

BOOK CLUB IN A BOX

Bookclub-in-a-Box presents the discussion companion for Philip Roth's novel The Human Stain

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Quotations used in this guide have been taken from the text of the paperback edition of **The Human Stain**. All information taken from other sources is acknowledged.

This discussion companion for **The Human Stain** has been prepared and written by Marilyn Herbert, originator of Bookclub-in-a-Box. Marilyn Herbert, B.Ed., is a teacher, librarian, speaker and writer. Bookclub-in-a-Box is a unique guide to current fiction and classic literature intended for book club discussions, educational study seminars, and personal pleasure. For more information about the Bookclub-in-a-Box team, visit our website.

Bookclub-in-a-Box discussion companion for The Human Stain

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CONTACT INFORMATION: SEE BACK COVER.

BOOKCLUB-IN-A-BOX

Philip Roth's *The Human Stain*

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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

Suggested Beginnings

Novel Quickline

Keys to the Novel

INTRODUCTION

Suggested Beginnings

1. The structure of Roth's novel is peculiar and may strike first-time readers as disconcerting.

How does Roth connect the historical events in the first section to the story of his fictional characters? What greater parallel is Roth trying to draw between the people of the past and the present, and how is this related to the concept of the "human stain"?

2. Many find Roth's writing verbose and confusing. The relationship of an author to his work is not explicit because Roth does not write with his readers in mind. Instead, he writes for the benefit of his own self-exploration, a fact which is evident in his stream-of-consciousness style.

How does Roth use the characters to explore issues directly affecting him, such as religious and cultural assimilation? Discuss Roth's interconnected relationship with Nathan Zuckerman.

4. Consider the significance of the image of the “human stain” in light of popular culture and mass media.

How does Roth use the Clinton/Lewinsky scandal of 1998 to illustrate this point?

5. The power of language is an important element in the novel.

Discuss Roth’s views about the misuse of language as well as the importance of words and labels to human behavior and progress.

6. Philip Roth has an extraordinary ability to layer irony; the character Nelson Primus is a good example.

Consider whether Primus is black or white. Discuss the clues that Roth lays down to demonstrate this irony.

Novel Quickline

Coleman Silk is an all-American success story. Born to working class parents and raised in Newark, New Jersey, Coleman goes on to be a star athlete, does his military service in the navy, graduates with honors from university, and becomes a professor of classic literature at Athena College. He marries Iris Gittelman and has four children, who also achieve successful professional careers.

All of this takes place before the book opens. By the time we meet Coleman, his life is in shambles: Iris is dead, his children are no longer speaking to him, he has left his post at the university under ignominious circumstances, and he is having an affair with a much younger woman, whose ex-husband is trying to kill him.

How and why this occurs and what this has to do with ex-President Bill Clinton is fascinating reading.



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

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print or PDF format, just visit:**

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