

**PinkMonkey® Literature Notes on . . .**

## **Sample MonkeyNotes**

**Note: this sample contains only excerpts and does not represent the full contents of the booknote. This will give you an idea of the format and content.**

# ***The Fixer***

by

**Bernard Malamud**

**1966**



**MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Jane Johnson**

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## KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

### SETTING

*The Fixer* by Bernard Malamud is set in pre-Revolutionary Russia. It begins in a shtetl (*a small Jewish village*) near Kiev. As the story progresses, the action moves to the city of Kiev and then .....

### LIST OF CHARACTERS

#### Major Characters

**Yakov Bok** - Yakov Bok is the main character. He is a very likeable person. He is Jewish, and the Jewish people have a very difficult time in pre-Revolutionary Russia. There is always the possibility of .....

**Shmuel** - Shmuel is Yakov's father-in-law. He is a father figure for Yakov, whose father.....

**Bibikov** - Bibikov is one person who believes that Yakov is innocent of the crime of which he is accused. He is the Investigating Magistrate for Cases of Extraordinary Importance. He wants the.....

**The Deputy Warden** - The Deputy Warden is the antagonist of the story. He is very.....

#### Minor Characters

**Nikolai Lebedev** - Nikolai Lebedev is a man who Yakov rescues in Kiev. He rewards Yakov for.....

**Zhitnyak** - Zhitnyak is a guard at the prison where Yakov is held. He gets in trouble for.....

**Kogin** - Kogin is also a guard in the prison where Yakov is held. Usually he works at.....  
Many additional minor characters are identified in the complete study guide

### CONFLICT

**Protagonist** - Yakov Bok is the protagonist of the novel.

**Antagonist** - The Deputy Warden is the antagonist.

**Exposition** - The exposition of *The Fixer* tells us about Yakov Bok. We learn about the place where he lived many years, the shtetl. We learn why he felt that he should leave the shtetl and .....

**Rising Action** - The rising action leads us from the time when Yakov thinks that the reason he.....

**Climax** - The climax is when Yakov writes that his confession is truly a lie in the place.....

**Falling Action** - The falling action takes place as Yakov finally receives his long-awaited .....

**Outcome** - The outcome or denouement occurs as Yakov is taken in a carriage to his trial. Until one reads the story, the ending may seem premature. After all, there is nothing written about the.....

### SHORT PLOT / CHAPTER SUMMARY (Synopsis)

*The Fixer* begins in a shtetl in Russia where Yakov lives near his father-in-law, Shmuel. Before the beginning of the story, Yakov's wife, Raisl, left him. There was friction in the marriage because the couple did not have a child. Yakov has made a decision to leave the shtetl and go elsewhere. Yakov thinks that surely elsewhere his luck will improve. He loads a few things, including his books, onto a wagon and heads to Kiev.

When Yakov reaches Kiev, he has difficulty making a living. Then, he rescues a drunk from the snow where he had fallen. The man, Lebedev, rewards him for his help by giving him a short-term job. While working at Lebedev's home, Yakov becomes acquainted with his daughter, Zinaida. Lebedev likes the work that Yakov does and offers him a job at a brickyard that he owns. On Yakov's last day at Lebedev's home, Zinaida invites Yakov to have dinner there to celebrate the end of one job and the beginning of a new one. After dinner, they go to Zinaida's room to have sex. When Yakov sees that Zinaida is what he refers to as "unclean," he decides not to go forward.

Yakov has some reservations about accepting Lebedev's offer of the job at the brickyard because it entails living on the property. This would seem like a good setup because it would give Yakov a place to stay as well as a place to work. But, the brickyard is located in an area which is forbidden to Jews. Yakov does take the new position and soon he makes an enemy of Proshko who works at the brickyard. Proshko has been.....

## **THEMES**

**Freedom** - Bernard Malamud explores the true meaning of freedom in this book. When Yakov Bok manages to resist confessing to a crime that he did not commit in order to get out of jail, he is freer....

Additional themes are identified in the complete study guide. the darker side of human nature.

## **MOOD**

The mood of *The Fixer* is somber.

## **BACKGROUND INFORMATION - BIOGRAPHY**

Bernard Malamud was born on April 26, 1914 and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. His father, Max, operated a grocery store. His parents were Jewish immigrants.

He attended Erasmus Hall High School, where he later taught night classes. His education continued at City College of New York where he graduated in 1936. He received a Master's degree at Columbia University in 1942. Malamud changed from student to teacher, at Erasmus Hall High School and Harlem High School from 1940-1949. His writing career started during this time.

Malamud's dual careers, teacher and writer, continued at Oregon State (1949-61), then at Bennington College (1961-66, 1968-86).

The author's first novel, *The Natural*, was very successful critically. It was also successful on.....

