

Advanced Placement Language Arts

Mrs. Cindy Martin, Instructor

SUMMER READING ASSIGNMENT



Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man

This packet includes:

1. Assignment Guidelines
2. AP Language and Composition Rhetorical Terms & Glossary
3. "Good Readers and Good Writers" – Vladimir Nabokov
4. *Why Read* by Harold Bloom
5. Invisible Man – "Invisible Man and Its Representation of Larger America" by Anthony M. Dykema-VanderArk
6. Invisible Man – "Ellison's Ambitious Scope in Invisible Man" by Stewart Lillard
7. MLA Guidelines

Please Note: If you have any questions while completing this packet, please feel free to contact me via email at Cindy.Martin@pgcps.org.

All Summer Reading Assignments are due the first day of school – NO EXCEPTIONS! Any assignment packet submitted late will receive a 20 point deduction for each day that it is late. Be sure to prioritize and manage your summer schedule so that you may devote at least 8 – 10 hours per week to working on your summer packet (anything less than that will not suffice). Packets will ONLY be accepted in the correct format (please see Assignment Guidelines).

The Summer Reading Assignment will account for 10% of your first quarter grade. We will also devote the first 2 – 3 weeks discussing Ralph Ellison's purpose, writing style, and use of rhetorical devices. If you DO NOT thoroughly read the text, you will be unable to contribute meaningfully to class discussion and assignments.

Assignment Guidelines

1. **Read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.** You may purchase the novel (highly suggested) or borrow the novel from the library. If you feel that you may have difficulties obtaining a novel, please see me before the end of this school year and I will allow you to borrow a novel from the English Department.
2. **While reading, maintain a Reading Response Journal (RRJ).** At the end of each chapter, write an entry in your RRJ. I suggest that you purchase a spiral notebook as your journal. You are to date each entry and label each with the chapter number. Since there are 25 chapters, you should have 25 entries in your journal. The rubric for scoring your journal is below.
 - **What is a Reading Response Journal?** A reading journal is an effective way to keep a record of your reading responses – positive or negative, sure or unsure. It offers a chance to respond personally, to ask questions, wonder, predict, or reflect on the characters, events, literary elements, or language of a text. As you read take time to record your observations. You may do this as ideas strike you or after you have read a small portion of the text, for example ten pages (a chapter). Write often and record as many of your observations as possible. Do not summarize. Instead, record your textual observations. Some of the first nine week's essays will reflect your responses, so take time and care when writing in your journal. If you are having trouble beginning an entry, try some of these "starters." I was impressed by...I noticed that...I wonder about...Some questions I have are...I don't understand...I now understand why/how/what...Something I notice or appreciate/ don't appreciate/wonder about is...I predict...An interesting word/sentence/thought is...This reminds me of...I never thought...I was surprised by... Please keep in mind that these logs are NOT meant to be a personal diary. They are meant to be read by others and should relate ONLY to the assigned material. You will be sharing your journal in class, so keep this in mind as you write. When sharing you will have the opportunity to confirm, clarify, and modify your responses through discussion.
 - **Do and Don't of Journal Writing – SCORING RUBRIC.** Generally, three stages of student work are exhibited in these journals. YOU SHOULD STRIVE FOR STAGE THREE.

✚ **STAGE I: A Literal surface encounter with the text. The work of students at this level will have some or many of the following characteristics (earns 50-69%):**

- lacks a critical interest in the narrative
- primarily summarizes the selection
- unsupported by evidence from the text or experience
- predictions are unrealistic or improbable
- fails to ask questions or hypothesize
- uses stereotypical responses
- uses images drawn from movies or television
- entries are too short
- confusion about the text and the story
- off –topic responses

✚ **STAGE II: Evidence and understanding and appreciation of text. The work of students at this level will have some or many of the following characteristics (earns 70% - 89%):**

- does not summarize, but rather reflects upon the narrative
- personal connection between text and student's own experiences are made
- predictions are plausible given the scenario (but may change after further reading)
- demonstrates an ability to understand characters' motivations
- quotes from the text for support
- ability to hypothesize and predict

- evidence that students are engaged in the text

✚ **STAGE III: Synthesis and evaluation of the text. The work of students at this level will have some or many of these characteristics (earns 90% - 100%):**

- a strong interest in the material as evidenced through an awareness of levels of meaning
- judgments are textually and experientially based
- predictions are thoughtful and keenly observed
- character analysis is consistent with the material presented
- show an understanding of character motivation
- comparisons and connections are found between text and other literary and artistic works
- recognizes the author's writing choices and reasons for those choices
- awareness that their own personal beliefs may differ from those expressed in the text
- demonstrates an awareness of point of view

3. Explanation of Rhetorical Terms. Take some time to review the rhetorical terms & glossary. You will work with many of these terms all throughout the school year. It is important that you become familiar with ALL of the terms. Below, you will find a list of terms. Select 15 terms and provide an explanation of how Ellison uses it within *Invisible Man*. In some cases, you will be able to provide an example from the text. In others, you will have to explain the term referencing the text.

