



## Ralph Ellison's View of His Time

Curriculum Unit 11.02.04  
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### Introduction

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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 ectoplasm. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind." <sup>1</sup>The narrator, a functioning body made of flesh, bone, and blood who breathes, feels, and fears, is anguished by an inexplicable dilemma: invisibility. He walks the streets of New York but no one can see him or hear the noise of his footsteps. In his desperate attempt to become visible, he paves a road of repetitive failures: his expulsion from a black college, the incident at the Liberty Paint Factory, the attempted radicalism of the Brotherhood, and his ultimate decision to react by hiding in the bowels of the city. In his torturous journey, the narrator deals with issues of race, stereotype, prejudice, and political ideologies that seem to open the door of respect but that ultimately increase his alienation. The invisibility of Ralph Ellison's narrator recapitulates what the African Americans have experienced from their slavery days up through the first half of the twentieth century (the novel was published in 1947). At the same time, the narrator touches themes that transcend the literal meaning of race and extend his analysis to how the man made of flesh and blood lives next to other human beings, how they interact, respect each other, and look upon each other. "Despite the emphasis on prejudice and oppression, Ellison's novel transcended the realm of race-relations so that the invisible man became in many respects Everyman." <sup>2</sup>

My curriculum unit will be built around the novel, *Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison and my goal is to lead my students to a serious reflection of the issues Ellison discusses because they are lingering in our own time. Prejudice, race, and stereotyping, just to mention some of them, control the lives of so many of my students that many of their decisions are unconsciously based on the cultural assumptions Ellison presents. In order to achieve my goal, the unit needs to have questions that can produce discussions of themes, motives, and cultural influences through excerpts we close read. I also expect my students to add other questions along the way to reinforce and enhance their analytical skills, and to hold their interest throughout our four weeks' study. Therefore, the initial essential questions are, "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 affected by its historical background?"

My objective is also to teach my students to research and interpret the sources they can find about Ellison's time and culture, and to analyze how they affected the author. I expect my students to view this entire project

as a complex landscape they need to understand. I will teach this unit to grades ten, eleven and in the AP English Literature and Composition class. This choice partly derives from our curriculum requirements that include units on research connected to the reading of a novel.

The unit, given this heterogeneous group of students, is formed by parts connected to the content and context of the novel. The first section refers to the protagonist's experiences from high school through his expulsion from college. The second deals with his initial experiences in New York and at the Liberty Paint factory up to the accident, the third covers his career as radical agitator in the streets of Harlem leading to his final decision to live underground. All the students, whatever their grades and learning levels are, read the entire novel and collect information about Ellison's life. And since Ellison can be considered a contemporary writer, I want my students to get information from oral history to really have a quite varied landscape of visions, thoughts, interpretations from which they can synthesize and conclude their study. Each group of students, at their specific learning level, learns to research, read and analyze fiction and non-fiction texts, write appropriate questions for oral interviews that are part of the oral collections of sources, infer, discuss, synthesize, and evaluate purpose, themes, tone, and voice and other literary devices. Based on the pedagogy of differentiation, the depth and the layering of each of these objectives vary from one group to another inside the same course. This has become a necessity in my school due to the diversity of students we have. The final projects of the unit follow the same principle of differentiation since I expect my students to write a speech, or a documented essay, or a literary analysis. However, they can conclude the unit with an oral presentation of their research and analysis of the novel, always in response to the essential questions.

All the strategies I use and groups I have identified depend on a thorough analysis of who my students are, their needs as persons and as learners. The strategies I follow are all based on specific pedagogical theories, explained at the end of the unit.

## Students' Context

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The unit takes into account who my students are, the curriculum requirements, and the characteristics of my school. Demographically, my students come from a wide range of backgrounds: 64% are African-Americans, 10 % are White, and 26% are Hispanics. I have two students who are not native and do not have an ESL teacher in the school. Another group of about twenty-two students has various special needs. They are included in all my classes and the Special Education teacher co-teaches with me. Therefore, I have to modify my lessons every day. About 10% of all the sophomores, juniors and seniors excel in both writing and reading whereas many of the others have serious difficulty writing one full page.

Within this context, my unit will seek to meet the required curriculum goals. The first of these is to teach the students how to respond to texts critically in order to achieve independence of thought and to build the character of a "real" citizen. The second goal is to build simple and straightforward strategies, both in reading and writing, to enhance their analytical and critical abilities. The same curriculum requests differentiated instruction, which I will achieve by using different strategies tailored to the specific student's needs.

