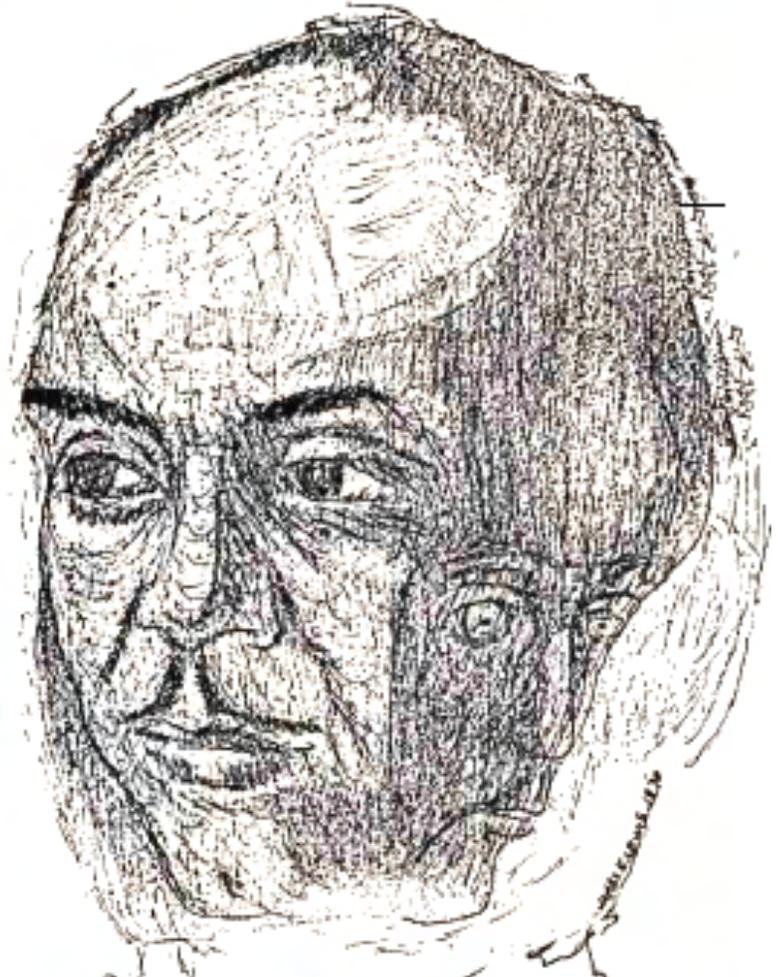


Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in the Spotlight

Strategies for teaching the most frequently cited novel for the Advanced Placement Literature Open Response Question -- historical context, stylistic analyses, motif strands, personal journaling, writing prompts, project assignments and music and art connections gleaned from 25 years of teaching this book in the author's home state.



That invisibility, to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come in contact.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS.

Volume 234, Number 17

'Invisible Man' At Thirty ← FIFTY

ALICE K. TURNER

There's nothing literary folk like better than taking odds on what, in the flood of books that rolls forth each year, will float for longer than, say, a decade. The yearly prizes give way to reassurances and reassessments, with anxious glances at what is being taught and at what young people have actually heard of, let alone read. Thus, in 1965, a *Book Week* poll of "200 prominent authors, critics and editors" chose Ralph Ellison's first novel, *Invisible Man*, published in 1952, as "the most distinguished single work published in the last 20 years."

Now, on the novel's thirtieth anniversary, Random House is reissuing it, affirming the editors' faith in its distinction (despite its singularity, for Ellison never gratified his publishers with another) and its continuing buoyancy.* They're surely right to do so, for the book survives wonderfully well; a new poll that limited the prize candidates to American novels might easily shore up *Invisible Man's* claim as the most distinguished postwar work yet published.

Certainly, it has been extraordinarily influential. That memorable introduction, a gravely cynical classic of alienation, conducted in the glare of 1,369 light bulbs to the sweet smell of marijuana smoke and the plaintive growl of Louis Armstrong asking,

What did I do
To be so black
And blue?

must have been the envy and inspiration of the entire Beat Generation, not to mention Norman Mailer in his "White Negro" phase. Ellison's use of knock-about farce with an edge of rue to dramatize deadly serious affairs predated the Black Humorists of the 1960s and the essays into surrealism which followed. And, of course, there can't be a black writer who hasn't studied his work.

Ellison has always ducked the mantle of dean of black (he would say Negro) writers, claiming, quite correctly, to be

**Invisible Man* By Ralph Ellison Random House 440 pp. \$15.95

Alice K. Turner is Playboy's fiction editor.

squarely in the American mainstream. If *Invisible Man's* roots reach back to Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground*, to Dickens and to a number of "young man from the provinces" novels popular in France, they owe even more to American writers like Melville (who provides an epigraph) and Twain. Maybe that's why the book seems so fresh: it was the start of something new, but it also skipped back to the solid foundations of the nineteenth century.

If the ultimate appeal of a novel is to young people, as many have claimed, *Invisible Man* is well grounded here too. Its theme is the education of a young person. Its setting is, mainly, an eerie, glittering Harlem, as magical and seductive as any El Dorado, and its villains are the changing faces of the Establishment: black and white grown-ups, educators, rich businessmen, manipulative do-gooders, demanding women, insistent rabble-rousers, powerful criminals. The prose is strong but easily accessible, the pace antic, the characters identifiable (as befits a picaresque novel) and the predicaments precarious and hilarious. What more could a young person ask for than to get both idealism and alienation in the same bag?

What's more, the novel has a strange precognitive quality, as though it were a glass through which the decades that

followed its publication were seen darkly. Although the Brotherhood that the hero joins is presumably a takeoff on various leftist groups of the 1930s and 1940s, it stands in uncannily well for the Movement of the 1960s. Ras the Exhorter sounds a lot like Rap Brown or even Malcolm X. The ineffable Rinehart—"Rine the runner and Rine the gambler and Rine the briber and Rine the lover and Rine the Reverend"—brings to mind the sinister Harlem superhero Nicky Barnes. The riots, looting and arson, the "woman question," the black-white comedy, the refuge in music and drugs, all seem to belong to a time *after* the book was published—and it's hardly sufficient to proclaim that the black subculture often previews subsequent mass movements.

All in all, it wouldn't take much to turn this thirty-year-old novel into a thoroughly contemporary Richard Pryor movie—just a little dirty talk. Perhaps the sole proof that the book dates from 1952 is the fact that it contains only one "forbidden" four-letter word. And yet despite this, it turns out that *Invisible Man* is on the list of books banned by some schools. How curious this is: the book deals with sex discreetly (far more discreetly than *Tom Jones*, say); its language is pure; it is a book that knows no color boundary, so that black and white students can enjoy it equally. Its only fault would seem to be comic subversiveness, healthy fare for young people up against their own Establishments. □

Anxiety and Its Displacement

NEIL SCHMITZ

THE FATE OF THE EARTH. By Jonathan Schell. Alfred A. Knopf, 244 pp. \$11.95.

The strong point of Jonathan Schell's *The Fate of the Earth* is that it compels us to think about the present danger of nuclear war. Schell takes us straight into the discourse, appropriates the several languages (pure and applied) of the nuclear scientist, splits the atom, describes Hiroshima, gives us paradigms, statistics, scenarios and vistas, somberly calculates the "rough probabilities" of a nuclear holocaust and then draws us a picture of the conse-

quences. A twenty-megaton bomb explodes over the Empire State Building: "The fireball would be about four and a half miles in diameter and would radiate the thermal pulse for some twenty seconds. People caught in the open twenty-three miles away from ground zero, in Long Island, New Jersey, and southern New York State, would be burned to death." All that frightful data is then magnified. A 10,000-megaton attack on the continental United States rains fireballs, and this is the sum of it, a "simplicity of nothingness."

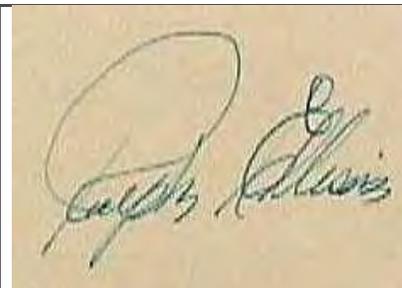
Neil Schmitz teaches literature at the State University of New York at Buffalo.

As I begin retirement, I look forward to expanding this site.
I welcome any donation you feel is appropriate, payable through PayPal.

Donate



Invisible Man



by Ralph Ellison

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in the Spotlight: Strategies for Teaching a Challenging Novel to Diverse Populations"

The presenter will offer specific strategies for teaching Ellison's *Invisible Man* - historical context, stylistic analyses, symbolism and motif strands, personal journaling, music and art connections. .

Historical Resources



Timeline of African-American History serves as a good beginning for the historical approach. Sponsored by **African-American Pamphlets**, a site well worth exploring for an overlooked alternative literary form.

The **Encyclopedia Britannica Guide to Black**

History is an extraordinary resource and they have allowed free access. Beautiful graphics, sound and video clips, and **imaginative assignments**, such as an anti-slavery broadside and a poster for a Harlem Renaissance show, make this a site worth exploring.

Documenting the American South offers a broad collection of more than 300 slave narratives. Several analytic essays are useful, especially one discussing the religious content of such narratives. Illustrations are also included.

African American Odyssey: A Quest for Full Citizenship offers political background, as well as in-depth resources on Booker T. Washington's importance.

Harlem 1900-1940 An African-American Community,

Music Resources

What Is the Blues? from the PBS Blues series attempts to define the term, providing examples and lesson plans in the **Blues Classroom**.

More in-depth lessons that include other resources and extensive links are available at **Learning the Blues**.

You would not want to miss NPR Morning Edition's 12-part series **Honky Tonks, Hymns, and the Blues** -- a detailed history with complete programs, music clips, and supplemental CDs.

Strange Fruit focuses on the famous Billie Holiday song which is certainly implied in *Invisible Man*. Further discussion of protest music as a genre. Includes a sound clip and lyrics.



Ralph Ellison Project at Jerry Jazz Musician

Robert O'Meally's interview is especially useful since it addresses not only music in general but also Ellison's *Living with Music*. Also touches upon T. S. Eliot and Louis Armstrong. Multiple sound clips, including **"What Did I Do To Be So Black and Blue?"** (Give it time; it's a slow load.)

presented by the Schomburg Exhibition, has links to short biographies of anyone who was anyone, teacher resources, great contemporary photographs, and directions for [Reading a Photograph](#).

[African-American Studies Video Resources](#) is an extensive annotated bibliography of available films, provided by the University of California at Berkeley. Includes some film clips.

[Black Film Center](#) is dedicated to film by and about black artists and black culture. Has some incredible film clips, one as early as 1897.