- For example, for the term allusion you might say: "Another allusion used by Ellison occurs after the main character discovers he has been deceived by the school master, which subsequently leads him to acquire an interim occupation at Liberty Paints. At his new job, the character is instructed to add ten drops of "Grey stuff" to a can full of White paint. After the paint is shaken, the main character peers into the can and beholds a "pure white" paint. This allusion hints at the mindset of Americans at those times, an addition of ten drops of indoctrination to the African-American soul can instill in him the love of white America; or it could illustrate that what is considered "pure white" isn't exclusively white. This is also a vague reference to Jim Crow-era laws that were based on the percentage of "black blood" one had in order for such to apply." (from Wikipedia <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/InvisibleMan>)

Please Note: You may use examples found on the internet or in other sources as long as you cite your source. If you do not cite your source, you are plagiarizing and in jeopardy of receiving no credit on the entire assignment.

- For the term tone, you might say: Throughout the novel Ellison's tone is ridiculing, yet hopeful. It is clear that Ellison ridicules America's hypocrisy in its treatment of blacks and he even asserts that blacks are manipulated and reduced to partaking in the hypocrisy against one another. The narrator's reclusion into the manhole at the end of the text suggests that America has no place for him and that its' supposed symbolic name, "United" States of America is a complete farce. On the other hand, Ellison suggests hope at the conclusion of the novel when the narrator is about to emerge from his underground existence. Through this, Ellison suggests that perhaps at a later time America will be able to embrace the narrator as he is.

You are only responsible for defining the terms below:

Abstract	Irony
Allegory	Logical fallacy
Allusion	Metaphor
Analogy	Metonymy
Anaphora	Oversimplification
Colloquialism	Oxymoron
Dramatic irony	Paradox
Emotional appeal	Point of view (first person & stream of consciousness)
Ethical appeal	Sarcasm
Extended metaphor	Satire
Figures of speech	Simile
Foreshadowing	Symbolism
Humor	Theme
Hyperbole	Tone
Imagery	Understatement
Invective	

4. **Read *Good Readers and Good Writers* – Vladimir Nabokov.** Write a summary of the article. Be sure to include characteristics of a good reader and writer according to Nabokov. While there is no length requirement given with this assignment, I feel that a thorough summary should be about $\frac{1}{4}$ of the length of the text that it is summarizing. (Use MLA format – please see MLA Guidelines).
5. **Read *Why Read* – Harold Bloom.** Write a summary of the prologue. Be sure to answer the question according to Bloom – why should we read? Again, there is no length requirement, but follow the same rules mentioned previously. A summary should be $\frac{1}{4}$ of the length of the text it is summarizing. (Use MLA format.)
6. **Read *Invisible Man and Its Representation of Larger America*.** In a well-organized essay, defend or challenge VanderArk's assertion that Ellison's novel concludes that "living as a true American requires faith – faith in equality and democracy when they are most out of reach, in the possibility of coming together when segregation predominates, in human complexity when society is obsessed with stereotypes." Be sure to use the text as well as other relevant sources to support your position. (Use MLA format.)
7. **Read *Ellison's Ambitious Scope in Invisible Man*.** In a well-organized essay, explain whether or not Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* qualifies as "the great American Negro epic" as Lillard asserts in his essay. Be sure to define an epic prior to responding to this essay. (Use MLA format.)

HINT: The essays (#6 and #7) by VanderArk and Lillard should help you to come up with examples of the rhetorical devices used in the novel (question #3).

MLA Guidelines

Please follow MLA format for all papers.

1. Type the paper.
2. Double-space the paper. (Set the line spacing at "2.")
3. The margins should be 1" on all four sides of the paper.
4. Use 12-point type. The only acceptable fonts are Times New Roman, Courier, or Verdana.
5. Use white, 8"X 11" paper only.
6. Indent each paragraph ½" (approximately 5 spaces from the left margin).
7. Justify the paper on the left margin only.
8. Type your last name and page number on every page in the top right corner one-half inch from the top.
9. Instead of using a title page, type your name, your teacher's name, course name and date on separate lines of the first page, beginning flush with the top left margin. Center your title on page one. Do not underline the title; do not put the title in quotation marks; do not put title in all caps; do not place the title in bold letters, and do not place the title in italics. Please look below at the example of heading:

Ima Good Student
Mrs Martin
AP English Language and Composition
September 15, 2007

Larsen's Use of Imagery in Isaac's Storm

10. For formal writing (most writing which you will complete in this course) do NOT use contractions, slang, or colloquialism expressions (dialect, regional expressions, informal words)
11. For formal writing, do not write in first or second person. (Do not use "I" or "you" unless they are words within a direct quotation.) Example: Write "Capital Punishment is barbaric and should never be imposed in a civilized society." Write: "I think Capital Punishment is barbaric and should never be imposed in a civilized society..."
12. Your paper should be free of all visible errors. Proofread carefully.
13. Staple your paper in the top-left hand corner of the page. Do not place your paper in any type of folder or binder unless your teacher instructs you to do so.