At the same time, my students need to acquire the ability to select the strategies they want to pursue. I teach them the techniques and they determine those that are most helpful to them. At the beginning of each unit,

my students and I frame question that lead us through the assigned texts. This question is important because it helps them understand, analyze, and evaluate the material we cover. It reflects the formal-operational thinking identified by Piaget as the stage when mental tasks involve abstract thinking and coordination of a number of variables <sup>3</sup>. When the students reach this abstract thinking stage, they are able to explore hypothetical questions, understand individual contributions, discuss and accept different positions, and reflect on the any important issues they encounter.

Furthermore, the curriculum requirements need to be adjusted to the specific goals of my school, which are to enhance the artistic talents of all students who attend our lessons. As a consequence, each unit must have interdisciplinary connections to dance, music, theater, painting, photography, and videography. The students' talents and their interests play a basic role by helping them understand, interpret, synthesize, and evaluate. I know from previous experiences that they easily understand difficult concepts if these are presented first in their art, and then identified in texts. For instance, when I explain the concept of "audience" and its importance in writing, I require each student to come to class with a sample from their art class - music, visual arts, drawing, dance, and theater. By looking at and discussing the artist's choices, my students see whom the artist addresses, and how he/she accomplishes it. At this point, the transition to the written text is easier because each student has understood the importance of audience. I only have to teach them the literary devices and conventions the writer uses to address his/her audience. By following their artistic interests, I have an opportunity to accomplish tasks that are normally considered "boring."

Moreover in planning my unit, I need to carefully consider when to teach it if I want it to be successful. If I taught it too early in the school year, I would not be able to adapt the unit to specific learning needs because I would not know each of my students well. This unit is set for the beginning of the fourth marking period so that I can create appropriate groups. By then I will know which students can do well with the independent reading of the texts, which need exposure to visual texts (movies) first, and then pass to the analysis of excerpts whose length varies according to the student's learning and attention levels. I will know the students who can understand, think, interpret, discuss, and write at a more sophisticated or abstract level. They will also have internalized how to respond to an essential question about a literary text, and will be familiar with the Socratic seminar method that I deem pivotal for the development of their skills and thoughts.

The great majority of my students spend just few seconds to think. They do not know where to begin, what to think and why they should stop their frenetic life to think. When it comes to writing, they do not have ideas; they do not know what to write and how to write. They respond with just a few words or few lines because they do not see the details either in the page they read or in an ordinary event. I also notice that they do not spend more than few seconds reading the document and their reading does not reach its second or third line most of the time.

To conclude, my students belong to a modern technological society in which everything is fast. They tend to reject the study of literary texts because they think they are boring and do not connect to their lives. My challenge is to show them how through the novel and the history that surrounds it that others have lived similar experiences. Ralph Ellison, in particular, sees and presents his truth of the time period. He has a peculiar vision of how the social, political, and economic forces affect the narrator. My students need to see the connections between a literary text and the world in order to appreciate it and learn from it. I also know that they are particularly interested in some of the issues - racism, stereotyping just to mention some - Ellison's novel presents and that is the "hook" I need to lead them in this journey. At the end of this unit, my students will become better readers and good interpreters of people's thoughts and feelings, and ultimately they will learn to be more tolerant and understanding.

## Objectives: Intellectual and Cognitive Development

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The objectives of this unit as well as the daily assessments are always based on the Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive domain. This taxonomy is a scale to measure the development of intellectual skills and includes six levels of intellectual behavior connected to learning: knowledge (recall data or information), comprehension (understand the meaning), application (use a concept in a new area), analyze (break down concepts into components), evaluate (make judgments), and create (create a new product or point of view). I usually try to include all or most of the six steps of the taxonomy in each lesson plan to guide the students in their thinking process.

The various lesson plans at the end of this unit are built on specific learning goals the students need to achieve by the end of each class. These objectives have also to be clear and measurable, so that I can assess each student, reflect, and decide the next steps that translate in how I build these differentiated groups every single day. The objectives are:

1. to read and understand, interpret, analyze and discuss the novel, *Invisible Man* ;
2. to understand the concepts of specific literary devices: point of view or narrative perspective, diction, allusions, figurative language, tone, syntax, and structure;
3. to analyze, discuss, and write about how point of view or narrative perspective, diction, allusions, figurative language, tone, syntax, and structure reveal meaning;
4. to understand and apply how to find sources;
5. to read, understand, interpret, and analyze non-fiction texts;
6. to determine the purpose(s) and the perspective(s) of each document;
7. to determine what information is relevant in connection to the novel or explanatory and/or influential to theme(s), purpose, and characterization;
8. to research, understand, and analyze the issues of race, stereotype, prejudice, political ideologies, and invisibility, and reflect on the related implications;
9. to apply their prior knowledge in determining the meaning of race, stereotype, prejudice, invisibility, and political ideology before reading the written sources;
10. to write appropriate open-ended questions for the interview of parents/grandparents or other people about city life, minorities, and/or fact(s) the interviewed people remember about African-Americans' political involvement, or experiences of prejudice and/or stereotyping;
11. to understand, analyze, discuss, and write about the information collected through interviews;
12. to research, understand, and analyze literary criticism;
13. to draw conclusions and evaluate the concepts of race, stereotype, prejudice, political ideology, and invisibility in the novel and today;
14. write the close analysis of both the written and visual documents;
15. discuss the close analysis of the written and visual documents with the peers;
16. compare and contrast the various written and visual documents, and draw the appropriate conclusions;
17. write an annotated bibliography of all the studied written, oral, and visual documents;
18. to write a speech, or an analytical essay, or a documented essay (the struggling students in special education can conclude the unit with an oral presentation focused on the essential question and supported by the novel and other sources).

