

**SYNOPSIS**

In early spring, Roy Hobbs, a budding baseball great, travels with Sam Simpson toward an interview that he hopes will open his way to the Chicago Cubs. Aboard the train, he encounters sportscaster Max Mercy and Walter "the Whammer" Wambold, the best hitter in the American league. During an unforeseen stop, Sam bets Max that Roy can strike out the Whammer in three balls. Roy succeeds, drawing the attention of Harriet Bird, a mysterious female passenger. Newly arrived in Chicago, Roy responds to Harriet's invitation to her hotel room, where she produces a pistol and shoots him in the abdomen.

Years pass, during which Roy works at odd jobs before drifting back to his dream of becoming a baseball star. At age 34, newly signed as left fielder with the New York Knights, he arrives at the ball park on Memorial Day. Pop Fisher, the team manager, scorns his advanced age; Bump Baily, the Knights' star player, pulls pranks on him, including trading rooms so that his girlfriend, Memo Paris, will seduce him.

Roy holds to his ambition and insists on using Wonderboy, his homemade bat. Because he refuses to be hypnotized by Doc Knobb, the team's trainer, Pop refuses to put Roy in the lineup. Three weeks later, on June 21, Roy learns that he is being shipped down to a B team. That afternoon, Bump fails the team and Roy gets his chance. Pop urges him to knock the cover off the ball. Roy complies, decimating the ball.

Immediately, Roy becomes a sports hero, idolized by fans and adored by the press and Pop, who regrets keeping him out of the game so long. After Bump is killed following a collision with a wall during a catch, Roy longs to possess Memo, who rejects him while mourning her old love. Near the end of July, Roy decides to press for a raise so that he can buy gifts to impress her. He petitions Judge Goodwill Banner, the team's owner, for more money. The Judge refuses.

Max Mercy, who hovers in the background of the story, presses Roy to divulge his mysterious past. Roy declines, then accepts Max's invitation for dinner at the Pot of Fire. In the company of Memo, Max, and Gus Sands, a seedy bookie, Roy loses a bet, then redeems himself with a staged magic trick. The ruse wins Memo's attention.

On Roy Hobbs Day, Roy receives a pile of gifts, including a Mercedes-Benz. He drives Memo toward Jones Beach and stops at a stream, where she tells him of her failed Hollywood career. Complaining of pain, she returns to the car and takes the wheel. Driving fast without lights, she appears to hit a boy at the roadside. Fearful that the black car following them belongs to the police, Memo insists that they not return to aid the victim. Roy, angered at her behavior, takes control and runs the car into a tree. Pop fines Roy for breaking training and regrets having introduced Memo to Bump.

The next day, Roy begins a losing streak. The fans desert him and Memo avoids him. Sunk in despair, he seeks out a fortune teller. The worried father of a sick fan implores Roy to make a

hit for the child's sake. Pop benches Roy for refusing to give up Wonderboy. During the game, a woman in a red dress stands encouragingly when Roy comes to bat. Roy makes a spectacular hit and saves the game for the Knights.

The woman waits for Roy and introduces herself as Iris Lemon. A definite contrast to Memo's sensuality, Iris seems wholesome, but appealing. She recounts her past, including the birth of her illegitimate daughter, and divulges that she is thirty-three and a grandmother. She and Roy go for a late night swim and make love on the shore.

As the Knights move toward the World Series, Roy is drawn into his career and puts Iris out of his immediate thoughts. His passion for Memo pushes him to a frenzy of dreams and fantasies. The night before his biggest game, to please her, he attends a party and eats huge amounts of food. He collapses with stomach pain and is taken to a hospital. The doctor warns Roy to give up baseball if he intends to survive.

Memo visits Roy daily. He presses her to marry him. She confesses that she cannot commit herself to a poor man, that he must make substantial amounts of money if he wants to keep her. Judge Banner appears at his room and offers a deal by which Roy will throw the game for the Knights so the Judge can gamble successfully on the outcome. Roy realizes that Memo is a part of the Judge's ploy.

Roy forces himself to suit up for the World Series game. He hits a ball into the stands and beans Iris. On her way to the hospital, she tells Roy that she is pregnant. She urges him to do his best. Roy returns to the game, destroys Wonderboy, then strikes out. Returning to the empty clubhouse, he finds \$35,000 in his clothes. He climbs to the Judge's tower. In the presence of Memo, Gus, and the Judge, he returns the money, then faces the streets, where a newspaper headline proclaims the truth about the shooting in his youth. He weeps.

**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

The son of poor Russian immigrants, Bernard Malamud (April 26, 1914-March 18, 1986), a mild-mannered, genteel teacher of creative writing, was born in Flatbush, Brooklyn, where his father operated a grocery store. Malamud attended Public School 181 and Erasmus Hall High, and in 1936 obtained a bachelor's degree from City College of New York, followed by a master's from Columbia University. To earn his way, he worked odd jobs and taught night school, then took a post in the English department of Oregon State University in 1949, where he produced *The Natural* (1952); *The Assistant* (1957), which is usually accorded the greater acclaim; his first short story collection, *The Magic Barrel* (1958); and *A New Life* (1961), his third novel, which places his central character, a New Yorker, on a Pacific Northwest college campus.

