

# Invisible Man

## Prologue

1. How would you describe the tone of the first two paragraphs?

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2. What is ironic about the narrator's encounter with the blond man?

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3. What does it mean when the narrator says that the blond man "had not seen [him]"?

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4. Who are the "sleeping ones"?

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5. Explain the narrator's desire for light in his hiding place in the basement.

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6. What is the relationship between the music of Louis Armstrong and the narrator's sense of invisibility?

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7. What does the narrator learn about the struggle for freedom during his conversation with a former slave?

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## Chapter One

1. How is allusion used in the second paragraph?

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2. Explain the advice that the narrator's grandfather gives him: "Let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open."

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3. What is the significance of the narrator's viewing himself as a "potential Booker T. Washington"?

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4. Explain the ambivalence the narrator feels toward the naked blonde.

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5. What is the effect of the images of the white men in Chapter One?

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6. How is the imagery describing the Battle Royal ironic?

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7. How does this chapter show the limits of assimilation?

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**Chapter Two**

1. How is the road in the first paragraph used as a metaphor?

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2. What is the rhetorical purpose of the Founder's statue?

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3. How are diction and syntax used in the description of the trustees' arrival at Founders' Day?

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## 4. How are allusions used in the initial description of Mr. Norton?

## The White Man's Burden

This famous poem was written as a response to the American takeover of the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. In it, Kipling encourages the Americans to take up the "burden" of "civilizing" indigenous peoples that had largely been the "responsibility" of the British Empire until then.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Send forth the best ye breed—  
Go bind your sons to exile  
To serve your captives' need;  
To wait in heavy harness,  
On fluttered folk and wild—  
Your new-caught, sullen peoples,  
Half-devil and half-child.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
In patience to abide,  
To veil the threat of terror  
And check the show of pride;  
By open speech and simple,  
An hundred times made plain  
To seek another's profit,  
And work another's gain.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
The savage wars of peace—  
Fill full the mouth of Famine  
And bid the sickness cease;  
And when your goal is nearest  
The end for others sought,  
Watch sloth and heathen Folly  
Bring all your hopes to nought.

Take up the White Man's burden—

No tawdry rule of kings,  
But toil of serf and sweeper—  
The tale of common things.  
The ports ye shall not enter,  
The roads ye shall not tread,  
Go mark them with your living,  
And mark them with your dead.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
And reap his old reward:  
The blame of those ye better,  
The hate of those ye guard—  
The cry of hosts ye humour  
(Ah, slowly!) toward the light:—  
"Why brought he us from bondage,  
Our loved Egyptian night?"

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Ye dare not stoop to less—  
Nor call too loud on Freedom  
To cloke your weariness;  
By all ye cry or whisper,  
By all ye leave or do,  
The silent, sullen peoples  
Shall weigh your gods and you.

Take up the White Man's burden—  
Have done with childish days—  
The lightly proffered laurel,  
The easy, ungrudged praise.  
Comes now, to search your manhood  
Through all the thankless years  
Cold, edged with dear-bought wisdom,  
The judgment of your peers!

— Rudyard Kipling, 1899

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5. What is suggested by the repetition of the word "pleasant"?

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6. What makes the sleeping farmer "the kind of white man [that the narrator fears]"?

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7. Why is Mr. Norton's enthusiasm for his widow so strange to the narrator?

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8. How is the following statement an example of foreshadowing?

"I've never seen this section before. It's new territory for me."

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9. How is juxtaposition used in the conversation that the narrator and Mr. Norton have with Jim Trueblood?

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10. What is the tone that Trueblood uses to tell the story of his incest?

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11. What is ironic about the sexual attraction between Trueblood and his daughter?

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12. Why would Trueblood's wife bring Aunt Cloe over?

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13. Why do you think Trueblood receives so much more charity from the white community than from his own?

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14. Why do you think Mr. Norton gives Trueblood \$100?

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**Chapter Three**

1. What is the significance of the wide range of professions that the insane men at the Golden Day used to practice?

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2. How do the apocalyptic ravings of one of the patients serve to foreshadow the future?

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3. Why do the patients find that kicking Supercargo is therapeutic?

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4. Why does the veteran call the narrator invisible in Chapter Three?

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**Chapter Four**

1. How does the imagery at the beginning of the chapter belie the narrator's inner tension?

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2. Why does the narrator hate Trueblood and the people at the Golden Day?

