



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2011 Volume II: What History Teaches

Ralph Ellison's View of His Time

Guide for Curriculum Unit 11.02.04
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"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor I am one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind."

The narrator of *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison, a functioning body made of flesh, bone, and blood who breathes, feels, and fears, is tortured by an inexplicable dilemma: invisibility. In his troubled journey, he deals with issues of race, stereotypes, prejudice, and political ideologies that seem to open the door of respect but that ultimately increase his alienation. The unit opens with specific essential questions: "How does Ralph Ellison view his society? How much is his main character affected by Ellison's own experience? How is the structure of the novel influenced by its historical background?" With these questions in mind, the students read and thoroughly analyze *Invisible Man* while researching and analyzing numerous other sources, both oral and in writing, to understand and reflect upon the historical and cultural landscape of the 1940s and '50s. The unit applies differentiated instruction, and all assignments, including the final project, vary according to the students' learning styles.

(Recommended for English and Advanced Placement English Literature and Composition, grades 10-12)

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