[The Rise and Fall of Jim Crow](#) is an interactive PBS website. "Jim Crow" came to personify the system of government-sanctioned racial oppression and segregation in the United States. Specific sections include a map and several student role-playing activities.

[AT&T Knowledge Network Explorer: Black History Homepage](#) has links to five related sites. **[Black History Hotlist](#)** is a starting point for anyone studying African-American events and issues. If you want to test your knowledge of African-American history (and even develop an essay on the topic), try the **[Interactive Treasure Hunt & Quiz](#)**. The Subject Sampler **[Sampling African America](#)** helps you engage in the topic and explore things about it that personally interest you. Get involved with two webquests: **[Little Rock 9](#)** and **[Tuskegee Tragedy](#)**.

[Musarium: Without Sanctuary](#) is a stunning and shocking website dedicated to the images from the book and traveling photographic exhibit of the same name. Be forewarned, not for the squeamish.

The Oklahoma Connection

The Tulsa Public Library maintains an **[African-American Resource Center](#)** that thoroughly explores Oklahoma's historical black towns, the Greenwood Riots of 1921, state growth of blues and jazz, and much more.



[The Tulsa Race Riot](#) by Scott Ellsworth includes a lengthy narrative, interviews, and photographs.

[Tulsa Reparations Coalition](#) includes survivor oral history, reparations commission reports, bibliography of books on the riots. The **full report** from the Oklahoma Commission to study the Tulsa Race Riot of 1921 is available for download.

["Tulsa, 1921"](#) -- An August 23, 2003, article tracing the

Art Resources

[Art History Resources](#) is an extensive webibliography, organized by style, artist, time period, etc. You can find representative examples of impressionism, expressionism, naturalism, realism, and surrealism here.

Harlem Renaissance

- **[PAL: Harlem Renaissance Introduction](#)** (emphasizes writers)
- **[Online Newshour](#)** (economic and political influences)
- **[Rhapsodies in Black](#)** (art)
- **[S.C.O.R.E. CyberGuide](#)** (music links)

[Powerful Days in Black and White](#) is a photo study of racism in America. caution: some pictures are shocking.

Because there are so many resources available to English teachers, I will just suggest some black artists whose work seems especially appropriate and useful.

- Romare Bearden
- Aaron Douglas
- Palmer Hayden
- William H. Johnson
- Lois Mailou Jones
- Jacob Lawrence
- Augusta Savage
- Henry Ossawa Tanner

Symbolism and Motif Strands

[Motif Chart](#) -- Chapter by chapter notes on dreams, sex, violence, paper, vision, symbolic objects, oratory, family, music, and power. Includes a blank form for taking your own notes.

[Song of the South](#) -- According to urban legend, this 1936 Disney mixed media film based on Joel Chandler Harris's Uncle Remus stories has never been released in the United States, supposedly because of opposition by the NAACP. Get the story here. Best way to get the film is eBay.

[Symbolism.org](#) -- Focuses on symbolism of popular culture. Useful resource for exploring deeper meanings.

[Phrase Finder](#) -- Meanings and origins of phrases, sayings, clichés and quotes.

[Found and Decorated Poetry](#) -- Based on Tom Phillips's *Humantment*, a "decorated" Victorian novel, which is out of

history of the riots and their long-term effect on race relations. Even makes connections to the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing.

The Night That Tulsa Burned -- Study Guide with vocabulary and questions. Video available from the History Channel.

Check out the **Oklahoma Historical Society**.

print, but you can see sample pages at the following sites.

- **Art and Books**
- **Tom Phillips Homepage**



Language and Style

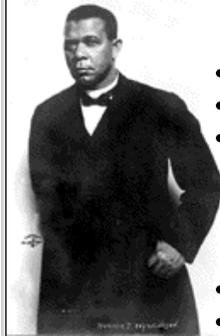
"An Essay on a Wickedly Powerful Word" by Keith Woods

An essay by a black journalist on word choice and its effects. Worth checking other articles from the Poynter Institute, a journalism school with a focused ethnic awareness. Also includes a **Diversity** section with a bibliography, tip sheets and teaching modules.

Dialect Survey uses word specific questions to map dialect areas.

The Story of English by Robert McCrum, "Black on White." Better if your library has copies of the Robert MacNeil PBS series.

Oratory: Men of Words



Booker T. Washington Resources

- **Atlanta Compromise Speech**
- **Today in History**
- **Booker T. Washington National Monument**

Frederic Douglass Resources

- **Keele University Website**
- **Frederic Douglas National Site**

Writing Black - Keele University provides links to unusual language resources, such as black pulp fiction, interviews, historical texts, etc.

Persona Writing Assignments, though not strictly speech, do require that you write in the voice of the Invisible Man. See the **Sophomore Autobiography Portfolio** for similar assignments to adapt for Persona Writing.

Biographical Resources

PBS American Masters: Ralph Ellison

Video available for purchase traces the influence Ellison has had on modern literature and includes enactments of several scenes from the novel (which should perhaps be avoided until the novel is finished). Includes feature essay, **career timeline**, eight additional **video** interviews, and a **teacher** section. Additional teacher materials available at **Black and Blue: Jazz in Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man**, which draws upon resources from the Ken Burns's Jazz series.



New York Times Featured Author: Ralph Ellison

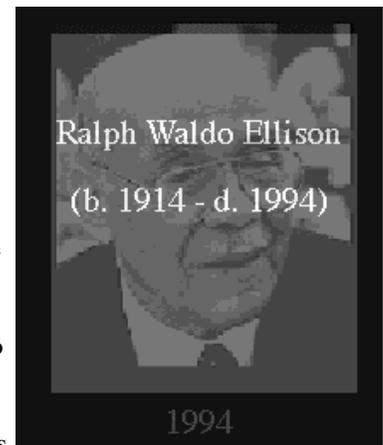
Offers extensive interviews, reviews, even an obituary. Free, but requires registration. Be sure to check the **Roger Rosenblatt** homage.

Ellison's Other Work

American Life Histories: Manuscripts from the Federal Writers' Project, 1936-1940. Search by Ralph Ellison and you'll actually come up with some of the interviews he actually recorded as a young man in New York City. My favorite is called "Harlem."

National Book Award Acceptance Speech 1953

As the first black author to win a National Book award, Ellison's comments are particularly relevant. He comments: "If I were asked in all seriousness just what I considered to be the chief significance of *Invisible Man* as a fiction, I would reply: Its experimental attitude and its attempt to return to the mood



Ralph Ellison's Legacy on Online NewsHour on June 21, 1999. [Sound clip](#) (11 minutes), with Ellison interview, discussion of *Juneteenth* and how it came to be. Guests include John Callahan, Ellison's literary executor, and Charles Johnson, author of *Middle Passage*.

Biographical PowerPoint

This class project could serve as an example for student projects or a general introduction to the author.

of personal moral responsibility for democracy which typified the best of our nineteenth-century fiction."

This History Channel clip has Ellison talking **On the Origins of *Invisible Man***. He speaks specifically about the influence of current events and his reading of Lord Raglan's *The Hero*.

Study Guides

Random House Teacher Guide

Organized in the order of the book. Includes reading comprehension questions, discussion questions different from the reading guide, and suggestions for further study.

Random House/Vintage Books

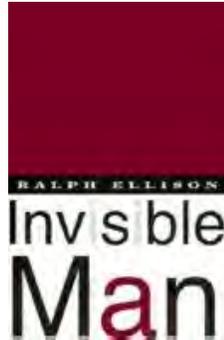
Reading Guide

Fifteen thought-provoking discussion questions, mostly on the book as a whole.

Excerpt from Chapter 1.

Unabridged book available on audiobook, but you can pre-hear a significant **excerpt from Chapter 7**, courtesy of Salon.com. Read by Joe Morton.

MsEffie's Chapter Questions



Critical Resources

Understanding History Through the Literary Reviews of *Invisible Man*

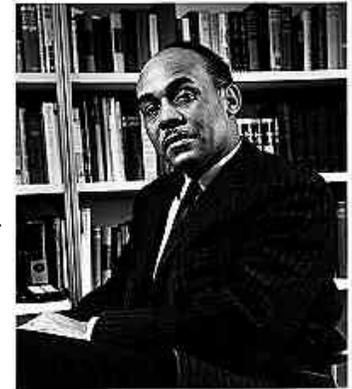
by Virginia Brackett, Ph.D. You can download this PDF file with links to specific critical articles:

- Irving Howe, "[Black Boys and Native Sons](#)" (essay about Wright, Baldwin, and Ellison).
- Saul Bellow, "[Man Underground](#)" (Review of *Invisible Man*).
- *Wright Morris*, "[A Tale From Underground](#)" (Review of *Invisible Man*).

Ernest Kaiser, "[A Critical Look at Ellison's Fiction & at Social & Literary Criticism by and about the Author.](#)"

John Corry, "[Profile of an American Novelist, A White View of Ralph Ellison.](#)"

Robert Stepto, *[From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative](#)* (Excerpt).



Advanced Placement Free Response Questions

have mentioned
Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
more times than any other novel
--specifically 17 times --

1976, 1977, 1978, 1982, 1983, 1985, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001, 2003, 2004, 2005.

My Handouts

- [Style Assignment](#)
- [Passages](#)
- [Possible Graphs](#)
- [Style Models](#)

Advanced Placement Free Response Prompts



Download my History of the Novel college paper.		
.		
<u>Norman North Student Web Pages on <i>Invisible Man</i> Webpages from West Springfield High School</u>	.	<u>Student Web Pages on Lost Generation and Harlem Renaissance</u>
		
Updated 19 April 2010.	Back to <u>Assignments</u> or <u>Home</u> .	Contact <u>Sandra Effinger</u> .

