

A Multidisciplinary Study of Song of Solomon and Invisible Man

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Narrative

In 1983 the Pittsburgh Board of Education inaugurated and instituted a comprehensive high school gifted program encompassing grade levels 9-12 in all academic areas. Curriculum was written by Pittsburgh City teachers through the auspices of a then very active and fine Curriculum Department. Said curriculum included course objectives, lesson objectives, state mandated goals, student activities including discussion topics and writing assignments, and final assessment of student knowledge gained through completion of units and courses. These curriculum guides served teachers and students well, and in many cases, with classroom teacher input and development, still serve as a viable resource for teaching the gifted student.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, however, a need for the inclusion of multicultural materials was recognized. Such a need was particularly felt in the English and Social Studies classes. Consequently, Pittsburgh City teachers were hired to develop curriculum to meet the need of multicultural infusion. As one of the teachers hired to write curriculum, I found myself with the task of developing viable curricula for the teaching of Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man. After a complete rereading of both works, I set myself the task of developing plans and methods to utilize these great American novels as teaching tools for multicultural inclusion.

Both novels are extremely rich in historical background, in reference to historical figures and Biblical figures, in allusions to historical texts such as the Bible, Marxist writings, and legal documents such as Plessy vs. Ferguson and Brown vs. Board of Education. Moreover, both novels have as their major theme the quest for self realization, for maturation, for the individual's place and function as a member of the human community.

Milkman Dead of Song of Solomon and the Invisible Man of the novel of the same name embody the universality of a young man's search for self and meaning. Both men are African Americans but of radically different backgrounds. Milkman Dead is a member of a well-to-do family seemingly little impacted by prejudice and racism. His youth is spent removed from the African American mainstream by dint of his father's attitude and his preservation of his family's isolation. Initially, Milkman Dead is a young man captured by the desire for gold and wealth, not at all concerned about his background or his self-identity or his place in society. Unlike Milkman, the Invisible Man is a youth imprisoned in wretched poverty, racial discrimination and prejudice, power struggles, lack of personal self-esteem, lack of family, and after expulsion from college, lack of direction. He does, however, possess the gift of vivid imagination, a gift that will guide him on his journey in his quest for self.

Throughout the years of a long teaching career, I have taught many literary works with the quest theme, including: King Lear, Heart of Darkness, The Secret Sharer, Life and Times of Frederick Douglas, The Diary of Anne Frank, Flowers for Algernon, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, and Hamlet. However, no two books seem to have captured the imagination and interest of my students as have Song of Solomon and Invisible Man. Possibly student interest is high because both works are contemporary, Ralph Ellison having only died in 1995 and Toni Morrison still very much alive and still writing. Both books are multi-themed, have surrealistic elements, and move at a gripping pace. Yet each book appears to have some intangible quality or qualities to which high school students are receptive. Thus, classroom discussion and seminar on these pieces have always been interesting and dynamic. Over time, I have made adjustments to the curricula that I originally wrote in 1990, some years highlighting some lessons or tasks over others in an attempt to utilize the interests and creativity of each class, because each class is very much its own entity in chemistry and make-up. I have even varied such activities in each of the two or three classes I teach on this level each year.

Despite adaptation and change there are, too, some elements which I feel, are absolutely essential for students to study in order to key in on the essence of tone and themes inherent to both books. Some of these absolutes include a study of literary terms and concepts relative to each novel, a study of the historical context of each novel, and the significance of cultural history in each novel.

My decision to apply to the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute for 2000, and my acceptance into Dr. Roark's seminar on American History Through Art has given me further insight into making adjustments to this unit on Song of Solomon and Invisible Man, thereby resulting in more varied student involvement and greater student understanding of these novels.

I would like my students to become aware of not only the interconnection among literature, history, and cultural history but also of art. Many elements inherent in nineteenth and twentieth century art are much in tune with the literature of our day in theme, tone, and use of literary/artistic devices. Specific units from the PTI course which I will use to embellish and strengthen my curriculum unit include "Landscape and National Identity" from which I will have students view and discuss works by Thomas Cole. These Cole paintings will work as a jump off point for student discussion on elements of political allegory in both novels. I will utilize the PTI unit on the Civil War in Painting and Photography to help students become more aware of the impact of the Civil War on African Americans and their American heritage through a study of selected artwork. We will then relate this visually gained knowledge to the impact of the Civil War on civil rights and the lives of African Americans as treated in Invisible Man and in the characterizations in the Song of Solomon, its impact on later generations as exemplified in Macon Dead and his son, Milkman Dead, and its relevance to the 1960s Civil Rights Movement as depicted in the same novel. The PTI unit on folklore will be used in conjunction with the study of symbols in both novels. We will study some of the patterns and symbols used in American quilting, particularly in African American quilting, which is often Biblical in nature and which is most apropos to the symbols used in both novels. Lastly, the PTI unit on "Meaning in Cemetery Gravestones" will be utilized in its symbolic value as a pre-study to one of the final projects to be used as an authentic exit assessment. That project will involve the design and execution of a gravestone celebrating the life of one of the major characters in Song of Solomon or the Invisible Man in Invisible Man.