Jul 1, 2007

Invisible Man | Invisible Man and Its Representation of Larger America

In the following essay, Anthony M. Dykema-VanderArk examines how the individual journey of the "Invisible Man" can represent the larger American experience. He asserts that Ellison's novel concludes that "living as a true American requires faith—faith in equality and democracy when they are most out of reach, in the possibility of coming together when segregation predominates, in human complexity when society is obsessed with stereotypes."

From his earliest published writings in the late 1930s until his death in 1994, Ralph Ellison remained an outspoken commentator on American literature, culture, race, and identity, but his reputation has always rested most solidly on his one published novel, *Invisible Man*. Since its publication in 1952, *Invisible Man* has consistently been singled out as one of the most compelling and important novels of this century. Praised for both its artistic originality and its thematic richness, the novel continues to find new readers not least because of the reading experience it provides—at once inspiring and unsettling, lucid and complex, approachable and profoundly challenging. From the powerful first line of the novel ("I am an invisible man"), readers are engaged in the life of the narrator, this "invisible man," as he tries to tell his story and "put

invisibility down in black and white." Moreover, the novel urges its readers to undertake a similar quest along with the narrator: to examine the painful realities of American history and culture and, in the end, to seek the ways in which they, too, may have "a socially responsible role to play."

Like the familiar opening of *Moby Dick* ("Call me Ishmael"), *Invisible Man* begins with a prologue by the novel's first-person narrator, but in this case the introduction comes without a name: "I am an invisible man." The narrator's name remains hidden to the reader throughout the novel, but the importance of names and the act of naming becomes clear as his story unfolds. The narrator is "named" by nearly every person he encounters in the novel: He is, for example, a "boy" and a "nigger" to the "leading white citizens" of his town; just the same (to his surprise) to Dr. Bledsoe; a "cog" in the machine of Mr. Norton's "fate"; little more than a laboratory animal to the doctors in the factory hospital; a race-traitor to Ras the Exhorter; and a "natural resource" to the Brotherhood. Each person or group that the narrator encounters tries to identify him, to impose an identity upon him, while ignoring or denying his own emotional and psychological sense of self. As he reflects on his experiences from his "hole in the ground," he understands that this misnaming is the real source of his identity crisis. He is "invisible" not from any lack of physicality or intelligence but because of a willed action of those around him, "simply because people refuse to see me." But this blindness, this desire to call him by any name but his own, initially affects even the narrator himself. It takes him, as he acknowledges, "a long time and much painful boomeranging of my expectations to achieve a realization everyone else appears to have been born with: That I am nobody but myself."

Achieving that "realization" requires the narrator to come to terms with his personal history and with his place in the larger history of America. The first words of the narrator's story in the first chapter of the book—"It goes a long way back ..."—establish immediately the importance of history and memory to his quest, and his narrative itself constitutes both memory and history "in black and white." Much of the tension of the story, however, results from the narrator's conflicted understanding of history and his desire to stifle his memories, to disconnect himself from his past. As he recollects his experiences at the college, for example, the narrator struggles to determine "what was real, what solid, what more than a pleasant, time-killing dream." After rejecting the identity that he possessed at the college, the narrator is left with "the problem of forgetting it," of quieting "all the contradictory voices shouting" inside his head. The narrator's difficulty in leaving his past behind resonates throughout his story, from the recurring voice and image of his grandfather to the physical reminders of his past that he carries with him throughout the novel.

Two physical objects in particular—Primus Provo's "FREE PAPERS" and Brother Tarp's chain link—act as vivid emblems of the painful realities of America's past. The narrator wants to believe that the legacy of slavery and southern chain-gangs belong to the distant past: When he reads the "fragile paper" that once released a man from slavery, he tells himself, "*It has been longer than that, further removed in time....*" But, as he begins to perceive in the factory hospital, the narrator's quest for his own "freedom" and identity can only be fulfilled when he recovers that history, when he understands its continuing relevance as part of his own past. He recognizes this connection fully only after rejecting the Brotherhood's "scientific" language in favor of a more personal sense of history: "I began to accept my past and, as I accepted it, I felt memories welling up within me.... Images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me." Only after seeing this composite picture of his past does the narrator recognize not only his invisibility but also the "great potentialities" and "possibilities" that exist in spite of that invisibility.