*As I begin retirement, I look forward to expanding this site.
I welcome any donation you feel is appropriate, payable through PayPal.*



Release Ch.	Dreams	Sex	Violence	Paper	Vision	Object	Oratory	Music	Family	Power
1	Reefer Dream suction, chick soma (or fight) Face of Girl Walking Nightmare	Slave Girl (with mother's voice)	Fight with Man who bumps him → Bledsoe's Prize fighter vs. Yoxel Boys in dream	Newspaper floury	man doesn't see him; IM's invisible	1369 light bulbs record player	Church Sermon	"What Did I Do to Be So Black and Blue?" (saw something)	found wrong to kill father Slave w/d. Mother's voice	Monopolated Light + Power
2	Grandfather's Curse + recurs in dream of circus	Nude Dancer	Battle Roy	College Scholarship → "Keep this Nigger running."	Blindfold in Fight Smoke Looking at Nude	BRIEFCASE brass tokens tattoo	Graduation Speech	clavinet Hymn	Grandfather	Electric Rug Greenwood's most powerful White Men
3	Trueblood's Dream (clock, bread, water, melon)	Trueblood's Incest	Kate with AX	\$100 Bill Faded Pictures	Veil of statue "offending eye" Eye of God	Founder Statue platinum miniature Red Tin Apple	Trueblood's Tale	"A Mighty Fortress Is our God" "London Bridge" Blues	Sharecropper + Family Norton + Dead Daughter	Black Powerhouse Norton's Power
3	Norton semi-conscious	Prostitutes White man as monkey, or goat	Crazy Vets + Supercargo Norton punched		Norton's eyes IM = walking zombie	Golden Day log cabins	Vets Philosophy Speech	out of tune Piano - frsts + elbows	"home- maker"	Norton as General Pershing Rockefeller Jefferson Daddy of Messiah
4	College = dreams	Wet Dream pregnant girls		Bledsoe letters mentioned	Bledsoe puts on mask BUT eyes reveal Veil depending on talking to Norton	White Line of road		"Live a Humble" Girl Singing	Rabb Hall	Bledsoe's Power
5	Founder's Dream or rather vision	Founder as seed in Mottor Earth = birth of Bledsoe	Words as violence slavery + Underground Railroad		Barbee blind (Honor) Moon as eye	Single Rose Barbee's black glasses	Barbee's Memorial Address (founder's parade)	Dvořák's New World Symphony: "Swing Low, Sweet Christ"		
6	Grandfather again	Like being castrated when Bledsoe talks of power	Bledsoe called IM, "nigger"	Seven Letters to Trustees	Eyes burning, occupied, Bledsoe's attack, eyes falling out	Old Leg Shackle	Bledsoe's Leath. or discipline	Harmonizing Blues Guitar + Piano	Coal Black Daddy = Bledsoe	Bledsoe's Power
7	New York = dream	White Woman as freedom, subway ride, dancing	Vet's words as violence Ras's hands	Bus Ticket	IM can't be seen leaving in light gog		Vet's Fatherly Advice + Ras Hints		Vet = "Be your own father" Ras' voice = father's	Same rules = Power
8	Grandfather dream so depressed Being next to wildness a dream	-		Letter to Norton like prayer to God NO ANSWER Letter from Emerson	Clock Eyes Peepholes	Bible rejects watch Statue of Liberty			Men's House Homesick Jesse himself as a young Bledsoe (G.O.P.)	Money + Clothing
9	Dream of Revenge	Unspeakable Club Calamus Gay "Pass"	Plans to kill Bledsoe Picking Robin clean	Seed Letter from Bledsoe Blueprint Totem and Calm	Ambition is blinding; don't blind yourself to the truth	Office Museum (birds) Pork chops + grits Blueprints	Peter Wheatstraw Raps Emerson Father's View	Blues- wheatstraw "Poor Robin"	Emerson JR opposer father college = parent	Move = Power Power of Letters
10	Fight like a dream explosion = immersion		Uproar Dept. "Fink" Fight with Brekway Boiler explodes		Gray Paint	Optic white 10 drops dope Liberty Paint sign False Teeth			Trained to accept the foolishness of OLD MEN (fools, clowns)	Machine inside the machine (Runs Plant)
11	Whole experience in machine is dream	Castration Boys in the Bushes	Electro- Shock Disconnected somehow	Placards with Quest. Insurance Release Form	Third Eye Vision blurred	umbilical cord, glass coff in electric chair	Dozens	Beethoven's Fifth Sym. Folk Blues "The Holy City Grandmother"	Rebirth Loses Name- Mother	electric current Doctors power
12	disillusioned dreamer,		Spittoon on Reverend			Overalls spittoon			Mary Rambo like Mother Infant's eyes	Mary = force

CH	Dreams	Sex	Violence	Paper	Vision	Object	Oratory	Music	Family	Power
13	Dream Book	Statue of Nude Nubian slave grins	Chitterlings at Bledside Marshals 3 days sight of with each as obscure	Manuscript Paper of Primus Provo Jack's number	Snow like veil Seeing Eye Seed "promises" graceful a candle fate away and long ago	All of the Old Couple's stuff YAMS (cabbage) Birds (CABE)	Eviction Speech Jack's Reuniting Pitch		Mother + Wash "brother" Old couple = relatives (same over)	Words move people to action "Blessing"
14	Grandfather + voting test (315)	Emma - eyes, presses against dancing vet's prediction + subway	Song like chitterlings in face	New Identity in Brother hood \$300	Emma's LOOK at him	Cabbage Chthonian (owl knocker) outworn clothes	Be the New Yorker T. Washington	"Back Water Blues" + "Go Down, Moses" The brother does dec. sing.	Mary thinks "we" Brother had bigger "we" live together	Dead have power
15	Lies about "mixed-up dream" of number		Hungover attack on radiator Killing roads with Mary	\$100 bill tabloid story about protest "rabble rouser" pamphlets	avoids Mary's eyes eyes shut on subway	old skin cast-iron minstrel bank + coins new suit		Mary singing and 4 others so I'm alone	Mary calls IM son	
16	Grandfather part/traitor self (335)			photo of fighter	boxer blinded here I'm blinded by spotlight one-eyed mice	Hooverville Master- bulldog	Dispossessed 1st Brotherhood speech	"John Brown's Body"	Birth rituals Jack = father Create ourselves	IM's speech releases energy of people
17	Numbers/Dream Book (38) old self dream of Grandpa, etc. Familiar people relationships like in a dream - top 30	Use white woman to bring Carter who talks occasional skills of rape + incest	Fight with Ras + men		Fight is in dark	Two pull fight printing April 7 calendar Douglass poster	Ras's Exhortation monstrous IM + Tod	"Media Luz" Redes Hot Foot Squad	Black Brotherhood	Words as power
18	Grandfather in Tarps eyes	Woman question assigned	Lea chain used like brass knuckles	Warning Note IM's picture in magazine	Westrum hidden by mask but blazing eye	Rainbow Poster Lea Chain (grandfather's watch)	"Trial" by Westrum prosecuting	spiritual		Secrets of power + authority almost in IM's grasp
19	Beautiful dreamer + Imbert's visit are dream like awakens from deep sleep	... = Sex Symbolic woman "flashes" + communicates	Imaginary Lunch Mob			Nude Renour Mirror				
20	Street like dream in 30 mins IM's been dreaming	Foot Suits	Tod shot IM spits on doll Man want to fight in bar		No one on street fixes with eyes	Sambo doll	Sambo Spiel	blues from Haldon Day nun parade	→ Mary's	Being outside HISTORY as power
21				Black-bordered banners + banners etc.	Tod full of illusions		Mount Morris Park Funeral Eulogy	"There's Many a Thousand Sone" drum corps		Sambo/ Stereotype as power
22	Grandfather looking across dream room during meeting	Tobitt's black wife	IM breaks glass		Jack like cyclops	Jack's eye			Marse Jack in fatherly role	Discipline Sacrifice as Power
23	Jack, Norton, Emerson merge into Grandfather curse embraced	Rinehart's girl Emma remembers dance, plans to seduce	Ras's men attack IM Maceo's knife Barnhouse's gun	Handbill from Rinehart	green glasses change sight "let there be light" in church	green glasses + white hat	Brother's Homogenized of New Program	"Jelly Jelly" on juke box nursery rhymes	fraternity of hipsters	Disguise as power
24		Siby asks IM to rape by "Santa, Claus" nymphomaniac	Vandalism Slaps Sibyl		dizzy, foggy blurred like watery waves (also drunk)				IM is oddly protective of Sibyl Brother Taboo	
25	Cops = blue dream Remembered dreams castration dream	Castration - generations on the water	Ras's men, RIOT, shot, spear + jaw building burns	Paper in briefcase	flash or flame to see by dark mass in vision	Briefcase - glasses broken BURNS ALL	Ras + IM argue	Joe Louis's blues "Times flying" spiritual	Trying to get to Mary's	People have power (Dupre + Scottfield)
EPI	Grandfather references several times					Disembodied voice		Louis Armstrong	Sees Norton again -	Self as power Telling story

Study Guide for *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

Terms

- | | | | |
|--------------|---------------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| 1. imagery | 8. reliability | 15. trickster | 22. propaganda novel |
| 2. symbolism | 9. naïve narrator | 16. picaresque | 23. slave narrative |
| 3. prologue | 10. point of view | 17. gothic novel | 24. naturalism |
| 4. epilogue | 11. taboo | 18. kunstlerroman | 25. realism |
| 5. irony | 12. rite of passage | 19. bildungsroman | 26. surrealism |
| 6. satire | 13. stereotype | 20. epic novel | 27. Freudianism |
| 7. idiom | 14. allegorical | 21. quest novel | 28. existentialism |

Imagery and Symbolism

1. How does the vision imagery relate to the theme of invisibility? Consider darkness and light, blindness and insight, visibility and invisibility.
2. Discuss the significant dreams in *Invisible Man*.
3. How does the collection of items in the Invisible Man's briefcase parallel his own development?
4. What is the symbolic importance of the Sambo doll?
5. Investigate any Christ symbols in the novel.
6. Discuss the symbolic function of names in *Invisible Man*.
7. How does Ellison use the running man metaphor?
8. Ellison does not use color imagery, but depends solely upon black and white. What do these colors mean in his novel and how does he demonstrate his meanings?
9. How does Ellison use food symbolically?
10. Discuss the function of music.
11. What do the Zoot suiters symbolize for the Invisible Man?
12. Explain how paper objects signal important turning points for the narrator.
13. How are animal and machine imagery used?

Significant Scenes

1. How does his grandfather's "curse" and death scene affect the Invisible Man throughout the book?
2. In what ways is the Battle Royal an initiation rite?
3. Explore the possible meanings of Trueblood's narrative — as an inversion of sexual Taboos, "puttin' on the massa" slave tale, racial purity symbolism, pure sexual titillation, etc.
4. Explain why *Invisible Man*'s confrontation with Dr. Bledsoe is so devastating for him.
5. What is really happening in the scene between young Emerson and the Invisible Man?
6. Why must the Invisible Man fight Brockway?
7. In what ways does the Invisible Man's hospital experience resemble death and rebirth?
8. Why does Ellison develop in such detail the scene between the Invisible Man and Sybil?
9. How does Tod's death affect the Invisible Man?
10. What insight does the Invisible Man gain by disguising himself as Rinehart?

Characterization

1. Is the Invisible Man a hero or an anti-hero?
2. Compare and contrast the characters of the young men who figure significantly in the novel — Tod Clifton, Ras the Destroyer, and Rinehart.
3. Compare and contrast the characters of the older men who figure significantly in the book — Dr. Bledsoe, Lucius Brockway, and Brother Jack.
4. Compare and contrast the characters of the women who figure significantly in the novel — Mary Rambo, Sybil, and Emma.

