

# Illusions in the invisible man

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



There are two types of illusions: optical and perceptual. Optical illusions are objects that are distorted due to the anatomy of the eye. Perceptual illusions are objects that are distorted due to the nature of the brain. A child hears a monster outside his window, but when the parent turns on the light, it is revealed that it is only a branch hitting the window. A survivalist develops frostbite in her leg and a ranger must amputate it before she dies. After the amputation, the woman sees the leg separated from her body, but can still feel it there. Perceptual illusions are an unconscious form of self protection, but too much protection can isolate an individual. In the Invisible Man by Ralph Ellison, the main character, a nameless, faceless black man falls victim to the illusion that his identity is determined by others and as a result severs himself from society.

The Invisible Man is narrated by a character who recently discovers that he is unseen by others. The book is a recollection of moments from his past before he realizes his invisibility. From his teenage years in the South to a Negro college to a political organization in the streets of Harlem, the Invisible Man explains how the illusion began. He is looking back at his life and realizing that he has only defined himself as how others see him. Throughout the entire book, the Invisible Man tries to convince the reader that he is the victim of his illusion and little can be done to prevent his invisibility. One of the first memories of invisibility is when he performs a speech in front of white leaders in an event called the Battle Royal. Once in the event, he realizes that the event is actually entertainment for the rich white leaders. They urge the black youth to fight against one another and throw money at the beaten boys. The Invisible Man reluctantly fights with the hope of reading

his speech. When the whites tell him to read his speech, he is bloody and bruised. He stutters words as the drunk white men laugh at him. At the end of the speech, he is given a scholarship to a Negro College and quickly forgets about the pain he endured. The speech was about “ social responsibility” and “ equality”, which he quickly regrets saying, which is ironic as he is standing among the men who instructed him to put aside his otherwise peaceful nature. He explains that he had never considered himself a fighter, but in the Battle Royal he becomes the whites stereotype him to be: an undereducated sycophant. Because the Invisible Man had not developed the illusion that he is invisible, he recites his speech louder to the white men as they drink, and talk as if they truly could not hear his voice. The men only make more noise and laugh at the blood spraying from the boy’s mouth. This scene is the birth of the illusion that his identity is malleable. He believes that he can submit to these men in order to be successful without neglecting his true self. The older Invisible Man recalls the scene by stating that he was happy to have received the scholarship thus proving that he still does not see reality.

As the Invisible Man walks through the streets of Harlem, he sees white men throwing an old black couple’s possessions out the window of the apartment the couple could not pay rent for. The Invisible Man makes a speech about the event as it is happening and a man named Brother Jack asks him to join a political organization. Brother Jack promises him a new name, past, clothing, style, and home. The Invisible Man agrees and for a short while grows famous in Harlem. It isn’t until he makes a speech that the organization does not allow him to recite that he realizes that he is a tool.

They ostracize him and once again he loses his identity. The reality of the situation was that the Invisible Man was not simply given a new identity, he was stripped of what was left of his past. He was told to forget who he once was and even given a new name. He became exactly what others wanted him to be, but when leaves he sees the reality: in his pursuit to find himself through others, he sees that others only see him as a tool. Since the story is recollection of memories, the Invisible Man is just now, as the reader is hearing the man's past, destroying his illusion. While his invisibility benefited him for a short period of time, he admits that he had always felt like a puppet to others. With the newly found evidence to support the claim that he his identity is not only invisible to others, but also himself, he will be able to find it himself.

When the parent showed the child that the monster outside was really just a branch tapping the window, the child realized that there was no threat and he could safely go to bed. The ranger covers the survivalist's amputated leg with a mirror. This prevents her from going into shock and stops the perceptual illusion that she can still feel her leg. When illusions are prolonged (if the child refuses to go to bed in his room because of the monster), the brain unconsciously develops more reasons to believe that the illusions are reality. When the illusions become prevent one from socializing, eating, sleeping, and other necessary human activities, they evolve into hallucinations. Illusions, whether they are developed in his own mind or by society, haunt and torture the Invisible Man. The Invisible Man's illusion is not a monster under the bed that can be revealed with a light switch, his illusion is his own identity. He defines himself as how others see him, but

that changes from person to person. As the story develops, the Invisible Man distinguishes reality from his illusion as he begins to realize that his identity is his own. Just as the parent turns a light on for the child to see that the monster is an illusion, the Invisible Man isolates himself in order to reveal reality. Through isolation, one may find true identity as he or she is untouched from other's prejudgments.