



# Invisible Man

by Ralph Ellison

## Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

**PERMA-BOUND**  
THE STRONGEST BOOKS YOU CAN BUY

**LIVING  
LITERATURE  
SERIES**

**A Perma-Bound Production**

This guide was prepared using the Second Vintage International edition, ©1995. Other editions may differ.

## Synopsis

### Prologue

The unnamed narrator declares that he lives unseen because white people choose not to look at him or acknowledge his being. Living rent-free in the cellar of a whites-only building in Harlem, the twenty-year-old former college student declares war on the Monopolated Light and Power Company and flees Ras the destroyer, a crazed black nationalist. The narrator lights his ceiling with 1,369 illegally-wired light bulbs.

### Chapter 1

A grandson of slaves, the narrator recalls that his grandfather urged him to victimize whites. The narrator suffered hazing at his high school graduation when he and other youths were forced into a boxing ring where they fought blindfolded. After delivering his valedictory to a rowdy crowd, he received a reward—a calfskin brief case containing a scholarship to a state college for blacks.

### Chapter 2

During his junior year at the segregated Southern school, the narrator works as campus chauffeur for Mr. Norton, a wealthy college benefactor from Boston. On an afternoon outing in late spring, the narrator accommodates his white passenger by taking him to the old Slave Quarters. Norton is overcome by the scandal of Jim Trueblood, who sired a child with his own daughter, Matty Lou.

### Chapter 3

The car passes a gang of men outside a bar called

the Golden Day. The narrator dashes in to buy whiskey. On returning to the car, he fears that Norton is dying. After dragging him into the bar, the narrator revives him with brandy. A black World War I veteran claims that attempted lynching has reduced him to invisibility. Norton asserts that blacks are part of his destiny. The veteran ridicules the narrator's role in Norton's life as a mark on a score card. Angrily, Norton returns to the car.

### Chapter 4

Upon the narrator's return to campus, Norton asks to go to his room and summons the president, Dr. A. Hebert Bledsoe, and a physician. Bledsoe learns of Norton's sudden illness and blames the narrator for showing a white benefactor black squalor.

### Chapter 5

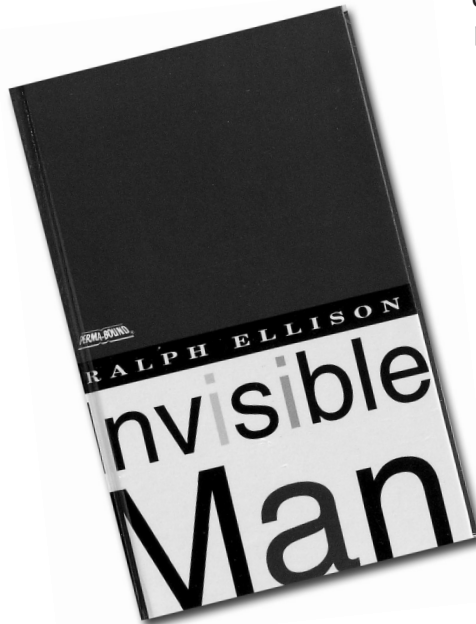
During vespers, a vocal solo precedes the Reverend Homer A. Barbee's encomium of the Founder. At a height of emotion, Barbee describes the Founder's death in a Pullman berth and collapses.

### Chapter 6

In his office, Bledsoe demands that the narrator explain the drive to the quarters. Dropping his usual courtesy, he expels the narrator for endangering the college's receipt of contributions from a white supporter. The narrator threatens to inform Norton of Bledsoe's duplicity. Bledsoe sends the narrator to New York for the summer to earn tuition for his senior year. The next day, the narrator leaves in disgrace by bus after receiving seven sealed letters of introduction to trustees.

### Chapter 7

The veteran shares the bus ride and depresses the narrator by recommending that he make his own way without assistance from whites. In New York



the narrator gets directions to Harlem and exults in the freedom of subways and the number of jobs open to blacks. He observes Ras, a West Indian street orator, and follows the directions of a police officer to Men's House.

**Chapter 8**

After locating a room, the narrator visits six of the seven trustees, who refuse him jobs. He writes a note to the seventh, Mr. Emerson, who mails a reply.

**Chapter 9**

At the potential job site, Mr. Emerson's son reveals that the letters were derogatory and urges the narrator to forget completing his last year in college. Dismayed that Bledsoe betrayed him, the narrator takes Mr. Emerson's suggestion that he apply for work at the Liberty Paints plant. The narrator immediately gets a job.

**Chapter 10**

Under the control of MacDuffy, the narrator learns that the company hires blacks to avoid paying union wages. Kimbro, a racist technician, assigns the narrator to put ten drops into each bucket of white paint, which is mixed for a government contract to be shipped that day. The narrator selects the wrong tank and botches the paint run by adding remover. Kimbro lets him complete the mixing, then sends him back to MacDuffy, who passes him along to Lucius Brockway, an aged black worker who worries that someone will take his job. The narrator checks gauges in the basement. Brockway picks a fight. Pressure rises and a tank explodes. The narrator, covered in white paint, is knocked unconscious.

**Chapter 11**

The plant physician examines and x-rays the narrator. The director insists that the narrator is incapable of industrial employment, but promises to compensate him for injury in the explosion.

**Chapter 12**

Mary Rambo, a kindly Negro matron, offers the narrator a room and food until he recovers. The monetary compensation for the accident soon runs out. As winter approaches, the narrator, again in search of a job, thinks of Mary as a stabilizer.

**Chapter 13**

While the narrator walks Harlem streets, a crowd gathers to watch two hirelings evict Primus Provo, an 87-year-old ex-slave, and his wife from an apartment. When observers try to force authorities to reinstate the elderly couple, the narrator moves the mob with an impromptu speech about the rights of blacks. The crowd begins restoring the couple's belongings into an apartment. When police arrive, the narrator runs away. At a cafeteria, an unnamed admirer discounts the Provos as defunct and worthless. He gives the narrator a phone number and instructs him to ask for Brother Jack.

**Chapter 14**

Brother Jack, a member of an idealistic organization that helps black people gain their rights, hires the narrator and tells him why things must change for blacks. To protect the narrator, Jack creates a new identity, introduces him to other committee members, and offers him a respectable residence, \$60 per week, and a bonus of \$300 for back rent, food, and new clothes.

**Chapter 15**

The narrator hands Mary a one-hundred dollar bill and pretends that he won it by playing the numbers. He accepts an apartment on the upper East Side and plans a speech for that evening.

**Chapter 16**

Jack and other men accompany the narrator to Harlem to make a presentation. The status of public narrator seems ill-suited to his temperament. At the beginning of the Brothers' program, the audience sings "John Brown's Body." At a post-forum meeting, the Brothers debate the effect of the speech. One man insists that it was a poor model because it appealed to emotion rather than to intellect. The critic insists that the narrator go to Brother Hambro the next morning for training.

**Chapter 17**

Four months later, Brother Jack summons the narrator and advances him to chief spokesman for Harlem. The next day at the first business session, the narrator meets Brother Tod Clifton, who encounters harassment from Ras the Exhorter, leader of a violent faction of black nationalists.

**Chapter 18**

The narrator becomes a close friend of Brother Tarp, who reminds the narrator of his grandfather. Tarp praises the narrator's work with youth and his distribution of posters encouraging racial unity. At a business session, Brother Wrestrum accuses the narrator of opportunism. The narrator feels betrayed by the committee, which studies the accusation and reassigns him downtown to handle the "woman question." The narrator slips away without saying goodbye to Tarp or Clifton.

**Chapter 19**

At a downtown meeting, the narrator agrees to accompany a married woman to her apartment to discuss ideology. She maneuvers him to her bedroom. He tries to escape, then yields. A second crisis, Clifton's disappearance, shakes the narrator's faith in the Brotherhood.

