**READING LOG QUESTIONS**

### Chapter 6

1. What shocking aspects of Bledsoe’s character are revealed to the narrator?
2. What specific statements does Bledsoe make that show his concern is for himself rather than for the school or for the advancement of other Blacks?
3. Read the last paragraph on p. 146 beginning “How did I come to this?” What do you make of the paragraph in terms of the narrator’s struggle to find his identity?

**Chapter 7**

1. Who does the narrator meet on the bus to New York? Why dos the encounter make him uncomfortable?
2. On p. 152, the narrator is told New York is “not a place, it’s a dream.” Interpret this statement.
3. How does the fate of the vet parallel the fate of the narrator? Think of how both are controlled.
4. Reread the final paragraph on p. 153 What do you make of the vet’s advice?
5. On p. 155, the vet says, “there’s always an element of crime in freedom.” What does this statement mean to you? Do you agree or disagree?
6. Describe the narrator’s encounter with Ras.

### Chapter 8

1. In the first six chapters, the narrator’s identity is defined by the scholarship. Now the letters defines it. Describe them.
2. Notice the narrator’s decision to get a watch. How does fit with his new identity. Look for other images to watches and time.
3. How does the narrator deny his Southern heritage? Why does he do this?
4. Why do you think the narrator dreams of his grandfather?

**Chapter 9**

1. How does Peter Wheatstraw (with plans) make the narrator homesick?
2. What is the symbolism of Wheatstraw’s blueprints?
3. How does the narrator continue to deny his Southern heritage?
4. Look at the details from Emerson’s office.
5. Why does Emerson keep referring to Huck Finn?
6. Walt Whitman wrote a series of homoerotic poems called the Calamus poems. Can you make any inferences about young Emerson from his reference to the Calamus Club?
7. Why might young Emerson identify with the narrator and Blacks in general?

**Chapter 10**

Ellison says that beginning with chapter 10, the novel begins to rely heavily on expressionism. In very simple terms, expressionism uses concrete objects to attempt to objectify abstract inner feelings. Therefore, objects in the novel function as complex multifaceted symbols. Remember that chapter 10 and 11 are not to be perceived as realistic, but rather as expressionistic.

1. Consider the racial connotations of Liberty Paints. Think about the company name, trademark, slogans, government contracts, and Optic White. What do you think the company symbolizes?
2. Why has the company been hiring Blacks?
3. Think about how Optic White is manufactured. What do the 10 drops of “dead black liquid” symbolize?
4. Note that Lucius Brockway works deep in the basement of the factory, hidden from view. Is this symbolic? How is Brockway like Bledsoe? How is he different?
5. How is Brockway himself like the 10 drops?
6. After the explosion on p. 230, the narrator is thrust “into a wet blast of black emptiness that is somehow a bath of whiteness. How does this immersion of a Black man into a world of whiteness continue the expressionism of the chapter?

**Chapter 11**

The expressionist images of chapter 10 are black and white. Here they are death and rebirth.

1. What images of this chapter echo the Battle Royal?
2. The doctors at the factory hospital shock the narrator until he enters a warm watery world. Look for other images of the womb and birth.
3. Afterwards, the narrator is a blank slate with no memory or identity. How do the doctor’s questions develop this image of rebirth?
4. Why has the narrator been reborn? What aspects of his old identity have died?
5. Buckeye the Rabbit is the same as Brer Rabbit. Remember the reference to the Tar Baby in chapter 10? In realizing that he is Buckeye the Rabbit, the narrator finds the wit and strength to escape from the machine. How is the machine like Trueblood’s clock? How does Buckeye the Rabbit embody the folk wisdom of the narrator’s childhood? How has he been reborn into the identity he at first denied upon arriving in New York?
6. What lesson has the narrator learned?

**Chapter 12 (**transitional bridge between the two halves of the novel)

1. In what way is the narrator childlike?
2. How does he permanently close off the link with his old aspirations and dreams?

**Chapter 13**

1. Peter Wheatstraw foreshadows the encounter with the yam seller. How do these encounters differ? What changes are revealed in the narrator’s identity? How is his change in identity linked with his desire to show Bledsoe as a fraud?
2. In the eviction scene, the narrator makes his second speech of the novel. Study it carefully. Compare it to the first speech. Take notes about the narrator’s developing identity.
3. How does the narrator meet Brother Jack? The Brotherhood is a thinly veiled version of the Communist Party. Richard Wright, Ellison’s first mentor, was an active member in the Communist Party. At Wright’s request, Ellison wrote a number of articles for leftist publications between 1937 and 1944, but never joined. He objected to the Communist Party’s limitations of individuality and personal expression.
4. What new piece of paper replaces the letters from Bledsoe as the narrator’s identity?