## Applied Strategies

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In teaching this unit, I start with a pre-reading/writing activity for each text. The previewing activity, also known as a warm-up, is an essential strategy to motivate my students. The choice of effective strategies is the key point of the entire unit. Research says the level of motivation students bring to a task impacts whether and how they will use comprehension strategies. Reading for a reason and creating an environment rich in high-quality texts are equally important. Sometimes an oral preview of stories, which are then turned into discussions and predictions, increases the story comprehension, and a creative variation of the preview by having the students compose a narrative based on key words from the upcoming story triggers a deeper comprehension <sup>4</sup>.

Consequently, I use two different activities: a Quick Write activity at the very beginning of the unit and the "Tea Party" strategy (see the details in Lesson Plans) before the reading of each written document, when addressing my weakest students who may be in a regular class. The Tea Party strategy encourages an active participation with the text. This pre-reading strategy allows students to predict what they think will happen in the text while inferring, comparing and contrasting, seeing casual relationships, and using their prior knowledge. It is extremely effective with unmotivated and/or struggling readers <sup>5</sup>, and it is excellent to achieve the formal-operational stage.

Throughout the unit modeling and scaffolding are recurrent as well as writing prompts. Following both Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories (the details are at the end of the unit), I extensively use Class Discussion, Questioning, Comparing and Contrasting either to move the students from the concrete-operational stage to the formal-operational one, or to bring them to the nearest zone of proximal learning. Actually, I find the Class Discussion strategy, which I usually call Sharing Time, very beneficial because many of my students refrain from saying what they think. In order to overcome their resistance, I usually present this strategy as a celebratory time, in which we share whatever we have done or whatever we think without being or becoming judgmental. It generally works very well because it develops ownership in learning, and it moves the concrete-operational students to the formal-operational stage.

## Unit Plan: Warm-Up

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Before I introduce the novel, I need to arouse my students' interest but I also have to help them understand the concept on which I have built the entire unit: the numerous factors that have contributed to Ellison's view of his time and more specifically to the African-American conditions in the first part of the twentieth century. These elements make Ellison decide to label the protagonist of the novel 'invisible' and make him choose the first person narrative perspective to tell the story. Since these can be difficult concepts for all my students, I start from something they love and care a lot: their art.

To build and increase their interest, I send them to the library lab with the task to research images, if they major in visual arts, videos, if they major in theater or music, or dance, and excerpts of written literary documents (novels, poems, short stories, newspaper articles, or magazine) if they major in creative writing or

journalism. They are to come back to class and start decoding their documents. The essential questions for the visual documents – printed images or brief video images – will be:

- What does the author see?
- How does he/she represent what he/she sees?

I do not use the word 'describe' to lead them to the understanding of the landscape concept deductively: each individual has a different perception of the reality or of the events that occur around him/her. At the end of the writing activity, we discuss the different perspective(s) and how they contribute to create a complex scenario. Once my students have understood the concept, they are able to see the complexity that layers Ellison's protagonist.

However, after they have shared their interpretations and we have thoroughly discussed their analysis, I require my students to write one page analysis of the researched written and/or visual/oral documents/sources while taking into considerations the observations their peers expressed during the discussion.

## The Novel

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All students start reading the novel soon after the warm up. However, due to the heterogeneity of my population, I have to introduce the following modification:

- The AP students read the novel as homework and have a window of three weeks. However, every day in class we spend twenty minutes to review one or two chapters. They are given five minutes to review the chapter, then they have to write one page reflections on what stands out most or a critic of the narrator. Soon after, they share their responses followed by discussion.
- The College students read the entire novel too, but they are grouped according to their reading levels. The struggling readers read in class with me or the Special Education teacher who co-teaches with me, but every single part has to be preceded by a specific pre-reading activity. I generally use the Probable Passage and if their interest is really low I start class with the Tea Party Strategy (details for both strategies are in the Lesson Plan Section).
- The College students who can read but need to work on their motivation start every class with a Quick Write that can be a "wonder why" question each student has followed by one paragraph response or even more. I sometimes select a quotation from the chapter(s) we have to read, and I ask them to use their prior-knowledge and write their reflections, and/or prediction. When the pre-reading activities are completed, we share, discuss, and start reading the assigned chapter(s). After reading the students have five to ten minutes to skim through the text and choose a quotation they analyze and explain.