**Chapter 20**

The narrator returns to Harlem to find Tarp's room empty. The Brotherhood appears to have lost its Harlem influence. The narrator organizes search teams, but is too late to stop a police officer from shooting Clifton. In shock, the narrator returns to Harlem.

**Chapter 21**

Distraught with grief and confusion, the narrator informs horrified youths that the police provoked Clifton and murdered him. The narrator helps organize an elaborate procession and funeral at Mount Morris Park and delivers a moving, despairing eulogy to his dead friend. A banner describes Clifton as "Our Hope Shot Down."

**Chapter 22**

Brothers Tobit and Jack disapprove of the narrator's unauthorized speech and accuse him of arranging a demonstration honoring a traitor. The committee breaks down into squabbling and sniping. The session concludes at 6:15 with a warning that the narrator must practice self-discipline. Jacks sends him to Hambro for instructions.

**Chapter 23**

Clifton's death galvanizes discontented Harlemites. Believing he is being watched, the narrator engages in a sidewalk confrontation with Ras. At Hambro's residence, the narrator learns that the Brothers sacrifice members. The narrator accuses

Hambro of cynicism. Back at his residence, the narrator contemplates forming a splinter group to fight the Brothers.

**Chapter 24**

In August, riots break out. The narrator, stung by Brother Jack's betrayal and corruption among Brothers, seduces Sybil. A phone call summons him to trouble.

**Chapter 25**

At Morningside, the narrator hears shooting and is caught up in street fighting. As shots sound in the distance and looters pour out on the sidewalks, the narrator flees with Dupre and Scofield. A bullet grazes the narrator's head. Voices blame Ras for fomenting trouble. Rioters ignite a tenement. The narrator barely escapes with a brief case of important papers. He deduces that the Brothers manipulated him into starting a riot. Because Ras calls for a lynching, the narrator stabs him. At dawn, the narrator looks for Jack. Police seize his brief case and shut him in an underground room. Clinging to the isolation and safety of the cellar, the narrator yields to dark and invisibility.

**Epilogue**

In a subterranean lifestyle, the narrator loses his former identity and becomes an invisible man. He encounters Norton and terrorizes him. Norton flees. Back in his lair, the narrator notes that it is time for him to abandon invisibility and return to public life.

**Author Sketch**

Ralph Waldo Ellison created classic fiction by connecting the blues and tragedy to black history and culture. A descendent of black slaves from the Savannah River area, he was born in Oklahoma City on March 1, 1914, to Spanish-

American war hero Lewis Alfred Ellison, a construction worker and vendor of ice and coal, and to Ida Millsap Ellison, a building custodian and socialist organizer. In 1917, Ellison's father died from a fall at work, leaving Ida to support herself and two sons as a domestic. Ellison profited from her menial work by retrieving discarded opera recordings and magazines, which introduced him to middle class culture.



By filling his free time with jazz and harmonics and with readings at the black library, Ellison readied himself for college at age 21. On scholarship, he entered Tuskegee Institute in Alabama to study music. In 1936, he abruptly quit school, migrated to Harlem, and never returned south. His plans changed when he met Richard Wright. With the help of the Federal Writers' Project, he began writing essays and critiques for *The Masses* and *New Challenge* with the intent of combating racial injustice.

During World War II, Ellison served in the Merchant Marine, then returned to writing and teaching. In 1942, he edited the *Negro Quarterly*. After marrying business executive Fanny McConnell, he began publishing in newspapers and scholarly journals. On a Rosenwald Fellowship, over a seven-year period, he completed *Invisible Man* (1952), a surreal fictional journey tinged with dream states and neo-gothic touches. The book won a 1953 National Book Award. In 1963, he received an honorary doctorate from Tuskegee; the next year, he published *Shadow and Act* (1964), an anthology of twenty essays on art, folklore, music, and life. He began a second novel, which a fire destroyed in 1967. In 1986, he published *Going to the Territory*, a second collection of short works.

Although blacks castigated him for supporting peaceable protest, Ellison remained a significant voice. He served as lecturer and professor at numerous American colleges and universities and at similar posts in Austria, Germany, and Italy and worked as consultant and lecturer at the Library of Congress. After studying on a Prix de Rome award, at age 44, he settled on New York City's Riverside Drive. In 1969, President Richard Nixon awarded him a Medal of Freedom. The next year, Ellison was named the Albert Schweitzer Humanities Professor at New York University. He advised the committee on the design of the Kennedy Center. At his death on April 16, 1994, he left unfinished *Flying Home and Other Stories*, which his wife published in 1996. Three years later, she issued *Juneteenth*, his long-awaited second novel.

## Critic's Corner

Critics define *Invisible Man* as an allegory of black society's multistage journey from slavery to the beginning of the civil rights movement. They acknowledge Ellison's version of Jim Crow practices that launched the great migration from the agrarian south to industrial cities in the north. Implicit in the trek was a predictable disillusion with urbanism, social unrest, violence, and attempts to acclimate to a complex environment. In 1978, the *Wilson Quarterly* proclaimed *Invisible Man* the most influential post-World War II novel in world literature. Ellison's broad view had a remarkable impact on black novelist Toni Morrison and playwright August Wilson as well as a white novelist Joseph Heller and satirist Kurt Vonnegut.

In creating a shift of milieus, Ellison applied considerable skill at farce, satire, symbolism, psychological motivation, and dreamscape. The humanistic thrust of his writing voices his compassion for misled and discarded people, the tools of clever politicians and manipulators. His choice to follow universal truths rather than the prescribed dogma of black leaders put him out of step with his time, but saved his writing from too narrow a scope. As a result, he contributed to the transformation of black culture from a despised ethnic anomaly to a contributing element of American life.

## Other Works by Ralph Ellison

*The Collected Essays of Ralph Ellison* (1995)  
*Conversations with Ralph Ellison* (1995)  
*Flying Home and Other Stories* (1996)  
*Going to the Territory* (1985)  
*Juneteenth* (1999)  
*Shadow and Act* (1964)

## Bibliography

Bellow, Saul, "Man Underground," *Commentary*, June 1952.  
Busby, Mark. *Ralph Ellison*. New York: Twayne, 1991.  
Butler, Robert J. *The Critical Responses to Ralph Ellison*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 2000.  
*Contemporary Authors*. (CD-ROM) Detroit: Gale Research, 1993.  
Corliss, Richard, "Invincible Man," *Time*, April 25, 1994, p. 90.  
Corry, John, "Profile of an American Novelist, a White View of Ralph Ellison," *Black World*, December 1970.

- Farley, Christopher John, "Flying Lesson," *Time*, January 13, 1997, p. 76.
- Gates, Henry Louis, "The Last Sublime Riffs of a Literary Jazzman," *Time*, June 28, 1999, pp. 66-67.
- Howe, Irving, "Black Boys and Native Sons," *Dissent*, Autumn 1963.
- , "Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man," *Nation*, May 10, 1952
- Kaiser, Ernest, "A Critical Look at Ellison's Fiction and at Social & Literary Criticism by and about the Author," *Black World*, December 1970.
- O'Meally, Robert G., ed. *New Essays on "Invisible Man."* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.
- Parr, Susan Resneck, and Pancho Savery, eds. *Approaches to Teaching Ellison's "Invisible Man."* New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1989.
- Ploski, Harry A., and James Williams, eds. *The Negro Almanac*. Detroit: Gale, 1989.
- Porter, Horace A. *Jazz Country: Ralph Ellison in America*. Ames: University of Iowa Press, 2001.
- Daniels, Lee, "A Critical Tradition," *Emerge*, July/August 1994, pp. 51-54.
- Seidlitz, Anne, "Ralph Ellison," [www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ellison\\_r.html](http://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/database/ellison_r.html)
- Sundquist, Eric J., ed. *Cultural Contexts for Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man."* New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1995.
- "Visible Once Again," *Newsweek*, May 24, 1999, pp. 68-69.
- Warren, Tim, "A More Visible Ellison," *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, February 9, 1997.

