

**BOOK
CLUB
IN A BOX**

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE
FOR READERS AND LEADERS

DISCUSSES SAUL BELLOW'S NOVEL

**DECONSTRUCTING
HERZOG**

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BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents “Deconstructing Herzog”, the Novel Notes mini-guide for Saul Bellow’s novel **Herzog**

First published in the United States by the Viking Press 1964. The version used here is published by Penguin Books, Penguin Putnam, New York, 2003, and includes a preface selection by Philip Roth, titled “Rereading Saul Bellow”. ISBN: 0 14 24.3729 8

Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the paperback text described above. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged. This discussion companion for Herzog has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of bookclub-in-a-box. Marilyn Herbert is a graduate of the University of Toronto, Canada and has taught English language skills to students at all levels: elementary school to college. Currently, Marilyn organizes and conducts literary presentations, workshops and discussions for private and public groups. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box Novel Notes mini-guide for **Herzog**

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Saul Bellow's Herzog

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BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Readers and Leaders Guide

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is clearly and effectively organized to give you information and ideas for a lively discussion, as well as to present the major highlights of the novel. The format, with a Table of Contents, allows you to pick and choose the specific points you wish to talk about. It does not have to be used in any prescribed order. In fact, it is meant to support, not determine, your discussion.

You Choose What to Use.

You may find that some information is repeated in more than one section and may be cross-referenced so as to provide insight on the same idea from different angles.

The guide is formatted to give you extra space to make your own notes.

How to Begin

Relax and look forward to enjoying your bookclub.

With Bookclub-in-a-Box as your behind the scenes support, there is little for you to do in the way of preparation.

Some readers like to review the guide after reading the novel; some before. Either way, the guide is all you will need as a companion for your discussion. You may find that the guide's interpretation, information, and background have sparked other ideas not included.

Having read the novel and armed with Bookclub-in-a-Box, you will be well prepared to lead or guide or listen to the discussion at hand.

Lastly, if you need some more 'hands-on' support, feel free to contact us. (See Contact Information)

What to Look For

Each Bookclub-in-a-Box guide is divided into easy-to-use sections, which include points on characters, themes, writing style and structure, literary or historical background, author information, and other pertinent features unique to the novel being discussed. These may vary slightly from guide to guide.

INTERPRETATION OF EACH NOVEL REFLECTS THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX TEAM.

Do We Need to Agree?

THE ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION IS NO.

If we have sparked a discussion or a debate on certain points, then we are happy. We invite you to share your group's alternative findings and experiences with us. You can respond on-line at our website or contact us through our Contact Information. We would love to hear from you.

Discussion Starters

There are as many ways to begin a bookclub discussion as there are members in your group. If you are an experienced group, you will already have your favorite ways to begin. If you are a newly formed group or a group looking for new ideas, here are some suggestions.

Ask for people's impressions of the novel. (This will give you some idea about which parts of the unit to focus on.)

- Identify a favorite or major character.
- Identify a favorite or major idea.
- Begin with a powerful or pertinent quote. (not necessarily from the novel)
- Discuss the historical information of the novel. (not applicable to all novels)
- If this author is familiar to the group, discuss the range of his/her work and where this novel stands in that range.
- Use the discussion topics and questions in the Bookclub-in-a-Box guide.

If you have further suggestions for discussion starters, be sure to share them with us and we will share them with others.

Above All, Enjoy Yourself

INTRODUCTION

All Novel Notes mini-guides are intended to acquaint the reader with the essence of a novel and its author in an introductory form. Most of the regular Bookclub-in-a-Box categories are present, but some are omitted due to lack of space. Each Novel Notes guide will contain 10-20 pages of thought-provoking material, exclusive of the title page, the contents page, and the Readers and Leaders Guide.

Enjoy this mini-guide introduction to Saul Bellow and his novel, **Herzog**.

Novel Quickline

There is virtually no plot nor action in this or any of Bellow's other novels that fits the usual, traditional definition of a literary plot. The story of **Herzog** consists of Moses Herzog asking himself and everyone else, including God, innumerable questions so that he can understand all that has happened to him to date.

He writes endless letters, composed mostly in his mind. If he can get the answers he needs, he feels he might be able to figure out his future. The novel opens and ends with Herzog lying down in the same prone position. The only changes in the 371 pages of the novel lie in Herzog's musing observations and his amusing comments.

Moses Herzog's status is that he has been married twice, first to Daisy with whom he has a son, Marco, and then to Madeleine, with whom he has a daughter, June. When the novel begins, Herzog is attempting to deal with the end of his marriage to his second wife, Madeleine, who has taken as her lover, Herzog's friend, Valentine Gerspach. Herzog escapes into his thoughts and memories, which include various past paramours of his own. Herzog, though lonely, is not quite alone. He can take refuge in the willing arms of the voluptuous Ramona, if he so chooses.

Keys to the Novel

- To understand Bellow is to understand him through his characters, and vice-versa. He is his own hero/protagonist. His characters, Herzog especially, are all archetypes of self-absorbed, anguished, ironic, schlemiels (unlucky souls) who triumph in the end because they retain enough of the essential values that make them human, if not heroic.



**Thanks for previewing this
Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion guide.**

**If you'd like to purchase the full guide in
print or PDF format, just visit:**

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