Thus, in my curriculum unit on Toni Morrison's Song of Solomon and Ralph Ellison's Invisible Man I shall utilize "a sensitivity to how images can teach" a gift from the seminar, American History Through Art, Spring 2000, as led by Elisabeth Roark, Department of Art, Chatham College. In teaching seniors in gifted English classes (CAS – Centers for Advanced Studies) I will utilize topics and elements in American Art to make more real the literary devices used in these two great American novels. The end result should be an increased student awareness of the interconnections among literature, art, and history. This awareness will lead to a better and more complete understanding of literary devices, characterization, historical background, theme and plot in both novels. In order to accomplish these ends we will study the universality of concepts and their use in art and literature. Those concepts to be studied will include symbolism, myth, metaphor, isolation, universality, folklore, absurdism, irony, ambiguity, satire, realism, and surrealism. Through a study of landscape and national identity in painting, the Civil War in painting and photography, folk art, and study of "Meaning in Cemetery Gravestones," the student will be able to perceive the intertwining and universality of art, history, and literature. This study will incorporate Pittsburgh Content Standards in Communications, Family and Consumer Sciences, Arts and Humanities, Citizenship, Career Education and Work and Health, Safety and Education. Further, they will fulfill the course objectives of English 4 CAS/AP.

Course Objectives

This course is for students capable of doing college level work in English while they are in secondary school and who are willing to devote the energy necessary to complete a course more rigorous and demanding than other high school English courses designed for the college level student. The short-term goal is to enable students to demonstrate their achievement in college level work by taking the Advanced Placement Examination in Literature and Composition. The more important long-term goals of the course are to enable

students to learn at a rate commensurate with their ability; to deal with material that intellectually mature students find engaging; to refine reading and writing skills important for success, not only in college but also in the business and professional world; and to cultivate habits of reading, writing, and thinking that characterize life-long learning and enjoyment.

Students in this course through reading, discussion, and composition will be able to:

utilize reading strategies to improve literary competency

analyze major works of literature critically, using the inquiry method

identify the historical background which produced the core literary work or which the work depicts

fulfill the requirements of independent study and research

verbalize ideas in seminar discussions, building an understanding through listening, through exchange of ideas and through modification

employ strategies of organization and attention to the multiple complications of words in writing

use the writing process as a means of clarifying thought

create an original work/project utilizing skills, information, and concepts covered in this course

complete a portfolio

Lastly, the utilization of information from American History through Art will be aligned to an original authentic assessment project as a culminating activity to the unit. That assessment project must be visual and oral and must be accompanied by a personal journal detailing ideas relative to the development of the project and an annotated bibliography of works used in the project development. Students may choose a final project from the following or develop a project of their own. Teacher supervision is necessary to ensure that the project is aligned with completed course work. Final projects may take the form of original blocks for quilts or a class made quilt design with individual squares and a group designed medallion, all of which would be analogous to or symbolic of the work(s) studied. Other possible assessment projects could include a carved or designed gravestone relative to a book's character. For example, in Song of Solomon, Ruth's father's gravestone is a site she periodically visits. A student might design and execute a proper gravestone in memory of the doctor. For Invisible Man a student might construct a gravestone for the Invisible Man or for another character, living or dead. Another assessment project might be the making of a detailed road map with specific points of interest incorporating drawings or photos as a reflection of the journey Milkman Dead takes in his quest for understanding and self-realization in Song of Solomon. Yet, another assessment project might be the making of a palimpsest, one manuscript inscribed on top of another, related to the books studied. For example a manuscript of the Invisible Man's thoughts might be overlaid with a manuscript of his visible outward actions. Other final assessment projects might include a set of symbols, either drawn, painted, or made with papier-mâché, or created as fabric art or sculpture. Symbols for Song of Solomon might include gold, velvet roses, a scarred table, glitter and makeup, a still and wine bottles, bones, a roadmap, a gravestone, a flying machine or a sheet of music. Symbols representative of Invisible Man might include light bulbs, paint cans, the Apollo Theatre, The Daily News, a boxing ring, gold coins, or little black Sambo.

Each assessment project would be presented by each student to the class with explanation and analysis in an oral presentation set for a specific date. Thus, the entire unit, including final assessment, would incorporate the

goals of the course and Pittsburgh Content Standards, while making use of information gained through the seminar of the Pittsburgh Teachers Institute.