## General Objectives

1. To understand the impact of racism and trickery on youth
2. To account for student exploitation in an all-black Southern college
3. To interpret social and community customs in the urban North
4. To analyze the emotional turmoil that follows loss of a friend
5. To discuss the themes of confusion and outrage
6. To list examples of suspicion, cruelty, duplicity, and callousness
7. To analyze causes of regret, self-doubt, and grief
8. To characterize attitudes of white authorities
9. To describe Gothic elements of atmosphere and tone

## Specific Objectives

1. To explain why racism looms in the black haven of Harlem
2. To analyze the symbolism of the title
3. To account for the narrator's role as narrator and leader
4. To contrast Dr. Bledsoe, Emerson, and Brockway as authority figures
5. To justify suspicion of the idealistic Brotherhood
6. To predict how the narrator will cope with Harlem when he emerges
7. To summarize the job of chauffeur to college supporters
8. To discuss the implications of Mary Rambo's maternal love and support
9. To summarize the roles of Rinehart, Ras, Tarp, and Wrestrum
10. To explain the main events in terms of Communist ideology
11. To characterize the transformation of the narrator from college flunky to member of the Brotherhood
12. To analyze details

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Ralph Ellison's narrative style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**Character name:** a method of displaying or revealing character traits or attitudes through name, imagery, symbolism, dialogue, or action. Ellison produces starkly emblematic characters, such as Sybil, the lustful temptress whose name suggests the seer in Virgil's *Aeneid* who leads Aeneas to the Underworld, a hellish supernatural setting mirrored by the Harlem riot. Other names that ring true to image are Jim Trueblood, Dr. Bledsoe, Ras the Exhorter, Barrelhouse, Rinehart, Tarp, Supercargo, and Tod Clifton, the pivotal character at a social precipice who cannot escape martyrdom. Ironically, the narrator has two names—his own and his Brotherhood alias—but the author reveals neither one.

**Framework:** a setting that encases a story, which may be told in flashback. Beginning with a prologue that describes the unnamed narrator's bizarre subterranean lifestyle, the novel introduces

mania and delusion that the text explains. By the end of the story, the reader has ample justification for the protagonist's hibernation in the dark, burning his important papers, and for his fascination with light bulbs operated on electricity stolen from a public utility.

**Imagery:** a word picture that allows the reader to visualize meaning. Ellison creates impressive word pictures, for example, an explosion at the Liberty Paint factory that coats the black narrator with white, fascination with a blues song entitled "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue," a jumping-jack doll that epitomizes the step-'n-fetchit role of Tod Clifton among the Brothers, a broken coin bank that the narrator has trouble disposing of, a disguise comprised of dark glasses and a white hat, a link from a leg iron, boxing blindfolded, a naked blonde, and a retreat into coal storage where the narrator fades from sight like an animal seeking protection in the forest.

**Motif:** a pattern that represents a complex or abstract idea or relationship. By interlacing scenes and episodes with descriptions of light and dark, the author creates a series of resonances between truth and lies, identity and namelessness, delusion and understanding, white-on-black crime, and illumination and concealment. The completed pattern represents not only the narrator's disillusion with an organized civil rights movements but also his discontent with self, personal and professional relationships, and attempts to trust society and ideology.

### The Importance of Setting

The milieu of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* parallels an historic migration of blacks from the Jim Crow South to industrial centers in Northern cities, particularly New York, Detroit, Chicago, and Pittsburgh. From Reconstruction into the Civil Rights movement, displaced blacks like the narrator made their way north and applied to ghetto settings the coping skills they had learned in the South. The narrator lives like a rat in a maze. He leaves behind a college campus where he misperceives the duplicity of the black president, who wears an accommodating face to lure philanthropists to contribute to the cause of educating blacks.

In New York City, the narrator is naive about subways, job opportunities, and unions when he makes the rounds of trustees in search of work. After his injury, he retreats into his quarters with Mary Rambo and recovers during a period when he learns little about his new environment. Temporary withdrawal from Harlem streets gives him a chance to regain his strength, but does nothing to help him cope with urban crime and social disorder.

The setting shifts to outdoor settings with the coming of spring and summer. Equally naive about the Brotherhood, the narrator observes the living conditions of ghetto dwellers like the Provos, two elderly former slaves, and witnesses the interaction between nonwhites and the police during clashes on the street and in the park. The noise and confusion of looting, Ras's spear passing over him, and flights from the authorities increase the narrator's disillusion with his chosen second home.

Setting typifies the narrator's dilemma. Unable to return to the black college in the South or to cope with ideological turmoil among the Brothers, he flees from chaos much as his ancestors sought better lives by fleeing slavery on the Underground Railroad and relocating in Philadelphia, New York, New England, and Canada. He hides in a manhole and burns his important papers to shed light on his predicament. As a last resort, like a cowering animal, he retreats into a basement room and creates artificial welcome by wiring the ceiling with 1,369 light bulbs. Like a hibernating snake, he determines to "[shake] off the old skin" and return to the streets.

### Cross-Curricular Sources

#### Novels

William Armstrong, *Souder*  
James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*  
Claude Brown, *Manchild in the Promised Land*  
Fyodor Dostoevsky, *Crime and Punishment*  
Ernest Gaines, *A Gathering of Old Men*  
Terry McMillan, *Mama*  
Toni Morrison, *Tarbaby*  
Richard Wright, *Native Son*

#### Plays

Lorraine Hansberry, *A Raisin in the Sun*  
August Wilson, *Piano Lesson, Fences, Jitney, and Two Trains Running*

**Nonfiction**

Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*  
Sarah Delany, Elizabeth Delany, *Having Our Say*  
Alex Haley, *Autobiography of Malcolm X*  
Mark Mathabane, *Kaffir Boy*  
Anne Moody, *Coming of Age in Mississippi*  
Richard Wright, *Black Boy*