Of course, "potentialities" and "possibilities" are just what the narrator finds—for a time—in the grand missions of the Founder's college and the Brotherhood. At the college, the narrator identifies himself with Mr. Norton and with Dr. Bledsoe and feels that he is "sharing in a great work"; likewise, in the Brotherhood, he believes that he has found "a way to have a part in making the big decisions, of seeing through the mystery of how the country, the world, really operated." What attracts the narrator to both groups is, in part, versions of history and visions of the future that are full of meaning, purpose, and direction. But both groups, he eventually learns, maintain a strict control over all "possibilities," conceal all "contradictions," and, as the vet at the Golden Day prophesied, finally see the narrator as "a thing and not a man." These groups give him a "role" to play, but only as an "automaton," a "child," a "black amorphous thing."

When the narrator ends his story, then, by wondering if "even an invisible man has a socially responsible role to play," it is clear that the answer to his question rests on the entirety of his narrative and has no simple solution. "Social responsibility," first of all, is precisely what the racist "leading white citizens" of his southern town desired from him, the responsibility of keeping himself in a submissive and segregated "place." In contrast, the responsible role that the narrator seeks for the future will go hand in hand with a belief—even if it is his alone—in the "social equality" that he inadvertently pronounced to the horror of the white men. Such a role will also rest on "personal responsibility" and emotional integrity of the sort that Jack and the Brotherhood denied to him. The narrator desires a role that neither engulfs his identity, his humanity, and his memory, nor requires, in his words, "Rinehartism-cynicism." For his "mind," his self, to be satisfied, he can neither "take advantage of the people" nor take no responsibility at all: He "must come out" to play a meaningful part in society, whether or not he remains invisible to the people he encounters there. In the end, the narrator finds the key to his identity in a healthy contradiction, both "denouncing" and "defending" his society, saying "yes" and saying "no," affirming a world whose "definition is possibility" at the same time he refuses to be blind to negations of that promise.

A sense of "contradiction" and "possibility" may also, finally, be the key to the artistic power and continuing relevance of Ellison's *Invisible Man*. Just as his narrator offers "no phony forgiveness," no unambiguous moral to his story, so Ellison leaves many of the tensions and competing elements unresolved. Ellison implies that the truth of American society cannot be encompassed in absolutes such as hope or despair, idealism or cynicism, even love or hate, but rather requires a willingness on the part of each citizen to see both extremes and hold them in balance. As Ellison envisions it, living as a true American requires faith—faith in equality and democracy when they are most out of reach, in the possibility of coming together when segregation predominates, in human complexity when society is obsessed with stereotypes. That the novel continues to move readers almost half a century after it was written testifies not only to the power of Ellison's story telling but also to the continuing relevance of these themes. Ellison's success in reaching new readers each year affirms, it seems, the narrator's final, unanswered question: "Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"

Source: Anthony M. Dykema-VanderArk, in an essay for *Novels for Students*, Gale, 1997. Dykema-VanderArk is a doctoral candidate at Michigan State University.

July 1, 2007

Invisible Man | Ellison's Ambitious Scope in Invisible Man

In the following excerpt, Stewart Lillard places *Invisible Man* within the epic tradition and calls the novel "a most successful attempt ... to produce the great American Negro epic."

[In *Invisible Man*], Ellison attempted to portray the theme of Negro endurance and cultural continuity by devising a plot which would include a maximum of experiences common to the American Negroes, but which could be employed by a wandering hero in an episodic manner. For this plot, he relied heavily on the social migration theme that promised equality to the Southern Negro but shattered his hopes in an economic jungle which ended with a dispossession in Harlem....

In the novel, one unnamed youth progresses from a high school setting in Greenwood to the Southern college for Negroes and from there to Harlem. He does not remain in Harlem but seeks employment in the white neighborhoods of New York City and expresses interest in a scientific Brotherhood before returning to Harlem. In the final riot scene he flees from Harlem and discovers an underground cellar near Harlem situated in a white community bordering the Negro ghetto. His motivation for leaving Greenwood was the scholarship presented him by the white community of the town. At the college, the hero again felt an external motivating force which this time catapulted him from the Southern college to New York supposedly under the same expectations that faced Eddie, Harry, and Marvin (of earning his college expenses for the next school year); but he soon felt the true motivating impulse of expulsion.... [Although] the hero in *Invisible Man* has achieved no recognition of his identity, he has developed a workable solution and method of continued searching.

Within the episodic migration theme, Ellison developed a central character ... [who] is nameless and achieves an enlarged symbolic position. As he confronts the idiosyncrasies and overt violence of his environment and the white man's world that closes its doors to him, he is able to portray the frustrations and victories common to every man ("Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?"); thereby, he achieves universal magnitude equivalent to the requirements for an epic hero.

