

“A Perfect Day for Bananafish” Discussion Questions

1. Describe Muriel. Although she doesn't actually do anything in the story other than talk with her mother, what role do you think she plays?
2. Describe Muriel's mother. How does she appear at the beginning of the story? Has your perspective on her changed by the end of the story?
3. Describe Sybil and discuss the significance of her interactions with Seymour.
4. “Little Black Sambo” was a popular children's story first published in 1899 that originally featured cartoonish caricatures of dark-skinned people. The original version of the story eventually lost popularity because of its racially insensitive imagery and title. Here is a summary of the plot from Wikipedia:

Sambo is a South Indian boy who lives with his father and mother, named Black Jumbo and Black Mumbo, respectively. Sambo encounters four hungry tigers, and surrenders his colourful new clothes, shoes, and umbrella so they will not eat him. The tigers are vain and each thinks he is better dressed than the others. They chase each other around a tree until they are reduced to a pool of melted butter. Sambo then recovers his clothes and his mother, Black Mumbo, makes pancakes out of the butter.

What do you think the significance of “Little Black Sambo” within the story is? Keep in mind that “Bananafish” is set in 1948, and mainstream white perceptions of “Little Black Sambo” had begun changing by that time.

5. The name *Sybil* is derived from the term used to refer to a group of female oracles (*sibyls*) in ancient Greece. Do you think this name has any symbolic or thematic significance in the story?
6. What are “bananafish,” and what do you think their significance in the story is?
7. Describe Seymour based on others' descriptions of him and on his own words and actions. What do we know about his background? Why do you think he kills himself?