While we are reading the novel, all the students are grouped based on their capabilities, motivation, interest, or special needs and are assigned different tasks. They have to study the narrator in the course of his journey and the complexities of his attitudes, but they also have to focus on other minor characters like the protagonist's grandfather, Jim Trueblood, Dr. Bledsoe, Mr. Norton, Reverend Homer A. Barbee, the Veteran, Mary, Brother Jack, Ras the Exhorter, and other secondary characters my students have to select on their own. We also identify and discuss the major themes and motifs, and the inner conflict of the protagonist, setting, syntax, structure, diction, tone, and figurative language. I also want to have some close reads of specific excerpts for the AP students and also for the College students. Each group has an expert and they have to decide what and how they have to proceed. They also have to complete this task as homework or in class based on the characteristics of the group. During our class discussion, the expert of each group presents the study and opens the discussion. All the details for the assigned tasks are specified in the Lesson Plans Section.

## Research

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In this section I want my students to research and analyze various components of the historical landscape of the forties and fifties in order for them to compare and contrast all the possible visions and perspectives they can find to those Ralph Ellison describes in the novel. We start from the author's biographical information and we include the experiences of all possible people who have lived in those years. I want to extend the analysis of life experiences to all possible social and ethnic groups because the novel does not address the African American exclusively but extends its message to those who are riveted by identity issues, prejudice or stereotyping. Our research also includes Booker T. Washington, Communism, Jim Crow, Angelo Herndon, the Scottsboro Boys, Harlem Renaissance, Civil Right Movements, and Adam Clayton Powell.

### Ralph Ellison's Experience

Once all the various groups (AP and College students) have completed the first reading of the novels and have completed all the related tasks, I intend to research as many sources as possible in order to have opposing visions we can compare and/or contrast with the experience of Ralph Ellison's characters. First of all, my students have to determine who Ralph Ellison is. I also expect them to start their research with some questions otherwise they either depend on the teacher for any further steps or do not understand. Therefore, we begin with a very broad activity in which I simply ask them to determine and list what each of them would like to know about a new friend and why. After they have listed all their questions, we narrow them down to no more than three or four essential questions they can use as a guide in searching facts about this author and his time. I also want to teach them to compare the various sources for validity and reliability. Therefore, once they have the essential questions, I expect them to analyze the source:

1. electronic versus written source(s)
2. determine the differences or similarities of information
3. validity of information by comparing this source to two other sources
4. author(s), publication, and citations.

This activity culminates with the production of a written response (two pages for the AP students and one page for all the others) of their analysis; they first share in small groups and then as a class.

Ellison's childhood next to his father, his death, and the emotional cost on Ralph, the economic difficulty the family faces, the inherited book of poems by Ralph Waldo Emerson, his acceptance at Tuskegee Institute, and his later transfer to New York City where he publishes his novel are all necessary to understand the novel's background. At this point, each group, according to the specific learning level, has to determine where they see any possible connections to the narrator's experience. Once they have selected the various passages, each group has to compare and contrast similarities and differences. I also want them to draw an initial conclusion of how the difference in the narrator's experience reflects a specific view of the first half of the twentieth century. The specific tasks for the various groups are listed in the lesson plans section.

### *Identity*

After the initial understanding of the author and how his personal experiences are reflected or differ from the *Invisible Man*'s protagonist, I want to introduce the issue of "identity" and have the students reflect and respond to the following questions:

"Who am I"

"What is identity?"

"How does it affect or does not the individual decisions?"

Identity is the leading motif of the entire novel and it creates internal and external conflict for the protagonist who ultimately believes himself to be invisible to the entire world. His experience as an invisible man gives the audience a personal vision of the events and people of his time. Now my students have to research what identity means and why it is important, and when it can affect the decision an individual takes. In order for them to understand how to start their research, I will make them read two documents about the Identity Theory <sup>6</sup>. The AP students have to read the *Identity Theory of Mind* by J.J.C. Smart and *Identity Theory* by Stephen Desrochers <sup>7</sup> in their group, interpret, and present them to the entire class. The college students read the two documents with me, so I can model how to interpret a non-fictional document; since I follow the "Think Aloud" strategy, I can teach by saying aloud what I think and how I make sense of what I have read. The special education students will only listen and take notes during the class presentation and discussion of the documents on the Identity Theory.

