

# INVISIBLE MAN

*Ralph Ellison*



## **RESOURCE GUIDE**

*Reading + Writing + Analysis*

**NO PREP**

**PRINT & GO**

**HIGH SCHOOL ELA**

# About the Text

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*Invisible Man* follows an unnamed Black narrator as he searches for identity in a society that refuses to truly see him. Moving from the South to Harlem, he encounters institutions that shape, control, and ultimately distort his sense of self.

The novel explores invisibility as a social and symbolic condition, showing how racism and power structures can erase individuality and reduce people to assigned roles. As the narrator's journey unfolds, he begins to question identity, truth, and what it means to be seen.

## **Key Themes**

- Identity and self-definition
- Racism and social invisibility
- Power and manipulation
- Individual freedom versus societal control

## **Before You Read Questions**

1. What does it mean to feel “invisible” in a group or society?
2. Why might someone struggle to define who they are if others constantly define them first?
3. How can power influence the way people are treated or seen?

# *Comprehension Questions:*

## *SECTION 1*

1. How does the narrator describe himself at the beginning of the novel?
2. What does the “battle royal” symbolize in this section?
3. How do the men in power treat the young Black boys?
4. What conflicting messages does the narrator receive about success?
5. Why is the narrator confused about his identity?

# Quick Discussion

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## Time to Reflect

*How does this section introduce the idea of invisibility in society?*

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# *Comprehension Questions*

## *SECTION 2*

1. Why is the narrator excited to attend college?
2. How do Dr. Bledsoe and other authority figures control the narrator's future?
3. What mistake leads to the narrator's expulsion?
4. How does the college shape the narrator's beliefs about success?
5. What does the narrator begin to realize about power and education?

# Quick Discussion

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## Time to Reflect

*How does this section challenge the idea that education guarantees freedom?*

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# *Comprehension Questions*

## *SECTION 3*

1. Why does the narrator move to Harlem?
2. What does the Brotherhood promise him?
3. How does the narrator feel about his new role in society?
4. What begins to go wrong with the Brotherhood?
5. How does the narrator's identity begin to shift in this section?

# Quick Discussion

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## Time to Reflect

*How does the narrator's experience with the Brotherhood reflect manipulation and control?*

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# *Comprehension Questions*

## *SECTION 4*

1. How does the Brotherhood begin to limit the narrator's independence?
2. What conflicts arise between the narrator and the organization?
3. How do public expectations affect the narrator's behavior?
4. What events lead to the narrator feeling invisible again?
5. How does confusion about identity grow in this section?

# Quick Discussion

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## Time to Reflect

*How does the narrator lose control over his own identity?*

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# *Comprehension Questions*

## *SECTION 5*

1. What major turning points lead the narrator underground?
2. How does the narrator define invisibility by the end of the novel?
3. What does the narrator learn about society?
4. How does isolation change the narrator's thinking?
5. What is the significance of light and darkness in this section?

# Quick Discussion

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## Time to Reflect

*What does invisibility mean in both a literal and symbolic sense?*

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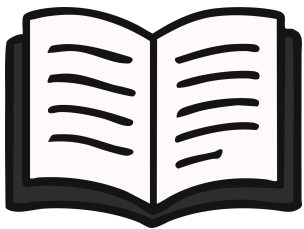
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# Extension Activity

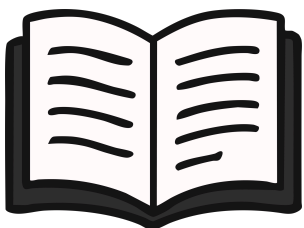
**Choose one activity to complete.**



Create a symbolic “invisibility” diagram showing what causes the narrator to feel unseen



Research Harlem during the Harlem Renaissance and present findings



Create a visual timeline of the narrator’s identity changes

# Writing Prompt

How does Ralph Ellison use symbolism and the concept of invisibility to show the narrator's struggle for identity?

## **Be sure to include:**

- A clear claim
- At least 2 pieces of textual evidence
- Explanation of how the evidence supports your argument

# *Understanding the Big Ideas*

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**This story explores:**

- **Identity and self-definition**
- **Invisibility and feeling unseen in society**
- **Power and manipulation**
- **Racism and systemic inequality**

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***How does the narrator's journey in  
Invisible Man show the challenges of  
finding identity in a society that refuses  
to truly see him?***

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# Final Project

## Choose one:

1. Literary Analysis Essay: Analyze how Ralph Ellison develops the theme of invisibility throughout the novel.

2. Creative Writing: Write a monologue or diary entry from the narrator's perspective reflecting on identity and invisibility.

3. Symbolism Project: Create a visual representation (poster, slideshow, or collage) showing key symbols in the novel and their meanings.

# Historical Connections

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* reflects racial and social realities in early 20th-century America, particularly during the Jim Crow era and the Great Migration.

Ongoing racial  
discrimination despite  
geographic movement

Migration to Northern  
cities like Harlem in  
search of opportunity

Limited access to equal  
education and  
leadership roles

Segregation laws  
limiting opportunities  
for Black Americans

Political organizations  
influencing Black  
communities