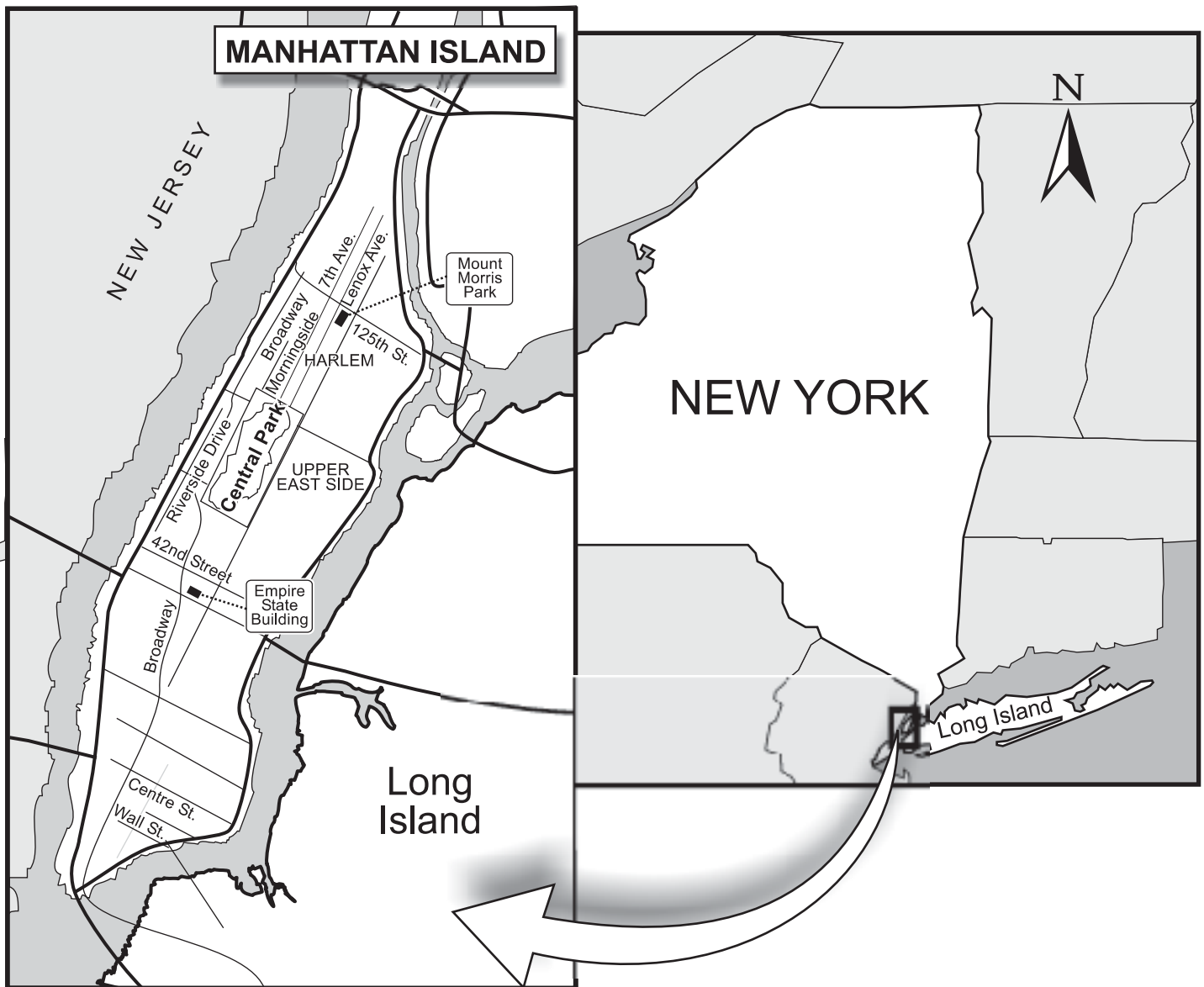
**Videos/DVDs**

*Beloved*  
*The Color Purple*  
*A Lesson before Dying*  
*Native Son*  
*Queen*  
*Ragtime*  
*Separate But Equal*  
*Souder*

**Themes and Motifs**

**Themes**

- injustice
- poverty
- ignorance
- unity
- racism
- murder
- flight
- self-esteem
- exploitation
- self-isolation



**Motifs**

- coping with social upheaval
- escaping from an ominous organization
- comprehending the demands of living and working in the urban North
- gaining self-esteem by giving speeches
- retreating from danger

**Meaning Study**

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the novel. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can reread the passage in which it appears.

1. Then in my mind's eye I see the bronze statue of the college Founder, the cold Father symbol, his hands outstretched in the breathtaking gesture of lifting a veil that flutters in hard, metallic folds above the face of a kneeling slave; and I am standing puzzled, unable to decide whether the veil is being lifted, or lowered more firmly in place; whether I am witnessing a revelation or a more efficient blinding. (Chap. 2, p. 36)

*(In his college days, the narrator is inspired by the example of the Founder, the all-knowing father figure whose idealized statue adorns the campus. With limited vision, the narrator sees himself following the Founder's precepts, becoming a teacher, and eventually rising to the presidency of the Negro college. On Founder's Day, Reverend Homer A. Barbee, a black minister from Chicago, gives an inspirational speech picturing the Founder as a father to his people, a humble black Moses leading the Negro race out of the darkness of ignorance into the light of knowledge. Ironically, the narrator realizes that Barbee is blind, a suggestion of his failure to identify the Founder as a man.)*

2. A Bostonian, smoker of cigars, teller of polite Negro stories, shrewd banker, skilled scientist, director, philanthropist, forty years a bearer of the white man's burden, and for sixty a symbol of the Great Traditions. (Chap. 2, p. 37)

*(In describing Mr. Norton, the millionaire philanthropist and trustee, Ellison alludes to a poem by Rudyard Kipling, a paternalistic English poet of the Victorian era who extolled British colonialism. Kipling valued European colonialism in Asia and Africa as a means of conferring the blessings of Western civilization and Christianity on the inferior nonwhite, non-Christian races. He failed to see the theft of land and resources as exploitation or to consider that Asian and African people might prefer to shape their own destinies.)*

3. Poor stumblers, neither of you can see the other. To you he is a mark on the scorecard of your achievement, a thing and not a man; a child, or even less—a black amorphous thing. And you, for all your power, are not a man to him, but a God, a force— (Chap. 3, p. 95)

*(Before the narrator perceives the concept of invisibility, the black doctor, who has been admitted to a veterans' hospital, articulates the controlling theme. He condemns Norton and the narrator for their blindness. In the doctor's opinion, neither can see the reality of the other. Norton dedicates his life to the cause of educating blacks like the narrator, who is a lump of black clay to be shaped and formed according to white misconceptions of what an educated black person should be. To the narrator, Norton is an awe-inspiring force, a godlike power who directs the destiny of blacks. Neither man can perceive the other.)*

4. My God, boy! You're black and living in the South—did you forget how to lie? (Chap. 6, p. 139)

*(Dr. Bledsoe, president of the black college, considers the narrator a fool for allowing Norton, the white trustee, to see the seamier side of Southern negro life. Accepting a white-controlled society as a fact of life, Bledsoe compromises his own integrity so he can sustain power. In his opinion, the narrator's obedience to Norton is an example of incredible stupidity because the ride through the quarters jeopardized Norton's view of Southern blacks by showing him squalor and incest in a black family. Bledsoe encourages the boy to accommodate whites by lying.)*

5. Now all the little black boys run away to New York. Out of the fire into the melting pot. I can see you after you've lived in Harlem for three months. (Chap. 7, p. 152)

*(The black veteran tries to shake the narrator out of his illusions and into a recognition of the realities of survival in a society controlled by the white man. The fires of Southern racist society have scarred the narrator; now he is innocently entering the melting pot of Northern racism, which he assumes is a haven. The veteran refers to the traditional sense of the melting pot as the mainstream of American life, into which various ethnic citizens lose their culture to become generic, race-less Americans. In a greater sense, the veteran perceives the melting pot to be a crucible that will test the narrator's mettle through a painful, soul-searing experience.)*

6. "Dispossed," eighty-seven years and dispossessed of what? They ain't got nothing, they caint get nothing, they never had nothing. So who was dispossessed?" (Chap. 13, p. 279)

*(The narrator is dismayed at the eviction of an elderly black man and wife, both former slaves, whom authorities evict from their*



quarters in a slum apartment. Held at bay by an armed marshal, the narrator jumps to the apartment steps and harangues the crowd to pity the pathetic possessions scattered along the sidewalk, mute evidence of the miserable poverty the homeless couple has endured throughout their long lives. In the narrator's point of view, being black in America is a form of automatic dis-possession of civil rights to education, jobs, and prosperity.)

7. "And you made an effective speech. But you mustn't waste your emotions on individuals, they don't count." (Chap. 13, p. 291)  
(The narrator is amazed to hear a leader of the Brotherhood negate poor, elderly West Indian Harlemites as worthless. The brother explains that elderly agrarian types are "ground up by industrial conditions. Thrown on the dump heaps and cast aside." To him, they are "dead limbs that must be pruned away so that the tree may bear young fruit or the storms of history will blow them down anyway." The callous and inhumane evaluation of the Provos disconcerts the narrator.)
8. Still, could he be all of them: Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rinehart the Reverend? Could he himself be both rind and heart? What is real anyway? (Chap. 23, pp. 498)  
(To escape Ras the Destroyer and his nationalist followers, the narrator assumes an ironic two-toned disguise—dark glasses and a white hat. The elements so effectively alter his appearance that he loses his identity. Several people mistake him for a well-known local character, an exploiter who plays many roles. Some know Rinehart as a numbers runner, some as a ladies' man. Another part of Harlem knows him as Reverend B. P. Rinehart, spiritual technologist and pastor of the Holy Way Station. The experience of imitating the duplicitous personality teaches the narrator to realize that his own identity is superficial and that he can easily deceive others by trickery. He coins the term "rinehartism" to refer to cynical behavior and bilking of the public.)
9. Outside the Brotherhood we were outside history; but inside of it they didn't see us. It was a hell of a state of affairs, we were nowhere. I wanted to back away from it... (Chap. 23, p. 499-500)  
(The narrator sees himself and the black people of Harlem as tools of the Brotherhood, a faceless, heartless organization that achieves goals that have little to do with individual needs of the black community. He denounces the Brothers as swindlers and sees Brother Jack, Mr. Norton, and Mr. Emerson merge into the same exploitive figure. He yearns for a friend who can see him as he truly is.)

