

## The Shadow and the Flash

By Jack London

### Part 2

**Author:** Daniel Barber

**Level:** Advanced

**Age:** Young adults / Adults

**Aims:** In this lesson the students will:

1. talk about invisible characters in fiction and how their invisibility is explained, whether through science or magic;
2. listen for gist to understand the main points of the story;
3. discuss the anachronistic racist labelling of peoples;
4. practise listening for stress and using it naturally;
5. discuss ways of using invisibility for different purposes.

**Materials:** One copy of the worksheet per student; Track 1 (the full audio of Part 2) and Track 2 (an extract) downloaded from onestopenglish; one copy of the full transcript per student

**Summary:** The story is about two competitive scientists who take different routes to achieving invisibility, with tragic results. It is told in five parts. In Part 2, the men become locked in the race for invisibility and their differing means of achieving it are explained.

### Warmer

**Aim:** to engage in the theme of invisibility

1. With the whole class, review Part 1. Ask who the characters are, and how Lloyd and Paul compete with one another. Ask the students to recall their predictions as to what's going to happen and discuss whose ideas were the most convincing or likely.
2. Explain that you're going to give them a clue as to what they compete over next. Explain that you're going to write the names of some fictional characters who all have something in common. The connection is the clue. Write the following names, one by one, on the board, each time allowing the class time to suggest a connection. Write them in this order:
  1. Jack Griffin
  2. Jerry Mouse
  3. Harry Potter
  4. the Predator
  5. Frodo Baggins
  6. Violet Incredible
  7. one of James Bond's cars!

Alternatively, write all the characters' names on the board at the start, then put the students in groups and ask them to try to find a connection between them all.

### Teacher's note:

1. Jack Griffin is the name of HG Wells's eponymous hero in *The Invisible Man*. In fact, Wells never gives Griffin a first name, but in the 1933 film of the novel, the protagonist, played by Claude Rains, is given the name Jack. In other versions of the story he is called Jack, John and Hawley Griffin.
2. from Tom and Jerry
3. the main character in J.K. Rowling's series of seven fantasy novels
4. the alien predator from the 1987 film *Predator* starring Arnold Schwarzenegger
5. the character from *The Lord of the Rings*
6. the character from Disney's *The Incredibles*

**Key:** 1. Jack Griffin creates a scientific formula.; 2. Jerry Mouse paints himself in invisible ink.; 3. Harry Potter is given a magic cloak.; 4. The Predator is able to camouflage himself perfectly (but we don't know how).; 5. Frodo Baggins puts on the magic ring.; 6. One of Violet Incredible's super powers is invisibility.; 7. James Bond's car creates a high-tech optical illusion.

You may also want to show pictures of the characters, which you can find in Google images by typing their names '+ invisible'.

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4. Ask the students if they know of other stories that involve invisibility. If anyone does, you could invite them to tell the class about the story.

#### Activity 1

**Aim:** to listen extensively to understand the main points in this part of the story

1. Hand out the worksheet. Direct the students' attention to the questions in Activity 1. Before you play the audio, you should consider explaining the use of the word *negro* in the story. Explain that there is a black man in the story who they refer to as a *negro*. Explain that when the story was written this was a neutral term for a black person but that in most contexts today it is seen as offensive. It may be a good idea to remind students that the common neutral term nowadays, and one that they can use without causing offence, is *black person*.

2. Play the audio (Track 1). Conduct whole-class feedback after giving the students time to compare their answers in pairs.

#### Key:

1. at the narrator's house; 2. by creating a perfectly black paint; 3. Lloyd believes that invisibility would bring him financial and political power.; 4. Paul thinks that a perfectly black object will still cast a (visible) shadow.; 5. Paul believes that the best way of achieving invisibility is by attaining transparency.; 6. He takes him to a boxing match and points out a black man wearing a black coat who is almost invisible.

#### Activity 2

**Aims:** to confront the issue of London's treatment of Ben Wasson, the black boxer; to allow students space to discuss and reflect on this complex issue of anachronistic racism

1. Put the students in groups of three or four. Have the students express their opinions on the questions posed in Activity 2 on the worksheet.

2. Conduct a whole-class round-up of the students' opinions. Clearly this is a potentially sensitive issue, so allow students the space to express themselves even if you disagree with them. The questions are designed to focus the students on the salient arguments surrounding the issue.

#### Activity 3

**Aims:** to listen in detail; to identify tonic stress; to practise applying tonic stress with increased loudness and rising intonation

1. Write on the board the first line of the extract (see Activity 3 on the worksheet):

"But we see black objects in daylight,"  
I objected.

Elicit the number of syllables (13) and ask students to tell you which of the syllables (not words) are probably stressed. Show the stress pattern using whatever system the students are familiar with; e.g.

o o o o o o o o o o  
"But we see black ob-jects in day-light,"

o o o o  
I ob-jec-ted.

