

Books by the Stack



Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison

A Black man's search for success and the American dream leads him out of college to Harlem and a growing sense of personal rejection and social invisibility.

Why you'll like it: *Racism. Loss of innocence. Unflinching.*

About the Author: Ralph Ellison (March 1, 1914 - April 16, 1994) has the distinction of being one of the few writers who has established a firm literary reputation on the strength of a single work of long fiction. Writer and teacher, Ralph Ellison was born in Oklahoma City, studied at Tuskegee Institute, and has lectured at New York, Columbia, and Fisk universities and at Bard College. He received the Prix de Rome from the Academy of Arts and Letters in 1955, and in 1964 he was elected a member of the National Institute of Arts and Letters. He has contributed short stories and essays to various publications. *Invisible Man* (1952), his first novel, won the National Book Award for 1953 and is considered an impressive work. It is a vision of the underground man who is also the invisible African American, and its possessor has employed this subterranean view and viewer to so extraordinary an advantage that the impression of the novel is that of a pioneer work. A book of essays, *Shadow and Act*, which discusses the African American in America and Ellison's Oklahoma boyhood, among other topics, appeared in 1964. Ralph Ellison died on April 16, 1994 of pancreatic cancer and was interred in a crypt at Trinity Church Cemetery in the Washington Heights neighborhood of Upper Manhattan. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Think about the impact this book made when it was published. It was written in the 1940s but not published until 1952. What was life like in America? Especially for African Americans?
2. This was considered controversial in its day, why? In today's society, is it still?
3. How were women perceived in this book?
4. Were you surprised in IM's speech/oration at the eviction of the old couple? What gave him the courage to speak to the crowd like that?
5. What was the Brotherhood? When you first read about them, what did you think their goals were? Were you suspicious of them?
6. Why did he join the Brotherhood? Why did the Brotherhood choose him? How was he invisible to them?
7. When he confronted Ras, after the funeral, he had to run for his safety. He donned a disguise – white hat and sunglasses – and people thought he was someone named Rinehart. What did he learn from that experience?

8. His being mistaken for Rinehart opened his eyes to a lot of things: many people are invisible, that people will only see what they want to see about a person. Were there other things this deception changed in him?
9. He wondered who was left who really knew him. Did he even know who he was himself?
10. Why did he decide it was time to rejoin the world?
11. At the end of the book, the Invisible Man concluded that “even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play.” What do you think that role should be?



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