Prepared by Sandra Effinger, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
Please see my website for more materials and links, including art and music resources.
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Structure

1. The book is organized around four adventures which are essentially the same adventure again and again, moving from the particular to the universal in scope. What adventure?
2. The book moves from a state of illusion to a state of perception using the controlling metaphors of vision to express these states, and the metaphor of death and rebirth to mark the passage from one condition to the other. Explain.
3. The novel is a succession of episodes which finally strip the hero of his illusions and his innocence. Explain.
4. There is an odyssey taking place on four levels – geographic, social, historical, and philosophical. Explain.
5. The book is a quest novel with two searches – the quest for a father or a mother and the quest for brotherhood. Explain.
6. The book is one long ironic joke wherein the trickster tricks even himself. Explain.
7. The book is a dramatized version of black history, especially noting the movement from the South to the North, from the country to the city, from the field to the factory, from slavery to emancipation. Explain.
8. The book is an elaborate striptease, wherein masks are removed and stereotypes are discarded until we are left finally with the inner soul of one man facing himself. Explain.
9. Ellison has said that the novel is divided into three parts, each of which has its own style, moving from realism to expressionism to surrealism, as the narrator moves from the familiar to the unfamiliar. Explain.

Philosophy

1. Define “Rinehartism.”
2. In general, what view of history does the Invisible Man embrace?
3. Is this an existential novel?
4. Is this novel comic or tragic?
5. What is Dr. Bledsoe's personal philosophy?
6. What is the ideology of the Brotherhood?

Type of Novel

1. In what ways does this novel draw upon the traditions of the following kinds of novels – gothic novel, epic novel, picaresque novel, quest novel, bildungsroman, kunstlerroman, and propaganda novel?
2. Does this novel satisfy Stepto's definition of a slave narrative which combines both ascent and immersion forms?

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STYLE: Learning from Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Sample: The following sentence from page 71 is graphed below. Note that there are alternative ways to graph this same sentence.

Up ahead I saw the one who thought he was a drum major strutting in front, giving orders as he moved energetically in long, hip-swinging strides, a cane held above his head, rising and falling as though in time to music.

*Up ahead
I saw the one
who thought he was a drum major
strutting in front,
giving orders
as he moved energetically
in long, hip-swinging strides,
a cane held above his head,
rising and falling
as though in time to music.*

Passage One: Everyone fought hysterically . . . the blood spattering from my chest. (Page 23)

Passage Two: It was a beautiful college . . . where the road turned off to the insane asylum. (Page 34)

Passage Three: I always come this far and open my eyes . . . but recall only the drunken laughter of sad, sad whores. (Page 35)

Passage Four: His voice was mellow and with more meaning than I could fathom . . . with the rich man reminiscing on the rear seat. (Page 39)

Passage Five: I headed the car through the red-brick campus . . . helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness. (Page 99)

Passage Six: As the sound of vespers . . . and the moon a white man's bloodshot eye. (Pages 109-110)

Passage Seven: As the organ voices died . . . through the contained liquid of her large uplifted eyes. (Pages 116-117)

Passages from Ellison's *Invisible Man*:

The boys groped about like blind, cautious crabs

crouching to protect their mid-sections,
their heads pulled in short against their shoulders,
their arms stretched nervously before them,
with their fists testing the smoke-filled air
like the knobbed feelers of hypersensitive snails.

In one corner

I glimpsed a boy

violently punching the air
and heard him scream in pain
as he smashed his hand against a ring post.

The room spun round me,

a swirl of lights, smoke, sweating bodies
surrounded by tense white faces.

I bled from both nose and mouth,

the blood spattering upon my chest.

Honeysuckle and purple wisteria hung heavy from the trees and white magnolias mixed with their scents in the bee-humming air.

I've recalled it often, here in my hole:

How the grass turned green in the springtime and
how the mocking birds fluttered their tails and sang,
how the moon shone down on the buildings,
how the bell in the chapel tower rang out the precious short-lived hours;
how the girls in bright summer dresses promenaded the grassy lawn.

The sound floats over all,

clear like the night,
liquid,
serene, and
lonely.

I wanted to stop the car and talk with Mr. Norton,

to beg his pardon for what he had seen;
to plead and show him tears,
unashamed tears like those of a child before his parent;
to denounce all we'd seen and heard;
to assure him
that far from being like any of the people we had seen,
I hated them,
that I believed in the principles of the Founder with all my heart and soul, and
that I believed in his own goodness and kindness
in extending the hand of his benevolence
to helping us poor, ignorant people out of the mire and darkness.

I could not understand the words,
but only the mood, / / of the singing.
sorrowful,
vague and
ethereal

Many times,
here at night,
I've closed my eyes and walked along the forbidden road
that winds past the girls' dormitories,
past the hall with the clock in the tower,
its windows warmly aglow,
on down past the small white Home Economics practice cottage,
whiter still in the moonlight, and
on down the road with its sloping and turning,
paralleling the black powerhouse
with its engines droning earth-shaking rhythms in the dark,
its windows red from the glow of the furnace,
on to where the road became a bridge over a dry riverbed,
tangled with brush and clinging vines;
the bridge of rustic logs,
made for trysting,
but virginal
and untested by lovers;
on up the road,
past the buildings,
with the southern verandas half-a-city-block long,
to the sudden forking,
barren of buildings, birds, or grass,
where the road turned off to the insane asylum.

As I drove,
**faded and yellowed pictures of the school's early days displayed in the library flashed
across the screen of my mind,**
coming fitfully and fragmentarily to life --
photographs of men and women in wagons drawn by mule teams and oxen,
dressed in black, dusty clothing,
people who seemed almost without individuality,
a black mob that seemed to be waiting,
looking with blank faces, and
among them the inevitable collection of white men and women in smiles,
clear of features,
striking,
elegant and
confident.

**It throbbed with nostalgia, regret and repentance, and
I sat with a lump in my throat**

as she sank slowly down;
not a sitting but a controlled collapsing,
as though she were balancing,
sustaining the simmering bubble of her final tone
by some delicate rhythm of her heart's blood, or
by some mystic concentration of her being,
focused upon the sound
through the contained liquid of her large uplifted eyes.

Ellisonian Sentence

I think that with the brilliant potential he has shown
it is certain he will be a great leader of men,
a royal king among mere princes,
a shining star among mundane comets,
a glittering diamond among dull stones,
a majestic unicorn among common horses,
a steering ship among unguided boats;
and in his greatness he will be **MAGNIFICENT!**

Carla Sledge (Hinton)
December 9, 1983

PUTTIN' ON THE PERSONA: INVISIBLE MAN

Put on your Invisible Man persona, become the character and write the specific Autobiography Portfolio assignment given to you and you alone. Please note that you will receive no credit at all for writing any assignment other than the one I have chosen just for you. (Please use notebook paper for this assignment.)

Likes / Dislikes List: _____

Make two columns, one titled "Likes," the other "Dislikes," and list from ten to fifteen specific items in each column. Avoid naming specific classmates and teachers by generalizing. For example, "that mean teacher who's making me write an autobiography," not my name!

Metaphorical Definitions: _____

This kind of definition helps make abstract words easier to understand by giving a specific concrete example. A famous metaphorical definition is "Happiness is a warm puppy." For you, happiness may be something very different -- a raise in your allowance, a banana split, a room of your own. Write metaphorical definitions of ten different abstract nouns. Your concrete example must be something specific that you can sense -- taste, touch, smell, see, or hear. Your definitions should follow the format below:

METAPHORICAL DEFINITION = ABSTRACT NOUN + IS + CONCRETE EXAMPLE

The Perfect Present: _____

Since I am the perfect teacher, I have the ability to select the perfect present for each of you. It's something you've always wanted, something you've secretly yearned for. It's not a black Trans-Am or designer jeans because there's a catch -- the gift is intangible, or abstract. This means that you cannot perceive it with the five senses. For example, you might want patience, self-confidence, intuition. Tell me what the gift is, why it's the perfect gift, why you need it, and how it will affect your life.

Personal Metaphors: 1-10 _____ 11-20 _____

Make a list of metaphorical comparisons. Think, "If I were an animal, what kind of animal would I be?" For each item, write the general label and then your specific comparison. Be realistic, be somewhat honest, and be able to explain your choices. Don't say you are a rose, if you're really a daisy. *Explain your Invisible Man choices in a few sentences each.*

- | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Animal | 11. Musical Instrument |
| 2. Car | 12. Geometric Shape |
| 3. Article of Clothing | 13. Piece of Furniture |
| 4. Day of the Week | 14. Song |
| 5. Food | 15. Season of the Year |
| 6. Color | 16. Television Character |
| 7. Movie | 17. Comic or Cartoon Character |
| 8. Fragrance | 18. Appliance or Machinery |
| 9. Type of Building | 19. Natural Phenomenon |
| 10. Flower | 20. Word |

Unfinished Sentences: _____

Complete each of the following sentences by expanding them into short paragraphs. As always, be specific.

- | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. I usually worry about... | 6. I feel frustrated when... |
| 2. I feel angry when... | 7. I feel depressed when... |
| 3. I'm moody when... | 8. I am comfortable when... |
| 4. I'm happiest when... | 9. I feel nervous when... |
| 5. I feel confident when... | 10. I feel sentimental when... |

Look Who I Look Up To: _____

Think of three people of established reputation whom you admire. You may need to do some formal research on these people, so don't choose your Aunt Helen unless she's in the encyclopedia. You must be specific. If you admire Martin Luther King, Jr., saying he fought for civil rights isn't enough. Exactly what did he do? Devote one solid paragraph to each person, telling what each person has done to deserve your admiration.

These Words Belong to Me: _____

Make a list of words which have special power and magic. Think of common words with uncommon meanings, or even strange new words which allow you to think a new kind of thought. For example, do you know what "serendipity" means? Find out why it's so wonderful. What's ironic about a "scar"? List and define at least ten words. For each word, explain why this particular word belongs to you. Or perhaps give me a hint hidden in a question?

As Time Goes Bye-Bye: _____

Carpe diem (or, Seize the day!). Before time passes you by, what things do you want to do? What one thing do you most want to do by the time you are thirty-five? Why? What have you already said goodbye to – people, places, ideas, stages in your life, hopes, dreams, sorrows? Reflect on those goodbyes and/or grand plans. Make a list with short explanations, or concentrate on explaining one specific goal or farewell in depth.

Flashback: _____

If you could relive one day or experience in your life, what would it be? You might choose to relive this time because it was so wonderful you want to experience it again, or you might choose a day you want to change in some way. Identify the day or experience, tell why it was so important to you, and explain what reliving it would accomplish.

