Nine Stories Study Guide

Nine Stories by J. D. Salinger

BOOKRAGS

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A Perfect Day for Bananafish

A Perfect Day for Bananafish Summary

Muriel Glass is sitting in a Florida hotel room, waiting for a long distance operator to call her back. While she waits, she reads a magazine and paints her fingernails. When the phone rings, she does not rush to answer it, taking her time to move an ashtray to the nightstand where the phone sits. On the fifth or sixth ring, she answers the phone.

The telephone operator announces that her call to New York has gone through. The caller is Muriel's mother, who is worried because she has not heard from her daughter since she left New York for Florida. Muriel becomes slightly impatient with her mother, who repeatedly asks if Muriel is "all right." She asks Muriel who drove, and is startled when Muriel answers that her husband, Seymour, drove. Muriel assures her mother that Seymour drove safely. Her mother asks if he tried any "funny business with the trees". Muriel repeats that he drove safely, and alludes to an earlier accident, apparently involving Seymour, her parents' car, and a tree.

Muriel's mother continues to ask about Seymour's behavior, and it becomes clear that he has been acting oddly. She tells Muriel that Muriel's father has spoken to a psychiatrist about Seymour's behavior. According to the psychiatrist, Muriel's mother claims, Seymour should not have been released from the Army hospital where he was being treated, and that he may be dangerous. Muriel responds that there is a psychiatrist at the hotel where she is staying who observed Seymour playing piano in the lobby and asked if he had been "sick". In between digressions on the subjects of fashion and Muriel's sunburn, Muriel's mother grills her on the details of what the psychiatrist at the hotel thinks of Seymour. Muriel dismisses her questions. She protests that her mother talks about Seymour as if he is a "maniac". All he does, Muriel tells her mother, is lie on the beach with his bathrobe tightly closed.

Muriel becomes increasingly impatient with her mother's worried questioning. She tells her mother that she is not afraid of Seymour, but promises that she will call her parents if anything "funny" happens. She hangs up the phone.

The scene shifts to the beach near the hotel, where two women are engaged in light conversation while one of them rubs suntan oil on her young daughter's shoulders. The girl is about five years old, and her name is Sybil Carpenter. Sybil is repeating the name Seymour Glass as "see more glass", to the annoyance of her mother. Her mother tells her to run and play, and Sybil takes off across the beach.

She runs straight to a man lying on his back on the sand, wrapped in a bathrobe. It is Seymour. She startles him when she asks if he is going in the water. In his surprise, Seymour's right hand reaches into his bathrobe. He relaxes when he see Sybil, and turns over on his stomach. They apparently have spoken before, and he addresses her

my name. Sybil asks where Muriel is, and Seymour gives a sarcastic response that she could be in "one of a thousand places".

Seymour addresses Sybil in a teasing, adult tone, like a young man addressing his girlfriend. Sybil petulantly complains that Seymour let another little girl sit on the bench by him as he played piano the night before. Seymour responds that he pretended the other little girl was Sybil.

Sybil suggests they go in the water, and Seymour agrees. He takes off his robe, revealing blue bathing trunks and very pale skin. As he picks up a rubber float, he tells Sybil that they will see if they can catch a bananafish. She says she has never heard of bananafish. Seymour responds with mock surprise. Their discussion wanders as they wade into the water. Seymour gently chides Sybil for having tormented a small dog, an action he witnessed previously.

They wade into the water and Seymour lifts Sybil onto the float, placing her on her stomach. He gently pushes her along, telling her to keep an eye out for bananafish. He tells her about the habits of bananafish. They swim into bananaholes and eat bananas until they get banana fever and die, he tells her.

A wave approaches them, and Seymour takes Sybil's ankles, pushing her and the float up over the wave. She is splashed by the water, and screams in delight. She tells Seymour excitedly that she saw a bananafish with six bananas in its mouth. Seymour responds by suddenly kissing Sybil on the bottom of one of her feet. Sybil reacts indignantly and Seymour announces that it is time to get out of the water.

Sybil protests mildly, but says goodbye and runs off back toward the hotel once they reach the sand. Seymour puts his robe back on, picks up the wet float, and begins to walk back as well. Once in the hotel, Seymour boards an elevator up to his room. On the elevator, he somewhat angrily and insultingly accuses a woman of looking at his feet. She insists that the elevator operator let her out immediately.

Seymour gets out on the fifth floor and lets himself into his room. He glances as Muriel, who is sleeping in one of the twin beds in the room. He opens one of the suitcases and digs out a pistol. He checks it for bullets and cocks it. Then Seymour sits down on the other twin bed and shoots himself through the right temple.

A Perfect Day for Bananafish Analysis

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" slowly builds tension until its dramatic, abrupt ending. Muriel Glass's conversation with her mother gradually reveals that her husband, Seymour Glass, was hospitalized after his service in World War II and has been suffering from mental problems. His odd behavior is referred to only obliquely through the dialogue, making it seem even stranger as the reader imagines the details. Muriel's conversation with her mother swings rapidly from the serious subject of Seymour's mental health to shallow conversation about dresses and hats. Muriel's mother is

worried that Seymour will hurt Muriel, Muriel insists that he is harmless. It will turn out that both are wrong.

The second half of the story deals with Seymour directly. Just as Muriel describes, he is lying on the beach wrapped tightly in his robe. He is discovered there by the young girl, Sybil. Seymour's conversation with Sybil is playful, but also slightly disturbing, given the earlier description of his inappropriate behavior. He mockingly speaks to her as a young man might speak to a jilted lover when she becomes petulant about his spending time with another young girl.

So it is revealed that Seymour has spent time with other small girls at the hotel, and has apparently spent time with Sybil on this part of the beach, which is outside the area reserved for hotel guests, and far from her mother. When Seymour takes her into the water on the rubber float, the tension builds. His story about "bananafish" is a playful, childlike story, but also has a sexual undertone. His sudden kiss of Sybil's foot surprises both Sybil and the reader, and its meaning is uncertain. Seymour's later insulting words to the woman who he imagines is staring at his own feet suggests the character may have some kind of fixation.

Seymour's deliberate movements after returning to the hotel room suggests that his actions on the beach and the rest of his odd behavior may have been similarly deliberate, if misdirected. Salinger has used the possibility of Seymour harming Muriel or Sybil to build tension in the story, and after Seymour removes the gun from the suitcase it is uncertain until the last few words in the story whether he intends to shoot his wife or himself, or neither.

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is one of several stories that Salinger wrote about the fictional Glass family. Seymour is mentioned in another story later in the book, "Down at the Dinghy".

Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut

Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut Summary

It is nearly three pm as Mary Jane, after having gotten a little lost, arrives at Eloise's house. Mary Jane has part of the day off work, and is visiting Eloise for lunch. She is late. Eloise tells her that the lunch was burned, and Mary Jane responds that she had stopped for something to eat on the way, anyway. It is winter, and it has been snowing.

The women are former college roommates with a particularly strong connection which comes from the fact that neither one graduated. Eloise had left school after being caught in an elevator with a soldier, and Mary Jane left college to get married to an airman. Mary Jane's marriage had lasted three months.

They sit down in Eloise's living room and begin to drink highball cocktails, falling into an easy conversation about their days at school and people they used to know. Their conversation is disjointed and frequently interrupted as they search for and light cigarettes. Eloise makes a few disparaging remarks about her maid, who she says is in the kitchen, reading. Eloise continues to mix cocktails, although Mary Jane protests weakly. As the two women drink more, the conversation becomes looser and they begin laughing. The conversation continues to center on people they knew in college, and is generally derogatory. Eloise makes mention of her husband, Lew, and of the fact that she does not get along with his mother.

Eloise interrupts their conversation when she hears her young daughter Ramona enter the house. She calls to her to shut the door and to have Grace, the maid, take off her galoshes for her. Ramona is heard calling for someone named Jimmy to come along with her.

Mary Jane indicates that she hasn't seen Ramona in some time. She asks Eloise which parent she resembles, and refers to an eye operation that Ramona has had. When Ramona enters the room, Mary Jane begins to effusively ask her questions . Ramona gives brief answers while scratching herself and picking her nose. Her mother scolds her and prods her to answer Mary Jane's enthusiastic questions.

Mary Jane asks where Jimmy is, the boy she heard Ramona call to. Ramona answers that he is here. Mary Jane asks Eloise who Jimmy is. Eloise rolls her eyes and says Jimmy is Ramona's "beau". Mary Jane becomes even more enthusiastic with her questions about Jimmy. She asks Ramona his full name. Prodded by her mother, Ramona responds that it is Jimmy Jimmereeno. Mary Jane again asks where Jimmy is, and Ramona answers that he is here, and that she is holding his hand.

Confused, Mary Jane looks to Eloise, who does not explain. Mary Jane slowly realizes that Jimmy is imaginary, and then pretends to address him directly. Eloise tells her that Jimmy will not answer her. She prompts Ramona to tell Mary Jane what Jimmy looks

like. He has green eyes and black hair, no parents, freckles and a sword, Ramona tells her . Mary Jane becomes even more enthusiastic, remarking that it is "marvelous". Eloise responds wearily that she hears about Jimmy all the time, and that Ramona even sleeps on one side of the bed to make room for Jimmy.

Ramona asks to go back outside to play. Eloise responds that she only just came in. Ramona explains that Jimmy has left his sword outside. Eloise implies that Jimmy frequently leaves his sword outside. She gives her permission with a motherly warning to stay out of the street, and Ramona leaves. Eloise jumps up to refill their cocktails. Mary Jane protests again that she must go because her boss is expecting her, but Eloise convinces her to call and tell him she cannot come.

The scene moves ahead a couple hours. The women have continued to drink and are talking expansively. Eloise is lying on the floor; Mary Jane is spread out on the couch. Eloise is nostalgically telling Mary Jane about Walt, an old boyfriend. Everything Walt used to do made her laugh, she says. He was nice, she says. She relates a story of a time when they were running for a bus and she fell and twisted her ankle. He held her ankle sweetly and called it Uncle Wiggily.

Mary Jane asks if Eloise's husband Lew has a sense of humor. Eloise replies that he laughs at cartoons and jokes, but otherwise is not funny. Mary Jane responds that a sense of humor isn't everything. Eloise disagrees, and implies that is especially isn't true when one's sex life is lacking.

Eloise continues to reminisce about Walt, and Mary Jane asks if she has ever told Lew about him. Eloise responds that she started to once, but that Lew put her off. She advises Mary Jane that should she ever get married again, she should never tell her husband about any of the other men she has known. Husbands want to feel as if they are the only man their wives have ever known, she warns. You cannot treat them as if they are intelligent.

To this, Mary Jane asks if Lew is not intelligent. Eloise responds impatiently, and asks to drop the subject. Mary Jane asks her why she married Lew.

Eloise responds somewhat bitterly that he told her that he loved the novels of Jane Austen. She later came to find out that he had never read any of them, and that his favorite author was actually a little-known adventure author. Mary Jane chides Eloise for being so critical of Lew. She asks Eloise if she ever intends to tell Lew that Walt was killed. Surely, she suggests, if he knew that he had been killed he wouldn't be jealous. Eloise responds that he would be even more jealous and that she would never tell him. If she did, however, she'd tell him he was killed in action, she says.

Mary Jane asks Eloise to tell her how Walt was really killed. Eloise is reluctant, but finally admits that he was killed while packing a Japanese gas stove that exploded in his face. Eloise begins to cry. As Mary Jane seeks to console her, Ramona is heard coming back into the house. Eloise asks Mary Jane to tell the maid to give Ramona her dinner in the kitchen. Mary Jane stumbles out, and returns shortly, with Ramona stomping

ahead in her galoshes. Mary Jane says she will not let her take off her galoshes. The maid is in the bathroom, Ramona says. Eloise calls Ramona to her and begins to take off her galoshes. Mary Jane informs Eloise that Jimmy has been run over. Eloise is surprised and asks Ramona what happened to Jimmy. Ramona confirms that he was run over and killed.

Eloise feels Ramona's forehead and pronounces that she feels feverish. She instructs her to tell Grace to give her dinner upstairs and then put her straight to bed. Ramona leaves the room, Eloise lights another cigarette, and asks Mary Jane to fix another drink and to bring the bottle back with her.

The story moves forward a few hours in time. It is a little after seven p.m. and is dark when the telephone rings. Eloise gets up from the window seat to answer it. Mary Jane is asleep face-down on the couch, and does not waken when the phone rings.

It is Eloise's husband, Lew, calling from the train station, wanting her to meet him there to bring him home. Eloise explains that she cannot meet him, saying that Mary Jane is parked in the way and cannot find the key to her car to move it. Eloise somewhat bitterly suggests that Lew form a troop with the other commuters and march home. She hangs up, returns to the window seat, and finishes the last remaining Scotch in the bottle.

Grace, the maid, turns on the light in the dining room, startling Eloise. She tells Grace that her husband will be late tonight and to hold dinner until eight o'clock. Grace politely asks Eloise if it is all right if Grace's husband stays the night in her room instead of going back to New York because the weather has become worse. Eloise firmly responds that her house is not a hotel, and that Grace's husband, who is waiting in the kitchen, cannot stay.

Eloise makes her way upstairs to Ramona's room, picking up one of her galoshes off the steps and throwing it forcefully over the banister. She enters Ramona's room and turns on the light. She sees her daughter, sleeping on one far side of the bed, nearly falling off. She wakes her and demands to know why she is sleeping there when she said that Jimmy Jimmereeno had been killed. Ramona explains that she does not want to squash Mickey Mickeranno.

Eloise is frantic. She shrieks at Ramona to get into the center of the bed at once. Ramona is terrified, and does not move. Eloise takes her by the ankles and physically moves her to the center of the bed and orders her to go to sleep. Ramona closes her eyes.

Eloise turns off the light, but stands in the doorway for a moment. Suddenly she rushes to the nightstand where Ramona's eyeglasses are neatly folded. She takes the glasses and presses them against her cheek. She is crying and repeats, "Poor Uncle Wiggily," over and over. She puts the glasses back on the table carelessly and begins to tuck in Ramona's blankets. Ramona has been awake and crying during this episode. Eloise kisses her and leaves the room.

Eloise staggers downstairs, sobbing, and wakes Mary Jane. She asks her if she remembers a time during their first year at school when another girl mocked Eloise's dress, which she had brought from home in Boise, and Eloise cried all night. Shaking Mary Jane's arm, she pleads, "I was a nice girl, wasn't I?"

Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut Analysis

Affluent postwar suburban Connecticut is the setting for this story, which describes two college roommates who have taken different paths in life, getting together to reminisce and reflect. Eloise has become a suburban housewife, while her friend, Mary Jane, has remained single after a brief marriage to a soldier that ended in divorce. They drink while they talk about their college days, and as they become increasingly drunk, Eloise becomes more distraught and regretful in her reminiscences. The love of her youth, Walt, had died in an accident in World War II, and it becomes clear that Eloise is still affected by the loss. She compares her present husband, Lew, unfavorably against her positive memories of Walt. When Mary Jane asks her point blank why she married Lew, her answer indicates that she was duped, in a way. She thought he was a different kind of person than he turned out to be.

