

APPENDICES

Synopsis of Richard Wright's *Native Son*

The novel is about a poor uneducated boy, Bigger Thomas, who lives in a one-room house with his mother, his sister Vera and his brother Buddy in a slum in Chicago. His mother often tells him to get a job so that the family can have a better living, but Bigger joins the neighborhood gang instead and often robs people and stores in order to get money. After having a feud with his gang, Bigger who is afraid of the whites reluctantly agrees to work for the Daltons as their chauffeur.

Bigger's job is to drive Mr. Dalton's daughter, Mary Dalton, to her school. However, Mary orders him to take her to meet her boyfriend, Jan Erlone, who is a member of a communist party and Bigger is not allowed to tell this to anyone. On the way home, Mary is too drunk to walk on her own, so Bigger has to carry her to her bedroom. Bigger is afraid that if anyone finds out about all this, he will lose his job. Suddenly, Mary's blind mother comes into the room to check on her. Afraid of being discovered, Bigger covers Mary's face with a pillow to silence her. Unfortunately, Mary dies because of what Bigger does.

In order to hide his crime, Bigger decides to mutilate and burn Mary's body in a furnace at the Daltons' house. He then sends a fake ransom note about Mary's

kidnapping and signs it with Jan's signature so that the police will assume that Jan is responsible for Mary's disappearance. Bigger tells everything to his girlfriend, Bessie. Nonetheless, Bigger is paranoid about the possibility that she will betray him, so he murders Bessie in order to keep his secret. Bigger tries to escape from the mob that is chasing him but he is soon captured. In the court, he is accused of rape and murder and in the end he is executed on the electric chair.

Synopsis of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*

Invisible Man tells about the life of a nameless protagonist who is a male African-American in his twenties. The protagonist comes from the low-class society in the South. He manages to get college education in a segregated school. He is an intelligent student and an excellent orator; thus he receives a scholarship from the school. However, when he is assigned to be the guide for one of the trustees of his school, Mr. Norton, he accidentally shows the real situation of how the black people live. Consequently, the principal, Mr. Bledsoe, thinks that his action will endanger the reputation of the college and he revokes the protagonist's scholarship.

With letters of introduction from Mr. Bledsoe, the protagonist decides to go to New York in order to get a job so that he can pay tuition and go back to college. However, it turns out that Mr. Bledsoe has deceived him. Forced to live in the North without having any chance to return, the protagonist lives in Harlem with a woman named Mary Rambo as he is jobless. By chance he witnesses a black couple being unfairly evicted by the authority. Moved by the scene, he impulsively gives a speech that encourages the black people around him to unite and help the couple.

His action impresses Brother Jack, the Leader of the Brotherhood and he asks the protagonist to join him so that he can use his oratorical ability for a greater cause. Thus he joins the Brotherhood and becomes a prominent figure in the organization. However, soon he is aware that he is nothing but a tool for the Brotherhood to reach their ambition. He realizes that in the white society he is unrecognized because the society refuses to see him as an individual but merely as stereotypical African-American. At the end of the story, he is involved in a riot and amidst the chaotic situation he accidentally finds an unused cellar. There he gives up all his ambitions and decides to hibernate before he is ready to return to the society.

Biography of Richard Wright

Richard Nathaniel Wright was born near Natchez, Mississippi, on September 4, 1908. His father, Nathaniel, was an illiterate sharecropper. His mother, Ella Wilson, was a well-educated school teacher. Wright graduated from the Smith Robertson Junior High School in Jackson in June 1925. After leaving school, Wright went to Lanier High School but dropped out after a few weeks and then he worked.

In spring 1924, a local black newspaper the *Southern Register* printed *The Voodoo of Hell's Half Acre*, which is his first short story. Three years later, he moved to Chicago. In 1937 he moved to New York and became the editor of *Daily Worker*. In 1938 his four short stories were published together as *Uncle Tom's Children*. His first novel *Native Son* was published in 1940 and it is regarded as Wright's greatest novel and most influential book. Since then, he has been called the father of black American literature. He married a white dancer, Dhimah Rose Meadman in 1939 but

then they separated. In 1941 he married Ellen Poplar, a white member of Communist Party, and they had two daughters, Julia (1942) and Rachel (1949).

Wright suffered from amoebic dysentery and died suddenly of an apparent heart attack at the Clinique Eugène Gibez in Paris. Richard Wright died on November 28, 1960 at the age of fifty-two.

Source: Hoffman 291, Sparknotes

Biography of Ralph Ellison

Ralph Waldo Ellison was born in Oklahoma City on March 1, 1914. His father, Lewis Alfred, was a tradesman and construction worker. He died when Ellison was three, and his mother supported herself and her son by working as a domestic.

Ellison was trained as a musician at Tuskegee Institute from 1933 until 1936. By 1939 he began his writing career. Before the publication of his first novel *Invisible Man*, in 1947, he worked as a waiter and as a jazz musician, and he had also worked in the United States Merchant Marine. He became an editor in *Negro Quarterly* in 1942. In July 1946, he married Fanny McConnell. They lived in an apartment on Riverside Drive in the Washington heights section of Manhattan.

In his life, he has received many awards for his book *Invisible Man* including the Rosenwald Grant Award in 1945 and the National Book Award in 1953. Ellison was a visiting professor of writing at Yale University since 1964. He was an instructor in Russian and American literature at Bard College from 1958 to 1961, Alexander White Visiting Professor at the University of Chicago in 1961, and visiting professor of writing at Rutgers University from 1962 to 1964.

On April 16, 1994 he died at the age of eighty due to pancreatic cancer. He was buried at Trinity Church in Washington Height, New York. His second novel *Juneteenth* was published in 1999 posthumously.

Source: Innes and Roberts, 5-6, Sparknotes