

Olentangy Local School District Literature Selection Review

Teacher: Ben McKibben & Bridget Skelton
Book Title: Invisible Man
Author: Ralph Ellison
Publisher: Vintage Books (Random House)

Grade: 11 School: OOHS
Genre: African-American Fiction
Pages: 581
Copyright: 1995

In a brief rationale, please provide the following information relative to the book you would like added to the school's book collection for classroom use. You may attach additional pages as needed.

Book Summary and summary citation: (suggested resources include book flap summaries, review summaries from publisher, book vendors, etc.)

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* is a monumental novel, one that can well be called an epic of modern American Negro life. It is a strange story, in which many extraordinary things happen, some of them shocking and brutal, some of them pitiful and touching--yet always with elements of comedy and irony and burlesque that appear in unexpected places. It is a book that has a great deal to say and which is destined to have a great deal said about it.

After a brief prologue, the story begins with a terrifying experience of the hero's high school days, moves quickly to the campus of a Southern Negro college and then to New York's Harlem, where most of the action takes place. The many people that the hero meets in the course of his wanderings are remarkably various, complex and significant. With them he becomes involved in an amazing series of adventures, in which he is sometimes befriended but more often deceived and betrayed--as much by himself and his own illusions as by the duplicity of the blindness of others.

Invisible Man is not only a great triumph of storytelling and characterization; it is a profound and uncompromising interpretation of the Negro's anomalous position in American society.

Publisher's Comments

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Invisible-Man/Ralph-Ellison/e/9780679732761/?itm=3&USRI=invisible+man&tabname=edreviews>

Provide an instructional rationale for the use of this title, including specific reference to the OLSD curriculum map(s): (Curriculum maps may be referenced by grade/course and indicator number or curriculum maps with indicators highlighted may be attached to this form)

More frequently than any other novel, this text appears regularly on the AP Literature & Composition Exam's free-response essay. It is a tour-de-force of literary techniques and stylistic devices that lends itself to multiple lines of questioning and interpretation.

The quest of the protagonist to become "visible" to others makes this text an essential read for any American serious about tackling a critical approach to racism in American history and, through cultural analysis, to American present.

The Curricular Requirements for the AP Course Audit for AP Literature & Composition includes the following statement: "Writing to Evaluate: Analytical, argumentative essays in which students draw upon textual details to make and explain judgments about a work's artistry and quality, and its social and cultural values." *Invisible Man* is, without doubt, an ideal text for this type of evaluation.

Include two professional reviews of this title: (a suggested list of resources for identifying professional reviews is shown below. Reviews may be “cut and pasted” (with citation) into the form or printed reviews may be attached to the form)

Review #1

Atlantic Monthly

Unquestionably, Ellison's book is a work of extraordinary intensity — powerfully imagined and written with a savage, wryly humorous gusto.

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Invisible-Man/Ralph-Ellison/e/9780679732761/?itm=3&USRI=invisible+man&tabname=edreviews>

Review #2

Sacred Fire

Invisible Man — incredibly, Ralph Ellison's first and only novel — is one of the lasting masterpieces of American literature. It chronicles the existential journey of an unnamed black man attempting to discover his identity and role in a hostile and confusing world that refuses to acknowledge his existence.

Within the story of the protagonist's quest for definition, Ellison offers a vivid and unforgiving examination of the shortcomings of the self-serving black bourgeoisie, clumsy white philanthropists, dehumanizing American industry, and unrealistic revolutionary movements. The narrator jointly tells his own, personal coming-of-age story — one that takes him from the deep South to the streets of Harlem, from workaday jobs to revolution, from a black college to (literally) a hole in the ground — and the symbolic story of the unfinished coming of age of his race in America. Ellison skillfully manages to tell both stories without ever reducing his narrator to a fiat symbol of everyblackman, allowing the story to work successfully on both levels.

The novel also benefits from Ellison's rich narrative style, which drew from a heady mix of influences. He incorporated the jazzy rhythms and vivid imagery of black American speech, music, and folklore in his tale, while also showing the influence of white writers such as Melville, Twain, and Dostoyevsky.

Invisible Man is an essential book, whether read as an intriguing coming-of-age story, an incisive portrait of an individual's quest for identity, or a powerful indictment of the absurdity of racism that remains fresh and relevant today. Ellison's stylish prose speaks to the individual and collective need to acquire self-knowledge, self-definition, self-illumination—to become visible to ourselves.

<http://search.barnesandnoble.com/Invisible-Man/Ralph-Ellison/e/9780679732761/?itm=3&USRI=invisible+man&tabname=edreviews>

What alternate text(s) could also fulfill the instructional requirements?

Title: Black Boy Author: Richard Wright

Title: Native Son Author: Richard Wright

Title: Their Eyes Were Watching God Author: Zora Neale Hurston

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Title: Author:

Document any potentially controversial content:

Racially charged language; offensive language; drug references; sexual references; hazy and dream-like incestuous rape scene--details are limited, but the act is committed

Keeping in mind the age, academic level, and maturity of the intended reader, what is the suggested classroom use: (check all that apply)

Gifted/Accelerated Regular At Risk

GRADE LEVEL(S): 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

Reading level of this title (if applicable): Advanced Placement Lit & Comp

Date Submitted to Department Chair: August 2009

Suggested Professional Literary Review Sources:

School Library Journal

Horn Book

Bulletin of the Center for Children's Books

VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)

Library Journal

Book Links

Publisher's Weekly

Booklist

Kirkus Review

Wilson Library Catalog

English Journal (and other resources of the National Council of Teachers of English)

The Reading Teacher (International Reading Association)

Literature for Today's Young Adults