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Individual Learning Packet

Teaching Unit

Invisible Man

by Ralph Ellison

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Invisible Man

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the significance of the title as it relates to the main theme (the inability of society to view a black man as an individual) and comment on how this theme also contributes to the narrator's lack of self awareness or identity and alienation from society.
2. recognize the following symbols used in the novel:
 - cast iron bank
 - leg irons
 - Sambo doll
 - Jack's glass eye
 - briefcase with papers
3. point out examples of puns and sarcasm.
4. recognize how the author's choice of names for characters and places contributes to the reader's understanding of their personalities or function, including the following:
 - Trueblood
 - Chthonian
 - Bledsoe
5. cite examples of the storytelling forms parable and legend.
6. compare the narrator's level of freedom in the South with his freedom in New York, considering his ability to publicly enjoy what he likes to eat and his physical contact with whites.
7. point out the importance of blues music and food to the narrator's past and to his discovery of self.
8. comment on the use of water as a symbol for rebirth, considering
 - when the narrator is released from the paint factory
 - when the water main breaks, soaking the narrator before he enters the basement.
9. point out how the company's policy of enlightenment at the paint factory is an example of irony.

10. define communism and point out how the ideology of the Brotherhood is similar to communistic philosophy, considering the
 - needs of the individual versus the needs of the whole
 - scientific method and the use of logical persuasion versus emotional arousal
 - sacrifice that is necessary for the good of the larger group.
11. discuss the narrator's opinion of the following historical people:
 - Booker T. Washington
 - Frederick Douglass
 - Ralph Waldo Emerson
 - Louis Armstrong
12. cite incidents from the text to support the narrator's views on the conflict between black and white, including:
 - black suffering and white bigotry
 - black suffering from the cruelty of other self-serving blacks
 - white dependence upon black labor
13. recognize and comment on the author's use of metaphors.
14. cite incidents from the novel supporting the narrator's view that it is essential for the black race to remember its heritage.
15. trace the growth of the narrator in the following areas:
 - release of emotions
 - acceptance of heritage
 - awareness of self
16. cite incidents from the text illustrating the author's use of blindness to represent ignorance and light to represent knowledge.
17. point out the extent to which satire is used to poke fun at the myth that white women desire black men.
18. recognize and identify some characters that may represent character types rather than individuals.
19. discuss the conclusion of the novel in regard to the narrator's opinions on race relations and whether his outlook is hopeful or pessimistic, considering
 - the reasons the narrator intends to emerge from the basement
 - a new interpretation of his grandfather's last words
 - the importance of encouraging diversity in all aspects of society
20. point out the extent to which this novel and the protagonist's search of identity has a universal application to people of all races.

Invisible Man

Definitions and Terms

Allusion – a reference to a person, place, poem, book, event, etc., which is not part of the story, that the author expects the reader will recognize. **Example:** In *The Glass Menagerie*, Tom speaks of “Chamberlain’s umbrella,” a reference to British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain.

Irony – a perception of inconsistency, sometimes humorous, in which the significance and understanding of a statement or event is changed by its context. **Example:** The firehouse burned down.

- *Dramatic Irony* - the audience or reader knows more about a character’s situation than the character does and knows that the character’s understanding is incorrect. **Example:** In *Medea*, Creon asks, “What atrocities could she commit in one day?” The reader, however, knows Medea will destroy her family and Creon’s by day’s end.
- *Structural Irony* – the use of a naïve hero, whose incorrect perceptions differ from the reader’s correct ones. **Example:** Huck Finn.
- *Verbal Irony* - a discrepancy between what is said and what is really meant; sarcasm. **Example:** A large man whose nickname is “Tiny.”

Legend – a story that is only partly true (or completely false) about a real or fictional character. Legends usually include exaggerations and unusual events or circumstances. **Example:** Paul Bunyan changes the course of the Pecos River.

Metaphor – a comparison of two things that are basically dissimilar in which one is described in terms of the other. **Example:** The moon, a haunting lantern, shone through the clouds.

Parable – a brief story or tale that illustrates a moral or life lesson. **Example:** Jesus’ story of the loaves and fishes.

Pun – an expression that achieves emphasis or humor by utilizing:

- two distinctly different meanings for the same word. **Example:** “play” meaning “fun” and “play” meaning a performance on stage.
or
- two similar sounding words. **Example:** close/clothes.
Example: In *Romeo and Juliet*, one character, Mercutio, says after being fatally stabbed, “Ask for me tomorrow and you will find me a grave man.”

Sarcasm – the use of harsh words to deride and criticize. Sometimes, sarcasm is apparent only by the way something is said rather than the actual words that are used; other times the sarcasm is obvious. **Example:** In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden says about a taxi driver he dislikes that, “he certainly was good company. Terrific personality.”

Satire – using humor to expose something or someone to ridicule. **Examples:** *Animal Farm*; *Gulliver’s Travels*.

Symbol – an object, person, or place that has a meaning in itself and that also stands for something larger than itself, usually an idea or concept; some concrete thing which represents an abstraction. **Example:** The sea could be symbolic for “the unknown.” Since the sea is something that is physical and can be seen by the reader, and also has elements that cannot be understood, it can be used symbolically to stand for the abstraction of “mystery,” “obscurity,” or “the unknown.”

Theme – the central or dominant idea behind the story; the most important aspect that emerges from how the book treats its subject. Sometimes theme is easy to see, but, at other times, it may be more difficult. Theme is usually expressed indirectly, as an element the reader must figure out. It is a universal statement about humanity, rather than a simple statement dealing with plot or characters in the story. Themes are generally hinted at through different methods: a phrase or quotation that introduces the novel, a recurring element in the book, or an observation made that is reinforced through plot, dialogue, or characters. It must be emphasized that not all works of literature have themes in them. **Example:** In a story about a man who is diagnosed with cancer and, through medicine and will-power, returns to his former occupation, the theme might be: “Real courage is demonstrated through internal bravery and perseverance.” In a poem about a flower that grows, blooms, and dies, the theme might be: “Youth fades, and death comes to all.”

Invisible Man

Notes

While this novel is the story of a Southern black man's search for his identity in a pre- and post-World War II white world, it is also a complex narrative rich in theme, language, and symbolism. Although it is primarily a study of race relations, the message of self-discovery applies to anyone experiencing a search for personal identity.

Note to Teacher: Throughout the novel, adult language and themes are evident: gangs, drugs, and sexual encounters of rape and incest. Therefore, the maturity level of the class should be taken into consideration.

Note: All references come from the Vintage Books edition of *Invisible Man*, copyright 1980.

Invisible Man

Test

1. The narrator believes he is invisible because
 - A. people, both black and white, refuse to see him as an individual.
 - B. the white people do not recognize him when he wears dark glasses.
 - C. he is a black man living in a dark basement without any lights.
 - D. of his physical disability.
 - E. of his career.
2. Assuming the Battle Royal is a parable describing race relations before the Civil Rights Movement, what does it teach the reader?
 - A. Greed is painful for both blacks and whites.
 - B. The white people want to keep the black race ignorant and directionless.
 - C. Intelligent black youth will be rewarded by whites.
 - D. A strong mind is better than a strong body.
 - E. Physical fighting is not the way to solve issues.
3. “Sheer modesty, Brother. The sheerest modesty. We have here an extraordinary tactician, a Napoleon of strategy and personal responsibility.”
The above quotation from the novel is an example of
 - A. a pun.
 - B. a metaphor.
 - C. sarcasm.
 - D. realism.
 - E. alliteration.
4. Bledsoe is upset that the narrator lets Mr. Norton talk to Trueblood because
 - A. the whole race is dragged down by letting the trustee meet an immoral black man.
 - B. Mr. Norton gets sick from the heat of the afternoon.
 - C. Trueblood is just after money and will say anything to squeeze some cash out of Mr. Norton.
 - D. Mr. Norton is probably going to withdraw his support from the school.
 - E. now Trueblood will be admitted to the college.
5. Which of the following incidents from the novel highlight the importance to the black race of remembering its heritage?
 - A. The narrator eats a yam on a public street.
 - B. Tarp gives the narrator a leg iron from a chain gang.
 - C. The narrator is mistaken for a street character named Rinehart.
 - D. Bledsoe gives Mr. Norton a bag of gold coins to deliver to Rinehart.
 - E. both A and B

6. If the chapters about the paint factory are examples of expressionism, what inner meanings about race relations do they illustrate?
 - A. The work black people do is important to the success of the white world.
 - B. Blacks were able to exercise power once they were employed.
 - C. Some black people are willing to hurt other blacks or the entire black race to obtain power for themselves.
 - D. The white world wants black people to think for themselves.
 - E. both A and C
7. The Brotherhood transfers the narrator away from the Harlem district despite his obvious success because
 - A. they need his great speaking skills to help push the women's issues.
 - B. Tod Clifton is jealous of the narrator.
 - C. the narrator nearly causes a riot when he makes an impromptu speech against the eviction of an elderly black couple.
 - D. the Brotherhood is concerned that the narrator may be gaining too much individual power and influence. They need him to stay under their complete control.
 - E. it is dangerous for the narrator to stay in the district.
8. The cast iron bank the narrator finds in Mary's house is most likely a symbol of
 - A. the blindness of white people to the severity of the race problems in this country.
 - B. the way the blacks behaved around whites during the time of slavery.
 - C. the way the whites want blacks to dance to their every whim.
 - D. how little the black race has gained since the days of slavery.
 - E. the imbalance of wealth between blacks and whites.
9. As a character type, Mary may also stand for
 - A. the way all black people should treat each other.
 - B. the Southern black women who try to guide their children into living moral lives while also providing them with a warm home.
 - C. an example of how black people can be taken advantage of, even by other blacks.
 - D. the role fate has in the narrator's life.
 - E. the biblical mother of Christ.
10. The Brotherhood decides to have Hambro train the narrator in their ways because
 - A. they fear the power he has over the black people and want to train him in the Brotherhood's scientific methods of thinking.
 - B. Hambro is well educated and has proven himself to be a great leader.
 - C. the narrator wants to teach people in Harlem about issues dealing with the "Woman Question"
 - D. they feel it is important to educate blacks.
 - E. the narrator is not using enough emotion to incite blacks into action.

11. Bledsoe tells the narrator that to survive in the white world, he must
 - A. get power and influence even if he must sacrifice dignity.
 - B. always tell the truth to white people.
 - C. live a moral life and help other blacks at every opportunity.
 - D. become a leader in the Brotherhood.
 - E. both B and C

12. The doctor from the Golden Day tells the narrator to
 - A. rest his broken leg and not work for several days.
 - B. find his own identity, yet pretend to behave the way the whites want him to serve his own purposes.
 - C. discover what the world has to offer but stay away from powerful white men.
 - D. be sure to complete his education.
 - E. participate in the Battle Royal.

13. Ellison names the Brotherhood headquarters *Chthonian*, a word from Greek mythology, because
 - A. as a member of the Brotherhood, the narrator's identity is defined by them and his individual self can no longer exist.
 - B. the Brotherhood is a secretive organization run by unnamed, powerful men who keep their identities undercover.
 - C. Harlem will be born again like the spirit of the Chthonian.
 - D. dances are held there.
 - E. all of the above

14. The narrator decides to stay in the dark basement because
 - A. he is afraid to go out and face Ras.
 - B. he wants to stay underground to reflect on what he has learned until he is ready to live his life as an individual.
 - C. he thinks that he is truly invisible only in the basement, since both he and the basement are black.
 - D. he cannot face the fact that he is a black man living in a white world.
 - E. both C and D

15. Legend has it that Bledsoe's first job at the college was to
 - A. work as the Founder's office boy.
 - B. clean the bird poop off the statue of the Founder.
 - C. slop the hogs.
 - D. run errands for the white trustees.
 - E. serve lunch in the cafeteria.