Robert Bone, in his attempt [in "Ralph Ellison and the Use of Imagination," *Anger and Beyond*, 1966], to classify *Invisible Man* as a picaresque novel, recognizes the heroic qualities in the unnamed character's confrontations with reality: "His [Ellison's] heroes are not victims but adventurers. They journey toward the possible in all ignorance of accepted limits. In the course of their travels, they shed their illusions and come to terms with reality." The internal evidence from the novel further substantiates the heroic qualities of the hero, who alone must contend frequently with the machinations of the white mind.

During the high school address before the drunken audience at the smoker in Chapter 1, the speaker illustrates his speech with the account of "a ship lost at sea," whose sailors ask for fresh water from the first friendly vessel they meet. The reply stresses self-reliance: "Cast down your bucket where you are." Like the captain of the distressed vessel, the Negro youth has been taught to seek help where it can be obtained. He must seek and strive for his own identity within society.

The encounter with Mr. Norton following the ill-fated Golden Day episode again resounds with an emphasis on self-reliance, for Mr. Norton explains that "'Self-reliance is a most worthy virtue. I shall look forward with the greatest of interest to learning your contribution to my fate.'" Do not Dr. Bledsoe's letters manipulate the hero into a position of being rejected by Mr. Emerson in New York City, a rejection that forces the hero to rely on his own skills rather than the reputation of his Southern alma mater ("... that though the wide universe is full of good, no kernel of nourishing corn can come to him but through his toil bestowed on that plot of ground which is given to him to till")?

Following the youth's symbolic second birth from the prefrontal lobotomy machine, he collides with the street crowds of New York without a protective shield (his college ties that opened doors for him, or a strong body that enabled him to work in non-union plants and remain temporarily outside his Harlem environment); and he soon struggles for a new identity, although his "tail feathers" have been "picked clean" like Poor Robin's. It is his encounter with a "yam" seller in Harlem that reverses his bewilderment and enables him to regain an identity:

This is all very wild and childish, I thought, but to hell with being ashamed of what you liked. No more of that for me. I am what I am! I wolfed down the yam and ran back to the old man....

Although this discovery and the search for identity has begun, it remains a disheveled stream of arabesqueness at the conclusion of the novel. Ellison's hero apparently has yet a host of worlds to vanquish.

In his struggle the hero cannot act independently of all external forces. Ellison's central hero is governed by his paternal grandfather's deathbed command to act the part of an intelligencer toward the white society and "overcome 'em with yeses." The hero, moreover, is also controlled by a naturalistic fate that is almost as important as the classical Olympian interference. Beneath this fate, the hero is allowed some degree of independence whereby he may become self-reliant. But this self-reliance is restricted to the Negro world; regardless of his solutions for establishing his identity, the society in which the hero lives and must find work is a segregated society that limits his opportunities. Unlike the racial injustice portrayed in Ellison's vignette, "The Birthmark" (*New Masses*, July 2, 1940), when Matt and Clara are repulsed by the brutality and barbarism of a lynching, the segregated social conditions in *Invisible Man* manipulate the hero as though they were an amoral fate in which the hero finds himself. Within his limitations, the hero refuses to retreat from his heroic search for his identity. In the *Epilogue*, he realizes his need to return to the streets of Harlem rather than live continually in complacent seclusion. (The only men worthy of praise of the gods during the heroic age were those who accomplished noble deeds.) And so the hero reasons, "Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat"—a restatement of the conflict that plagued men for centuries.

Along with his grandfather's deathbed command, which haunts the hero throughout the novel as Anchises' predictions in the underworld influenced Aeneas' struggle in Italy or as Achilles' potential return to his father would have eliminated his chances for universal fame, a limited number of additional epic similarities appear in Ellison's novel: the hero's Dantesque descent in the *Prologue*, Sybil's Circean attempts to detain the hero from his mission, examples of gory combat, and one mock epic battle.

In the *Prologue*, the Negro youth's descent into a cave that appears in a "reefer" dream is similar to Dante's progress into *Inferno* following his night of wandering in a lonely woods. During the Brotherhood portion of the novel, the hero has been denounced by the party leaders, but before he can effect his separation from the organization, he is transferred to the downtown section of New York and assigned to lecture on the position of women in the United States. The women of the Brotherhood and Sybil in Chapter 24 are unable to seduce the hero. Their attempt to sap his stoic will has failed, and they are unable to preclude his search for identity.

The battle scenes and physical flights from death echo of primitive combat. Near the end of the Harlem Riot, the hero "ran expecting death between the shoulder blades or through the back of my head, and as I ran I was trying to get to Mary's." In the *Epilogue* his description of his personal feelings upon recognition of his fated position in society reeks of gory details:

That is the real soul-sickness, the spear in the side, the drag by the neck through the mob-angry town, the Grand Inquisition, the embrace of the Maiden, the rip in the belly with the guts spilling out, the top to the chamber with the deadly gas that ends in the oven so hygienically clean—only it's worse because you continue stupidly to live.