In 1961 Malamud and wife Ann moved to Bennington College in Vermont and remained there for eighteen years. During this period, he did some of his most satisfying writing: *Idiot's First*

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(1963), followed by his riveting historical novel, *The Fixer* (1967), *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), *The Tenants* (1971), *Rembrandt's Hat* (1973), and *Dubin's Lives* (1979). His latest works—*God's Grace* (1982), *The Stories of Bernard Malamud* (1983), and *Long Work, Short Life* (1985) round out over thirty years of quality fiction.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Blissfully wedded to fiction, Malamud once observed that it "speaks its own truth." Admired early in his career for satiric wit, storytelling skill, and allegorical insight into human foibles, particularly those of an assortment of lower class victims and losers, Malamud—classed with Saul Bellow, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and Philip Roth as America's deans of the Jewish school of writing—concentrated on the theme of character tested by misfortune. Unquestionably humanistic, he dwelled on universal situations which venture into whimsy. A master chronicler of suffering tinged with humor, as found in his piquant pairing of a black and a Jew in the short story, "Angel Levine," he first achieved national acclaim when he won a National Book award in 1958, followed by a Pulitzer Prize and a second National Book award in 1967. His post-1970 writing, criticized for ambitious bookishness and repetitive themes, earned less renown.

The film-going public became aware of Malamud's skills in 1968, when Alan Bates received an Academy Award nomination for best actor for the film version of *The Fixer*, adapted by screenwriter Dalton Trumbo and set in a gritty, barren Jewish ghetto in Tsarist Russia. A similar burst of enthusiasm for the Tri-Star cinema version of *The Natural*, once classed as a simple tale of baseball, occurred in 1984. Starring Robert Redford, Robert Duvall, Glenn Close, Kim Basinger, Wilford Brimley, and Richard Farnsworth, the film alters significantly the moral intent of the novel, but captures the idiom and vitality of a good sports story suffused with the supernatural. It received four Academy Award nominations.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To analyze a novel and identify theme, characters, plot, setting, tone, and mood
2. To discuss human reaction to both success and loss
3. To identify aspects of baseball that are crucial to the story
4. To identify examples of loyalty, perseverance, dishonesty, and courage
5. To discuss the nature of passion
6. To examine the importance of ambition
7. To discuss the theme of heroism
8. To evaluate the importance of team spirit
9. To discuss reasons for caution, suspicion, jealousy, and disappointment
10. To note the effect of third person point of view
11. To characterize the date and locale of the settings and the passage of time

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss Roy's attitude toward his background
2. To contrast Gus, Bump, Pop, and Roy in terms of their treatment of Memo
3. To comprehend the reasons for Roy's slump
4. To note the interaction between Roy and various minor characters, particularly Otto, Sadie, Lola, Red, Bump,

Mike Barney, and Harriet

5. To contrast the persistence of Roy and Max
6. To comment on Pop's desire to win the World Series
7. To name admirable character traits in Red, Pop, Iris, and Sam
8. To account for Roy's downfall
9. To enumerate opportunities Roy has to avoid dishonesty
10. To explain the significance of the title

### MEANING STUDY

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the novel. Explain each. Page numbers are given so that you can note the context from which the item is taken.

1. Occasionally she stopped and giggled at herself or the breathless volume of words that flowed forth, to his growing astonishment, but after a pause was on her galloping way again—a girl on horseback—reviewing the inspiring sight (she said it was) of David jawboning the Goliath-Whammer, or was it Sir Percy lancing Sir Maldemer, or the first son (with a rock in his paw) ranged against the primitive papa? (p. 25)  
(Harriet Bird ponders an appropriate classical allusion to capture Roy's defeat of Whammer. She considers David and Goliath, an ill-fated pair from the Old Testament, then switches to medieval imagery and on to mythic anthropology. Roy, an ordinary-Joe American who lacks her learned background, remains centered on his first love, baseball.)
2. Roy bent lower and Sam stretched his withered neck and kissed him on the chin. (p. 31)  
(This scene restates a standard motif in heroic literature—the wise old man, who lacks the vigor and ambition of the younger man, prepares the way for the budding hero's success by establishing time, place, and people to see, then concludes the interview with a personal blessing. Under fortuitous stars, Roy accepts both the prophecy of greatness to come and the reality of his mentor's death.)
3. Once Pop broke out of his reverie to point out Grant's Tomb. (p. 49)  
(On his introduction to New York City, Roy receives a bit of advice from Pop, who encourages him to rent a spare room from a married player so that he can avoid high-priced hotels. Shortly afterward, Pop and Roy take a cab past Grant's Tomb, a tourist attraction which carries symbolic significance for the story. Grant, who led the Union army to victory over Confederate forces, was swept into the U.S. presidency, then presided over a blatantly corrupt term of office. Roy, like Grant, is about to rise phenomenally in importance and influence. Also like Grant, he ultimately ruins his reputation by letting his appetites range out of control and by behaving ignobly rather than asserting integrity and morality.)
4. Are you sardines being swallowed up in the sea, or the whale that does the swallowing? That's why I'm here, to help you answer that question in the affirmative, to help you by mesmerism and autosuggestion, meaning you do the suggesting, not I. (p. 63)  
(Doc Knobb, who "pacifies" the team, is a mix of shaman and cheerleader. He uses hypnotism to empty the players' minds of all distractions so that they can concentrate on winning. His philosophy requires them to improve their attitudes, to take responsibility for whether or not they beat the Pirates. His imagery forces harsh contrasts, as in the

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difference between a "flock of bats flying around in a coffin or the sun shining calmly on a blue lake."

