

# *The Divine Comedy* of Dante Alighieri

11<sup>th</sup> Grade English Block - Afternoons, November 7– December 2, 2011

Teacher, Barbara Huckabay

Dante Alighieri's life (1265 - 1321) was shaped by two passions: his love for Beatrice Portinari and his love for his home city of Florence. He suffered two great losses: when he was 25, his beloved Beatrice died, and 11 years later when he was 36, he was exiled from Florence, never to return. Longing and loss impelled him to imagine and record an epic journey through hell, purgatory and heaven, speaking to and learning from the souls he encountered along the way.

Dante – like many modern day celebrities, he is known by his first name – called this work simply “My Comedy”, because it has a happy ending, but admiring readers soon began calling it “The Divine Comedy”. Dante's spiritual realms exist in a pre-Copernican universe centered upon a fixed earth, but his insights into love, pity, justice, evil, goodness and redemption are timeless.

The Comedy is divided into three parts: “Inferno” (Hell), “Purgatorio” (Purgatory), and “Paradiso” (Heaven). We will spend most of our time reading Inferno, the journey through hell, but will also devote some time at the end of the block to tales from the Purgatorio and Paradiso. We will also refer briefly to some of the poems Dante wrote for and about his beloved Beatrice in “La Vita Nuova”.

There will be three major assignments. One will be an artistic response to the material; one will be a work of creative writing, and the final assignment will be a longer analytical essay. There will be approximately weekly quizzes and a final exam.