In the more than 30 years that I have taught in the Pittsburgh Public Schools, authentic assessment for senior year English has always involved the writing of a research paper, usually aligned to the study of literature. Thirty, twenty-five, and even fifteen years ago, I allowed students to choose their own topic and would then work with each individual to help in narrowing the topic so it could be encompassed in a 10-15 page paper. After a time, though, I found this approach unworkable and, therefore, began to assign a paper to be developed on a novel of literary merit. Each student was to choose a novel of literary merit, read, cogitate, and develop an original thesis, and prove the thesis through textual references within the novel. This assignment quickly became outdated and negligible, precipitating numerous problems related to student plagiarism, both conscious and unconscious. I attempted to supervise each student, each step of the way by pre-checking bib cards and notecards twice weekly and reading daily student journals relating to their papers, following the individual's thesis development, checking subsequent outlines for the paper, reading preliminary drafts of the paper and checking bibliographic sources. All this was done before grading the final paper. This process became tedious and time consuming for me as a teacher, yet I found it so necessary. With the availability of papers on the Internet, with parental and sometimes professional help and writing, the standard research paper can often result in meaningless work for both student and teacher.

In an attempt to make this authentic assessment more manageable, I have, these last two years insisted that my students keep a journal for one month's time on their reflection and commentaries on the reading of their chosen poet's work (a poet of literary merit). Even with this extra work (in addition to bib and notecards) and detailed direction for their journal not to copy poems, but to write down ideas gleaned from the reading or to copy useable or interesting quotes, many students have attempted to bypass this part of the assignment or have written inane comments or drivel in an attempt to have something to turn in each week. The purpose of the journals, to my mind, was for the development and statement of ideas – eventually leading to a glimmer and then a realization of an original thesis which would then be supported through characteristics of the poet's work and through textual evidence only, without references to critical reviews or biographical information.

Although, this authentic assessment (research paper) is set up step by step, the process is too lengthy and involved. Consequently, I should like to develop a group of projects to be used as the culminating activity in lieu of a research paper. Each student could choose a specific project, termed a senior exit project, and then pursue it to completion. This is probably the most significant change in the curriculum unit I propose to adapt as a result of taking the PTI course, "American History Through Art." Another happy coincidence, besides being a fellow of PTI, is that I had attended a Teacher's Evening at Carnegie Museum in February 2000, the purpose which was to view the Carnegie International, at the behest of the Educational Department of Carnegie Museum of Art. As a result of that evening, I have received teaching materials and more importantly, to my purpose, slides of works of art included in the 1999 Carnegie International. These slides of artwork included in CI:99/00 Teacher Resources Supplement: Slide Information, are particularly useful for student awareness of and introduction to the possible exit projects.

An example of one of the foreseen projects involves the projection and class study of the slide, Second Means of Egress, by Sarah Sze. Ms. Sze incorporates real objects (flashlights, plants, paper clips, pencils, irons, ladders, etc.) into her large but whimsical fantasy sculpture. After the study of Ms. Sze's work and a discussion of its purpose and meaning, a student choosing to do this project will embark on developing a collage or a piece of sculpture or even a poem exemplifying the elements of reality and unreality or fantasy which Milkman Dead encounters in his quest in Song of Solomon or the real and surrealistic events and images which surround the Invisible Man in his quest.

Another suggestion for an authentic assessment project is connected to the same source, a slide from the Carnegie International 1999. Franz Ackermann's untitled (pacific no. 8: give me some water) 1998. Ackermann's piece is a fantastical documentary relating his travel experiences. Those travel experiences

incorporate not only the geographical features of the places he visits, but also his personal responses to those places. A study of Franz Ackermann's work could naturally lead to a project involving the creation of a detailed road map with specific points of interest incorporating drawings or photos as a visualization and reflection of the journey Milkman Dead takes in his quest in Song of Solomon. Also, this project might well work in a tracing of the Invisible Man's trek throughout life in Invisible Man.

Another project in this vein could be an original collage reflective or representative of the theme of a character's quest in the novel. A study of the following works of art would be a preliminary to the student's project development.

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Regiment Memorial (Hughes 208)

Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Black Soldier's Head, Study for the Shaw Memorial (Hughes 209)

William Henry Johnson, The Breakdown (Craven 547)

Malvin Gray Johnson, Negro Masks (Craven 549)

In a journal the student would record responses to these pieces and comment on how a study of these works of art influenced the design and execution of the collage project.

A full complement of projects of this tenor would well work as an alternative to the traditional senior research paper as an authentic exit assessment. Other possible projects involve the study of materials from both the PTI coursework and slides from the Carnegie International to be utilized as teaching models or guidelines for student projects reflective of themes inherent in Song of Solomon and Invisible Man.

Thus, this unit would broaden to include not only objectives, lessons and assignments, but also authentic exit projects for seniors. It would be wise to plan this unit as the last of the senior year in order to facilitate timing and presentation of authentic assessment exit projects.

The Instructional Plan (assign either A or B)

Song of Solomon

Assign the reading of this work early in second semester with an ideal due date four weeks before the end of the semester. Introduce the novel without giving away the story. Use the following as a guideline.

Song of Solomon, a historical novel, takes place during the peak years of the Civil Rights Movement. Set in a town similar to Flint, Michigan, it is much concerned with the conflicting agendas of the Civil Rights Movement through the lives of its central characters. Although the protagonist, Milkman Dead, and his family enjoy middle class privilege and are seemingly untouched by racism, his life and that of his family seems empty, without meaning. Other important characters, such as the eccentric Pilate, live a life much more in touch with the community; although poor in wealth, they are in tune with self.