16. Ironically, the paint factory personnel tell the narrator they are
- A. not going to hurt him if he will just lie still.
 - B. only hiring blacks with a college education.
 - C. enlightened because they carry insurance on all of their employees, so he will be compensated for his injury.
 - D. not going to compensate him for the injury because he caused it.
 - E. A, B, and C
17. Some critics believe the narrator's encounters with the white women in the Brotherhood are examples of satire because they
- A. show that the narrator does not really want to be with white women.
 - B. show that the narrator is naïve when it comes to women.
 - C. ridicule the myth that white women want to be with black men.
 - D. demonstrate the underlying immorality of the Brotherhood.
 - E. demonstrate the difference between the lives of black and white women.
18. Which incident in the novel helps the narrator understand that he is "no longer afraid. Not of important men, not of trustees and such; for knowing now that there was nothing which I could expect from them, there was no reason to be afraid"?
- A. The narrator realizes this right after he is released from the paint factory hospital.
 - B. The narrator realizes this when he sees Jack's glass eye.
 - C. The narrator realizes this when he is unable to seduce Sybil.
 - D. The narrator realizes this when Tod Clifton is killed by the police.
 - E. The narrator realizes this when he joins the Brotherhood.
19. The narrator decides to accept Bledsoe's punishment because
- A. Emma convinces him to accept it during dinner.
 - B. the narrator believes that the white world will never let him pull himself up to live a good life even if he lives by their rules.
 - C. he is convinced he will find a way to come back to the school and finish his education.
 - D. he has no choice.
 - E. he feels the punishment is fair.
20. Which of the following statements about life in general best defines the narrator's view of race relations at the end of the book?
- A. It is important for the black people to separate themselves as much as possible from white people.
 - B. The world would be better off to encourage diversity among its people, thus eliminating tyrants who try to make people conform to their ideas.
 - C. The black people have been the victims long enough. They have every right to take whatever they can from the white race.
 - D. It is best for blacks to pretend to do what the whites want and then, when they are not looking, work to help their own people.
 - E. Education is the most valuable resource available, and without it, one cannot succeed.

Essays (*Answer any two*)

1. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the story: The quotation "I Yam What I Am" would be a good title for this book. (Pg. 266)
2. Discuss the importance of names in this book. Why does the author leave the narrator nameless? What is the significance of the names Trueblood and Bledsoe?
3. In what ways does the grandfather's deathbed statement prove to be true for the narrator? Cite incidents from the story to support your answer.

"Son, after I'm gone I want you to keep up the good fight. I never told you, but our life is a war and I have been a traitor all my born days, a spy in the enemy's country ever since I give up my gun back in the Reconstruction. Live with your head in the lion's mouth. I want you to overcome 'em with yeses, undermine 'em with grins, agree 'em to death and destruction, let 'em swoller you till they vomit or bust wide open." (Pg. 16)
4. Trace the development of the narrator's self awareness in the following incidents from the book. State what he learns from each incident and how it helps lead him to the conclusion that he is invisible.
 - the interview the narrator has with Mr. Emerson's son
 - Tod Clifton's death
 - the Harlem riot

Invisible Man

Test Answer Key

1.	A	6.	E	11.	A	16.	C
2.	B	7.	D	12.	B	17.	C
3.	C	8.	B	13.	A	18.	A
4.	A	9.	B	14.	B	19.	C
5.	E	10.	A	15.	C	20.	B

Invisible Man

Questions for Discussion and Essay

1. Reread the Prologue. What is the narrator saying in the following passage from the Prologue?
“All dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all.” (Pg. 14)
2. Discuss the significance of light and blindness in the following incidents from the novel:
 - the blindfolds put on the young men in the Battle Royal
 - the 1,369 light bulbs the narrator has in his basement
 - the blind speaker at the school
 - Jack’s glass eye
3. Find two examples of puns in this novel. What does the phrase “I Yam What I Am” mean to the narrator?
4. Define parable. Support or refute the idea that the chapter titled “Battle Royal” is a parable for race relations in the South.
5. Define expressionism. In what ways are the chapters in the paint factory less real and less believable than the other incidents in the novel? Why does the narrator no longer fear important white men after he has been released from the hospital?
6. Briefly research the biographies of Louis Armstrong, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Frederick Douglass, and Booker T. Washington. Which of these men does the narrator admire and why?
7. Many critics believe this novel can be broken into four parts. If the narrator’s time in the basement is one part, which incidents in the novel do you think mark the beginning of each of the other three parts?
8. Compare the legend of the Founder’s life with that of young Dr. Bledsoe.
9. Keeping in mind the time period, discuss the difference in race relations in the South with those of the North. In what ways does the narrator experience more freedom in the North?
10. Define communism. What elements of communism are present in the ideology of the Brotherhood? What part of their ideology is the most objectionable to the narrator at the end of the novel?

11. What are the hidden meanings of the following names from the novel? Find two other names that may have a hidden meaning.
 - Trueblood
 - Chthonian
 - Bledsoe
12. Discuss the following list of symbols in the novel. What are they telling the reader about black and white relations at the time of the novel?
 - cast iron bank
 - leg irons (both Bledsoe and Tarp)
 - Sambo doll
 - briefcase with papers
13. Point out two instances in the story when the narrator is drenched in water. In what ways can these incidents be considered baptisms giving the narrator a new beginning or rebirth?
14. Why does the official at the paint factory give the narrator money but no job? What is ironic about their actions?
15. Cite incidents from the novel to support the following list of generalizations the narrator believes to be true before the Civil Rights Movement.
 - Blacks traditionally suffer from the cruelty and bigotry of whites.
 - Blacks suffer from the cruelty of other self-serving blacks who are unconcerned with the impact of their actions on the overall perception of the black race.
 - Whites could not be successful without work done by blacks, yet they do not acknowledge their contributions.
 - The white world does not want blacks to think for themselves.
16. What do these items have in common: Mary, leg irons, yams, blues music, and the cast iron bank?
17. Why does the Brotherhood want to employ the narrator when it is clear they do not like the way his speeches touch the emotions of his audience?
18. Some critics believe that the chapters dealing with the woman in the red dress and Sybil are satires, poking fun at the myth that white women desire black men. Cite incidents from these chapters to support or refute this idea.

19. What does the narrator mean in the following passage when he says he will have to do a Rinehart?

“For now I saw that I could agree with Jack without agreeing. And I could tell Harlem to have hope when there was no hope. Perhaps I could tell them to hope until I found the basis of something real, some firm ground for action that would lead them onto the plane of history. But until then I would have to move them without myself being moved...I'd have to do a Rinehart.” (Pg. 507)

20. How does the narrator interpret his grandfather's deathbed words at the end of the novel? Why is he probably going to leave the basement? Do you think he is hopeful or discouraged about the problems of the black race in America?

21. What is the narrator saying about a possible solution to the problems of race relations in the following passage from the book?

“Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states.” (Pg. 577)

Invisible Man

Study Guide Teacher's Copy

Prologue

Vocabulary

ectoplasms – immaterial substances

epidermis – outer layer of skin

hibernation – period of seclusion or extended sleep

bilious – like bile

ingenuity – inventive; cleverness

reefer – slang for a marijuana cigarette

yokel – term for a bumpkin

flamenco – a rhythmic gypsy dance

1. Why does the narrator believe he is an “invisible man”?

He is invisible because as a black man, people refuse to see him as an individual.

2. How does the narrator carry on a fight against the Monopolated Light & Power?
Where is he living?

He is able to use their electric service without paying for it. He is proud to have evaded their notice and takes advantage of the free electricity by using excessive amounts of lights. He is living on the border of Harlem, New York, in the basement of a building rented to whites.

3. Often in novels light is a symbol for knowledge. Assuming that is true in this story, why do you think the narrator writes, “The truth is the light and light is the truth”? (Pg. 7)

Answers may vary. Example: The narrator needs to understand the truth about himself and his position in life.

4. Ellison's style of writing includes many play on words. What is the double meaning behind the title of Louis Armstrong's song “What Did I Do to be so Black and Blue”? (Pg. 12)

The play on words relates to slavery conditions and an emotional state of depression. In regards to slavery, “black and blue” relates to the physical beatings, which were unjustified (“what did I do”), and resulted in scars and bruising. The song may also be describing the emotional depression that blacks may feel being oppressed in a white world.

5. What do you think the narrator is saying about race relations in the following passage? Do you agree with him?

“All dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all.” (Pg. 14)

The white race is responsible for refusing to see black people as individuals. They will pay the price for sleepwalking just as the blonde man paid the price of not recognizing the narrator. The narrator is the invisible victim and is held accountable for the mugging.

Chapter One

Vocabulary

obscene – offensive

anarchy – political disorder; confusion

melee – brawl; hand-to-hand fighting

languid – weak; slow

fastidious – meticulous

stolid – revealing little emotion

1. What does the narrator’s grandfather say before he dies that makes the narrator feel guilty whenever anything good happens to him?

His grandfather says to pretend to do what the whites want. The protagonist defines this behavior as treachery and feels guilty whenever the whites praise him. He is worried that by doing what the white people want he is somehow hurting them.

2. Some critics believe the Battle Royal is a parable that illustrates the state of race relations in the South before the Civil Right Movement. Assuming this is true, what do you think each of the following incidents from this Battle Royal is saying about the power of the whites in the South?

Answers may vary. Examples:

forcing the black boys to watch the white stripper – Black boys and men are not permitted to look at or want white women.

the use of blindfolds in the fight – Blindness in novels often represents ignorance. The whites keep the black people ignorant and without direction.

the electrified rug – This is a disgusting display of the white people’s disregard for the pain felt by the black boys. The men enjoy watching them suffer.

3. List two things the narrator does in this chapter to please the white folks even after they have subjected him to the humiliating Battle Royal.”

First, the narrator lets himself be knocked out in his fight with Tatlock because he hears the white men say that they bet on the Tatlock. The narrator is worried that the white men will not let him give his speech if he wins the fight. Next, the narrator slips in his speech and says “social equality” instead of “social responsibility.” He quickly corrects his mistake when it becomes obvious the whites do not like the phrase.

4. What do the white men give the narrator at the end of his speech?

They give him a calfskin brief case with a scholarship to the state college for Negroes.

5. What do you think is the meaning of the following message the narrator’s grandfather asks him to read in his dream? “To Whom It May Concern,” I intoned. “Keep This Nigger-Boy Running.” (Pg. 33)

Answers will vary.

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

promenaded – walked; danced

stagnant – immobile

alchemy – magical power

philanthropist – effort to improve mankind; love of humankind

ginghams – yarn-dyed cotton fabrics

degenerates – declines

indignation – anger

1. Some critic believe Ellison’s description of the Negro college was inspired by T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*. A wasteland is defined as land that is uncultivated or barren. What do you think the author is saying about the type of education the black youths receive at a college described as a wasteland?

Answers may vary. Example: The knowledge they receive at the college is useless to them because they will never be permitted by the whites to compete equally in the white world.

2. How do you think the narrator feels about the millionaires who visit the school on Founder's Day, as described in the following passage?

"I'm convinced it was the product of a subtle magic, the alchemy of moonlight; the school a flower-studded wasteland, the rocks sunken, the dry winds hidden, the lost crickets chirping to yellow butterflies. And oh, oh, oh, those multimillionaires!" (Pg. 37)

Answers will vary. Example: The narrator sees the school as a dream, not a reality. It is a promise of a better life for blacks, but in reality a wasteland. He thinks of the multimillionaires as representing the rich white world. They are happy to contribute to a black school that teaches black youth to think and behave only as the rich white world wants them to. The millionaires are like the white men who conduct the Battle Royal. They are powerful and in control of the school.

3. List the two reasons Mr. Norton gives the narrator for wanting to support the school.

First, he believes his fate is somehow tied to the fate of the Negro people. Next, he contributes to the school as a tribute to his deceased daughter.

4. How does Trueblood justify sleeping with his daughter? Why is the narrator upset Trueblood is telling this story to a white man?

Trueblood says he thinks he was dreaming when he slept with his daughter. The narrator is upset Trueblood is telling his terrible story to a white man because then white men will say all Negroes behave in this way. He may believe that Trueblood's actions will reflect on himself.

5. Why does Trueblood decide to continue to live at home and face his wife and daughter?

Answers will vary. Example: Trueblood knows that what he did is against God, the laws of the church, and the community; however, he feels he is not totally guilty because it happened in a dream.

He is unable to eat, drink, or sleep. Finally, he decides he will face them, and says, "I sings me some blues that night ain't never been sang before, and while I'm singin' them blues I makes up my mind that I ain't nobody but myself and ain't nothin' I can do but let whatever is gonna happen happen. I made up my mind that I was goin' back home and face Kate; yeah, and face Matty Lou too." (Pg. 66) He also refuses to allow Matty Lou to get an abortion once he returns, since he feels it would be compounding the sin.

6. Why do you think Mr. Norton is interested in the story? What does the narrator think about Mr. Norton giving Trueblood one hundred dollars?

Mr. Norton may be interested in the story because he may have had similar sexual dreams about his daughter. The narrator is disgusted that Trueblood gets money for his immoral behavior.

7. Ellison likes to give his characters names that tell the reader something about the personality of the character. Why do you think Ellison names the black man who sleeps with his daughter Trueblood?

Answers may vary. Example: The name Trueblood may represent his integrity. Although his crime is despicable, he tells it in a matter-of-fact way with details and does not make excuses or attempt to justify himself.

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

thalamic – area of the brain dealing with sensory information

autonomous – independent

coccyx – tailbone

mulatto – term for a person who is half white and half black

endocrinology – study of hormone glands and their functions

nostalgia – homesickness

catharsis – purging emotions

pragmatist – solving things matter-of-factly

1. Why does the narrator plan to “rush in and get the whiskey and leave” the Golden Day as quickly as possible?

The shell-shocked veterans they pass on the road are on their way to the Golden Day to drink and visit the prostitutes. The narrator wants to get something to revive Mr. Norton but to keep him away from the immoral atmosphere of the Golden Day.