After these initial steps, my students have to interview two or more different people (friends, parents, or other relatives) to collect more information about the interpretation of identity. The questions for the interview are the same we have used to open our discussion. I also expect each group to find other documents they have to read, interpret, compare and contrast to the protagonist's perception of identity. We conclude the reading activity with a class discussion followed by two (college and special education students) and three to four pages reflections (AP students) in which they support their argument of what identity means and how it affects an individual's experience; their reflections have to be supported with three to four sources that can be the two documents I hand out, the novel, and/or others sources they have analyzed.

### *Oral History: Experiences of Metropolitan Life*

Ellison's protagonist describes his experiences at his high school graduation, in college, and in the big city.



These descriptions are just his vision of the first years of the twentieth century. Many other African Americans and non-African Americans, who have lived in a city, have attended a high school, and/ or have experienced the city life, have seen these years in a complete different way. Therefore, I want my students to analyze how people belonging to different social classes and ethnic groups have lived their time by interviewing relatives, friends, or any other persons they may find, and by researching the city news reported in *The New York Times* as well as in our local paper, *The New Haven Register* . I also expect them to collect photographs of the same time period and lyrics as well as the music by Louis Armstrong since the novel reflects various jazz motifs.

Once my students understand what they have to research as "Metropolitan Life" I create the various groups and each of them has to focus on one specific topic. In determining what each group has to do and how to group the students, I consider the difficulty of the task and the student's abilities. The group who conducts the interviews has to gather information on how the interviewee lived the fifties or sixties. The students prepare five to ten open questions in reference to home, school, and city experiences. When the students have completed their study, we first thoroughly discuss in class and then I expect them to determine the connections with Ellison's novel. In completing this assignment, they have to compare and contrast the various experiences and begin to respond to the essential questions of the unit (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 affected by its historical background?).

The AP students follow the same instructions but I want them to read and analyze the argument Daniel B. Weber writes in this regard so they can have a more scholarly insight of "Ellison's portrayal of the American political demagoguery for several decades".<sup>8</sup> They can also use Weber's analysis and juxtapose the results of their interview and other documents they find.

### *Ellison's Contemporaries*

In this final part of our research, I expect my students to learn what Communism means and to determine the differences between Marx's ideology and the political philosophy adopted by the American Communist Party. I also expect them to detect eventual differences between the experiences of the white class to communism in contrast to the African American. Once they have understood the ideology, they can reread the passages related to the "Brotherhood" and "The Liberty Paint Plant" in Ellison's novel and analyze them for similarities and/or differences. To help in their reflections, I suggest the following questions:

- How does the protagonist of *Invisible Man* live these two experiences and why?
- Why does he reject the Brotherhood?
- How does this decision affect his identity?
- What differs between the perspectives of Ellison's protagonist and those of other people who had an active part in the Communist Party?

The students are free to use the visions of any authors or other people/documents they find to support their

interpretations.

It is also interesting to juxtapose the experiences of Angelo Herndon, who was arrested for attending a Labor Day meeting, and Ellison's protagonist both in college and when he arrives in New York. The AP students are required to read the argument Professor Griffiths has published on the interconnections between the *Invisible Man*'s narrator and Angelo Herndon<sup>9</sup>. This group has to identify the various passages in the novel that seem to be influenced by Herndon and analyze the eventual difference(s). Identically, the AP students have to find information about Adam Clayton Powell and his active role in demanding reforms at Harlem Hospital in 1930, as well as in the charismatic leadership role he occupied in the Civil Rights Movement during the Great Depression. His vision of racial equality can help my students understand the narrator's experience in those years and his conclusion that he is invisible. This information together with the AP students' argument in response to the unit essential questions is presented to all the other college students. In this way I have the opportunity to use the students' peers (AP students) modeling how to analyze and synthesize different experiences.

Other important historical figures whose experiences can be detected in Ellison's novel are Booker T. Washington, who resembles the Founder of the college attended by narrator. At the same time, the students have to research the Scottsboro Trial and Jim Crow's vision, and their view of racism, stereotyping, or prejudice. When they have enough information, the students can determine similarities or differences to Ellison's protagonist, and they can write their analysis always keeping in mind the essential questions of the unit (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 affected by its historical background?).

When the various components of the research section are completed and the students have analyzed the experiences of these historical figures in juxtaposition to the narrator's ones, I expect them to write a paper in which they have to select one of the novel themes (race, prejudice, and/or stereotyping) and respond to the essential questions of the unit:

- How does Ralph Ellison view his society?

In their essay, they can use any of the sources we have researched and studied as well as the reflections they have written while analyzing the various sources.