Ask them:

- which words are normally stressed (*the words that hold the lexical meaning of the utterance, especially nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs, but also negation words and other grammatical words that are pertinent to the meaning*);
- how we make stress (*chiefly by making the syllable louder and by a rise in pitch*).

You may want to explain that speakers have a great deal of choice in which words to stress depending on the precise meaning they wish to convey, so while there are some words that we will probably all agree on (e.g. *black*) there will always be words that could be stressed or not (e.g. *But*).

2. Direct the students to Activity 3 on the worksheet. Ask them to underline the stressed syllables in the paragraph.

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3. Put the students in pairs to compare their answers by reading the paragraph aloud to one another. In feedback afterwards, ask them if there are any syllables that they could not agree on.

4. Play Track 2 twice for students to compare their answers with the narrator's choices.

#### Key:

*"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.*

*"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them. Ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."*

5. Ask the students why they think Lloyd's sentence stress is particularly exaggerated here (*because he is explaining his theory in a very enthusiastic and didactic way*). One tip that may therefore help to stress this paragraph naturally is for them to 'get into character' and imagine that they are Lloyd explaining his theory to his friend in this manner. You may want them to practise with this dramatic technique by reading the paragraph out loud again.

#### Group task

**Aims:** to further engage in the theme of invisibility; to speak about hypothetical situations

1. Ask the students by what means they think invisibility could most likely be achieved if it were a possibility. Options include Lloyd and Paul's methods, any method discussed in the warmer, or even their own ideas.

2. Explain that the students are very lucky because the scientist (or magician) responsible for a major breakthrough in invisibility has offered one of them the chance to become invisible for a period of 24 hours. The person with the best ideas for

how to use their power will win the prize. Put students in groups of two to four and ask them to come up with ideas for how to use invisibility in three categories.

- schemes to make a lot of money
- schemes to find out interesting information
- schemes to have fun

3. Give the groups time to think of ideas, then have the groups share their ideas with the class. The class could vote for the best ideas in each category and an overall winner.

#### Follow-up tasks

1. Students read the transcript for Part 2 and add to their summary for Part 1.
2. Students research current developments in the science of invisibility. They have time at the start of the following lesson to share their findings.
3. Students write an account of their 24 hours as the prizewinners of invisibility (as per Activity 4 above): what they did, where they went and how they used their power.

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#### Activity 1

Listen to Part 2 and answer the questions.

1. Where are they at the start of Part 2?
2. How does Lloyd think invisibility could be achieved?
3. Why is Lloyd interested in becoming invisible?
4. Why does Paul think Lloyd's idea won't work?
5. What is Paul's approach to attaining invisibility?
6. How does Lloyd convince the narrator that his approach may work?

#### Activity 2

- How convinced are you by Lloyd's demonstration of invisibility?
- Do you think the author is being racist about Ben Wasson? Why? Why not?
- Are there words in your language which, like *negro*, were acceptable in the past but which are these days offensive? Why have their connotations changed, do you think?
- Is it acceptable to publish older pieces of writing like *The Shadow and the Flash* without changing words that people may find offensive, or should publishers feel free to edit and 'modernize' the language to avoid offence?

#### Activity 3

Underline the stressed syllables.

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them--ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right pigments, properly compounded, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would render invisible whatever it was applied to."

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But things came to a head soon enough. It was at my home, after they had taken their degrees and dropped out of the world's sight, that the beginning of the end came to pass. Both were men **of means**, with little inclination and no necessity for professional life. My friendship and their mutual animosity were the two things that linked them in any way together. While they were very often at my place, they made it a fastidious point to avoid each other on such visits, though it was inevitable, under the circumstances, that they should come upon each other occasionally.

On the day I have in recollection, Paul Tichlorne had been **mooning** all morning in my study over a current scientific review. This left me free to my own affairs, and I was out among my roses when Lloyd Inwood arrived. Clipping and pruning and tacking the climbers on the porch, with my mouth full of nails, and Lloyd following me about and lending a hand now and again, we fell to discussing the mythical race of invisible people, that strange and **vagrant** people the traditions of which have come down to us. Lloyd warmed to the talk in his nervous, jerky fashion, and was soon interrogating the physical properties and possibilities of invisibility. A perfectly black object, he **contended**, would **elude** and defy the acutest vision.

"Color is a sensation," he was saying. "It has no objective reality. Without light, we can see neither colors nor objects themselves. All objects are black in the dark, and in the dark it is impossible to see them. If no light strikes upon them, then no light is flung back from them to the eye, and so we have no vision-evidence of their being."

"But we see black objects in daylight," I objected.

"Very true," he went on warmly. "And that is because they are not perfectly black. Were they perfectly black, absolutely black, as it were, we could not see them. Ay, not in the blaze of a thousand suns could we see them! And so I say, with the right **pigments**, properly **compounded**, an absolutely black paint could be produced which would **render** invisible whatever it was applied to."