2. How does the narrator feel about the patrons of the Golden Day?

Answers may vary. Example: He feels uncomfortable seeing various professionals (cooks, a preacher, a politician, etc.) in such a place because he aspired to be like them. He seems confused about their behavior and says, “Sometimes it appeared as though they played some vast complicated game with me...whose rules and subtleties I could never grasp.” (Pg. 74)

3. What do you think the fat man is trying to tell the narrator in the following excerpt from the novel?

“‘Stop screaming!’ a voice commanded, and I felt myself pulled away. It was the short fat man...‘That’s better,’ he shouted into my ear. ‘He’s only a man. Remember that. He’s only a man!’ ” (Pg. 86)

White men are not godlike; they are only men.

4. What do you think has happened to the doctor to make him believe that his work can “bring him no dignity...I returned to save a life and was refused”? (Pg. 93)

The doctor may have believed that his skill as a physician made him equal to whites. He probably tried to treat a white person; but instead of receiving dignity for his skill as a physician, he was taken out of town and beaten.

5. Why does the doctor describe the narrator as “a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!”? (Pg. 94)

The narrator believes that he will improve his life if he does and says what the white man wants. The doctor is saying that the narrator is so well trained in the role the white man wants him to play that he can no longer think or feel for himself. He is a mechanical man.

6. How is Mr. Norton hurt before leaving the Golden Day? What does Halley mean when he says the white man “cain’t die!”? (Pg. 97)

Edna, who wanted Mr. Norton’s money, pushes Mr. Norton and the narrator down the stairs. Norton scrapes his head when he falls against the screen door.

Answers will vary. Example: The white race is too strong and powerful to die. Another possibility is that Halley is worried that the Golden Day will be closed if Mr. Norton dies in his place.

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

predicament – difficult situation; dilemma

benevolence – kind act

moiling – slaving

1. How are the narrator's feelings of innocence at what happens to Mr. Norton similar to Trueblood's lack of guilt over sleeping with his daughter?

The narrator thinks the events at the Golden Day are not his fault. They happen because Mr. Norton chose to stay in the sun listening to Trueblood's distressing story and because the owner forces the narrator to bring Mr. Norton inside. Trueblood thinks sleeping with his daughter is not his fault because he thinks he was dreaming.

2. What does the following excerpt from this chapter tell the reader about the narrator's purpose in life?

“Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it. In this brief passage I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams.” (Pg. 99)

Answers will vary. Example: The narrator believes the school can really help young blacks become good citizens. His purpose in life is to continue his education and fulfill the expectations of the school and its trustees. He does not see himself as a separate individual but as part of the school.

3. Why does the following speech from Dr. Bledsoe shock the narrator?

“Haven't you the sense God gave a dog? We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see. Don't you know that? I thought you had some sense.” (Pg. 102)

Dr. Bledsoe's words are shocking because the narrator was just following Mr. Norton's request. Dr. Bledsoe is telling the narrator to control a white man's actions, which is a shocking position for the protagonist to be in. The narrator is shocked to learn that Dr. Bledsoe is only pretending to be humble when he is with white people.

4. Why is the narrator grateful to Mr. Norton?

The narrator is grateful to Mr. Norton because Mr. Norton explains to Dr. Bledsoe that the narrator is not to blame for the day's problems.

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

vespers – stars

arpeggios – chords that are played quickly

condescension – patronizing behavior

ascot – scarf

precarious – unstable situation

emissary – an agent who represents someone's interests

halitosis – bad breath

1. What is the legend of how Dr. Bledsoe first came to the college? What is the connection between young Bledsoe's first job and his current position?

Dr. Bledsoe comes to the college as a barefoot boy who has walked across two states. He gets a job slopping hogs. He is so good at his job that the Founder gives him a job as his office boy, and from there he rises to become the president of the college.

Answers will vary. Example: Dr. Bledsoe's main job as president of the college is to keep the rich white men happy, just as his main job as a boy was to keep the fat hogs happy.

2. In what ways does the speaker compare the Founder to Jesus and Moses? What literary term is being employed?

The Founder is compared to Jesus when the speaker compares the Founder's coma recovery to Jesus' resurrection after the crucifixion. The speaker compares the Founder to Moses when he says the Founder leads his people "out of the land of ignorance." By using references to Moses and Jesus, allusion is employed.

3. Some critics believe that blindness in a character illustrates his ignorance about something. Assuming this is true, why do you think Ellison describes Homer A. Barbee as a blind speaker?

In Barbee's speech he portrays the Founder and Bledsoe as great men who help the plight of the black race. In reality, Barbee is ignorant of the harm their separate but equal philosophy has on the black people.

4. List two reasons the narrator is upset by Barbee's speech.

First, the narrator feels guilty for endangering the school by taking Mr. Nelson to the Golden Day bar. Next, he thinks Barbee's speech will make Dr. Bledsoe less sympathetic to the narrator's plight.

5. How does the narrator feel when he sees Dr. Bledsoe patting the backs of the white patrons just before Barbee begins his speech?

He realizes that Dr. Bledsoe is the only black man he knows who can touch a white man with impunity. The narrator feels sick because it reminds him of touching Mr. Nelson earlier in the day.

Chapter Six

Vocabulary

conciliatory – reconcile

1. Ellison chooses the names for his characters very carefully. What does the following passage suggest to the reader about the meaning of the name Bledsoe for the president of the Negro college?

“The white folk tell everybody what to think - except men like me. I tell them...It's a nasty deal and I don't always like it myself. But you listen to me: I didn't make it, and I know that I can't change it. But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am.” (Pg. 143)

Bledsoe is willing to harm or bleed his own people in order to keep his position of power.

2. Why does Dr. Bledsoe believe the narrator must be disciplined for letting Mr. Nelson meet Mr. Trueblood and the doctor at the Golden Day? What is the significance of the leg shackle Dr. Bledsoe keeps in his office?

The main character must be disciplined because he let the white man talk to an immoral black man and talk to a black doctor who does not keep his place with white men. Dr. Bledsoe thinks the narrator has dragged down the whole race because the white man will think all blacks are immoral and do not know their place.

The leg shackle may be a reminder of how far the black people have come since slavery. Or perhaps Dr. Bledsoe keeps it to remind himself and his students that their separate but equal lives are much better than slavery.

3. What advice about surviving in the white world is Dr. Bledsoe giving the narrator in the following passage? In what way can the phrase “stay in the dark and use it” have a double meaning?

“You let the white folk worry about pride and dignity—you learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people—then stay in the dark and use it!” (Pg. 145)

Dr. Bledsoe is telling the narrator to play up to powerful white people to get power and influence even if he must sacrifice his personal dignity. Once he gets power, he should still exercise it passively (i.e., in the dark). The passage speaks to the black world in general by stating that even when blacks have power, influence, and contacts, they are still powerless.

4. Why does the narrator decide to accept the responsibility for what had happened and submit to punishment?

The narrator does not know any other way of life except for life as a black student in a white world. He cannot accept his grandfather's final words—that by pretending to be humble he will be able to hurt the whites. The narrator decides to accept the punishment because he does not know what else to do. He still believes that the white world will let him pull himself up to live a good life if he lives by their rules.

5. What is the first paper given to the narrator for his new briefcase? How is it different from the seven letters given to him by Dr. Bledsoe?

The first paper given to the narrator is the scholarship to the Negro college. It is their stamp of approval on him, allowing him the privilege of an education, because he is the kind of black youth they approve of. The second set of papers given to the narrator is the letters from Dr. Bledsoe. They are to introduce the narrator to important white people, and hopefully get him a job. The first paper is a reward for being a good black youth and following the rules. The second set of papers is a punishment for violating the code of conduct required at the Negro college.

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

sophistication – refinement

bombardment – attack

staccato – short, disconnected sounds

1. In the following passage from the novel, what advice does the old doctor from the Golden Day give the narrator about how to survive in the world?

“Play the game, but don’t believe in it...but play it your own way...Play the game, but raise the ante...learn how you operate.” (Pg. 153)

The doctor is telling him to learn to pretend to behave the way the whites want him to behave but to do it for his own purposes. The doctor tells him to find his own identity along the way.

2. What do you think the doctor is referring to when he says to Crenshaw, “But...there’s always an element of crime in freedom”? (Pg. 155)

Answers will vary. Example: In the past the black men went North to find freedom when they committed or were accused of a crime in the South.

3. List the three parting pieces of advice the doctor gives the narrator before leaving him to change buses. What evidence is there that the narrator will probably not listen to the doctor's well-meaning words?

The doctor tells the narrator to find his own identity, discover what the world has to offer, and stay away from powerful white men. The narrator will most likely not follow the advice because he is too scared and confused to understand what the doctor is telling him. Also, he knows the doctor is a mental patient on his way to an asylum.

4. Why is the narrator uncomfortable in the subway?

Both blacks and whites are crammed in and pressed together in the subway. There is no separation between races like on the bus where the blacks sit in the back.

5. Why is the narrator surprised when he sees Ras making a speech on the streets of New York?

The narrator is surprised because there is a large crowd of angry black people and the policemen standing nearby are not alarmed by the gathering. They do not seem to be interested in the crowd. This kind of gathering would never be permitted in the South.

Chapter Eight

Vocabulary

rhetoric – persuasive language

nuances – subtle differences

façade – a deceptive front

antagonism – hostility

immaculate – spotless; pure

scandalous – shocking

1. What are the Negroes the narrator sees on Wall Street doing? What does their occupation tell the reader about the position of the black men in the powerful white world of Wall Street?

The Negroes the narrator sees are rushing down the street with leather pouches strapped to their wrists. The narrator thinks they look like prisoners in a chain gang carrying their leg irons. The Negroes on Wall Street are treated like the slaves of the old South. They are running to do the work of the rich, powerful white men.

2. How does the narrator explain the strange looks he receives from the secretaries of the trustees?

He dismisses their looks because it is not antagonistic. "Perhaps they're surprised to see someone like me with introductions to such important men," he says. (Pg. 168)

3. Why does the narrator decide to write Mr. Emerson a letter instead of hand delivering Dr. Bledsoe's letter?

The narrator believes the secretaries of the trustees must be destroying the letters. He decides to write to Mr. Emerson telling him he has an important message from Dr. Bledsoe. That way, his secretary cannot take the letter before the narrator gets to see Mr. Emerson.

Chapter Nine

Vocabulary

exasperated – greatly annoyed

malicious – spiteful; harmful

ebony – hard dark wood; black

sadistic – deriving pleasure from cruelty

cynicism – negative attitude

deportment – behavior; manner

rookery – crowded tenement

1. What is Ellison saying about the narrator when the narrator tries to get away from the man singing the blues in the street?

"...who got the damn dog? Now I know you from down home, how come you trying to act like you never heard that before! Hell, ain't nobody out here this morning but us colored - Why you trying to deny me?" (Pg. 173)

The narrator is trying to get away from his humble Southern beginnings. To do this, he thinks he must deny his past and separate himself from anyone who reminds him of home.

2. How does the nasty campus gossip about Dr. Bledsoe help him maintain his power and leadership at the college?

The rumors about Dr. Bledsoe help, rather than hurt him. They help because, even if the rumors are nasty, they keep Dr. Bledsoe on the minds of his students. They think and talk about him, which adds to his power.

3. What does young Mr. Emerson say about ambition?

He says that ambition can be blinding. It can keep a person from seeing reality.

4. The club Calamus is named after Walt Whitman's poems about homosexuals. What evidence is there in this story that young Mr. Emerson may be a homosexual?

He compliments the narrator on his physique, asks the narrator if he has been to the Club Calamus, touches his knee, and hints that his father dislikes him because he is different.

5. How is the following passage from Bledsoe's letter to Emerson similar to the narrator's dream at the end of Chapter One, where his grandfather makes him read a document that says, "To Who It may Concern ... Keep This Nigger-Boy Running"? (Pg. 33)

"I beg you, sir, to help him to continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler."

Answers will vary. Example: Both letters state a message of keeping the protagonist moving. The narrator has his goals and actively pursues them although he is sabotaged. By denying the motivations of the saboteurs, he continues his journey. The letter from his grandfather may be a forewarning about these experiences.

6. Why do you think Dr. Bledsoe gives the narrator the seven letters instead of just telling him to leave the school?

Answers may vary. Example: Dr. Bledsoe is making sure the narrator does not go to Mr. Nelson to complain about being expelled from the school.

7. The author's full name is Ralph Waldo Ellison, named after the famous transcendental writer. Emerson is famous for his essay "Self Reliance" and his belief that all men are equal. He worked for the abolition of slavery. What similarities could there be between the Mr. Emerson from the novel and the famous writer?

