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❁ JOHN MILTON ❁

from *Paradise Lost: Book I*

PRE-GRAMMAR | Preparation

Prepare the student for understanding the Central One Idea by drawing upon his or her prior knowledge or experience.

1. What is your favorite epic battle from literature or film? Tell about it here, and why you like it.

GRAMMAR | Presentation

The student is presented with and discovers essential facts, elements, and features of the poem through the Reading Notes, Words to Be Defined, and Comprehension Questions.

READING NOTES

1. **John Milton** (1608-1674) – For more information, read the biography given in the *Poetry Book II* anthology.
2. **Heavenly Muse** (l. 6ff.) – Urania, the muse of sacred poetry in Greek mythology. In these lines Milton connects Urania with the Holy Spirit, who in the Old Testament inspired “that shepherd” Moses to receive and interpret God’s word.
3. **Oreb and Sinai** (l. 7) – Mt. Horeb and Mt. Sinai, the locations where God delivered the Ten Commandments to Moses. The location of Mt. Horeb is unknown; Mt. Sinai is located on the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.
4. **Chaos** (l. 10) – the ruler of the realm of confusion on the edge of hell
5. **Aonian Mount** (l. 15) – a mountainous region in Greece, specifically Mt. Helicon, the home of the Muses
6. **perdition** (l. 47) – eternal punishment; damnation
7. **adamantine** (l. 48) – unbreakable

8. **ken** (l. 59) – range of knowledge; perception
9. **durst** (l. 102) – past tense of the word *dare*
10. **Seraphim** (l. 129) – angels with three wings; members of the highest order of angels
11. **rood** (l. 196) – an archaic measure of land, about a quarter of an acre
12. **Pelorus** (l. 232) – a specific promontory; a high area of rock in Sicily
13. **Etna** (l. 233) – an active volcano on the east coast of Sicily, Italy
14. **epic poetry** – a long narrative poem in elevated or dignified language that tells the story of a hero and reflects the values of a culture
15. **enjambment** – In poetry, the continuation of a sentence without pause beyond the end of a line, couplet, or stanza. Milton uses this technique frequently in *Paradise Lost*; thus, **be sure to pay more attention to punctuation than to line breaks as you read the poem.**
16. **in medias res** – Latin: “In the middle of things.” For example, all of Shakespeare’s plays begin in the middle of action that has already begun before the opening of the first act.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

Definitions Bank

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| a very steep drop | doubtful; uncertain |
| bitterly regret | heavenly; divine |
| blasphemous; heretical | lacking consciousness |
| brighten | refusing to change course of action; unyielding |
| celestial; heavenly | relating to punishment |
| cunning; slyness | to break or go against |
| defeated; conquered | wild; turbulent |
| disgrace; degradation | |

1. **Illumine**, what is low raise and support, *v.* (l. 23)
2. From their Creator, and **transgress** his will, *v.* (l. 31)
3. Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose **guile**, *n.* (l. 34)
4. Raised **impious** war in Heaven and battle proud, *adj.* (l. 43)
5. Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' **ethereal** sky, *adj.* (l. 45)
6. In adamantine chains and **penal** fire, *adj.* (l. 48)
7. Lay **vanquished**, rolling in the fiery gulf, *v.* (l. 52)
8. Mixed with **obdurate** pride and steadfast hate. *adj.* (l. 58)
9. With floods and whirlwinds of **tempestuous** fire, *adj.* (l. 77)
10. In **dubious** battle on the plains of Heaven, *adj.* (l. 104)
11. That were an **ignominy** and shame beneath, *n.* (l. 115)
12. Too well I see and **rue** the dire event, *v.* (l. 134)
13. The fiery surge, that from the **precipice**, *n.* (l. 173)
14. Not by the sufferance of **supernal** Power. *adj.* (l. 241)
15. Lie thus astonished on th' **oblivious** pool, *adj.* (l. 266)



Read Paradise Lost: Book I, marking the poem in key places.

WORDS TO BE DEFINED

1. brighten
2. to break or go against
3. cunning; slyness
4. blasphemous; heretical
5. celestial; heavenly
6. relating to punishment
7. defeated; conquered
8. refusing to change course of action; unyielding
9. wild; turbulent
10. doubtful; uncertain
11. disgrace; degradation
12. bitterly regret
13. a very steep drop
14. heavenly; divine
15. lacking consciousness