Her disillusionment has a parallel in her young daughter, Ramona, who has an imaginary "beau" named Jimmy. Jimmy, like Walt, is kind of a soldier - he has a sword. Like Walt, he is also killed in an accident. Ramona's formative ideas about relationships between men and women seem to be following the tragic lines of her mother's experience. Likewise, Eloise's memories of Walt and her early illusions about her husband are imaginary, yet very real to her.

Just as Ramona replaces the imaginary Jimmy with the imaginary Mickey at the end of the story, Eloise has replaced her imagined notion of her present husband with the imagined ideal of Walt. It is perhaps in partial recognition of this that Eloise forcefully tries to stop her daughter from making up imaginary boyfriends.

The setting of the story on a winter afternoon adds to the bleakness of the story. The growing darkness and the worsening weather also help set the tone. No "real" men or boys actually appear in the story. Lew's presence is implied only as the unheard half of a phone conversation, and Ramona's beaus are imaginary. The husband of Grace, the maid, is waiting in the kitchen, Grace says, but he does not appear. In fact, by refusing to let Grace's husband stay at the house, by making up a story to avoid picking up Lew at the train station, and by forcing Ramona to ignore the imaginary Mickey, Eloise has expelled or excluded all males, real and imagined, from her house.

Just Before the War with the Eskimos

Just Before the War with the Eskimos Summary

For the fifth Saturday in a row, Ginnie and Selena, two fifteen-year-old classmates, are going home in a taxi from playing tennis. Ginnie is reflecting that while Selena always brings a fresh can of tennis balls, she has only once offered to split the cab fare with her. Ginnie resolves to bring the matter up. As the taxi reaches Selena's building, Ginnie asks her to reimburse her for half the taxi rides they have shared.

Selena replies that she thought she had always paid half, but Ginnie corrects her that she only did one time. Selena protests that she always brings the tennis balls, but Ginnie points out that Selena's father manufactures them, so it does not quite seem equitable. Selena goes through her pockets and comes up with thirty-five cents and asks if it is enough to cover the fare. Ginnie responds that she owes $1.65 total for all the previous rides. Selena becomes indignant, and protests that she would have to go upstairs and get it from her mother. She offers to bring it to school Monday, but Ginnie, put off by her indignation, insists, stating that she needs the money to go to the movies that night.

The girls sit silently for the rest of the ride, and when the taxi reaches Selena's building, she gets out and walks in without saying a word. Ginnie, irate, pays the fare again and follows her in. In the lobby, Ginnie gives Selena the new total, $1.90. Selena tells Ginnie that her mother is quite ill, and that she will not enjoy having to disturb her for something as silly as money. Ginnie, not caring if the story is true or not, follows her into the elevator.

A maid lets them into Selena's apartment. Selena asks Ginnie to wait in the living room while she goes to speak with her mother, adding that she may have to wake her up. Ginnie calmly agrees to wait, and sits down. Selena realizes that Ginnie is not going to give up, and responds bitterly as she leaves the room.

From elsewhere in the apartment, a male voice calls out, asking if it is Eric who has entered the apartment. Ginnie assumes the voice belongs to Selena's brother, whom she has not met. The young man enters the room wearing pajamas and holding one hand to his chest. He realizes his mistake, but sits down near Ginnie anyway, telling her that he has just cut his finger. Taking him in, Ginnie judges him to be "goofy" looking. She asks how he cut his finger. He responds that he does not know exactly, but that he was rummaging through a wastepaper basket that had razor blades in it. He seems somewhat helpless. Ginnie asks if he has put anything on it. Only toilet paper, he responds.

The boy asks Ginnie if she is a friend of his sister, and calls his sister a jerk. She says she is, and that her name is Virginia Mannox. The boy recognizes the name, and tells Ginnie that he knows her older sister. He calls Ginnie's sister a snob. Ginnie does not

believe that he actually knows her, but he seems to know her name, which is Joan. Ginnie informs him that Joan is getting married soon. Selena's brother asks whom she is marrying, and Ginnie responds that it is nobody he would know. He responds that he pities the groom. Ginnie laughs, clearly enjoying the young man's characterization of her sister.

Selena's brother's attention returns to his cut, and he asks Ginnie if he should put something on it. He seems ignorant of such things, and Ginnie recommends iodine. He continues to pick at the toilet paper, and Ginnie warns him to stop touching it. He immediately complies. He asks her if she has eaten, and offers her half a chicken sandwich that he has in his room. Ginnie politely declines, saying her mother will have lunch ready for her at home. He presses her to have something, even a glass of milk, but Ginnie politely resists.

Selena's brother casually asks Ginnie the name of the man her sister is marrying. She tells him his name, and also that he is an officer in the Navy. He shrugs this information off, and Ginnie laughs again. She asks how it is he knows Joan, since she has never met him before. He replies that he met her at a party. She presses him and asks what party. He first replies that he does not know, but then answers it was a Christmas party in 1942. She asks him why he calls her a snob, and he responds that he wrote her eight letters, and she did not respond to any of them.

Ginnie is slightly taken aback at this news, but goes on to defend her sister weakly, stating that perhaps she was busy. He disagrees, sarcastically. She asks why he never phoned her, then, and he reveals that he was not in New York, but in Ohio, working in an aircraft factory. He was exempted from military service because of his heart, he tells her. Ginnie asks if he enjoyed the work, and he responds sarcastically, indicating that he did not. He goes to the window and watches the people on the street below, speculating that eventually everyone would be running off to the draft board. The next war, he jokes, will be against the Eskimos, and they will be drafting sixty-year-old men. Ginnie replies that at least he will not be drafted, but immediately regrets saying it.

Selena's brother tells her he is expecting someone, and asks her to tell him if he comes that he will be ready shortly, after he shaves. He leaves the room, but returns shortly with the half of a chicken sandwich, insisting that Ginnie take it. She does so, reluctantly, thanking him. He insists that she eat it, and she chokes down a single bite. The doorbell rings, and he rushes off to get dressed.

Alone, Ginnie looks for a place to hide or throw away the sandwich. Hearing someone come through the foyer, she quickly shoves the sandwich in the pocket of her coat. A well-dressed young man enters the room, says hello to Ginnie, and asks if she has seen Franklin. She tells him that he is shaving and will be ready soon. The young man checks his wristwatch and takes a seat, covering his face with his hands, as if he is very tired. He announces that this has been the worst day of his life. Ginnie asks what has happened, and he refrains from telling her, saying he does not want to bore her. He allows that he is a bad judge of human character, and leaves it at that.

Ginnie presses him to tell her what happened, and he relents. A writer that he has been living with has moved out suddenly, taking everything he could. He had taken the man in, he said, fed him, introduced him to important people, carried his shirts to his laundry, and even more, he suggests, before he cuts himself off. He suddenly turns his attention to Ginnie's camel hair coat, saying it is "lovely" and asking if he might touch it. He asks where she got it, and she responds her mother brought it back from the Bahamas. They chat some more. The young man is effusive and friendly to Ginnie. He checks his watch again and complains that Franklin is rarely on time. They are in danger of being late for the film they are going to see, he says. He reveals that he and Franklin have been to many films before, and refers to the aircraft plant where they both worked. Ginnie asks if he has a bad heart, as well. He responds that he does not, and is just about to tell more when Selena enters the room.

Ginnie stands up and walks to meet her. Selena apologizes insincerely for keeping her waiting, saying she had to wait for her mother to wake up. Ginnie notes that she has changed clothes. Selena greets Eric, the young man waiting for Franklin. Quietly, so that Eric will not hear, Ginnie tells Selena to forget about the money. She says that since Ginnie brings the tennis balls, it is fair for her to pay the taxi fare. Selena is surprised to hear this. Ginnie asks her to walk her to the door, and on the way asks if she might come back over later that night. She adds that she met Selena's brother. She asks her casually what he does for work. Selena responds that he has recently quit work and that their father wants him to finish college. He says he is too old, Selena tells Ginnie. He is twenty-four, Selena tells her.

Ginnie boards the elevator, telling Selena she will call later. Outside, she starts walking toward the bus stop to go home. She finds the sandwich half in her pocket and is about to toss it in the street, but she reconsiders and puts it back in her pocket. A few years previously, the narration informs the reader, she had held on to a dead Easter chick for three days before throwing it out.

Just Before the War with the Eskimos Analysis

The world of affluent young New Yorkers provides the setting for "Just Before the War with the Eskimos". The story describes a short encounter between Ginnie, a teenage girl, and the brother of her friend, Selena, named Franklin.

The time is shortly after the end of World War II. Ginnie has followed Selena up to her apartment to collect the taxi fare that Selena has failed to share over the previous weeks. Selena is indignant at being called on to pay, and responds with an insincere sounding story that her mother is very ill, and that Ginnie is being rude for making her disturb her mother. Ginnie is resolute, and in the face of Selena's petulance, the reader sympathizes with her.

Franklin, who appears while Ginnie is waiting for Selena, is almost comically helpless with his cut finger. He boyishly asks Ginnie about how to take care of it. His insulting words about Ginnie's sister Joan ingratiate him to Ginnie, but also display a bitter streak

in Franklin. When he reveals that he wrote eight letters to Joan with no response, his boyishness begins to appear slightly pathetic. His remark about the ridiculousness of people rushing off to fight the Eskimos seems to be a joke at first, but he is in earnest.

Franklin's friend, Eric, by contrast, is relatively worldly. He is older, and has his own apartment. Like Franklin, Eric was exempted from being drafted during the war, but made to work in a defense plant instead. Franklin claims his bad heart kept him out of the draft. Eric begins to explain why he was exempted, but is interrupted. Eric's mannerisms and form of speech are meant to indicate that he is homosexual, which is probably the actual reason he was exempted. His story about being victimized by the young writer who moved in with him is in the exaggerated tone of a jilted lover. Given Eric's obvious social and financial situation, it seems likely that he is less of a victim than he pretends to be.

This raises the possibility that Eric is preying upon the boyish Franklin, who may also be homosexual or at least may be exploring his sexuality. Ginnie seems to miss this possibility, however, or else is attracted by it. She becomes somewhat enamored of Franklin after his clumsy gift of the half sandwich. Ginnie's sudden forgiveness of Selena's debt at the end of the story is manipulative, as she simply wants a chance to meet Franklin again. Selena is immediately conciliatory as their roles reverse.

The story contains very little action, and is simply a set of dialogues through which the individual characters are developed. Ginnie, from whose point the story is told, actually speaks the least.

The Laughing Man

The Laughing Man Summary

The narrator is an adult, telling about a time when he was nine years old in 1928 in New York City and belonged to a group of boys who called themselves the Comanche Club. These boys are picked up every day after school in a rickety old bus driven by their Chief, a stocky young man who is employed by the boys' parents to watch and entertain them after school. The Chief, as the boys called him, drives them to Central Park to play games, or if the weather is bad, to a museum. On Saturdays and holidays, the Chief picks up the boys in the mornings and they spend the day camping or go to larger playing fields.

The Chief's real name is John Gedsudski, and he is an athletic young man from Staten Island. To the boys, he is a conglomeration of all he movie heroes they are familiar with. At the end of each day they fight over who gets to sit in the bus seats closest to him. After the boys settle down, the Chief boards the bus, straddles his seat facing the boys, and gives them another installment in the story of "The Laughing Man".

The Laughing Man, as the Chief describes him, was the son of wealthy missionaries who was kidnapped by Chinese bandits who tortured him. As a result of this torture, he grew into adulthood with a misshapen head and only a hole for a mouth, and two small holes for nostrils. His hideous appearance caused people to faint, and so he took to wearing a red, poppy-petal veil over his face. He remained with the bandits and learned their secrets. All the while, the Laughing Man also would steal off to the woods, where he befriended many animals and learned to speak their languages.

Over the course of several months, the tale of the Laughing Man becomes more and more complex. He becomes a master criminal and folk hero, and exacts his revenge on the bandits who kidnapped him. He regularly visits Paris, France and challenges a great detective named Marcel Dufarge. He is frequently caught by Dufarge, but always manages to escape mysteriously. The narrator explains that he and the other Comanches all considered themselves somehow direct descendants of the Laughing Man at the time, and that he himself imagined that he, too, was destined to become a master criminal like him, and was just awaiting the chance.

One day the boys notice that there is a photograph of a girl above the rear view mirror on the Chief's bus. The Chief is reluctant to give details, but admits that her name is Mary Hudson, and she used to go to Wellesley College. The boys press him to explain why her picture is on the bus, but the Chief simply shrugs. They notice, however, that the picture stays up, and they eventually get used to it.

On their way to the park one day, the Chief stops the bus a good way from their baseball field. The boys demand to know why they have stopped, but the Chief offers no explanation. He turns around and begins another installment of "The Laughing Man".

Just as he begins, however, there is a tap on the door. He jumps and opens it, and a girl in a beaver coat boards the bus. The narrator is struck by her beauty. This is Mary Hudson. She asks if she is late, and the Chief tells her she is not. He motions for the boys at the front to make room, and she sits next to the narrator.

As they drive back to the ball field, the girl leans forward and speaks with the Chief, who is very nervous. She tells him about the trains she took and missed on her way in from Long Island. When the boys reach the field, it becomes clear that Mary is coming along with them, to their consternation. To make matters worse, as they are flipping a coin to see which team will take the field first, Mary indicates that she wants to play.

The Chief takes her aside and speaks to her softly, but she insists that she has come all the way to the city, and she wants to play, too. The Chief walks over to the narrator, who is captain of one of the baseball teams, the Warriors, and suggests that Mary replace his regular center fielder, who was out sick that day. The narrator reluctantly agrees, after he senses that Mary is smiling at him.

The Warriors take the field, with Mary wearing a catcher's mitt, as she has insisted. The narrator is mortified, but no balls are hit her way. When it is time for the team to bat, he puts Mary in the last slot. She gets to the plate in the first inning, taking off her beaver coat and catcher's mitt to take the bat. The Chief hastily tries to give her some advice on holding the bat, but she is eager to play and tells him to get out of her way. She swings at the first pitch and belts it into left field for a stand-up triple.

The narrator is astonished, and then delighted. He looks at the Chief, who appears to be floating he is so happy. Mary waves at the narrator from third base, and he waves back. For the rest of the game, Mary gets on base every time at bat. Her fielding is awful, possibly because she is using a catcher's mitt, the narrator suggests, but because of all the runs, it doesn't seem to matter. Mary continues to play ball with the boys a couple times a week.

This continues for a few months. One day, the boys board the bus and see the Chief has combed his hair down and is wearing his nice coat, usually an indication that they will be meeting Mary on the way. Indeed, the bus stops and the Chief turns to give them another installment of the Laughing Man. This episode is remarkable, the narrator explains, and he gives a synopsis.

