Outline and Study Questions for Selections from Paradise Lost

Book 1:

Lines 1-5 announce the subject, and line 6-26 call on the Muse for assistance with the ambitious project (an epic convention). There are some clues in line 7-11 that might allow you to identify who Milton's muse is. The passage ends with a statement of purpose (24-26).

Lines 27-49 give the back story. There was a rebellion in heaven (which will be told in detail in Books 5 and 6). The rebel angels were defeated and cast down into Hell.

50-83: The scene opens in Hell. “He” is Satan. Consider the description of him and the scene.

He begins speaking at line 84, addressing his second in command, Beelzebub. Consider his response to the situation, here and in the following speeches.

The narrator speaks in 125-27. How do these comments affect how you view Satan?

Beelzebub speaks 128-155, Satan 157-191

192-241 gives some physical description, then Satan and Beelzebub lift themselves off the burning lake where they landed and fly to dry land where they have a better view of the scene.

Satan speaks 242-270, Beelzebub 271-282. Watch for how Satan refers to God.

Starting at 283 there is more physical description of Satan, then of the other fallen angels beginning at 300.

Satan speaks to his followers in lines 315b-330. How does he come across as a leader?

Make a cut from there to 587b. In between is a description of a number of the fallen angels. Beginning at 587b is some more physical description of Satan, and beginning at 600 some sense of his emotions.

He addresses the followers in lines 622-662. How does he come across as a leader? Note how he characterizes God in 637b-642. He calls for a council to decide what to do next.

Skip the rest of Book 1, which describes the building of Pandemonium, their "capitol," where they will have the counsel.
Book 2:

Lines 1-10 describe Satan’s throne inside Pandemonium. What impression does he make here?

He speaks to open the council in 11-42.

Skip to line 299. In between, three of the fallen angels offer suggestions: an open assault on heaven; waiting quietly in the hopes that God will become less angry over time; and making the best of where they are. Beelzebub gets up to speak at 299. The meat of his proposal begins in 344b. What do you think of the idea?

The others like the idea, and Beelzebub continues speaking at line 390. A volunteer is needed to execute the plan. What happens in 417-425a? At the end of line 425?

Note the bit of “inside information” the narrator gives us at lines 378b-385a. Whose idea was this? Why does Beelzebub present it? Knowing what we know, how do you assess the fact that it is Satan who volunteers to put the plan into action?

Book 2 ends with Satan beginning the journey in search of Earth.

Book 3:

The scene shifts to Heaven, beginning with an invocation to Light (lines 1-55). God is watching Satan’s journey. How is God described? He speaks to the Son in lines 80-134. There’s some challenging theology in here, but see how much sense you can make of it. One key idea is in lines 98b-102.

The Son speaks in 144-166, then God again in 167-216. Notice especially lines 203-216. What is he asking for? What’s the reaction in lines 217-223? At 224? This should remind you of a scene back in Book 2. What do you make of the comparison?

The Son speaks 227-265, and the narrator comments 266-271. What impression do you get of the Son here?

God speaks to the Son 274-343.

The rest of Book 3 follows Satan as he completes his journey to earth.
We then skip to Book 9. In between, Adam and Eve are visited by an angel who tells them about the rebellion in Heaven, the fall of the angels, and the fact that Satan has broken out of hell. We get to watch in detail as the temptation "goes down"—see what you think about how Satan goes about this, why Eve is tempted first, how she handles the temptation, and what happens after she succumbs.

**Book 9**

Begin at line 192. In the morning, Eve suggests that she and Adam separate for the morning’s gardening in order to get more work done. As they discuss the idea, try to get a sense of their characters and evaluate their arguments.

Eve speaks 205-225, 273-289, 322-341, and 378-384, and then departs. Adam speaks at 226-269, 290-317, 342-375. Notice the “but” at 370—why does he shift gears here?

Satan comes on the scene at line 413, in the body of the serpent. He talks to himself in lines 473-493. Why is he glad to find Eve alone?

He approaches here at line 494, and begins to speak to her at 532.

Watch the whole conversation carefully. What strategies does Satan use to persuade her to eat the fruit? How does Eve respond early on? What seems to have finally persuaded her?

After Eve eats the fruit, she decides whether to share it with Adam, lines 816-833. What are the arguments for either side?

When she returns and offers the fruit to Adam, how does he react? (Lines 886-916 and 952-9) How long does it take him to decide, compared to Eve? Is he fooled? Why does he eat the fruit?

After he eats, watch what happens in lines 1013-1045, and then in 1065 to the end of the book.