The Catcher in the Rye Study Guide

The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites".

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers".

Contents

Introduction

Although *The Catcher in the Rye* caused considerable controversy when it was first published in 1951, the book—the account of three disoriented days in the life of a troubled sixteen-year-old boy—was an instant hit. W ithin two weeks after its release, it was listed number one on *The New York Times* best-seller list, and it stayed there for thirty weeks. It remained immensely popular for many years, especially among teenagers and young adults, largely because of its fresh, brash style and anti-establishment attitudes—typical attributes of many people emerging from the physical and psychological turmoil of adolescence.

It also was the bane of many parents, who objected to the main character's obscene language, erratic behavior, and antisocial attitudes. Responding to the irate protests, numerous school and public libraries and bookstores removed the book from their shelves. Holden simply was not a good role model for the youth of the 1950s, in the view of many conservative adults. Said J. D. Salinger himself, in a rare published comment, "I'm aware that many of my friends will be saddened and shocked, or shock-saddened, over some of the chapters in *The Catcher in the Rye.* Some of my best friends are children. In fact, all my best friends are children. It's almost unbearable for me to realize that my book will be kept on a shelf out of their reach." The clamor over the book undoubtedly contributed to its popularity among the young: It became the forbidden fruit in the garden of literature.

For some reason—perhaps because of the swirling controversies over his written works—Salinger retreated from the New York literary scene in the 1960s to a bucolic New Hampshire community caned Cornish, where he has lived a very private life and avidly avoided the press. Despite the fact that he has granted few interviews, there is a substantial body of critical and biographical works about Salinger and his all-too-brief list of literary creations.

Author Biography

Born in 1919 to a prosperous Manhattan family, Jerome David Salinger grew up in a New York City milieu not unlike that of young Holden Caulfield. Being a diligent student was never his first priority: After he flunked out of several prep schools, including the prestigious McBurney School, his parents sent him to Valley Forge Military Academy in Pennsylvania, from which he graduated in 1936. (Many people believe he modeled Pencey Prep, the fictional school attended by Caulfield, after Valley Forge.) He briefly attended Ursinus College, also in Pennsylvania, and New York University, where he stayed one month.

It was not until he took a short story course at Columbia University that Salinger officially launched his literary career. His teacher, Whit Burnett, was the founder and editor of *Story* magazine, which gave a headstart to a number of mid-century fiction writers. Salinger's first published piece appeared in *Story.* Then he moved rapidly into the big time of slick commercial magazines, writing short pieces for *Collier's, Saturday Evening Post, Esquire, Good Housekeeping, Cosmopolitan* and the upscale *New Yorker.*

Salinger has consistently refused to allow anyone to republish his early stories—those written between 1941 and 1948. (However, they may still lurk among the microfilm or microfiche copies of old magazines in local libraries.) Several are about draftees in World War II and may mirror Salinger's own military experiences in that war. He served in the Army Signal Corps and the Counter-Intelligence Corps from 1942 to 1945, participating in the Normandy campaign and the liberation of France. Winner of five battle stars, he still found a way to keep writing during this period, toting a portable typewriter around in the back of his Jeep (as did Holden's brother, D. B., in the novel).

The extant body of Salinger's work therefore consists (in addition to *The Catcher in the Rye)* of three collections of shon stories: *Nine Staries* (1953), *Franny and Zooey* (1955) and *Raise High the Roof Beams* (1963)— plus, of course, his more recent book, *Hapworth* 16, 1924 (1997), which is a republication of a former *New Yorker* novella.

Since the early I 960s, Salinger has lived in seclusion in rural New Hampshire, his privacy fiercely protected by loyal friends and neighbors. Married twice, he has two children, Margaret Ann and Matthew, from his second marriage. Both marriages ended in divorce.

Plot Summary

Part I□Holden Flunks out of Pencey

The Catcher in the Rye tells the story of Holden Caulfield, a teenage slacker who has perfected the art of underachievement. The novel begins with Holden flunking out of school for the fourth time. During the last days before his expulsion, he searches for an appropriate way to conclude his school experience, but he ends up getting so annoyed with his school and schoolmates that he leaves in the middle of the night on the next train home to New York City. Arriving home a few days earlier than his parents expect him, he hangs out in the city to delay the inevitable confrontation with his parents When his money runs out, he considers hitchhiking out west, but he ultimately returns home, mainly to be with his younger sister Phoebe.

The first few chapters describe Holden's last days at Pencey Prep School in Agerstown, Pennsylvania. Advertisements portray Pencey as an elite school that grooms boys into sophisticated men, but Holden sees it as a nightmare of adolescence run amok. Fed up with everything about Pencey, Holden skips the football game against Pencey's rival to say good-bye to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer. He vaguely hopes that Spencer might give him some comfort and useful advice, but Spencer is a sick old man who simply lectures him with a thousand platitudes about not applying himself. Like Spencer, the other teachers and administrators rarely spend any tune mentoring boys because they are too busy spouting off platitudes or kissing up to the wealthy parents visiting the school.

Moreover, Pencey's students do not fit the prep school ideal any more than its teachers do. Holden's classmate Robert Ackley, for example, is the quintessential adolescent nerd. His acne and unbrushed teeth make him physically repulsive, while his annoying social habits□such as barging into the room uninvited, asking annoying questions, and refusing to leave when asked□make him a general nuisance. Other students, like Holden's roommate Ward Stradlater, Initially appear sophisticated, but even they are really phonies. Stradlater seems good-looking, but he is secretly a slob who never cleans his rusty old razor. He also appears to be a successful student, but he is really an ungrateful egotist who gets other people to do his assignments. Nevertheless, Holden still feels a certain affection even for these annoying phonies. He is annoyed by Ackley but still invites him to the movies, and he sees through Stradlater's phoniness but also notices his occasional generosity.