Dufarge and his daughter have trapped the Laughing Man's loyal wolf companion Black Wing. The Dufarges offer Black Wing's freedom for his own, and he agrees. He meets them at the designated place where Black Wing is to be set free. The Dufarges have substituted a different wolf as Black Wing, however, which the Laughing Man learns after he has been tied up by Dufarge's daughter. Infuriated, the Laughing Man pulls off his veil with his tongue and reveals his face to his captors. Dufarge's daughter faints away, but Dufarge happens to be looking the other direction at the time. Seeing what has happened, he shields his eyes and fires his gun in the direction of the Laughing Man.

The installment ends here, as the Chief looks at his watch, turns, and starts the bus. The narrator asks if the Chief was not going to wait for Mary Hudson. The Chief snaps back that everyone on the bus should be quiet, which the narrator says is a ridiculous request, because the bus is already silent as the boys contemplate the fate of the Laughing Man.

Halfway through the baseball game, the narrator sees Mary Hudson watching from a park bench some distance away. He points her out to the Chief, who leaves the field. The narrator watches him walk over and stand by Mary, apparently talking to her. After a few minutes, she gets up and they walk silently back to the ball field. The Chief takes his place as umpire behind the pitcher, and Mary sits down on a player's bench, smoking a cigarette.

The narrator approaches Mary and asks if she is going to play. She shakes her head. He tries to talk her into playing, but she does not respond. He invites her to dinner at his house sometime, adding that the Chief often comes to dinner, too. She tells him to leave her alone. He walks back to his bench. He does not know what has happened between Mary and the Chief, but somehow understands that she will never be playing ball with them again.

As darkness falls, the boys begin to gather their equipment. The narrator sees Mary Hudson standing with the Chief near third base. She is crying, and then suddenly breaks away, running. The Chief does not follow her. The narrator asks the Chief if they have had a fight, and the Chief tells him to tuck in his shirt.

The Comanches head back toward the bus, running the last leg in order to get the best seat for the upcoming story. The narrator trips on the way, and ends up with a seat near the middle. The Chief boards the bus and demands quiet or he will not tell the story. The boys fall silent, and after deliberately sitting and blowing his nose, the Chief begins the next installment.

The Laughing Man was hit by four of Dufarge's bullets. He still stands, tied with barbed wire to the tree where he was restrained, his head turned toward the ground, groaning in agony. Dufarge, delighted that he has finally killed his archenemy, awakens his daughter. Together, they approach the dying Laughing Man. As they near him, however, the Laughing Man looks up and regurgitates the four bullets. This shocks the Dufarges to the extent that they fall down dead. The Laughing Man remains tied to the tree for days, starved of his only sustenance, eagle's blood. He finally pleads with some animals of the forest to summon his dwarf assistant, Omba. After many more days, Omba reaches his master. He replaces his veil and begins to nurse him back to health. He gives the Laughing Man a vial of eagle's blood to drink, but before he drinks, he asks about Black Wing. Omba sadly informs him that Black Wing is dead. With a groan, the Laughing Man crushes the vial without drinking, pulls off his red poppy-petal mask, and dies with a groan.

This is the end of the story. The Chief starts up the bus. One of the boys begins to cry, and nobody tells him to be quiet. As the narrator is walking from the bus to his home, he

happens to see a piece of red tissue paper floating on the wind. He arrives home with his teeth chattering and is told to go straight to bed.

The Laughing Man Analysis

"The Laughing Man" is told from the point of view of a nameless adult narrator who is recounting events from his childhood. The narration moves back and forth between the past and the present, as the narrator reflects on how he viewed the world as a young boy.

The narrator is nostalgic for his younger days, it seems, when he was ignorant of the complicated relationships between men and women. His boyhood assessment of women, or at least of Mary Hudson, is based purely on her ability to hit a baseball. He is dimly aware of the trouble that arises between The Chief and Mary, and boyishly tries to patch things up.

What seems the most real to him at the time are the installments of the Laughing Man story that the Chief tells the boys every day. He remembers the precise details of the stories many years later, even with their factual inaccuracies, and remembers believing that he lived in a world where such things were possible.

The story ends after the final installment of the Laughing Man story, with the death of the Laughing Man. The narrator is physically shaken by the tale, which he recounts completely. Although it is not explicitly stated, the end of the Laughing Man seems to signal the end of a distinct period in the narrator's life. It also seems to mark a transition for The Chief, who has started to turn his attentions away from the boyhood pastimes of sports to more adult endeavors.

Down at the Dinghy

Down at the Dinghy Summary

It is about four in the afternoon in the kitchen of a lakefront house. Sandra, the maid, is pacing between the window looking over the lake and the kitchen table. Seated at the table is Mrs. Snell, the cleaning lady. The women are sharing a cup of tea before Mrs. Snell walks to catch her bus. Mrs. Snell is waiting for her cup of tea to cool, as Sandra speaks. She is agitated about the young boy of the family that owns the house, but is insisting that she is not going to worry about it any more. She tells Mrs. Snell that the boy moves silently around the house, surprising her, and is very sensitive about what people say. Sandra complains that the family never goes near the water any more, yet they insist on staying at the lake house for long periods. Sandra is eager to return to New York and tells Mrs. Snell that the situation is making her "loony". She asks Mrs. Snell what she would do in her place, and as Mrs. Snell eagerly begins to answer, the lady of the house, Boo Boo Tannenbaum, enters the kitchen from the dining room.

Boo Boo Tannenbaum is a stunning, if unpretty, slender woman of twenty-five. She goes to the refrigerator and peers in, whistling softly to herself. She asks Sandra if there are any more pickles. She wants to take one to her son, Lionel. Sandra replies that he ate the last two the night before, and Boo Boo says she will get more later, when she goes into town. She wants the pickles to lure her son out of "that boat", she says. Lionel is sitting in a dinghy at the pier and will not come out.

Mrs. Snell says with a short laugh that she understands that Lionel is "running away" again. Boo Boo says it seems so, and begins to tell the women about her son's history of "running away". The farthest he ever got, she says, was about a block from their apartment in New York City. She tells them that the reason he gave for running was that another child had told him "you stink" earlier in the day. Another time a child had told him she had a worm in her thermos, which caused him to hide beneath a sink. Boo Boo announces that she will have another try at getting him out of the boat, and walks outside through the kitchen door.

Boo Boo, whistling, walks down the sloping lawn toward the pier where Lionel is floating in the dinghy. She crouches on the pier near where the boat is tied and addresses him. He does not look at her, but pretends to steer the boat by jerking the tiller back and forth. Boo Boo pretends she is "Vice Admiral Tannenbaum. Nee Glass." and says she is there to inspect the boat.

Lionel responds to this. He says she is not an admiral, she is a lady. Boo Boo demands to know who told him this, and he replies, "Daddy". Boo Boo says it is true she's a lady while on shore, but Lionel interrupts her and says she is a lady all the time. She responds that it has been kept a secret. She suddenly stands and delivers a sort of bugle call through her circled fingers, followed by a salute. This gets Lionel's attention.

She tells him it is a secret bugle call that only admirals are supposed to hear. He asks her to do it again.

Boo Boo says she cannot, but that if he tells her why he is running away, she will blow every secret bugle call she knows. Lionel says he will not tell her. She presses him, but he refuses. She says she thought he had promised he was through running away. He replies that he had never promised. He asks if she is an admiral, then where is her fleet. She begins to answer as she starts to climb down into the boat. He orders her to stop, saying nobody is allowed on the boat.

Boo Boo replies that this is too bad, because she is lonesome and misses Lionel. He stops swinging the tiller back and forth, but insists that she cannot come aboard, but can talk to him from the pier. She again asks him to tell why he is running away after he promised he would not. Lionel responds by picking up a pair of swimming goggles with his toes and swinging them over the side, where they sink. Boo Boo scolds him, telling him that the goggles belonged to his Uncle Webb, and had once belonged to his Uncle Seymour. Lionel replies that he does not care, and Boo Boo says she can see that.

Boo Boo takes a small package from her side pocket. She tells Lionel it is a keychain. Lionel looks up at her. She continues to explain that the keychain is just like his daddy's, but with many more keys on it. He tells her to throw it to him. She hesitates, saying that she thinks perhaps she should just throw it in the lake. Lionel protests that it belongs to him, and Boo Boo replies that she does not care. Lionel understands.

Boo Boo tosses the package to him in the boat. It lands in his lap. Lionel looks at it, picks it up, then flings it into the lake. He begins to cry loudly. Boo Boo carefully gets in the boat and takes him in her lap, holding him and consoling him. Lionel suddenly tells her the reason he is upset. Sandra, he says, told Mrs. Snell that his daddy is a "big sloppy kike". Boo Boo flinches slightly, but reacts calmly. She tells Lionel that this is not the worst thing that could happen, and asks if he knows what a "kike" is. He responds by giving the definition of a kite.

Boo Boo does not correct him. She tells him that they will drive to town and get some pickles and bread and pick up his daddy at the station, then come back and make his daddy take them for a ride in the boat. Lionel agrees, and they race back to the house.

Down at the Dinghy Analysis

The precocious, sensitive child is a recurring character in much of Salinger's work, including several of the stories in this book. Lionel Tannenbaum is one such child, who apparently has the impulse to run away whenever provoked. The things that provoke him are unusual and unpredictable, however.

The first portion of the story is told from the viewpoint of the Tannenbaum's maid, Sandra. Lionel's odd behavior has her distraught, but she seems most disturbed by his tendency to move around without her noticing. Later in the story, it is revealed that what has triggered Lionel's present attempt to run away is something he overhears Sandra

say to Mrs. Snell, the cleaning woman, probably while he was tucked away somewhere unknown to them. Sandra and Mrs. Snell are critical of the Tannenbaums during their discussion at the beginning of the story, but become outwardly congenial once Boo Boo enters the kitchen. Sandra's complaints that the family has stayed at their lake house longer than usual and have stopped using the boat suggest that there has been recent tension in the family.

The second part of the story takes place at the pier on the lake near the house between Boo Boo and Lionel. Boo Boo is silly, but sincere in her efforts to talk Lionel out of the boat, and at the same time find out what has triggered the episode. While announcing her fictitious naval title, Boo Boo mentions that her maiden name is Glass, and later refers to Lionel's "Uncle Seymour" who once owned the goggles that Lionel has thrown into the lake. This is the same Seymour Glass who appears in the first story of this collection, and this revelation colors the otherwise simple plot of the story with some psychological tension. Boo Boo glosses over the prejudicial slight that Lionel has heard and misunderstood, and the story ends on a positive note, as Boo Boo promises that they will all go for a ride in the boat with his father.

For Esme - with Love and Squalor

For Esme - with Love and Squalor Summary

The narrator indicates that he has recently received a wedding invitation from England for a wedding he would very much like to attend. After discussing it with his wife, he has decided against it. His wife has reminded him that her mother will be visiting them at the time the wedding is to take place. Nevertheless, the narrator says, he intends to write down a few things about the bride in honor of the occasion. They may make the groom slightly uncomfortable, he suggests, but this is for the better.

The story slips back in time to when the narrator is an enlisted man in the Army during World War II, stationed in Devon, England and taking a special training course taught by British Intelligence. He is one of a group of sixty men, all of whom are socially independent. They all spend most of their free time writing letters, reading, and occasionally wandering around the English countryside.

The training ends on a very rainy Saturday. At seven o'clock that evening, the men are to board a train for London and will probably be sent into action in Europe. By three o'clock, the narrator has packed his things and is staring out the window of his barracks at the rain. Suddenly, with no real purpose, he puts on his rain gear and goes for a walk into the town.

He makes his way to a church and stops to read the bulletin board outside. He has become addicted to reading bulletin boards, he says. The bulletin board indicates there is children's choir practice taking place, with a list of the children expected to attend. He reads all the names, then enters the church.

He makes his way to the front pew and sits. There are about thirty children sitting in rows on the rostrum, being lead in singing by a very large woman in tweed clothes. He listens attentively, picking out each individual voice and scanning each face. One child catches his attention in particular. She is a girl of about thirteen, with short blond hair and bored-looking eyes. Her voice is the sweetest one of the group, he decides.

The children stop singing and the leader begins to lecture them on how they are to behave while in church. The narrator gets up and leaves the church and makes his way to the Red Cross recreation room, where he looks in but continues on. It is raining heavily. He enters a small tearoom, which is empty except for the proprietor. He sits and orders tea and toast, and begins to re-read some letters he has in his pocket, one from his wife and the other from his mother in law.

As he is reading, the same girl he had taken notice of at the church comes in to the tearoom. She is with her younger brother, a small boy of five, and her governess. The girl selects a table for them that is directly in line with the narrator's vision. She and the

governess sit, but the boy begins to fool around with his chair. The governess tells him to stop, but he continues to mess around until his sister instructs him to sit down.

After a short time, the girl becomes aware that the narrator is staring at them. She gives him a small smile, and he smiles back. She suddenly stands and makes her way to his table, and remarks that she thought Americans did not like tea. She is not being a smart aleck, but seems genuinely interested to find an American drinking tea. He invites her to join him.

She says she will, if just for a few moments. He hurriedly gets up and pulls a seat out for her. She sits on the edge of the chair and places her hands flat on the table. He notices she is wearing a large military-style man's wristwatch. She tells him she saw him watching the choir practice at the church. He confirms this, and tells her she has a fine voice. She agrees with his compliment, and says she intends to become a professional singer. He asks if she wants to sing opera, and she replies that she wants to sing jazz on the radio, make lots of money, then retire at age thirty to live on a ranch in Ohio. She asks the soldier if he is familiar with Ohio.

He replies that he has been through it on the train a few times. He offers her some toast, but she declines. She informs him that he is the eleventh American she has met. In the meantime, her governess has been signaling for her to return to the table and stop bothering the soldier, but the girl turns her chair slightly so her back is to the governess. She asks if he is attending the intelligence school in town. He politely gives an uninformative answer. She responds that he seems very intelligent for an American, and he scolds her lightly for the remark.

The two engage in more conversation. She is precocious and intelligent, and the soldier is completely charmed by her. She tells him she is not normally so gregarious, but that she thought he looked lonely. He affirmed that he was indeed feeling lonely, and is glad she came over. She tells him that she lives with her aunt, as her mother has died, and that many people find her cold. He says he disagrees that she is cold. He tells her his name, and asks hers.

She tells him her first name is Esme, but that she will not tell him more because she has a title, and does not want him to be overly impressed. The soldier is suddenly aware that the small boy is right behind him. He has come to the table to tell his sister that Miss Megley, the governess, wants her to return to her table and finish her tea. His name is Charles, Esme tells the soldier. Charles begins to act goofy, sitting down at the table and placing the cloth over his head.

Esme begins chewing her nails and telling the soldier about their parents. Their father, she says, was "slain" in North Africa. She spells out the word "slain". Charles has moved to the floor and is resting his face on the chair. When he notices the soldier looking at him, he sticks out his tongue and makes a raspberry noise. Esme tells him to stop, explaining to the soldier that he learned it from an American.