In Other Words: _____

Try expressing yourself through someone else’s words. Select at least ten “Quotable Quotes” which express your philosophy of life. Choose quotations which represent your thought on several aspects of life – not only love, but also faith, success, integrity, character, friendship, etc. List the ten you have selected, including attribution (who said it).

Remembrance of Things Present: _____

In twenty years you will have forgotten most of the things that fill your life now. What are the things about who you are now, what you enjoy and value, what you do with your time, and so on that you want to remember twenty years from now? Imagine what will be important to your memory of yourself later on. Write these things down.

Futures -- Fantasy and Fact: _____

This is a three-part assignment. In the first paragraph, pretend that you can see yourself ten years from now. Describe your future as it could be if all your wishes came true. This description is “romantic.” In the second paragraph, describe what your life will probably be like ten years from now if you continue just as you are now. No miracles or magic allowed. This description is “realistic.” For most people, the “romantic” and “realistic” descriptions are very different. In the third paragraph, analyze the discrepancy. Discuss the specific differences between your two descriptions and how you feel about these differences. Finally, explain the steps you can take to find a sensible compromise between the romantic and the realistic.

My Own List of Lists: 1-5 _____ 6-10 _____

Now in its third edition, *The Book of Lists*, lists facts from history, literature, science, entertainment, etc. For your list of lists, I have selected more personal topics. Write the general label for each category and underline it. Then list from six to ten specific items under each category. You may write in two columns to save space.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. People who have influenced me... | 6. Things that worry me... |
| 2. Places that make me happy... | 7. Things I would like to know how to do... |
| 3. Places I would like to go... | 8. Things that have moved me... |
| 4. Things in people which I like... | 9. Ideas that intrigue me... |
| 5. Things in people which I dislike... | 10. My personal favorites... |

Metamorphosis: _____

Make a list of objects, places, ideas that could stand for your younger self, symbols for the way you used to be. Then make a contrasting list that could stand for your current self, symbols that represent the way you are now. Sort of an “I used to be...but now I am...” kind of chart. Use these contrasting lists to write a free verse poem on your transformation.

Cheer Yourself Up!: _____

Got the blues? Down in the dumps? Make a list of crazy things you could do to distract yourself from your troubles. Some possibilities -- Play Frisbee with your old, worn-out records, smile all the way through class and make your teacher wonder what’s going on, or cover your front teeth with foil to look like braces. Think of your own ideas, both sane and crazy. You might want to draw cartoons to go with some of your ideas.

One Medium Suitcase: _____

Imagine that you are leaving home forever, and you can only take with you what will fit in one medium-sized suitcase. Think about the things that you truly value. Specifically, what will you take with you and why? Explain.

Lessons I Learned After It Was Too Late: _____

It seems that we always learn the most important lessons the hard way, usually when it’s too late, when we’ve already made our big mistakes. Look back over your life and write approximately a page on the lessons you learned after it was too late.



After Invisible Man by Jeff Wall



Lifting the Veil of Ignorance by Charles Keck
Booker T. Washington National Monument at Tuskegee University

(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue

Lyrics by Harry Brooks and Andy Razaf

Music by Fats Waller

Performed by Louis Armstrong

Cold empty bed...springs hard as lead
Feel like ole Ned...wished I was dead
What did I do...to be so black and blue?

Even the mouse...ran from my house
They laugh at you...and scorn you too
What did I do...to be so black and blue?

I'm white...inside...but, that don't help my case
'cause I...can't hide...what is in my face

How would it end...ain't got a friend
My only sin...is in my skin
What did I do...to be so black and blue?

(instrumental break)

How will it end...I ain't got a friend
My only sin...is in my skin
What did I do...to be so black and blue?

Strange Fruit

Lyrics and Music by Abel Meeropol

Performed by Billie Holiday

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the Southern breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees.

Pastoral scene of the gallant South,
The bulging eyes and the twisted mouth,
Scent of magnolia, sweet and fresh,
Then the sudden smell of burning flesh.

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck,
For the rain to gather, for the wind to suck,
For the sun to rot, for the trees to drop,
Here is a strange and bitter crop.

An Essay on a Wickedly Powerful Word

By Keith M. Woods

Poynter Dean

August 25, 2002

When I heard Mark Fuhrman's voice saying the word "nigger," I heard a lynch mob. I saw the grim and gleeful faces of murderous white men. I felt the coarse, hairy rope. I smelled the sap of the hangin' tree and saw Billie Holiday's "strange fruit" dangling from its strongest limb.

What a wickedly powerful word, nigger. So many other slurs could have slithered from Fuhrman's tongue and revealed his racism without provoking those images:

Jiggaboo.

Spade.

Coon.

I hear the hatred in those words, but I don't feel the fire's heat the way I do when this white former policeman says nigger. Somewhere in that visceral reflex is the reason news organizations had to use that word this time around.

Somewhere in the sting of seeing it, hearing it, feeling it is the reason they should think hard before using it the next time.

In context, there is no other way to report what Mark Fuhrman said. "Racial epithet" doesn't quite get it, does it? "Spearchucker" is a racial epithet, but it doesn't make you see burnt crosses and white sheets. Just rednecks.

The "n-word" sounds silly, childish, something you'd say when you don't want your 3-year-old to know what you're talking about. And "n-----?" What does that accomplish other than to allow newspapers the dubious out of saying, "Well, it's actually the reader who's saying nigger, not us."

When Mark Fuhrman or any person armed with a club or a gun or a bat or a judicial robe or a teaching certificate or any measure of power says "nigger," it's more than an insult. It summons all the historic and modern-day violence that is packed into those six letters.

Nigger is "Know your place."

Nigger is, "I am better than you."

Nigger is, "I can frame you or flunk you or beat you or kill you because ..."

Nigger is, "I own you."

You just can't convey that definition with n-dash-dash-dash-dash-dash. You can't communicate it with bleeps or blurbs or euphemisms. The problem is that sometimes the only way to do your job as a journalist is to say or write the word that furthers the mission of racists.

I'd like to believe that there's some lessening of harm every time the word sees the light of day. I once fantasized about a day when a group of black rappers or comedians would appropriate the white sheets and hoods of the KKK and go gallivanting across MTV or HBO and forever render that image so utterly ridiculous that no self-respecting racist would ever wear it again.

But then, Richard Pryor tried to appropriate nigger, didn't he? Took it right from the white folks and turned it into a career before he thought better of it. So did the rappers NWA ("Niggas With Attitudes"). So did my friends on the streets of New Orleans. So has a generation of young black people today.

Still, the definition didn't change.

Dick Gregory tried it. In the dedication of his autobiography, "Nigger," the comedian-turned-activist wrote: "Dear Momma -- Wherever you are, if ever you hear the word 'nigger' again, remember they are advertising my book."

He wrote that 31 years ago, but if Lucille Gregory were here to hear Mark Fuhrman, she'd surely know he wasn't talking about her son's novel. The definition doesn't change. It doesn't hurt any less after three decades. No less after three centuries.

It's the same word, spiked with the same poison, delivering the same message of inferiority, degradation, hatred and shame. The same word whether it's Fuhrman saying it or Huck Finn or Def Comedy Jam or Snoop Doggy Dogg or my old friends from Touro Street (Because, they do call themselves nigger, you know).

It hurts every time it's in the paper or on the air or in the street. Every time. Sometimes there's no way around using it in the media, but only sometimes.

Could there come a day when you see it or read it or hear it from the homeboys so much that you hardly notice? When your eyebrow doesn't arch as often or your jaw suddenly drop when the six o'clock anchor plops the word onto your living room coffee table?

Maybe. And you might even say, that day, "Oh, they're just talking about niggers again."

Are we better off then?

Blacks: Offended by use of N-word? Then stop saying it.

Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service | March 25, 1998 | Pitts, Leonard, Jr.

As Richard Pryor told it years ago, he was sitting in a hotel lobby on a trip to Africa when he heard a voice within. "What do you see?" it asked. "Look around."

"I looked around and I saw people of all colors and shapes. And the voice said, 'Do you see any niggers?' I said, 'No.' It said, 'Do you know why? There aren't any.'"

Pryor told an audience that he started crying then. The comedian, whose speech had always been peppered with that ugly word, abruptly realized that it had not passed his lips in the three weeks he'd spent among the blacks of Africa. Pryor subsequently renounced the word altogether: The most profane man in America decided that here was a term too profane even for him.

I mention this only because there is, in case you hadn't noticed, a renewed struggle under way over the use and abuse of the N-word. And it's left me a little ticked off at the blatant hypocrisy. Of black people.

I'm sorry, but I just don't get it. Over recent months, black activists have battled the people who put out the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a black educator has challenged Mark Twain's "Huckleberry Finn," and Spike Lee has lambasted Quentin Tarantino, all over the use and abuse of the N-word.

But I haven't seen anybody say a damn thing about black comics who fly it like a dirty flag. Haven't heard a peep about the tiny talents of raunch rap who spill it into the ether like sewage. Haven't heard anyone say the obvious: that if we as African-Americans truly abhor this word, then the protest ought to begin on our own doorstep.

Yeah, yeah, I know the rules. It's OK for us to say it, but not for whites. Except that some young blacks say it is OK for whites if those whites are honorary blacks, down with the brothers. Yet if those same whites mistakenly use the word outside their circle of black friends, they're likely to incite a riot.

I know the rules, but the rules are stupid. Contradictory. And confusing. If white people are baffled about what is and isn't allowed, I can't blame them. I blame us.

We've become entirely too casual, too gratuitous, with this instrument of disparagement. These days, one is less likely to hear the word from a white jerk with his bedsheet draped on his head than from a black one with his pants sagging off his butt. I once heard a young black colleague make a point of saying it in front of a white woman, who was properly flummoxed. The colleague explained with blithe self-satisfaction that she enjoyed dropping the word into conversation in order to observe white folks' stunned reaction.

All of which suggests to me that we as black people suffer from historical amnesia. A blindness to the suffering of ancestors. And a stubborn refusal to learn the lesson Pryor did _ to grow up and leave this evil thing behind.

So the last word some beaten black man heard before gravity yanked him down and the rope bit into his neck becomes a shock tactic for a callow youth. The word that followed his torn corpse as it was dragged down dusty roads behind the bumper of a car now serves some oafish rapper who can't find anything else to rhyme with trigger.

That's grotesque. It is obscene.

And it renders just slightly hollow all these recent protests of mortal offense.

I'm supposed to be outraged that the word is used _ with historical accuracy _ in a classic novel that came out 114 years ago? No. Mark Twain doesn't bother me. Snoop Doggy Dogg does. Def comedy does.

Because they suggest to me that behind the facade of arrogant cool, we still hate us.

That self-loathing is slavery's hardest legacy, Jim Crow's bastard child. And I'm impatient to see it dead. Impatient for a day when we love ourselves enough to be offended by anyone who uses this word. Moreover, love our children enough to stop teaching it to them.