But Ellison, the Ellison of subtle humor, does not neglect at least one mock epic battle as Ras the Exhorter fights the uniformed New York policemen: "Hell, yes, man, he had him a big black hoss

and a fur cap and some kind of old lion skin or something over his shoulders and he was raising hell. Goddam if he wasn't a *sight*, riding up and down on this ole hoss, you know, one of the kind that pulls vegetable wagons, and he got him a cowboy saddle and some big spurs." The unnamed hero from a nebulously defined town of Greenwood and the college for Negroes in the South has migrated to Harlem where he witnesses mock-chivalry and chaos but has yet failed to achieve his own identity.

Although the central character in *Invisible Man* is fictitious and nameless, the chaos that swirls about him in the final chapters presents a scene similar to the Harlem Riot of 1943. Ellison's clever meshing of fiction with historical fact and his structural development in the novel tend to produce a surface adventure with historical significance.

Intertwining through the episodes is Ellison's use of lyrics, which often are effective digressions and possess ironic overtones that suggest an atmosphere of defeat or of victory. Moreover, the spirituals and hymns, blues and jazz, recall slavery work songs and catastrophes that weld the centuries of the American Negroes' experiences into a collective event of suffering and expectation....

As a novelist, Ellison seems to have engaged his literary talents in a conscious effort of recording a century of Negro culture in *Invisible Man*. He records speech habits and musical lyrics of an oral tradition before they are lost to future ages. But his greater achievement is that he couches the lyrics and sermons within a framework of Negro expressions and history. His novel becomes no mere anthology of unrelated selections, but a unified presentation of the American Negroes' culture and heritage. The lyrics, moreover, reflect glimpses of the white culture that dominated the slavery and reconstruction eras of the South and was modified by Negro choirs. Spirituals and anthems left behind by the hero on the Southern college campus reappear in a pejorative form of insult ("Go Down Moses") voiced by the intoxicated members of the scientifically oriented Brotherhood. Conversely, the spiritual theme of "Swing Low Sweet Chariot" resounded throughout sections of Dvorak's *New World Symphony*.

In the hospital scene following the paint factory explosion, the hero is reminded of a work song as he struggles to free himself from the machine and as he attempts to recall his past identity. Mary Rambo's use of the "Backwater Blues" and Trueblood's singing of primitive blues laments are two characteristic examples of Ellison's heavy reliance on the blues form. Trueblood's children and those of Brother Hambro in New York, sing nursery and game songs, but the songs are those borrowed from the Anglo-Scottish community. Ellison's use of animal lyrics ("Poor Robin"), the jazz of the musical bars in New York, and the Harlem jive of Peter Wheatstraw ("She's got feet like a monkey / Legs like a frog—Lawd, Lawd!") together form a composite, along with his other musical types, of the American Negroes' culture and the experiences to which the invisible hero was subjected.

The musical references and lyrics parallel the geographic settings used in the structure of the novel and provide evidence of a cultural heritage that existed long before the events in the novel occurred. They are the remains of a primitive oral tradition among the American Negroes that Ellison sought to record in their authentic context before they were lost or obscured in fragmented passages in printed anthologies. The scope of the novelist was ambitious enough, and the once oral musical tradition has become literature.

Ralph Ellison's "love" for the American scene somehow inspired him to capture the American Negroes' culture in an artistic form, and his *Invisible Man* is Ellison's attempt—a most successful attempt—to produce the great American Negro epic. For the reader aware of the American Negroes' culture, it is an *Odyssey* in disguise.

Source: Stewart Lillard, "Ellison's Ambitious Scope in *Invisible Man*," in *English Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 6, September, 1969, pp. 833-39.

Good Readers and Good Writers- Vladimir Nabokov

My course, among other things, is a kind of detective investigation of the mystery of literary structures.

"How to be a Good Reader" or "Kindness to Authors"—something of that sort might serve to provide a subtitle for these various discussions of various authors, for my plan is to deal lovingly, in loving and lingering detail, with several European Masterpieces. A hundred years ago, Flaubert in a letter to his mistress made the following remark: *Comme l'on serait savant si l'on connaissait bien seulement cinq à six livres*: "What a scholar one might be if one knew well only some half a dozen books."

In reading, one should notice and fondle details. There is nothing wrong about the moonshine of generalization when it comes after the sunny trifles of the book have been lovingly collected. If one begins with a readymade generalization, one begins at the wrong end and travels away from the book before one has started to understand it. Nothing is more boring or more unfair to the author than starting to read, say, *Madame Bovary*, with the preconceived notion that it is a denunciation of the bourgeoisie. We should always remember that the work of art is invariably the creation of a new world, so that the first thing we should do is to study that new world as closely as possible, approaching it as something brand new, having no obvious connection with the worlds we already know. When this new world has been closely studied, then and only then let us examine its links with other worlds, other branches of knowledge.

