

***Invisible Man*, Ralph Ellison**
Summer Reading Assignment
English 11, American Literature
Mr. Coleman
ecoleman@gsgis.k12.va.us

For your summer reading in American Literature, you be reading Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*.

As you read, consider the following topics to guide you. Choose passages from *Invisible Man* that address each of the following five topics (5 passages total):

1. Invisibility
 2. Identity: Individual within Community
 3. Journey
 4. Initiation and Self-Discovery
 5. Conformity and Rebellion
1. For each passage you choose, write two to three sentences explaining how the language of the passage illustrates the topic with which you have identified the excerpt. You may want to allude to fragments of the larger passage as you analyze its language.
 2. For four of the five passages you have chosen, make a connection between it and another artwork in a different genre from the time period in which Ellison wrote *Invisible Man*. Each topic should be connected to a genre; all four genres must be represented. You are given a free pass on one of the five topics. In two to three sentences, explain your rationale for connecting the topic that you have chosen to the artwork you have selected. A sample is on the second page of this assignment.

The following are the four art forms that you should connect to the passage:

- i. Art (2D)
 - ii. Art (3D)
 - iii. Music
 - iv. Poetry
3. Passages should be cited in MLA format; e.g., (Ellison 100).

Note: Because annotation is subjective, you may find that your peers have marked or that your teacher is citing words, phrases, or entire passages that you did not. That is okay. You will likely note similar overarching ideas. You are encouraged to be self-directed, but, of course, you are welcome to email Mr. Coleman after July 11th, 2016 if you have questions.

Example

Topic: Invisibility.

Quote: “Before that I lived in the darkness into which I was chased, but now I see. I’ve illuminated the blackness of my invisibility—and vice versa. And so I play the invisible music of my isolation. The last statement doesn’t seem just right, does it? But it is; you hear this music simply because music is heard and seldom seen, except by musicians. Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility?” (Ellison 13-14).

Explanation: In this passage, Ellison’s narrator discusses a particular part of his invisibility, its blackness. By asserting that his invisibility stems from being black, not just from a literal darkness, the narrator makes it clear that there is a racial reason why he is not seen by the larger white culture. Instead of bemoaning his invisibility, however, the narrator equates it with music, which is “heard and seldom seen.” The similarity between his experience and music suggests that he might be noticed through putting his story down “in black and white,” an ironic twist of the idiom that usually describes print or newspapers but that here also alludes to race.

Art connection: Music

Piece: Charles Mingus plays bass on “Duke Ellington’s Sound of Love”
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xaFNHjggWnc>)

Explanation: I chose this piece because it was performed by a musician who was a contemporary of Ralph Ellison’s, but also because the mood of the piece – slow, slightly mournful – matches the mood of the Invisible Man during the prologue when he plays with the idea of both blackness and invisibility as he sits in his lit hole, listening to Louis Armstrong’s “(What Did I Do to Be So) Black and Blue.” There are flourishes in it that suggest some of the Narrator’s mania, and like most jazz pieces, motifs and refrains circle back through the tune, just as the notion of invisibility recurs throughout the novel. The other interesting part of this song is its title: “the sound of love.” Just as the Invisible Man toys with the notions of music being heard and not seen, with blackness being heard and not seen, and with the power of the written word to make the invisible seen, the idea that love could have a sound is similarly paradoxical.