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3. What is the effect of comparing the campus building to an "old plantation manor house"?

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4. How has Dr. Bledsoe achieved power in society?

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5. How are the mirror and the aquarium metaphors?

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## Chapter Five

1. What is the rhetorical argument behind the comparison of the moon to a “white man’s bloodshot eye”?

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2. What is the tone of the two paragraphs that begins “Into the doors and into the soft lights...”

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3. What is the rhetorical effect of the long italicized passage?

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4. What phrase does the narrator use to describe Dr. Bledsoe’s position relative to the trustees around him? Why is this significant?

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5. How is allusion used during Rev. Barbee’s sermon?

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6. How is simile used to express the effect of the Founder's death?

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7. How are sound devices connected to the word "black" in the latter part of Rev. Barbee's sermon?

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8. What is the rhetorical effect of Rev. Barbee's blindness?

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9. What images does the narrator see as he leaves chapel?

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**Chapter Six**

1. Describe Dr. Bledsoe's posture as the narrator goes to his meeting.

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2. Why is Dr. Bledsoe so angry with the narrator?

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3. How are Dr. Bledsoe's ideas about black/white relations similar to those of the narrator's grandfather?

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4. How is repetition used to show the narrator's shock when Dr. Bledsoe calls him a "nigger"?

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5. How is Dr. Bledsoe's handshake an example of foreshadowing?

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**Chapter Seven**

1. What device appears in the vet's advice to the narrator, after he tells him to "come out of the fog"?

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2. What does it mean when the vet tells the narrator to be his own father?

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3. What allusion is used to describe the narrator's arrival in Harlem?

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**Chapter Eight**

1. What is ironic about the narrator's discovery of a Bible in his room at Men's House?

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2. What is ironic about the difference between the way blacks could speak in the North as opposed to the South?

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3. What is the significance of the image of the Statue of Liberty, her torch "almost lost in the fog"?

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4. What is unusual about the narrator's description of the pictures in Mr. Bates' office?

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**Chapter Nine**

1. What does the vendor mean when he asks the narrator if he “got the dog”?

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2. What is the overall effect of the conversation between the narrator and the man with the cart?

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3. What is the purpose of the drawn-out conversation between the narrator and Mr. Emerson's son?

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4. How would you describe the tone of Dr. Bledsoe's letter?

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5. What extended metaphor does the narrator use to describe the imagined conversation between the elder Mr. Emerson and Dr. Bledsoe?

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**Chapter Ten**

1. Explain the extended metaphor of Liberty Paints.

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2. How are Lucius Brockway and Dr. Bledsoe similar?

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**Chapter Eleven**

1. What literary devices contribute to the narrator's sense of disorientation?

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2. What is the rhetorical purpose of the conversation that the narrator overhears?

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3. How is the narrator different after he leaves the hospital?

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**Chapter Twelve**

1. What is the rhetorical purpose of the “spoiled-cream” complexions of the women that the narrator sees as he careens out of the subway?

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2. How does the syntax of the first three pages contribute to the narrator's sense of disorientation?

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3. What is the rhetorical effect of the syntax as the narrator returns to Men's House?

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4. What purpose does Mary serve for the narrator?

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5. How is alliteration used to express the anxiety that the narrator feels?

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**Chapter Thirteen**

1. What is the metaphorical value of the sweet potatoes?

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2. What is the purpose of the emancipation letter among the old couple's belongings?

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3. Why do the language and the text style change when the narrator is watching the eviction?

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4. Why is the narrator ambivalent about attacking the men who are evicting the old couple?

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5. What is the narrator's rhetorical argument as he addresses the crowd?

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6. How does the man in the café interpret the narrator's sentiments incorrectly?

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### Chapter Fourteen

1. What is the narrator's principal motivation for accepting the job?  
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2. What is the effect of the trip through Central Park?  
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3. How is color used to affect imagery in the salon?  
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4. Why does Emma wish that the narrator were blacker?  
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5. What is ironic about Brother Jack's suggestion that the narrator become the new Booker T. Washington?  
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6. What is the idea behind the narrator's confrontation with the drunken man who wants him to sing, because "all *colored people sing*"?  
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7. What is the difference between the definition of "we" that people like Mary embrace and the definition that people like Brother Jack embrace?  
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**Chapter Fifteen**

1. Why does the narrator get so angry when he notices the cast-iron bank in the shape of a caricature of a black man?

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2. What is the metaphorical value of the fact that the clock in Mary's kitchen is slower than the narrator's?