Roy is lured into the serenity of Doc's mind control and plumbs the ocean depths in search of a mermaid. Then his will asserts itself, breaking his concentration and forcing him to stalk out of the hypnosis session. Pop objects to the departure and accuses him of disobedience, but Roy, determined to make his own decisions, refuses to return, even if Pop vows "that nobody by the name of Roy Hobbs would ever play ball for him as long as he lived.")

5. Nihil nisi bonum. (p. 85)

(The Judge's homily is a shortened reiteration of the Latin translation of a Greek quotation from Chilon of Sparta (ca. 555 B.C.), one of ancient Greece's Seven Sages: "De mortuis nihil nisi bonum," which means "Speak nothing but good of the dead." The melange of advice in the "framed motto piece" epitomizes the Judge's ability to twist and subvert logic by means of common bromides.)

6. Roy worked the fable around in his mind and got the point. It was not an impressive argument: be satisfied with what you have, and he said so to the Judge. (p. 88)

(To dissuade Roy from demanding more salary, the Judge narrates a fable. The story about Olaf's cow also points up the quandary which leads Roy to ultimate moral collapse: whether to pursue the sullied beauty of Memo or the wholesome appeal of Iris. Like Olaf, Roy falls in the ditch and withers away because he makes the wrong choice.)

7. "All I know about the dark is that you can't see in it."

"A pure canard. You know you can." (p. 89)  
(As Judge Banner and Roy spar over the matter of a raise for Roy, Banner spouts a lot of pseudo-philosophical nonsense about darkness and perception. Roy, who is more matter-of-fact, notes that darkness impedes perception. Banner retorts that his remark is pure fabrication. Roy persists, concluding that he does not see enough to draw a firm conclusion.)

8. He called him everything from a dadblamed sonavagun to a blankety blank Judas traitor for breaking training, hurting his eye, and blowing in at almost 5 A.M. on the day of an important twin bill with the Phils. (p. 112)

(Roy ponders the slump in his career, but fails to see the obvious cause for his diminished performance: he breaks training by keeping late hours, concentrating on Memo Paris rather than the game, leading a reckless life, and harming his vision.

Pop allows himself to be mollified by his golden boy. Roy, cockily refusing to be serious about a subject that Pop considers crucial, remarks, "Nothing is going to kill me before my time. I am the type that will die a natural death." His word choice suggests the title, which implies that Roy is not a prodigy, but a predictable outgrowth of nature.)

9. After a hilarious celebration in the dining car (which they roused to uproar by tossing baked potatoes and ketchup bottles around) and later in the Pullman, where a wild bunch led by Roy stripped the pajamas off players already sound asleep in their berths, peeled Red Blow out of his long underwear, and totally demolished the pants of a new summer suit of Pop's who was anyway not sold on premature celebrations, Roy slept restlessly. (p. 148)

(The Pullman, a plush railroad car with seats that open into a sleeper, was designed by inventor and cabinetmaker

George Mortimer Pullman (1831-1897), who also created a dining car and vestibule car.)

10. The Judge flushed through his yellow skin. "Honi soit qui mal y pense." (p. 187)

(The Judge makes his point about the odds against a win for the Knights by quoting Edward III: "Evil to him who evil thinks." The citation, which serves as the motto of the Order of the Garter, dates to 1349. Roy, who lacks the Judge's savoir faire, replies in typical American slang, "Double to you." The Judge, not to be outdone, offers him \$25,000 and quotes the dying line of Hamlet, "The rest is silence," an ominous end to a play that delineates the greed that precipitates multiple tragedy in the royal house of Denmark.)

## COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers with quotations from the novel.

### Questions 1 - 5 Literal Level

1. Describe the team's situation when Roy is first hired.

(As the second segment of the novel opens on a dismal, dusty Memorial Day, Pop Fisher, bitter because his team plays poorly, mourns that he did not become a farmer. He concludes, "I shoulda farmed instead of playing wet nurse to a last place, dead-to-the-neck ball team." Red Blow fidgets as he listens to the tirade. In the background, the "half-empty stands" attest to the fans' distaste for the Knights' mediocre playing.

Pop's emotions plummet, leaving him with a heart "as dry as dirt for the little I have to show for all my years in the game." He scorns his partner, the Judge, who is too cheap to fix a rusty drinking fountain. Pop regrets "one of the darkest days of my life when that snake crawled into this club."

As Pop and Red discuss the removal of their star player, prankster Bump Baily, for putting dry ice down the umpire's pants, a newcomer in a frayed, ill-fitting suit appears, sets his valise and a bassoon case on the step, and hands a folded letter to Pop, who explodes in disbelief that the scout, Scotty Carson, would hire so aged a rookie for left field. The newcomer, Roy Hobbs, produces a signed contract, which Pop disclaims. Hobbs, satisfied that the deal is legal, replies, "If you don't want me, Merry Christmas." Pop backs down a bit from his initial outburst and sends Hobbs to suit up.)

2. Explain how Roy benefits the Knights.

(For three weeks, Pop benches Roy, who arouses his ire by refusing to be hypnotized by Doc Knobb, the team's trainer. By June 21, Roy is destined to be "shipped to a Class B team in the Great Lakes Association" and Doc Knobb, following a clash with Pop, is fired. The team perks up briefly, but their improvement is marred by Bump's sloppy fielding. Pop, angered that he cannot depend on Bump, sends Roy in Bump's place.

