

## A Summer's Reading



**Summary:** **A Summers Reading** is about a young man; George Stoyonovich, feels like people do not respect him in his neighborhood because he does not have a job and has not finished school. George feels like school was a waste of time because it did not teach about important aspects of life. Then George runs into a man that he respects, George exaggerates the reading he has done and soon people find out. George begins to feel respected in the neighborhood after people find out he reads.

### **Some background:**

- \* In a typical immigrant neighborhood in New York City, everyone tries to succeed.
- \* The key word is proper education, while moving through a dynamic process of growing up and taking responsibility .
- \* Reading books in the summer is what George would like to do... But, will he?

### **Major Characters:**

- o **George Stoyonovich:** The meaning of Stoyonovich in Polish is "Staying in one place". George is a nineteen-year-old high-school dropout living aimlessly in the working-class neighborhood in Brooklyn. He "considered registering in a night high school" but "he did not like the idea of the teachers always telling him what to do. He felt they had not respected him."
- o **Sophie Stoyonovich:** George's elder sister, a "tall bony girl of twenty-three" who works at a cafeteria in the Bronx. She has to take care of the house because their mother was dead. She sometimes reads "good books."
- o **Mr. Cattanzara:** The meaning of Cattanzara in Italian is "Chained to a place". "Mr. C. is a stocky, bald-headed man who worked in a change booth on an IRT [subway] station," living on the next block to George's. He reads the *New York Times* "from the first page to the last"; in short, he is the "intellectual" of the neighborhood.

### Chronology of Events:

- o *Nearly four years ago*, George Stoyonovich had quit high school "on an impulse" when he was sixteen.
- o "*This summer*" [the beginning of the story] is a hard time for jobs and George, now "close to twenty", has none. Having no money to spend, he stays off the streets and spends most of the day in his room. Sophie urges him to read some "worthwhile books" but he is in no mood for them: "Lately he couldn't stand made-up stories, they got on his nerves."
- o *One evening*, while on his walk, George meets Mr. Cattanzara coming home very late from work. George tells him that he is reading one hundred great books in the library list. He wants Mr. Cattanzara to respect him.
- o "*After that*", George does nothing different from usual but he finds the people in the neighborhood start calling him "a good boy." He feels himself being respected because of the books he is *not* reading.
- o "*As the summer went on* George felt in a good mood about things." He occasionally buys paperback books but he never gets around to reading them. Yet, "he could feel approval on all sides." "*For a few weeks*" he talks only once with Mr. Cattanzara, who says nothing about the books. George decides to stay away from "the change maker."
- o "*Then one night*" George sees Mr. Cattanzara, a little drunk, walking toward him. He hands a nickel to George, saying "Go buy yourself a lemon ice, George," as he used to do when George was a "squirt." Asked to name one book on the list he has read so far, George cannot answer. After saying, "George, don't do what I did," Mr. Cattanzara leaves.
- o "*The next night*" George is afraid to leave his room. Sophie finds out that his brother is not reading a single book on the list and calls him a "bum."
- o "*One night*," after staying in his room "*for almost a week*" George sneaks to the park unable to stand the heat. Unexpectedly, he finds people still friendly to him. A man on a street corner asks him if it is true that "he had finished reading so many books."
- o "*After a couple of days*," George sees Mr. Cattanzara again. He feels that Mr. Cattanzara "had started the rumor that he had finished all the books."
- o "*One evening in the fall*," George runs to the library and "though he was struggling to control an inward trembling, he easily counted off a hundred, then sat down at a table to read."

## A Summer's Reading - Literary Analysis

Respect is a very dominant and important factor in the story of Bernard Malamud, "A Summer's Reading." The reach for respect from the people around him causes a lot of dilemma within the main character, George Stoyonovic. And those dilemmas led to consequences that George hated. George, a high school drop out, can not get any job during one summer. He decides to read the magazines found at home. But when he met Mr. Cattanzara, he immediately lies about the hundred books he is reading, in order for Mr. Cattanzara to respect him as well as to be proud of him.

