

The Literary Work of Ralph Ellison

Contributions of Influential Oklahomans

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Grade Level	9th – 12th Grade	**Time Frame**	2 class period(s)
Subject	Social Studies	**Duration**	100 minutes
Course	Oklahoma History		

Essential Question

How does literature help us understand the human experience? How have the messages of Ellison's literary work contributed to our understanding of American society both historically and currently?

Summary

In this lesson, students are introduced to Ralph Ellison, a celebrated Oklahoman, and the influence of his literary achievements. Students will analyze an excerpt from Ellison's most notable work, Invisible Man, to explore major themes in Ellison's writing and make connections between those themes and American society both historically and currently.

Snapshot

Engage

Students evaluate Ralph Ellison quotes.

Explore

Students watch a video introducing Ralph Ellison and the impact of his work.

Explain

Students analyze the prologue of Ellison's *Invisible Man.*

Extend

Students explore how Ellison's concept of "invisibility" is relevant historically and currently.

Evaluate

Students create an Exit Ticket explaining the significance of Ralph Ellison's literary contributions.

Standards

ACT College and Career Readiness Standards - Reading (6-12)

CLR403: Draw simple logical conclusions in more challenging passages
IDT401: Infer a central idea in straightforward paragraphs in somewhat challenging literary narratives
WME402: Interpret most words and phrases as they are used in somewhat challenging passages, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings

Oklahoma Academic Standards (Social Studies: Oklahoma History (9th through 12th grade))

OKH.6.3: Describe the artistic contributions of Oklahomans in the fields of music, art, literature, theater,and dance such as Ralph Ellison and the Five Indian Ballerinas.

Oklahoma Academic Standards SOCIAL STUDIES (United States History)

USH.C.1.2: Analyze the post-Reconstruction civil rights struggles.
USH.C.1.2.C: Describe how some Southerners responded to change brought about by Reconstruction, including the rise of the Ku Klux Klan, its methods of intimidation such as lynching, and the effect of Jim Crow laws aimed at establishing segregation.

Attachments

- Chat-Station-Note-Catcher-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Chat-Station-Note-Catcher-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf
- Chat-Station-Question-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Chat-Station-Question-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf
- Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.docx
- Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.pdf
- Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf
- Lesson-Slides-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pptx
- Magnetic-Statements-Handout-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.docx
- Magnetic-Statements-Handout-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.pdf
- Magnetic-Statements-Handout-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Magnetic-Statements-Handout-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf
- Magnetic-Statements-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.docx
- Magnetic-Statements-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison - Spanish.pdf
- Magnetic-Statements-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Magnetic-Statements-Posters-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf
- Teacher-Guide-Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.docx
- Teacher-Guide-Invisible-Man-Prologue-Excerpt-The-Literary-Work-of-Ralph-Ellison.pdf

Materials

- Magnetic Statements Posters (attached)
- Chat Station Question Posters (attached)
- Student Slides (attached)
- Magnetic Statements Handout (attached)
- *Invisible Man* Prologue Excerpt (attached; one per student)
- Chat Station Note Catcher (attached; one per student)
- Pen or Pencil

10 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Day 1 Lesson Preparation

Before class, print out the **Magnetic Statements posters** and hang them around the classroom.

Display **slide 3**. Distribute the **Magnetic Statements handout**. Ask students to review each of the statements on the handout. You could also choose to read through them as a class. After the statements have been reviewed, announce that each is printed on a piece of paper hung around the room. Using the Magnetic Statements strategy, ask students to determine which statement they find most compelling or which statement speaks to or resonates with them the most. Once they have made their decisions, ask students to stand next to the statement they chose.

Once students have distributed themselves among the statements, ask them to share with the other students at the same statement the reasoning for their choice. If there is a large number of students at one or more statements, ask them to divide into small groups of 2–3 students. Alternatively, you might choose to divide them.

After students have discussed their choices, select one student from each group to share with the whole class what resonated with them about the statement.

Once students have shared, reveal to students that all of the statements are quotes by an influential Oklahoman named Ralph Ellison. Tell students that he is a celebrated author who was born in Oklahoma City, OK. Display **slide 4**, which states the lesson's essential questions — *How does literature help us understand the human experience? How have the messages from Ellison's literary work contributed to our understanding of American society both historically and currently?* Lastly, display **slide 5** to share the learning objective with the class.

10 minutes

Explore

Divide students into small groups of 3–4 students. Consider establishing at least six groups. If you have a small class, you might consider groups of 2–3 students. Display **slide 6**. Introduce the video linked on this slide, which will provide background information about Ralph Ellison and the impact of his contributions to American literature and society as a whole.

Before starting the video, ask students to consider a POMS – Point Of Most Significance as they watch. Advise them that they should be ready to share and explain their POMS once the video is over. Suggest students record their thoughts as they watch the video on the back of their magnetic statements handout, in a notebook, or on a notecard or sticky note.

Once the video is over, ask students to share their POMS with their small group. Once students have had enough time to discuss with their groups, select a student from each group to share with the whole class.

Teacher's Note

Depending on what students offer to the discussion, consider following up with the following discussion questions.

- What experiences influenced Ralph Ellison's writing?
- Why is Ralph Ellison considered an influential Oklahoman?
- Why did the current Mayor of Oklahoma City, David Holt, believe more is needed to be done in Oklahoma to recognize Ralph Ellison?
- What are some of the things that have been done in recent years to honor Ellison?
- Additionally, highlight that Ralph Ellison went to Douglass High School in Oklahoma, City where the library is named after him.

30 minutes

Explain

Emphasize that Ellison's most notable literary work, *Invisible Man,* published in 1952, won the prestigious National Book Award in 1953. Since then, this book has been considered one of the most important works of American literature.