10. So I took to the cellar; I hibernated. (Epilogue, p. 573)  
(To survive an emotional winter, the narrator hibernates by retreating into a hole. After becoming aware of people's inability to perceive him as an individual, he lives secretly in a comfortable lair located in a forgotten corner of a New York apartment building rented strictly to whites. He jokes morbidly, "Call me Jack-the-Bear, for I am in a state of hibernation.")

## Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

### Motivation

1. Why does the narrator drive Norton to the Golden Day?  
(On a drive to the black quarter with Mr. Norton, the school's prize philanthropist, the narrator passes near the Golden Day, a house of prostitution for blacks, which is off-limits to college students. Black veterans from the nearby government hospital frequent the bar. The narrator gains entry after Norton, shocked and sickened by Jim Trueblood's revelation of incest with his daughter Matty Lou, needs a stimulant and asks his driver to get whiskey. The only readily available source is the Golden Day. The quirky behavior of veterans at the bar deepens Norton's shock.)

### Setting

2. What does Norton learn about blacks from his drive through the quarter?  
(When the chauffeur takes Norton through the black quarter, they come in contact with Jim Trueblood, a derelict father who lives in a shack. He confesses that he has committed incest with his daughter and impregnated her. The sin of incest is so shocking that people of the black community and at the college feel disgraced. They believe that Trueblood's sin reflects upon the morality of the whole black race. Trueblood passes it off as the result of the family sleeping together in one bed at their shack during a cold winter night.  
  
The whites who live near the quarter surprise Trueblood by being helpful and generous. He puzzles over how he could have "done the worst thing a man could ever do in his family and instead of chasin' me out of the country, they gimme more help than they ever give any other colored man, no matter how good a nigguh he was." The narrator is exasperated by Norton's gift of \$100 to Trueblood and drives back to campus without accounting for the squalor of the quarter.)

**Character Development**

3. What does the narrator hope to accomplish by moving to Harlem?

*(After Dr. Bledsoe learns of the narrator's indiscretion in driving Norton through the quarter, taking him to the Trueblood shack, and obtaining whiskey for him at the Golden Day, he expels the narrator, who lacks one year of completing a college education. To relieve the student's naiveté, Bledsoe advises him to spend the summer in New York to earn money for the next school term. Bledsoe supplies him with seven sealed letters to trustees who might offer him a job.)*

*After the narrator takes the bus to New York, he intends to travel to Harlem by subway, find lodging, and apply for employment. During his round of the seven trustees, he is puzzled by six refusals. Upon learning from Mr. Emerson, the last trustee, of the treacherous message in Bledsoe's letters, the narrator changes his mind about spending the summer and realizes that he can never return to school and that he must remain in Harlem. Abandoning the original plan to return south for his senior year, he determines to earn his living in New York.)*

**Historical Milieu**

4. What is the purpose of the Brotherhood?

*(Set during the heyday of the Communist party in New York, the novel depicts the Brotherhood as a reforming agency aimed at some vague form of upgrading society. Although Ellison does not spell out the nature of reform, he depicts the Brotherhood as directing efforts at organizing the lower class for political action. According to party principles, the individual is expendable in the attainment of a greater good.)*

*To achieve the Brotherhood's aim, the narrator becomes an organizer by delivering speeches to Harlem negroes. A natural orator, he becomes a tool of the Brotherhood, studies their style and platform for four months with a scholar, and advances to chief spokesman for Harlem. As such, he is expected to organize the black community along party lines. He abandons the Brothers' ideology after realizing its mercenary intent.)*

**Theme**

5. What does the author reveal about self-esteem?

*(Ellison characterizes a need for self-esteem and acceptance among black people living in a white-controlled society. The narrator recognizes the need for self-worth in himself and others he encounters, including the black vet. At the quarter, the narrator is disgusted by the repulsive Jim Trueblood, who ponders why whites treat him well when he obviously deserves repudiation for impregnating his daughter Matty Lou. After the narrator loses his job, Mary Rambo expresses the importance of self-esteem by welcoming him to Harlem, setting an example of a person who refuses to be changed by Harlem, and aiding him during his troubled days of settling in.)*

*The strongest statement concerning self-worth occurs at the eviction of the Provos from their home. Old and poor, the former West Indian slaves wander the sidewalk among their pathetic belongings and gather support from other black Harlemites as the authorities eject them and threaten their survival. To the narrator, the condemnation of people who have lived on the fringe of prosperity is more than he can bear. With no training or understanding of sidewalk polemics, he launches into a speech on behalf of disenfranchised people, particularly the old and defenseless. It is his championing of the oppressed that brings him to the attention of the Brotherhood, who have no stake in aiding the Provos, but who manipulate the self-seeking newcomer as a talented orator who can accomplish their aims. Thus, the search for self-esteem makes the narrator vulnerable to exploitive social agitators.)*

**Interpretation**

6. What does the narrator learn from his New York contacts?

*(Upon arriving in New York City and joining the Brotherhood, the narrator begins to lose his innocence. After meeting a Brother over cheese cake, the narrator feels welcome and loses his inhibitions until his exploiter reveals a serious bias toward some of the black population, particularly the elderly from an agrarian background. He claims that individuals are less important to the Brotherhood than the collective good, a basic tenet of Communism. Upon joining forces with Tod Clifton, a young idealist and chief lieutenant, the narrator admires Tod's dedication to the cause and is dismayed when he drops out of the Brotherhood to sell Sambo dolls on the street. At Tod's death after police shoot him for resisting arrest, the narrator suffers a serious blow to his illusions about ideals and honors Tod with a funeral in the park that unifies the blacks of Harlem.)*

*The narrator discovers variant points of view on black people and civil rights when he is beset by Ras the Exhorter, a rabid West Indian and promoter of black nationalism. Ras condemns the Brothers for associating with whites. He harangues Harlemites to organize a purely black movement and to revolt against white oppressors. Late in the novel, Ras dresses in the robes of an Abyssinian chieftain to transform himself into Ras the Destroyer. While leading a race riot, he proposes hanging the terrified narrator and threatens him with a spear. Against the motif of flight from a deranged fanatic, the narrator takes comfort in a relationship with Sybil, the wife of a white Brother, who claims to need the narrator to end her loneliness. The narrator's inexperience is obvious in his faulty plan to exploit her for information from the Brotherhood's inner circle. He eventually realizes that she is using him as an exotic black lover. At this point, the narrator has few illusions left concerning the ideals of Northern society.)*

**Conflict**

7. Why does the narrator fail as an industrial employee?

*(In Chapter 10, the narrator lands a job at Mr. Emerson's plant, the Liberty Paint Company. The narrator works for Kimbro, a white foreman who has a low opinion of blacks. He shows the narrator how to add dope to paint, but declines to instruct him further on the purpose of the additive or the final product, which will be sold to the government. Unskilled and awkward, the narrator makes a mistake and spoils the batch of paint. Kimbro removes him from the job and sends him to the personnel office.*

*On a new assignment, the narrator assists Lucius Brockway, an old black worker, in the basement of Building No. 2. He regards the narrator as a threat to his job, which is the further processing of paint by controlling cooking vats and gauges. At lunchtime, the narrator goes to get his lunch and accidentally intrudes on a union meeting in the locker room. The workers regard him with suspicion and hostility for working under the supervision of Brockway. When Brockway learns of the narrator's contact with union members, he attacks the narrator. During the set-to, equipment explodes, coating the narrator in smelly goo and knocking him unconscious. He receives medical care and a small settlement. After signing a release, he loses his job.)*