Esme continues to talk about her father, saying that Charles misses him greatly and telling the soldier how intelligent and handsome he was. Suddenly, Charles punches him on the arm and asks him a riddle, "What did one wall say to the other wall?" The soldier pretends to think about it, then gives up. Charles yells the answer, "Meet you at the corner!" and begins to laugh so hard he starts coughing.

Esme asks what the soldier did before the war. He responds that he was just out of college, but aspired to be a writer. This excites Esme, and she says she would enjoy it if he would write a story for her some time. He says that will, if he can. She adds that the story should have some squalor in it. He is about to ask her for more details, when Charles pinches him and repeats the same riddle. This time, the soldier answers with the punch line, which angers Charles so much that he stomps on his foot and returns to his table. He has a terrible temper, Esme explains.

She stands and says, in French, that she must also go. She asks if the soldier speaks French. He does not. He tells her he has enjoyed her company, and she replies that she thought he might. She asks if he might be returning to the church to watch their choir practice. He answers that he would like to, but is afraid he will not make it again. She understands that as a soldier he cannot give details of where and when he will be traveling.

She asks the soldier if he would like her to write to him, and he eagerly gives her his APO number. She returns to their table and he orders another pot of tea. He watches them until they leave the shop. Esme waves, and he waves back, feeling a surge of emotion. In less than a minute, Esme returns with Charles, telling the soldier that Charles wants to kiss him goodbye. The soldier is reluctant, but Charles gives him a wet kiss below the ear. The soldier turns to him and asks him the same riddle. Delighted, Charles yells the punch line again and runs out of the shop.

Esme reminds him of the story he has promised to write, and he assures her he will not forget. Saying goodbye again, she tells him she hopes he emerges from the war with all his "faculties intact". He thanks her, and she walks out slowly.

The next scene is introduced by the story's narrator as being the "squalid" part of the story. The narrator sarcastically remarks that he is one of the people in the next part of the story, but that he has disguised himself so that nobody can tell who he is.

The time is in the weeks after the end of the war in Europe. Ten soldiers are being quartered in a civilian house in Germany. One, who the narrator calls Staff Sergeant X, is sitting in his upstairs room at a messy writing table. He has been trying to read a paperback novel, but has given up after finding himself reading and re-reading sentences and words. Closing the book, he lights a cigarette with shaking fingers. Suddenly, he begins to feel as though his mind is "teetering", as it has on occasion for weeks. He presses his hands against his temples until the feeling passes. His hair is dirty and in need of a cut. He has been in the hospital recently. His writing table is covered with several unopened letters and packages addressed to him.

He picks up a book from the table. It is in German, and had belonged to the previous occupant of the house. Written inside on the flyleaf someone has written in German, "Dear God, life is hell." X takes a pencil and writes a quote from Dostoevsky beneath the inscription, but is astonished and frightened to see that he cannot even read his own handwriting.

He closes the book and takes up a letter from his older brother in the US. He opens it, meaning to read the whole thing, but stops and tears the letter into pieces after reading only part of it. He folds his arms on the table and rests his head on them.

Without knocking, another soldier bursts into the room. He is Corporal Z, and has been with X all through his time in Europe, since D-Day. He is a handsome young man of twenty four. The narrator invites him to sit, addressing him as Clay. Clay sits on the bed and lights a cigarette. Eying X's radio he tells him about a good program that will be airing soon. X says he has just turned the radio off. X opens a pack of cigarettes and lights one with difficulty. Clay remarks at how bad his hands are shaking. He tells X how different he looked after his stay in the hospital.

Changing the subject, X asks Clay if he had any good letters from his girlfriend, Loretta, while X was gone. All during the war, Clay has read these letters aloud to X, who has helped him write letters to her in return. Clay responds that he recently received a letter from Loretta, and he would show it to X later. He tells X that he wrote her that X had had a nervous breakdown, which she found interesting because she was studying psychology. According to Loretta, Clay tells X, the war itself probably did not cause his breakdown, and that he must have been unstable before the war.

X responds sarcastically, and Clay defends his girlfriend. X tells him to get his feet off the bed. Clay hesitates, then does so. He reminds X of a time they were being shelled and were hiding, when a cat jumped up on a nearby jeep and Clay shot it. X is pained to hear the story, and asks Clay not to go on about it again. Clay goes on that he wrote to Loretta about it, and she discussed it in her psychology class. She told Clay that he was temporarily insane when he did it. X sarcastically disagrees. He says the cat was actually a German spy, and so Clay was not brutal or cruel in killing it. Clay responds angrily.

X suddenly feels sick, and he turns and throws up in a wastepaper basket. Clay stands up, embarrassed, and invites him downstairs to listen to the radio. X declines. He invites him to come out to a dance, but X says no. He asks if he can give him a letter to Loretta for X to "fix up" for him. X agrees, and asks to be left alone. Clay leaves, shutting the door.

X picks up a portable typewriter and clears a place on the table. He intends to write a letter to an old friend in New York, hoping it might make him feel better. His hands shake too badly to get the paper in the machine, however. Frustrated, he crumples up the paper and puts his head in his hands.

When he opens his eyes, he notices a small package wrapped in green paper. It has been readdressed several times. Without looking at the return address, he opens it. Inside are a note and an object wrapped in tissue paper. Taking up the note, he sees it is from Esme, and was written about a month after their short meeting. The letter is short and somewhat formal. Esme mentions that her aunt has been sick, and that she is teaching Charles to read and write. She has enclosed, she says, her wristwatch, which she was wearing when they met. She hopes that he will find it useful. At the end of the letter, Charles has written a few words, as well.

X takes the watch from the box. Its crystal has been broken. He wonders if it still works otherwise, but is afraid to wind it to find out. Suddenly, he feels very sleepy.

The narrator then addresses Esme directly, for this is the story he has promised to write for her. He says that a man who can feel sleepy "always stands a chance of becoming a man with all his ["faculties"] intact." (p. 173) He spells out the word "faculties."

For Esme - with Love and Squalor Analysis

"For Esme - with Love and Squalor" is told from the viewpoint of a man who was mentally ravaged by World War II, but has apparently made significant gains in overcoming it. He connects the turning point in his recovery to a brief encounter with a young British girl he meets while stationed in England just before he joins the fighting in Europe. The narrator emerges from the war in a state of mental anguish. He is hospitalized as a result, and is having a difficult time holding on to his sanity after being released.

It is the mundane things that seem to both irritate and frustrate the narrator after the war, such as his brother's simple letter from home and his friend's invitation to listen to the radio. On the other hand, the somewhat formal letter from Esme seems to cause a shift in his thinking, partly because of the inclusion of her wristwatch, which had belonged to her father, who was killed in the fighting in North Africa.

Esme had lost both parents, one to war and the other to illness, and yet had shouldered her new responsibilities as an orphan and older sister to Charles and moved on. Her letter, like her conversation with him in the teashop, is matter-of-fact and free of sentiment or drama. It is interesting that the feeling the narrator first associates with his recovery is sleepiness, a perfectly mundane feeling, but one which he had apparently been missing.

This brings the story back around to the beginning, where the narrator mildly complains that he cannot attend Esme's wedding in England because his mother-in-law is coming to visit. He has apparently settled into the routine of married life, complete with a mother-in-law, suggesting that finding this ability to simply get on with the everyday aspects of life has contributed to his recovery. His story, dedicated to Esme in the final sentences, is told in gratitude of her showing him this fact.

Pretty Mouth and Green my Eyes

Pretty Mouth and Green my Eyes Summary

A grey-haired man and a young woman are in bed when the phone rings. He asks her if she would prefer he not answer it. She rises up on one elbow and asks what he thinks. He responds that he doesn't see that it makes any difference, and leans over to pick up the receiver.

The caller addresses him as Lee, and asks if he has wakened him. Lee recognizes the caller as a man named Arthur. They are lawyers in the same firm. Lee tells Arthur that he did not wake him, and that he was in bed reading. Arthur explains that the reason he is calling is to ask Lee if he saw Joanie, his wife, leaving the party they were all at earlier. He wonders if he saw her leave with a couple named the Ellenbogens. Arthur looks away from the girl, staring at the wall on the opposite side of the room. He replies that he did not see her leave at all. He asks if Arthur has called the Ellenbogens.

Arthur says he has, but they are not home. Lee suggests that perhaps they all went out together and that Joanie would probably be coming home any minute. Arthur is angry, suggesting that his wife has been unfaithful to him before and that he is tired of it. After five years, he says, he is through putting up with it. Lee tries to console him, suggesting that perhaps they all missed the last train home and would be coming in any moment. Arthur responds that he knows the Ellenbogens drove that night, and did not take the train. He continues to complain that she has not come home.

Lee offers him some advice. He should get in bed and relax and perhaps fix himself a nightcap. Arthur says he is already drunk, having finished a bottle of liquor in about two hours. Nevertheless, Lee continues, he should get in bad and relax and not stew about it. Arthur is distraught. He feels he cannot trust his wife. He tells Lee that whenever he comes home from work, he feels like checking every closet for men who might be hiding.

Lee tries to get Arthur to relax. He begins to tell Arthur that Joanie as actually a wonderful woman, and that perhaps he doesn't give her enough credit. Arthur becomes angry that Lee seems to be defending her. He becomes agitated complaining about her. Lee turns to the woman and signals that he wants a cigarette. She lights two and gives one to him.

Changing the subject, Lee asks Arthur about a case he had that day at work. Arthur angrily describes losing the case, which was for an important client. He wonders if his boss at the law firm, Junior, might be upset with him over it. Lee agrees that he might be. Arthur tells Lee that he is considering going back into the Army. Lee begins to criticize him for getting so worked up over so many little things, letting them build up.

Arthur continues to complain about his wife, adding that he was close to leaving her himself recently, but that he felt sorry for her. She does not love him, he believes, and he says he does not love her, either, really, but that every so often she does something sweet or he has a memory of when they were in college and is reminded of a happier time. He becomes maudlin and asks Lee to just hang up him. Lee gives a knowing look to the young woman to let her know what is happening. He again urges Arthur to just go to bed.

Arthur asks if he might come over to Lee's apartment for a drink. Lee sits bolt upright and calmly talks him out of the idea. He should just go to bed and wait for Joanie. If he wants to call later, he can. Arthur calms down, and Lee hangs up the phone.

The young woman immediately asks Lee what Arthur said. Lee tells her that Arthur wanted to come over. She is astonished, and compliments Lee on the wonderful job he did. She says she feels like a dog. It is now plain that the woman is Joanie.

Joanie continues to compliment Lee on the wonderful job he did of calming down her husband. Lee responds that it is a difficult situation, and he is not sure how wonderful he really is. The phone rings again.

It is Arthur again. He apologizes to Lee for calling back so late. He is calling, he says, to let Lee know that Joanie has just come home. Lee is startled. Arthur continues to explain that she has come home and is in the bathroom and that he wanted to call Lee and thank him for helping. He gives Lee an involved explanation of Joanie's whereabouts. He says everything is fine, now, and he is thinking of possibly moving from New York to Connecticut and plans on talking to Joanie about it. He says he feels they might have a chance to fix things up between them. He wonders if Lee thinks that he might be able to straighten out his situation at work. He adds that he did not just call because he is worried about his job, but that if Lee thought there was a chance to straighten things out with his boss, he should try to do it.

Lee listens silently for a time, then wearily tells Arthur he suddenly has a terrible headache, and wants to hang up. He will talk to Arthur in the morning. He hangs up and reaches for a lit cigarette from the bedside ashtray. He drops it accidentally and the young woman grabs for it. He barks at her to just sit still and she pulls her hand away.

Pretty Mouth and Green my Eyes Analysis

"Pretty Mouth and Green my Eyes" is a darkly humorous story about a man who is desperately looking for his wife, and happens to call the man with whom she is in bed. The story is told during the course of a tense telephone conversation in dialogue between the two men, Arthur and Lee. These two men are both lawyers who work in the same firm, and Arthur swings back and forth between complaining about his missing wife and discussing work matters. Lee smoothly deflects Arthur's inquiries and complaints without arousing any suspicion that he knows exactly where Arthur's wife is.

Joanie, the wife, says very little until after Lee has convinced Arthur to hang up and go to bed. She expresses some remorse, but not regret. Indeed, it is her husband who seems to be regretful, for he calls Lee back and tells him that Joanie has come home after all. Lee knows this is a lie, of course, and when Arthur then continues to mention the matter at work, it is implied that Arthur has realized that his complaining about his missing wife might jeopardize his position at the law firm. This twist at the end of the story turns the table on the smooth-talking Lee, who is now in the middle of a double lie.

Like many of the stories in the collection, this one is based in post-war New York at a time when affluent couples were moving from the city into the nicer suburbs surrounding New York City. Arthur and Lee's friends, the Ellenbogens, have already done so, and Arthur mentions that he is thinking of doing the same. The ostensible reason is that this will allow him and his wife to spend more time together, but it is implied that this will also isolate her from the social scene in the city. This theme is also suggested in "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Down at the Dinghy," which feature wives alone in the suburbs while their husbands are away working in the city.

De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period

De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period Summary

The narrator introduces his account with a kind of dedication to his recently deceased stepfather, Bobby. He speaks kindly of Bobby, regretting that he had not spoken so kindly of him while he was alive.

The narrator's parents divorce in 1928, when he is eight, and his mother is remarried to Bobby, a New York stockbroker. Bobby loses everything in the stock market crash in 1929, but reinvents himself as an art appraiser. The next year, when the narrator is ten, the three of them move to Paris. Nine years later, the narrator's mother dies, and he and Bobby move back to New York, staying at the Ritz Hotel.

His mother's death is traumatic to the narrator, and he finds himself reacting hostilely toward people. He tells off a bus driver in French, and is uncomfortable in the crowded city. He wishes he could just be alone, and finds, after a time, that he is indeed very lonely. He is something of an aspiring artist, and is taking art classes during the day. Shortly before leaving Paris, some of his artwork had won prizes at a junior exhibition. At night, he sets up an easel in the small bedroom he shares with his stepfather and paints. He has completed eighteen paintings, seventeen of them self-portraits. Sometimes he draws cartoons, instead. It is clear that his own opinion of his talent is probably greater than what he actually possesses. His relationship with his stepfather is polite, but strained.

Almost a year after moving into the Ritz, the narrator spies in a French language newspaper from Quebec an advertisement asking for art instructors for a correspondence art school in Quebec called Les Amis Des Vieux Maetres, which is run by a Monsieur I. Yoshoto. Applicants must be fluent in French and English and be of good character, the ad says.

The narrator immediately types out a very long letter addressed to Mr. Yoshoto. The first paragraph is three pages long. In the letter, the narrator concocts an involved personal history, saying he is twenty-nine and a great-nephew of the famous painter Honore Daumier. He claims to have had a wife who recently passed away in the south of France. He has been painting since childhood, but on the advice of Pablo Picasso, a good friend of his family, he has never exhibited. He says he would be glad to send some examples of his work, just as soon as his agent in Paris can send some. He signs the letter, Jean de Daumier-Smith.