## **LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

Bernard Malamud was influenced by what he heard about Mendel Beilis, a man similar to Yakov in a situation similar to Yakov's plight. His story also took place in Ukraine around 1911 to 1913. *The Fixer* should certainly not be considered factual in every detail. Malamud did not mean for.....

## **CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES**

### **CHAPTER I**

#### **PART 1**

#### **Summary**

Yakov Bok first became aware of the incident when he noticed people hurrying toward the scene. The following day, he read in the newspaper that the body of a murdered twelve-year-old boy had been discovered in a nearby cave. His name was Zhenia Golov.

The cave was one and a half versts from the brickyard where Yakov lived and worked. The boy's body had many stab wounds. An anti-Semitic group, one of the Black Hundreds organizations, distributed pamphlets accusing the Jews of committing the murder for the purpose of getting the boy's blood to use in preparing Passover matzos. This allegation worried Yakov. He lived, at that time, in an area forbidden to Jews like himself. There was a threat of a new pogrom. Yakov knew first-hand about pogroms. He had experienced a pogrom when he was a child.

## Notes

This is not in chronological order. Time wise, this first bit goes near the end of Chapter II.

A verst is approximately equal to a kilometer, or approximately equal to two-thirds of a mile. It is a Russian measure of distance.

## PART 2

### Summary

Five months before the terrible discovery of the boy's body, as the time Yakov was to leave the shtetl approached, Yakov's father-in-law, Shmuel, came to him to say good-bye. It was November. Shmuel's daughter, Raisl, had been unfaithful to Yakov. Shmuel's favors to Yakov were all the dowry he had been able to give to his son-in-law.

Yakov and Shmuel had tea together. Shmuel offered Yakov the sugar cube half that was in his pocket. Yakov declined the offer. Shmuel commented that he knew Yakov blamed him for his daughter. Yakov denied that he blamed Shmuel, but did not deny that he was unhappy with what she had done. He was also unhappy because she was barren. When Shmuel commented on his lack of charity, Yakov told him that he himself had never received charity. His life had been difficult since the day he was born.

Yakov's mother had died within minutes of his birth. Then his father had been killed by anti-Semites when he was ten. He had been conscripted for the war between Russia and Japan, but it was over before he had reached any battlefield. The military had really not wanted him anyway. He had asthma. When he had returned to the shtetl, he had met Raisl. Shmuel reminded Yakov that Raisl had shared his misfortunes. The spin that Yakov put on it was that she had shared the misfortunes that she had caused. Yakov wished "black cholera" on Raisl and, in turn, an angry Shmuel wished the same on Yakov.

Yakov had not kept much as he had prepared to leave the shtetl. He took some books and the tools of his trade as a fixer. Shmuel, at the last moment, gave him some religious items that he would otherwise have left. He rode in a wagon pulled by a horse for which he had traded Raisl's cow. The horse had belonged to Shmuel. It was old and did not like to be hurried.

Shmuel wanted Yakov to stay in the shtetl, but Yakov had plans. He wanted a better life.

The fixer had trouble getting the horse to move until a dog came along and barked. They stopped for a while and ate. Yakov managed to get the horse moving again. Soon they came upon an old woman. They gave her a ride. When she thanked Yakov by saying "May Jesus bless you," he knew that she was a Christian and began to fear bad luck. A rock in the road caused a rear wheel on the wagon to break. The old woman trudged on without him and he pondered what to do,. He decided to try moving on three wheels. He succeeded for half a verst, but then, near the point the old woman had reached, the other rear wheel collapsed. Leaving the wagon, Yakov mounted the horse and passed the old woman, who was laying before a roadside crucifix.

Yakov road the horse through the dark countryside until he came to a river.

## Notes

A "shtetl" is a Jewish village.

“Treyf” means “unkosher.”

In this chapter, the wheel on the wagon gave Yakov trouble. Also, on the last page of the book, a wheel on the carriage in which Yakov was riding wobbled.

## PART 3

### Summary

At the river, the Dneiper, Yakov met a boatman. He took Yakov across the river and kept the horse in exchange. The boatman spoke against Jews. He spoke of what he foresaw being done to Jews in the future. Yakov dropped the prayer things that Shmuel had encouraged him to take into the river.

## CHAPTER II

### PART 1

Yakov felt strange in Kiev. He did not know his way around. He didn't want to be recognized as a Jew. He went to an Orthodox Church and left when a hunchback suggested that he join in. Afterward, he toured the Lavra catacombs and viewed religious relics including the hand of Saint Andrew. Others kissed.....

## OVERALL ANALYSES

### CHARACTER ANALYSIS

**Yakov Bok** - Yakov Bok is the main character. He struggles from the beginning to the end of the story. He leaves the shtetl and heads toward a better life in Kiev. A better life is not what he.....