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3. Explain the following quotation:

"Some folks just live in filth," she said disgustedly. "Just let a little knocking start and here it comes crawling out. All you have to do is shake things up a bit."

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4. What is ironic about the narrator's attempt to get rid of the coin bank?

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**Chapter Sixteen**

1. How is repetition used to express the change the narrator feels in his identity?

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2. What is the metaphorical value of the policemen that the narrator sees when he ducks out into the street before his speech?

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3. What is the significance of the narrator's daydream about the bulldog?

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4. How does the description of the stage contribute to the narrator's sense of isolation?

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5. Why do some members of the Brotherhood object to the narrator's speech?

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### Chapter Seventeen

1. How is paradox used to express the contradictory constraints placed on the narrator?  
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2. How might Tod Clifton serve as a more effective spokesman than the narrator, at least in the eyes of Emma?  
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3. How is humor used in the first introduction of Ras the Exhorter?  
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4. Why do you think the author chooses to have Ras speak the dialect of a native African learning English?  
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5. What does Tod Clifton mean when he says that “sometimes a man has to *plunge outside history*”?  
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6. How is alliteration used to reflect the instantaneous paradox that memories of the narrator’s grandfather bring to mind?  
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**Chapter Eighteen**

1. Who are “they”? Who will cut the narrator down, according to the letter?

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2. How is Brother Tarp’s slave chain-link different from Dr. Bledsoe’s?

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3. What does the narrator mean when he says that Brother Wrestrum “snatched [him] back to the South”?

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**Chapter Nineteen**

1. How does the setting of the beginning of the chapter contradict the woman's tone?

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2. How are sound devices used to express the ambivalence the narrator feels about the woman?

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3. How is asyndeton used to show the building panic in the narrator's mind as he leaves the building?

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4. Explain the significance of this sentence:

"My nerves were in a state of constant tension, my face took on a stiff, noncommittal expression, beginning to look like Brother Jack's and the other leaders'."

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**Chapter Twenty**

1. Why is there so much resentment toward the narrator in the Jolly Dollar?

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2. How did Clifton choose to make his escape from history?

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3. How does the author use irony to show how far Clifton had fallen?

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4. Explain the significance of this sentence:

They were outside the groove of history, and it was my job to get them in, all of them.

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5. What happens right before the end of the chapter to make the narrator realize the significance of his leadership?

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**Chapter Twenty-One**

1. In the description of the funeral procession, how do the images show the angry pride of the crowd?

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2. How is personification used to show the power of the music in the procession?

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3. Why is the narrator envious of the old man?

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4. How could an old slave song have such power?

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5. Is the peanut vendor an allusion to Christ on the cross?

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6. How does the narrator use anaphora to make his eulogy more personal?

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7. What does the narrator mean when he says that everyone at the funeral is in the box with Tod Clifton?

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8. Is there any sign that the narrator is learning that he is dealing with people, rather than a people?

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**Chapter Twenty-Two**

1. What is the reason behind the narrator's conflict with the Brotherhood?

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2. What is the metaphorical value of Brother Jack's glass eye?

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**Chapter Twenty-Three**

1. How is humor used when the narrator puts on a pair of sunglasses to escape Ras's goons?

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2. Why does Hambro disappoint the narrator?

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3. Explain the significance of this sentence:

“If they tolerate Rinehart, then they will forget it and even with them you are invisible.”

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4. How has the narrator become invisible?

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**Chapter Twenty-Four**

- 1. How has the narrator come to adopt one of Dr. Bledsoe's strategies?

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- 2. How does the narrator use grammar to ridicule Sybil?

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**Chapter Twenty-Five**

- 1. How does the burning tenement show progress?

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- 2. How is humor used to show Ras' ridiculousness?

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- 3. What is the rhetorical effect of Ras' getting hit by a spear?

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**Epilogue**

1. What does the narrator mean when he says he became “ill of affirmation”?

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2. How is polysyndeton used to show the inner rage the narrator would feel while affirming others in their errors?

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3. What definition of invisibility spurs the narrator to return to social action?

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4. What is the effect of the rhetorical question that ends the novel?

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