He mails the letter in a Ritz envelope and spends the next four days painting examples of commercial art such as would be found in popular magazines. These he sends to Mr. Yoshoto, along with some paintings and a note further explaining how he had struggled against all odds to achieve his greatness. Within a few days, he receives a letter from Mr. Yoshoto accepting him as an instructor and asking him to come to Montreal in five

weeks for the start of the next session. The school cannot pay for transportation, the letter says, but includes room and board. The narrator immediately accepts by telegram.

That evening, he meets Bobby in the hotel restaurant for dinner as usual. Wanting to break the news to him alone, he is disappointed to find that Bobby has brought along Mrs. X, a recent divorcee whom Bobby has been dating. The narrator is cool toward Mrs. X, choosing to interpret any friendliness she shows toward him as a sexual advance. Bobby is surprised to hear the news, and slightly reluctant. Mrs. X is congratulatory and excited for the narrator.

Smartly dressed, the narrator steps onto the train platform in Montreal. Mr. Yoshoto, a small man in a dirty linen suit, is there to greet him, but does not speak. The narrator is grinning from ear to ear. He talks constantly during the bus ride to the school, running through his list of inventions about his personal background and even elaborating on them. He relates imaginary encounters with Picasso, pretending to have been a personal friend.

They arrive at the school, which is actually just the second floor of a somewhat run-down building in an ugly neighborhood. It is above a shop for orthopedic appliances. It consists of one large room and a small bathroom. Nevertheless, the narrator finds it very agreeable, mainly because the walls are hung with several framed watercolors by Mr. Yoshoto. Mrs. Yoshoto is there, in a black kimono, sweeping the floor. Mr. Yoshoto introduces them and then shows the narrator to his room. The room had belonged to their son, who had recently moved out to live on a farm in British Columbia, Mr. Yoshoto says. He apologizes that there are no chairs in the room, only floor cushions. The narrator is so eager to please that he says he actually hates chairs. He adds that he is a student of Buddhism. Later, the narrator interjects, he discovers that the Yoshotos are Presbyterians.

Later, while in bed, the narrator hears one of the Yoshotos moaning in their sleep. It is a high, continuous moan, and it keeps him awake. Unable to sleep, he gets out of bed and sits on one of the cushions, smoking. He finally gets back to sleep about five am. An hour and a half later, Mr. Yoshoto wakes him with a rap on the door and tells him breakfast will be ready in fifteen minutes. He asks the narrator if he slept well, and he responds, falsely, that he did.

He puts on a blue suit he feels is appropriate for the first day of classes and hurries down to the kitchen. Mrs. Yoshoto presents him with a piece of fish for breakfast and asks if he might prefer an egg. He lies that he never eats eggs. The three of them finish breakfast in silence, then walk downstairs to the schoolroom.

The narrator is shown to his desk, on the far side of the room from the desks of the Yoshotos. On their desks is a pile of bulky envelopes, which the two of them open, examining their contents methodically. The narrator sits at his desk, quietly arranging some drawing pencils, and trying to look "indispensable". He sits there for an hour and a half, doing nothing, while the Yoshotos sit and work on the pile of packets.

Finally, Mr. Yoshoto comes over to the narrator's desk with a group of papers. They are his notes on the students' drawings, written in French. He asks the narrator to translate them into English. Heartbroken, the narrator takes out his fountain pen and begins. He discovers while translating Mr. Yoshoto's nearly illegible handwriting that Yoshoto is really not much of an art teacher. He is not surprised at this, exactly, but given the trouble he has put himself through, it concerns him.

By lunchtime he has finished the work. He declines the Yoshoto's invitation to eat with them and rushes downstairs and out into the street. He walks hurriedly, but aimlessly, until he runs into a hot dog shop. He quickly eats four hot dogs and heads back to the school. On the way back, he wonders if Mr. Yoshoto has seen through his story and if that is why he is only using him as a translator. He begins to feel slightly indignant. He rushes back to the school.

Taking his seat at his desk, he sits stock still for several minutes, watching the Yoshotos work and thinking up new Picasso stories to tell should Mr. Yoshoto confront him. When Mr. Yoshoto does come over to his desk, he rises, ready to tell one of them, but suddenly forgets the plot. He compensates by praising a watercolor of a goose hanging over Mrs. Yoshoto's desk, saying he knows a man in Paris who will give any price for it. Mr. Yoshoto says the painting belongs to his cousin. He asks the narrator if he will correct some lessons. He gives the narrator three of the bulky envelopes and briefly explains the school's method of instruction while the narrator nods continuously.

The first envelope is from a woman named Bambi Kramer. As she was requested to do, she has included a photograph of herself, which is a full-size picture of her in a strapless bathing suit. Her enclosed paintings are poor and of sappy, sentimental subjects. The second envelope also contains several poorly arranged drawings, but are of risque subjects, such as a priest sexually assaulting a buxom young woman. They are by a man named R. Howard Ridgefield.

The narrator describes the artwork of these to students in a humorous light in retrospect, but at the time, he explains, he found nothing funny about his situation, which seemed impossible. He is in despair that he cannot teach these talentless people how to draw. He feels like telling the Yoshotos the truth that his mother has died and he is living with his "charming" stepfather in New York where nobody speaks French and, to make things worse, he has no chairs in his room. He controls the urge, however, and opens the third envelope.

The third envelope contains the work of a young nun named Sister Irma. She explains in the student questionnaire that she has been asked to take over a drawing class at her convent school and wants to learn to draw people running, as that is what her students want to learn, mainly. Her sample pictures are in watercolor on brown paper. They move the narrator, and looking back he still remembers them vividly. The most striking one is a religious scene of Jesus' body being carried to the tomb. It displays her hard work, the narrator feels, and is "an artist's picture" with only minor flaws.

He is extremely excited about Sister Irma's work, and his impulse is to rush over and show it to Mr. Yoshoto. Instead, he carefully puts it aside and begins to work on the other two envelopes. The method of instruction involves laying tissue paper over the student's drawings and tracing corrections onto it. This he does for the rest of the afternoon on the obscene drawings of Mr. Ridgefield. As dinnertime approached, he carefully stashes Sister Irma's envelope under his shirt, so as to work on it later, in his room, on his own time.

At dinner, the narrator is relaxed and in good spirits, thinking about the envelope. He tells a particularly outrageous Picasso story, which does not seem to impress either of the Yoshotos. Mrs. Yoshoto asks him if he might like a chair in his room. He politely says no, explaining that sitting on the floor next to the wall is helping his posture. He stands up to demonstrate. After dinner, he asks to be excused and rushes to his room.

He spends much of the night carefully going over the drawings and making sketches. He writes Sister Irma a long letter, a copy of which he still has, he interjects. In the letter, he offers extensive advice on her use of color and suggests some art supplies she might need. He also asks her how old she is and if she is allowed to have visitors at her convent. The narrator includes an excerpt from the letter, which is very complimentary of Sister Irma's talent, and sometimes highly personal. He reiterates his question about visiting the convent and asks about her life as a nun, explaining that he himself is agnostic. He includes some of his sketches, almost apologizing for their roughness, and mails everything to her, going out in the middle of the night to do so. Satisfied, he returns to his bed just as the strange moaning begins again in the next room. The narrator imagines himself able to help the Yoshotos with this "secret problem," after which he will sit them down and show them Sister Irma's work so they might share his joy.

The following day, he is sustained by the fact that his letter to Sister Irma is safely in the mail as he goes to work on Bambi Kramer's drawings. He is discouraged once more, however, when Mr. Yoshoto presents him with two new envelopes from people with even less talent than Kramer and Ridgefield. In his despair, he dares to light a cigarette at his desk, but after a few puffs Mr. Yoshoto walks over to inform him that there is a no smoking policy at the school.

The narrator works diligently during the days while he waits for the next envelope from Sister Irma. He spends his off hours trying to fill the time. On Wednesday night, he tries to sketch her drawing from memory. On Thursday, as he is returning from an afternoon out, he stops at the orthopedic appliances shop window below the school. As he is looking at the urinals and bedpans and trusses, a realization washes over him that no matter how cool or sensible he manages to become, he will always be surrounded by such things. The thought troubles him and he rushes upstairs and gets straight into bed.

He lays awake, listening to the moaning from the next room and imagining Sister Irma. In his mind, they meet on opposite sides of a high fence. She is young and has not yet taken her vows, he imagines, and they walk off together, he with his hand around her waist. He falls asleep.

The following day, he works hard all morning and into the afternoon, when Mr. Yoshoto comes to his desk and hands him a letter. It is from the Mother Superior of Sister Irma's convent. The letter apologetically states that they have decided that Sister Irma should no longer be a student at the art school, and politely asks if the tuition can be refunded.

The narrator is crestfallen. He reads and re-reads the letter. Suddenly, he puts it down and writes to each of his four other students, in French, that they have no talent at all and should give up drawing entirely. He immediately goes out and mails them.

He asks to be excused from dinner that night, spending the time in his room, staring at the window. Finally, he breaks away and writes a letter to Sister Irma. The narrator interjects that he never mailed the letter, and inserts it into the story in its entirety.

The letter speculates on why she has withdrawn from the school. He wonders if he has said anything himself that caused it. He wonders if the Father in charge of the school thought pursuing her artistic talent might interfere with her being a nun. If it is a lack of funds, he says, he offers to take her as a student for free. He makes more specific requests to come visit her at the convent.

The narrator feels that the occasion calls for getting drunk. He has never been drunk before, and he makes elaborate plans for the occasion. He makes a reservation at a nice hotel restaurant. Later, he dons a formal dinner jacket and slips out of the apartment unseen. He looks for a cab, but finding none, begins to walk. When he comes across the hot dog shop where he had eaten before, he decides to let the hotel reservation pass and goes inside, taking a booth where he hopes he will not be noticed in his formal suit. He orders soup, rolls, and coffee.

He takes out the letter to Sister Irma and re-reads it. He decides to add to it. He makes more definite plans to visit her, thinking he will get his train tickets that same evening. He leaves the lunch shop and heads back to the school.

As he approaches, he notices a light on in the orthopedic appliance shop downstairs. Inside, he sees a large young woman lacing a truss on a display dummy, her side turned to the window. He walks up to the window and watches her for a moment, until she suddenly becomes aware of him. He smiles to show he is friendly, but in her surprise, she steps backward onto a pile of basins and falls down. He instinctively reaches out to help her, but cannot because of the glass. Flushed, she gets back up and resumes her job, not looking at him.

He suddenly has a realization so strong that he has to steady himself against the building for a moment. He walks around the block a couple times until his knees stop shaking, then goes up to bed. After a time, he makes an entry in his diary, "I am giving Sister Irma her freedom to follow her own destiny. Everyone is a nun" (p. 251).

He then writes back to his four students, saying that an administrative mistake had been made and inviting them to continue with their instruction. The letters are easy to write, the narrator says, perhaps because he has finally brought a chair into his room.

The narrator adds that the school was closed down shortly afterwards for not having a proper business license. He returned to stay with Bobby and spent the rest of the summer following girls. He has never gotten in touch with Sister Irma, he says, although he still hears from Bambi Kramer. She is branching out into the design of Christmas cards. He muses that she might be good at it, if she has not "lost her touch".

De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period Analysis

This is the most overtly humorous of the stories in the collection, told through the ironical and sarcastic point of view of a man looking back on his days as an overeager youth. The narrator is older as he tells the story, and self effacement and light ridicule of his younger self are injected in some scenes, such as when he dresses in a tuxedo as part of his deliberate plan to get drunk.

The young narrator assumes an outrageous identity as the heir of a famous artist and close personal friend of Picasso. He feels the need to embellish his background continuously, even when it is unnecessary. He approaches lying with an enthusiasm, stating that at that time in his youth, it came more naturally than telling the truth. This tendency to go over the top is evident in his lengthy response to Sister Irma, the nun whose artwork has impressed him so much. Sister Irma, or rather her superiors at the convent where she lives, are taken aback by the young man's eagerness and insistence that he should come visit. They withdraw her from the course, which only fans the flame of his single-minded enthusiasm.

He prepares an even longer letter, partly apologizing, but going even further in his insistence that they meet. He never sends the letter because he suddenly realizes how he has been acting. The incident that leads him to this revelation takes place at the shop window below the art school, where a young woman is arranging the window display. In his usual, earnest way, the narrator stands and stares intently as the woman goes about her work. His attention startles the woman to the point where she falls. She stands and continues about her business, doing her best to ignore him at the window. The narrator finally understands how his enthusiastic attention and attempts to ingratiate himself is off-putting to people, and decides to leave Sister Irma alone.

The outrageous inventions of the narrator are balanced by the understated, "inscrutable" Mr. and Mrs. Yoshoto. Interestingly, the Yoshotos are building themselves up just as the narrator does, only in a quieter way. Their art school is a fly-by-night operation that does not have a business permit. Mr. Yoshoto speaks of the "school policy", even though the school consists only of him and his wife. He has managed to convince the narrator to pay his own expenses to travel to Montreal with only a vague idea of what his actual duties will be. The narrator describes his youthful self as being constantly afraid that his deception will be discovered, when in fact it was he who was letting himself be deceived.

Teddy

Teddy Summary

Teddy McArdle is standing on his father's new suitcase, poking his head out the porthole of his parent's ship cabin. He is a small boy, and is wearing worn and dirty clothes. He is in need of a haircut. His father, lying sunburned in a twin bed, tells him in a loud voice to get down off the suitcase at once. His mother, half awake in a separate bed, tells him to stay where he is. His parents exchange some bitter words, while Teddy, seemingly oblivious to either of them, continues to look out the porthole, responding only when his father yells at him to get a haircut. He responds that he hasn't any money.

Teddy addresses his mother, who is still just half awake and who asks him to let her sleep a few more minutes. Teddy is insistent that he has something interesting to say, and continues. He tells her about a man they sit near at mealtimes on the ship. He met him in the gym earlier that morning, Teddy tells her. The man approached him and began talking to him about a tape Teddy had made for an examining group in Boston. The man was a professor himself, and had heard the tape played at a party. This seems to interest Mrs. McArdle somewhat. Mr. McArdle repeats his demand that Teddy get off the suitcase.

Mrs. McArdle, more awake now, asks Teddy what time it is and reminds him that he and his younger sister, Booper, have a swimming lesson at 10:30. Teddy responds that there is plenty of time. He reports that someone has just thrown some orange peels out the window. His father sarcastically corrects him, telling him it is a porthole, not a window, then turns to his mother and bitterly jokes that she should call the "Leidekker Group" to let them know the boy genius has made a mistake.

Teddy has continued to watch the orange peels float on the surface of the water. He finds it interesting, and tells his parents so. It is not the fact that they float he finds interesting, he tells them, but that if he had not seen them thrown out, he wouldn't know they were there, and if he didn't know they were there, he could not say whether they even existed. He is about to continue when his mother interrupts him. She asks him to go find Booper. She is afraid that Booper may be sitting in the sun somewhere making her sunburn worse. Teddy casually answers that he made her wear long pants, and returns to the subject of the orange peels. They are beginning to sink, now, he tells his parents. Soon, they will only exist in his mind, he says.

