

# ***Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison**

Approved for use in 11th Grade

## **Summary**

Set in the early 20th century, Ralph Ellison's unnamed narrator is college educated and black. After his unjust expulsion from school, he decides to escape the segregated South and move to New York City. He equates New York with freedom and opportunity, but he is continually confused, misled, and disappointed. After many adventures that include work in a paint factory that explodes, a near lobotomy, speaking engagements as a public orator, and a street riot, the Invisible Man flees into the abandoned basement of an apartment complex where he lives rent free. Here, in his "hole", he reflects on his recent experiences and discovers his invisibility. He is effectively invisible because others "see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination." Ultimately, the narrator realizes that he has a social responsibility to effect change, and so he must emerge and rejoin society--even as an Invisible Man.

## **Connection to Curriculum**

This novel is Ellison's great work of satire in which he criticizes racism in early 20th century America--both in the North and South. Like most classic and modern satirists, Ellison relies on ironic language and literary absurdity to make his true perspectives and purpose clear to his readers. This novel is one of very few fictional satires approved for 11th grade.

*Invisible Man* is referenced most often on the AP Literature Exam. Students of this novel are well versed in rhetorical and literary techniques, prepared for both AP English exams, as well for future reading of deeply complex and artistic texts.

## **Standards**

Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain. RL.11.1

Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text. RL.11.2

Analyze the impact of the author's choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama. RL.11.3

Analyze a complex set of ideas or sequence of events and explain how specific individuals, ideas, or events interact and develop over the course of the text. RI.11.3

Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text. RI.11.6

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly fresh, engaging, or beautiful. RL.11.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11–12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies. RL.11.11

Analyze a case in which grasping a point of view requires distinguishing what is directly stated in a text from what is really meant. RL.11.6

**A Note on the Text**

Additional information about the text, including possible controversial issues, awards, etc.

**Awards**

- National Book Award (1953)
- Anisfield-Wolf Book Award for Special Achievement (1992)

**Controversial Issues**

Ellison’s use of satire focuses primarily on racism and bigotry. This criticism is achieved in part by...

- Violent scenes
- Ironic language, including occasional uses of the “n” word
- Adultery

**Additional Unit Design Connections**

There are several opportunities to make cross curricular connections to poetry, drama, music, speeches, and essays from many eras including the Elizabethan Era, Transcendentalism, and the Harlem Renaissance. Ellison alludes to Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Booker T. Washington, Louis Armstrong, and many other artists and poets.