Dante Aligheri’s Divine Comedy

*6.H.2 Understand the political, economic, and/or social significance of historic events, issues, individuals or cultural groups.*

*6.C.1 Explain how the behaviors and practices of individuals and groups influence societies, civilizations, and regions.*

Dante Aligheri wrote the Divine Comedy in the early 1300s and it has become one of the classic works of world literature. Better known as Dante’s inferno, it is an epic poem about the author’s travels through the underworld (hell), purgatory, and paradise (heaven). Dante’s depiction of hell was so terrifying and unforgettable to his readers that the Catholic Church saw an immediate increase in attendance. In this excerpt, translated from the Harvard Classics Volume 20 in 1909, Dante and his guide, the Roman historian, Virgil, are about to enter into the gates of hell (*Inferno Canto III).*

Through me you pass into the city of woe:

Through me you pass into eternal pain:

Through me among the people lost for aye.

Where is the traveler getting ready to enter?

Justice the founder of my fabric moved:

To rear me was the task of Roman divine,

Supremest wisdom, and primeval love.

Before me things create were none, save things eternal I endure.

What is the general attitude of those who enter?

All hope abandon, ye who enter here.

Such characters, in color dim, I mark’d

Over a portal’s lofty arch inscribed.

Whereat I thus: Master, these words import

Hard meaning. He has one prepared replied:

Here though must all distrust behind thee leave;

What does the visitor expect to see on his journey?

Here be vile fear extinguish’d. We are come

Where I have told thee we shall see the souls

To misery doom’d, who intellectual good

Have lost. And when his hand he had stretched forth

To mine with pleasant looks, whence I was cheer’d

Into that secret place he led me on.

What does the visitor first encounter on his journey?

Here sighs with lamentations and loud moans,

Resounded through the air pierced by no star,

That e’en I wept at entering.