Again, he begins to elaborate on the nature of the existence of the orange peels when his mother interrupts him. She wants to know exactly where Booper is. Teddy replies that she is OK, and that he gave her the camera. His father erupts that his expensive Leica camera is in the hands of a six-year-old. Teddy calmly answers that he showed Booper how to hold it so she would not drop it and had taken the film out. His father insists that Teddy retrieve the camera immediately. His mother asks him to tell Booper she wants to see her.

Teddy ties his shoe, then moves over to his father's bed and cleans up the cigarette ashes he has carelessly dropped. He replaces the ashtray in the exact center of the nightstand and picks up his father's pillow, asking if he wants it back. His father sternly replies that he wants his camera back. Teddy's mother again tells Teddy to tell Booper that she wants to see her before he swimming lesson. Mr. McArdle scolds his wife for not giving Booper more freedom, and she responds sarcastically. Meanwhile, Teddy is at the door to the cabin, twisting the door handle back and forth. He muses quietly to himself that after he walks through the door, he may only exist in the minds of his acquaintances, like the orange peels.

Outside the door is the one-sheet ship's newspaper, which Teddy carefully reads as he walks down the passageway. He makes his way deliberately up a flight of stairs to the main deck and goes directly to the Purser's desk, where he inquires about an activity that afternoon, a word game played by the passengers. He then hurries up to the Promenade deck to look for Booper.

He finds her on the sports deck, stacking shuffleboard counters in piles of red and black. Sitting near her and watching is a younger boy named Myron. As Teddy approaches, Booper angrily tells Myron to move out of the way so Teddy can see her handiwork. Teddy praises her symmetrical arrangement. Booper abruptly begins to criticize Myron to Teddy, saying he has never heard of backgammon and does not live in New York. She turns to Myron and tells him he is the stupidest person in the entire ocean. Teddy contradicts her, telling Myron that he is not.

Teddy tells Booper he needs the camera right away and asks where it is. She points to where it is sitting, a few yards away. Teddy puts the strap around his neck, but then changes his mind. He returns to Booper and asks her to take the camera back to their parents because he needs to write in his diary. He tells her their mother wants to see her. She does not believe him, but he repeats that it is true. He hangs the camera around her neck and tells her he will meet her by the pool at 10:30 sharp. As he walks away, she shouts out that she hates him and everyone in the ocean.

Teddy goes to the sun deck, where dozens of deck chairs are placed in rows, each with a placard showing the name of the passenger it is reserved for. Teddy methodically moves from chair to chair reading the placards, looking for his own. He finds the four chairs reserved for his family, and sits in one of the middle ones so that nobody is around him. He stretches out and pulls a small notebook from his pocket. He begins to read it intently. His handwriting looks like that of an adult, and the writing itself does not seem like that of a ten-year-old.

He reads through the previous entry in the diary. He has made a deliberate note that he should find his father's dog tags and start wearing them because his father would like it. He has written that he is tired of poetry and should ask Professor Mandell to stop sending him books of poems. He has made reference to his practice of meditating, and has noted to himself that he should try not to lose consciousness, as he did earlier on the trip when a waiter dropped a spoon. He has made a list of words to look up, and made a note to be nicer to the librarian.

Teddy takes out a pen and begins to write in the notebook. He notes that he meditated that day, and makes a list of the people he has written letters to, including several professors. He makes a few other observations and then writes, "It will either happen today or February 14, 1958 when I am sixteen. It is ridiculous to mention even."

After writing this, Teddy sits looking at the diary as if he might have more to write. He is unaware that a young man has been watching him from a higher deck. The man leaves his place and makes his way down to the sun deck, angling through the rows of chairs toward Teddy. Teddy continues to be unaware of him until he is standing directly at the foot of his chair. He greets Teddy and Teddy says Hello.

The man is dressed in the manner of a graduate student, in a tweed jacket. He sits in a chair next to Teddy and begins to chat about the weather in a loud, confident voice. It is the same man that approached Teddy in the gym earlier. He introduces himself as Bob Nicholson. Teddy puts his notebook back in his pocket.

Nicholson casually asks Teddy if he enjoyed his time in Europe, and asks where he visited. Teddy responds that they went many places, but that he and his mother spent much of the time in Oxford and Edinburgh, where he was being interviewed by universities. He mentions that some professors from Sweden and Austria had come there to meet him.

Teddy abruptly asks Nicholson if he is a poet, and Nicholson responds that he is not. Teddy wonders why poets are always injecting emotions into things that have no emotions. He quotes some Japanese poetry as an example of unemotional poetry. He then tells Nicholson that he has some water in his ear from swimming the day before.

Nicholson brings up the subject of the Leidekker examining group and the tape that was made of Teddy, which he has heard. He says he has heard that the group found Teddy's interview quite disturbing. He has heard that Teddy made some predictions that upset some of the professors. He asks Teddy if this is true.

Teddy ignores the question and returns to the subject of emotions. He wonders what they are good for. Nicholson asks if Teddy has no emotions, and he responds that if he does, he does not recall ever using them. Nicholson asks if Teddy loves God, referring to something that he heard Teddy say on the tape. Teddy answers that he does, and he loves his parents as well, but not in the sentimental way that he thinks Nicholson wants him to mean it. He asks Nicholson the time, saying that he has a swimming lesson at 10:30, down on the E deck. Nicholson tells him it is just 10:10. Teddy thanks him, and says they can converse for ten more minutes.

Nicholson sits up and starts in. He says he understands that Teddy believes in the theory of Vedantic reincarnation. Teddy responds that it is not a theory, and Nicholson agrees to concede the point. He further outlines what he understands what Teddy has claimed. As he understands it, Teddy has discovered through meditation that in his previous life he was a spiritually advanced man in India who fell from grace after meeting a woman and giving up meditation. Teddy confirms this, and says this is why he

has been reincarnated as an American. It is very difficult to lead a spiritual life as an American, he tells Nicholson, because people think he is a freak.

Teddy tells Nicholson that he was six when he discovered that everything was God. He was watching his sister drink some milk and realized that she was God and the Milk was God. He has been escaping the "finite dimensions" since he was four, he tells Nicholson. Nicholson asks him more about this, and Teddy attempts to explain. The first thing one has to do is to give up thinking logically, he says. The apple that Adam ate in the Garden of Eden contained logic and reason and similar things, Teddy tells him. The problem with most people is that they do not want to advance themselves spiritually so that when the die they can stay with God instead of being reincarnated over and over.

Nicholson asks Teddy if it is true that he told various members of the Leidekker group where, when and how they would die. Teddy says it is not true. What he told them were places and times when they should be very careful, but he did not tell them anything specific. He adds that he could have, but he sensed that they did not really want to know. Even though they spend their time contemplating philosophy and religion, Teddy says, they are still basically afraid to die. He adds that this is silly, because dying is essentially just leaving one's body and that they have already done it thousands of times before, they just do not remember it.

Teddy continues to speak about how silly this fear is. He gives an example to Nicholson. He reminds him about his swimming lesson. He says that this might be the day that they change the water in the pool, or something, leaving the pool empty. He suggests that what could happen is he could walk up to the edge of the empty pool just to look in, and his sister could come up behind him and push him in. He might fall to the bottom and fracture his skull, and die. He looks at Nicholson and tells him that his sister is only six and has not been a human through many lives yet, and she does not like Teddy very much.

Teddy asks Nicholson what would be so tragic if that happened. He suggests there would be nothing to fear, as he is just doing what he is supposed to be doing. Nicholson says it might not be a tragedy for Teddy, but it would be tragic for those he left behind. Teddy agrees, but this is only because they are emotional and do not understand what is happening.

Teddy stands and says he must go to his swimming lesson. Nicholson detains him, asking him what he would do to change the educational system if he could. Teddy thinks for a moment then responds that he would start by teaching them to meditate so that they might know themselves first. Then he would simply show them things without describing them with words. Words are relative and changing, he says. Children can learn them later if they wish, but they should first learn the true nature of things.

Teddy tries to leave again, and again Nicholson asks him a question. He wonders if Teddy has ever considered going into medical research or some similar field. Teddy replies that he has, but that doctors do not understand the true nature of the body. Everyone has the ability to heal himself or herself, he says, they have just lost the

conscious knowledge of how to do it. Finally, Teddy deliberately takes Nicholson's right hand and shakes it, saying he really must go to his swimming lesson. Teddy moves off quickly.

Nicholson sits silently for a short time, finishing his cigarette. He stands up suddenly and begins to move briskly toward the stairway leading downward. He rushes his way down to the D deck, and looks around for direction. He finds a steward who shows him a door marked "To the Pool." The door opens onto a stairway.

Halfway down the stairs, Nicholson hears the high, sustained scream of a young girl. It reverberates heavily, as if in an empty tiled room.

Teddy Analysis

The final story in the collection, like the first, ends suddenly with the death of the main character. In "Teddy," it is the ten-year-old child genius Teddy McArdle whose off-stage death caps the tale.

Salinger reveals the nature of Teddy's talents gradually over the course of the story, dropping hints about the "Leidekker Examining Group" and Teddy's relationships with various college professors. It is eventually apparent that he has made quite a stir among the academic circles of the world, although Teddy himself seems somewhat oblivious to it, or, rather, above it all. He is a calm boy, unaffected by emotion and deliberate in his speech and actions.

At first, it seems that it is Teddy's intelligence is what has captivated academia, but through his discussion with Bob Nicholson, it is revealed that he is a follower of the Hindu religion, and claims to have come to know about the true nature of God and reality based on meditation and his experience in past lives. Nicholson is curious, if at first slightly antagonistic, but Teddy is consistent in his views and Nicholson eventually begins to ask his advice.

One of Teddy's more fantastic claims is to be able to know the future, and indeed he seems to predict his own death in his diary as well as describe how it will happen to Nicholson, although he pretends to be speaking hypothetically. His discourse on the nature of reality contains some of the longer stretches of dialogue in Salinger's stories, and seems to be forced, although Salinger presents the ideas in a casual way.

Characters

Seymour Glass

Seymour Glass is a young soldier who has emerged from World War II deeply troubled. He has been hospitalized as a result of his mental state, but has now been released. He acts strangely and inappropriately. His unusual actions are only hinted at in the story, but he has apparently wrecked his father-in-law's car by deliberately driving it into a tree, given his wife a book of poetry in German expecting her to learn the language so she could read it, and has done something unspecified to her grandmother's chair. His in-laws are concerned that he may try to harm their daughter.

When young Sybil startles Seymour on the beach, he instinctively reaches for his lapel as if for a gun, indicating his perhaps frightened and uncertain state of mind. He is at ease with Sybil, speaking to her in a playful, adult way. His one exchange with an adult is insulting and irrational. Seymour speaks resentfully of his wife, who he seems to think is idle and vain. The extent of his instability is not fully known until the end of the tale when he takes his own life.

Muriel Glass

Muriel Glass is the wife of Seymour Glass and the first character to appear in the story. She defends Seymour and his behavior to her mother, but at the same time discusses it with a psychiatrist she meets at the hotel. She has apparently waited for Seymour while he was away during the war and is still supportive of him, in her way. Muriel is presented as somewhat shallow, as concerned with hats and dresses as with her husband's strange actions. She seems to spend much of her time in the hotel room, sleeping.

Muriel's Mother

Muriel's mother is the voice of worry in the story. It is through he conversation with Muriel about Seymour that his odd behavior is first described. She lives in New York with Muriel's father. She has come to disapprove of Muriel's marriage to Seymour and encourages her to leave him, offering to come and get her. Like Muriel, she seems to give Seymour's mental well-being and modern fashion equal weight in conversation.

Sybil Carpenter

The young girl who befriends Seymour at the seaside hotel. Seymour takes Sybil for a ride on a rubber float and tells her about bananafish.

Eloise

Eloise is originally from Boise, Idaho. She came to New York to go to college, where she met Mary Jane and fell in love with Walt. Eloise did not finish college, and Walt was killed in an accident while he was serving in the military in Japan. She has stayed in touch with Mary Jane, whom she sees occasionally. Eloise is married to Lew and has one daughter, Ramona. She lives in suburban Connecticut, and is the only mother in her neighborhood.

Eloise is physically and emotionally isolated in her home. She is envious of Mary Jane's relative freedom, and resentful of her husband, who has turned out to be a different person than she thought she was marrying.

Mary Jane

Mary Jane is Eloise's roommate from college. She was married briefly to a soldier who was put in jail for stabbing someone, and now is a private secretary for an affluent businessman. She is presented as being somewhat flighty and does not always seem to connect with Eloise's caustic sense of humor. Eloise seems to envy her freedom.

Ramona

Ramona is the young daughter of Eloise and Lew. She is the only child in her neighborhood and has taken an imaginary friend, Jimmy Jimmereeno, whom she treats as if he is a real person, even making room for him in her bed at night.

Grace

Grace is the maid for Eloise and Lew. She is married and lives in New York City, but also has a room at the suburban house where she works.

Lew

Lew is Eloise's husband. He works in New York City and takes the train to and from home in Connecticut. He once told Eloise that he loved the works of Jane Austen, but she later found out that he had never read any. He only appears in the story briefly as the unheard half of a telephone conversation, during which Eloise treats him shortly.

Ginnie Mannox

Ginnie Mannox is an affluent teenage girl who lives in Manhattan and attends a private girls' school with Selena Graff. Ginnie is resolute and resistant to being manipulated, as when Selena tries indignantly to avoid splitting the taxi fare with her. Yet she is

sometimes manipulative herself, forgiving the debt and offering friendship to Selena once she has become enamored of Selena's brother, Franklin. Ginnie has a perhaps typical low view of her older sister, Joan, and is pleased to hear her criticized by Franklin. She is perhaps a little obsessive, choosing to keep the already day-old chicken sandwich that Franklin gives her. Ginnie is the only character in this collection whose inner thoughts are described by Salinger.

Selena

Selena is a teenage schoolmate of Ginnie Maddox. They play tennis together on Saturdays, and Selena always brings fresh balls, as her father manufactures them. She pretends to be oblivious about her debt to Ginnie and becomes indignant when Ginnie calls it in. She is haughty to Ginnie until Ginnie pretends to show an interest in being friends, which seems to please her.

Franklin

Franklin is Selena's brother. He is in his twenties. Franklin attended college, but has not finished. He was exempted from being drafted into the military because of a heart condition, and spent the war working in an aircraft plant. He is boyish and adrift. He has bitter feelings toward Ginnie's sister, Joan, over her perceived snobbishness. He is relaxed and friendly with Ginnie, even though he has not met her before.

Eric

Eric is a friend of Franklin's whom he met while working at the aircraft plant. Eric was also exempted from being drafted into the military, because of a bad "constitution", he explains, but it is implied that he is homosexual, which would also have eliminated him from service. Eric is a sharp dresser and lives in his own apartment. He is apparently trying to expose Franklin to higher culture, encouraging him to see an art film as opposed to the mysteries and thrillers that Franklin prefers.

