

English 213: Modern and Postmodern Literature

Invisible Man Essay

Length and Due Dates

Length: 5 pages, formatted as described in the “Essays” portion of the syllabus
First Draft Due: Friday, November 19, **by 12:00 p.m.** via E-Submit or in hard copy at Padelford A-305

Revised Draft Due: Friday, December 3, **by 12:00 p.m.** via E-Submit or in hard copy at Padelford A-305

Assignment

For this essay, you may write on one of the following topics:

1. Analyze how the novel incorporates one of the contemporary contexts we have discussed in class (African American leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, and Marcus Garvey; the Communist Party; segregated race relations within the United States; racist Americana such as the “Jolly Black Man” bank and Sambo dolls; folklore). Where does the context appear in the novel? How does the novel critique or give new meaning to the specific context you select?
2. How does *Invisible Man* use speeches to mark shifts in the narrator’s persona? Compare and contrast two or more speeches, analyzing how the narrator’s purpose, message, and rhetoric shift.
3. Analyze the ways in which *Invisible Man* incorporates songs—notably jazz and blues—into the narrative. How do music and musical lyrics function in the novel?
4. Is *Invisible Man* a modernist novel? Why or why not?
5. Some writers have critiqued *Invisible Man*’s politics, arguing the novel does not function as a protest fiction. Does invisibility function as a site of protest, of critique, of opposition? Why or why not?
6. Analyze the function of a key trope in the novel (sight/blindness, invisibility, technology/machines). Why is the pattern of imagery significant?

Guidelines

1. Although I have posed specific questions, you will need to focus the topic and develop a clear, defensible argument that you can support with selected references to the text. For example, an essay on music could focus on one song, such as Louis Armstrong’s “What Did I Do (To Be So Black and Blue)” or folksongs about trickster figures.
2. Let your argument dictate the organizational format of your essay. Just because the novel has a particular narrative order does not mean that your essay must follow that order.

3. Close textual analysis will serve as your main source of evidence. In supporting your argument, you will need to pay attention to the text's language, imagery and structure.

4. Remember that you are writing to an audience who has read *Invisible Man*. Therefore, you do not need to summarize the plot in your essay. Instead, you should incorporate summary, paraphrase, or quotation into an analysis. Each reference to the text should support your argument.

5. When writing about literature, use the present tense (for example, "the Invisible Man lives underground" or "the narrator takes on the role of Rinehart").

6. Do not forget the arguments posed in class or the electronic bulletin board. A review of the postings and in-class discussion may help you to ask key questions and shape your analysis. You will, of course, cite specific words and interpretations borrowed from classmates. The course web site has information on when and how to cite sources.

7. If you're having difficulty devising an approach to the essay, or if you want to discuss ideas-in-progress, come to my office hours or email me to set up an appointment.

Grading

I will use the grading criteria distributed with the first essay assignment. Failure to submit essay drafts will result in a 10-point deduction from the final grade; I will also deduct 10 points per day for late essays, as the ability to develop an argument within time limits is an integral aspect of the essay assignment. I will make exceptions to the lateness policy only in cases of documented illness or family emergency. Technology glitches do not constitute valid excuses for lateness.