



Groups launch community reading initiative focusing on Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

♣ All Randolph County is invited to read, learn about and discuss the same book as Randolph Reads: *Invisible Man* gets underway in June and concludes in September.

The initiative will include discussions, lectures, forums, performances, an art exhibit and more events that illuminate Ralph Ellison's acclaimed and influential novel.

"The purpose of Randolph Reads: *Invisible Man* is to allow people from all walks of life to have a common literary and artistic experience around this great American novel, and to be able to share their views on themes and issues of being invisible in Randolph County," says George Taylor, assistant director of the Randolph County Public Library and spokesperson for a partnership of community groups organizing the initiative.

As of this writing, partners include *The Courier-Tribune*, the Friends of the Randolph Public Library, the Asheboro City Schools, the City of Asheboro, the George Washington Carver Community Enrichment Center, Randolph Community College, the Randolph County Public Library and the Randolph County Schools.

From June through September, copies of the novel will

be available in quantity at Randolph County Public Library branches in print, ebook and audiobook formats. During the summer, a discussion group will be available at the library to consider sections of the book in turn.

The Courier-Tribune will develop a series of articles about people in our community who feel invisible, and a call to artists will be issued for an exhibit at the Randolph Arts Guild in September on the theme of invisibility.

In September, discussions of the full work will take place at libraries and other venues as the community is invited to a series of events related to the book (see reverse for details), including a theatrical production based on the *Courier's* invisibility series.

Organizers acknowledge that local controversy last fall surrounding the book prompted calls for a community reading initiative, but say the effort is more a response to renewed readership and discussion of the novel generated in the wake of the controversy.

"Hundreds of county residents read or re-read the book," Taylor says. "It's a deep, rich novel and we want to provide the opportunity for folks to talk about it and put in context what they have read," Taylor says.

Performances, discussions, more... —see reverse

Community reading

Community reading initiatives got their start in Seattle in 1998, and have spread to cities nationwide. Usually books are selected address a social issue relevant to the community. Randolph Reads began in 2003 with To Kill a Mockingbird, followed by Raney (2004), Wolf Whistle (2005) and A Home on the Field (2008).

Activities to include discussions, performances, more

♣ **Randolph Reads: *Invisible Man*** will begin in June and culminate in September with a series of high-profile events, including dramatic and musical performances at the Sunset Theatre.

Activities will include:

- The opportunity for guided reading and discussion of the novel over the summer months at the Asheboro Public Library.
- A series of *Courier-Tribune* articles on people in our community who are “invisible.”
- A dramatic production based on the *Courier-Tribune* series created by Chatham County actor/playwright Michael Wiley, who will bring the individuals’ thoughts and feelings to life on the Sunset Theatre stage.
- Also at the Sunset, a performance by Duke University Jazz Program director/music professor John V. Brown and fellow musicians who will explore the influence of jazz on Ralph Ellison’s writing.
- A forum on censorship hosted by Randolph Community College.
- Full book discussions at libraries and other venues in the community facilitated by librarians and educators.
- An art exhibit in Gallery 101 at the Randolph Arts Guild focusing on the theme of invisibility.

Other events may be included as the project develops; find more details ongoing at www.randolphreads.org.

First up: Invisible in our community; guided reading; a call to artists

Randolph Reads: *Invisible Man* gets underway now with a series of *Courier-Tribune* articles on invisibility in the community, a call to artists and an opportunity for guided reading and discussion.

Feel invisible?

Invisibility comes in many forms. How many of our neighbors feel invisible? If you feel that way or know someone who does, and are willing to talk about it, contact Chip Womick at 626-6122 or cwomick@courier-tribune.com. More details at www.randolphreads.org.

Discuss as you read

Want to talk about *Invisible Man* as you read it? Assistant Library Director George Taylor will facilitate ongoing discussions at 5:30 p.m. on the fourth Thursday in June, July and August at the Asheboro Public Library. Each discussion will cover parts of the book in progression. Call 318-6814 for more information.

What does invisibility look like? A call to artists

Artists and teams of artists are invited to submit work to “Revealing the Invisible,” an exhibition slated for September 2-October 17 at the Randolph Arts Guild that seeks a creative response to the concept of invisibility. Artists of all ages are invited to submit work; find the full prospectus at www.randolphreads.org.

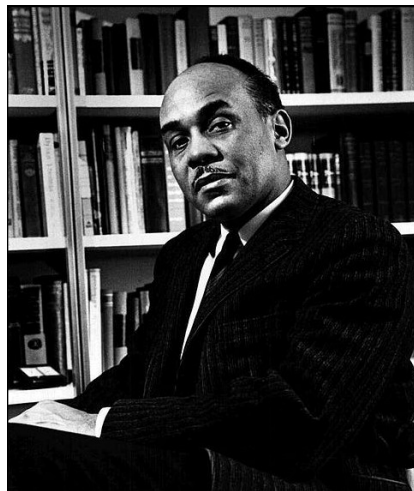
Ellison’s novel provides plenty of food for thought

♣ **Published to immediate critical acclaim in 1952, Ralph Ellison’s *Invisible Man* became a best seller and in 1953 won the National Book Award.**

It has remained in print since, and is a mainstay of high school and college reading lists.

The novel tracks the experiences of a young, unnamed African American man in 1930s America. Told from the young man’s point of view, it follows him from a historically black college in the south to Harlem, where he becomes involved in competing social reform movements.

As the narrative progresses, he begins to perceive himself as invisible — to white people, certainly, on account of racism; but also to people regardless of race who impose on him their expectations of who he is or



Ralph Ellison

ought to be, and who will not allow him to develop an identity of his own. The ultimate psychological effects of his perceived invisibility are devastating, allowing only a glimmer of hope.

Ellison was a musician as well as a writer, and the use of language in *Invisible Man* is heavily influenced by jazz and poetry, to which Ellison was exposed as a student at the Tuskegee Institute.

After the success of *Invisible Man*, Ellison taught at Bard College, Rutgers University, Yale University, the University of Chicago and New York University.

He was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1969 and the

National Medal of Arts in 1986.

His confidants included writers Richard Wright and Robert Penn Warren, and artist Romare Bearden.

Ellison died in 1994 at age 80.