**Symbols**

8. Why does the author stress Mary Rambo's cast-iron coin bank?

*(Ellison interjects an unusual symbol when the narrator looks for something heavy to use as a hammer to bang on the steam pipe. He notices "the cast-iron figure of a very black, red-lipped and wide-mouthed Negro, whose white eyes stared up at me from the floor, his face an enormous grin, his single large black hand held palm up before his chest." The repulsive shape, "a piece of early Americana," is mechanized to receive a coin in the hand and toss it into the mouth. To the narrator, the bank depicts blacks as subservient and debased in their pleas for money from whites.*

*After the narrator mulls over the insult and degradation of blacks from the pose, he despises the object, perhaps because of his own experience at college as a chauffeur to a rich contributor. The narrator smashes and decapitates the bank, almost as an act of self-hate and embarrassment for his race. Unable to discard the cast-iron figure, he retains it as a symbol of his own degradation and trials in Harlem. Late in the novel, he discovers that he still carries the bank in his brief case, a broken image that haunts him as he flees disillusion and street violence.)*

**Author Purpose**

9. Why does Ellison leave the narrator unnamed?

*(Ellison leaves his invisible man unidentified because a name would confer individual identity. Central to the narrator's problem is the inability of society to see him as a person or to recognize his unique needs. To heighten the dramatic import of namelessness, Ellison keeps other characters from calling the narrator by name. After the Brotherhood assigns him an assumed name, Ellison continues to leave the invisible man nameless. As he flounders in search for identity, he even avoids calling himself by name.*

*Ellison emphasizes the theme of invisibility by describing how other people regard the narrator as a tool. To Mr. Norton, the narrator is a sensitive, accommodating chauffeur who feeds Norton's self-ennobling ego. To Mr. Emerson and Brother Jack, the narrator contributes to their own ends. All three betray the narrator. Even when mistaken for Rinehart, the narrator discovers that his own race fails to identify him and that blacks in Harlem apply the various poses of Rinehart, who deliberately avoids identity by playing the parts of numbers man, lover, con artist, and preacher.)*

**Structure**

10. Why does Ellison use a framework to begin and end the novel?

*(Ellison presents the narrator as an irresponsible parasite while in hibernation, yet justifies the bizarre circumstances as the narrator's right. He rids himself of guilt by claiming that he owes no duty to a society that refuses to recognize him as an individual. He takes the philosophical stand that duty exists only if there is a corresponding right. After retreating into the basement room and lighting the ceiling with electrical power stolen from the public utility, the narrator retreats into "gin, jazz, and dreams," Ellison's accusation against black culture as a whole.*

*The author retrieves the narrator from a self-destructive state by holding out hope that he will end his hibernation. The narrator claims that he intends to end his withdrawal from Harlem and to abandon his self-serving attitude. He admits that "Even hibernations can be overdone, come to think of it. Perhaps that's my greatest social crime. I've overstayed my hibernation, since there's a possibility that even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.")*

## How Language Works

Ellison characterizes individuals in his novel through their speech as well as their attitudes and behaviors. For example:

1. Mary Rambo, the mother figure, gives the narrator friendly advice couched in black dialect, "That's what's wrong with the world today, don't nobody trust nobody."
2. On the street, Peter Wheatstraw, a jiving laborer, speaks the lingo of Harlem: "Now I know you from down home, how come you trying to act like you never heard that before! Hell, ain't nobody out here this morning but us colored— Why you trying to deny me?"
3. The prim Bostonian, Mr. Norton, speaks to the narrator as though he is a teacher addressing a class: "If you become a good farmer, a chef, a preacher, doctor, singer, mechanic—whatever you become, and even if you fail, you are my fate. And you must write me and tell me the outcome."
4. The insane mouthings of Ras the Exhorter turn to vindictive cries as he announces with West Indian accent, "I repeat, black ladies and gentlemahn, the time has come for ahction! I, Ras the Destroyer, repeat, the time has come!"
5. Brother Jack, a manipulator and user, sets up the narrator with false compliments that the new Brother "simply arose out of a crowd. The people always throw up their leaders."

## Across the Curriculum

### Cinema

1. View films depicting racism. Compare the movies' settings, themes, and dialogue to those of *Invisible Man*. Comment on the interplay of people of different ethnic, social, educational, and political backgrounds.
2. View the sci-fi film *Invisible Man*. Explain Ralph Ellison's purpose in creating a novel on physical and racial invisibility. Determine why he chose the title of a well-known fantasy novel for his classic on racism in America.

### Drama

1. Contrast the narrator, Sybil, Mary Rambo, Norton, Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Emerson, Kate, Wrestrum, Ras the Exhorter, Dupre and Scofield, Brockway, Primus Provo, Tarp, Brother Jack, Jim Trueblood, Matty Lou, and Tod Clifton to characters from the plays of August Wilson, particularly *The Piano Lesson*, *Jitney*, *Two Trains Running*, and *Fences*.
2. Create a storyboard account of Tod Clifton's murder and the August riot. Indicate the narrator's actions when he is angry, sad, depressed, and moved to action. List his faults as a leader of Harlem's youth and as his rescuer of Tod.

### History and Social Studies

1. Compose an extended definition of social isolation. Explain why the term describes the narrator at his high school graduation, during his junior year in college, on arrival in Harlem, at his job at the paint factory, in the Brotherhood, at Tod Clifton's funeral, in flight from the Brothers, during the riot, and in his lair in the basement.
2. Contrast female characters and their attitudes toward the narrator and other black males. Include Sybil, Matty Lou, Kate, Hester and Edna, Emma, the naked blonde, the nurse, and Mary Rambo.
3. Explain why the Brothers seem vague about their plans to help Harlemites and about the nature of "the woman question" and its solution. Compare their efforts to appease black men and women with the social doctrine of the Nation of Islam.
4. Describe job opportunities for skilled and unskilled blacks arriving from the agrarian South to Harlem. Explain why the narrator is delighted with free access to subways for both blacks and whites and why public transportation simplifies the narrator's problems of job hunting and holding a position on Long Island.
5. In a theme, explain why the relationship between black workers and unions is a critical issue for the narrator and others of the Great

- Migration to industrial cities in the North.
6. Use topographical maps to contrast the West Indies and Boston to New York City and to describe Harlem, Centre Street, Seventh Avenue, Riverside Drive, Morningside, Mount Morris Park, Lenox Avenue, 42nd Street, 125th Street, Central Park, Broadway, the Empire State Building, Wall Street, Long Island, and the upper East Side.
  7. Draw a subway map indicating stops that the narrator would take to arrive at Harlem, Centre Street, Seventh Avenue, Riverside Drive, Morningside, Mount Morris Park, Lenox Avenue, 42nd Street, 125th Street, Central Park, Broadway, the Empire State Building, Wall Street, Long Island, and the upper East Side. Give directions from the subway to the train station for a trip to Boston.
  8. Based on your understanding of the novel, lead a panel discussion of the effects of bias, poverty, racism, injustice, job discrimination, displacement, rioting, social disorder, police brutality, and other forms of violence on youth. Support your opinions with facts from census reports, sociological surveys, and statistics obtained from almanacs and economic and health surveys.

**Language Arts**

1. List words and phrases that underscore the difficulties of life in the South and in Harlem.
2. Compose an extended definition of dialect. Analyze the remnants of Southern and West Indian speech that survive among newcomers to Harlem. Determine what aspects of grammar and punctuation cause the most difficulty.
3. Record aloud descriptive passages from *Invisible Man*. Consider pouring brandy into Norton, discovering the hoax of the sealed letters, recovering from an explosion of paint, igniting papers to relieve the dark, seeing Sambo dolls, becoming Rinehart, fighting with Tatlock, protecting a brief case filled with important papers, relating to Sybil, critiquing a speech, seeing Jim Trueblood receive a \$100 bill, and burning lights with stolen electricity.