Milkman Dead, initially on a search for gold, travels from Michigan to Pennsylvania and through Virginia. Gold remains elusive but Milkman's search changes its course as he realizes a need to search for his personal history of place, home, and family background and for his place as a member of the human community.

After introducing the novel, state the objectives to give students an awareness of unit guidelines.

The student will be able to:

read the Song of Solomon.

analyze the social and familial deprivations which cause Milkman to initiate his search.

interpret the meaning of myth as represented by the "Song of Solomon" in the novel and the Bible and by the opening and closing scenes of the novel.

classify the characters with regard to their contribution to or hindrance of Milkman's search.

study the historical context of the novel through research of events during the peak years of the Civil Rights Movement.

study symbolism, myth, political allegory, metaphor, isolation, universality, folklore, absurdism, irony, ambiguity, satire, realism and surrealism.

study artworks which exemplify literary elements.

study artworks as reflective of a journey, real or unreal.

Pittsburgh Content Standards:

The fulfillment of these objectives will serve to satisfy many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards including Communications (1-9), Family and Consumer Sciences (4), Arts and Humanities (1-4), Citizenship (1,3,7,8,9,11), Health, Safety and Physical Education (7), and Career Education and Work (2).

Areas of study:

It can be seen from the objectives that the major areas of study include the significance of myth in the novel, the causes and results of Milkman's search and Milkman's quest for his self. Other major areas of study include the significance of the novel as a historical novel and as a cultural/historical document and the relevance of art to many concepts in the novel.

Discussion and Activities: (2 weeks)

While students are reading Song of Solomon at home, have them read the original "Song of Solomon" (chapters 1-8) from the Bible. After a thorough reading have the students discuss the Biblical connection to Morrison's book.

Then divide the class into groups and assign each group one or two Biblical names to research, among them First Corinthians, Ruth, Magdalene (called Lena), Pilate, Solomon, Mary, Rebecca, and Hagar. In an oral report, have the students relate the Biblical names and stories to the novel, Song of Solomon. In another class discussion direct the students to describe the needs and the individuality of the main characters including Milkman Ruth, Macon, Corinthians Dead, Hagan, Guitar Baines, and Pilate.

After an intensive discussion on the quest theme, have the students outline the stages of Milkman's search in relation to his emotional growth. (This might be done as a timeline).

Have the students define and find examples in the text of the following: symbolism, myth, political allegory, metaphor, isolationism, universality, folklore, absurdism, irony, ambiguity, satire, realism, and surrealism. This may be done individually or in small groups, the results to be presented to the class in an oral presentation. (Many of these terms will have been alluded to or studied earlier in the course). Extend this activity to have the students utilize teacher-provided slides and/or copies of artwork and discuss how each work of art exemplifies a literary element or elements. A more interesting approach however, would be to place copies of paintings and/or artwork around the room. Divide the class into small groups. Give each student group a card with two or three literary terms and their definitions. Have students move around the room studying each work and then have them list names of appropriate works next to each term. Then each group is to discuss together, the elements in each chosen artwork which exemplify each literary term. Have each group then present their findings to the class in an oral presentation. After completion of the oral presentation have each group lead the class in further discussion to clarify the analogous concepts in art and in the novel we are studying i.e. Song of Solomon or Invisible Man. (Most students will have taken or are in the process of taking a humanities class. Thus, they will be capable of "reading" a painting or work of art.) The following works of art are well known and can easily be found in many books. They may include but are not limited to:

Symbolism

Thomas Cole, The Voyage of Life (Hughes 150)

Myth

Arthur B. Davis, Unicorns (Craven 432)

William Rimmer, Dying Centaur (Craven 260)

Jackson Pollock, Galaxy (Search 378)

Metaphor

Robert Rauchenberg, Monogram (Search 379)

Isolation, Universality, Folklore

Jacob Lawrence, The Migration Series (various sources)

Jacob Lawrence, Daybreak – A Time to Rest (Search 393)

Irony

Gordon Parks, American Gothic (Craven 624)

Ambiguity

Ronald Bladen, X (Search 390)

Satire

Claes Oldenburg, Proposal for a Giant Balloon in the Form of a Typewriter Eraser (Search 382)

Realism

William Sidney Mount, Dancing on the Barn Floor (Craven 223)

William Sidney Mount, The Truant Gambler (Craven 223)

Surrealism

Arshile Gorky, Garden in Sochi (Craven 553)

Meret Oppenheim, Luncheon in Fur (Search 373)

Salvador Dali, The Persistence of Memory (Search 373)