As Roy moves toward the plate, Pop yells "Knock the cover off of it." Roy, on edge from waiting for his chance at stardom, swings. Wonderboy, his homemade bat, "flashed in the sun" as it smacks the ball "like a twenty-one gun salute." Like a benediction on the drought-ridden team, a few drops of rain fall. The cover rips from the ball as it "[screams] toward the pitcher." Pop, impressed by

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Roy's showing, decides to "use him as a pinch hitter and substitute fielder."

Roy's prodigious debut, which develops into a permanent position after Bump's death, leads to general acclaim. Red comments that Roy is "a natural." A reporter claims, "He can catch everything in creation." Quickly, Roy becomes one of the league's leading hitters, and the Knights, "like a rusty locomotive pulling out of the roundhouse for the first time in years," begin their climb.)

3. What is Roy's attitude toward Memo?

(From his first meeting with her, Roy is love-sick and obsessed by the sensuous, spoiled Memo Paris. He thinks of her, dreams of her, and watches the wives' box to see whether she notices his performance. As the Knights improve their game, Roy confronts the Judge in his darkened tower room—not to better himself, but to acquire enough money to buy gifts for Memo.)

On Roy Hobbs Day, Roy receives a Mercedes-Benz, in which he chauffeurs Memo toward Jones Beach, then stops by a stream. In the uneven moonlight, he reaches for her. Memo pushes him away, complaining of pain. Later, she claims to have gone to a doctor, who diagnosed her problem as neuritis. Roy, who perceives the dark side of Memo's personality, disbelieves her.

Even with the knowledge that Memo is a superficial gold-digger, Roy is unable to shake his fascination for her allure. During the slump that brings him down, he ponders whether Pop is right, that "she had maybe jinxed him." He enjoys a brief liaison with Iris Lemon, yet reunites with Memo in Boston. She leaves him, "like all the food he had lately been eating, that left him, after the having of it, unsatisfied.")

4. Describe Roy's illness.

(Led on by the promise of an evening of romance, Roy follows Memo to a party room on the eighteenth floor of the hotel for a special buffet and get-together with women that she invites to entertain the players. She indicates that Gus helped pay for the food; Roy notes prophetically that the food may be poisoned. The spread, consisting of "delicatessen meat, appetizing fish, shrimp, crab, and lobster, also caviar, salads, cheeses of all sorts, bread, rolls, and three flavors of ice cream" makes his stomach ache before he begins. He loads his plate and eats heartily, visits a bit with the showgirls, then allows Memo to escort him back to the table for more food.)

Roy, depressed by Memo's questions about his past, leaves the buffet and takes the elevator to the hotel lobby. In the grill room, he orders six hamburgers and two glasses of milk "to kill the pangs of hunger." He ponders the inexplicable emptiness that stalks him: "What must I do not to be hungry?" he asks himself. On his way back to the party, pain rips through his stomach. Fowler, a teammate, warns him, "Stay away from the stuffin's."

Wandering down to Memo's room on the fourth floor, Roy finds the key in the lock. He approaches her, undresses, then faints. At a hospital near Knights Field, the doctor pumps Roy's stomach. His delirium takes him into bizarre visions of food, ending with the discovery that "it was himself he was chewing." Because of high blood pressure and an overworked heart, he risks sudden death from the exertion of playing. The doctor's verdict allows him some

leeway: he can play, but he must "say goodbye forever to baseball—if he hoped to stay alive.")

5. What types of magic and psychology bolster the team? (The Knights are subject to belief in the supernatural. They depend on Doc Knobb's hypnotism sessions to improve their attitudes and practice a variety of magic to relieve themselves of "hexes and whammies." They cross their fingers, avoid cross-eyed fans, and spit through two fingers. Bump marks his socks and shorts with colored thread; Pop strokes a rabbit's foot; Red refuses to change clothes during a winning streak; and Flores touches his genitals as a means of warding off bad luck.)

When Roy's good performance begins to wane, he falls back on magic as a means of restoring his former standing with the team. Even though he has his doubts about fortunetellers, he accepts Memo's suggestion to visit Lola in Jersey City. In her "two-room shack near the river," he listens to the stereotypical crystal ball reading about falling in love with a dark-haired woman, then returns to try his own machinations. He wears socks inside out, stitches red thread in his underpants, spits between two fingers to ward off a black cat, and searches for the "crosseyed whammy who might be hexing him." He also sews medals and amulets in his clothing. The Knights, observing Roy's attempts to improve on fate, blame him for "jinxing himself and the team.")

### Questions 6-8 Interpretive Level

6. How does the Judge demonstrate his understanding of Roy?

(A seedy, unctuous man who, according to Roy, should be selling snake oil, Judge Goodwill Banner, like a black-souled mage, is remarkably accurate in his assessment of Roy. During their first interview, the Judge cites homilies and a fable to impress on the rookie the dangers of greed. Himself a rapacious money grubber, the Judge warns, "He that maketh haste to be rich shall not be innocent." He follows up with advice about gambling and "loose ladies," both of which lead to Roy's downfall. The Judge's benediction, delivered as Roy descends the murky tower steps, is short, cynical, and to the point: "Resist all evil.")