They both believe in equality and freedom. Young Mr. Emerson tries to free the narrator from his blind trust of Dr. Bledsoe and tries to awake the narrator to his blind ignorance of the reality of his situation.

8. What revenge is the narrator dreaming about at the end of this chapter?

He is dreaming about returning to the school and killing Dr. Bledsoe. He says, "I owe it to the race and to myself." (Pg. 194)

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary

hydrometer – instrument used to measure fluids' gravity

belligerently – aggressively

dissimulating – disguising

fink – a hired strikebreaker; an informer

impudent – shameless

1. What indications are there that the paint plant could be a symbol for white America?

The company's slogan is "Keep America Pure" and their trademark is a screaming eagle.

2. In what sense does the narrator's job at the paint factory, adding ten drops of black to the white paint making it *Optic White*, parallel the role of black men in the white world?

The black men in the white world are given jobs, which help the white people become richer and more powerful. The work the black people do is important to the success of the white world, just as the drops of black are necessary to the quality of the Optic White paint.

3. Why does Kimbro transfer the narrator to the basement of another building?

The narrator is transferred because he thinks for himself when he selects the wrong additive for the paint. The white world at the time wants the black people to do as they are told without questioning why or thinking for themselves.

4. In what way is Mr. Brockway's way of running his machines similar to Dr. Bledsoe's methods of running the Negro school?

They both find a way of to get power in the white world and are willing to hurt other black people to keep it.

5. What is the slogan Mr. Brockway makes up for the paint company? In what sense does this slogan sum up Mr. Brockway's philosophy of life?

The slogan is "If it's Optic White, It's the Right White." (Pg. 217) Mr. Brockway believes the white people are right when they want the black people to remain humble and separate. Mr. Brockway thinks he is successful because he has power over the Old Man.

6. What happens to the narrator in the following passage from the story?

"...and I turned, running now...up the stairs so far away and hearing the clear new note arising while I seemed to run swiftly up an incline and shot forward with sudden acceleration into a wet blast of black emptiness that was somehow a bath of whiteness." (Pg. 230)

The narrator is knocked unconscious by an explosion in the basement. He is covered with white paint in the blast.

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

gingerly – cautiously

electrodes – conductors through which electric currents pass

manipulating – controlling

phonograph – a machine that reproduces sound off of rotating disks

sorghum – syrup made from a grass grain

lobe – specific region of the brain

castration – to neuter

bewildered – confused

myopically – nearsightedness

pantomime – to communicate without words

placard – sign; small card

convalescence – return to health

1. While the doctors are administering the shock treatments, why do you think the narrator clings to his memories of his childhood in the South?

Answers may vary. Example: The narrator is trying to hold onto his identity while under the pressure of the pain from the electrical shock treatments.

2. What does the following passage from the chapter say about the results the doctors are hoping for from their experiments on the narrator?

“The patient will live as he has to live, and with absolute integrity. Who could ask for more? He’ll experience no major conflict of motives, and what is even better, society will suffer no traumata on his account.”
(Pg. 236)

The doctors are experimenting on the narrator to discover a way to keep him (who represents the black race) happily under white control. If the experiment is successful, he will pose no threat to society or to them.

3. Many critics believe this chapter serves as a symbolic rebirth for the narrator. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute this idea.

Answers may vary. Examples: The narrator experiences a rebirth when he is given warm fluids while in the machine. His experience there is similar to a baby is encased in warm fluid before birth.

Another example is his reply to the doctors when they inquire about his mother. "But the scream came from the machine. A machine my mother?" (Pg. 240) The protagonist's paralleling association with the machine to his mother signifies a rebirth.

In addition, there is a cord attached to his belly, much like an umbilical cord is attached.

Students may notice that the narrator is annoyed that the doctor associates him with Buckeye the Rabbit, which he calls an "old identity." He is combating himself when he says, "I lay fretting over my identity." (Pg. 242) This combat can signify a rebirth, with the narrator attempting to redefine himself in the world.

4. What is ironic about the following quotation from the chapter?

"And remember you'll be adequately compensated for your experience."
"Compensated, Sir?"
"O, yes," he said. "We follow a policy of enlightened humanitarianism, all our employees are automatically insured. You have only to sign a few papers." (Pg. 247)

The passage is ironic because the narrator has just been subjected to painful experiments designed to strip him of his humanity.

5. Why do you think Ellison uses the word "palaver" when he says good-bye to the man in the white coat at the factory hospital? (Pg. 249)

The word was originally used to describe a conference between African natives and European explorers. Ellison uses it to illustrate the docile position the narrator is supposed to be in after the electric shock treatment.

6. At the end of this chapter, the narrator returns to Harlem, but he is a changed man. What does he realize about himself on the train to Harlem that may be considered a life-altering revelation?

The narrator realizes that he is no longer afraid of men like Mr. Norton. He knows they cannot do anything to him and that he is strong enough to maintain his identity no matter what they do to him.

Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

utopian – impractical reformer of society

orthodox – keeping with traditional faith

dunned – requested payment

nebulous – cloudy

deluge – great flood; heavy rain

1. What is Mary saying when she tells the narrator,

“It’s you young folks what’s going to make the changes,” she said. “Y’all’s the ones. You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher. And I tell you something else, it’s the ones from the South that’s got to do it, them what knows the fire and ain’t forgot how it burns. Up here too many forgits.” (Pg. 255)

Mary is telling the narrator that the black people in the South are still experiencing open racism and segregation. They suffer from it more than the black people in the North, who have forgotten what it is like to be a slave. The people in the South must encourage the black people to seek true freedom and equality.

2. How does the narrator manage to get thrown out of the Men’s House for “ninety-nine years and a day”? What does this action say about the changes in the narrator’s personality? (Pg. 257)

The narrator empties a full spittoon over the head of a Baptist minister, who he mistakes for Dr. Bledsoe. The narrator is now releasing his emotions. One way he is doing this is through physical violence.

3. What is the “ice” the narrator is talking about in the following passage? Other than violence, how do you think he plans to release his resentment?

“And while the ice was melting to form a flood in which I threatened to drown I awoke one afternoon to find that my first northern winter had set.” (Pg. 260)

Answers may vary. Example: The ice may be the narrator’s control over his emotions. As the ice thaws, the narrator begins experiencing anger and resentment toward Bledsoe, Emerson, and anyone else who has harmed him. The narrator releases his resentment by making speeches.

4. Some critics believe that one of the main themes in this story is the comparison between the narrator's life in the South with his life in the North. Assuming this is true, what Southern qualities of home does the narrator find living in Mary's house?

Answers may vary. Example: Mary is a Southern woman who tries to comfort and take care of the narrator, much like a mother. She offers him advice on how to live his life, gives him good home cooking, and provides him with a solid foundation from which he can begin to start rebuilding his life. She tells him to find a way to help lift up the black people.

Chapter Thirteen

Vocabulary

confectionaries – candy stores

consternation – fear; dismay

evicted – removed

chiffonier – a chest of drawers

celluloid – material used to make film

intrinsic – inherent

dispossessed – impoverished

verbiage – wordiness

1. Why does the narrator experience an “intense feeling of freedom” when he eats the warm yam? (Pg. 264)

The narrator is free to enjoy the Southern food he loves, right on the public street. Since he is free of Bledsoe's rules of conduct, he is free to eat Southern food without feeling ashamed, and says, “No more of that for me. I am what I am!” (Pg. 266) He wonders how much of himself he has lost since he has been trying to deny his identity.

2. What is the narrator saying about Bledsoe when he accuses him of eating hog bowels in private?

The narrator is saying that Bledsoe is a fraud. Inside he likes Southern food but is afraid to admit it because it is not proper behavior for the president of the Negro college.

3. Ellison is famous for his puns and plays on words. Find an example of a pun in this chapter illustrating the narrator's newfound freedom.

Answers may vary. Example: “I yam what I am!”

4. Why is the narrator compelled to make a speech at the eviction of the old people? What does he accomplish with his words?

The narrator makes the speech because he is moved by the plight of the old couple. In his mind they represent those who work their whole lives and then are rewarded by being evicted from their homes when they are old. These two people are eighty-seven years old and have little to show for their lives. The narrator makes the speech to try to control the anger he feels toward the men doing the eviction.

The narrator manages to control the crowd enough that the marshals are overcome and the furniture is returned to the home, but there is no riot.

5. Why does the narrator agree to get a cup of coffee with the white man who has escaped the eviction over the rooftops, just like the narrator?

The narrator is flattered because the white man likes his speech. If he refuses the offer of coffee, the narrator will appear guilty of having done something wrong when he makes the speech.

6. What does the narrator think about Brother Jack's job offer? Why do you think he is worrying about Mary at the end of the chapter?

The narrator does not understand Brother Jack's motives. He thinks Brother Jack is smug and trying to use the narrator for his own purposes.

Answers may vary. Example: The narrator is worrying about Mary because she could someday end up like the old couple that was being evicted. She may work her whole life and just end up out on the streets also.

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

uncanny – peculiar; weird

divan – a long, backless sofa

taffeta – fabric made of various materials

missionary – propagandist

1. Why does the narrator change his mind and decide to accept Brother Jack's job offer?

The narrator is behind in his rent, and he knows Mary needs the money. He says, "The odor of Mary's cabbage changed my mind." (Pg. 296)

2. Define “Chthonian.” Why do you think Ellison decides to use this word to name the building where the Brotherhood meets?

Answers may vary. Example: “Chthonian” is from Greek mythology and is the name for the underworld or a place for dead spirits. Ellison may be saying that the Brotherhood is just another place for the narrator to lose his identity. Joining the Brotherhood is the same as joining the dead.

Another possibility is that Brother Jack, a leader in the Brotherhood, wants to raise the black race out of the Chthonian world that it is currently in. Brother Jack says that “destruction lies ahead unless things are changed.” (Pg. 307)

3. List two things Emma says that may suggest to the reader that the narrator is soon to become a tool of the brotherhood.

Emma wants to know if the man they choose to work in Harlem should have darker skin than the narrator, suggesting the narrator is a type or a product rather than an individual. Also, she says that leaders are made and then destroyed. This statement suggests that the narrator will be their expendable creation.

4. Why does the Brotherhood want the narrator to move out of Mary’s house?

They want him to live further downtown, so he will be available when they call. Also, he must divorce himself from his past so he cannot unwittingly give away any information about the activities of the Brotherhood.

5. What do you think the narrator thinks about Booker T. Washington in the following passage? Why does he not want to pattern himself after Washington?

“But to hell with this Booker T. Washington business. I would do the work but I would be no one except myself - whoever I was. I would pattern my life on that of the Founder.” (Pg. 311)

Answers will vary. Example: The narrator does not want to be like Booker T. Washington because he wants to maintain his own identity. The narrator has tangible experience with the Founder’s success, believing him to have accomplished more than Washington.

6. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the chapter: The narrator is not insulted by the drunken man’s request that the narrator sing for the group.

Answers will vary.

7. What does the following passage from the novel tell the reader about the progress the narrator is making toward finding his own identity?

“I felt that I could never allow myself to show surprise or upset—even when confronted with situations furthest from my experience...it was nothing new, white folks seemed always to expect you to know those things which they’d done everything they could think of to prevent you from knowing.” (Pg. 315)

The narrator is being careful how he behaves in front of the Brotherhood. He is still trying to please other people. He is not being himself as he is when he decides to eat the yam in the public street. The narrator is searching for his identity through his association with the Brotherhood.

Chapter Fifteen

Vocabulary

impertinence – insolence; irrelevance

furtively – secretly

exhilarated – stimulated

1. Briefly describe the cast iron bank the narrator uses to bang on the pipe. What can the figure on the bank symbolize for the narrator?

The iron bank has a white-eyed black man with a large, smiling, red mouth. When a coin is placed in his hand and a lever is pressed, the black figure pops the coin into the large smiling mouth.

Answers may vary. Example: The bank can be a symbol for the way the black race behaves toward their white masters in the old South.

2. Why does the narrator try to hide the broken bank from Mary? How does he try to dispose of it when he leaves her home? Why do you think his efforts are fruitless?

The narrator tries to hide the bank because he does not want to tell Mary about the broken bank and about his decision to move out of her home simultaneously. The narrator first tries to put the bank into a garbage can. Then, he tries to leave it in the snowy street. Both times the bank is returned to him.

He is unsuccessful at disposing of the bank because the bank represents the narrator’s past. It is part of him. It is useless for the narrator to try to deny who he is.

3. Briefly describe the narrator's new apartment. What is his reaction to his new surroundings?

The apartment is large, furnished, and has a private bathroom. The narrator thinks it is larger than he needs, but he does enjoy the bath.

Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

volition – choosing; conscious decision

imparted – bestowed; disclosed

tempo – speed of music

plexus – network

imbecilities – foolish or stupid acts

heinous – abominable

caucus – political meeting

stenographer – shorthand writer

1. What does the following metaphor from this chapter tell the reader about the narrator's relationship with Brother Jack?

“It was Master the bull dog; and I was the child who was afraid to touch him, although, panting with heat, he seemed to grin back at me like a fat good-natured man...He had barked the same note when angry or when being brought his dinner...I liked, but didn't trust old Master; I wanted to please, but did not trust the crowd. Then I looked at Brother Jack and grinned: That was it; in some ways, he was like a toy bull terrier.”
(Pg. 338)

The narrator is nervous about making his speech. While the narrator wants to please Brother Jack, he does not trust him. The narrator thinks that Brother Jack, like the old dog, is as capable of biting him as he is of praising him.

2. List three kinds of dispossession the narrator talks about in his speech. How is he using the political technique he calls “I'm-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they've-been-treating-us approach”? (Pg. 342)

The narrator discusses dispossessing them of their manhood, womanhood, childhood, adolescence, homes, and brains.

The narrator is trying to make emotional contact with the audience by talking to them about problems they all share.

3. Ellison often uses blindness in this novel to represent ignorance. What is he saying to the audience in the following passage from the novel when he compares the black race to one-eyed mice?

“Think about it, they’ve dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we’re born. So now we can only see in straight white lines. We’re a nation of one-eyed mice....” (Pg. 343)

The black people are permitted to see only the white way of doing things. They are taught that white is right so that they fail to see the strength of the black race.

4. Why do Brother Wrestrum and the unnamed man with the pipe object to the narrator’s speech?

They think he turns the crowd into an emotional mob instead of using reason to guide their thinking. The Brotherhood wants to lead using a scientific approach, not an emotional one.

5. What evidence is there in this chapter that the main objection the Brotherhood has to the narrator’s speech is their fear of the intensity and power he is capable of invoking from the crowd?

Brother Jack says, “There’s hope that our wild but effective speaker may be tamed.” (Pg. 351) The Brotherhood decides to have the narrator trained in their scientific approach. They also agree that they need to guide the people rather than fear the enthusiasm of the people.

6. Where does the narrator think he has learned the phrase “more human”?

The narrator is unsure where he learns that phrase or why he uses it. He hopes it comes from his desire to learn about how the world works and his desire to find a way to become part of the important decisions that are impacting his life.

Chapter Seventeen

Vocabulary

theoretician – an expert in a theory or art

matador – a bullfighter

non-partisan – impartial

sectarianism – narrow-minded

countenance – facial expression

vehemently – intensely

1. Briefly identify the following characters introduced or reintroduced in this chapter.

Brother Hambro - *He is a tall, friendly lawyer who teaches the narrator the Brotherhood's philosophy.*

Brother Tarp - *He is an elderly member of the Brotherhood who is always at the Harlem office.*

Brother Tod Clifton - *He is a young good-looking, dark black man who has a fight with Ras the Exhorter's boys. His job is to organize the youth groups.*

Ras the Exhorter - *He is a rival of the Brotherhood who calls himself a black nationalist.*

2. Why does Ras the Exhorter not kill Tod Clifton when he has the chance? How does he try to convince Clifton and the narrator to leave the Brotherhood?

Ras does not kill Clifton because Clifton is black. Ras likes Clifton and wants to persuade him to leave the Brotherhood.

Ras tries to persuade Clifton that only men of the same color can be brothers. Ras tells the narrator that he is trying to deny his Southern slave heritage by working with the white people in the Brotherhood. Ras wants to know if the Brotherhood has offered the narrator and Clifton white women or money to betray their people. Ras says that the white man will betray them in the end.

3. What evidence is there in this chapter that Clifton is emotionally touched by Ras' words? What does Clifton mean when he says, "I suppose sometimes a man has to plunge outside history"? (Pg. 377)

Clifton has tears in his eyes after he punches Ras. Clifton calls him crazy but cannot help being influenced by a man who thinks Clifton is like a black king. Clifton thinks that he has to break away from the history of the whites enslaving the blacks in order to make a better world.

4. Why do you think Brother Tarp gives the narrator a picture of Frederick Douglass for his wall?

Frederick Douglass is a famous slave who spent his life fighting for equality for the black people. Tarp gives the narrator the picture of Douglass because he may believe the narrator is going to fight for equality for the people of Harlem. Like Douglass, the narrator hopes to find his identity working for the black people.

5. Point out a possible flaw in the philosophy of the Brotherhood stated in the following quotation:

“We recognized no loose ends, everything could be controlled by our science. Life was all pattern and discipline; and the beauty of discipline is when it works. And it was working very well.” (Pg. 382)

Answers may vary. Example: Life cannot be controlled. It is free and unpredictable. The philosophy of the Brotherhood works only as long as everything runs smoothly and predictably.

Chapter Eighteen

Vocabulary

unperturbed – calm

rheumatism – arthritis

liable – obligated; responsible

cauterizing – deadening; callous

vaudeville – a variety show

vindicated – justified

1. Why is the narrator alarmed at the unsigned letter he finds in the mail?

The letter is a threat telling the narrator to slow down his activities in Harlem. The letter reminds the narrator that this is a white world. The narrator is alarmed because it does not have a stamp, so it must have come from someone inside the Brotherhood organization.

2. What is the significance of Tarp’s metal leg iron? Why does he pass it on to the narrator?

The leg iron reminds Tarp that he once escaped from a chain gang. Tarp wants the narrator to have it because he believes the narrator is fighting for equality and freedom for the black people in Harlem. The leg iron reminds the narrator of his family and his black heritage.

3. Why does Wrestrum object to the narrator openly displaying the leg iron on his desk?

He thinks the leg iron reminds people of the differences between the races.

4. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from this chapter: Brother Wrestrum sees the Brotherhood as a flawed but an effective tool to get equal treatment for people of all races.

Answers will vary.

5. How does Wrestrum betray the narrator?

Wrestrum first encourages the narrator to do an interview with a magazine and then reports him to the Brotherhood for being an opportunist. He tells the group that the narrator "wants to be a dictator!" (Pg. 401)

6. Even though the Brotherhood finds the narrator innocent of trying to gain personal recognition from the magazine article, why do they decide to relieve him of his duties in Harlem and reassign him to the women's issues?

The Brotherhood thinks he is becoming too important and famous in Harlem. They do not want any one individual gaining that kind of power or recognition. The survival of the Brotherhood depends on the idea that individuals do not count. They reassign him to protect the integrity of the Brotherhood.

7. Why does the narrator decide to accept the new assignment?

The Brotherhood is his identity and therefore, cannot become inactive. He convinces himself that his new assignment working for the Woman Question is "proof of the committee's goodwill." (Pg. 408)

8. Some critics think the Brotherhood is patterned after the Communist party that was active in Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s. What similarities do you see between the ideology of communism and the ideology of the Brotherhood? Do you agree or disagree that the Brotherhood may be inspired by the Communist Party activities of the times?

Answers may vary. Example: The Communist party believes in a classless, stateless society that equally shares in economic gains. The Brotherhood is similar in that it accepts people of all races, and the Brotherhood values the needs of the organization over the needs of the individual, just as the Communist put the needs of society above the needs of the individual.

Chapter Nineteen

Vocabulary

salvationist – evangelist

Renoir – French impressionist painter

discordantly – conflicting

enigmatic – puzzling

decanter – a container that holds liquor

chinkapin – small tree or shrub

indifferent – apathetic

fathom – imagine

1. What clues does the narrator have that the woman may want more from him than a discussion of ideology? Why does he not leave the apartment?

The woman tells the narrator that her husband will not be coming home for a while. Then, she oddly offers him milk to drink and compliments him on being forceful. She also takes him to her bedroom and lets her robe fall open in front of him.

After the narrator does not leave because the white woman is rich and he thinks she is very human. At first, he is too naïve to understand her sexual advances. Later, he seems to be overcome by desire.

2. Some critics believe this chapter is a form of satire poking fun at the idea that white women desire black men. Support or refute this theory. If you disagree, what other reason could Ellison have for including this chapter at this point in the story?

Answers will vary. Example: The woman claims to be afraid of the narrator, calls him “primitive,” and says, “you have tom-toms beating in your voice.” (Pg. 413) In her desire to seduce him, she belittles him and his heritage. Ellison may be using her words satirically, since she makes the outrageous request for rape.

Another possible answer may be that Ellison does not poke fun at the idea. The woman says, “it isn’t a game, really you have no cause to worry, we’re free.” (Pg. 415) In her statement, Ellison may imply that there is nothing wrong with her desire and as members of the human race, their experience should be acceptable. She seems to desire him for his intellect and concern with the “Woman Question” – something her husband has no concern over. She calls the Question “the sickness of our class” since whites do not address the issues of women. (Pg. 415) They are both minorities.

3. Why is the narrator surprised by Clifton’s disappearance? Why doesn’t the narrator keep in touch with the Harlem membership?

The narrator is surprised Clifton has disappeared because he is one of the Brotherhood’s best men. Also, Ras would not have dared kill Clifton because Harlem is one of the Brotherhood’s strongest districts. The narrator does not keep in touch with the membership in Harlem because he does not want to offend the committee.

Chapter Twenty

Vocabulary

balked – refused quickly

insinuating – suggesting

spieled – gave a lengthy speech

stewards – managers

pomade – hair product

cryptic – secret

1. How does Barrelhouse explain the hostility the narrator experiences when he calls the man at the bar “Brother”? (Pg. 426)

Barrelhouse explains that money is tight and many of the people who were employed through the Brotherhood have since lost those jobs. The people in Harlem are becoming hostile to the Brotherhood. They feel betrayed because the organization has stopped fighting for them to concentrate their resources on other issues.

2. Besides the hostility in the bar, list the other surprises the narrator finds when he returns to the Harlem headquarters.

He is surprised to find that Brother Tarp is gone, the picture of Frederick Douglass is missing, no one knows anything about Clifton, and the narrator is snubbed by the committee by being excluded from their downtown meeting.

3. What do you think the Sambo doll symbolizes in this story? Why do you think Clifton leaves the Brotherhood to sell these dolls?

Answers may vary. Example: The Sambo doll represents the black people who dance for the white people and who lower the image of the black race by doing so. The doll represents those who do whatever the white people want for their amusement, regardless of the negative consequences to the black race.

Clifton is selling these dolls because he believes he mimics them when he works for the Brotherhood. He does whatever they ask of him because he believes they are going to help lift up the black race. When the Brotherhood pulls their support from the Harlem district, Clifton feels like a dancing doll.

4. Some critics think that in this chapter, the narrator becomes aware of the individuals who make up Harlem rather than just seeing them as a faceless group. Find a quotation in this chapter that helps to demonstrate the narrator’s awakening to the sights and sounds of the people living in Harlem.

Answers may vary. Example: “I was painfully aware of other men dressed like the boys, and of girls in dark exotic-colored stockings, their costumes surreal variations of downtown styles.” (Pg. 443) In this quotation, the narrator realizes characteristics about the people in Harlem.

Chapter Twenty-one

Vocabulary

denouncing – condemning

provocation – urge on

euphonium – tuba-like instrument

lucid – clear

ventricle – a small chamber inside an organ

brogue – strong shoe

1. Why does the narrator decide to give Clifton a large funeral?

The narrator does not fully understand the reasons for Clifton's death, but he feels some guilt and responsibility because he does not keep in contact with the membership in Harlem. The narrator decides he cannot help the dead, but a large funeral can help resurrect Clifton's integrity and bring people back to the Brotherhood.

2. What box is the narrator referring to in the following passage?

“Now he's in this box with the bolts tightened down. He's in the box and we're in there with him, and when I've told you this you can go. It is dark in this box and it's crowded. It has a cracked ceiling and a clogged-up toilet in the hall.” (Pg. 458)

The box is the poverty and poor quality of life most black people experience because they are denied equal opportunities to gain power and wealth.

3. List two reasons the narrator's speech does not have any political statements pertaining to the Brotherhood's philosophy.

First, the narrator tries to get in touch with the Brotherhood, but they are unavailable to him. He is forced to proceed on his own. Next, the narrator is moved by the music and makes his speech from the anger he feels over Clifton's death.

4. What does the following quotation from this chapter tell the reader about the mood of the people in Harlem after Clifton's funeral?

“The crowd were boiling figures seen through steaming glass from inside a washing machine; and in the streets the mounted police detail stood looking on...men and horses of flesh imitating men and horses of stone.” (Pg. 460)

The people are angry and about to boil over.

Chapter Twenty-two

Vocabulary

tactician – one who maneuvers cleverly

matzos – unleavened breads

acute – keen; crucial

tenement – low-rental building

supersonic – speed greater than the speed of sound

polemical – controversial argument

1. Why does Brother Jack sarcastically say, “The great tactician of *personal* responsibility regrets our absence”? (Pg. 464) How does the Brotherhood view the narrator’s decision to give Clifton a grand funeral?