**Shmuel** - Shmuel is Yakov's father-in-law. He is very serious about his religion. He provides .....

**Bibikov** - Bibikov is one person who believes that Yakov is innocent of the crime of which he is accused. He is the Investigating Magistrate for Cases of Extraordinary Importance. He wants the person who.....

**The Deputy Warden** - The Deputy Warden is the antagonist of the story. He is very .....

### PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

We, the readers, first read about what happened on the day that Zhenia Golov's body was found. Then, the author takes us back five months and tells us about that earlier time. At the end of.....

### THEMES - THEME ANALYSIS

**Freedom** - When Yakov Bok is in chains in prison refusing to say that he committed a crime that he did not commit, he is freer than he was in the shtetl. Malamud helps us to see this and, in doing so, he helps us to discover what real freedom is.

Prior to the beginning of *The Fixer*, Yakov Bok's thinking has been influenced by Baruch Spinoza, the Seventeenth Century philosopher. Like his character, the author appears to have.....  
Additional themes are analyzed in the complete study guide.

### AUTHOR'S STYLE

Bernard Malamud was a Jewish writer, but he was also a writer for all of mankind. In the Jewish experience he saw the human experience and wrote accordingly. Malamud wrote about seemingly .....

## POINT OF VIEW

*The Fixer* is written in the third- person limited point of view. The story-teller can see.....

## GENRE

*The Fixer* is historical fiction.

## IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS - QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The page numbers listed refer to *The Fixer* by Bernard Malamud, published by Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, New York, 1966.

The page numbers in parenthesis are from Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* published by Dell Publishing Co., Inc.

1.) *The son had lived through a pogrom when he was a schoolboy, a three-day Cossack raid. On the third morning when the houses were still smoldering and he was led, with a half dozen other children, out of a cellar where they had been hiding he saw a black-bearded Jew with a white sausage stuffed into his mouth, lying in the road on a pile of bloody feathers, a peasant's pig devouring his arm.* p. 4-5 (p. 10)

We learn that life has been difficult for Yakov Bok since he was young.

2.) *"So why, if you'll excuse me, did you stop sleeping with her for months? Is that a way to treat a wife?"*

*"It was more like weeks but how long can a man sleep with a barren woman? I got tired of trying."*

*"Why didn't you go to the rabbi when I begged you?"*

*"Let him stay out of my business and I'll stay out of his. All in all he's an ignorant man."*

*"Charity you were always short of," the peddler said.* Shmuel and Bok on p.6 (p. 11)

Here, in a few sentences, we are exposed to Yakov Bok's outlook on life. He is upset because his life is not going as he wants it to go. He does not think that religion will help to.....

Additional quotations are analyzed in the complete study guide.

## SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

**The Title of the Book** - As the story comes to an end and as we review the history of that period, we see that Yakov is playing a part in fixing the political situation. Not only is he a fixer, or repairman, in the sense....

Additional symbols are discussed in the complete study guide.

## IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

**Title:** *The Fixer*

**Author:** Bernard Malamud

**Date Published:** 1966

**Meaning of the Title:** "The Fixer" refers to Yakov Bok's occupation. It also refers to what he does in playing his part in the larger political happenings of his....

## STUDY QUESTIONS

Choose an answer for each of the following from choices A through J below.

1.) The ruler of Russia at the time of this story.

2.) A group that agitated against the Jews.....

A.) blood libel

- B.) carbolic acid
- C.) Dnieper
- D.) Kiev
- E.) Mendel Beilis
- F.) pogrom
- G.) shtetl
- H.) The Black Hundreds
- I.) three
- J.) Tsar Nicholas II

Key to above can be found immediately below the Essay Topic Ideas

## ESSAY TOPICS - BOOK REPORT IDEAS

1. How is *The Fixer* similar to *The Assistant*? How is it different?
2. How are things today different than they were in early Twentieth Century Russia? How are they similar?.....

Following is the answer key for the Study Questions which are found above the Essay Topic Ideas.

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

## MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUIZ

Answer key for the following questions is at the bottom.

- 1.) A verst is approximately the same length as
  - a.) a mile
  - b.) a yard
  - c.) a kilometer
- 2.) Kiev is in
  - a.) Poland
  - b.) Ukraine
  - c.) Romania.....

Answers to above 15 multiple-choice questions:

- 1.) c 2.) b 3.) a 4.) c 5.) c 6.) c 7.) b 8.) c 9.) c 10.) c 11.) b 12.) a 13.) c 14.) b 15.) c

## VOCABULARY / HISTORICAL REFERENCES

**Shtetl** - a small Jewish village in Eastern Europe.

**Pogrom** - an uprising of physical attacks and persecution against the Jewish people in a region or city.

**Hasid** - refers to: A member of a Jewish mystic movement founded in the 18th century in eastern Europe by Baal Shem Tov that reacted against Talmudic learning and maintained that .....

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