4. Pantomime symbolic or significant episodes from the novel.
5. List sense impressions from the novel that give immediacy and force to characterization. Name graphic details such as street fighting, fleeing over roofs, hearing an explosion of paint, smelling and tasting yams, listening to Louis Armstrong, watching hirelings evict Primus Provo and his wife from their home, seeing Reverend Barbee fall, experiencing a hard winter, hearing a spear strike a dummy, and hiding in a dark subterranean room.
6. Read aloud from nonfiction, novels, plays, speeches, and stories that describe racism, abuse, neglect, flight, mental confusion, and poverty.
7. Analyze elements of character and personal history that the narrator divulges about himself, particularly his relationship with his grandfather, an ex-slave. List information that he conceals, particularly his name, family, birthplace, and the alias that the Brothers assign him. Investigate the location of Greenwood, his home.
8. Apply the parameters of Gothic literature to *Invisible Man*. Consider mystery, the supernatural, stalking, escapism, flights from danger, grotesque figures, hyperbole, vague forms of menace, and unusual settings.
9. Using dreamscapes and nightmarish scenes from the novel as models, write an extended definition of surrealism.
10. Make an illustrated web site or bulletin board that identifies these names and terms: Mother Hubbard, Noah's Ark, Masonic emblem, verbena, fyce, Weltschmerz, sphinx, handkerchief-headed, sneakypete, wafer and wine, pince-nez, Edgar Allan Poe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Pulaski, liberal arts, con game, pad-dies, on the lambo, Charlie Chaplin, Paul Robeson, Thomas Jefferson, Brer Rabbit, tabloid, pressure gauge, brownstone, Hooverville, Red Cap, Emancipation, philanthropist, Sullivan law, co-ed, geld, stool pigeon, spats, Puritan, and mysticism.

**Law**

1. Read aloud state laws governing crimes committed in the novel, especially affray, public brawling, uttering threats, adultery, robbery, rioting, looting, running numbers, carrying a concealed weapon, stabbing, attempted murder, and murder. Determine what crimes the narrator is guilty of and what crimes are perpetrated against him.
2. Make a chart of advice to the narrator concerning his rights as a citizen to speak his opinion in a public place, ride the subway, apply for jobs, join a union, put up posters, and witness a crime or riot with impunity, particularly police brutality against an innocent bystander.

**Psychology and Health**

1. Explain with diagrams the mental and physical pressures that impinge on the narrator in high school and college, in the boxing ring, while job hunting, at the paint factory, among the Brothers, as a rebel against the Brotherhood, in flight from Ras the Destroyer, and in the cellar hermitage. Justify his belief that he is invisible.
2. Lead a debate concerning the best methods of lifting spirits among elderly black residents of Harlem like the Provos.
3. Compose a lecture on emotional trauma as found in the narrator, Tod Clifton, the vet, and Ras the Destroyer. List causes, symptoms, and treatment for people who live with anger, frustration, disappointment, violence, shell-shock, and disillusion.

**Religion**

1. Compose a graveside service for Brother Tod Clifton. Indicate the kind of eulogy chosen by the Brothers, newspaper reporters, and the narrator and the effect of each on Harlem mourners.
2. Outline the parallels between the lives of the narrator and of Malcolm X. Express the black world's shock that gunmen from the Nation of Islam executed Malcolm X while he was delivering an address to a Harlem audience.

3. Characterize the personalities of Rinehart, including his pose as a street preacher. In a paragraph, contrast the expectations for a pulpit minister and a self-appointed street haranguer.
4. Outline the origin and development of Rastafarianism, including its benefits to poor black people.

**Speech**

1. Organize a discussion of racism and other forms of persecution, classism, and exclusion. Answer these basic questions: What makes people belittle identifiable groups, especially the ignorant and members of a minority race? How does prejudice cause tense situations? How do speeches, books, plays, monuments, music, murals, posters, and other forms of creativity help quell ridicule, hatred, segregation, and prejudice? Include commentary on the narrator's natural skills as a speaker, organizer, and leader.
2. Compose a presentation to parents, teachers, trustees, contributors, and friends of the college concerning opportunities for blacks under Dr. Bledsoe's regime. Use the narrator's experiences as examples of duplicity and manipulation.

**Alternate Assessment**

1. List examples of cruelty, duplicity, dishonesty, or racism in various characters.
2. Compile a list of actions that demonstrate community spirit.
3. Compose a scene in which the narrator returns to Mary Rambo to explain how he escaped Ras the Destroyer and why he has been in hiding in a basement room.
4. Make a character list and explain the character flaws of each.
5. Account for the recurrence of images of darkness and blindness.

## Vocabulary

Complete each of the following sentences with an appropriate pair of words from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank at left.

- |                             |                             |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| a. albino, pigment          | k. ideal, ideology          |
| b. angular, composure       | l. improvise, metamorphosis |
| c. blank-faced, profound    | m. individuals, debunk      |
| d. caption, prominent       | n. irrevocable, deluge      |
| e. committed, confronted    | o. lessen, riveted          |
| f. compressed, nodes        | p. newsworthy, aboil        |
| g. contralto, intoned       | q. obscene, flouncing       |
| h. diaphragm, fleetingly    | r. prim, ritual             |
| i. dissonance, exhilarating | s. throaty, solemnity       |
| j. electrodes, frenzied     | t. treachery, impersonal    |

- The others \_\_\_\_\_, looking out of eyes that were meant to reveal nothing and to stir \_\_\_\_\_ uncertainty.
- As I listened I had been so torn between humiliation and fascination that to \_\_\_\_\_ my sense of shame I had kept my attention \_\_\_\_\_ upon his intense face.
- I would have to \_\_\_\_\_ upon my materials in the manner of a jazz musician putting a musical theme through a wild star-burst of \_\_\_\_\_.
- For having \_\_\_\_\_ myself, I felt that I could never allow myself to show surprise or upset—even when \_\_\_\_\_ with situations furthest from my experience.
- And of course we as \_\_\_\_\_ must sympathetically \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves.
- It came upon me slowly, like that strange disease that affects those blackmen whom you see turning slowly from black to \_\_\_\_\_, their \_\_\_\_\_ disappearing as under the radiation of some cruel, invisible ray.
- My lungs were \_\_\_\_\_ like a bellows and each time my breath returned I yelled, punctuating the rhythmical action of the \_\_\_\_\_.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ is to strike a medium between \_\_\_\_\_ and inspiration.
- Such an \_\_\_\_\_ of everything human!
- I looked at the \_\_\_\_\_ of his face searching for the sincerity in his words.
- There was something almost \_\_\_\_\_ about the way she sat there, and yet she had just made a modest proposal that I join her in a very revolting \_\_\_\_\_.
- Out in the yard a woman's hoarse \_\_\_\_\_ a hymn.
- The \_\_\_\_\_ over his picture: \_\_\_\_\_ Educator Reverts to Field-Niggerism!
- And I seemed to move in close, like the lens of a camera, focusing into the scene and feeling the heat and excitement and the pounding of voice and applause against my \_\_\_\_\_, my eyes flying from face to face, swiftly, \_\_\_\_\_, searching for someone I could recognize.
- I could feel the air from the window hot against my neck now as through the smell of morning coffee I heard a \_\_\_\_\_ voice singing with a mixture of laughter and \_\_\_\_\_.