"It would be a remarkable discovery," I said non-committally, for the whole thing seemed too fantastic for **ought** but speculative purposes.

"Remarkable!" Lloyd slapped me on the shoulder. "I should say so. Why, **old chap**, to coat myself with such a paint would be to put the world at my feet. The secrets of kings and courts would be mine, the machinations of diplomats and politicians, the play of stock-gamblers, the plans of trusts and corporations. I could keep my hand on the inner pulse of things and become the greatest power in the world. And I ..." He broke off shortly, then added, "Well, I have begun my experiments, and I don't mind telling you that I'm right in line for it."

A laugh from the doorway startled us. Paul Tichlorne was standing there, a smile of **mockery** on his lips.

"You forget, my dear Lloyd," he said.

"Forget what?"

"You forget," Paul went on, "ah, you forget the shadow."

I saw Lloyd's face drop, but he answered sneeringly, "I can carry a sunshade, you



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know.” Then he turned suddenly and fiercely upon him. “Look here, Paul, you’ll keep out of this if you know what’s good for you.”

A rupture seemed imminent, but Paul laughed good-naturedly. “I wouldn’t lay fingers on your dirty pigments. Succeed beyond your most **sanguine** expectations, yet you will always **fetch up against** the shadow. You can’t get away from it. Now I shall go on the very opposite **tack**. In the very nature of my proposition the shadow will be eliminated.”

“Transparency!” **ejaculated** Lloyd, instantly. “But it can’t be achieved.”

“Oh, no; of course not.” And Paul shrugged his shoulders and strolled off down the briar-rose path.

This was the beginning of it. Both men attacked the problem with all the tremendous energy for which they were noted, and with a **rancor** and bitterness that made me tremble for the success of either. Each trusted me to the utmost, and in the long weeks of experimentation that followed I was made a party to both sides, listening to their theorizings and witnessing their demonstrations. Never, by word or sign, did I convey to either the slightest hint of the other’s progress, and they respected me for the seal I put upon my lips.

Lloyd Inwood, after prolonged and **unintermittent** application, when the tension upon his mind and body became too great to bear, had a strange way of obtaining relief. He attended **prize fights**. It was at one of these brutal exhibitions, **whither** he had dragged me in order to tell his latest results, that his theory received striking confirmation.

“Do you see that red-**whiskered** man?” he asked, pointing across the ring to the fifth tier of seats on the opposite side. “And do you see the next man to him, the one in the white hat? Well, there is quite a gap between them, is there not?”

“Certainly,” I answered. “They are a seat apart. The gap is the unoccupied seat.”

He leaned over to me and spoke seriously. “Between the red-whiskered man and the white-hatted man sits Ben Wasson. You have heard me speak of him. He is the cleverest **pugilist** of his weight in the country. He is also a Caribbean **negro**, full-blooded, and the blackest in the United States. He has on a black overcoat buttoned up. I saw him when he came in and took that seat. As soon as he sat down he disappeared. Watch closely; he may smile.”

I was for crossing over to verify Lloyd’s statement, but he restrained me. “Wait,” he said.

I waited and watched, till the red-whiskered man turned his head as though addressing the unoccupied seat; and then, in that empty space, I saw the rolling whites of a pair of eyes and the white double-crescent of two rows of teeth, and for the instant I could make out a negro’s face. But with the passing of the smile his visibility passed, and the chair seemed vacant as before.

“Were he perfectly black, you could sit alongside him and not see him,” Lloyd said; and I confess the illustration was apt enough to make me **well-nigh** convinced.

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#### Glossary

**of means** with a lot of money and not needing to work for a living

**moon** lie around not doing anything useful

**vagrant** (old-fashioned) nomadic, travelling around with no fixed home (In modern usage, *vagrant* is a noun that means a person who has no home or job.)

**contend** (formal) to claim that something is true

**elude** (formal) manage to escape or hide

**pigment** a natural substance that gives colour to something such as paint, skin or hair

**compound** (scientific) mix substances together to make a new substance

**render** (formal) make something be

**aught** (old-fashioned) anything

**old chap** (old-fashioned) an affectionate exclamation used with a male friend

**mockery** that makes someone seem stupid

**sanguine** (formal) confident and hopeful about what might happen

**fetch up against** (informal) have to deal with a problem

**tack** a particular way of achieving something

**ejaculate** (old-fashioned) suddenly say or shout something

**rancor** a long-lasting feeling of hate and anger; British spelling: *rancour*

**unintermittent** continuous, never-ending

**prize fight** (old-fashioned) boxing match

**whither** (old-fashioned) to which place

**whiskered** (old-fashioned) bearded

**pugilist** (old-fashioned) boxer

**negro** of black African descent (At the time the story was written, it was an accepted term, used by black people as well as white, but it has since come to be considered offensive in most contexts.)

**well-nigh** (old-fashioned) nearly