The students' study of works of art as analogous to literary terms may need some teacher direction. For example, Thomas Cole's The Voyage of Life is symbolic of and analogous to the life of Milkman in Song of Solomon. The four pictures in the series Infancy, Youth, Manhood, and Old Age correlate to Milkman's search or quest for self. Although he is deprived of "Old Age," Milkman has no need for it as his quest is fulfilled through the strange and unique events that comprise his childhood, youth, and manhood. Both fantasy and reality are much in evidence in the three stages of his active life as they are in Cole's paintings. Further, the mystical, the surrealistic, and the unexplained all figure in Milkman's search for self as they do in Cole's paintings. Study, for example, Youth, in which we see elements of reality, such as nature and a young boy, a mystical element in the angels and the surrealistic in a castle-like edifice in the clouds. Then liken these elements to Milkman's reality in his everyday life, to the mysticism and surrealism he encounters with a found knowledge of Solomon's flying and of Pilate's having no belly button. In the final moments of the book, Milkman "flies" off the cliff, never to face "Old Age" but he is, nevertheless, content with his new found knowledge and the completeness of his life up to this moment.

Have the students research African folktales and choose one or two to present to the class. Have students use a storyboard or their own illustrations to follow the storyline and illustrate symbols. After this activity, lead the class in a discussion on elements of the tales which define them as African in origin.

While the students are reading Song of Solomon advise them to keep a working journal on thoughts and reflections on the work. As a writing assignment have the students use one of the following quotes or one of their choosing from Song of Solomon and build an original story or myth around the quote:

"She seemed to know a lot and understand very little" (Solomon, 75).

He "took liberties...., liberties he purchased with the services he rendered" (Solomon, 35).

She "pulled him like a carpet tack under the influence of a magnet" (Solomon, 29).

"He felt like a garbage pail for the actions and hatreds of other people" (Solomon, 120).

"Nose, chin, cheekbones, forehead, neck and all had surrendered their identity to the pleats and crochet work of skin committed to constant change" (Solomon, 242).

The historical forces of the time have much to do with the characters and their lives in Song of Solomon, but the characters are much hampered by their lack of historical knowledge. Have the students read the five paintings by Thomas Cole which comprise The Course of Empire. Discuss their value as a political allegory of Cole's time (Jacksonian Democracy) to America's history of slavery, Civil War, and the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. The cyclical theory of history is much in evidence in these paintings and certainly is allegorical to the slavery and civil rights issues as exemplified in Song of Solomon and Milkman's quest for self through an understanding of his heritage and family's history. A lively discussion should parallel the reading of Cole's paintings and Morrison's Song of Solomon. (This assignment may also be applied to a study of Invisible Man as the Invisible Man searches for identity and meaning in a world that is alien to him).

To continue the study of historical issues, show the class some Civil War slides of photos taken by Matthew Brady and his crew. Discuss the seeming realism of the photos and point out that bodies or parts of bodies were sometimes moved by the photographers for dramatic effect. Discuss the impact of the Civil War and its dramatic effect on the Macon Dead family in Song of Solomon.

Continuing historical study, have the students research a documented historical event or the historical impact of a real person alluded to in Song of Solomon. Have the students develop and present a slide tape or video presentation on that event or person to the class. Lead a class discussion on how the historical knowledge presented might have aided or changed a circumstance in the life of one or more characters in the novel.

Discuss also the value of the historical text beneath the fictional text of the novel. Have students make research choices from the following lists.

Real People

Charles Lindbergh

Father Divine

Franklin Roosevelt

Eleanor Roosevelt

Harry Truman

Herbert Hoover

Albert Schweitzer

Elijah Muhammed

Sam Sheppard

Louise Beaver

Butterfly McQueen

Orval Faubus

Adolf Hitler

The Kennedy Family

Historical Events

1896 Plessy v. Ferguson (U.S. Supreme Court Decision)

1918 Drafting of African Americans into the military

1919 Race riots

1931 Scottsboro Case

1954 Brown v. Board of Education

Civil Rights Acts of 1964-65

Montgomery bus boycott

Racially motivated bombings in the South in the '60's

Rounding of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference

Founding of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Sit-ins and Freedom Rides of the '60's

August 28, 1963 – March on Washington

September 15, 1963 – racial bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama where four young girls were killed

Final Projects: (2 weeks)

Lastly, the students will choose and work on an authentic exit project based on Song of Solomon. The utilization of information from the course "American History Through Art" will be an integral part of these projects. A journal will be kept by each student detailing the initiation and development of the project. Projects may be individually conceived or worked in small groups. After deciding on a project, individuals and groups will present their ideas to the teacher who will then guide them to appropriate research materials. At the completion of the project it must be presented in a formal program to the class. The project, a journal, and an annotated bibliography must be turned in to the teacher for final evaluation.

Project Choices:

Read Tar Beach by Faith Ringgold. Although written for children, it is autobiographical and based on a quilt design painting by Ms. Ringgold. Its theme is that of a young girl dreaming of flying above Harlem and claiming all she sees for herself and her family, very apropos to a theme in Song of Solomon. Then research the folk art of quilt design, relying heavily on the African American quilts based on Biblical themes. Using symbols, design and execute a block, a medallion, or the entire quilt. The quilt block, medallion, or quilt must be analogous to or symbolic of the book Song of Solomon.