In their second meeting, Banner, seated by Roy's hospital bed, uses Memo as a shield as he feels out Roy's gullibility. Roy, less awed by the Judge than in their first meeting and armed with imperfect logic, spars as best he can. The Judge, cognizant of Roy's intellectual limitations, quotes a French homily ["Honi soit qui mal y pense"] as well as the dying line of Hamlet ["The rest is silence."] A satanic figure, he begins the bidding for Roy's soul, stopping at thirty thousand.

The Judge, who perceives how completely Roy is smitten by Memo, taunts him with the possibility that a better provider may steal her away. The Judge also skewers Roy's pride by commenting, "The Knights are demoralized. Without you, I doubt they can win over a sandlot team, contrary opinion notwithstanding." Roy accepts the Judge's offer and acknowledges its deceptiveness by citing Isaiah 5:20: "Woe unto him who calls evil good and good evil.")

7. How does Malamud utilize mythic and heroic motifs in the novel?

(The novel is filled with mythic and heroic motifs, particularly those from Greek mythology and the Arthurian tradi-

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tion. Roy Hobbs, whose first name in French means "king" and whose last name calls to mind the work of Thomas Hobbes, the seventeenth century English philosopher who studied the rational mind's enslavement to the passions, plays for the Knights, a modern-day Round Table striving to achieve the pennant for their manager. Roy, who is dogged by ill fate in the form of the witchy Harriet Bird, makes a holy pledge to be the best. After Harriet betrays him, for fifteen years he clings to his quest for a baseball career. Against the evil eye of Gus Sands, the deceptive sophistry of the Judge, the jibes of the grotesque homunculus, Otto Zipp, and the draw of Memo, the siren, he struggles to remain true to the quest.

Under the brief but salubrious influence of Iris, who was goddess of the rainbow in Greek mythology, Roy plumbs the depths of his desires, as symbolized by the mud at the bottom of the lake. He dallies briefly with Lola, a filmsy wisp of clairvoyance, then accepts Mike Barney's challenge to restore his son's fragile health by playing his best. Pulled alternately by the desire for purity in baseball and the base urge to possess Memo, Roy battles an inner phalanx of demons.

Throughout his soul-searching, Roy wanders in darkness or under a shadowed moon. When his motives are pure, light sparkles from his bat, leading defamers to conclude that his luck stems from Wonderboy, carved from an oak touched by lightning. The talisman proves false on his final test and shatters cleanly, a grim reminder of Roy's deal with the Judge. After Roy buries the wooden remains, he waits for the cover of darkness before removing his soiled uniform. On the street, he watches traffic pass him by, then weeps in front of the newsboy who carries the headline announcing "Hobbs's Sellout.")

8. What is Iris's role in the novel?

(Wronged by Harriet at age nineteen, Roy falls even more heavily under the spell of a conniving female when he allows Memo into his bed, which he occupies on a one-time trade with her lover, Bump. Iris, who perceives that Roy has the makings of a hero, literally stands up for her beliefs by rising from the bleachers, endangering herself from a hit into the stands. Contrasting Harriet's demented venom and Memo's insinuating evil, Iris offers Roy a chance at redemption.

During her brief fling with Roy, Iris narrates her past, good and bad. Symbolic of a human being tested and strengthened by temptation, she influences Roy, who realizes that "she knew what life was like." In Indiana, by the lake under the light of a new moon, she states her simple credo: "I hate to see a hero fail. There are so few of them." Idealistic about heroes and their worth to "plain people," she encourages Roy to be his best for the sake of his young fans. With womanly wisdom, she answers his question about the purpose of ill fate: "Experience makes good people better . . . Suffering is what brings us toward happiness."

Roy, who is incapable of internalizing and profiting from Iris's advice, misunderstands her comment about suffering making people "want the right things." Filled with self-pity, he misses her explanation of how childbirth changed her. Stripped for a late-night swim, the pair dive into the lake. Iris worries when Roy swims to the bottom. Holding out a "pair of golden arms," she inclines her golden head

toward him. Symbolically, she asks, "Why did you do it?" His reply prophesies his doom, "To see if I could touch the bottom."

Roy fails to profit by Iris's example, which she so freely offers. As he succumbs to the sex urge, she reaches up and tries to explain that she is now a grandmother. Roy, thinking only of sexual release, pushes her back. The next time they meet, Roy, who has discounted the worth of Iris's letter, carries her to the trainer's table after striking her in the face with a ball. Oblivious to the pain, she is overcome with joy that she is carrying Roy's child, who she predicts will be a son. He buries his head into her bosom and makes a feeble attempt to redeem himself from his lust for Memo, but Iris's magic is not strong enough to retrieve his plunge into infamy.)

### Questions 9 and 10 Critical Level

9. Discuss the theme of heroism as revealed in the novel. (Roy, who comes from the stereotypical bad home, spent time in an orphanage, then bummed around and worked at odd jobs before Sam Simpson spotted him and helped him inaugurate his baseball career. Roy's instincts are good, yet his appetite for sensual pleasure overrides his basic moral urge. He makes the mistake of falling for Harriet Bird, who embodies random evil, then he spends fifteen years recovering from the error.

At thirty-four, Roy, who has only one more try at playing baseball before aging out of eligibility, receives backing from Scotty Carson, a scout who signs him to play left field from the Knights. Again, Roy gives in to his physical drives by falling for Memo Paris, the team manager's niece. Set against the backdrop of growing fan loyalty, their love match blooms unevenly, never offering him much hope that he will drive Bump from her heart. Against all advice, even Pop's, he devotes much of his time to dreaming about possessing her.