Another question: Can we expect to glean information about places and times from a novel? Can anybody be so naive as to think he or she can learn anything about the past from those buxom best-sellers that are hawked around by book clubs under the heading of historical novels? But what about the masterpieces? Can we rely on Jane Austen's picture of landowning England with baronets and landscaped grounds when all she knew was a clergyman's parlor? And *Bleak House*, that fantastic romance within a fantastic London, can we call it a study of London a hundred years ago? Certainly not. And the same holds for other such novels in this series. The truth is that great novels are great fairy tales—and the novels in this series are supreme fairy tales.

Time and space, the colors of the seasons, the movements of muscles and minds, all these are for writers of genius (as far as we can guess and I trust we guess right) not traditional notions which may be borrowed from the circulating library of public truths but a series of unique surprises which master artists have learned to express in their own unique way. To minor authors is left the ornamentation of the commonplace: these do not bother about any reinventing of the world; they merely try to squeeze the best they can out of a given order of things, out of traditional patterns of fiction. The various combinations these minor authors are able to produce within these set limits may be quite amusing in a mild ephemeral way because minor readers like to recognize their own ideas in a pleasing disguise. But the real writer, the fellow who sends planets spinning and models a man asleep and eagerly tampers with the sleeper's rib, that kind of author has no given values at his disposal: he must create them himself. The art of writing is a very futile business if it does not imply first of all the art of seeing the world as the potentiality of fiction. The material of this world may be real enough (as far as reality goes) but does not exist at all as an accepted entirety: it is chaos, and to this chaos the author says "go!" allowing the world to flicker and to fuse. It is now recombined in its very atoms, not merely in its visible and superficial parts. The writer is the first man to mop it and to form the natural objects it contains. Those berries there are edible. That speckled creature that bolted across my path might be tamed. That lake between those trees will be called Lake Opal or, more artistically, Dishwater Lake. That mist is a mountain—and that mountain must be conquered. Up a trackless slope climbs the master artist, and at the top, on a windy ridge, whom do you think he meets? The panting and happy reader, and there they spontaneously embrace and are linked forever if the book lasts forever.

One evening at a remote provincial college through which I happened to be jogging on a protracted lecture tour, I suggested a little quiz—ten definitions of a reader, and from these ten the students had to choose four definitions that would combine to make a good reader. I have

mislaid the list, but as far as I remember the definitions went something like this. Select four answers to the question what should a reader be to be a good reader:

1. The reader should belong to a book club.
2. The reader should identify himself or herself with the hero or heroine.
3. The reader should concentrate on the social-economic angle.
4. The reader should prefer a story with action and dialogue to one with none.
5. The reader should have seen the book in a movie.
6. The reader should be a budding author.
7. The reader should have imagination.
8. The reader should have memory.
9. The reader should have a dictionary.
10. The reader should have some artistic sense.

The students leaned heavily on emotional identification, action, and the social-economic or historical angle. Of course, as you have guessed, the good reader is one who has imagination, memory, a dictionary, and some artistic sense--which sense I propose to develop in myself and in others whenever I have the chance.

Incidentally, I use the word reader very loosely. Curiously enough, one cannot read a book: one can only reread it. A good reader, a major reader, an active and creative reader is a rereader. And I shall tell you why. When we read a book for the first time the very process of laboriously moving our eyes from left to right, line after line, page after page, this complicated physical work upon the book, the very process of learning in terms of space and time what the book is about, this stands between us and artistic appreciation. When we look at a painting we do not have to move our eyes in a special way even if, as in a book, the picture contains elements of depth and development. The element of time does not really enter in a first contact with a painting. In reading a book, we must have time to acquaint ourselves with it. We have no physical organ (as we have the eye in regard to a painting) that takes in the whole picture and then can enjoy its details. But at a second, or third, or fourth reading we do, in a sense, behave towards a book as we do towards a painting. However, let us not confuse the physical eye, that monstrous masterpiece of evolution, with the mind, an even more monstrous achievement. A book, no matter what it is—a work of fiction or a work of science (the boundary line between the two is not as clear as is generally believed)—a book of fiction appeals first of all to the mind. The mind, the brain, the top of the tingling spine, is, or should be, the only instrument used upon a book.

Now, this being so, we should ponder the question how does the mind work when the sullen reader is confronted by the sunny book. First, the sullen mood melts away, and for better or worse the reader enters into the spirit of the game. The effort to begin a book, especially if it is praised by people whom the young reader secretly deems to be too old-fashioned or too serious, this effort is often difficult to make; but once it is made, rewards are various and abundant. Since the master artist used his imagination in creating his book, it is natural and fair that the consumer of a book should use his imagination too.