The tension between Holden and his classmates eventually climaxes in a fight between Holden and Stradlater. Stradlater annoys Holden by asking him to write his English paper, so he can go on a date with Jane Gallagher, an old friend of Holden's. Stradlater really angers Holden, however, when he returns from the date and begins insinuating that he did all kinds of stuff with Jane in the back seat of a car. Fed up with Stradlater's phony nice-guy image, Holden picks a fight. Stradlater easily defeats the weaker Holden and gives him a bloody nose After the fight, Holden retreats into Ackley's room to forget

about Stradlater, but Ackley only makes Holden more lonely. Then Holden goes into the hall to escape Ackley, but the hall is just as lonely. Surrounded by Pencey's all pervasive loneliness, Holden decides to return home immediately instead of waiting for school to finish. He quickly packs and heads for the train station late at night, but before departing he vents his frustration with his schoolmates one last time. Yelling loud enough to wake everyone, he screams his final farewell to his moronic classmates.

Part II□Holden's Adventures in New York City

The middle section of the novel describes Holden's adventures in New York City. As soon as he arrives in New York, he looks for something to do, since it is too late to call his friends. He calls Faith Cavendish, a stripper recommended by a friend, but she does not want to meet a stranger so late. After a failed attempt to get a date with some girls in the hotel bar, he takes a cab to another bar in Greenwich Village. When he returns to his hotel, a pimp named Maurice sets him up with a prostitute named Sunny, but Holden is too nervous to do anything with her. The next day Holden asks his old girlfriend, Sally Hayes, to a show. While waiting to meet her, he has breakfast with two nuns and buys a blues record for his sister. When he finally meets Sally, they go to a concert and go skating, but they eventually get into a fight and split up. After their fight, Holden meets an old classmate, Carl Luce, at the Wicker Bar, where they have a brief discussion until Holden gets drunk and starts asking inappropriately personal questions. After Carl leaves, the still-drunk Holden calls up Sally and makes a fool of himself.

Part III□Holden Returns Home

The last section of the novel describes Holden's return home. At first, Holden only wants to briefly say good-bye to his sister, Phoebe, so he sneaks into his house late at night in hopes of avoiding his parents. He successfully sneaks into the room where his sister sleeps, aided by the lucky coincidence that his parents are not home. At first, Phoebe is delighted to see Holden, but she gets upset when she realizes that he has flunked out again. She asks him why he flunked out, and he blames it on his terrible school. After listening to Holden's excuses, Phoebe criticizes him for being too pessimistic. Holden tries to deny this by explaining how he likes lots of things, but he can only think of a few: his dead brother Allie, a kid named James Castle who died at one of his schools, and Phoebe. In the end, Phoebe forces Holden to admit that he is a rather pessimistic failure. In the passage that gives the book its title, Holden explains that he cannot imagine himself fitting into any of the roles that society expects him to perform, like growing up to be a lawyer or scientist. Instead, he can only imagine being a catcher in the rye who stands at the edge of a large rye field watching over and protecting little kids from danger.

"Yau know that song. 'If a body catch a body comin' through the rye'? I'd like-"

"It's 'If a body *meet* a body coming through the rye'!" old Phoebe said. "It's a poem. By Robert *Burns."* "I *know* it's a poem by Robert Bums."

She was right, though. It *is* "If a body meet a body coming through the rye." I didn't know it then, though.

"I thought it was 'If a body catch a body,'" I said. "Anyway, I keep picturing an these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around-nobody big, I mean-except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to eaten everybody if they start to go over the cliff I mean if they're running and they don' I look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and *catch* them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy."

In this passage, Salinger brilliantly blends the two sides of Holden's character. On the one hand, Holden admits that he *is* a failure: he is incapable of even imagining himself functioning in the adult world. On the other hand, however, Holden is not *only* a failure: he is also a deeply sensitive and compassionate person, albeit in an unorthodox way. In particular, he understands and cares about people who are outcasts or powerless. Phoebe seems to understand and accept this unorthodox sensitivity because she eventually reconciles herself to him, and they celebrate their reconciliation by dancing until their parents return and Holden has to sneak back Out of the house.

After sneaking out of the house, Holden spends the night with his favorite teacher, Mr. Antolini, but he leaves early in the morning when he wakes up to find Mr. Antolini stroking his hair. Confused by such unusual behavior, Holden spends the morning wandering the streets until he eventually decides to hitchhike out west. He leaves a note at Phoebe's school telling her to meet him at the museum so they can say good-bye, but Phoebe shows up carrying her own belongings in a suitcase be

cause she wants to go with Holden. At this point, Holden realizes how important they are to each other, and he finally decides to return home and face his parents. The novel never actually describes what happens next, but it suggests that Holden faces the dreadful confrontation with his parents and then later experiences some sort of nervous breakdown. The novel concludes with Holden looking back at all the people he has described and fondly remembering how he likes them despite their annoying and phony qualities.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

"The Catcher in the Rye" by J.D. Salinger is told in the first person by the main character, Holden Caulfield. Holden starts by saying that he will not be telling a story about his childhood and divulging personal information about his parents. He says his parents are nice, but "touchy" and would not like him talking about them. Instead, he will only talk about the events that happened last Christmas. Those events led to him being sent to the unnamed place he is now. He says that is run-down and is relaxing. Furthermore, he claims he hasn't even told his brother, D.B., every thing that has happened to him. D.B. is a writer in Hollywood. He once wrote a book of short stories that Holden thinks is great. Now D.B. is making a lot of money writing for the movies, which is a profession Holden compares to prostitution.

