

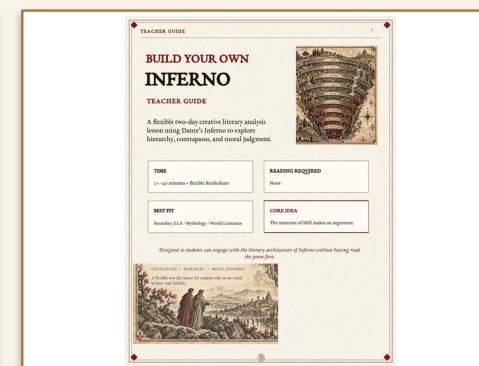
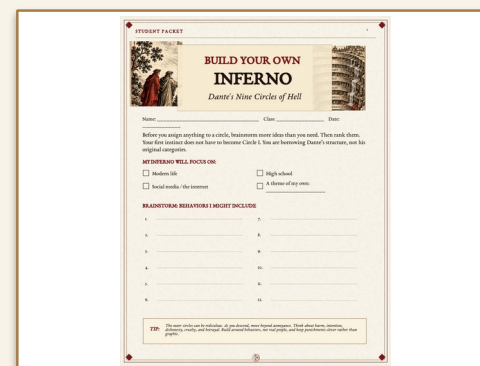
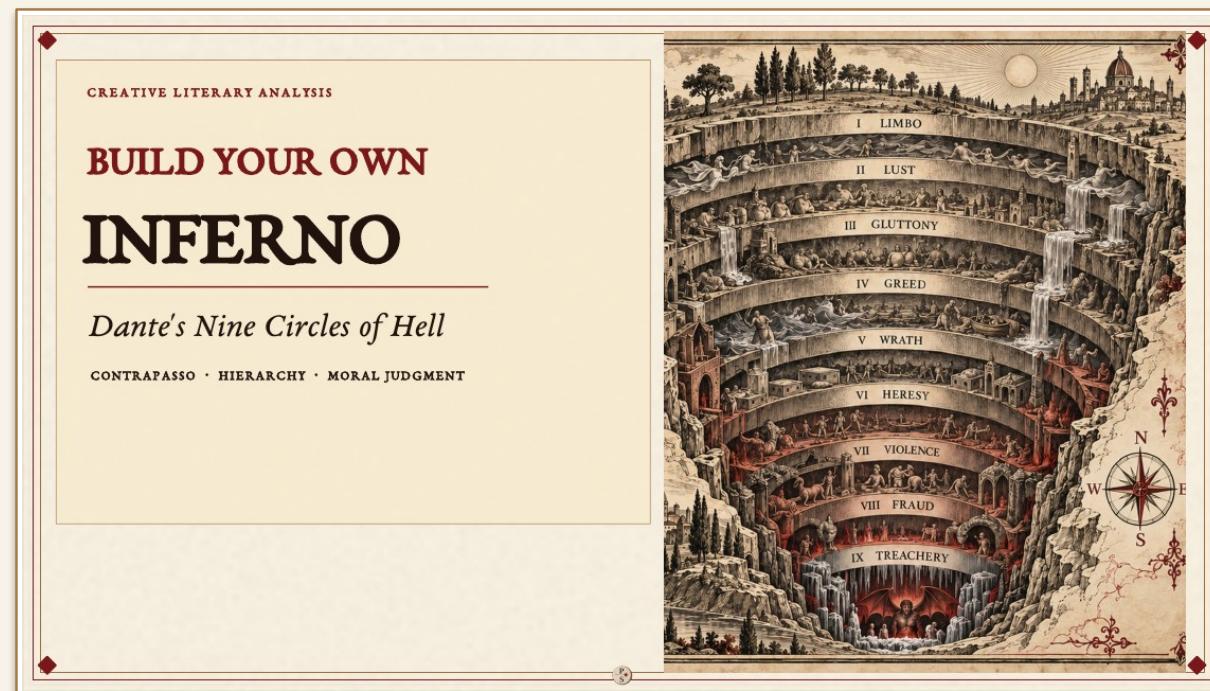
BUILD YOUR OWN INFERNO

Dante's Nine Circles of Hell

A two-day lesson that teaches just enough Dante to make the creative work meaningful.

Students examine hierarchy and contrapasso, then build a modern nine-circle Inferno of their own.

No prior reading of Inferno required.



16-slide teacher deck • 7-page student packet • 8-page teacher guide

What students actually do

The humor is welcome. The reasoning is required.