Respect is a form of acknowledgement of one's existence. **Respect is very important to everybody. Respect also gives a person a sense of confidence that he is not a failure and contradicts the idea that he is not good enough.** People want respect because they want others to know how good they are. Though everybody wants it, most people often take it for granted. The irony of it all is that people wants it so much that they would do anything just to get it.

In the story, the theme *Respect is very important for everybody* was shown a couple of times. An example of these scenes is when George was contemplating whether or not he should attend the night classes. *"He has considered registering in a night high school, only he did not like the idea of teachers always telling him what to do. He felt that they had not respected him."* He decides that since he has nothing to do at home, attending night-class would be great and it would help him catch up on the lessons he has missed. But that the idea of teachers telling him what to do causes George to think twice. He thinks that when his teachers tell him what to do or should not do it shows a lack of respect on the teachers' part. He then feels that he is not good enough and loses confidence in himself. But in reality, when people tell you what to do, it means that they are concerned about you and that they know that you can do better but it does not really mean that you are not good enough as a person. They are actually acknowledging your abilities and your capabilities which also acknowledge your existence. George searches for respect because it is where he gets the confidence that will enable him to move on forward with his life.

Another instance in the story where it shows respect is very important is when George tells Mr. Cattanzara that he is reading a hundred books for the summer. He wants Mr. Cattanzara to respect him that he is willing to

lie in order to achieve that respect. He wants Mr. Cattanzara that to know that he is more than just a boy who dropped out of school and who can not get a decent job. And that he can also do things which people around him can be proud of. When he found out that his neighbors knew what he was doing for the summer, George instantly became confident that he is not a nobody anymore in the community. People in his community respect him now. But what did George do with the respect shown to him? He did not fulfill his "end of the bargain". He thinks that being respected is enough already but he must learn that he should "walk the talk". He must do what he says he will do because if the people finds out that he is just pure "talk" and no concrete actions are being done, people will start to doubt him and eventually George will lose the respect that his neighbors gave him.

Ultimately, Mr. Cattanzara senses that George was not telling him the whole truth. He knew that George really did not finish reading all those books as what he has said he has done. Maybe the reason why Mr. Cattanzara did not told the others about George's lie is because he knows that George did not want to lose the admiration that the people has for him. And he thought that he could help George by confronting him himself. Though George lied to Mr. Cattanzara, he still respected George and decides to confront him privately instead of telling the whole neighborhood what George has done.

People find it absurdly important to become renowned and, at its very base, respected because they feel confident when they are being respected. People are ready to do anything in order to gain the respect that they want even to the extent of lying and betraying the trust of a certain person just like what the main character did in the short story. George's search for respect led him to lying to the only person who listened to him when he was feeling sad and down. Respect is, indeed, essential in any relationship. Respect gives a person a sense of self-esteem that he could do anything because there is someone who respects and trusts him. But in searching for respect, one must remember that he should achieve it in the proper and honest way.

**Bernard Malamud**



Bernard Malamud

## Introduction

Bernard Malamud is the Chekhov of the urban Jewish milieu. Like the elegant short stories of the great Russian author, Malamud's writings were deeply rooted in social concerns. He was raised in Brooklyn, New York, and the experiences of hard-working immigrants were particularly important to him. Linguistically, Malamud depicted this world using a *mélange* of English and Yiddish, giving his stories a unique and powerful rhythm. The language further served as a commentary on the cultural mosaic that was (and still is) New York. Within this often-bleak landscape, Malamud saw glimmers of hope and possibility. In doing so, he managed to create honest depictions of the Jewish immigrant experience with lyrical touches that suggested the potential the future might hold.

## Essential Facts

1. Although Malamud is not particularly known for sports writing or anything resembling Americana, one of his most loved works is the baseball story *The Natural*.
2. Malamud earned a Pulitzer Prize in 1967 for his book *The Fixer*. It was turned into an Oscar-nominated film starring Alan Bates the following year.
3. Like many writers, Malamud began his career writing short stories, which were later published in collections. He put out dozens of shorts throughout his career and won an O. Henry Award in the late 1960s.
4. As a professor, Malamud taught at Oregon State University and Bennington College.
5. For the past twenty years, the PEN/Malamud Award has recognized achievement in short-form writing. Notable recipients include celebrated novelist John Updike and the prolific Joyce Carol Oates.