Brother Jack is being sarcastic because he does not think the narrator has any right to act without the guidance of the committee. He is mocking him in this way to let the narrator know the committee considers him incompetent to make those kinds of decisions. He tells the narrator, “You were hired to think...the committee does the thinking...you were hired to talk.” (Pg. 469–470) The committee does not want to give Clifton a grand funeral because they consider him to be a traitor to the Brotherhood.

2. Why does Tobitt think he knows everything he needs to know about the black situation in Harlem?

Tobitt is married to a black woman, so he thinks he understands the black race. The narrator tells Tobitt to take his wife into Harlem so he can learn the real issues and history of the people. Brother Jack tells the narrator that it is not the job of the committee to listen to the people; it is their job to tell the people what to think.

3. What does Brother Jack say that makes the narrator respond by asking Brother Jack if he would like the blacks in Harlem to address him as “Marse Jack”? (Pg. 473)

The narrator compares this with the white men who tell their slaves what to think.

4. Blindness in a character often illustrates ignorance about something. What do you think is the significance of Brother Jack having one glass eye? How is this partial blindness linked to his belief in the Brotherhood?

Answers will vary. Example: Brother Jack can see only the ideas of the Brotherhood. He is blinded to anything the narrator has to say about the situation in Harlem because it does not correspond to the position of the committee.

5. Brother Jack thinks the narrator is joking when he says, "... maybe you'll recommend me to your oculist...then I may not-see myself as others see-me-not." (Pg. 477)What do you think the narrator is cleverly telling Brother Jack by making this joke about his glass eye?

The narrator is saying that the Brotherhood is unable to see the narrator as a person. They see him only as a tool to attain their goals.

6. What is the mood of the narrator at the end of this chapter? What evidence is there that he does not want to leave the Brotherhood?

The narrator is lost. He is afraid to leave the Brotherhood because it is the only life he knows. At the same time, he has been changed by Clifton's death and his meeting with the committee. He decides to go see Hambro, hoping he can explain the confusion he feels over the committee's attitude.

Chapter Twenty-three

Vocabulary

Disdain – despise; treat with contempt

Jaunty – self-confident

Conspicuously – noticeably; obviously

Gait – movement

Filibustering – delaying tactics

Antiphonal – alternating

Integrity – adhering to ethics

Charlatan – quack; fraud

Absurdity – ridiculously unreasonable

1. Why does the narrator decide to wear sun glasses like the three men in cream-colored suits he sees in the street?

The narrator needs protection from Ras' men. When he puts on the sunglasses, no one recognizes him. They all think he is someone called Rinehart.

2. List the people who mistake the narrator for Rinehart. What can you infer about Rinehart's character by these encounters?

*a woman with heavy perfume
two young hipsters on the street
Ras does not recognize him
the bartender at the Barrelhouse
Some young men drinking on a corner that think Rinehart can get them a job
a woman mistakes him and tries to seduce him
he is mistaken for Reverend Rinehart, the pastor of a church*

Rinehart is in touch with many different aspects of life in Harlem. He is involved in gambling, guns, and women. Rinehart is a leader of sorts, but a leader who does not try to make life better for his people.

3. Whom do you think Rinehart represents in this chapter?

Answers will vary. Example: Some critics believe Rinehart is more of a character type than a real person. Others believe Rinehart is an example of another path the narrator could take to cope with life in Harlem.

4. How does Hambro explain the Brotherhood's decision to sacrifice the members of the Brotherhood in the narrator's district?

The Brotherhood is making alliances with other political groups; and to form these partnerships, they need to distance themselves from the Harlem district.

5. Hambro tries to tell him that his new job will be to teach the people of Harlem about the Brotherhood. What does the narrator mean in the following:

"I don't think I can," I said.

"Why? It's just as important."

"Because they are against us; besides, I'd feel like Rinehart..." (Pg. 504)

The narrator is saying that he would feel like a fraud, just like Rinehart, if he went along with the Brotherhood's plan. He would be using the people who like and respect him.

6. Why does the narrator think he is both the sacrificer and the victim?

The narrator is the sacrificer because his actions will contribute to making the black people victims. He is a victim because he is black.

7. What does the following quotation from the chapter tell the reader about the narrator's intentions concerning his future relationship with the Brotherhood?

"I would remain and become a well-disciplined optimist, and help them to go merrily to hell. If I couldn't help them to see the reality of our lives, I would help them to ignore it until it exploded in their faces." (Pg. 511)

The narrator is going to work against the Brotherhood from the inside. He is going to agree to everything they want from him and then secretly work against their plans. By doing this, he hopes the Brotherhood will be destroyed by their own inability to see the real problems facing the Harlem district.

8. The narrator needs a contact on the inside who can help him to know their true objectives. He decides to find some woman in the organization that he can seduce and use to get information. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the story: The narrator is not a ladies' man and should try a different way of getting inside information about the Brotherhood.

Answers will vary.

Chapter Twenty-four

Vocabulary

distorting – twisting; misrepresenting

inextricably – unavoidable

wistful – melancholy

prim – unsophisticated

pristine – clean; free from corruption

nymphomaniac – a female who has an uncontrollable sex drive

farce – mockery

sublime – supreme; impressive

1. Why does the narrator decide to try to get information from Sybil?

It would be easy to get information from her since she is interested in him and his affiliation with the "Woman Question." Since she "...had indicated several times a willingness to know me better," he decides to use it to his advantage. (Pg. 515) In addition, she is the drunk, lonely wife of a big shot in the organization.

2. What does Sybil want from the narrator? What happens to break up the disastrous evening?

Sybil wants the narrator to pretend to rape her so she can experience a rape by a black man. The narrator gets a call from the Brotherhood in Harlem. He is needed because there is trouble in the district.

3. What does the narrator take with him, besides Sybil, when he leaves the apartment?

The narrator takes his brief case with him when he leaves the apartment.

Chapter Twenty-five

Vocabulary

Tangent – irrelevant; digression

Pawnshops – stores where customers can sell items for money

Pinafore – dress-like garment

Incongruous – inappropriate; inconsistent

Turgid – swollen; bloated

Apex – summit

1. Who starts the riot in Harlem?

No one is certain how the riot starts. Some men say it is over a white woman while others say it is Ras the Destroyer who starts the riot. Finally, they conclude that the neighborhood just exploded.

2. Why does the narrator not try to question or interfere with the men who are burning down the apartment building?

The narrator can see that the men have a plan and they do not need any help or outside leadership.

3. What is the narrator saying about the committee in the following passage from the chapter?

“I could see it now, see it clearly and in growing magnitude. It was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, and had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree, I had indeed agreed....” (Pg. 553)

The narrator realizes the committee has used him to help start the race riots. He thinks he is working against them when he tells them everything is under control, but they know better all along.

4. Why does the narrator open his brief case and look for his dark sunglasses? What does the narrator say to try to protect himself from Ras the Destroyer?

The narrator looks in the brief case for his dark glasses so he can disguise himself as Rinehart. When he discovers the glasses are broken, he tries to tell Ras and his followers that he is no longer a member of the Brotherhood.

5. Read the following quotation. What do you think the narrator is saying about life?

“And that I, a little black man with an assumed name should die because a big black man in his hatred and confusion over the nature of a reality that seemed controlled solely by white men whom I knew to be as blind as he, was just too much, too outrageously absurd. And I knew that it was better to live out one’s own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras’ or Jack’s.” (Pg. 559)

Answers will vary.

6. What do you think is the significance of the narrator’s being drenched by a broken water main just before he is chased into the manhole by the men who want to steal his brief case?

Answers may vary. Example: It may be another baptism signaling that the narrator is about to find another identity.

7. What does the protagonist do with the items in his briefcase? What does he realize about Jack when he burns the anonymous letter?

The narrator burns several papers from the briefcase: his high school diploma, Clifton’s doll, the anonymous letter, and the slip of paper with his Brotherhood name. The narrator realizes that Jack wrote the anonymous letter because the handwriting on the letter is the same as on the slip of paper Jack gave him with his Brotherhood name written on it. He is outraged by his discovery and begins to scream.

8. What is important about the remaining items in his briefcase?

The narrator has the leg iron and the iron bank left in the briefcase. These are parts of his heritage that cannot or should not be destroyed.

9. What do you think the last sentence in this chapter means? “The end was in the beginning.”

Answers may vary. Example: The narrator plans to stay underground until he is ready to begin life again, this time as an individual.

Epilogue

belated – delayed

mea culpa – acknowledging fault

albino – having white skin and red eyes

ornery – disagreeable; mean spirited

spryly – lively

lethargy – sluggish

abysmal – unfathomable

1. The narrator proposes a new interpretation of his grandfather's deathbed advice in the following passage from the Epilogue.

“...that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. Did he mean say “yes” because he knew that the principle was greater than the men....” (Pg. 574)

What principle is the narrator referring to in this passage?

Regarding his grandfather's words, the narrator questions various principles about society and the roles races play within. The principle is that this country stands for equality and justice for all. However, the equality is not easily attained.

2. Why does the narrator mean when he says “diversity is the word”? (Pg. 577)

The narrator thinks the world would be better off to accept and encourage diversity among its people. That way there can be no tyrants trying to make people conform to their ideas.

3. Why is the narrator coming out of his “hole”? (Pg. 581)

The narrator thinks that even an invisible man may have some social responsibility.

4. The last line in the book is:
“Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?” (Pg. 581)

In what ways do you think the narrator might speak for you?

Answers will vary.

Invisible Man

Study Guide Student Copy

Prologue

Vocabulary

ectoplasms – immaterial substances

epidermis – outer layer of skin

hibernation – period of seclusion or extended sleep

bilious – like bile

ingenuity – inventive; cleverness

reefer – slang for a marijuana cigarette

yokel – term for a bumpkin

flamenco – a rhythmic gypsy dance

1. Why does the narrator believe he is an “invisible man”?
2. How does the narrator carry on a fight against the Monopolated Light & Power?
Where is he living?

3. Often in novels light is a symbol for knowledge. Assuming that is true in this story, why do you think the narrator writes, “The truth is the light and light is the truth”? (Pg. 7)

4. Ellison’s style of writing includes many play on words. What is the double meaning behind the title of Louis Armstrong’s song “*What Did I Do to be so Black and Blue*”? (Pg. 12)

5. What do you think the narrator is saying about race relations in the following passage? Do you agree with him?

“All dreamers and sleepwalkers must pay the price, and even the invisible victim is responsible for the fate of all.” (Pg. 14)

Chapter One

Vocabulary

obscene – offensive

anarchy – political disorder; confusion

melee – brawl; hand-to-hand fighting

languid – weak; slow

fastidious – meticulous

stolid – revealing little emotion

1. What does the narrator's grandfather say before he dies that makes the narrator feel guilty whenever anything good happens to him?
2. Some critics believe the Battle Royal is a parable that illustrates the state of race relations in the South before the Civil Right Movement. Assuming this is true, what do you think each of the following incidents from this Battle Royal is saying about the power of the whites in the South?

forcing the black boys to watch the white stripper –

the use of blindfolds in the fight –

the electrified rug –

3. List two things the narrator does in this chapter to please the white folks even after they have subjected him to the humiliating Battle Royal.”
4. What do the white men give the narrator at the end of his speech?
5. What do you think is the meaning of the following message the narrator’s grandfather asks him to read in his dream? “To Whom It May Concern,” I intoned. “Keep This Nigger-Boy Running.” (Pg. 33)

Chapter Two

Vocabulary

promenaded – walked; danced

stagnant – immobile

alchemy – magical power

philanthropist – effort to improve mankind; love of humankind

ginghams – yarn-dyed cotton fabrics

degenerates – declines

indignation – anger

1. Some critics believe Ellison's description of the Negro college was inspired by T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*. A wasteland is defined as land that is uncultivated or barren. What do you think the author is saying about the type of education the black youths receive at a college described as a wasteland?

2. How do you think the narrator feels about the millionaires who visit the school on Founder's Day, as described in the following passage?

"I'm convinced it was the product of a subtle magic, the alchemy of moonlight; the school a flower-studded wasteland, the rocks sunken, the dry winds hidden, the lost crickets chirping to yellow butterflies. And oh, oh, oh, those multimillionaires!" (Pg. 37)

3. List the two reasons Mr. Norton gives the narrator for wanting to support the school.

4. How does Trueblood justify sleeping with his daughter? Why is the narrator upset Trueblood is telling this story to a white man?
5. Why does Trueblood decide to continue to live at home and face his wife and daughter?
6. Why do you think Mr. Norton is interested in the story? What does the narrator think about Mr. Norton giving Trueblood one hundred dollars?
7. Ellison likes to give his characters names that tell the reader something about the personality of the character. Why do you think Ellison names the black man who sleeps with his daughter Trueblood?