Holden says he only wants start this story on the day he left Pencey Prep. Holden has little respect for the Pennsylvania boarding school for boys. He scoffs at the advertising the school uses, which features a young man on a horse. Holden says has never seen a horse anywhere on school grounds. He starts his story at a Saturday football game with Saxon Hall. It is the game of the year and the stands are packed on the Pencey side. Holden watches the game from a distance. He dislikes everything about Pencey. He especially doesn't like the rule that allows only seniors to bring girls to the football games. The headmaster's daughter, Selma Thurmer, is in the stands. Holden doesn't think she is very pretty, but she is nice. He remembers a conversation they once had on a bus. He was impressed that she didn't brag about her father's position at the school. Holden now stands on a hill, still watching the game from a distance. He has just returned from New York with the fencing team. He is the manager of the team. That morning the team had gone to the city for a meet, but it had to be cancelled because Holden left all of the team's equipment on the subway. The players did not talk to him all of the way home on the train, but Holden thinks the whole thing was funny.

He says he also chose not to go to the game because he wants to say goodbye to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer. Christmas break is coming up and Holden knows he will not be returning to school. He has been kicked out for failing. Holden runs to the main gate and feels quite winded. He claims he was a heavy smoker before he was forced to quit. He reverts to the present and says he is in a place (which he still does not name) for checkups because he almost got T.B. He says he is now healthy. He resumes his story, picking up on the day he went to see Mr. Spencer. Mrs. Spencer warmly welcomes in and lets him in. She tells him that Mr. Spencer is in his room.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Holden immediately comes across in the first chapter as cynical and sarcastic. He scoffs at the idea of telling his story like a Dickinson novel, suggesting he does not see

himself as a victim of a bad childhood. The statement also gives the reader the impression that Holden does not think of his story as teaching any lesson or having a real ending or beginning.

Holden is evidentially undergoing some kind of treatment at a mental health facility, which he alludes to by saying he is resting after some "madman" behavior. Later, in the chapter he says he was sent to the place because he grew more than six inches in just one year and almost got tuberculoses. That reason seems to make no sense and gives the impression that Holden is delusional and in denial about how his own actions that led to his treatment. His lack of responsibility is shown in his retelling of how he left the fencing team's equipment in the subway. Because of his mistake, the team could not take part in a meet. However, instead of feeling remorseful, he makes excuses for his actions and thinks the teams' angry reaction is funny.

In many ways, Holden just seems like a typical teenager. As he stands alone during the football game, his physical distance from the crowded stands symbolizes the isolation he feels. This sense of being different is common among teenagers. Like many teens, he rejects authority and people who he thinks are "phony." For instance, he calls his brother a prostitute for making money in Hollywood. While Holden states that he hates movies, he does not give any real reason for his harsh assessment of D.B.'s new job. He disparages his brother, even though D.B. is obviously caring enough to visit him every weekend. This naivety about adults and their responsibilities foreshadows his mounting anxiety over growing up. Holden prefers to think of adults as either bad or good, without any nuances in character.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Holden goes into Mr. Spencer's room. He thinks the room is depressing. Mr. Spencer's pills and his old bathrobe especially repel him. Holden tells Mr. Spencer he has come to say goodbye. The old man asks Holden to sit down. Mr. Spencer then asks what the headmaster, Dr. Thurman, said to Holden. Holden recounts how Dr. Thurman told him that life was a game and that it should be played by the rules. Mr. Spencer agrees with Dr. Thurman, but Holden is not convinced by the logic. Holden tells Mr. Spencer that his parents don't know that he has been expelled. He says they will be very angry because this is the fourth school he has attended.

Holden thinks about how he often behaves as if he is thirteen. Mr. Spencer says Holden's parents are very nice. Holden agrees. Mr. Spencer starts to question Holden about his course load. Holden admits that he is failing four out of five classes. Mr. Spencer says he had to flunk Holden because he knew nothing about the subject. Mr. Spencer asks Holden to pick up his exam paper. This demand makes Holden very sorry that he stopped to say goodbye to his teacher. Mr. Spencer starts reading Holden's essay question on Egyptians. It is clear Holden didn't know anything about the topic and he becomes very uncomfortable listening to his teacher read his answers. At the end of the essay, Mr. Spencer reads a note Holden wrote saying that he didn't know anything about Egyptians and that Mr. Spencer should not feel bad about flunking him. Holden thinks that he will never for give Mr. Spencer for embarrassing him by reading the note aloud. As the two discuss Mr. Spencer's reasons for flunking Holden, the boy's mind starts to wander. He wonders where the ducks in Central Park go in the winter. Mr. Spencer is very persistent with Holden and continues to ask him about his troubles with school. He wants to know why Holden quit his last school, Elkton Hills. Holden only says that it is a long story, but the question makes him think about his time at the school. He hated the headmaster because he thought he was "phony." At school events, the headmaster would ignore students' parents who were not stylish or attractive. Holden tells Mr. Spencer that he does want to have a bright future and that he is just going through an unproductive phase. As Holden leaves, Mr. Spencer yells something to him that sounds like, "Good luck." Holden hopes that is not what he said, because he hates the term and thinks that he would never say it to someone.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter two continues to develop Holden's character. Ironically, Holden starts the novel by saying that he will not be giving his life story, yet in chapter two, the reader learns more about Holden's past problems. It is now apparent that Holden's problems did not start at Pencey Prep. He has had difficulties adjusting and thriving in other academic settings. Also, it begins to become clear that Holden in not just the typical, rebellious teenager. Despite the intelligence of his narrative, he seems to have trouble applying

