

Topics in Literature: Imaginary Worlds

Paper #2

Assigned Readings

Inferno by Dante Alighieri, Trans. Robert Pinsky (2000)

Brave New World by Aldous Huxley (1932)

Optional Readings

“Dante and the Medieval Invention of the Self” by Gary Gutchess (online)

“Brave New World: A Defense of Paradise Engineering?” by David Pearce (online)

Directions: Develop your own specific topic based on either an expressive, objective, or persuasive approach to the *Inferno* and *Brave New World*. Your paper should engage both of the assigned readings in some depth. Research to supplement your own commentary is strictly optional, but if you do include researched material from a source other than our textbook, you are responsible for documenting it correctly using MLA style parenthetical documentation.

Topic Approaches

These notes are meant to be suggestive, not exclusive.

EXPRESSIVE

Develop a paper that explores your own understanding of the relevance of each of these works. Discuss your personal opinions, responses, and feelings about the themes, characters or situations you encounter in the readings. Explore ways in which these works resonate with your understanding of contemporary American culture.

OBJECTIVE

Develop a paper that analyzes or interprets the meaning of one or both of the works assigned (*Inferno* and *Brave New World*).

- Write a comparative analysis.
- Trace the development of a common theme through both works.
- Present an objective interpretation of one or both works.
- Write a thematic analysis of one or both works.
- Write a critique of one or both works.

PERSUASIVE

Identify the ambiguity in at least one of the works on the reading list and then argue for a particular interpretation. Acknowledge other interpretations but prove, by your close analysis of details in the text, that your interpretation is a strong one. Argue for a particular reading of one or more of the works we studied.

CREATIVE

- Create and describe an alternatively structured Inferno. The Hell you envision and describe may be very different from Dante’s but it should, like Dante’s, include your vision of a comprehensive system of “punishment” for
- Create and describe an alternative utopia or dystopia to the one Huxley describes.

Suggested Topics: Paper 2

Expressive

- What seems eerily familiar to you about the Brave New World? What connections can you make between the world Huxley invents and our own present society?
- Does the moral order Dante establishes in the *Inferno* satisfy your own moral consciousness? How might you personally rearrange the hierarchy of “sins” to be punished, or change the punishments themselves to better suit our modern world?
- You can respond expressively to the criticism that the *Inferno* and *Brave New World* “justify torture.”
- You can establish expressively whether *Brave New World* represents a vision of “utopia,” “dystopia,” or some combination of the two.

Objective

- Compare/contrast the theme of individuality, free will, or rebellion in *Brave New World* and the *Inferno*.
- Compare Dante’s friendship with Virgil in the *Inferno* with Bernard Marx’s friendship with Helmholtz Watson in *Brave New World*.
- Trace the theme of “dehumanization” in the *Inferno* or in *Brave New World*, or compare/contrast how the theme is developed in each work.
- Compare/contrast Beatrice in the *Inferno* and Lenina Crowne in *Brave New World*.
- Interpret the social role that science plays in *Brave New World*, then compare/contrast its role in the novel with its role in our own society.
- Interpret the meaning of “progress” in *Brave New World*. Relate the notion of “progress” you find to the modern concept of “transhumanism.”

Persuasive

- Argue that Dante’s *Inferno* may still be relevant for modern readers who may reject its Christian theology and medieval cosmology.
- Argue that the system of “punishments” described in the *Inferno* does or does not represent a form of “perfect justice.”
- Argue that *Brave New World* is a “utopia,” a “dystopia,” or both.
- Argue for or against “happiness” and “stability” as the basis for a utopian society.
- Argue that the seed of Huxley’s *Brave New World* is planted right here in our own modern world.