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. epic; iambic pentameter; blank verse
2. He invokes the Heavenly Muse, a very common epic convention; in Milton's case, the Heavenly Muse is the Holy Spirit, who inspired Moses.
3. As mentioned in the previous question, Milton invokes the Heavenly Muse, the Holy Spirit. With the phrase "oracle of God," it could be said simply that he invokes God. His aim is to have his adventurous poem soar into the heavens (presumably in both subject matter and poetic greatness) and write a grand epic that has yet to be attempted in prose or rhyme.
4. "Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile Stirred up with envy and revenge ..." (ll. 34-35)
5. Answers will vary. There are many lines of description: "adamantine chains and penal fire" (l. 48); "A dungeon horrible, on all sides round, / As one great furnace flamed" (ll. 61-62); etc.
6. Despite God's power, or anything else God can inflict, he will not repent or change.
7. It adds momentum and excitement—it's as if Satan is getting increasingly excited as he thinks of things, in quick succession, that he has gained through this loss. Though he's lost the field (e.g., a battle), he does not feel he has lost the war.
8. To do anything good will never be their task; but always to do evil will be their sole delight; to labor to pervert any good out of evil, and out of good always to find a means of evil.
9. "... in bulk as huge / As whom the fables name of monstrous size" (ll. 196-197); He is compared to figures in classical mythology who fought with Zeus—Titanian, Earth-born, Briareos, and Typhon. The Titans (early gods) were led by Briareos; the Giants (Earth-born), were led by Typhon, a serpent monster. He is also compared to the biblical sea-monster Leviathan.
10. God—"but that the will / And high permission of all-ruling Heaven / Left him at large to his own dark designs" (ll. 211-213)

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What **poetic form** is the poem *Paradise Lost*? What is its **meter** and **rhyme scheme**?
2. What epic convention does Milton employ in lines 6ff. that announces his epic intentions?
3. Read lines 12-16. Whom does Milton invoke, and what highly significant aim does he announce?
4. Who first seduced them (our "grandparents") to that foul revolt? Why did he do it? Quote a line or two from the poem for your answer.
5. Give a brief description of the place where Satan was thrown. Include a line or two from the poem for your answer.
6. What important resolution does Satan make at lines 94ff.?
7. Read lines 105-109. How does the use of **anaphora** add force to Satan's growing resolution?
8. "Fallen Cherub, to be weak is miserable ..." (l. 157)
What does Satan, along with his followers, resolve to do in the following lines?
9. What **simile** is used to describe Satan in the stanza beginning at line 192? To whom is he compared?
10. Who leaves Satan "at large to his own dark designs"?

LOGIC | Dialectic

The student reasons with the facts, elements, and features of the poem; sorts, arranges, compares, and connects ideas – and begins to uncover and determine the Central One Idea.

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

May be verbally discussed or answered in written form in your Literature Notebook.

1. **Summarize** lines 22-26. What is involved in what Milton asks? What is his aim?
2. How does Milton's pitting of God and Satan in opposition remind us of epics that involve famous battles?
3. According to Milton, why did God leave Satan "at large to his own dark designs" (l. 213)?
4. *The mind is its own place, and in itself
Can make a Heaven of Hell, a Hell of Heaven.* (ll. 254-255)
Do you agree with Satan's words here?

RHETORIC | Expression

The student expresses in his or her own words the Central One Idea with supporting details.

RHETORICAL EXPRESSION

To be answered in your Literature Notebook.

1. In 2-3 sentences, **summarize** the poem.
 2. Write the **Central One Idea** of the poem in a precise, eloquent sentence.
- ◆ **Central Quote:** Choose a line or two from anywhere in the poem that you think best embodies the Central One Idea. With good penmanship, write it in your Literature Notebook.
- ❶ **Write the Central One Idea as expressed by the teacher.**

SOCRATIC DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Answers will vary. What is significant here is that Milton is asking God for spiritual purification and illumination in order for him to write such elevated and holy material properly. He is asking for divine providence to help him in this undertaking, so he may accomplish his task fruitfully and rightly. His aim is to "justify the ways of God to men"—an undertaking of such (self-assigned) prophetic magnitude, it is most understandable that he should utter such a pleading prayer at the outset.
2. Answers will vary. Classic epic fare often features heroes fighting in grand battles.
3. With repeated crimes Satan will heap damnation upon himself; and while he seeks evil to others, he will be enraged to see how all his malice served only to bring forth infinite goodness, grace, and mercy on man.
4. Answers will vary. Yes, it seems to be the case. The mind has great power over the will and soul. The mind truly is its own place. In many ways, our thoughts determine our lives, as Marcus Aurelius so rightly said. We can make hellish circumstances heavenly; and heavenly circumstances hellish—simply by the character and content of our thoughts.

RHETORICAL EXPRESSION

1. This beginning section of *Paradise Lost* begins *in medias res*, explaining Satan's earlier rebellion against God and the resulting consequence: the archangel Satan and his followers have been cast into a dungeon of fire. From the cavernous lake of fire, Satan remains proud and unrepentant, discussing and scheming with his fellow demons about how to bring as much evil to the world as possible.
 2. Answers will vary.
- ◆ **Central Quote:** Answers will vary. Here is an example:
"We may with more successful hope resolve / To wage by force or guile eternal war / Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe" (ll. 120-122)
- ❶ Satan and his followers have been cast into the dungeon of fire; proud and unrepentant, Satan plans a grand battle against God to sow as much evil in the world as possible.