

The Natural by Bernard Malamud (Published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux)

Approved for use in Communication Arts II

Summary

Roy Hobbs is a small-town teenage pitching prodigy on the fast-track to major league baseball. However, his career is stalled when he is shot and seriously wounded by a psychotic woman, beginning a series of events that constantly deny Roy of his greatest ambitions. An embittered Hobbs eventually claws his way back to the big leagues by his mid-thirties, only to be ruined by recklessly trying to claim the social and financial laurels that he is convinced should have been his long ago.

Connection to the Curriculum

In the continuing study of alternatives to the archetypal hero, Bernard Malamud's *The Natural* captures an antiheroic figure (Roy Hobbs) whose ambitions and desires are constantly thwarted by his own faults and errors. While Hobbs is certainly as talented and mysterious as the archetypal hero studied in the previous curriculum, Malamud turns this genre on its head when Hobbs finds his dreams constantly dashed—in part by fate, but mostly by his own foolish decisions and mistakes. Hobbs' rise and fall as a heroic figure provides meaningful social commentary on the cult of heroism in American society, illuminating how the public and press conspire to place talented individuals on an impossibly high pedestal, only to take equal pleasure in seeing them fall from that pedestal. This theme provides ample opportunities for meaningful class discussions and writing assignments concerning the literary techniques used by Malamud to build this antiheroic concept, and to compare and contrast this concept with the archetypal modes of previous study. Malamud's exceptionally detailed and vivid descriptions throughout the novel provide students with a strong example of how tone can be molded through the "DIDLS" method taught in the curriculum (diction, imagery, details, language devices, syntax). *The Natural* also provides students with numerous opportunities to analyze sophisticated symbolism that threads itself throughout the novel.

Standards

Course Objectives (Benchmarks)

Reading: 1.2- The students read fluently. 1.3- The students expand vocabulary. 1.4- students write effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

Literature: 2.1- The students use literary concepts to interpret and respond to the text.

Writing: 3- The students write effectively for a variety of audiences, purposes, and contexts.

Possible Skills Taught (Indicators)

Reading:

- 1.2.1- The student adjusts reading rate to support comprehension when reading and interpreting narrative texts.
- 1.3.5- The student identifies, interprets, and analyzes the use of figurative language including similes, metaphors, analogies, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, personification, idioms, imagery, and symbolism.
- 1.4.9- The student uses prior knowledge, content, and text type features to make, revise, and confirm predictions.
- 1.4.12- The student analyzes and evaluates how authors use text structures to help achieve their purposes.
- 1.4.17- The student analyzes and evaluates how an author's style and use of literary devices work together to achieve his or her purpose.

Literature:

- 2.1.4- The student analyzes themes, tone, and the author's point of view using textual evidence and considering audience and purpose.
- 2.1.5- The student identifies, analyzes, and evaluates the use of literary devices.

Writing:

- 3.4.10- The student writes a cohesive piece with a clear introduction, well-developed ideas, and an insightful conclusion.
- 3.4.11- The student uses transitions to connect ideas within and between paragraphs.
- 3.4.12- The student uses sequence that is logical and effective within each paragraph as well as within the entire written piece.

A Note on the Text: (The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)

During Roy Hobbs' search for fame, he encounters a series of mature events including violence (a shooting), sexual content (including brief, descriptive scenes of relationships with women), and some limited profanity. In addition, the text includes references to teenage pregnancy and prostitution. The sadness of Roy's troubled journey and the theme associated with sports heroes are developed through these mature images. These situations strengthen the development of Roy as a realistic antihero.

Additional Unit Design Connections

Coming soon:

To be completed during future curriculum development activities