Allow students to engage in creating their own personal hells. Presentation will allow for students to get creative with their own ‘punishments’ and circles of hells. They can opt to do a short play/skit or a power point or some sort of presentation on what their hell might look like.

* **8-10 minute presentations**
  + There should be about four; leave remaining class time to set up presentations and sign up for potluck
* Potluck sign ups (ask students if they prefer pizza, or something else like al ‘dante’ pasta)
  + Ask students if they have any dietary preferences and allergies

**WEEK TEN: Music and the Ascension to Heavenly Pizza Party**

Questions | Objectives: How do we ‘hear’ Hell? How do key changes, for example, affect this sound and imagining? Consume pizza.

* Listen to Robert W. Smith’s “Symphony No.1: The Divine Comedy”
* Have students share what they think makes the music sounds hellish
* Pizza party (with past experience…this will probably consume all of their attention, plus they will probably socializing with one another)