Narrator

The narrator of the story is looking back fondly on a specific time in his youth. As a boy, he was one of several others who spent every day after school playing sports or visiting museums with a young law student they called The Chief. The narrator was something of a leader among the boys, serving as captain of one of their baseball teams and usually getting a good seat on The Chief's bus in order to better hear the latest installment of the bus driver's oral story, The Laughing Man. In retrospect, the narrator describes a time when he felt the world held unlimited potential and he shared in the sense of adventure and possibility that were embodied in The Chief and the stories he told. The end of the Laughing Man saga profoundly affects the narrator.

The Chief

The Chief is the nickname for John Gedsudski, a young man who is employed by several New York City parents to entertain their boys after school and on holidays. He drives a bus in which he transports the boys to Central Park to play sports on nice days, or to a museum on rainy days. He is a well-built, stocky young man and is very popular with the boys. He is very creative, and his installments of the "Laughing Man" stories keep the boys engaged and silent as they listen intently. The Chief eventually takes a girlfriend, Mary Hudson, which initially creates confusion among the boys.

Mary Hudson

Mary Hudson is the girlfriend of The Chief. She has attended college, but it is implied that she has not finished. She meets The Chief and the rest of the boys whenever she is in New York City to visit her dentist. The Chief picks her up in his bus. Her presence is confusing to the boys at first, who are not certain why a female should be present in their all-male world. When Mary proves she can compete at baseball, however, she is quickly accepted.

The Comanches

The Comanches are the young boys whose parents have hired The Chief to pick them up after school and keep them entertained. They spend their afternoons playing baseball, visiting museums, and listening to The Chief's installments of The Laughing Man.

Boo Boo Tannenbaum

Boo Boo Tannenbaum is a small, "stunning" woman of twenty-five. She is married and has one young son, Lionel. It is revealed incidentally that she is also the sister of Seymour Glass, who appears in the story "A Perfect Day for Bananafish." Boo Boo and her husband are affluent, with an apartment in New York and a lakeside home in Connecticut. She is portrayed as a loving and attentive mother to Lionel, who is a very sensitive child.

Lionel Tannenbaum

The young son of Boo Boo. Lionel is a sensitive child who is set off by unusual and unpredictable things, usually something spoken. His reaction is to run away. He frequently hides around the house.

Sandra

The Tannenbaums' maid. She resents the Tannenbaums and speaks poorly of them behind their back. She finds Lionel's behavior disturbing.

Mrs. Snell

Mrs. Snell is the gossipy cleaning lady who works for the Tannenbaums. She lives in the village near the lake house.

Narrator/Staff Sergeant X

The narrator of the story does not reveal his name, but includes himself as a character in it called Staff Sergeant X. X is a thoughtful, educated, literate man who begins his military career in a quiet section of England where he is undergoing training. He goes to Europe on D-Day and is present there throughout the fighting, clear through the end of the war on V-E day. He emerges from the fighting a changed man, one on the brink of mental breakdown. Indeed, he has already had a breakdown for which he was been hospitalized. He begins his recovery after reflecting on a conversation he had before the fighting with a charming young English girl named Esme.

Esme

Esme is an articulate, charming young English girl. Her parents have both died, her father in the fighting in North Africa. She has inherited a family title as a result, but does not share it with strangers, she says, because they tend to become overly impressed. She wears a large man's wristwatch, a gift from her father which she passes on to Staff Sergeant X. Esme lives with her aunt and looks after her younger brother, Charles.

Charles

Charles is the younger brother of Esme. He enjoys riddles and is of the impression that they become funnier each time they are repeated. Charles is a willful boy who only listens to his older sister.

Clay/Corporal Z

Corporal Z is the jeep partner of the narrator during their time in Europe. He has a girlfriend, Loretta, in the United States to whom he writes regularly with the narrator's help. He is a good deal younger than the narrator and sometimes blunt about the narrator's mental condition.

Lee

Lee is the name of the "gray-haired man" who is the first to appear in the story. Lee is an unmarried lawyer at the same firm as Arthur, who calls him late at night looking for his wife. Lee is in bed with Arthur's wife. He lives in New York City.

Arthur

A married lawyer at the same firm as Lee, and the husband of Joanie, the girl in Lee's bed. Arthur lives in New York City, but is thinking of moving to Connecticut to have more time alone with his wife. He does not trust his wife, and is not certain that he loves her. Yet, he is sentimental about her and cannot bring himself to leave her.

Joanie

Joanie is the amorous wife of Arthur, and is "the girl" in Lee's bed. She shows some remorse for cheating on Arthur, but not much. She has violet eyes.

Narrator/Jean de Daumier-Smith

"Jean de Daumier-Smith" is the invented name of the narrator of the story. He arrives at the name by attaching the plain name "John Smith" (after rendering the first name in French) to the last name of the famous painter Honore de Daumier. Orphaned at a young age, "Jean" is raised in Paris by his stepfather, Bobby. He is an enthusiastic youth and has some artistic ability, although perhaps not as much as he pretends. He is a compulsive liar, claiming to be a personal friend of Pablo Picasso.

Mr. Yoshoto

Mr. Yoshoto is the head of the correspondence art school in Montreal, Les Amis Des Vieux Maetres, where "Jean" take a position. He is a competent artist, and a man of regular habits. "Jean" describes him and his wife as "inscrutable". His art school is unlicensed and is eventually shut down. He speaks French, but little English.

Mrs. Yoshoto

Mrs. Yoshoto is the wife of Mr. Yoshoto and assists him with the business of the art school. She also cooks for the three of them. She speaks some English.

Bobby Agadganian

Bobby is the stepfather of the narrator. He was a stockbroker who lost everything in the great crash in 1929, but found success again as an art appraiser in Paris. He takes good care of his stepson, and is very charming, which his stepson only admits after hsi stepfather dies of thrombosis.

Sister Irma

Sister Irma is a young nun who has been assigned to teach drawing at her convent school and has applied to the correspondence art school where Jean is a teacher. Jean is impressed by her work, mainly out of boyish enthusiasm, it seems. Sister Irma is not allowed to continue with the art lessons following Jean's overenthusiastic response to her work.

R. Howard Ridgefield

Ridgefield is one of Jean's art students. He creates obscene drawings of illicit scenes.

Bambi Kramer

Bambi Kramer is another of Jean's art students. She favors sentimental and cute subjects.

Teddy

Teddy is the reincarnated soul of an Indian holy man in the body of a young boy. He has been reincarnated as an American child, he says, because of a transgression in his previous life. He meditates regularly and claims to be able to enter infinite dimensions, allowing him to see the future. He seems to predict his own death, which comes suddenly at the end of the story.

Mr. McArdle

Mr. McArdle is Teddy's father. He is a radio actor in New York and uses a very loud voice. He is demanding of Teddy and indulgent toward his daughter, Booper.

Mrs. McArdle

Mrs. McArdle is Teddy's mother. She indulges Teddy and is protective of Booper. Neither Mr. nor Mrs. McArdle leave their beds during the story.

Booper McArdle

Booper is Teddy's six-year-old sister. She is impatient and petulant and does not like Teddy. Teddy explains that she has not been a human being for many lives. It is implied that Booper pushes Teddy into an empty pool to his death.

Bob Nicholson

Nicholson is a college professor of Education who is on the same ocean liner as Teddy. He approaches Teddy casually a few times before engaging him in serious conversation. He is sometimes politely condescending to Teddy, but eventually earnestly seeks his opinion.

Objects/Places

Manhattan, New York City

The largest city on the East Coast of the United States, and the setting for many of the stories in the collection, including "Just Before the War with the Eskimos", "The Laughing Man", "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes", and part of "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period." The stories "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut", "Teddy", and "Down at the Dinghy" do not take place in New York City, but the characters in the stories are mainly from New York.

Suburban Connecticut

The affluent region near New York City where many professionals began to live following World War II. The small towns were reached by commuter train from the city. "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Down at the Dinghy" take place in suburban Connecticut.

Miami, Florida

The coastal city in Florida where Muriel and Seymour Glass are visiting on a vacation at a seaside hotel.

The Ocean Liner

The large passenger ship that the McArdle family is taking back to New York from a visit to Europe. The ship has several decks and a pool.

Central Park

A large park in the center of Manhattan in New York City. Central Park is where the Comanches go to play baseball every day in "The Laughing Man."

Metropolitan Museum

A large art museum on the eastern edge of Central Park.

Museum of Natural History

A large museum on the western edge of Central Park.

Devon, England

A large county in southwest England, bordering on the English Channel.

Gaufert, Bavaria

Part of southern Germany where Staff Sergeant X is stationed after Germany has been defeated by the Allied forces in World War II.

Les Amis Des Vieux Maetres

The small correspondence art school in Montreal where "Jean de Daumier-Smith" takes a position as an instructor in "De Daumier's Blue Period". The school occupies the second floor of a building, above an orthopedic appliance shop, and is operated by Mr. and Mrs. Yoshoto.

Montreal

The largest city in the Canadian province of Quebec. Montreal is largely French-speaking.

Themes

The social consequences of war

The stories that appear in this collection were originally published in the years following World War II. Many men were finding it difficult to adjust to normal civilian life following the extreme stress of combat. Many women also had a hard time coping with the absence or loss of loved ones. Many of the characters in Salinger's stories are dealing with these hardships in one way or another.

The narrator of "For Esme with Love and Squalor" is the most direct example of this theme of Salinger's. A thoughtful, quiet young man emerges from the fighting in Europe severely disturbed and teetering on the brink of insanity. Where he used to take pleasure in reading and rereading simple newsy letters from home, after the war he cannot bring himself to finish even one. When his friend tries to interest him in listening to the radio or going to a dance, he cannot bring himself to participate. He tries to write a letter, which is something he did regularly before the fighting, but shakes too much to put paper in his typewriter. His handwriting has become illegible. It is as if the simple things in life have become meaningless to him after his wartime experience. But it is also the simple things that save him from insanity, Salinger suggests. One of the most common feelings in the world, sleepiness, comforts the narrator. Once he is able to find solace in simple things again, he begins to recover.

Seymour Glass does not fare so well in coping with the mental strain of returning to normal life after serving in the war. One of Salinger's techniques is to leave much unsaid in his stories, leaving the reader to observe the results and imagine the details. Exactly what has put Seymour over the top is not specified, only that he has been hospitalized following the war. He does not seem to have the ability to "fit in" with adult society any longer, preferring the company of children. Salinger's description of Seymour leaves the reader wondering if he really knows what he is doing. His actions seem quite deliberate elsewhere in the story, suggesting that his suicide has been planned. The reader is not told how Muriel, his wife, is left to deal with the consequences.

"Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" does address the issue of a woman who has lost her lover in the war. Eloise has moved on from her loss, but only technically speaking. She has married a successful businessman and has a daughter. She lives in a nice suburb of New York, yet she is isolated from her former friends as she lives with the ghost of Walt, her college love. Her young daughter seems to be imitating her by inventing an invisible "beau" for herself. Eloise cannot bear to see this, and forcefully tries to prevent her daughter from creating these imaginary boys. She is in danger of passing her grief along to her daughter.

Salinger himself served in Europe in World War II, and his original readers might well have been personally familiar with the kinds of anguish that the war brought with it.

Redemption through children

Children take important roles in Salinger's story, figuring prominently in seven of the nine stories in the collection. The children in Salinger's stories are often unusually sensitive, intelligent, and perceptive children. Lionel, in "Down at the Dinghy" runs away at the smallest provocation. Esme, in "For Esme with Love and Squalor" is a teenager with the poise and presence of a much older woman. Teddy, in "Teddy" is a highly advanced spiritual genius. The other young people who appear in the tales, such as in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" and "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period", are independent and well spoken, if still immature in many ways.

It is in the interactions between children and adults that Salinger makes some of his most interesting observations. The interplay between Seymour and Sybil in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is an example. Seymour's grip on reality is slipping, something he seems to be partly aware of. He speaks oddly about inanimate things, such as when he says the rubber float "needs more air than I'm willing to admit". Sybil is at first skeptical of his story about the existence of bananafish, but soon suspends her disbelief and imagines she has seen one. It is perhaps out of joy that they have shared a part of Seymour's unreal world that he impulsively kisses Sybil on the foot.

In "Down at the Dinghy", the sensitive Lionel has taken to a boat and will not get out. Earlier dialog suggests that there is strain between his parents, possibly due partly to Lionel's impulsive behavior. Boo Boo gives Lionel her full attention and engages him in a sometimes silly conversation that ends in his admitting what has set him off. He has correctly interpreted a derisive word spoken about his father, but in his innocence has misdefined it. This flash of innocence, and Boo Boo's response to it, leave the story on an optimistic note.

Redemption is an even more overt theme in "For Esme with Love and Squalor", where the memory of an encounter with a girl before the war reminds a soldier of the small pleasures he once took in reading and re-reading letters and engaging in pleasant conversation. The girl's mature yet still naive outlook on life is an example of the optimism and enthusiasm of youth that the soldier has lost. A similar theme is explored in the young character "Jean" in "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period", in which an adult looks back on the enthusiasm of his youth from adulthood. He does not condemn himself for it, but embraces it as a time of exploring adult roles and finding his own place in the adult world.

In "Teddy" the theme of redemption is almost literal, as the ten-year-old Teddy calmly informs the adults that surround him of his own path to spiritual enlightenment. At the end of the tale, the professor Nicholson treats him almost as a guru, asking his opinion on education.

Teddy's description of how he might educate children provides a good description of the kind of child that often appears in Salinger's stories. These are children who have come to their own conclusions largely independent of adult influence, it seems. As a result, their behavior seems sometimes out of place to the adults that surround them. Salinger

seems to suggest that by becoming more childlike and independent in our thought we can also become more enlightened.

Coming of age

Two of Salinger's stories in particular deal with major turning points in young men's lives; "The Laughing Man", and "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period". As he does in many of his stories, Salinger leaves many of the details to the imagination of the reader, focusing on short episodes during the characters' transitional intervals between youth and adulthood.

The narrator of "The Laughing Man" is telling the story of his childhood in retrospect, looking back as an adult. Although the story ends without indicating so, the implication is that when the boy's hero, The Chief, told the last installment of the story of The Laughing Man to the Comanche Club, the club disbanded. In this way the story marks an end to a definite period in the narrator's life, suggesting a transition. It is the character of The Chief who really seems poised at the threshold of manhood, however. At first, he is content to spend all of his time with the Comanches in the "men-only" confines of his bus and engaged in the traditional male pastimes of sports. When his interest turns to a young woman, he is probably as delighted as the other boys that she seems to enjoy sports, and is even pretty good. Salinger does not tell his readers why things begin to sour between The Chief and Mary Hudson, but one imagines that it may have to do with his spending much of his time with her in the company of the Comanche Club. When she reappears at one of their games after an apparent spat, The Chief's reaction is to talk her into joining them, which she partially agrees to do. The narrator then tries in his boyish way to convince her to play in the game once again. The Chief and the young boy are really doing the same thing, and are equally ignorant of how Mary wants to be treated. She runs away. The episode is instantly recognizable to any man who ever tried to impress a girl by throwing his baseball mitt in the air and trying to make it land on his head.