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Match each of the following descriptions from the novel with a character name. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| _____ 1. objects to the link lying on the narrator's desk                | A. narrator        |
| _____ 2. has a racist statue as a coin bank                              | B. Mary            |
| _____ 3. demonstrates Sambo dolls  | C. Tarp            |
| _____ 4. takes a bus to New York along with the vet                      | D. nurse           |
| _____ 5. uses an ax as a weapon  | E. Scofield        |
| _____ 6. does not blame the narrator for the drive through the quarters  | F. Wrestrum        |
| _____ 7. reveals the contents of the seventh sealed letter               | G. Bledsoe         |
| _____ 8. offers the narrator underwear and overalls                      | H. Norton          |
| _____ 9. considers the chauffeur a fool for driving through the quarters | I. Brotherhood     |
| _____ 10. repeatedly sings the blues from a record                       | J. Barrelhouse     |
| _____ 11. served in France and suffers shellshock                        | K. Kate            |
| _____ 12. fails to recognize the narrator at the bar                     | L. the vet         |
| _____ 13. helps the narrator slop coal oil on floors                     | M. Louis Armstrong |
| _____ 14. assigns the narrator a name                                    | N. Emerson         |
| _____ 15. reminds the narrator of his grandfather                        | O. Clifton         |

### Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The narrator pounds on Mary's steam pipes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Rinehart keeps up multiple identities as preacher, lover, and numbers runner.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Ras the Exhorter is guilty of manipulating members of the Brotherhood.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Dr. Bledsoe believes that black students should work for a summer in Harlem to experience the North.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Emerson opens the narrator's first sealed envelope and reads the message aloud.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Emerson offers the narrator a job as valet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Sylvia thinks of the narrator as black and beautiful.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Looters prevent the narrator from seeing who shoots Clifton.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Kimbro explains that exactly ten drops go into each bucket.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Brother Jack's glass eye causes the narrator to distrust him.



## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: Completion (20 points)

Fill in each blank below with a word or phrase that completes the sentence.

1. At \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ soaks in the tub.
2. In \_\_\_\_\_'s yard, \_\_\_\_\_ links his destiny with that of blacks.
3. At \_\_\_\_\_, blacks mourn \_\_\_\_\_.
4. The \_\_\_\_\_ collapses and dies in a \_\_\_\_\_ coach.
5. At the \_\_\_\_\_ Company, members at a \_\_\_\_\_ meeting oust the narrator as an outsider.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Explain why the vet and the narrator are both on a bus headed north.
2. Contrast the narrator while giving his graduation speech, honoring a dead friend, explaining his actions to Dr. Bledsoe, and defending Primus Provo and his wife.
3. Discuss why Clifton disappears from the Brotherhood and sells Sambo dolls.
4. Explain Ras the Exhorter's point of view about racism and power and his Abyssinian uniform as Ras the Destroyer.
5. Contrast the intent of three people who mislead the narrator.

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Matching (30 points)

Match the following actions with places from the list below. Place the letter of your response in the blank provided at left.

- |   |                         |
|---|-------------------------|
| _____ 1. Emma dances with the narrator.                                   | A. Lenox Avenue address |
| _____ 2. The audience sings "John Brown's Body."                          | B. chapel               |
| _____ 3. Tarp's link lies on the desk.                                    | C. company hospital     |
| _____ 4. The narrator hides behind dark glasses.                          | D. France               |
| _____ 5. An electric current sears the narrator's body.                   | E. downtown             |
| _____ 6. Ralston helps get the narrator into bed.                         | F. bus                  |
| _____ 7. The narrator puts lunch in a locker.                             | G. tenement             |
| _____ 8. Emerson proposes meeting a job applicant.                        | H. Harlem hall          |
| _____ 9. The vet fights for his country.                                  | I. Calamus Club         |
| _____ 10. Tatlock faces the narrator.                                     | J. narrator's office    |
| _____ 11. Scofield spreads coal oil.                                      | K. building No. 1       |
| _____ 12. The narrator goes to handle the "woman question."               | L. Mary Rambo's home    |
| _____ 13. Barbee collapses.   | M. boxing ring          |
| _____ 14. The narrator applies ice as first aid.                          | N. Golden Day           |
| _____ 15. The vet warns the narrator about his expectations of the North. | O. Jolly Dollar         |

### Part II: Quotation Identification (20 points)

Identify the narrator of each quotation below. Comment on the significance of each statement.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. One night I accidentally bumped into a man, and perhaps because of the near darkness he saw me and called me an insulting name. I sprang at him.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I escaped for a while—I went to France with the Army Medical Corps and remained there after the Armistice to study and practice.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. This case represents, my dear Mr. Emerson, one of the rare, delicate instances in which one for whom we held great expectations has gone grievously astray, and who in his fall threatens to upset certain delicate relationships between certain interested individuals and the school.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. But come down, Brothers, come down or you'll land on your dialectics; the stage of history hasn't built that far.
- 
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. You know, talk rough to me, beautiful.
- 
-

## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

Supply a word or phrase to complete the following statements. Place your response in the blank provided.

1. The narrator observes the shooting death of \_\_\_\_\_ and grieves for the loss.
2. Jim Trueblood blames \_\_\_\_\_'s pregnancy on a cold night on which the family slept in one bed.
3. The record plays \_\_\_\_\_'s rendition of "What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue."
4. \_\_\_\_\_ shows the narrator how to watch gauges on the paint tanks.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ is transferred to St. Elizabeth's in Washington, D. C.
6. Mary Rambo's racist \_\_\_\_\_ surprises the narrator, who destroys it.
7. The narrator's grandfather urges him to practice \_\_\_\_\_ against whites.
8. Norton claims that his \_\_\_\_\_'s death caused him to give money to the black school.
9. The taste of a roasted \_\_\_\_\_ revives the narrator's nostalgia for the South.
10. Peter Wheatstraw hauls \_\_\_\_\_ and jives with the narrator.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Discuss the importance of trustees to the college, the narrator, and Bledsoe.
2. Describe Ras' behavior before and during the riot.
3. Account for the narrator's burning of important documents from his brief case.
4. Discuss the significance of the narrator's seventh attempt to gain employment.
5. Contrast the narrator the first and last times he appears in the novel.

## Answer Key

### VOCABULARY

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. A  | 11. R |
| 2. O | 7. F  | 12. G |
| 3. L | 8. K  | 13. D |
| 4. E | 9. Q  | 14. H |
| 5. M | 10. B | 15. S |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. H  | 11. L |
| 2. B | 7. N  | 12. J |
| 3. O | 8. D  | 13. E |
| 4. A | 9. G  | 14. I |
| 5. K | 10. M | 15. C |

#### Part II: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. F | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. F |

#### Part III: Completion (20 points)

1. a downtown apartment, the narrator
2. Jim Trueblood, Norton
3. Mount Morris Park, Clifton
4. Founder, Pullman
5. Liberty Paint, union

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION STUDY B

#### Part I: Matching (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. L  | 11. G |
| 2. H | 7. K  | 12. E |
| 3. J | 8. I  | 13. B |
| 4. O | 9. D  | 14. N |
| 5. C | 10. M | 15. F |

#### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

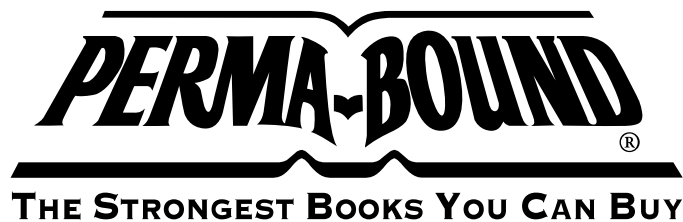
1. the narrator
2. the vet
3. Bledsoe
4. Brother Jack
5. Sybil

#### Part III: Short Answer (20 points)

- |                    |                |
|--------------------|----------------|
| 1. Tod Clifton     | 6. coin bank   |
| 2. Matty Lou       | 7. treachery   |
| 3. Louis Armstrong | 8. daughter    |
| 4. Brockway        | 9. yam         |
| 5. The vet         | 10. blueprints |

#### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



#### Perma-Bound

617 East Vandalia Road • Jacksonville, Illinois 62650  
Toll Free 1-800-637-6581 • Fax 1-800-551-1169  
E-Mail: books@perma-bound.com

#### Perma-Bound Canada

Box 868, Station Main • Peterborough, Ontario K9J 7A2  
Toll Free 1-800-461-1999 • Fax 1-888-250-3811  
E-Mail: perma-bound.ca@sympatico.ca

Visit us online at [www.perma-bound.com](http://www.perma-bound.com)