## Final Project

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Once the students have completed their research and all the connected written reflections, I intend to make them read four essays that analyze racism and stereotyping (including one supported by the feminist theory) in *Invisible Man*. I reserve these readings to the AP students whereas the students in the regular class will only listen to the AP students' presentation of these essays. I also want the AP students to model how they choose their argument for the final project and how they intend to support it.<sup>10</sup>

This concluding piece requires the students to argue their responses to the 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 affected by its historical background?), and support their analysis with evidence

from the novel and at least five or six sources. They can choose to write:

- A speech in which the narrator/main character argues about his identity and the effectiveness of the Brotherhood.
- A speech in which the narrator/main character refutes his expulsion.
- An essay in which they have to respond to the essential questions and support their thesis with specific references to the novel and to some of the sources they have collected in the course of the unit.
- A literary analysis in which they have to explain how the author uses specific literary devices like for instance the narrative voice, diction, symbolism, tone, and/or figurative language to express his vision of the American culture in the first half of the twentieth century.
- An oral presentation in response to the unit essential questions for the students who struggle most and/or are in Special Education.

## Lesson Plans

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This section contains the detailed strategies I choose and adopt in order to differentiate. Each strategy responds to a specific area and/or group of students. Primarily, I use formative assessments at the end of each class to decide how to group the students for the next task. In deciding what strategy to adopt, I consider the reading and writing levels, any other special needs, and the pedagogical theories that are explained at the end of this section.

### Pre-Reading

*Quick Write Activity:*

Every day, I start my class with a ten minutes writing activity. I use the "Quick Write" with the AP students and also with all those who are not struggling readers/special educational needs/ESL, or those who need help with motivation.

1. Select one quotation with a specific detail/literary element like diction, setting, imagery, symbol, and/or literary technique like structure that you want to comment on either for its insightfulness or its power to make you see something.
2. Sharing Time: Teacher and students sit in a circle, read aloud, take brief notes, and discuss the various responses.
3. Ask the students to review their notes, decide the most relevant ones, and write them on a Post-It board.
4. Ask the students to write whether their initial position has changed after our discussion/sharing time, and why.
5. After reading the excerpt/passage, ask students to write an evaluation of whether their initial

understanding/analysis has changed after the close read, and how.

Tea Party activity: <sup>11</sup>

This strategy is appropriate for those students who are not motivated and are struggling readers. I would not suggest modeling it because "not knowing how to do it" triggers more thinking.

1. Prepare fifteen or twenty index cards with one phrase from the document they will be reading. Repeat those phrases two or three times in order to have one card per student.
2. Distribute one card to each student and ask them to move from student to student. While moving, they have to share their card, listen to others as they read their cards, discuss what these cards might refer to, and suggest what these cards might mean.
3. After ten minutes, group them and ask them to write their reflections.
4. Sharing Time
5. Read the text aloud.
6. After reading the text, compare and contrast their predictions and the text.

Probable Passage Activity:

This strategy is appropriate for struggling readers or those who have difficulty with close reading and literary analysis. When I present my students this activity for the first time, I model it. Then, we do it together on our second time. I also form groups of three or four students.

1. Write on the board a list of words from the passage we are about to read.
2. Ask them to distribute those words in one of the following categories: character(s), setting, causes, outcome(s), and unknown words.
3. When they finish categorizing the words, ask them to write a Gist Statement (concise statement).
4. Sharing Time: ask the students to say/share how they categorized those words. Write them on the board together with their gist statements.

*Annotations*

I do not ask students to annotate every single scene in *Invisible Man*. However, every day we reread one passage of the assigned reading and I expect them to annotate it. Students work in pairs and each pair has a specific focus. After practicing this strategy in class, I expect each student to annotate all the various literary elements the passage contains.

- Group 1: Highlight the passage for diction (connotation vs. denotation) and write "meaning statements" in the margins.
- Group 2: highlight the passage for images (sound, sight, touch, taste, and scent descriptions) and write "meaning statements" in the margins.

- Group 3: do the same for figurative language
- Group 4: point of view
- Group 5: syntax patterns
- Group 6: structure of the chapter or passage
- Group 7: tone
- Group 8: focus on characterization (setting/structure/imagery/symbolism/tone), and other literary elements or techniques.

Modification:

The AP students can usually work independently and annotate all the literary techniques the passage contains. The college students usually need to work in groups to learn what to annotate before working independently. The group composition includes students with different abilities to facilitate learning and help the struggling ones.

### *Close Reading and Analytical Writing*

The following strategies are adequate for students in the AP class and even in college classes. The difference is that the AP students can work independently while the students in a regular class need to be placed in mixed groups to achieve the objective:

1. Predict the content of each new chapter/passage based on prior-knowledge.
2. Read the first time and underline every other sentence (this is an important strategy to help students see the length of the sentences and identify the literary elements).
3. Annotate.
4. Read a second time.
5. Summarize the passage, or paraphrase it.
6. Determine the point of view and discuss how it affects the meaning.
7. Determine the verb tense and its effects on meaning.
8. Write a first response in the journal.
9. Bracket concrete details in the passage.
10. Discuss the importance of these details.
11. Circle the author's diction's choices and discuss them.
12. Identify the images/setting descriptions/symbols and discuss their effect in decoding the narrator/main character as well as the secondary characters.

