

How to Draw an Invisible Man by Terrance Hayes

Introduction:

In an interview in 2010, Callahan stated that writer's block hadn't been Ellison's problem [in finishing his second novel]. "Ellison wrote and wrote and wrote and wrote," he said. He also agreed with Rampersad's conclusion that Ellison lost "about a summer's worth of revisions" in the 1967 fire [that burned his writings]. In the end, after 40 years of work, it appeared the weight of massive expectations, the unwieldy bulk of the narrative and the pressure to give voice to the transformative events of the times had combined to ensure Ellison would never complete the sweeping novel of America he envisioned.

Despite its long delayed arrival, and its inevitable failure to live up to the success of "Invisible Man," Ellison's "Juneteenth" [a compilation of Ellison's unfinished writings] stands as a tribute to a writer's life spent grappling with the contradictions and complexities of race. On his deathbed, the fictional Senator Sunraider, who dismisses the Juneteenth holiday as "the celebration of a gaudy illusion," realizes his own narrative is not just a tale of freedom and success. Instead, it is intrinsically tied to the story of the young man who shot him and the story of the former slaves who learned of their independence that June day in 1865.

- Sarah Pruitt

Directions: Follow the steps provided below:

1. Listen to Terrance Hayes' "[How to Draw an Invisible Man](#)," (transcribed below), paying close attention to the literary elements and techniques Hayes uses to contribute to the meaning of the work as a whole.
2. As you are going through the pieces of poem, find three different pieces of text that you find particularly significant or weighty, for whatever reason. Highlight those three pieces of text by denoting them with **different** colors.
3. Once you've made your highlights, create an image - per piece of evidence - that best represents your understanding of your highlighted text. Your image does not necessarily need to be a literal interpretation of the text, though it could be, if that makes the most sense to you. But you should create your drawing in a way that reflects your understanding of the text in that particular context and on a broader scale; being too literal in your artistic rendering may hinder you from understanding the evidence more holistically.

- Use one of the following programs to create your illustration:
 - Google Drawing (click Insert > Drawing)
 - [Google Canvas](#)
 - [Brush Ninja](#)
 - [Draw Chat](#)
- 4. After you've created all three of your images, paste it in the three spaces provided below the poem. Please make sure to identify which drawing corresponds with each color. You will probably need to save the illustrations onto your device and insert them into each space manually.
- 5. In the space beneath your images, discuss the thematic connection between them. What common idea, theme, message, etc. does each image attempt to convey in their own unique way? And how do the images and the text that inspired them connect to another? What do your illustrations & Hayes' poem convey not only about Ralph Ellison the writer, but also the society and world he wrote about?
 - Your response should consist of no less than 150 words, discuss specific elements of your illustrations, and incorporate textual evidence from the poem to support your claim. Each response should consist of no less than 150 words.

Poem

How to Draw an Invisible Man

by Terrance Hayes

And then when Ralph Ellison's corpse burst
open, I discovered his body had been hoarding
all these years a luscious slush, a sludge
of arterial words, the raw and unsaid pages
with their plots and propositions, with their arcs
of intention and babbling, with their mumbling
streams and false starts and their love
and misanthropic thrusts, tendons of syntax
unraveled from his bones and intestinal cavities,

the froth of singing, stinging, stinking ink,
 reams of script fraught with the demons,
 demagogues and demigods of democracy,
 demographies of vague landscapes,
 passages describing muddy river bottoms
 and elaborate protagonists crawling
 through a foliage greener than money in America
 before America thought to release anyone
 from its dream, the water-logged monologues
 one who is unseen speaks burst suddenly
 from Ralph Ellison's body and because I mean to live
 transparently, I am here, bear with me,
 describing the contents: the fictions envisioned
 by Emerson and immigrants, the dogmas,
 aboriginal progeny, scholastic recriminations,
 dementia, jubilee, hubris in Ralph Ellison,
 Duke Ellington's shadow, a paragraph
 on the feathered headdress of Marcus Garvey,
 some of it was pornography, some of it alluded
 to Negroes who believe educating black kids
 means teaching them to help white people feel
 comfortable, some of it outlined the perks
 of invisibility, how we are obliged to eschew
 the zoo, the farm animals, it had something
 to do with captivity, flayed in the clinical light
 the notes printed on the underside of his flesh
 were reversed but readable mirrored in the metal
 of the medical table and I wanted to print it all
 properly in a posthumous book in the name
 of prosperity and proof the genius we believed
 he'd wasted had been waiting all these years
 for a simple death sentence to break free.

Illustration 1

Illustration 2

Illustration 3

<p style="text-align: center;">Discussion</p> <p>* What common idea, theme, message, etc. does each image attempt to convey in their own unique way? And how do the illustrations/the text that inspired them connect to another? Your response should consist of no less than 150 words, discuss specific elements of your illustrations, and incorporate textual evidence from the poem to support your claim. Each response should consist of no less than 150 words.</p>		