Chapter Three

Vocabulary

thalamic – area of the brain dealing with sensory information

autonomous – independent

coccyx – tailbone

mulatto – term for a person who is half white and half black

endocrinology – study of hormone glands and their functions

nostalgia – homesickness

catharsis – purging emotions

pragmatist – solving things matter-of-factly

1. Why does the narrator plan to “rush in and get the whiskey and leave” the Golden Day as quickly as possible?

2. How does the narrator feel about the patrons of the Golden Day?

3. What do you think the fat man is trying to tell the narrator in the following excerpt from the novel?

“Stop screaming!’ a voice commanded, and I felt myself pulled away. It was the short fat man...‘That’s better,’ he shouted into my ear. ‘He’s only a man. Remember that. He’s only a man!’ ” (Pg. 86)

4. What do you think has happened to the doctor to make him believe that his work can “bring him no dignity...I returned to save a life and was refused”? (Pg. 93)

5. Why does the doctor describe the narrator as “a walking personification of the Negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams, sir! The mechanical man!”? (Pg. 94)

6. How is Mr. Norton hurt before leaving the Golden Day? What does Halley mean when he says the white man “caint die!”? (Pg. 97)

Chapter Four

Vocabulary

predicament – difficult situation; dilemma

benevolence – kind act

moiling – slaving

1. How are the narrator's feelings of innocence at what happens to Mr. Norton similar to Trueblood's lack of guilt over sleeping with his daughter?

2. What does the following excerpt from this chapter tell the reader about the narrator's purpose in life?

“Here within this quiet greenness I possessed the only identity I had ever known, and I was losing it. In this brief passage I became aware of the connection between these lawns and buildings and my hopes and dreams.” (Pg. 99)

3. Why does the following speech from Dr. Bledsoe shock the narrator?

“Haven't you the sense God gave a dog? We take these white folks where we want them to go, we show them what we want them to see. Don't you know that? I thought you had some sense.” (Pg. 102)

4. Why is the narrator grateful to Mr. Norton?

Chapter Five

Vocabulary

vespers – stars

arpeggios – chords that are played quickly

condescension – patronizing behavior

ascot – scarf

precarious – unstable situation

emissary – an agent who represents someone's interests

halitosis – bad breath

1. What is the legend of how Dr. Bledsoe first came to the college? What is the connection between young Bledsoe's first job and his current position?
2. In what ways does the speaker compare the Founder to Jesus and Moses? What literary term is being employed?
3. Some critics believe that blindness in a character illustrates his ignorance about something. Assuming this is true, why do you think Ellison describes Homer A. Barbee as a blind speaker?
4. List two reasons the narrator is upset by Barbee's speech.
5. How does the narrator feel when he sees Dr. Bledsoe patting the backs of the white patrons just before Barbee begins his speech?

Chapter Six

Vocabulary

conciliatory – reconcile

1. Ellison chooses the names for his characters very carefully. What does the following passage suggest to the reader about the meaning of the name Bledsoe for the president of the Negro college?

“The white folk tell everybody what to think - except men like me. I tell them...It's a nasty deal and I don't always like it myself. But you listen to me: I didn't make it, and I know that I can't change it. But I've made my place in it and I'll have every Negro in the country hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am.” (Pg. 143)

2. Why does Dr. Bledsoe believe the narrator must be disciplined for letting Mr. Nelson meet Mr. Trueblood and the doctor at the Golden Day? What is the significance of the leg shackle Dr. Bledsoe keeps in his office?
3. What advice about surviving in the white world is Dr. Bledsoe giving the narrator in the following passage? In what way can the phrase “stay in the dark and use it” have a double meaning?

“You let the white folk worry about pride and dignity—you learn where you are and get yourself power, influence, contacts with powerful and influential people—then stay in the dark and use it!” (Pg. 145)

4. Why does the narrator decide to accept the responsibility for what had happened and submit to punishment?
5. What is the first paper given to the narrator for his new briefcase? How is it different from the seven letters given to him by Dr. Bledsoe?

Chapter Seven

Vocabulary

sophistication – refinement

bombardment – attack

staccato – short, disconnected sounds

1. In the following passage from the novel, what advice does the old doctor from the Golden Day give the narrator about how to survive in the world?

“Play the game, but don’t believe in it...but play it your own way...Play the game, but raise the ante...learn how *you* operate.” (Pg. 153)

2. What do you think the doctor is referring to when he says to Crenshaw, “But...there’s always an element of crime in freedom”? (Pg. 155)
3. List the three parting pieces of advice the doctor gives the narrator before leaving him to change buses. What evidence is there that the narrator will probably not listen to the doctor’s well-meaning words?
4. Why is the narrator uncomfortable in the subway?
5. Why is the narrator surprised when he sees Ras making a speech on the streets of New York?

Chapter Eight

Vocabulary

rhetoric – persuasive language

nuances – subtle differences

façade – a deceptive front

antagonism – hostility

immaculate – spotless; pure

scandalous – shocking

1. What are the Negroes the narrator sees on Wall Street doing? What does their occupation tell the reader about the position of the black men in the powerful white world of Wall Street?
2. How does the narrator explain the strange looks he receives from the secretaries of the trustees?
3. Why does the narrator decide to write Mr. Emerson a letter instead of hand delivering Dr. Bledsoe's letter?

Chapter Nine

Vocabulary

exasperated – greatly annoyed

malicious – spiteful; harmful

ebony – hard dark wood; black

sadistic – deriving pleasure from cruelty

cynicism – negative attitude

deportment – behavior; manner

rookery – crowded tenement

1. What is Ellison saying about the narrator when the narrator tries to get away from the man singing the blues in the street?

“...who got the damn dog? Now I know you from down home, how come you trying to act like you never heard that before! Hell, ain't nobody out here this morning but us colored - Why you trying to deny me?” (Pg. 173)

2. How does the nasty campus gossip about Dr. Bledsoe help him maintain his power and leadership at the college?

3. What does young Mr. Emerson say about ambition?

4. The club Calamus is named after Walt Whitman's poems about homosexuals. What evidence is there in this story that young Mr. Emerson may be a homosexual?

5. How is the following passage from Bledsoe's letter to Emerson similar to the narrator's dream at the end of Chapter One, where his grandfather makes him read a document that says, "To Who It may Concern ... Keep This Nigger-Boy Running"? (Pg. 33)

"I beg you, sir, to help him to continue in the direction of that promise which, like the horizon, recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler."

6. Why do you think Dr. Bledsoe gives the narrator the seven letters instead of just telling him to leave the school?
7. The author's full name is Ralph Waldo Ellison, named after the famous transcendental writer. Emerson is famous for his essay "Self Reliance" and his belief that all men are equal. He worked for the abolition of slavery. What similarities could there be between the Mr. Emerson from the novel and the famous writer?
8. What revenge is the narrator dreaming about at the end of this chapter?

Chapter Ten

Vocabulary

hydrometer – instrument used to measure fluids' gravity

belligerently – aggressively

dissimulating – disguising

fink – a hired strikebreaker; an informer

impudent – shameless

1. What indications are there that the paint plant could be a symbol for white America?
2. In what sense does the narrator's job at the paint factory, adding ten drops of black to the white paint making it *Optic White*, parallel the role of black men in the white world?
3. Why does Kimbro transfer the narrator to the basement of another building?
4. In what way is Mr. Brockway's way of running his machines similar to Dr. Bledsoe's methods of running the Negro school?
5. What is the slogan Mr. Brockway makes up for the paint company? In what sense does this slogan sum up Mr. Brockway's philosophy of life?
6. What happens to the narrator in the following passage from the story?

“...and I turned, running now...up the stairs so far away and hearing the clear new note arising while I seemed to run swiftly up an incline and shot forward with sudden acceleration into a wet blast of black emptiness that was somehow a bath of whiteness.” (Pg. 230)

Chapter Eleven

Vocabulary

gingerly – cautiously

electrodes – conductors through which electric currents pass

manipulating – controlling

phonograph – a machine that reproduces sound off of rotating disks

sorghum – syrup made from a grass grain

lobe – specific region of the brain

castration – to neuter

bewildered – confused

myopically – nearsightedness

pantomime – to communicate without words

placard – sign; small card

convalescence – return to health

1. While the doctors are administering the shock treatments, why do you think the narrator clings to his memories of his childhood in the South?
2. What does the following passage from the chapter say about the results the doctors are hoping for from their experiments on the narrator?

“The patient will live as he has to live, and with absolute integrity. Who could ask for more? He’ll experience no major conflict of motives, and what is even better, society will suffer no traumata on his account.”
(Pg. 236)

3. Many critics believe this chapter serves as a symbolic rebirth for the narrator. Cite incidents from the story to support or refute this idea.

4. What is ironic about the following quotation from the chapter?

“And remember you’ll be adequately compensated for your experience.”

“Compensated, Sir?”

“O, yes,” he said. “We follow a policy of enlightened humanitarianism, all our employees are automatically insured. You have only to sign a few papers.” (Pg. 247)

5. Why do you think Ellison uses the word “palaver” when he says good-bye to the man in the white coat at the factory hospital? (Pg. 249)
6. At the end of this chapter, the narrator returns to Harlem, but he is a changed man. What does he realize about himself on the train to Harlem that may be considered a life-altering revelation?

Chapter Twelve

Vocabulary

utopian – impractical reformer of society

orthodox – keeping with traditional faith

dunned – requested payment

nebulous – cloudy

deluge – great flood; heavy rain

1. What is Mary saying when she tells the narrator,

“It’s you young folks what’s going to make the changes,” she said. “Y’all’s the ones. You got to lead and you got to fight and move us all on up a little higher. And I tell you something else, it’s the ones from the South that’s got to do it, them what knows the fire and ain’t forgot how it burns. Up here too many forgits.” (Pg. 255)

2. How does the narrator manage to get thrown out of the Men’s House for “ninety-nine years and a day”? What does this action say about the changes in the narrator’s personality? (Pg. 257)

3. What is the “ice” the narrator is talking about in the following passage? Other than violence, how do you think he plans to release his resentment?

“And while the ice was melting to form a flood in which I threatened to drown I awoke one afternoon to find that my first northern winter had set.” (Pg. 260)

4. Some critics believe that one of the main themes in this story is the comparison between the narrator’s life in the South with his life in the North. Assuming this is true, what Southern qualities of home does the narrator find living in Mary’s house?

Chapter Thirteen

Vocabulary

confectionaries – candy stores

consternation – fear; dismay

evicted – removed

chiffonier – a chest of drawers

celluloid – material used to make film

intrinsic – inherent

dispossessed – impoverished

verbiage – wordiness

1. Why does the narrator experience an “intense feeling of freedom” when he eats the warm yam? (Pg. 264)
2. What is the narrator saying about Bledsoe when he accuses him of eating hog bowels in private?
3. Ellison is famous for his puns and plays on words. Find an example of a pun in this chapter illustrating the narrator’s newfound freedom.
4. Why is the narrator compelled to make a speech at the eviction of the old people? What does he accomplish with his words?
5. Why does the narrator agree to get a cup of coffee with the white man who has escaped the eviction over the rooftops, just like the narrator?
6. What does the narrator think about Brother Jack’s job offer? Why do you think he is worrying about Mary at the end of the chapter?

Chapter Fourteen

Vocabulary

uncanny – peculiar; weird

divan – a long, backless sofa

taffeta – fabric made of various materials

missionary – propagandist

1. Why does the narrator change his mind and decide to accept Brother Jack's job offer?
2. Define "Chthonian." Why do you think Ellison decides to use this word to name the building where the Brotherhood meets?
3. List two things Emma says that may suggest to the reader that the narrator is soon to become a tool of the brotherhood.
4. Why does the Brotherhood want the narrator to move out of Mary's house?

5. What do you think the narrator thinks about Booker T. Washington in the following passage? Why does he not want to pattern himself after Washington?

“But to hell with this Booker T. Washington business. I would do the work but I would be no one except myself - whoever I was. I would pattern my life on that of the Founder.” (Pg. 311)

6. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the chapter: The narrator is not insulted by the drunken man’s request that the narrator sing for the group.

7. What does the following passage from the novel tell the reader about the progress the narrator is making toward finding his own identity?

“I felt that I could never allow myself to show surprise or upset—even when confronted with situations furthest from my experience...it was nothing new, white folks seemed always to expect you to know those things which they’d done everything they could think of to prevent you from knowing.” (Pg. 315)

Chapter Fifteen

Vocabulary

impertinence – insolence; irrelevance

furtively – secretly

exhilarated – stimulated

1. Briefly describe the cast iron bank the narrator uses to bang on the pipe. What can the figure on the bank symbolize for the narrator?
2. Why does the narrator try to hide the broken bank from Mary? How does he try to dispose of it when he leaves her home? Why do you think his efforts are fruitless?
3. Briefly describe the narrator's new apartment. What is his reaction to his new surroundings?