himself in school because of deeper problems. He has trouble concentrating on even direct conversations, which is displayed when he talks to Mr. Spencer while at the same time wondering about the ducks in Central Park. His thoughts about Central Park will later develop into a major theme of the story. In this chapter, Holden seems to think that concentrating on something else while acting like he is paying attention is a rare ability. Instead, the reader suspects it is a problem, not a gift. Holden is unable to focus even while having a serious one-on-one conversation with someone.

While Holden is quick to criticize anyone he labels as "phony," he is actually quite phony himself. When talking to Mr. Spencer, he only pretends to care about what the old man is saying. He refers to this as "shooting the bull." While he expects complete sincerity from others, he only pays Mr. Spencer lip service by agreeing with everything the man says. Mr. Spencer clearly cares about Holden, and Holden cares about the old man enough to go visit him. Yet, despite his affection for the old man, he quickly dismisses anything Mr. Spencer says that might require him to examine his actions. He says he is just going through a phase. At the end of the chapter, Holden scoffs at the term "good luck" because he thinks it is meaningless. However, the reader knows Mr. Spencer is sincere in wishing the boy luck. Holden is incapable of honestly expressing his emotions.

This chapter also gives a physical description of Holden. His looks contradict his personality. While his height and prematurely gray hair make him look like an adult, he admits he is very immature and seems to dislike anything that he associates with adulthood. The offensive, adult items include nearly everything about Mr. Spencer, including his smell and magazines, and the actions of his old headmaster.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Holden starts the chapter by saying he is the "most terrific liar you ever saw in your life. It's awful." He says he lies about even simple things and that he lied to Mr. Spencer when he told him that he had to go the gym. Instead, Holden is on his way to his room in the Ossenburger Memorial Wing of the new dormitories. Mr. Ossenburger is an alumnus who donated a lot of money to Pencey after becoming rich in the undertaking business. Holden recalls a speech Ossenburger gave to the students. Holden thinks Ossenburger is a phony and his speech was way too long. Ossenburger told the students to get on their knees and pray when they are in trouble, which is something that Holden scoffs at. Holden thinks that the only good part of the speech was when one of his fellow students farted loudly in the middle of the chapel.

Holden is relieved to return to his room. Everyone is still at the game, so he is alone. He puts on a red hunting hat that he bought that morning in New York, right after he realized he had lost the team's foils. He sits down and starts to read *Out of Africa,* which he thinks is a pretty good book. While he is reading, a student named Ackley bursts into the room uninvited. Ackley's room is connected to his by a shower. Holden says that Ackley barges in on him constantly. He describes Ackley as strange, with a bad case of acne and gross teeth. Holden keeps reading, trying to ignore Ackley's presence, but Ackley questions Holden about the fencing meet.

Holden finally explains how he lost the team's foils. When Ackley continues to pester Holden, he gives up reading his book and starts to pretend he is blind. He mostly puts on the act because he knows it will annoy Ackley. However, Ackley still doesn't leave the room. In fact, he stays and begins cleaning and cutting his nails, which really angers Holden. Ackley says that he can't stand Holden's roommate, Ward Stradlater, but Holden defends Stradlater. Ackley does not like Stradlater because he once told him to brush his teeth. Holden explains that Stradlater was not trying to be mean, he simply thought Ackley would feel better if he had a clean mouth. Stradlater comes into the room and is very friendly in a way that Holden thinks is phony. He asks to borrow Holden's coat. Ackley is brusque to Stradlater and leaves the room. Stradlater takes off his shirt and prepares to shave before going on his date. Holden knows that Stradlater walks around without a shirt on because he thinks he has a good build. Although irritated, Holden begrudgingly admits to himself that Stradlater is well built.

Chapter 3 Analysis

In the first sentence of chapter 3, Holden calls himself a terrific liar and says that it is awful. However, this is a disingenuous statement because he actually seems quite proud of lying about even the most trivial events. Once again, Holden thinks his ability to lie makes him superior to others. He is quick to criticize people that he perceives as

phony, while never questioning his own insincere actions. In fact, he seems to have no real understanding of his own personality. For instance, he calls himself illiterate and then talks about his love of reading and how books can move him. Holden also appears to have no empathy for others. When he arrives back in his room, he puts on the hunting hat he bought right after he lost the foils. He is quite pleased by his purchase because it only cost a dollar. He has no guilt over his costly mistake and how it affected the team.