Suggestions for symbols may include but are not limited to:

gold glitter and make-up

velvet roses a still and/or wine bottles

a scarred table a flying machine

After studying the history and determining the symbols important to the Southern African American tombstones, design and execute a tombstone for Ruth's father. Make sure the gravestone is appropriate to your research and to the history between Ruth and her father as shown in Song of Solomon.

Teacher input could include slides or photos of gravestones and/or monuments taken at Allegheny or Homewood Cemeteries. Also, students could be directed to readings for background information such as Sloan's, The Last Great Necessity: Cemeteries in American History and Meyer's Cemeteries and Gravemarkers: Voices of American Culture.

Produce a set of symbols representative of Song of Solomon by drawing, painting, or creating a sculpture. Materials are limitless and might include papier-mâché, fabric, wood, metal, or paper.

Make a detailed road map with specific points of interest as a reflection of the journey Milkman Dead takes in his quest for self-realization and understanding. Use photos, montages, drawing or paintings to illuminate those places most important to him in his journey.

Construct a collage which is reflective or representative of the theme of a character's quest in the novel. Read about and study Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Regiment Memorial (Hughes 208) and his Black Soldier's Head, Study for the Shaw Memorial (Hughes 209). Also, read and study William Henry Johnson, The Breakdown (Craven 547) and Malvin Gray Johnson, Negro Masks (Craven 549). In a journal discuss your responses to and interpretation of these pieces and clearly explain how a study of these works of art influenced the design and execution of your design project.

Study the slide, Second Means of Egress, by Sarah Sze (CI:99/00 S1). In this slide from the Carnegie International 99/00, Ms. Sze incorporates real objects (flashlights, plants, paper clips, pencils, irons, ladders, etc.) into her large whimsical sculpture. After a study of this sculpture, a student would develop a project (collage, sculpture, original poem) exemplifying the elements of reality and unreality or fantasy which Milkman encounters in his quest.

Study the slide, untitled (pacific no.8: give me some water, 1998 (CI:99/00 S1) by Franz Ackermann. Note the incorporation of the real with the fantastical as Ackermann relates not only the geographical features of his travel experience, but his personal response to those travels. After study and contemplation, the student would

devise a project involving the creation of a detailed road map with specific points of interest incorporating drawings, paintings, and/or photos as a visualization and reflection of Milkman's quest.

Invisible Man

Assign the reading of the work early in second semester with an ideal due date four weeks before the end of the semester. Introduce the story by using the following as a guideline.

In an examination of his life and times, Ralph Ellison asked himself who he was and how he came to be and what he would become. Five words he wrote led him to write the literary masterpiece Invisible Man. Those five words "I am an invisible man" led to an explanation of his unnamed character and his attempt to define himself and to maintain his individuality despite the world and the people who surround him.

The narrator of Invisible Man becomes the universal symbol for every person who struggles to develop and maintain individuality in a world that sometimes little values such individual strength, a world that too often does not "see" the individual.

After this introduction, state the objectives to give students an awareness of unit guidelines.

The student will be able to:

analyze the external and internal dilemma of the narrator in Invisible Man.

define the literary terms used in Invisible Man.

work on prewriting exercises and use them to develop a series of essays supported by critical study and textual reference.

discern and study literary techniques used in the novel's development.

research and study historical background referred to in Invisible Man.

view and study slides and copies of artwork which reflect some of the literary elements in Invisible Man.

Pittsburgh Content Standards:

The fulfillment of these objectives will serve to satisfy many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards including Communications (1-9), Family and Consumer Sciences (4), Arts and Humanities (1-4), Citizenship (1, 3, 7, 8, 9, 11), Health, Safety and Physical Education (7), and Career Education and Work (2).

Areas of Study:

The major areas of study for Invisible Man include societal estrangement and alienation, development and growth within an individual, literary techniques applied in the novel, historical background, and the study of art works which exemplify the visual use of symbolism, surrealism, and other applicable concepts.

Discussion and Activities: (2 weeks)

In preparation to discussion on the book have the students research, collaborate, and discuss Ralph Ellison's background and his development as a "Renaissance Man". Use this discussion to lead into a general class

discussion on Invisible Man. Insure that students discuss plot, character development, themes and the importance of the "Prologue" and the "Epilogue". In ongoing discussions, list and have students define applicable terms on the chalkboard, relating their usage as literary devices in Invisible Man. Make this a viable and interesting lesson by presenting slides and photos of artwork which make more real these elements:

symbolism	universality	absurdism
duality	parable	irony
surrealism	alienation	ambiguity
myth	isolation	satire
metaphor	folklore	

Place copies of paintings and/or artwork around the room. Divide the class into small groups. Give each student group a card with two or three literary terms and their definitions. Have students move around the room studying each work and then have them list names of appropriate works next to each term. Then each group is to discuss together, the elements in each chosen artwork which exemplify each literary term. Have each group then present their findings to the class in an oral presentation. After completion of the oral presentation have each group lead the class in further discussion to clarify the analogous concepts in art and in the novel we are studying i.e. Song of Solomon or Invisible Man. The following works of art are well known and can easily be found in many books. They may include but are not limited to:

