**A Perfect Day for Bananafish**, by J.D. Salinger

**In A Nutshell**
American author J.D. Salinger is most famous for his novel *Catcher in the Rye*, published in 1951. But before the infamous Holden Caulfield came the Glass family – the focus of many of Salinger's most well-known short stories.

The Glass family is a fictional creation of Salinger, featuring seven children of staggering intelligence, wisdom, and precociousness. These characters pop up again and again in Salinger's short stories, either as the main characters or as peripheral connections. And it all starts with "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," the story of Seymour Glass, the oldest of the Glass children.

Salinger wrote "Bananafish" in 1948 when he was still relatively unknown. In the story, Seymour Glass, just back from his service in World War II, struggles with mental illness while vacationing with his wife in Florida. The story explores themes of innocence, youth, and spirituality (a reflection of Salinger's growing interest in Zen Buddhism). The folks at *New Yorker* were so impressed with the story that they published it immediately and signed a "right of first refusal" for any more of Salinger's stories. Thus Salinger was launched to fame – long before *Catcher in the Rye*.

"Bananafish" is famous not only as the beginning of the Glass family saga, but also for its highly enigmatic ending. We won't spoil it for you by giving anything away here, but the
story's shocking and perhaps confusing conclusion has left critics debating Salinger's intentions, not to mention the real meaning of the story. Now that we've thoroughly enticed you, you can get to reading the story already.

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Big Picture Study Questions

1. How does the Seymour of Salinger's other Glass family stories differ from the Seymour of "Perfect Day for Bananafish"?

2. In what ways is Seymour similar to Holden Caulfield, the protagonist of Salinger's novel Catcher in the Rye? Why do these two characters, similar in many ways, end up in such different places?

3. There are a number of references to other writers and literary works in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" (see "Shout Outs" for a full list). How do these other works or authors inform and comment on this story?

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