Here's a new and much simpler rule for the use of the N-word:

Don't.

Pitts, Leonard, Jr. "Blacks: Offended by use of N-word? Then stop saying it." Knight Ridder/Tribune News Service. Tribune Company. March 25, 1998.

Zora Neale Hurston's Self-Introduction

How It Feels to Be Colored Me

I am colored but I offer nothing in the way of extenuating circumstances except the fact that I am the only Negro in the United States whose grandfather on the mother's side was not an Indian chief.

I remember the very day that I became colored. Up to my thirteenth year I lived in the little Negro town of Eatonville, Florida. It is exclusively a colored town. The only white people I knew passed through the town going to or coming from Orlando. The native whites rode dusty horses, the Northern tourists chugged down the sandy village road in automobiles. The town knew the Southerners and never stopped cane chewing when they passed. But the Northerners were something else again. They were peered at cautiously from behind curtains by the timid. The more venturesome would come out on the porch to watch them go past and got just as much pleasure out of the tourists as the tourists got out of the village.

The front porch might seem a daring place for the rest of the town, but it was a gallery seat to me. My favorite place was atop the gate-post. Proscenium box for a born first-nighter. Not only did I enjoy the show, but I didn't mind the actors knowing that I liked it. I usually spoke to them in passing. I'd wave at them and when they returned my salute, I would say something like this: "Howdy-do-well-I-thank-you-where-you-goin'?" Usually the automobile or the horse paused at this, and after a queer exchange of compliments, I would probably "go a piece of the way" with them, as we say in farthest Florida. If one of my family happened to come to the front in time to see me, of course negotiations would be rudely broken off. But even so, it is clear that I was the first "welcome-to-our-state" Floridian, and I hope the Miami Chamber of Commerce will please take notice.

During this period, white people differed from colored to me only in that they rode through town and never lived there. They liked to hear me "speak pieces" and sing and wanted to see me dance the parse-me-la, and gave me generously of their small silver for doing these things, which seemed strange to me for I wanted to do them so much that I needed bribing to stop. Only they didn't know it. The colored people gave no dimes. They deplored any joyful tendencies in me, but I was their Zora nevertheless. I belonged to them, to the nearby hotels, to the county-- everybody's Zora.

But changes came in the family when I was thirteen, and I was sent to school in Jacksonville. I left Eatonville, the town of the oleanders, as Zora. When I disembarked from the river-boat at Jacksonville, she was no more. It seemed that I had suffered a sea change. I was not Zora of Orange County any more, I was now a little colored girl. I found it out in certain ways. In my heart as well as in the mirror, I became a fast brown-- warranted not to rub nor run.

But I am not tragically colored. There is no great sorrow dammed up in my soul, nor lurking behind my eyes. I do not mind at all. I do not belong to the sobbing school of Negrohood who hold that nature somehow has given them a lowdown dirty deal and whose feelings are all hurt about it. Even in the helter-skelter skirmish that is my life, I have seen that the world is to the strong regardless of a little pigmentation more or less. No, I do not weep at the world--I am too busy sharpening my oyster knife.

Someone is always at my elbow reminding me that I am the granddaughter of slaves. It fails to register depression with me. Slavery is sixty years in the past. The operation was successful and the patient is doing well, thank you. The terrible struggle that made me an American out of a potential slave said "On the line!" The Reconstruction said "Get set!"; and the generation before said "Go!" I am off to a flying start and I must not halt in the stretch to look behind and weep. Slavery is the price I paid for civilization, and the choice was not with me. It is a bully adventure and worth all that I have paid through my ancestors for it. No one on earth ever had a greater chance for glory. The world to be won and nothing to be lost. It is thrilling to think--to know that for any act of mine, I shall get twice as much praise or twice as much blame. It is quite exciting to hold the center of the national stage, with the spectators not knowing whether to laugh or to weep.

The position of my white neighbor is much more difficult. No brown specter pulls up a chair beside me when I sit down to eat. No dark ghost thrusts its leg against mine in bed. The game of keeping what one has is never so exciting as the game of getting.

I do not always feel colored. Even now I often achieve the unconscious Zora of Eatonville before the Hegira. I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background.

For instance at Barnard. "Beside the waters of the Hudson" I feel my race. Among the thousand white persons, I am a dark rock surged upon, overswept by a creamy sea. I am surged upon and overswept, but through it all, I remain myself. When covered by the waters, I am; and the ebb but reveals me again.

Sometimes it is the other way around. A white person is set down in our midst, but the contrast is just as sharp for me. For instance, when I sit in the drafty basement that is The New World Cabaret with a white person, my color comes. We enter chatting about any little nothing that we have in common and are seated by the jazz waiters. In the abrupt way that jazz orchestras have, this one plunges into a number. It loses no time in circumlocutions, but gets right down to business. It constricts the thorax and splits the heart with its tempo and narcotic harmonies. This orchestra grows rambunctious, rears on its hind legs and attacks the tonal veil with primitive fury, rending it, clawing it until it breaks through the jungle beyond. I follow those heathen--follow them exultingly. I dance wildly inside myself; I yell within, I whoop; I shake my assegai above my head, I hurl it true to the mark yeeeooww! *I am in the jungle and living in the jungle way. My face is painted red and yellow and my body is painted blue. My pulse is throbbing like a war drum. I want to slaughter something--give pain, give death to what, I do not know. But the piece ends. The men of the orchestra wipe their lips and rest their fingers. I creep back slowly to the veneer we call civilization with the last tone and find the white friend sitting motionless in his seat, smoking calmly.*

"Good music they have here," he remarks, drumming the table with his fingertips.

Music! The great blobs of purple and red emotion have not touched him. He has only heard what I felt. He is far away and I see him but dimly across the ocean and the continent that have fallen between us. He is so pale with his whiteness then and I am so colored.

At certain times I have no race, I am me. When I set my hat at a certain angle and saunter down Seventh Avenue, Harlem City, feeling as snooty as the lions in front of the Forty-Second Street Library, for instance. So far as my feelings are concerned, Peggy Hopkins Joyce on the Boule Mich with her gorgeous raiment, stately carriage, knees knocking together in a most aristocratic manner, has nothing on me. The cosmic Zora emerges. I belong to no race nor time. I am the eternal feminine with its string of beads.

I have no separate feeling about being an American citizen and colored. It merely astonishes me. How can any deny themselves the pleasure of my company! It's beyond me.

But in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, lengths of string, a key to a door long since crumbled away, a rusty knifeblade, old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two, still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held--so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place--who knows?

[--Zora Neale Hurston (from The World Tomorrow, 1928.)

That Word “Black”

“This evening,” said Simple, “I feel like talking about the word black.”

“Nobody’s stopping you, so go ahead. But what you really ought to have is a soap-box out on the corner of 126th and Lenox where the rest of the orators hang out.”

“They expresses some good ideas on that corner,” said Simple, “but for my ideas I do not need a crowd. Now, as I were saying, the word *black*, white folks have done used that word to mean something bad so often until now when the N.A.A.C.P. asks for civil rights for the black man, they think they must be bad. Looking back into history, I reckon it all started with a *black* cat meaning bad luck. Don’t let one cross your path!

“Next, somebody got up a *black-list* on which you get if you don’t vote right. Then when lodges come into being, the folks they didn’t want in them got *black-balled*. If you kept a skeleton in your closet, you might get *black-mailed*. And everything bad was *black*. When it came down to the unlucky ball on the pool table, the eight-rock, they made it the *black* ball. So no wonder there ain’t no equal rights for the *black* man.”

“All you say is true about the odium attached to the word *black*,” I said. “You’ve even forgotten a few. For example, during the war if you bought something under the table, illegally, they said you were trading on the *black* market. In Chicago, if you’re a gangster, the *Black Hand-Society* may take you for a ride. And certainly if you don’t behave yourself, your family will say you’re a *black* sheep. Then if your mama burns a *black* candle to change the family luck, they call it *black* magic.”

“My mama never did believe in voodoo so she did not burn no black candles,” said Simple.

“If she had, that would have been a *black* mark against her.”

“Stop talking about my mama. What I want to know is, where do white folks get off calling everything bad *black*? If it is a dark night, they say it’s *black* as hell. If you are mean and evil, they say you got a *black* heart. I would like to change all that around and say that the people who Jim Crow me have got a *white* heart. People who sell dope to children have got a *white* mark against them. And all the white gamblers who were behind the basketball fix are the *white* sheep of the sports world. God knows there was few, if any, Negroes selling stuff on the black market during the war, so why didn’t they call it the *white* market? No, they got to take me and my color and turn it into everything *bad*. According to white folks, black is bad.

“Wait till my day comes! In my language, bad will be *white*. Blackmail will be *white* mail. Black cats will be good luck, and *white* cats will be bad. If a *white* cat crosses your path, look out! I will take the black ball for the cue ball and let the *white* ball be the unlucky eight-rock. And on my blacklist -- which will be a *white* list then -- I will put everybody who ever Jim Crowed me from Rankin to Hitler, Talmadge to Malan, South Carolina to South Africa.

“I am black. When I look in the mirror, I see myself, daddy-o, but I am not ashamed. God made me. He did not make us no badder than the rest of the folks. The earth is black and all kinds of good things comes out of the earth. Trees and flowers and fruit and sweet potatoes and corn and all that keeps mens alive comes right up out of the earth -- good old black earth. Coal is black and it warms your house and cooks your food. The night is black, which has a moon, and a million stars, and is beautiful. Sleep is black which gives you rest, so you wake up feeling good. I am black. I feel very good this evening.

“What is wrong with black?”

Robert Stepto's *From Behind the Veil: A Study of Afro-American Narrative* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1979) identifies two basic types of narrative expressions: the **narrative of ascent** and the **narrative of immersion**.

The classic ascent narrative launches an "enslaved" and semi-literate figure on a ritualized journey to a symbolic North; that journey is charted through spatial expressions of social structure, invariably systems of signs that the questing figure must read in order to be increasingly literate and increasingly free. The ascent narrative conventionally ends with the questing figure situated in the least oppressive social structure afforded by the world of the narrative, and free in the sense that he or she has gained sufficient literacy to assume the mantle of articulate survivor. As the phrase "articulate survivor" suggests, the hero or heroine of an ascent narrative must be willing to forsake familial and communal postures in the narrative's most oppressive social structure for a new posture in the least oppressive environment--at best, one of solitude; at worst, one of alienation. This last feature of the ascent narrative unquestionably helps bring about the rise and development of an immersion narrative in the tradition. . .