13. Identify the figures of speech and discuss the effect of each figure, how each of them deepens the understanding of the character.
14. Label each sentence (simple/compound/complex) and analyze their effect.
15. Determine tone/atmosphere/mood and discuss the effect.
16. Write a second 500-word analytical response. The AP students always write a five paragraphs response (two to three-pages typed essay).

Modification (appropriate for all the struggling students):

1. Read the passage/document.
2. Underline interesting, important, and/or unusual/unexpected words, phrases, and language structures.
3. Reread the passage/document.
4. Determine connections and draw arrows from one part of the passage to another to mark those connections.
5. Write a "Wonder Why" question for each interesting, important, unusual, or unexpected word/phrase. Write your theory(ies) and support it with clear references to the text.
6. Sharing Time: students share, discuss their interpretations, and take notes of the peer's thoughts in their journals.
7. Write how your interpretation of the passage/document has changed after the class discussion.
8. Type the response in view of the final project.

#### Narrator/character's Analysis

This strategy allows students to decode the hidden thoughts and feelings of the character. The various body-parts represent the external clues which open his/her mind to the reader. It can be used with all students to draw the final conclusions about the character before writing the closing essay.

1. Head: intellectual side of the character. What are his/her dreams? Visions? Philosophies he/she keeps inside?
2. Eyes: seeing through the character's eyes. What memorable sights affect him/her? How?
3. Ears: hearing through the character's ears. What does he/she notice and remember others saying about him/her? How is he/she affected?
4. Nose: smelling through the character's nose. What smells affect him/her? How?
5. Mouth: the character's communication. What philosophy does the character share? What arguments/debates? What images would symbolize his/her philosophy?

6. Arms: working. What is the character's relationship to work in general? To specific work?
7. Hands: the practical side of the character. What conflicts does he or she deal with? How?
8. Heart: the emotional side. What does he/she love? Who? Whom? How?
9. Torso: the instinctive side of the character. What does he/she like about himself/herself? What does he hide? What brings the character pain? What does he/she fear?
10. Legs: the playful side of the character. What does he/she do for fun?
11. Feet: the character's mobility. Where has he or she been (literally/figuratively)? How has he been affected by setting and/or travel?
12. Wings: the character's future. Where is he/she going?

Modifications:

The AP students have to identify four to five meaningful quotations for each body part and also to write an evaluation/analysis of each quote. The college students have to identify two important quotations for each part followed by commentaries. The weakest students have to identify one quotation for each body part followed by commentary.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

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All students have to write an annotated bibliography as a result of their research in order to support their argument.

1. Divide the written sources with a specific author's name and title from the oral sources.
2. Write the name and last name of the people you have interviewed and the topic/title of interview.
3. Organize the various sources (author's last name first) alphabetically.
4. Use the MLA reference book to cite the source (I usually suggest them to refer to the Purdue OWL website so they can work at home too).
5. Write two pages for each source. Each written piece needs to include:
  - A detailed summary of the source
  - An evaluation of the source. Say why or why not this source is useful to the understanding of the unit essential questions. Consider whether the source is reliable or it is not. Is it biased? How does it compare to the other sources?
  - A reflection on how it is helpful and how it helps shape your argument. Has it changed your understanding of the narrator's/character's experience? How?

## *Final Paper*

Each student is free to choose the format of the final paper: a speech, an essay that can be argumentative or analytical, or an oral presentation. The length has to be four to five pages for the college students and six to eight for the AP students. The oral presentation has to cover a window of fifteen minutes. Suggested steps:

1. Reread their journals/responses/notes and highlight the details, information you want to use to support your thesis.
2. Write a possible idea/theory/argument, share, and discuss it with the peers.
3. Determine what researched sources can be used to support your thesis/argument
4. Select quotations from the chosen scholarly sources supporting your assertions.
5. Write appropriate analysis of those quotations from your sources.
6. Write a discovery draft with a thesis statement and reasons.
7. Discuss the discovery draft in your group and take notes of your peers' suggestions.
8. Write a first draft.
9. Peers' revision: each student reads the peer's draft and focuses on the strength of the argument (thesis statement, introduction, well-supported and analyzed or poorly supported and analyzed; coherent, major grammar errors).
10. Write a second draft including the suggestions from the peer's revision. Peers' editing follows.
11. Write a third draft followed by a conference with the teacher.
12. Final draft with Works Cited page.

