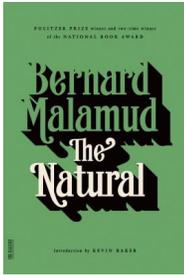


Books by the Stack



The Natural by Bernard Malamud

This sports novel follows the career of baseball player Roy Hobbs, a natural with a bat whose dreams of playing in the big leagues are deferred by a youthful indiscretion, but who finally becomes a hero.

Why you'll like it: *Sports fiction. Plot-driven. Moody.*

About the Author: Bernard Malamud was born in 1914 in New York City and later received his B. A. from City College of New York and his M. A. from Columbia University. All of Malamud's works are highly respected, including "Armistice" (his first), "The Magic Barrel," which won the National Book Award, "The Fixer," which received a Pulitzer Prize. "The Assistant," "The Natural," "The Fixer," and "The Angel Levine," which were all adapted as films. Bernard Malamud died in 1986. (Bowker Author Biography)

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is *The Natural* divided into two sections ("Pre-game" and "Batter Up!"). What sets the two sections apart, and what has occurred between them?
2. What do we learn about Roy Hobbs in the book's opening pages? What is he carrying in his bassoon case? What do you learn about about Hobbs' past – his boyhood and background – over the course of the narrative? And what aspects of Hobbs remain mysterious throughout the book?
3. Why does Hobbs reject the locker-room lecture and accompanying hypnotism of Doc Knobb, the pop-psych guru who "pacifies" the New York Knights? How do the other Knights regard Doc Knobb? (p. 66)
4. When Hobbs replaces Bump Baily as the premier hitter for the Knights – if not in the entire league - some of his teammates start wondering (and, behind his back, talking) about "whether [Hobbs is] for the team or for himself." (p. 85) Which is it, in your view? Is Hobbs ultimately playing for the Knights or himself? Or does his allegiance change over the course of the book?
5. Some time after Bump's accidental death while chasing a fly ball in the outfield, Memo tells Hobbs that Bump "made you think you had been waiting for a thing to happen for a long time and then he made it happen." (p.112) Could the same be said of Hobbs himself? If so, who might say it? And where else in the book do we see ballplayers rendered in a majestic, larger-than-life, or deity-like manner?
6. When Memo and Hobbs take a long night's drive out to Long Island in his new Mercedes-Benz, Hobbs is at one point certain that they have hit a boy or his dog. He wants to turn back and investigate. Memo, who is driving, refuses. But later Hobbs thinks differently, as we read: "It did not appear that there ever was any kid in those woods, except in his mind." (p.123) Is this boy-and-his-dog image merely a figment of Hobbs' imagination or is it real?
7. What link(s) do you recognize in Hobbs' disastrous hitting slump and his decision to visit Lola, the fortune teller in Jersey City? What does Lola predict for Hobbs? Is she accurate? Also, what other

baseball-oriented superstitions are depicted in *The Natural*? How do such rites and practices get started? Why do they remain popular?

8. On his first and only date with Iris, Hobbs tells her a secret. What is it? What does Iris mean when she says, shortly thereafter, that people have “two lives” to live? (p. 152) Identify the “two lives” at the core of this narrative. Finally, why does Hobbs eventually dismiss his affection for Iris? Do you think his dismissal is fair, given Hobbs’ own age ad background?

9. When Hobbs eventually regains his hitting ability, winning games for the Knights anew and reviving their chances in the pennant race, we gain various insights into what Hobbs the slugger thinks and feels. We read, for example: “Sometimes as he watched the ball soar, it seemed to him all circles, and he was mystified at his devotion to hacking at it, for he had never really liked the sight of a circle. They got you nowhere but back to the place where you were to begin with.” (p. 163) Looking at our protagonist in a more personal or philosophical way, explain why Hobbs dislikes circles. Also, who or what causes him to start hitting again in the first place.

10. What is a “Rube Goldberg contraption”? (p. 170)

(Questions provided by the publisher)



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