In this chapter, the reader is introduced to two new characters that personify all that Holden hates about his school. Ackley's obnoxious behavior and disgusting hygiene irritate Holden immensely. Holden's roommate, Stradlater, seems to be friendly, but he doesn't really care about Holden's friendship, unless he can get something out of it. Upon entering the room, he tries to charm Holden into agreeing to give him his jacket. Once Holden agrees, Stradlater arrogantly walks around bare-chested to show off his superior physique. These two characters may prove that Holden is justified in not enjoying his life at Pencey. However, the reader cannot be sure that Holden's harsh judgment of Ackley and Stradlater is even accurate. Holden is a very biased storyteller and he clearly has a tendency to exaggerate the shortcomings of others. Holden feels best about himself when he is criticizing those around him.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Holden doesn't have anything to do, so he follows Stradlater into the bathroom as he shaves in preparation for his date. Holden notes that Stradlater looks neat, but he is actually a slob. Anyone can tell that Ackley is dirty, but Stradlater is a "secret slob." Holden thinks that Stradlater looks really good when he is finished getting ready because he is in love with himself, but his razor is always dirty and rusty. Holden decides that Stradlater is good looking in the type of way that would make him stand out in yearbook pictures. In person, other guys at Pencey may look better than Stradlater, but they are not as photogenic. While Holden is thinking about Stradlater's appearance, Stradlater asks Holden to do him a favor. He wants Holden to write an English paper for him. Holden thinks that the request is ironic, since he is flunking out of school.

Stradlater persists with his request, asking Holden to "be a buddy." Stradlater tells Holden that the paper can be on any subject, as long as it is very descriptive. He also tells Holden not to do a very good job on the paper because the teacher might suspect that Holden wrote it. Holden does a little tap dance on the bathroom floor for fun. Stradlater admires Holden's new hat, but Holden knows he is only flattering him so he will agree to write the paper. Much to Holden's surprise, Stradlater says his date is a girl named Jean Gallagher. Holden knows the girl and has to correct him because her name is Jane. He is very shocked that Jane is on Pencey's campus. Holden goes on and on about the small details of their friendship, but Stradlater does not pay attention. He is busy using Holden's hair products. Stradlater only perks up when Holden mentions that Jane's stepfather is a drunk who used to walk around naked. Holden asks Stradlater not to tell Jane that he is being kicked out of school. Stradlater agrees and then takes Holden's jacket and leaves, but not before reminding Holden to write his paper. Holden can't stop thinking about Jane. Ackley comes back into the room and Holden is actually glad to see him, because their conversation takes his mind off of other matters.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Because Holden is telling this story well after the events have taken place, his memory of even the most mundane details seems extraordinary. The reader must believe either that Holden is obsessed with the habits of others (which he notes so he can criticize them) or that his narrative has been exaggerated to make his situation at Pencey seem even more terrible. Either way, Stradlater comes across as a terrible egotist. He is very concerned that he has a smooth shave for his date, yet he cannot even remember the girl's name. He also does not pay attention when Holden tells him about Jane. Stradlater only cares about his own appearance. He also seems like an obvious manipulator who flatters Holden to get what he wants, which in this case is Holden's jacket and a composition. It is ironic that Holden notes this phony act, because Holden

has already done the same thing to others. For example, he flattered Mr. Spencer just so the old man would stop asking him questions.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

It is Saturday night, which means the students will be eating steak. Holden thinks that the school serves steak on Saturdays because parents visit on Sundays. When the parents ask their sons what they ate for dinner the night before, the boys will say steak, which will impress the parents. In actuality, the steaks are hard, dry and unappetizing. After dinner, the boys go outside to find that it has snowed. Holden thinks that the snow is very pretty and he has a good time fooling around with the other students. He and a friend, Mal Brossard, decide to go see a movie. Holden feels pity for Ackley, who never has anything to do on Saturday nights, so he asks Mal if Ackley can go with them. Mal reluctantly agrees. When Holden invites Ackley, he is not appreciative. He acts like he is doing Holden a favor by going with him. While Holden waits for Ackley to get ready, he opens the window and makes a snowball. He is about to throw it, but everything looks so white and pretty that he doesn't want to mess up the scenery.

The boys take a bus to see the movie, but they have already seen the film that is being shown. Instead, they eat hamburgers and take the bus back to school. When they return, Ackley sticks around Holden's room and retells the story of a having sex with a girl the previous summer. Holden thinks he is lying because the story changes each time he tells it. Finally, Holden tells Ackley that he has to leave so he can write Stradlater's essay.

Holden decides he will not describe a room. He writes about his brother, Allie's, baseball mitt. Allie used to write poems in green ink on his glove so he could read them while he was in the outfield. Allie died in of leukemia in July, 1946. Holden says that Allie was two years younger than him, but much more intelligent. Holden also thinks that Allie was the nicest member of the family. The night Allie died, Holden broke all of the windows in the garage with his fist. In the process, he also broke his hand. His family wanted to take him to a psychiatrist. Holden still has Allie's mitt in his suitcase, so he takes it out and copies the poems. When he finishes writing, he can hear Ackley snoring in the next room.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Holden continues to cite examples of what he perceives as phony behavior. He even thinks that the school plots to impress parents by serving the students steak on Saturday nights. This seems improbable, but Holden wants to find a sinister motive behind every action at Pencey. It is as if he is building a case to later prove that the school made him mentally ill. Also in this chapter, Allie's death is explained. Holden's does not give many details about his feelings over losing his brother. However, he does say that he reacted violently. It now seems that Holden's emotional problems stem, at least partially, from losing his younger brother.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Stradlater comes into the room after his date, complaining about the cold weather. He doesn't say anything about Jane. Instead, he asks Holden if he wrote the composition. Holden tells him it is on the bed. Stradlater reads the paper and becomes very angry that it is about a baseball glove. It says that it should have been about a house or room. He tells Holden that he does everything wrong and this is the reason he is flunking out of school. Holden gets up and pulls the paper out of Stradlater's hand. He tears it up and throws it away. Holden then returns to bed and starts to smoke a cigarette, which is forbidden in the dorms. He finally asks Stradlater about his date. Stradlater says they didn't have time to go to New York, so they just sat in the backseat of a friend's car. Holden demands to know if Stradlater made sexual advances toward Jane, but the older boy refuses to answer the questions directly.