The immersion narrative is fundamentally an expression of a ritualized journey into a symbolic South, in which the protagonist seeks those aspects of tribal literacy that ameliorate, if not obliterate, the conditions imposed by solitude. The conventional immersion narrative ends almost paradoxically, with the questing figure located in or near the narrative's most oppressive social structure but free in the sense that he has regained sufficient tribal literacy to assume the mantle of an articulate kinsman. As the phrase "articulate kinsman" suggests, the hero or heroine of an immersion narrative must be willing to forsake highly individualized mobility in the narrative's least oppressive social structure for a posture of relative stasis in the most oppressive environment, a loss that is only occasionally assuaged by the newfound balms of group identity . . . (p. 167)

ESSAY QUESTIONS on *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison

Paragraph Topics: Answer each of the following questions in a blue book. Cite specific quotes, passages, pages (Somewhere indicate which book you're using for page citations).

1. List the objects in Invisible Man's briefcase at the end of the novel, and write at least one sentence explaining why each is important.
2. Explore several possible meanings to the last sentence in the novel.
3. Select what you consider to be the most important symbol in the novel and prove your opinion by relating it to the novel as a whole.
4. Select what you consider to be the most important quotation in the novel and prove your opinion by relating it to the novel as a whole.
5. Select what you consider to be the most important chapter in the novel and prove your opinion by relating it to the novel as a whole.
6. Machiavelli would admire several people who live in this novel. Write a paragraph about one character who appears to apply Machiavelli's advice to the Prince. Cite specific examples.
7. According to Northrop Frye's Five Categories of Hero, what kind of hero is Invisible Man? Explain in a paragraph, citing evidence from the novel.
8. Apply each of the following plot patterns to the novel: rite of passage, initiation, fall from innocence, and quest. As always, be specific.
9. Prepare a chart or graph which visually represents the different times the Invisible Man is "born again." Be sure to include the event or events which cause his symbolic death and resurrection.
10. What connections can you draw between *Invisible Man* and other major works we have read this year? Discuss the relationship you see between this novel and the following:
 - A. *All Quiet on the Western Front*
 - B. *Animal Farm*
 - C. *Brave New World*
 - D. *The Catcher in the Rye*
 - E. The Arthurian Legend (*Excalibur*)
 - F. *Everyman*
 - G. *Doctor Faustus*
 - H. *Cyrano de Bergerac*
 - I. *Julius Caesar*

Essay Topic: In retrospect, the reader often discovers that the first chapter of a novel introduces some of the major themes of the work. Write an essay about the first chapter of *Invisible Man* in which you explain how the first chapter functions to set forth major themes, introduce important characters and conflicts, establish the tone and mood of the book, etc.

***Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison**

Sentence-Combining Worksheet & Final Examination

Directions: Combine these sentences in the sets provided below. The sentence that has been underlined in each set is to be your base clause.

1. *Invisible Man* is a novel.
 2. Ralph Ellison wrote the novel.
 3. The novel records a journey.
 4. The journey is from innocence.
 5. The journey is to experience.
 6. The journey is from the south.
 7. The journey is to the north.
-
8. The hero becomes aware.
 9. The awareness is of his blackness.
 10. The awareness is of his invisibility.
 11. The invisibility is to whites.
 12. The awareness occurs gradually.
-
13. The awareness occurs through episodes.
 14. The episodes are seven.
 15. The episodes are confrontations.
 16. The confrontations are violent.
-
17. The first is the "Battle Royal."
 18. The Battle Royal is a match.
 19. The match is in boxing.
 20. The match is staged.
 21. The staging is for entertainment.
 22. Whites are entertained.
-
23. The hero is blindfolded.
 24. The hero fights with other blacks.
 25. The blacks are his friends.
 26. The friends have also been blindfolded.
-
27. The hero is goaded.
 28. The goading is by fear.
 29. The goading is by taunts.
 30. The taunts are from the crowd.
 31. The goading is by anger.
 32. The hero lashes out.
 33. The lashing is at his opponents.
-
34. His humanity is denied.
 35. The denial is by whites.
 36. The whites are sadistic.
-
37. The hero becomes an animal.
 38. The animal is cornered.
 39. The animal is fighting.
 40. The fight is for its life.
-
41. The hero is given a briefcase.
 42. The gift is after the match.
 43. The gift is a symbol.
 44. The gift symbolizes completion.
 45. The completion of one part.
 46. The part is of education.
 47. The gift symbolizes a commencement.
 48. The commencement is of awareness.

NOTE: The review is incomplete. To finish it, the other six episodes need to be discussed. Get it?

from **Hidden Name and Complex Fate**

Ralph Ellison

Once while listening to the play of a two-year-old girl who did not know she was under observation. I heard her saying over and over again, at first with questioning and then with sounds of growing satisfaction, "I am Mimi Livisay? . . . I am Mimi Livisay. I am Mimi Livisay . . . I am Mimi Li-vi-say! I am Mimi . . ."

And in deed and in fact she was—or became so soon thereafter, by working playfully to establish the unity between herself and her name.

For many of us this is far from easy. We must learn to wear our names within all the noise and confusion of the environment in which we find ourselves: make them the center of all of our associations with the world, with man and with nature. We must charge them with all our emotions, our hopes, hates, loves, aspirations. They must become our masks and our shields and the containers of all those values and traditions which we learn and/or imagine as being the meaning of our familial past.

And when we are reminded so constantly that we bear, as Negroes, names originally possessed by those who owned our enslaved grandparents, we are apt, especially if we are potential writers, to be more than ordinarily concerned with the veiled and mysterious events, the fusions of blood, the furtive couplings, the business transactions, the violations of faith and loyalty, the assaults: yes, and the unrecognized and unrecognizable

loves through which our names were handed down unto us. . . .

Perhaps, taken in aggregate, these European names which (sometimes with irony, sometimes with pride, but always with personal investment) represent a certain triumph of the spirit, speaking to us of those who rallied, reassembled and transformed themselves and who under dismembering pressures refused to die. "Brothers and sisters," I once heard a Negro preacher exhort, "let us make up our faces before the world, and our names shall sound throughout the land with honor! For we ourselves are our *true* names, not their epithets! So let us, I say, Make Up Our Faces and Our Minds!"

Perhaps my preacher had read T. S. Eliot, although I doubt it. And in actuality, it was unnecessary that he do so, for a concern with names and naming was very much a part of that special area of American culture from which I come, and it is precisely for this reason that this example should come to mind in a discussion of my own experience as a writer.

Undoubtedly, writers begin their *conditioning* as manipulators of words long before they become aware of literature—certain Freudians¹ would say at the breast.² Per-

1. Freudians: People who believe in the theories and methods of Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), the founder of psychoanalysis.

2. at the breast: In infancy.

haps. But if so, that is far too early to be of use at this moment. Of this, though, I am certain: that despite the misconceptions of those educators who trace the reading difficulties experienced by large numbers of Negro children in Northern schools to their Southern background, these children are, in their familiar South, facile manipulators of words. I know, too, that the Negro community is deadly in its ability to create nicknames and to spot all that is ludicrous in an unlikely name or that which is incongruous in conduct. Names are not qualities; nor are words, in this particular sense, actions. To assume that they are could cost one his life many times a day. Language skills depend to a large extent upon a knowledge of the details, the manners, the objects, the folkways, the psychological patterns, of a given environment. Humor and wit depend upon much the same awareness, and so does the suggestive power of names.

"A small brown bowlegged Negro with the name 'Franklin D. Roosevelt Jones' might sound like a clown to someone who looks at him from the outside," said my friend Albert Murray, "but on the other hand he just might turn out to be a fireside operator. He might just lie back in all of that comic juxtaposition of names and manipulate you deaf, dumb and blind—and you not even suspecting it, because you're thrown out of stance by his name! There you are, so dazzled by the F.D.R. image—which you *know* you can't see—and so delighted with your own superior position that you don't realize that it's *Jones* who must be confronted."

Well, as you must suspect, all of this speculation on the matter of names has a purpose, and now, because it is tied up so ironically with my own experience as a writer, I must turn to my own name.

For in the dim beginnings, before I ever thought consciously of writing, there was my own name, and there was, doubtless, a certain magic in it. From the start I was uncomfortable with it, and in my earliest years it

caused me much puzzlement. Neither could I understand what a poet was nor why, exactly, my father had chosen to name me after one. Perhaps I could have understood it perfectly well had he named me after his own father, but that name had been given to an older brother who died and thus was out of the question. But why hadn't he named me after a hero, such as Jack Johnson,³ or a soldier like Colonel Charles Young, or a great seaman like Admiral Dewey, or an educator like Booker T. Washington, or a great orator and abolitionist like Frederick Douglass? Or again, why hadn't he named me (as so many Negro parents had done) after President Teddy Roosevelt?

Instead, he named me after someone called Ralph Waldo Emerson, and then, when I was three, he died. It was too early for me to have understood his choice, although I'm sure he must have explained it many times, and it was also too soon for me to have made the connection between my name and my father's love for reading. Much later, after I began to write and work with words, I came to suspect that he was aware of the suggestive powers of names and of the magic involved in naming.

I recall an odd conversation with my mother during my early teens in which she mentioned their interest in, of all things, prenatal culture! But for a long time I actually knew only that my father read a lot, and that he admired this remote Mr. Emerson, who was something called a "poet and philosopher"—so much so that he named his second son after him.

I knew, also, that whatever his motives, the combination of names he'd given me caused me no end of trouble from the moment when I could talk well enough to respond to the ritualized question which grownups put to very young children. Emerson's name was quite familiar to Negroes in Oklahoma during those days when World

3. Jack Johnson (1878–1946): The world heavyweight boxing champion from 1908 through 1915.

War I was brewing, and adults, eager to show off their knowledge of literary figures, and obviously amused by the joke implicit in such a small brown nubbin⁴ of a boy carrying around such a heavy moniker,⁵ would invariably repeat my first two names and then to my great annoyance, they'd add "Emerson."

And I, in my confusion, would reply, "No, no, I'm not Emerson; he's the little boy who lives next door." Which only made them laugh all the louder. "Oh no," they'd say, "you're Ralph Waldo Emerson," while I had fantasies of blue murder.

For a while the presence next door of my little friend, Emerson, made it unnecessary for me to puzzle too often over this peculiar adult confusion. And since there were other Negro boys named Ralph in the city, I came to suspect that there was something about the combination of names which produced their laughter. Even today I know of only one other Ralph who had as much comedy made out of his name, a campus politician and deep-voiced orator whom I knew at Tuskegee,⁶ who was called in friendly ribbing, *Ralph Waldo Emerson Edgar Allan Poe*, spelled Powe. This must have been quite a trial for him, but I had been initiated much earlier.