## **Theories Supporting the Unit**

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### *Pedagogy*

The majority of my students, except those in the Advanced Placement class, are still at what Jean Piaget called the concrete-operational stage. They cannot think abstractly and do not understand what can be inferred from a written, or visual text. This stage occurs when the child is able to solve concrete problems. It is the time when he displays a logic based on a situation he can see, touch or hear. My goal is to move my students from this initial stage to the formal-operational one in which they are able to solve abstract problems. This means the students can infer, and can develop theories and concerns about the social world surrounding him/her. At this stage the students are able to think hypothetically and reason deductively. The formal-operational thinker can identify general principles or use specific observations to identify a solution or a new theory. This goal cannot be achieved at the end of a single unit since it requires a long and consistent



planning path primarily oriented to the formal-operational thinking process. This unit reflects just the beginning of a process that is consistently reinforced throughout the year.

In planning all my units, I also take into consideration Lev Vygotsky's theory - endorsed by the Connecticut Department of Education and the New Haven School District -- that the teacher has to assist and guide the students in their learning experience. This theory requires continuous scaffolding - giving information, prompts, reminders, and allowing the students to gain ownership of their learning. It is particularly important for this unit, which is based on critical thinking, because my students would never follow me, if I did not empower them.

In addition to guiding the students' learning through scaffolding, Vygotsky theorizes that the teacher needs to determine the "zone of proximal development" at the onset of every new learning segment. This is the level at which a student cannot solve the problem or do things alone because he does not know how. That is the point at which real learning occurs, and when the teacher is needed to guide the student to the solution of the problem. It is only at this level that the learning is directed by the teacher who models appropriate strategies to meet the goal, and guides the students in their use of strategies. It is also important to plan a consistent repetition of the task making students aware of the specific strategies they are using to achieve a degree of autonomy in learning independently.

Piaget's and Vygotsky's theories support all the strategies I implement, but my unit takes into account Gardner's theory of Multiple Intelligences as well. Gardner's theory states that there are separate abilities, but that there are connections among them. My students offer a clear example of his theory. I have students with a specific musical talent who have logical-mathematical skills because they are able to handle long chains of reasoning. I have dancers who have also interpersonal skills since they are able to respond appropriately to the moods, desires, and motivations of other students. I have many students in the AP and College classes who have a clear intrapersonal intelligence but also have capacities to perceive the visual-spatial world, or have a particular sensitivity for the meanings of words, sounds, and language in general. The concept of different intelligences is extremely important in teaching and can never be minimized. All individuals are different, and have different and multiple intelligences because they can excel in one or more disciplines or areas.

My unit is based on the cultivation of all these capabilities. As an educator, I feel the responsibility to prepare my students for the community they will live in and in a broader sense for our society. The multiple-intelligences theory allows me to approach my unit goals in a variety of ways. I can spend a significant amount of time on generating ideas or essential questions by asking each student to use what he/she already knows in his/her art in order to make him/her understand how to see details, to infer what the image may refer to, and finally draw conclusion about what they see. Gardner's theory offers me the possibility to introduce the principle of differentiation because I will use music, drawing, dance, creative writing, and theater while leading my students to understand how details are relevant in the analysis of a text. I intend to apply Gardner's theory to scaffold these skills and to challenge them to understand what and how each author or artist sees the reality around him/her.

### *Cognitive Theory*

Beyond what classical pedagogy suggests in teaching, differentiated instruction has become the most important tool I implement as a teacher because of the heterogeneity of all my classes. The support for this new flexibility comes from Robert J. Steinberg, professor of Psychology, who confirms that each student has a well-defined style of thinking. While this might seem irrelevant to teaching, it confirms that "the individual

preference for using abilities" has to be taken in serious consideration because it helps students achieve the learning objectives. <sup>12</sup> The individual differences do not derive from an ability in itself but from the thinking style each person prefers. In education, these "styles of thought are important" because they contribute to the enhancement of the motivation the students need in order to complete a task and learn. It is clear that in class, students have their specific preferences and abilities. My job is to facilitate and coordinates their preferences and needs so they can feel rewarded while achieving the stated goals.

## Appendix: Implementing District Standards

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The teaching implemented in this unit reflects the requirements of the Connecticut's Common Core of Learning K-12 Content Standards. The curriculum for Language Arts in the New Haven District adheres to the state standards and each unit offers the opportunity to teach, deepen or scaffold the four essential standards: Reading and Responding, Exploring and Responding to Literature, Communicating with Others, and English Language Conventions. Specifically, my students read, interpret, analyze and evaluate fictional and multiple non-fictional texts in order to extend understanding and appreciation of how different historical, cultural, and personal events intersect, influence and originate specific behaviors, attitudes, or/and reactions. The novel, *Invisible Man*, the various written, and oral sources enhance the student's ability to synthesize and create his/her own argument in response to the unit essential questions. The application of differentiated instruction with flexible groups and modified strategies facilitates the achievement of the above mentioned standards.

## Annotated Bibliography: Resources for Teachers and Students

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