Holden says what happened next is still a blur to him, but he remembers trying to hit Stradlater in the face. The next thing he knows, he is down on the ground, with Stradlater sitting on top of him. Stradlater tries to tell him to stop fighting, but Holden is enraged and calls Stradlater a "moron". Stradlater punches him in the face, then blames Holden for his violence by saying Holden provoked him. He tells Holden to go wash his face and then leaves the room and walks down the hall to the bathroom. Holden sits on the floor for a while, and then gets up to look at his face in the mirror. He says "you have never seen such gore in your life." He is both scared and fascinated by his reflection. Holden has only been in two fights in his life and has lost both of them. He says that he is really a pacifist. He goes in to Ackley's room.

Chapter 6 Analysis

When Stradlater criticizes the essay, Holden becomes angry and impulsively rips it up. His extreme reaction can be interpreted two ways. Perhaps he is still so distraught over his brother's death that he can not bear to have an essay about Allie's baseball mitt dismissed so rudely. He enjoyed writing the essay because he likes to relive the memories of his younger brother. Stradlater, who can not possibly understand the depth of emotion expressed in the composition, is only angry because the essay is not what he asked for. To Holden, Stradlater's rejection to the essay is a rejection of his bond with Allie. It could also be assumed that Holden is angry about Stradlater's saying that he cannot do anything correctly, which is why he is flunking out of school. Until now, Holden has seemed unfazed by his expulsion. His anger at Stradlater's criticism could be a sign that he cares more about his academic career than he has let on.

This chapter also provides even more evidence that Holden's storytelling is clouded by his own warped perceptions of himself and those around him. He cannot be trusted as a truthful reporter. When looking at his face after the fight, he is fascinated by the blood

and secretly satisfied by what he sees. He says "you have never seen such gore in your life." This is an exaggeration of the facts. The reader knows that he is bloody, but he does not seem to be in much pain or have suffered a serious injury. It is highly unlikely that he looks like anything more than a boy with a bloody nose. Instead of stating facts, Holden likes to create his own reality to make his life seem more dramatic, interesting, and unique.

Holden's statements about his personality often directly contradict his actions. For example, he says is a "pacifist," yet he threw the first punch in his fight with Stradlater, then continued to provoke Stradlater by calling him a moron, even when the older boy tried to stop the fight. A true pacifist would regret these actions, yet Holden is excited and proud of that has happened. This is proved when the chapter ends with him going into Ackley's room. Holden has already stated that he does not like spending time with Ackley and he does not like going into Ackley's room because of how it smells. He obviously only desires attention and wants Ackley to be impressed by his bloody appearance.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Holden goes into Ackley's room. The fight has awaked Ackley. Holden looks for the light and then turns it on. The blood on Holden's face shocks Ackley. Holden asks if Ackley wants to play Canasta. Ackley tells him to take care of the blood, but Holden dismisses his injuries, saying the blood will stop. Holden then asks Ackley if he can sleep in his room. Ackley's roommate is away for the weekend, so there is an empty bed. Ackley refuses the request, saying he cannot give Holden permission to sleep in his roommate's bed. Holden suddenly feels so lonely he wishes he were dead.

He lies down on the roommate's bed and thinks about Stradlater's date with Jane. He becomes angry wondering if they had sex. Ackley falls asleep. Holden hears Stradlater return to their room and go to bed. Holden thinks that he didn't even look around to see where he went. He is so lonely; he wakes Ackley up for some company. Ackley is irritated to be woken up.

He leaves Ackley's room and walks down the hall, feeling depressed. Suddenly, he realizes he will leave Pencey immediately and go to New York. He says his "nerves are shot." He goes back into his room and starts packing. Seeing the ice skates his mother has just sent him makes him sad. He thinks about her asking the sales person a lot of questions about the purchase. Now just a few days after receiving the gift, he is being thrown out of another school. He says that every time he gets a gift, he feels a little sad. He finishes packing and counts his money. He can't remember how much he had, but knows it was a lot of cash because his grandmother had just sent him money. He wakes up a fellow student and sells him his typewriter for twenty dollars. As he leaves the dorms, he screams, "Sleep tight, ya morons."

Chapter 7 Analysis

Upon entering Ackley's room, Holden immediately begins looking for the light switch. Ackley wants to know why Holden is turning on the light. The reader immediately knows that Holden desperately wants Ackley to see his bloodied face. It is the only reason he has come into Ackley's room. If he only wanted to see what Ackley was doing (which is what he claimed at the end of Chapter 6), he would have left the light off, out of respect to his sleeping friend. However, Holden needs attention, even if it only from Ackley.