During my early school years the name continued to puzzle me, for it constantly evoked in the faces of others some secret. It was as though I possessed some treasure or some defect, which was invisible to my own eyes and ears: something which I had but did not possess, like a piece of property in South Carolina, which was mine but which I could not have until some future time. I recall finding, about this time, while seeking adventure in back alleys—which possess for boys a superiority over playgrounds like that

4. **nubbin** *n.*: Anything small and undeveloped.

5. **moniker** *n.*: Slang for a person's name or nickname.

6. **Tuskegee** (*tus kē' gē*): Tuskegee Institute, the Alabama college which Ellison attended.

which kitchen utensils possess over toys designed for infants—a large photographic lens. I remember nothing of its optical qualities, of its speed or color correction, but it gleamed with crystal mystery and it was beautiful.

Mounted handsomely in a tube of shiny brass, it spoke to me of distant worlds of possibility. I played with it, looking through it with squinted eyes, holding it in shafts of sunlight, and tried to use it for a magic lantern. But most of this was as unrewarding as my attempts to make the music come from a phonograph record by holding the needle in my fingers.

I could burn holes through newspapers with it, or I could pretend that it was a telescope, the barrel of a cannon, or the third eye of a monster—I being the monster—but I could do nothing at all about its proper function of making images: nothing to make it yield its secret. But I could not discard it.

Older boys sought to get it away from me by offering knives or tops, agate marbles or whole zoos of grass snakes and horned toads in trade, but I held on to it. No one, not even the white boys I knew, had such a lens, and it was my own good luck to have found it. Thus I would hold on to it until such time as I could acquire the parts needed to make it function. Finally I put it aside and it remained buried in my box of treasures, dusty and dull, to be lost and forgotten as I grew older and became interested in music.

I had reached by now the grades where it was necessary to learn something about Mr. Emerson and what he had written, such as the "Concord Hymn" and the essay "Self-Reliance," and in following his advice, I reduced the "Waldo" to a simple and, I hoped, mysterious "W," and in my own reading I avoided his works like the plague. I could no more deal with my name—I shall never really master it—than I could find a creative use for my lens. . . .

If all this sounds a bit heady, remember that I did not destroy that troublesome mid-

dle name of mine. I only suppressed it. Sometimes it reminds me of my obligations to the man who named me.

It is our fate as human beings always to give up some good things for other good things, to throw off certain bad circumstances only to create others. Thus there is a value for the writer in trying to give as thorough a report of social reality as possible. Only by doing so may we grasp and convey the cost of change. Only by considering the broadest accumulation of data may we make choices that are based upon our own hard-earned sense of reality. Speaking from my own special area of American culture, I feel that to embrace uncritically values which are extended to us by others is to reject the validity, even the sacredness, of our own expe-

rience. It is also to forget that the small share of reality which each of our diverse groups is able to snatch from the whirling chaos of history belongs not to the group alone, but to all of us. It is a property and a witness which can be ignored only to the danger of the entire nation.

I could suppress the name of my namesake out of respect for the achievements of its original bearer but I cannot escape the obligation of attempting to achieve some of the things which he asked of the American writer. As Henry James⁷ suggested, being an American is an arduous task, and for most of us, I suspect, the difficulty begins with the name.

7. Henry James: An American novelist (1843–1916).

Primary Source			
Consciously or unconsciously, we all have private pictures of the people who answer to certain names. For their book <i>The Best Baby Name Book in the Whole Wide World</i> , Bruce and Vicki Lansky and their researchers have developed a list of names and their stereotypes. Try guessing the stereotypes before you look at them.			
Amanda	cultured	Peggy	spirited, cute
Amy	active	Vicky	very sexy, exceedingly well-liked and frisky
Angela	pleasant-looking, somewhat wistful	Anthony	tall, wiry, elegant
Ann	ladylike and honest, but not pretty	Benjamin	dishonest
Elizabeth	seductive	Brian	superstar—macho, dynamic
Emily	a sideline-sitter	Charles	masculine, popular, but not overly active
Jennifer	youthful, yet old-fashioned	Christopher	diligent, intelligent
Jessica	ambitious and beautiful	David	not quite as terrific as Dave, but still a winner
Linda	utterly feminine, popular and energetic	Eric	a big winner—very strong
Lisa	very frail, well-liked	Francis	passive, neuter
Margaret	a bit dowdy	James	a big winner in all categories
Mary	wholesome, womanly, active	Jason	hugely popular
Melissa	passive but graceful	John	trustworthy, surprisingly passive but manly
Nicole	average on all counts	Justin	vigorous
Patricia	plain	Kevin	very popular, virile
		Mark	spoiled
		Michael	very, very popular
		Nicholas	very strong
		Richard	very good-looking
		Stephen	a winner in all areas
		Thomas	large, soft and cuddly
		William	kind but not aggressive

Composition:

On your own paper, explore your feelings about the “unity between [your]self and [your] name.” Consider Ellison’s essay as a model in format if not in length.

NAME POSTER

An Introduction to "Personal Voice"

To be Used with Ellison's Essay "Hidden Name and Complex Fate"

On a piece of colored paper that you have received, create a NAME POSTER by following these instructions:

1. Measure the same distance from each side and draw a rectangle in the middle of the page.
2. Display your first name, your last name, OR another name which people call you at school inside the rectangle. Be creative in your display, using an image that says something distinctive about your personality. You can fashion the letters of your name in any way that you choose, as long as they are readable and school appropriate, but write only ONE of your names in the rectangle.
 Suggestions for the name display: comic strip paper, glitter, foil, fabric, wrapping paper, point, colored markers or pencils, crayons, pictures, etc.
3. In the space around your name display, write an explanation, a story, or a description which addresses ONE OR ALL of the following:
 - a. The origin or meaning of your name
 - b. Why you have this name
 - c. Why you have chosen this particular material to display your name
 - d. Why you like or do not like your name
 - e. Other writing connected to your name in the rectangle

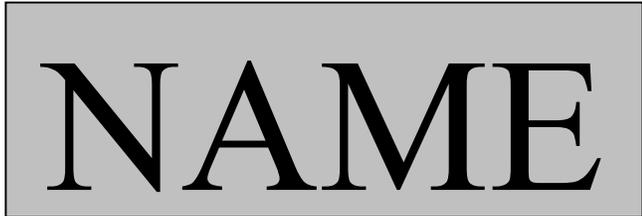
Fill up the entire space around the name display. You can divided it up into four sections, you can wind your words around and around the page, or you can place the words in another way—just be sure to fill up the space.

Be prepared to briefly tell the class about your poster on the due date. The posters will then be hung up in the room for a few weeks. Your grade will be based on effort, creativity, and following directions.

Mary Lynn Mosier <mmosier@vvisd.org

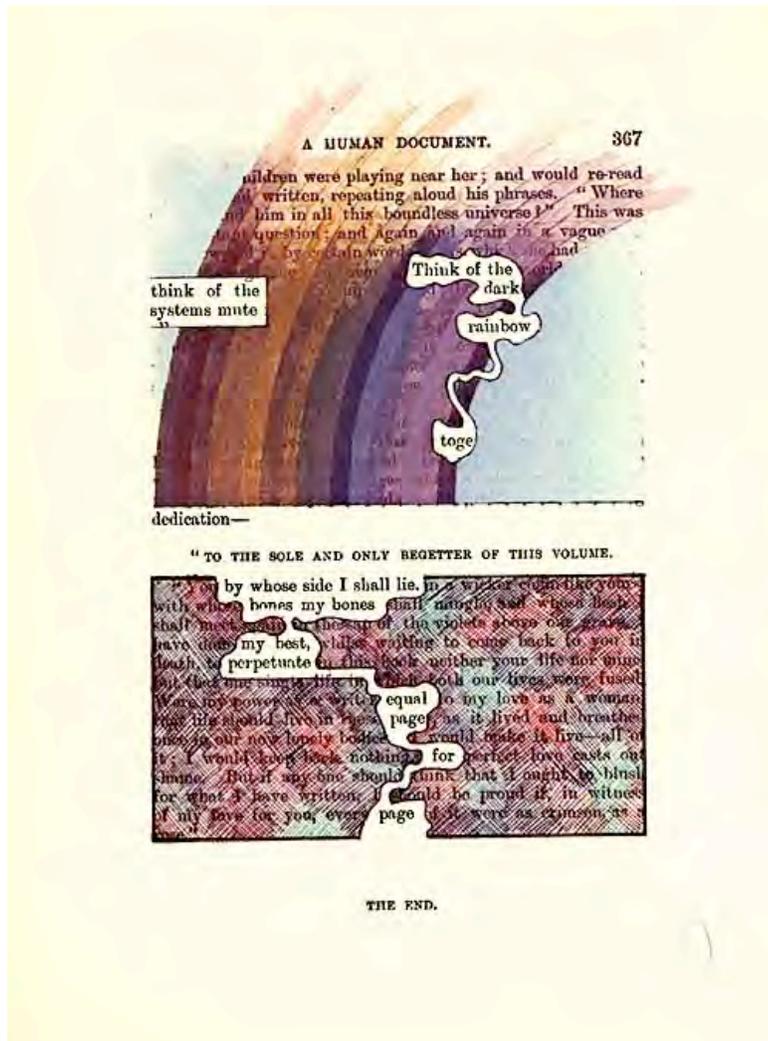
Scoring Rubric	
Following Directions	30 ___
Creativity	30 ___
Neatness	10 ___
Effort for Desc./Narrative	20 ___
Presentation	10 ___
Total	100 ___
Comments:	

THIS IS THE SPACE TO WRITE YOUR DESCRIPTION AND NARRATIVE.



THIS IS THE SPACE TO WRITE YOUR DESCRIPTION AND NARRATIVE.

A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel



“I took a forgotten Victorian novel found by chance. I plundered, mined, and **undermined** its text to make it yield the **ghosts** of other possible stories, scenes, poems, erotic incidents and **surrealist** catastrophes which seemed to lurk within its wall of words. As I worked on it, I replaced the text I’d stripped away with visual images of all kinds. **It began to tell and to depict**, amongst other memories, dreams and reflections, the **sad story** of one of **love’s casualties.**”

Tom Phillips, *A Humument: A Treated Victorian Novel*. NY: Thames and Hudson, 1987. Now in fourth editions.

Dense novels, because of their length and depth, are most likely to have the rich language where poetry hides.

English teachers have many possibilities:

Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison
To Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury
The Scarlet Letter by Nathaniel Hawthorne
The Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad
All Books by Charles Dickens

Other subject areas have their nominees:

The Panda’s Thumb by Stephen Jay Gould
Jurassic Park by Michael Crichton
The Declaration of Independence
Future Shock by Alvin Toffler
Totem and Taboo by Sigmund Freud
Escape from Freedom by Eric Fromm

Entire book available as graphic images at website – <http://humument.com/>

Yahoo Altered Books Group in homage --
<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/alteredbooks/>