The hilarious tale of "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" is a similar tale of an intelligent but bumbling young man searching for his place in the adult world. "Jean", the narrator, feels unreasonably confident of his abilities, but tries too hard to impress others. His eagerness and flat out bombast do not seem to faze the "inscrutable" Yoshotos, but are off-putting to others. Just as he pours all his effort into chasing the position at the art school based only on a newspaper ad, he effuses ridiculously over the drawings of the unseen Sister Irma. He is searching for an outlet for his enthusiasm, and will follow wherever it leads him: the farther off the better, for it allows him to feed on his own imagination. "Jean" eventually comes to realize this about himself when his intense attention causes a shop girl to fall over in embarrassment. He describes it as a blinding light of revelation. He is on his way to manhood.

Style

Point of View

Most of Salinger's stories in this collection are told in from a purely descriptive point of view in the third person. There is no impartial, omniscient narrator and the characters' motivations and emotions are only revealed through their words and actions. Some of the stories are told in the first person, in the form of reminiscences. In these cases, the narrator provides some insight into his own thoughts, but those of other characters are not revealed. One story does provide a third-person account of the inner thoughts of the main character, but only of that character and no others.

"A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is told in the third person through a series of conversations with short intervals of description between the dialog. Salinger employs a similar point of view in the stories "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut", "Down at the Dinghy", "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes", and "Teddy." Although Salinger gives no descriptions of the characters' inner thoughts in these stories, he manages to convey them by effectively describing their language and actions. In "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" for example, the surprise and confusion that Lee feels when Arthur lies to him about Joanie coming home is registered by a description of Lee sitting up straighter and placing one hand on top of his head, as if he is thinking of how to respond.

Salinger uses the first person narrative in the stories "The Laughing Man", "For Esme with Love and Squalor", and "De-Daumier's Blue Period". Each of these stories is introduced by the narrator so that it is clear that they are being told in retrospect and not as they are happening in the present. Once the narrators slip into the story, Salinger again relies on dialog to propel the action. This point of view allows the narrator to provide background information about his own thoughts and motivations. Salinger relies on brief but powerful description to provide insight into the other characters. In "For Esme with Love and Squalor", which is presented in the form of a letter, the narrator switches deliberately into the third person for the second half of the tale. He jokes with the reader that he has disguised the characters in this section, but it is clear that he is still talking about his own personal experience, and that he is the main character in the second half.

One story, "Just Before the War with the Eskimos", is told from a kind of omniscient viewpoint, but only the thoughts of the main character, Ginnie Maddox, are revealed, and only sparingly. For the most part, the story is like most of the others in that the characters' motivations can only be deduced from their language and descriptions. Salinger does not provide Ginnie's interpretations of the other characters' intentions, only with some of Ginnie's reactions and motivation.

Setting

Almost all of the stories in the collection are centered in one way or another around New York City. Even in those stories that take place outside New York, the characters are from New York or are otherwise connected to the city in some way. The time setting is the late 1940s or early 1950s, which is also when the stories were published. Readers who saw these stories when they were new would have recognized them as contemporary.

This was a time when World War II was still a very recent memory, and many people were dealing with the after effects of the war. This is dealt with directly in the stories "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "For Esme with Love and Squalor", which tell of troubled soldiers dealing with the mental strain of going through combat. Salinger treats the subject indirectly in the tales "Just Before the War with the Eskimos" and "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut". In the former tale, two young men who have been exempted from being drafted meet while working at a defense plant. One seems bitter about not being able to serve, while the other is indifferent. In the latter, a suburban housewife is still grieving for the senseless death of her onetime love, who died in an accident while serving in Japan.

It was also a time of prosperity in the United States as the post war economy grew and more people became relatively affluent. In New York City, as well as other large cities in the country, this affluence led to the expansion of suburbs outside the city where people aspired to live in new homes. In many places, these suburbs were connected by highway to the central city. In New York, which already had an extensive transit system, the outlying suburbs were mainly connected by train.

This suburban expansion improved the standard of living for many Americans, but among the first wave of young couples that moved out of the city, it was also an isolating experience. Salinger sets two of the stories, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Down at the Dinghy" in the isolated suburbs in Connecticut. Both of these stories are dominated by female characters, who are presented as alone in the suburbs while their husbands are away working in the city.

Two of the stories, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "Teddy" are not set in New York, but the characters are New Yorkers on vacation. "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" takes place partly in New York and partly in Montreal, another large city. In "For Esme -with Love and Squalor" in which the present location of the narrator is not mentioned and most of the action takes place in England and Germany, there is only passing reference to New York, but it is implied that this is where the narrator is from.

Language and Meaning

Salinger relies on dialog to move the action in many of his stories, with only a minimal amount of description. In all but two stories in the collection, "The Laughing Man" and "For Esme with Love and Squalor," the stories are essentially dialogs. Stories such as

"Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" and "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" are almost entirely made up of dialog between characters.

Salinger's style of writing dialog aims at portraying it realistically. Spoken sentences are left unfinished, people interrupt one another, and the subject sometimes changes abruptly, just as it does in real conversation. While this would sound quite natural if the words were being spoken, reading them as written sentences is sometimes distracting. Also, just as in real conversations, much of the underlying information in a conversation goes unspoken because the participants in the discussion already know it. Salinger keeps his dialog natural by retaining this feature of real conversation and reveals the details of the discussion gradually as they are mentioned within the dialog. As a result, it is not always clear what is happening as his stories begin, and the reader sometimes has to backtrack or check his inferences as the dialog continues and new information is revealed. To add to the realism of his dialog, Salinger sometimes indicates pronunciation by using italics and phonetic spelling.

The stories where Salinger does not rely heavily on dialog are conversational in tone. In "For Esme with Love and Squalor" the story is actually a letter written to the girl who appears in the story. Within this story, conversation and dialog play a crucial role. The narrator's brief conversation with Esme is the central event of the story. In "The Laughing Man," the story is narrated by one of the characters looking back from adulthood to his childhood. The style is easy, with parenthetical asides, like someone telling a story out loud. Indeed, the story is partly about storytelling, and how The Chief was able to capture the imaginations of the Comanche Club with his elaborate tales of the Laughing Man.

Structure

Most of the stories take place in "real time". The action unfolds linearly and continuously and covers a fairly short period of time, with no intervals or compression of the action. "A Perfect Day for Bananafish", "Just Before the War with the Eskimos", "Down at the Dinghy", "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes", and "Teddy" are examples of this kind of structure, where uninterrupted dialog drives the action within a short, limited period of time. "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" is similar, except that Salinger does compress time somewhat between episodes of dialog and the action takes place over several hours.

"The Laughing Man", "For Esme with Love and Squalor", and "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period" have a different kind of structure, and are written as first-person recollections. These recollections contain episodes of dialog that are very similar to those found in the other Salinger stories, and so are like them in tone. The structure of the recalled narrative allows Salinger more flexibility in speaking directly to the reader and providing insight into the main characters' thoughts and motivations.

Salinger's stories do not follow a typical beginning-middle-end structure where the main characters are introduced and then a situation is presented which is eventually resolved. Salinger's heavy use of dialog along with minimal description means that the

characters often introduce themselves over the course of the story. The action often begins in the middle with the beginning only implied, leaving the reader to deduce through the dialog what is occurring. In "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes", for instance, the reality of the situation - that a man looking for his missing wife unknowingly calls the friend with whom she is having an affair - is only revealed part way into the story as the dialog refers to events that preceded it. Finally, Salinger's stories are episodic, seldom having a complete resolution. The reader is left to imagine what follows the end of the story, which is sometimes left ambiguous.

The arrangement of the stories in the collection also has a certain structure. Both the first and last tales, "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and "Teddy" end with the death of the main character. There seems to be a certain balance between the tales, as well. The troubled soldier who commits suicide in "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" is offset by the similarly troubled soldier who finds redemption and recovery in "For Esme with Love and Squalor". The stories of lost love and infidelity, "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut" and "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes", are balanced by "Just Before the War with the Eskimos", which has a theme of potential young love.

Quotes

"She was a girl who for a ringing phone dropped exactly nothing. She looked as if her phone had been ringing continually ever since she had reached puberty." - "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," pp.3-4

"He glanced at the girl lying asleep on one of the twin beds. Then he went over to one of the pieces of luggage, opened it, and from under a pile of shorts and undershirts he took out an Ortgies caliber 7.65 automatic. He released the magazine, looked at it, then reinserted it. He cocked the piece. Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple." "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," p. 26

"Twenty minutes later, they were finishing their first highball in the living room and were talking in the manner peculiar, probably limited, to former college roommates. They had an even stronger bond between them; neither of them had graduated." - "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," p. 28

"'Once,' she said, 'I fell down. I used to wait for him at the bus stop, right outside the PX, and he showed up late once, just as the bus was pulling out. We started to run for it, and I fell and twisted my ankle. He said, "Poor Uncle Wiggily." He meant my ankle. Poor old Uncle Wiggily, ha called it. . . God he was nice.'" - "Uncle Wiggily in Connecticut," p. 42

"Five straight Saturday mornings, Ginnie Mannox had played tennis at the East Side Courts with Selena Graff, a classmate at Miss Basehoar's. Ginnie openly considered Selena the biggest drip at Miss Basehoar's - a school ostensibly abounding with fair-sized drips - but at the same time she had never known anyone like Selena for bringing fresh cans of tennis balls. Her father made them or something." - "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," p. 57

"A young man wearing glasses and pajamas and no slippers lunged into the room with his mouth open. 'Oh. I thought it was Eric, for Chrissake,' he said. Without stopping, and with extremely poor posture, he continued across the room, cradling something close to his narrow chest. He sat down on the vacant end of the sofa. 'I just cut my goddam finger,' he said rather wildly." - "Just Before the War with the Eskimos," p. 62

"In his hours of liberation from the Comanches, the Chief was John Gedsudski, of Staten Island. He was an extremely shy, gentle young man of twenty-two or -three, a law student at N.Y.U., and altogether a very memorable person." - "The Laughing Man," pp. 84-85

"One afternoon in February, just after the Comanche baseball season had opened, I observed a new fixture in the Chief's bus. Above the rear-view mirror over the windshield, there was a small, framed photograph of a girl dressed in academic cap and gown. It seemed to me that a girl's picture clashed with the men-only decor of the bus, and I bluntly asked the Chief who she was. He hedged at first, but finally admitted that she was a girl." - "The Laughing Man," p. 93

"Her joke of a name aside, her general unprettiness aside, she was - in terms of permanently memorable, immoderately perceptive, small area faces - a stunning and final girl." - "Down at the Dinghy," p. 115

"You aren't an admiral. You're a lady," Lionel said. His sentences usually had at least one break of faulty breath control, so that, often, his emphasized words, instead of rising, sank. Boo Boo not only listened to his voice, she seemed to watch it.
"Who told you that? Who told you I wasn't an admiral?"
Lionel answered, but inaudibly.
"Who?" said Boo Boo.
"Daddy." - "Down at the Dinghy," p. 121

"While I was still on my first cup of tea, the young lady I had been watching and listening to in the choir came into the tearoom. Her hair was soaking wet, and the rims of both ears were showing. She was with a very small boy, unmistakably her brother, whose cap she removed by lifting it off his head with two fingers, as if it were a laboratory specimen." - "For Esme with Love and Squalor," pp. 137-38

"You take a really sleepy man, Esme, and he always stands a chance of again becoming a man with all his fac - with all his f-a-c-u-l-t-i-e-s intact." - "For Esme with Love and Squalor," p. 173

"When the phone rang, the gray-haired man asked the girl, with quite some little deference, if she would rather for any reason he didn't answer it. The girl heard him as if from a distance, and turned her face toward him, one eye - on the side of the light - closed tight, her open eye very, however disingenuously, large, and so blue as to appear almost violet." - "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," p. 174

"You were wonderful. Absolutely marvellous," the girl said, watching him. "God, I feel like a dog!"
"Well," the gray-haired man said, "it's a tough situation. I don't know how marvellous I was." - "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes," p. 193

"Instantly, feeling almost insupportably qualified, I got out Bobby's Hermes-Baby typewriter from under his bed and wrote, in French, a long, intemperate letter to M.

Yoshoto - cutting all my morning classes at the art school on Lexington Avenue to do it. My opening paragraph ran some three pages, and very nearly smoked." - "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," p. 204

"Even today, as late as now, I have a tendency to wince when I remember that I brought a dinner suit up to Les Amis with me. But bring one I did, and after I finished my letter to Sister Irma, I put it on. The whole affair seemed to call out for my getting drunk, and since I had never in my life been drunk (for fear that excessive drinking would shake the hand that painted the pictures that copped the three first prizes, etc.), I felt compelled to dress for the occasion." - "De Daumier-Smith's Blue Period," pp. 246-47.

"Teddy was standing on the broadside of a new-looking cowhide Gladstone, the better to see out of his parents' open porthole. He was wearing extremely dirty, white ankle-sneakers, no socks, seersucker shorts that were both too long for him and at least a size too large in the seat, an overly laundered T shirt that had a hole the size of a dime in the right shoulder, and an incongruously handsome, black alligator belt. He needed a haircut - especially at the nape of the neck - the worst way, as only a small boy with an almost full-grown head and a reedlike neck can need one." - "Teddy," p. 254

"I was six when I saw that everything was God, and my hair stood up, and all that," Teddy said. "It was on a Sunday, I remember. My sister was only a very tiny child then, and she was drinking her milk, and all of a sudden I saw that she was God and the Milk was God. I mean, all she was doing was pouring God into God, if you know what I mean."
Nicholson didn't say anything. - "Teddy," p. 288

Topics for Discussion

Compare the characters of Seymour Glass and Teddy McArdle. How do their sudden deaths help tell the stories in which they appear?

The stories in the collection all take place and originally appeared in the late 1940s and early 1950s. What changes in American society were taking place at this time that are reflected in Salinger's stories?

Salinger does not use the names of the characters in "Pretty Mouth and Green My Eyes" except incidentally in the dialog. Lee is referred to as "the gray-haired man" and Joanie only as "the girl." Why do you think Salinger does this, and how does it affect your interpretation of the events in the story?

How does Salinger portray marital happiness and strain in his stories? Is he optimistic or pessimistic about love?

How does the character of Ginnie develop over the relatively short period of time covered in "Just Before the War with the Eskimos"?

The nine stories in the collection were originally written and published at different times. Does the order in which they appear in the book have any significance?

Compare the characters of Seymour Glass and the narrator in "For Esme with Love and Squalor." How are they alike? How are they different?

Discuss the role that children play in Salinger's stories. What is his view of childhood?

Several of Salinger's stories contain deaths or descriptions of death. How does he address this subject?