Later, Holden says that Stradlater did not even look around to see where he was. Holden is creating events to fit his own agenda of self-pity. He cannot see Stradlater, so he doesn't really know if Stradlater has looked for him or not. He also has no way of knowing how Stradlater feels about their fight. Instead of giving his roommate the benefit of the doubt, Holden is quick to assume that Stradlater does not care about him. Thinking about this makes him feel very lonely. Outwardly, Holden acts with a false

bravado and nonchalance. He wants to appear like he does not care about others or what they think of him. However, this "cool" act is only an attempt to mask his feelings of insecurity and loneliness. These feelings are typical for a teenager, yet Holden's reactions often seem extreme. For instance, he repeatedly makes it known that he does not like Ackley, but when Ackley says he can not sleep in his room, Holden immediately feels so lonely that he wants to die. Holden clearly has psychological problems deeper than first revealed. Ironically, Holden is always complaining that Ackley violates his personal space and stays in his room long after he is unwelcome, yet Holden does the exact same thing by lying on Ackley's roommate's bed, even when Ackley has told him not to sleep there.

Holden has deep feelings unworthiness. These feelings are revealed as he packs the ice skates his mother has purchased for him. He feels sad when he thinks about the care she took to select the gift and he says presents always make him sad. Holden feels guilty when he receives gifts because he does not feel valuable enough to deserve them. It is interesting to note that while Holden feels unworthy, at the same time, he often thinks that he is superior to others. Feeling that he is smarter than his classmates makes him feel better about himself. However, the feeling of satisfaction is short-lived because his feelings of inadequacy and superiority both make him feel different from others and contribute to his sense of isolation and depression. At the end of the chapter, he makes one more attempt to relieve his pain over being kicked out of school by shouting a final insult to all of the students who have received the grades necessary to stay at Pencey. Ironically, he calls them "morons."

Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

He walks to the train station and cleans his bloody face with snow. A woman begins talking to him and says that her son, Ernest Morrow, goes to Pencey. When she asks Holden's name, he lies and gives her the name of the school janitor. Holden knows the boy and does not like him, but he says nice things about him to Mrs. Morrow. The boy's mother says she has been worried about Ernest, because she fears he is too sensitive. Holden lies and says that everyone thinks Ernest is a great guy. He fabricates a story about how the other students wanted Ernest to run for class president, but he refused because he is so modest. The woman is surprised by the story, but seems to believe Holden. When she asks why Holden is going home, he tells her he has to have an operation for a brain tumor. She is very concerned. Later, as she is getting off the train, she invites Holden to visit Ernest during the upcoming summer. He lies again, telling her that he is going to South America with his grandmother.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Holden's boast that he is a good liar is proven in this chapter, because Mrs. Morrow seems to believe everything he says. He creates stories about her son in attempt to flatter her because he finds her attractive. However, when she says that her son is sensitive, Holden inwardly ridicules her, thinking that Ernest is actually insensitive. Holden views other people in very simplistic terms. Just because he has never seen Ernest act in a way he would personally describe as sensitive, he immediately believes he knows more about Ernest than his own mother does. Although Holden thinks Mrs. Morrow is attractive and nice, he only shows her disrespect by feeding her lies about her child. He does not ever think about how his lies can affect others.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Holden arrives at Penn Station in New York. He wants to talk to someone, but when he gets in the phone booth he doesn't know who to call. His brother D.B. is in Hollywood and he can not call his younger sister, Phoebe, because his parents will answer the phone. He walks out and catches a cab. Holden tries to strike up a conversation with the cab driver, even offering to buy him a drink, but the driver isn't interested. Holden checks into a cheap hotel. While looking out the window, he sees a man in another room take off his clothes and put on women's underwear and a black dress. In another window, he sees a couple laughing while they spit drinks at each other's faces. Holden thinks that spitting a drink into someone's face is stupid, but might be a bit fun. He begins thinking about sex and says that he is a big "sex maniac" even though he does not understand sex. He considers calling Jane Gallagher at her boarding school. In order to get through, he plans to call the school and say he is her uncle and that her aunt has just died. However, he changes his mind because he isn't in the mood. Instead, he calls a woman named Faith Cavendish. He had gotten her number from a guy who went to Princeton. He told Holden that Faith wasn't a prostitute but she was agreeable to having sex. He calls her and makes his voice as deep and charming as possible. At first, she is angry to have been woken up. She softens when he mentions the guy from Princeton. Holden tries to get her to meet him for a drink, but she refuses. When she offers to see him the next night, he tells her that he is only available right now. They hang up and Holden is left thinking that he messed up the conversation.

Chapter 9 Analysis

It is clear that Holden is acting impulsively because he has no plans once he reaches New York. He is also very lonely. Upon arriving in the city, he wants to talk to someone, but has no one to call. He even tries to befriend a cab driver, who turns him down. Holden thinks that the cab driver is stupid, which is one of his most frequent reactions. If someone disagrees with him or is not interested in him, Holden immediately decides that he his superior to them. Once Holden reaches his hotel room, he begins to think about sex. Like many teenage boys, he thinks about sex often, even calling himself a "sex maniac," yet he admits that he does not understand sex. He also spends time thinking about Jane Gallagher. His thoughts about Jane reveal that he feels some type of connection and attraction to her. However, at this point in the novel, Salinger gives little reason for Holden's fixation on the girl. In his frustration, he calls Faith because he thinks she will give him sexual satisfaction. Instead, his inexperience with dealing with the opposite sex is obvious and he is left alone.

Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Holden decides that he isn't ready to go to bed. He thinks about his sister Phoebe. He says she is the smartest one in the family. According to Holden, his brother D.B. is also smart and so was is late brother Allie. Holden says that he is the dumb one in the family. Holden also describes Phoebe as very pretty and "roller-skate skinny." She writes stories about a fictional girl named Hazel Weatherfield. Holden goes down to hotel's bar. He thinks the band is terrible and everyone is much older than him. He tries to order a drink, but the waiter demands to see identification. Holden turns his attention to three women sitting at a nearby table. He thinks two of them are unattractive, but they are with a cute blonde. The women laugh when he starts to "give them the eye."