1 See the structure

DAT 1

The shape of Hell

As Dante descends, the moral categories generally become more serious. Circle 1 is a special case.

Vestibule — Refusal to choose

I — Limbo

II — Lust

III — Gluttony

IV — Greed

V — Wrath

VI — Heresy

VII — Violence

VIII — Fraud

IX — Treachery



Students look at how Dante organizes the descent and why the order matters.

2 Decode contrapasso

DAT 2

Can you decode it?

The fortune-tellers

THE OFFENSE

They tried to see what lay ahead.

THE PUNISHMENT

Their heads are turned backward. They can no longer look ahead.



They figure out why a punishment reflects, reverses, or extends an offense.

3 Build a modern Inferno

DAT 3

OFFENSE — Who is here?

PUNISHMENT — What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO — Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT — Why is this worse than the circle above it?



They rank nine modern offenses and defend the punishment and placement of each.

PLOTTING SOMETHING

Just enough Dante for the project

DAY 1

The shape of Hell

As Dante descends, the moral categories generally become more serious. Circle I is a special case.

Vestibule — Refusal to choose

- I** — Limbo
- II** — Lust
- III** — Gluttony
- IV** — Greed
- V** — Wrath
- VI** — Heresy
- VII** — Violence
- VIII** — Fraud
- IX** — Treachery



The Vestibule sits outside the nine circles. Limbo (Circle I) is a special case, and several later circles divide further.

Students get a clear working model:

- The nine-circle structure and the general descent
- Contrapasso through memorable examples
- Why fraud and treachery sit so low in Dante's moral structure
- The idea that the structure itself makes an argument

Students do not need to have read the poem first.

Practice the logic before they create

STUDENT PACKET

Dante Decoder

Before you build your own, practice making the punishment mean something.

CONTRAPASSO The punishment fits the offense by reflecting, reversing, or extending something about it.

CASE A

OFFENSE: Someone spreads rumors for entertainment.

PUNISHMENT: Every word the person says is repeated, distorted, and whispered back by thousands of unseen voices.

Why does it fit? _____

CASE B

OFFENSE: Someone constantly takes credit for other people's work.

PUNISHMENT: The person works forever while everyone around them receives praise for it.

Why does it fit? _____

CASE C

OFFENSE: Someone refuses to listen to anyone but themselves.

PUNISHMENT: They are surrounded by people speaking forever but can never make themselves heard.

Why does it fit? _____

Dante Decoder

Three short modern examples give students a low-stakes way to practice contrapasso before they have to invent their own.

- rumors for entertainment
- taking credit for someone else's work
- refusing to listen to anyone else

The packet asks students to explain why each punishment fits.

Build the descent

Every circle asks students to make four decisions.

STUDENT PACKET

5

Past Annoyance

By now, think beyond things that are merely irritating.

V

CIRCLE V

OFFENSE — Who is here?

PUNISHMENT — What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO — Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT — Why is this worse than the circle above it?

VI

CIRCLE VI

OFFENSE — Who is here?

PUNISHMENT — What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO — Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT — Why is this worse than the circle above it?

STUDENT PACKET

7

IX

Circle IX

Your final circle should reveal what you think makes an action truly wrong.

IX

CIRCLE IX

OFFENSE — Who is here?

PUNISHMENT — What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO — Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT — Why is this worse than the circle above it?

LOOK BACK AT WHAT YOU BUILT

1. What pattern do you notice in the behaviors you considered most serious?

2. Finish the thought:
One of the worst things a person can do to another person is _____
because _____

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: Dante places treachery at the bottom of his Hell. Where would Dante probably disagree with your hierarchy? Explain.

OFFENSE

Who belongs here?

PUNISHMENT

What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO

Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT

Why is this worse than the circle above it?

Funny at the top. Serious by Circle IX.

The assignment deliberately moves students past a list of petty annoyances.

OUTER CIRCLES

Minor irritations can be funny.

People who stop in the middle of a doorway.



MIDDLE CIRCLES

Students begin to think about selfishness, dishonesty, and harm.

Who gets hurt? Was the harm deliberate?



CIRCLE IX

The final placement reveals what the student thinks makes an action truly wrong.

The reflection asks them to name the value behind the hierarchy.

STUDENT PACKET 7

IX

Circle IX

Your final circle should reveal what you think makes an action truly wrong.

CIRCLE IX

OFFENSE — Who is here?

PUNISHMENT — What happens forever?

CONTRAPASSO — Why does it fit?

PLACEMENT — Why is this worse than the circle above it?