The brief encounter with Iris offers Roy a chance to restore his fallen heroism and carry the Knights to the pennant. He bears a letter on his body and considers reading it, but, smitten by Memo's spell, he neglects his opportunity for a wholesome love with a mature woman. At the hospital, Memo's alliance with the Judge leaves no doubt that she connives with Roy's enemies. When the fatal deal is made, Memo showers Roy with affection. At this point, he reads Iris's letter, however, he is beyond her powers to save him.

10. Give examples of Malamud's reliance on American slang and baseball jargon.

(Much of the energy and force of Malamud's novel flows from the rich American slang and baseball jargon which permeate the narrative and dialogue. For example, after Roy's arrival at the dugout, Pop remarks, "thirty-four years for a rookie is starting with one foot in the grave. But like Red says, if our best scout sent you, you musta showed him something. Go on in the clubhouse and have Dizzy fit you up with a monkey suit. Then report back here and I will locate you a place on this bench with the rest of my All-Stars." Other instances of slang and jargon interlace the work, some of which may require explanation:  
cartwheels—silver dollars  
schmaltzy—sentimental  
sharper—con artists  
rednose—alcoholic



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greenhorn—beginner  
smithereens—tiny fragments  
snake eyes—the lowest score on a pair of dice  
sevens out—a losing score in a dice game  
gave him short shrift—paid little heed  
pinch hit—substitute  
busher—player in the bush leagues or lesser teams  
hayfoot—hick  
hang onto the water wagon—stay sober  
four-bit piece—fifty-cent piece  
two bits—a quarter  
have a little chin-chin—discuss  
Podunk—rural area  
a “C”—hundred-dollar bill  
took it on the chin—suffered  
pea-souper—fog  
break training—break the team manager’s rules  
take the flag—win  
Charley horse—muscle sprain  
cauliflower ear—misshapen ear from numerous blows  
heebie jeebies—nervousness; loss of confidence  
in fine fettle—prepared; in good shape  
pennant fever—a desire to win the championship  
over a barrel—at a loss  
Rube Goldberg contraption—bizarre device or invention  
put the squelch on—halted  
cook their own geese—bring about their own downfall  
bughouse nightmare—bad dream in a madhouse  
blowout—party or celebration  
rotgut—cheap liquor  
blew your conk off—caused nervous collapse  
selling snake oil—deceiving people  
peppering it up—building enthusiasm)

### Questions 11-14—Creative Level

11. Lead a panel discussion of why Roy Hobbs fails as a baseball hero. Decide whether he is a victim of fate or of his own foibles.
12. Explain in a paragraph the significance of each of these scenes:
  - a. Roy dives to the bottom of the lake.
  - b. Harriet lures Roy to her hotel room.
  - c. Bump switches rooms with Roy.
  - d. Gus, Roy, and Memo shoot dice.
  - e. Roy is taken to a maternity hospital.
  - f. The Judge meets with Roy in a dimly lit tower room.
  - g. Bump plays jokes on Roy.
  - h. Pop worries that the team is celebrating too soon.
  - i. Sam collapses.
  - j. Iris is hit by the ball.
13. In a theme, discuss how the story would change if Roy had won the last game for the Knights or if Roy’s love for Iris had made him stronger.
14. Contrast the movie version of the novel with the original. Explain why the screenwriter made so drastic a change in the novel’s ending.

### STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Compose a theme in which you compare the story of Roy Hobbs to the legend of King Arthur. Include episodes such as Arthur’s ignoble birth, the removal of Excalibur from the stone, the creation of the Knights of the Round Table,

Arthur’s affair with Morgen Le Fay, Arthur’s love of Guinevere, the fall of Camelot, advice from Merlin, the broken sword, and Arthur’s departure for Avalon.

2. Write a sports page account of Roy’s final game. Stress the type of sports jargon that permeates the novel, such as rookie, no-hitter, pill, stick, pinch hit, rhubarb, and run the bags.
3. Lead a discussion about the author’s emphasis on light and dark as symbols of good and evil. Cite passages in which light and dark play significant roles in the setting, particularly Roy’s ride with Memo in his Mercedes-Benz and his swim with Iris Lemon. Comment on the symbolism of Roy’s plunge to the dark mud at the bottom of the lake.
4. Compose a press release explaining Roy’s hospitalization to his fans. Stress the seriousness of his condition without robbing them of the hope that he may return to play in the World Series. Reply with a letter to the editor from a fan.
5. Create a list of sports heroes and heroines, politicians, and Hollywood stars who have harmed or destroyed their careers by losing control of their personal lives, for example Marilyn Monroe, Pete Rose, and Edward Kennedy. Comment on the moral issue at stake in each case.
6. Write a thorough comparison of the novel and its film version. Note how the change in endings alters the author’s intent. Conclude with your opinion as to which is more successful and which is more meaningful.
7. Write an extended definition of fable. Explain how fable educates a reader about serious moral issues, such as personal integrity, ambition, or sexual responsibility.
8. Propose some alternates for Roy as he ponders the headlines in the final scene of the novel. Suggest ways that he may still create a worthwhile life for himself in sports, for instance as a trainer, scout, sportscaster, manager, or coach.
9. Read other stories about fallen heroes, such as Tristan, Lancelot, Achilles, Ajax, David, and Samson. Comment on the mythic qualities they share with Roy.
10. Compile a list of adages which advise people about ambition. Consider these: “The bigger they are, the harder they fall,” “Hitch your wagon to a star,” “A man’s reach must exceed his grasp, or what’s a heaven for,” and “Pride goeth before a fall.”

