

“A Perfect Day for Bananafish” by J.D. Salinger

*The use of Carroll’s poem “Life is but a dream” is optional for this lesson.

Pre Reading: Journal Prompt

When was the last time you felt like a little kid? What, or when, do you think the moment is when someone goes from child to adult?

Pre Reading Supplementary Piece: “Life is but a dream” by Lewis Carroll

A boat, beneath a sunny sky
Lingering onward dreamily
In an evening of July--

Children three that nestle near,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Pleased a simple tale to hear--

Long has faded that sunny sky;
Echoes fade and memories die;
Autumn frosts have slain July.

Still she haunts me, phantomwise,
Alice moving under skies
Never seen by waking eyes.

Children yet, the tale to hear,
Eager eye and willing ear,
Lovingly shall nestle near.

In a Wonderland they lie,
Dreaming as the days go by,
Dreaming as the summers die;

Ever drifting down the stream--
Lingering in the golden gleam--
Life, what is it but a dream?

Poem background: Lewis Carroll was visiting with friends in Oxford during his summers away from school. The Liddell family had a son, Carroll's friend, and three daughters, the youngest of which was the inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland*. Alice was six or seven years old at the time and Carroll was in his mid 20s. Carroll would take Alice and her two older sisters on boat rides while telling them fantastical stories; it was Alice who asked him to write the stories down. The story goes that Alice's family did not like Carroll spending so much time with their youngest daughter; they thought he was originally courting the eldest. So, at the end of one summer, the parents told Carroll not to visit anymore. This poem is symbolic of the summers spent with Alice and her family, and the fall when those visits ended ("autumn frosts have slain july")

Lewis Carroll was not a confident man. He was very shy and suffered from a stutter when in company. He did not like to socialize with other adults. He was a mathematician and a photographer, very calculating and logical. However, he had a special relationship with children. He preferred their company, and when talking to them his stutter went away and he felt at ease.

Poem -> Story transition

Just like Carroll, the main character in "Bananafish" prefers the company of a child to his own wife or family. In the story, we'll learn more about the character's background. However, it is up to us as readers to interpret the reason for the ending. While reading, pay special attention to the character development of Seymour.

During Reading:

Pause at certain moments to reflect and predict what is going to happen next. Pause especially at moments that directly or indirectly describes Seymour's character.

Post Reading Activity:

Show three interpretations on board. Ask for textual evidence for each interpretation from students and have students defend the interpretation they think is correct or another interpretation they had themselves (can be done in discussion, writing, or combination).

<http://whyweweread.com/materials/27/BananafishInterpretations.pdf>