There are, however, at least two varieties of imagination in the reader's case. So let us see which one of the two is the right one to use in reading a book. First, there is the comparatively lowly kind which turns for support to the simple emotions and is of a definitely personal nature. (There are various subvarieties here, in this first section of emotional reading.) A situation in a book is intensely felt because it reminds us of something that happened to us or to someone we know or knew. Or, again, a reader treasures a book mainly because it evokes a country, a landscape, a mode of living which he nostalgically recalls as part of his own past. Or, and this is the worst thing a reader can do, he identifies himself with a character in the book. This lowly variety is not the kind of imagination I would like readers to use.

So what is the authentic instrument to be used by the reader? It is impersonal imagination and artistic delight. What should be established, I think, is an artistic harmonious balance between the reader's mind and the author's mind. We ought to remain a little aloof and take pleasure in this aloofness while at the same time we keenly enjoy—passionately enjoy, enjoy with tears and shivers—the inner weave of a given masterpiece. To be quite objective in these matters is of course impossible. Everything that is worthwhile is to some extent subjective. For instance, you

sitting there may be merely my dream, and I may be your nightmare. But what I mean is that the reader must know when and where to curb his imagination and this he does by trying to get clear the specific world the author places at his disposal. We must see things and hear things, we must visualize the rooms, the clothes, the manners of an author's people. The color of Fanny Price's eyes in *Mansfield Park* and the furnishing of her cold little room are important.

We all have different temperaments, and I can tell you right now that the best temperament for a reader to have, or to develop, is a combination of the artistic and the scientific one. The enthusiastic artist alone is apt to be too subjective in his attitude towards a book, and so a scientific coolness of judgment will temper the intuitive heat. If, however, a would-be reader is utterly devoid of passion and patience—of an artist's passion and a scientist's patience—he will hardly enjoy great literature.

Literature was born not the day when a boy crying wolf, wolf came running out of the Neanderthal valley with a big gray wolf at his heels: literature was born on the day when a boy came crying wolf, wolf and there was no wolf behind him. That the poor little fellow because he lied too often was finally eaten up by a real beast is quite incidental. But here is what is important. Between the wolf in the tall grass and the wolf in the tall story there is a shimmering go-between. That go-between, that prism, is the art of literature.

Literature is invention. Fiction is fiction. To call a story a true story is an insult to both art and truth. Every great writer is a great deceiver, but so is that arch-cheat Nature. Nature always deceives. From the simple deception of propagation to the prodigiously sophisticated illusion of protective colors in butterflies or birds, there is in Nature a marvelous system of spells and wiles. The writer of fiction only follows Nature's lead.

Going back for a moment to our wolf-crying woodland little woolly fellow, we may put it this way: the magic of art was in the shadow of the wolf that he deliberately invented, his dream of the wolf; then the story of his tricks made a good story. When he perished at last, the story told about him acquired a good lesson in the dark around the campfire. But he was the little magician. He was the inventor.

There are three points of view from which a writer can be considered: he may be considered as a storyteller, as a teacher, and as an enchanter. A major writer combines these three—storyteller, teacher, enchanter—but it is the enchanter in him that predominates and makes him a major writer.

To the storyteller we turn for entertainment, for mental excitement of the simplest kind, for emotional participation, for the pleasure of traveling in some remote region in space or time. A slightly different though not necessarily higher mind looks for the teacher in the writer. Propagandist, moralist, prophet—this is the rising sequence. We may go to the teacher not only for moral education but also for direct knowledge, for simple facts. Alas, I have known people whose purpose in reading the French and Russian novelists was to learn something about life in gay Páree or in sad Russia. Finally, and above all, a great writer is always a great enchanter, and it is here that we come to the really exciting part when we try to grasp the individual magic of his genius and to study the style, the imagery, the pattern of his novels or poems.

The three facets of the great writer—magic, story, lesson—are prone to blend in one impression of unified and unique radiance, since the magic of art may be present in the very bones of the story, in the very marrow of thought. There are masterpieces of dry, limpid, organized thought which provoke in us an artistic quiver quite as strongly as a novel like *Mansfield Park* does or as any rich flow of Dickensian sensual imagery. It seems to me that a good formula to test the quality of a novel is, in the long run, a merging of the precision of poetry and the intuition of science. In order to bask in that magic a wise reader reads the book of genius not with his heart, not so much with his brain, but with his spine. It is there that occurs the telltale tingle even though we must keep a little aloof, a little detached when reading. Then with a pleasure which is both sensual and intellectual we shall watch the artist build his castle of cards and watch the castle of cards become a castle of beautiful steel and glass. (@1948)