

# Discovering Ralph Ellison

Thanks to a Great Grant from the Oklahoma City Community Foundation, nearly 3,000 Oklahoma County high school students were introduced to native Oklahoman Ralph Ellison and his "Invisible Man," a novel many consider to be one of the most important books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In conjunction with the Metropolitan Library System/Oklahoma County and its yearlong celebration "The Year of Ralph Ellison: 50 Years of the Invisible Man," the Great Grant provided teachers at 38 high schools with a teaching tool that is important to the literary history of not only our nation but Oklahoma City in particular.

Born in Oklahoma City in 1914, Ellison graduated with honors from Douglass High School before attending Tuskegee Institute and eventually settling in New York City where he devoted seven years to write "Invisible Man." The 1952 novel, which focused on Ellison's idea of social invisibility upon which a person is judged by the superficial characteristics by society and not on their true qualities, hit a nerve with readers of all ethnic and social backgrounds. The novel won several honors including the National Book Award and its impact earned Ellison a Medal of Freedom from President Lyndon B. Johnson.

A portion of the Great Grant was also used to fund the performances of "An Indivisible Man," an

original one-act play about the life of Ralph Ellison, at local high schools and libraries including the Ralph Ellison Library at 2000 N.E. 23<sup>rd</sup> Street in Oklahoma City.

Exposing the life and work of a great native son such as Ralph Ellison to young minds reinforces the Community Foundation's mission of improving our community. You can play a part in this mission by contributing to the Fund for Oklahoma City. Contact **Jennifer Stewart** at [405/235-5603](tel:405/235-5603) or [j.stewart@occf.org](mailto:j.stewart@occf.org) for more information or visit [www.occf.org](http://www.occf.org).



*Millwood High School students and Denyvetta Davis of the Metropolitan Library System unpack copies of "Invisible Man."*  
Photo Credit: The Daily Oklahoman

*Photo Courtesy of Metropolitan Library System Archives*



***"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edger Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids – and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me."***

*Excerpt from Chapter 1 of "Invisible Man"*

# Great Grants

# Promoting Community Programs

The Oklahoma City Community Foundation is the metropolitan area's non-profit public charity that works with donors and non-profit organizations to attract and manage endowment funds for the community's benefit.



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Oklahoma City native Ralph Ellison, author of "Invisible Man."

As part of its mission, the Community Foundation fosters community programs that address specific opportunities and issues and provides support for projects such as "The Year of Ralph Ellison: 50 Years of the Invisible Man," that bring enrichment and opportunity to the community. The Community Foundation's goal is to not just distribute funds but to also develop and help implement effective community programs.

A basic goal of each community program is to develop effective solutions to improve the community, not simply to distribute funds. The Community Foundation staff takes a proactive approach to assisting organizations in identifying emerging issues and developing programs that meet those issues.

What are your dreams for a better community? Let the Community Foundation help you realize your goals. For additional information, contact us at [405/235-5603](tel:4052355603), or visit [www.occf.org](http://www.occf.org).



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