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## THE NATURAL

### VOCABULARY

Complete each sentence with a word from the list that follows. You will have answers left over when you finish.

albino  
amulets  
bilge  
contusions  
diagonally  
edict  
gossamer

malevolent  
nemesis  
oblivion  
offal  
opt  
ptomaine  
ravenously

shenanigan  
shrift  
stereopticon  
taunt  
toll  
trouncing  
wen

1. In the \_\_\_\_\_ opposite corner were the trainer's quarters, and here the door was ajar and gave forth an oil of wintergreen smell that crawled up his nose.
2. For a long while he had been eyeing Gussie, an \_\_\_\_\_ cow of his neighbor down the road.
3. After the bellhop had left he said he hoped Roy wasn't the \_\_\_\_\_ type.
4. He had once seen some \_\_\_\_\_ pictures of Chicago and it was a boxed-up ant heap of stone and crumbling wood buildings in a many-miled spreading checkerboard of streets without much open space to speak of except the railroads, stockyards, and the shore of a windy lake.
5. The girl, pretending to be unconcerned, \_\_\_\_\_ off the third and fourth kisses.
6. So they used the stomach pump instead and dredged up unbelievable quantities of \_\_\_\_\_.
7. They blamed the damage on \_\_\_\_\_.
8. Opening his lids, he saw Mercy in a nearby seat, gazing at him with a \_\_\_\_\_ sneer.
9. \_\_\_\_\_ and lacerations. Not much to worry about, but to be on the safe side she ought to be X-rayed.
10. The sight of his \_\_\_\_\_ crouched low in the brooding darkness around the plate filled him with fear.
11. He practiced different grips on Wonderboy before his bureau mirror and sewed miraculous medals and evil-eye \_\_\_\_\_ of fish, goats, clenched fists, open scissors, and hunchbacks all over the inside of his clothes.
12. And Otto Zipp had reappeared like a bad dream with his loud voice and pesky tooter venomously hooting Roy into \_\_\_\_\_.
13. Since Roy had always had rabbit ears, every \_\_\_\_\_ and barb hit its mark.
14. The Knights had come out of Sportsman's Park after \_\_\_\_\_ the Cards in a double header and making it an even dozen in a row without a loss, and the whole club had gone gay on the train, including, mildly, Pop himself, considerably thawed out now that the team had leapfrogged over the backs of the Dodgers and Cards into third place.
15. Yet no matter how many bangs he collected, he was \_\_\_\_\_ hungry for more and all he could eat besides.

**THE NATURAL**

**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Identification (30 points)**

Identify the character who is described below. Choose from the list of names that follows. You may use some names more than once.

Bump  
Charlie  
Doc Casey  
Doc Knobb  
Eddie  
Flores  
Gus  
Harriet  
Iris

Lola  
Max  
Memo  
Mike Barney  
Olson  
Omoo Oilers  
Otto  
Pop  
Red

Roy  
Roy's father  
Roy's mother  
Sadie  
Sam  
Scotty  
the Judge  
Whammer  
Wonderboy

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. was Bobo the clown.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. wanted to be a Hollywood star.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. escorts Roy to an interview with the Chicago Cubs.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. is carved out of a tree that was struck by lightning.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. hypnotizes the team.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. wears a glass eye.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. carries a hat box.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. searches for clues to Roy's past.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. eats too much at Memo's party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. learns to pitch from his father.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. travels on a train to Chicago with Max.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. introduces Memo to Bump.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. asks Roy to help his boy get well.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. lives in semi-darkness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. is struck by a ball that Roy hits into the stands.



## THE NATURAL

### Part II: Completion (20 points)

Fill in each blank with a word or phrase from the story.

1. On the night that Memo meets Roy, Bump trades \_\_\_\_\_ with Roy.
2. On the day that Roy is shot, he is carrying Sam's \_\_\_\_\_.
3. After \_\_\_\_\_ splinters, Roy uses a Louisville Slugger.
4. Roy receives a Mercedes-Benz on \_\_\_\_\_ Day.
5. The note reading "You'll get yours" is signed \_\_\_\_\_.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ regrets keeping Roy on the bench for three weeks in June.
7. After hitting something with Roy's car, Memo fears that the \_\_\_\_\_ are following her.
8. Roy pours \_\_\_\_\_ dollar bills on the Judge's head.
9. Gus wins a bet with Roy about the next \_\_\_\_\_ that the waiter will pick up.
10. Roy is \_\_\_\_\_ years old at the time he is shot.

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F for false.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Roy suffers nightmares of Harriet Bird pulling a gun and shooting him in the abdomen.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Pop allows Max Mercy to weigh and x-ray Wonderboy.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Red prophesies that Roy will hit the first ball and knock its cover off.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When Roy returns to his locker after the last game, he finds an envelope of money in his clothes.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Memo indicates that the Judge and Gus arranged for the party.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. While embracing on the shore, Iris admits to Roy that she is a grandmother.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Roy carries Iris's letter, but puts off reading it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The doctor indicates that Roy probably ate poisoned food.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Because of his own past record, Pop is sensitive about the word flop.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Memo is innocent of the Judge's plot to make illegal bets on Roy's intentional failure.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Discuss why Roy enters his career late in life.
2. Describe Roy's friendship with Iris.
3. Describe Max Mercy's role in the novel.
4. Analyze Roy's rise and fall as a baseball star.
5. Contrast Roy's relationships with the Judge and with Pop.