In 1952, the year *Invisible Man* was published, segregation of white people and Black people was still legal and socially acceptable. Racism against Black people was the norm in America. This was a time of great social and political unrest as many Americans fought against the racial strife that plagued and continues to plague our country. The story Ellison tells in *Invisible Man*, although a fictional account, reflects the realities experienced by Black people in America.

Invite students to read the book on their own. Announce that the class will read an excerpt of the book's prologue together. The class will analyze the first two paragraphs of the novel's prologue. This exercise is meant to familiarize them with both Ellison's writing and the book's important themes of character, race, and power.

Distribute copies of the ***Invisible Man*** **Prologue Excerpt** handout to each student. When all students have a copy, read the Prologue aloud to the class. After reading the excerpt, ask students to identify any words they would like to discuss. Consider words such as: "ectoplasm," which, in this context, refers to something like a spirit or something supernatural, or "epidermis," the outermost layer of the skin.

Display **slide 7**. The handout that is attached has divided the Prologue into six sections. Using the Jigsaw strategy, assign sections of the Prologue to each group. Depending on the size of your class, there might be more than one group analyzing the same section. You may also choose to break up the Prologue into a different number of sections to better suit your class.

Once the task has been explained, ask students to summarize, in 1–3 sentences in their own words, the section assigned to their group. When student groups have completed their summaries, ask a representative to share their summary with the class. As groups share, give them feedback and make adjustments to the summary as needed. Ask students to record the summaries for each section as they are being discussed. Encourage students to revise their writing based on the class discussion.

Teacher's Note: Teacher Discussion Guide

As these sections are being discussed, see the Teacher Guide Invisible Man Prologue Excerpt for additional discussion points. Use the information to ask follow up questions if these topics do not come up organically in the discussion as students share their summaries.

Conclude the discussion noting that Ellison's writing, and literature in general, can inform our thoughts and feelings about both our history and our present.

Teacher's Note: Suggested Break

Consider stopping here for day one of this lesson.

30 minutes

Extend

Teacher's Note: Day 2 Lesson Preparation

Before class, print out the **Chat Station Posters** and hang them around the classroom. Consider asking students to recall their take-aways from the *Invisible Man* Prologue excerpt to create a context for the following activity.

Display **slide 8** and distribute the **Chat Station Note Catcher** handout. Announce that in addition to the magnetic statements posted around the room, four chat station questions have been posted.

Using the Chat Stations strategy, students will discuss the questions at each station with their groups and record their thoughts in the Note Catcher.

Chat Station Questions:

1. How can preconceived notions or expectations prevent us from really "seeing" people? Explain.
2. What does the excerpt from *Invisible Man* tell us about the experience of Ellison and other Black Americans in American society during the 1950's? Explain.
3. How might the concept of "invisibility" relate to other groups of people historically? Explain using one historical example.
4. How might the concept of "invisibility" relate to groups of people today? Explain using one current example.

Teacher's Note: Note Catcher Expectations

Decide how you want student responses to look. For example, students can bullet their notes or write a specified number of sentences. Explicitly state what your expectations are to students. Or you may have students discuss the questions orally and not record any answers instead.

There are four chat station questions that have been duplicated to make eight Chat Stations. This allows for more manageable group sizes. Number students 1–8 and send all the ones to Chat Station 1, all the twos to Chat Station 2, etc. They will rotate through the stations in number order to ensure they review all four questions (students will rotate only four times).

Teacher's Note: Chat Station Preparation

If your students have never participated in an activity like this, consider selecting a few volunteer students to model a small group discussion so your students understand the expectations for their participation in the discussion.

Advise students standing at their first chat station that they will have four minutes at each station to discuss the question and record their responses. Use a timer for each chat station session. When allotted time is up, ask students to rotate to the next station. When they have discussed each of the four questions, students will return to their seats.

Once they return to their seats with their original groups (the groups they were working with for the prologue analysis), invite students to briefly reflect on and discuss their responses to the four chat station questions and add any additional information to their Note Catchers.

When groups have completed their reflections, select a student from each to share their thoughts with the class about each of the four questions. Assign each group one of the four questions to share with the class or instruct each group to choose which response they would like to contribute to the class discussion. Invite discussion of the relevance today of themes addressed in literature of the 1950s. Explore the relevance of Ellison's themes to our experiences and the experiences of others. Invite discussion of how these insights might guide us as we aspire to build a more just and equal society for all where the full humanity of all people is recognized, accepted, and valued.

10 minutes

Evaluate

Display **slide 9**. To bring closure to the lesson, ask students to view the poster on **slide 9**. Share with students that this poster was created by artist, Tiffani Sanders, for the Ralph Ellison Foundation in Oklahoma City as part of their School Poster Project. This project was designed to distribute these posters to classrooms across Oklahoma City to raise students' awareness about the artistic contributions of Ralph Ellison.

Advise students to respond to the prompt on the slide as their Exit Ticket: *Based on what you have learned, explain why the artist who created this poster highlights Ralph Ellison as both an "Oklahoma and American Legend."* Students can write their response on the back of their Chat Stations Note Catcher, in a notebook, on a separate sheet of paper, notecard, or sticky. This response could also be recorded on a Google doc or class discussion board.

Resources

- Cult of Pedagogy. (2014, October 24). Chat stations for class discussions [video]. Youtube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eFUL4yP0vqo
- Ellison, R. (1995). Invisible man. New York: Vintage International.
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Chat Stations. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/944
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- K20 Center. (n.d.). Magnetic Statements. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/166
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Point of Most Significance. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/101
- PBS. (2014, June 5). Ralph Ellison [video]. https://www.pbs.org/video/onr-ralph-ellison/