Symbolism

Jasper Johns, Flag (Hughes 512)
Frederick E. Church, Niagara (Hughes 158)
Marsden Hartley, Portrait of a German Officer (Hughes 369)
Winslow Homer, The Life Line (Hughes 311)

Surrealism

Arshile Gorky, Garden in Sochi (Craven 553)
Meret Oppenheim, Luncheon in Fur (Search 373)
Salvador Dali, The Persistence of Memory (Search 373)

Myth

Edward Hicks, Peaceable Kingdom (Hughes 2)
Charles Bud King, Young Omahaw, War Eagle, Little Missouri, and Pawnees (Hughes 176)
John Vanderlyn, Murder of Jane McCrea (Hughes 183)

Metaphor

Raphaelle Peale, Venus Rising From the Sea – A Deception [After the Bath] (Hughes 105)

Universality

Walter DeMaria, The Lightning Field (Hughes 571)
Kiki Smith, Lilith (Hughes 615)

Alienation

Grant Wood, American Gothic (Hughes 441)
Willem de Kooning, Seated Figure (Hughes 474)

Isolation

Winslow Homer, The Gulf Stream (Hughes 313)

Edward Hopper, Early Sunday Morning (Hughes 424)

Folklore

Thomas Cole, Daniel Boone and His Cabin on the Great Osage Lake (Hughes 191)

Absurdism

Elie Nadelman, Woman at the Piano (Hughes 343)

Irony

Gordon Parks, American Gothic (Craven 624)

Ambiguity

Ronald Bladen, X (Search 390)

Satire

Claes Oldenburg, Proposal for a Giant Balloon in the Form of a Typewriter Eraser (Search 382)

After a discussion on these elements have the students read "Fantasy Dada, and Surrealism" on pp. 370-374 in The Search for Personal Freedom, volume 2. Review elements of surrealism with the class, especially through examples of artwork, and then have the students find textual references to surrealistic elements in Invisible Man and discuss the value and importance of their inclusion in the novel. Artwork to be read and studied includes but is not limited to:

Surrealism

Arshile Gorky, Garden in Sochi (Craven 553)

Meret Oppenheim, Luncheon in Fur (Search 373)

Salvador Dali, The Persistence of Memory (Search 373)

Moving on to the writing and critical thinking section, ask students to think of an important theme in Invisible Man and to spend 20 minutes in writing an explanation of how the theme is developed in the novel. Pair students and have them share their ideas with each other. Have students list themes on the board and in class discussion determine which themes are viable and relative to Invisible Man.

For the next in-class writing assignment, have the students practice free writing for 15 minutes in response to this topic: "Reading through the 'Prologue' and first six chapters of Invisible Man has made me aware that...." After 15 minutes of writing have the students review their writing and find within it a topic that could be developed into a full-length essay. In an addendum to the freewriting, have the students list developmental ideas with supportive textual references to reinforce their chosen topic. This will serve as a plan for the essay.

To give the students an exercise in using original thinking in writing, ask the students to search through Chapters 7-13 and make a list of the death and rebirth images. From this list have the students choose one incident and using that one incident or one very similar, write an original story based on the premise that death of an idea, ideal, or desire often results in the rebirth of a new resolve. For example, in Invisible Man, when the narrator finds out the content of Dr. Bledsoe's letter to Mr. Emerson, his dream of getting a job, earning tuition money, and returning to college is shattered. He is then forced to find another path to follow. The demise of his old life and his old dream results in the knowledge that he must refocus, thus prompting the rebirth of a new direction in his life. Have the students write an original story in which the revelation of the contents of a letter disrupts the plans and/or life of an imaginary character. Have them continue their story with the manner in which the same character must make a new beginning or must instigate a rebirth in order to survive and/or further develop.

Lastly, in a fully developed essay, have the students argue for or against the statement that: "The tone of Invisible Man, through Chapter 21 is bitter, cynical, and overwhelmingly negative." Students are to write a response to the statement being sure to support their position, negative or positive, with textual references. Some of these essays might then be read in class to elicit class discussion and debate.

Because Invisible Man is a historical and cultural document, have the students work in groups, complete research, and develop a slide tape, video presentation, or oral presentation with visuals on the following events. Students are to clearly explain or show how each event is utilized in Invisible Man.