Chapter Sixteen

Vocabulary

volition – choosing; conscious decision

imparted – bestowed; disclosed

tempo – speed of music

plexus – network

imbecilities – foolish or stupid acts

heinous – abominable

caucus – political meeting

stenographer – shorthand writer

1. What does the following metaphor from this chapter tell the reader about the narrator's relationship with Brother Jack?

“It was Master the bull dog; and I was the child who was afraid to touch him, although, panting with heat, he seemed to grin back at me like a fat good-natured man...He had barked the same note when angry or when being brought his dinner...I liked, but didn't trust old Master; I wanted to please, but did not trust the crowd. Then I looked at Brother Jack and grinned: That was it; in some ways, he was like a toy bull terrier.”
(Pg. 338)

2. List three kinds of dispossession the narrator talks about in his speech. How is he using the political technique he calls “I'm-sick-and-tired-of-the-way-they've-been-treating-us approach”? (Pg. 342)

3. Ellison often uses blindness in this novel to represent ignorance. What is he saying to the audience in the following passage from the novel when he compares the black race to one-eyed mice?

“Think about it, they’ve dispossessed us each of one eye from the day we’re born. So now we can only see in straight white lines. We’re a nation of one-eyed mice....” (Pg. 343)

4. Why do Brother Wrestrum and the unnamed man with the pipe object to the narrator’s speech?
5. What evidence is there in this chapter that the main objection the Brotherhood has to the narrator’s speech is their fear of the intensity and power he is capable of invoking from the crowd?
6. Where does the narrator think he has learned the phrase “more human”?

Chapter Seventeen

Vocabulary

theoretician – an expert in a theory or art

matador – a bullfighter

non-partisan – impartial

sectarianism – narrow-minded

countenance – facial expression

vehemently – intensely

1. Briefly identify the following characters introduced or reintroduced in this chapter.

Brother Hambro -

Brother Tarp -

Brother Tod Clifton -

Ras the Exhorter -

2. Why does Ras the Exhorter not kill Tod Clifton when he has the chance? How does he try to convince Clifton and the narrator to leave the Brotherhood?
3. What evidence is there in this chapter that Clifton is emotionally touched by Ras' words? What does Clifton mean when he says, "I suppose sometimes a man *has* to plunge outside history"? (Pg. 377)

4. Why do you think Brother Tarp gives the narrator a picture of Frederick Douglass for his wall?

5. Point out a possible flaw in the philosophy of the Brotherhood stated in the following quotation:

“We recognized no loose ends, everything could be controlled by our science. Life was all pattern and discipline; and the beauty of discipline is when it works. And it was working very well.” (Pg. 382)

Chapter Eighteen

Vocabulary

unperturbed – calm

rheumatism – arthritis

liable – obligated; responsible

cauterizing – deadening; callous

vaudeville – a variety show

vindicated – justified

1. Why is the narrator alarmed at the unsigned letter he finds in the mail?
2. What is the significance of Tarp's metal leg iron? Why does he pass it on to the narrator?
3. Why does Wrestrum object to the narrator openly displaying the leg iron on his desk?
4. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from this chapter: Brother Wrestrum sees the Brotherhood as a flawed but an effective tool to get equal treatment for people of all races.

5. How does Wrestrum betray the narrator?
6. Even though the Brotherhood finds the narrator innocent of trying to gain personal recognition from the magazine article, why do they decide to relieve him of his duties in Harlem and reassign him to the women's issues?
7. Why does the narrator decide to accept the new assignment?
8. Some critics think the Brotherhood is patterned after the Communist party that was active in Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s. What similarities do you see between the ideology of communism and the ideology of the Brotherhood? Do you agree or disagree that the Brotherhood may be inspired by the Communist Party activities of the times?

Chapter Nineteen

Vocabulary

salvationist – evangelist

Renoir – French impressionist painter

discordantly – conflicting

enigmatic – puzzling

decanter – a container that holds liquor

chinkapin – small tree or shrub

indifferent – apathetic

fathom – imagine

1. What clues does the narrator have that the woman may want more from him than a discussion of ideology? Why does he not leave the apartment?
2. Some critics believe this chapter is a form of satire poking fun at the idea that white women desire black men. Support or refute this theory. If you disagree, what other reason could Ellison have for including this chapter at this point in the story?
3. Why is the narrator surprised by Clifton's disappearance? Why doesn't the narrator keep in touch with the Harlem membership?

Chapter Twenty

Vocabulary

balked – refused quickly

insinuating – suggesting

spieled – gave a lengthy speech

stewards – managers

pomade – hair product

cryptic – secret

1. How does Barrellhouse explain the hostility the narrator experiences when he calls the man at the bar “Brother”? (Pg. 426)
2. Besides the hostility in the bar, list the other surprises the narrator finds when he returns to the Harlem headquarters.
3. What do you think the Sambo doll symbolizes in this story? Why do you think Clifton leaves the Brotherhood to sell these dolls?
4. Some critics think that in this chapter, the narrator becomes aware of the individuals who make up Harlem rather than just seeing them as a faceless group. Find a quotation in this chapter that helps to demonstrate the narrator’s awakening to the sights and sounds of the people living in Harlem.

Chapter Twenty-one

Vocabulary

denouncing – condemning

provocation – urge on

euphonium – tuba-like instrument

lucid – clear

ventricle – a small chamber inside an organ

brogue – strong shoe

1. Why does the narrator decide to give Clifton a large funeral?

2. What box is the narrator referring to in the following passage?

“Now he’s in this box with the bolts tightened down. He’s in the box and we’re in there with him, and when I’ve told you this you can go. It is dark in this box and it’s crowded. It has a cracked ceiling and a clogged-up toilet in the hall.” (Pg. 458)

3. List two reasons the narrator’s speech does not have any political statements pertaining to the Brotherhood’s philosophy.

4. What does the following quotation from this chapter tell the reader about the mood of the people in Harlem after Clifton’s funeral?

“The crowd were boiling figures seen through steaming glass from inside a washing machine; and in the streets the mounted police detail stood looking on...men and horses of flesh imitating men and horses of stone.” (Pg. 460)

Chapter Twenty-two

Vocabulary

tactician – one who maneuvers cleverly

matzos – unleavened breads

acute – keen; crucial

tenement – low-rental building

supersonic – speed greater than the speed of sound

polemical – controversial argument

1. Why does Brother Jack sarcastically say, “The great tactician of *personal* responsibility regrets our absence”? (Pg. 464) How does the Brotherhood view the narrator’s decision to give Clifton a grand funeral?
2. Why does Tobitt think he knows everything he needs to know about the black situation in Harlem?
3. What does Brother Jack say that makes the narrator respond by asking Brother Jack if he would like the blacks in Harlem to address him as “Marse Jack”? (Pg. 473)

4. Blindness in a character often illustrates ignorance about something. What do you think is the significance of Brother Jack having one glass eye? How is this partial blindness linked to his belief in the Brotherhood?

5. Brother Jack thinks the narrator is joking when he says, "...maybe you'll recommend me to your oculist...then I may not-see myself as others see-me-not." (Pg. 477) What do you think the narrator is cleverly telling Brother Jack by making this joke about his glass eye?

6. What is the mood of the narrator at the end of this chapter? What evidence is there that he does not want to leave the Brotherhood?

Chapter Twenty-three

Vocabulary

Disdain – despise; treat with contempt

Jaunty – self-confident

Conspicuously – noticeably; obviously

Gait – movement

Filibustering – delaying tactics

Antiphonal – alternating

Integrity – adhering to ethics

Charlatan – quack; fraud

Absurdity – ridiculously unreasonable

1. Why does the narrator decide to wear sun glasses like the three men in cream-colored suits he sees in the street?
2. List the people who mistake the narrator for Rinehart. What can you infer about Rinehart's character by these encounters?
3. Whom do you think Rinehart represents in this chapter?
4. How does Hambro explain the Brotherhood's decision to sacrifice the members of the Brotherhood in the narrator's district?

5. Hambro tries to tell him that his new job will be to teach the people of Harlem about the Brotherhood. What does the narrator mean in the following:

“I don’t think I can,” I said.

“Why? It’s just as important.”

“Because they are against us; besides, I’d feel like Rinehart...” (Pg. 504)

6. Why does the narrator think he is both the sacrificer and the victim?

7. What does the following quotation from the chapter tell the reader about the narrator’s intentions concerning his future relationship with the Brotherhood?

“I would remain and become a well-disciplined optimist, and help them to go merrily to hell. If I couldn’t help them to see the reality of our lives, I would help them to ignore it until it exploded in their faces.” (Pg. 511)

8. The narrator needs a contact on the inside who can help him to know their true objectives. He decides to find some woman in the organization that he can seduce and use to get information. Support or refute the following statement by citing incidents from the story: The narrator is not a ladies’ man and should try a different way of getting inside information about the Brotherhood.

Chapter Twenty-four

Vocabulary

distorting – twisting; misrepresenting

inextricably – unavoidable

wistful – melancholy

prim – unsophisticated

pristine – clean; free from corruption

nymphomaniac – a female who has an uncontrollable sex drive

farce – mockery

sublime – supreme; impressive

1. Why does the narrator decide to try to get information from Sybil?
2. What does Sybil want from the narrator? What happens to break up the disastrous evening?
3. What does the narrator take with him, besides Sybil, when he leaves the apartment?

Chapter Twenty-five

Vocabulary

Tangent – irrelevant; digression

Pawnshops – stores where customers can sell items for money

Pinafore – dress-like garment

Incongruous – inappropriate; inconsistent

Turgid – swollen; bloated

Apex – summit

1. Who starts the riot in Harlem?
2. Why does the narrator not try to question or interfere with the men who are burning down the apartment building?
3. What is the narrator saying about the committee in the following passage from the chapter?

“I could see it now, see it clearly and in growing magnitude. It was not suicide, but murder. The committee had planned it. And I had helped, and had been a tool. A tool just at the very moment I had thought myself free. By pretending to agree, I had indeed agreed....” (Pg. 553)
4. Why does the narrator open his brief case and look for his dark sunglasses? What does the narrator say to try to protect himself from Ras the Destroyer?

5. Read the following quotation. What do you think the narrator is saying about life?

“And that I, a little black man with an assumed name should die because a big black man in his hatred and confusion over the nature of a reality that seemed controlled solely by white men whom I knew to be as blind as he, was just too much, too outrageously absurd. And I knew that it was better to live out one’s own absurdity than to die for that of others, whether for Ras’ or Jack’s.” (Pg. 559)

6. What do you think is the significance of the narrator’s being drenched by a broken water main just before he is chased into the manhole by the men who want to steal his brief case?
7. What does the protagonist do with the items in his briefcase? What does he realize about Jack when he burns the anonymous letter?
8. What is important about the remaining items in his briefcase?
9. What do you think the last sentence in this chapter means? “The end was in the beginning.”

Epilogue

belated – delayed

mea culpa – acknowledging fault

albino – having white skin and red eyes

ornery – disagreeable; mean spirited

spryly – lively

lethargy – sluggish

abysmal – unfathomable

1. The narrator proposes a new interpretation of his grandfather's deathbed advice in the following passage from the Epilogue.

“...that we were to affirm the principle on which the country was built and not the men, or at least not the men who did the violence. Did he mean say “yes” because he knew that the principle was greater than the men....” (Pg. 574)

What principle is the narrator referring to in this passage?

2. Why does the narrator mean when he says “diversity is the word”? (Pg. 577)

3. Why is the narrator coming out of his “hole”? (Pg. 581)

4. The last line in the book is:

“Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?” (Pg. 581)

In what ways do you think the narrator might speak for you?

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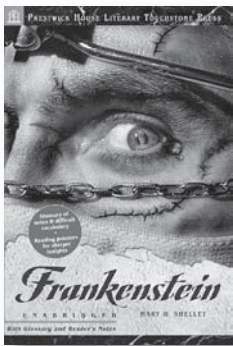
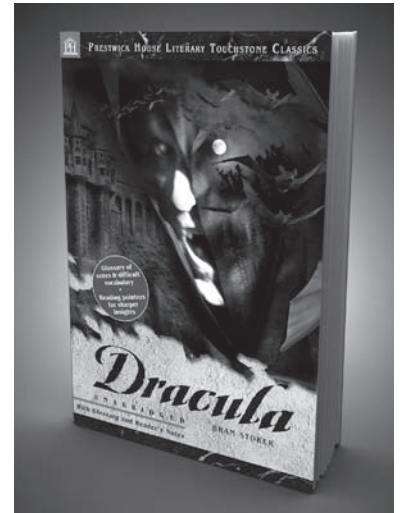
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