Dante's "Inferno" Guided Questions

Canto I

1. This epic is an allegory. An allegory is: a story in which the characters and settings and events stand for both abstract and concrete concepts.

What has happened to Dante, in an allegorical sense? Because of sin and worldly endeavors, Dante is no longer on the path to Heaven.

1. What do each of the following things/people symbolize in the Inferno?
   a. True way/path: living the right way to get to Heaven
   b. Dark wood: sins and cares of the world
   c. Sun: divine illumination
   d. Little hill: the Mount of Joy (Heaven)
   e. Three beasts: worldly sins
   f. Virgil: human reason
   g. Beatrice: divine love
   h. Hell: recognition of sin
   i. Purgatory: renunciation of sin
   j. Paradise/Heaven: forgiveness of sin; purification

2. While climbing the Mount of Joy, Dante finds his path blocked by: Leopard of malice and fraud, she-wolf of incontinence, lion of violence and ambition

3. Who becomes Dante’s guide through Hell? Virgil (Date’s favorite poet and symbol for human reason)

4. List three examples of personification in Canto I – include line numbers
   a. Soul in tears (pg 750, line 88)
   b. Death could be bitter (pg 748, line 7)
   c. Sun was climbing (pg 749, line 38)

Canto III

5. Hell is equated to a series of circles that start out wide and tend to narrow as one descends, sort of like the funnel of a tornado. Each level is smaller in size than the last but greater in punishment as the sins get more serious.

6. Over the gate of Hell is a poem that ends with the line: “Abandon all hope ye who enter here”

7. How does the beginning structure of this poem compare to the New Testament verse from John 14:6: “Jesus told them, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me’”? Uses the same beginning along with parallel structure to emphasize the path to the opposite direction from God – to despair and hopeless torment.
8. Just inside the gate, Dante meets the first souls in torment: **opportunists, fence-sitters, and cowards.** These people would not commit to good or evil during their lifetimes. Thus, their punishment is: **chase after an ever-changing banner with hornets and wasps chasing them.**

9. Which two of the five sense does Dante appeal to in his description of the hellish scene in lines 22-29? Give an example of each:
   a. Visual: enter your own example here
   b. Auditory: enter your own example here

**You are now entering the upper level of Hell**

Canto V

10. **Minos** waits at the border of the second level of Hell to hear sinners’ crimes and then pass judgement. He curls his tail around himself a certain number of times, indicating to which level each soul must go.

   **The next three levels represent sins of weakness - mostly things that we do to ourselves**

11. The Second Circle of Hell is reserved for those who have committed the sin of **lust.** These people have given in to their carnal desires by choosing forbidden love.

12. What is their eternal punishment? **Swirling in a storm forever.**

13. Why is this punishment appropriate to their crime? **Giving into lust and passion is like losing control in a storm – they become swept up.**

14. In lines 82-87, Dante compares Paolo and Francesca to doves. Why do you suppose Dante uses such a sympathetic image for the lovers? **Because doves represent peace and love – two things these souls no longer have because they gave into their forbidden love.**

15. Find and list two different types of imagery, along with their line numbers. Explain what type of imagery each example is and how it is appropriate for this Canto.
   a. Provide your own example
   b. Provide your own example

16. The Third Circle of Hell is for the **gluttonous**

17. Their punishment is: **Rain of filthy, polluted, stinky water and hailstorms. Sinner are guarded and chewed upon by Cerberus – the three-headed dog of hell**

18. The Fourth Circle of Hell is for the sin of **avarice** which means: excessive or insatiable desire for wealth or greed; greediness. Reckless spenders also find themselves in this circle of hell.
   a. Their punishment is: **They push heavy weights toward the center of a circle and yell – “why do you hoard?” and “why do you spend?” Forever.**

**The next three levels of Hell have to do with malice. These actions are usually premeditated and usually involved actions against others.**
20. **The Fifth Circle of Hell** is a torment for those whose sin is **wrath or sullenness** also known as **expressed anger** or **repressed anger**.

- Their punishment is: The wrathful attack one another continuously while the sullen stew about their anger below the surface of the muddy swamp.

  **You are now entering the lowest levels of Hell**

22. This lower level of Hell is the city of **Dis**. This is the region of Hell that is reserved for **intellectual** sins rather than mere sins of passion. Demons throng here.

23. **The Sixth Circle of Hell** was designed to punish the **heretics**. These are people who: **hold controversial opinions – especially against the Catholic Church**.

24. Their punishment is: **they are trapped in burning tombs**.

25. **The Seventh Circle of Hell** is for the punishment of the Violent. This circle is divided into three rings for violence against **acquaintances and strangers**, violence against **self**, and violence against **nature**.

Canto XXXIII

26. **The Eighth Circle of Hell** is for **fraud and treachery**. This circle is divided into ten ditches to cover a wide variety of dinners, to include: pimps and seductresses, flatterers, hypocrites, thieves and robbers, troublemakers, liars, and those who commit treason.

27. For instance, those who **treacherous against the ties of hospitality** lie frozen with only half of their faces above a block of ice and their tears freeze in their eye sockets, sealing them with crystal visors.

28. What metaphor for Hell is used in line 91 and how is it appropriate? “Hell is a frozen mine.” It suggests the coldness and darkness of a world far from God’s radiant warmth and light.

29. Why has Dante become as “numb as any callus” in line 101? What symbolic significance might this numbness have? He is emotionally numbed after seeing so many horrors; he is losing human feeling and growing cold as he moves further away from God and closer to Satan.

Canto XXXIV

**Welcome to the Center of Hell**

30. **The Ninth Circle of Hell** is for **murderers of family**, traitors to their masters, and **Satan**.

31. This is the lowest, deepest circle for the worst sinners, so naturally it is the farthest from **God**.

32. Their punishment is **Frozen in ice in weird positions with their heads bent forward at awkward angles**.

33. What are some details from the landscape of this section of Hell and what impression do they build? It is a cold, gloomy place in the depths of the earth as suggested by the rocky landscape and desolation.

34. What does Dante consider to be the worst sin of all? Why? **Judas’s betrayal of Jesus. It is the ultimate form of betrayal – to betray your ultimate master.**
35. In what way could Satan’s three faces be explained as symbols? It is a parody of the Christian trinity.

36. Which sinners are located in each of Satan’s three mouths? What makes the one being chewed on in the center mouth worse than the other two? Brutus – feet first; left, black face. Judas – head first; red (center) face. Cassius – feet first; right white face. Judas’s situation is the worst because he cannot speak.