The Harlem Renaissance

Black Soldiering in WWII

Jim Crow Laws

NAACP

Scottsboro Boys

1943 Riots in Harlem and Detroit

The Communist Party in the United States during the 20's and 40's

The Great Depression

Using the same methods have the student groups make clear in their presentation the influence and/or relationship between Ralph Ellison and 2 or 3 of the following personages alluded to in the novel:

Louis Armstrong

Sigmund Freud

Black Panthers

Ernest Hemingway

Count Basie

James Weldon Johnson

Ralph Bunche

Lyndon B. Johnson

George Washington Carver

Abraham Lincoln

Countee Cullen

Claude McKay

Eugene Debs

Andre Malraux

Frederick Douglas

Karl Marx

W.E.B. Dubois

Ezra Pound

Paul Laurence Dunbar

Franklin Delano Roosevelt

T.S. Eliot

Gertrude Stein

Duke Ellington

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Mark Twain

Booker T. Washington

Richard Wright

Final Project: (2 weeks)

The unit will conclude with each student selecting and completing an authentic exit assessment project on Invisible Man. The utilization of information from the PTI course, "American History Through Art", will be an integral part of these projects. A journal will be kept by each student detailing the initiation, development, and completion of the project. Projects may be worked individually or in small groups of 2 to 3 at the discretion of the teacher. Once a project is chosen, students will be guided to the research materials appropriate to that project. At the completion of the project it must be presented in a formal program to the class. The project, a journal, and an annotated bibliography must be turned in on the day of the presentation for final evaluation by the teacher.

Project Choices

Research the folk art of quilt design, relying heavily on the African American quilts based on Biblical themes. Then using symbols in Invisible Man, design and execute a block or a medallion, or the entire quilt. The quilt block, medallion, or quilt must contain symbols inherent to the novel. Suggestions for symbols include but are not limited to: light bulbs, paint cans, The Apollo Theatre, The Daily News, a boxing ring, gold coins, or little black Sambo.

After studying the history of African American tombstones and determining the symbols used on African American tombstones, design and execute a tombstone for the Invisible Man. Make sure the design is appropriate to the history of the Invisible Man as we know him through the novel.

Produce a set of symbols representative of Invisible Man. Symbols may include light bulbs, paint cans, The Apollo Theatre, The Daily News, a boxing ring, gold coins, or little black Sambo. Draw, paint, or create a sculpture in papier-mâché, fabric, wood, metal, paper or another medium of your choice.

Make a detailed road map with specific points of interest as a reflection of the sequence in the Invisible Man's journey to self-awareness and realization. Use photos, montages, drawings or paintings to illuminate those places most important to him on his journey.

Devise and make a palimpsest, one manuscript inscribed on top of another, related to Invisible Man. For example, a manuscript of the Invisible Man's thoughts might be overlaid with a manuscript detailing his visible outward actions.

Study the slide, Second Means of Egress, by Sarah Sze (CI:99/00 S1). In this slide from the Carnegie International 99/00, Ms. Sze incorporates real objects (flashlights, plants, paper clips, pencils, irons, ladders, etc.) into her large whimsical sculpture. After a study of this sculpture, a student would develop a project (collage, sculpture, original poem) exemplifying the elements of reality and unreality or fantasy which the Invisible Man encounters in his quest.

Study the slide, untitled (pacific no.8: give me some water), 1998 (CI:99/00 S1) by Franz Ackermann. Note the incorporation of the real with the fantastical as Ackermann relates not only the geographical features of his travel experience, but his personal response to those travels. After study and contemplation, the student would

devise a project involving the creation of a detailed road map with specific points of interest incorporating drawings, paintings, and/or photos as a visualization and reflection of the Invisible Man's quest.

Assessment

The final authentic exit assessment project is a marked departure from the standard research paper. In my opinion it will be a more interesting and "authentic" measure of the students' understanding of multidisciplinary concepts and their tangible application in the development and making of a project. I would suggest a series of checkpoints set up between student and teacher from beginning to end of the project. I also suggest a series of grades to be given on its completion. In grading the journal, grade for completeness of thought process and explanation of project development. Grade the oral presentation using a standardized rubric which addresses elements of speech and content. Lastly, grade the final project on relevance to the book read and studied, on creativity, and on completion and quality of product.

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(A history of American Art from the Colonial Period to the present)

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(Good basic reference on patterns and piecing)

Appendix: Standards

This unit meets many of the 62 Pittsburgh Content Standards. For example, the unit meets standards in Communications (1-9) by incorporating objectives, assignments and student assessment projects which directly relate to said content standards and the development of all the complex skills needed to communicate well. Through a study of Milkman's life in Song of Solomon, and the life of the Invisible Man, Family and Consumer Science Standard four is fulfilled. Arts and Humanities Standards (1-4) are met through a study of art about black history and culture in the United States from slavery through the 1960s, topics which are inherent to both novels. The final authentic assessment project satisfies (4). Citizenship criteria (1,3,7,8,9,11) are met also through the study of black history and culture especially the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the impact of those events on the protagonists of both novels. Standards in this area are further met by students working on group projects. Critical analysis by students satisfies Health, Safety and Education Standards (4,7) through a study of our two protagonists, both of whom have difficulty sorting through reality and fantasy, as each man searches for a stabilizing element in his life. Students can directly apply the lessons learned here to their own lives. A standard in Career Education and Work (2) is met through the students' study, awareness, an understanding of how changes in society, technology, government, and the economy affect careers and job choices of the characters in the novels. Thus, a goodly number of the Pittsburgh Content Standards are met through the objectives, lessons, and final assessment projects in this unit.