LOOK BACK AT WHAT YOU BUILT

1. What pattern do you notice in the behaviors you considered most serious?

2. Finish the thought:

One of the worst things a person can do to another person is _____

because _____

OPTIONAL EXTENSION: Dante places treachery at the bottom of his Hell. Where would Dante probably disagree with your hierarchy? Explain.

A teacher guide you can actually use

TEACHER GUIDE 1

BUILD YOUR OWN INFERNO

TEACHER GUIDE

A flexible two-day creative literary analysis lesson using Dante's Inferno to explore hierarchy, contrapasso, and moral judgment.



TIME

2 × ~40 minutes + flexible finish/share

READING REQUIRED

None

BEST FIT

Secondary ELA • Mythology • World Literature

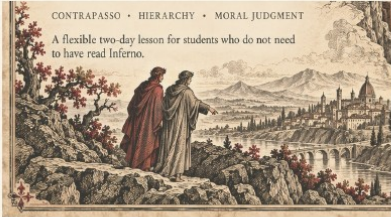
CORE IDEA

The structure of Hell makes an argument.

Designed so students can engage with the literary architecture of Inferno without having read the poem first.

CONTRAPASSO • HIERARCHY • MORAL JUDGMENT

A flexible two-day lesson for students who do not need to have read Inferno.



TEACHER GUIDE 7

Assessment and Flexible Use

Keep the grading as simple as the activity deserves.

20-POINT QUICK SCORE

COMPLETE HIERARCHY

5

Nine circles are present and intentionally ordered.

CONTRAPASSO

5

Punishments have a meaningful relationship to the offenses.

PLACEMENT REASONING

5

The student explains why the descent becomes more serious.

REFLECTION

5

The student identifies a value or principle revealed by the hierarchy.

FOR STUDENTS WHO NEED MORE SUPPORT

Let students choose a themed Inferno (school, social media, modern life). Conference after brainstorming and help them rank before they write. A student who can explain a clear five- or six-step hierarchy may show more understanding than one who fills nine circles randomly; adjust length when needed.

FOR OLDER/STRONGER READERS

Require the optional "Where would Dante disagree with you?" extension. Students can also identify which principle seems to matter most in Dante's hierarchy and compare it with the principle revealed by their own.

SHARING OPTION

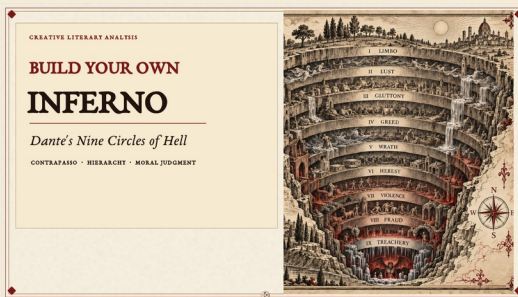
Have students share the circle that made them laugh most and the circle they consider most serious. The contrast usually makes the lesson's central idea visible without a long presentation.

- Two-day pacing
- Dante background
- Decoder responses
- Discussion guidance
- 20-point quick score
- Support + extension options
- Classroom-use boundaries

WHAT IS INCLUDED

Everything you need for the lesson

TEACHER DECK



16 slides

Day 1 mini-lesson + Day 2 launch

Editable PowerPoint + PDF

STUDENT PACKET

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____

Before you assign anything to a circle, brainstorm more ideas than you need. Then rank them. Your first instinct does not have to become Circle I. You are borrowing Dante's structure, not his original categories.

MY INFERNO WILL FOCUS ON:

☐ Modern life ☐ High school

☐ Social media / the internet ☐ A theme of my own: _____

BRAINSTORM: BEHAVIORS I MIGHT INCLUDE

1. _____ 7. _____

2. _____ 8. _____

3. _____ 9. _____

4. _____ 10. _____

7 pages

Decoder, nine-circle build, reflection

Editable PowerPoint + PDF

TEACHER GUIDE

A flexible two-day creative literary analysis lesson using Dante's Inferno to explore hierarchy, contrapasso, and moral judgment.



TIME 2 x ~40 minutes • flexible finish/share	READING REQUIRED None
BEST FIT Secondary ELA • Mythology • World Literature	CORE IDEA The structure of Hell makes an argument.

Designed so students can engage with the literary architecture of Inferno without having read the poem first.

8 pages

Pacing, background, responses, assessment

Editable PowerPoint + PDF

Secondary ELA • Mythology • World Literature • Standalone Dante lesson or underworld-unit extension