**Chapter 14**

1. What pushes the narrator to accept The Brotherhood’s offer?
2. Note that the building is called the Chthonia. In Greek mythology, this is another name for Hades’ realm, the underworld. What descriptions and images can you find that convey the sense of entering an underworld type of realm? Why is entering the world of The Brotherhood like entering the underworld?
3. The phone number has been replaced by a new name in an envelope? Why? Why are we never told of this new name?
4. How does the party scene remind the reader of how limited and/or hypocritical most whites are in the understanding of the treatment of Blacks?

**Chapter 15**

1. Think about the symbolism of the Sambo bank. Is it related to Clifton’s Sambo doll? What about the fact that it belonged to Mary Rambo? What about the bank’s “grinning mouth” that swallows coins? Think back to the Battle Royal in Chapter 1.

**Chapter 16**

1. List all the images of blindness in this chapter. What do you think the narrator means when he says he has become “more human?”
2. How does the narrator use the image of blindness as the central theme of his speech?
3. Be prepared to discuss the speech as a further expression of the narrator’s developing identity.
4. The rewritten quote from James Joyce is often discussed. Do you think that it is the duty of an individual to represent a particular race, gender or group? Do you believe it is more important to concentrate on developing ones individual identity?
5. What is The Brotherhood’s reaction to the speech? What is your personal reaction? What criticism of The Brotherhood is implied here?

**Chapter 17**

1. How much time has passed since the narrator’s speech?
2. Describe Brother Hambro.
3. What is Ras’ political doctrine and why is it in conflict with that of The Brotherhood?
4. Who is Tod Clifton? Why do he and the narrator become friends? Note that “tod” means death in German. Why does Ras spare Clifton’s life?
5. Ras pleads with the narrator to become a part of black unity and leave The Brotherhood. His arguments are similar to those of Black Panthers and others who came to the political forefront in the 1960’s. The Communist Party did, in effect, betray the Blacks who helped build the party in the 1930’s. What side do you believe Ellison is supporting?
6. What is significant about the portrait of Douglass that hangs in Brother Tarp’s office? How is Tarp like Douglass? Like the narrator’s grandfather?

**Chapter 18**

1. Consider the symbolism of the link of chain Tarp gives the narrator. It what ways does it link the narrator to Tarp? To his past? Is it significant that Westrum rejects that link?
2. What seems to cause the fight between Wrestrum and the narrator? What do you think is the REAL reason for this fight?
3. At the end of the chapter, the narrator is sent out of Harlem. Why would The Brotherhood remove a successful member of the party and send him off to lecture on a subject about which he knows so little either by training or personal experience?

**Chapter 19**

Note that chapter 19 is a transitional chapter like chapters 7 and 12.

This chapter details the narrator’s seduction by the nameless “woman in red.”

1. In what ways is Ellison playing with the idea that white women are drawn to Black me?
2. What reaction does the woman give when her husband comes home?
3. What is the narrator’s action?
4. Do you think this chapter is humorous, or is it serious social commentary.

**Chapter 20**

1. The narrator has been away from Harlem for several months. What “emergency” calls him back downtown?
2. What changes have taken place in the movement since he left. (Note how things have changed in the Jolly Dollar Bar.
3. What does Ellison mean when he says that returning to Harlem was “like returning to the city of the dead?”
4. What is Clifton selling?
5. How does the Sambo doll relate to the Sambo bank?
6. What do you think the doll symbolizes? Consider the fact that it is a puppet whose strings are pulled.
7. How does Tod Clifton die? What is the narrator’s reaction to his death?

# Chapter 21

1. Why does the narrator feel guilt over Clifton’s death?
2. Look at the funeral speech. How many times does the narrator use Clifton’s name? Why so many?

**Chapter 22**

1. Why is the meeting with the Brotherhood described in terms of a dream?
2. On p. 463, the members are said to have “flowed in one channel too long and too deeply.” What does this mean?
3. Why does the Brotherhood object to the phrase “personal responsibility?”
4. Contrast the reaction of the Brotherhood to the funeral speech to the audience’s reaction to the graduation speech. Has the narrator come full circle?
5. What is the significance of Brother Jack’s glass eye? How does it develop the sight image that is throughout the book?

**Chapter 23**

1. What symbolism do you find in the narrator’s purchase of dark glasses?
2. What are Rinehart’s various identities?
3. Is there any symbolism in Rinehart’s name (Rind and heart)?
4. Has Rinehart learned to play an identity game?

# Chapter 24

1. Contrast the narrator’s encounter with Sybil with that of the woman in red whose husband came home early.
2. What is the significance of the last line in the chapter?

# Chapter 25

1. What causes the riot?
2. Think about the Book of Revelations in the Bible. In what ways is Ras like one of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse?
3. What drives the narrator underground?
4. What does the narrator do with the papers in his briefcase? How is this action symbolic?

**Epilogue**

1. In what ways has the novel come full circle?
2. Is this a satisfactory ending for the novel? Why or why not?