**THE NATURAL**

**COMPREHENSION TEST B**

**Part I: Short Answer (20 points)**

Supply an answer to each of the following questions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Who regrets introducing Memo to Bump?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. What team does the Judge own?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What does Harriet carry in the hat box?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Who dives to the mud at the bottom of the lake?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. On whose head does Roy dump thousand-dollar bills?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Who refuses to be hypnotized?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. What was carved from wood taken from a tree hit by lightning?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. What position does Roy play?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Who promises, "You'll get yours"?
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Who warns Roy not to say flop?

**Part II: Description (30 points)**

Place an X by every statement that is true of Roy Hobbs.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. is shot in Harriet Bird's room at the Stevens Hotel
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. realizes that Memo is part of the Judge's dishonest scheme.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. does not care that Iris has an illegitimate daughter and a grandchild.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. weeps after seeing the headline about the shooting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. wins a bet from Gus Sands about the type of drink being served at the Pot of Fire.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. drives Memo toward Jones Beach and stops by a stream.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. hits an unidentified boy at the roadside.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. wrecks a Mercedes-Benz by running it into a tree.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. is the object of Otto Zipp's ridicule.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. suffers an injury by colliding with a wall during a catch.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. presses the Judge for a raise so that he can buy gifts for Memo.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. is shipped down to a B team on June 21.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. impresses the Whammer by winning prizes at a carnival.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. carries Sam Simpson's wallet.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. breaks training by eating too much.

## THE NATURAL

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

Match the following beginnings of sentences with their conclusions.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. By the end of the season, if you keep on like you're going,
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I often drove past this place and saw him sitting on the moldy front porch,
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. What I am saying is that emphasis upon money
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. One cannot begin to imagine how one's life may alter for the worse
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. I have disciplined myself so thoroughly against that fear, that
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Miss Paris informed me you were not asleep, and
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. There is the possibility that
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I have reason to believe that, although we are considered to be the underdogs,
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I asked myself can any action—no matter what its origin or motive—which ends so evilly—
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. However, one might consider, despite the difficulty of the personal situation—

- A. will pervert your values.
- B. they'll be ready to talk turkey, then we'll put the heat on.
- C. the authorities granted me a few minutes to visit with you.
- D. a doddering cripple starving to death with his tubercular albino cow.
- E. certain gambling interests have been betting heavily on the Knights to win.
- F. I much prefer a dark to a lit room, and water is my favorite beverage.
- G. that is to say, within the context of one's own compunctions—that it is impossible to predict what further good may accrue to one, and others, in the future, as a result of an initially difficult decision.
- H. can such an action possibly be designated as good?
- I. under the impetus of wealth-seeking.
- J. you may get into the game and unexpectedly wreck it with a single blow.

### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Describe how Roy behaves after he becomes famous.
2. Give evidence that Roy feels pulled in two directions about women and money.
3. Explain how Memo lures Roy to his downfall.
4. Describe Roy's first hit for the Knights.
5. Discuss why the Knights play better after Roy joins the team.

## THE NATURAL

### ANSWER KEY

#### Vocabulary Test

- |                 |                |
|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. diagonally   | 9. contusions  |
| 2. albino       | 10. nemesis    |
| 3. shenanigan   | 11. amulets    |
| 4. stereoptican | 12. oblivion   |
| 5. tolled       | 13. taunt      |
| 6. bilge        | 14. trouncing  |
| 7. ptomaine     | 15. ravenously |
| 8. malevolent   |                |

#### Comprehension Test A

##### Part I: Identification (30 points)

- |              |                 |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Roy       | 9. Roy          |
| 2. Memo      | 10. Roy         |
| 3. Sam       | 11. Whammer     |
| 4. Wonderboy | 12. Pop         |
| 5. Doc Knobb | 13. Mike Barney |
| 6. Gus       | 14. the Judge   |
| 7. Harriet   | 15. Iris        |
| 8. Max       |                 |

##### Part II: Completion (20 points)

- |              |              |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. rooms     | 6. Pop       |
| 2. wallet    | 7. police    |
| 3. Wonderboy | 8. thousand  |
| 4. Roy Hobbs | 9. drink     |
| 5. M.M.      | 10. nineteen |

##### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. T  |
| 2. F | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. F |

##### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

#### Comprehension Test B

##### Part I: Short Answer (20 points)

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Pop       | 6. Roy        |
| 2. Knights   | 7. Wonderboy  |
| 3. pistol    | 8. left field |
| 4. Roy       | 9. Max Mercy  |
| 5. the Judge | 10. Red       |

##### Part II: Completion (30 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. X | 9. X  |
| 2. X | 10.   |
| 3.   | 11. X |
| 4. X | 12.   |
| 5.   | 13.   |
| 6. X | 14. X |
| 7.   | 15.   |
| 8. X |       |

##### Part III: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. C  |
| 2. D | 7. J  |
| 3. A | 8. E  |
| 4. I | 9. H  |
| 5. F | 10. G |

##### Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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