

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS READING GUIDE

Congratulations! You're about to read a good book. Or some of it. You don't have to read every part of it (see below), but I do want you to read it like a writer.

This book was written by Philip Roth and published in 1959, early in Roth's career. The title is admittedly not so great, but Philip Roth was a Big Deal Writer, one you should know about, and this book is one of his best. He was Jewish and from New Jersey. This is important because much of what you're about to read concerns Jews from New Jersey. If that sounds foreign to you, it really shouldn't – you'll encounter plenty that seems familiar.

So what does it mean to read like a writer? Well, it's kind of like if you were a chef eating at a nice restaurant with three other people, one of whom is a food critic, one of whom is a professor at a culinary institute, and one of whom is just a dude who likes to eat. The dude who likes to eat might say, "Hey, this duck is awesome," and leave it at that. The critic might explain *why* he thinks it's so awesome and use bad metaphors like "this duck hits the palette like an explosion of citrus delights," and the professor might give us the historical context for the duck, explaining that the duck's been inspired by all the Asian fusion ducks that have come before this duck. But the chef (you, the writer, in this metaphor) can both enjoy the duck *and* wonder how it was made. How did they prep the duck? he might ask. How did they cook it? For how long? What's in the sauce?

One of our first questions, reading as writers, might be: what even is this book? And I can answer that: this book is a novella (also called "Goodbye, Columbus") plus a handful of short stories. What is a novella? It's like a short novel. Some of you AP Creative Writers will decide to write a novella for your final project. Others will write a collection of short stories. But I wonder how many novellas you've read before. How many short stories. Probably not all that many, especially if we exclude all the boring and/or weird ones you've been assigned in English class (just kidding – they're all brilliant and interesting). Maybe – if you like Roth's writing – you even can use his stories as models for your own.

As you read, think about where you're getting confused or where you're starting to understand. What kind of narrators do we have? Which characters do we meet first? How do the stories build and build (or not) to some kind of climax? How long is the novella? How long are the short stories? (Surprisingly long, you might think.) Just like a chef, you will hopefully be able to savor the meal while also maintaining a curiosity about how it was made.

And that's all for now. You have your book. Go read it!

Please read: "Goodbye, Columbus," "The Conversion of the Jews," "Defender of the Faith," and "You Can't Tell a Man by the Song he Sings." **You can skip the other two stories.** If you're feeling confused in the early going of any of the stories, you have permission to consult the plot summaries on Wikipedia, just to get your bearings.