Finally, Holden goes over and ask them to dance. He is pleased to discover that the blond woman is a great dancer. Holden really admires her ability, even though she does not respond to his conversation and he thinks she is a moron. The women are tourists from Seattle, Washington and are very excited that they saw the actor Peter Lorre earlier that day. He dances with the other women and tells one of them that he just saw Gary Cooper leave the bar. She tells her friends and they are very disappointed that they missed him. Holden buys all of the women drinks and tries to persuade them to stay, but they say they have to go to bed because they are getting up early the next morning to see the show at Radio City Music Hall. Holden thinks they are depressing.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, Holden finally talks about someone in a positive way. He clearly has a strong attachment to his siblings, especially Phoebe. He finds everything about her charming, even the way she misspells the name "Hazel." The kind descriptions quickly end when Holden meets the women at the hotel bar. He is quick to make fun of their lack of sophistication, yet he is offended when the tease him and question his age. Holden also is starting to appear arrogant. He decides he is worldlier than the women based on nothing more than their hats and their desire to see a show at Radio City Music Hall.

Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

It is still the same night. Holden cannot stop thinking about Jane Gallagher. He recalls the summer they met. His mother had called Jane's mother because she was angry that the Gallaghers' dog was going to the bathroom on the Caulfields' lawn. Holden said hello to Jane one day when she was by the pool, but it took some time to convince her that he didn't care where her dog relieved himself. Holden admits that Jane is not that pretty, but he really liked her smile and the way she held his hand. Jane was the only person in his family that he let see Allie's baseball mitt. She never knew Allie but she was interested in hearing about him. One day while they were playing checkers on the porch, her stepfather came outside and asks where the cigarettes where. Jane didn't answer him and he asked again. When he went inside, one tear fell out of Jane's eye on to the checkerboard. The tear moved Holden and he sat down beside Jane and began to kiss her on the head. He tried to kiss her mouth, but she wouldn't let him. Holden asked Jane if her stepfather had sexually abused her, but she denied it. At the end of Chapter 11, Holden decides to go to a nightclub in Greenwich Village that he heard about from his brother, D.B.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Holden explains his relationship with Jane. His feelings for her are much deeper than he let on to Stradlater. She is the only person who he has felt comfortable with talking about Allie. Holden admits Jane has imperfections, but he sees both her faults and her strengths. This is a sharp contrast to how he views other people. Usually he quickly dismisses people based on just one or two perceived defects.

Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Holden takes a cab to Ernie's nightclub. During the ride, he tries several times to try to strike up a conversation with the cab driver, Horwitz. He asks Horwitz about what happens to the ducks in Central Park during the winter. Horwitz is irritated by Holden's questioning, but Holden presses him for more information. He also asks the cab driver if he would like to join in him for a drink, but Horwitz is not interested. When he arrives at Ernie's, the club is packed with students on their Christmas break. The patrons are watching with reverence as Ernie plays the piano. Holden thinks that if he were a talented pianist, he would play in the closet because he wouldn't want people to clap for him. Holden gets a table and immediately decides that he is surrounded by jerks. He eavesdrops on the conversations around him. At one table, a guy is telling his unattractive date about a football game. At another table, a young man is trying to grope his date under the table while telling her about a student in his dorm who tried to commit suicide.

Holden instructs the waiter to ask Ernie if he would like to join him for a drink, but he doubts Ernie will get the message. Suddenly, one of D.B.'s ex-girlfriends notices Holden. She invites him to join her and her boyfriend for a drink, but Holden says he is leaving because he doesn't want to sit with her. Holden puts his coat on, angry that he has to leave now before hearing Ernie play again.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Holden continues to sharply criticize everyone he encounters. No one, except for Jane and his younger sister and late brother, meet his approval. Holden is especially critical of anyone older than him and people who have achieved financial success or are generally well liked. He again arrogantly thinks he can sum up people's personalities simply by looking at them. When he arrives at Ernie's, he immediately decides that he is surrounded by jerks. He hates Ivy League college men the most, perhaps because they represent what Holden's parents hope he will become. Holden says he wouldn't go to an Ivy League school unless he was dying. The reader is given a sense that Holden affects a self-important attitude in an attempt to cover-up his fear of not meeting his parents' expectations. Holden also does not seem to like himself. Therefore, he rejects the privileged young men who are most like him. Above all, Holden is a hypocrite. He pretends to be friendly to everyone he meets, while inwardly going to great lengths to list their physical and intellectual shortcomings. He is a perfect example of the "phoniness" he hates.

Holden's deluded sense of self is again on display in this chapter. For instance, Holden says that if he were a good piano player he would play in the closet because he would not want people clapping for him. However, he is constantly seeking attention from

people. This is yet another example of Holden's words not matching his actions. A large part of Holden's misery comes from the fact that he wants attention from the very people he pretends to despise. At one point, he even tries repeatedly to strike up a conversation with the cab driver, Horwitz.

Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Holden walks forty-one blocks back to his hotel because he doesn't feel like getting into another cab. His hands are cold and he is angry that someone has stolen his gloves. He thinks that he is "yellow" and would not directly confront the thief even if he knew who stole them. Thinking about his missing gloves and his cowardly behavior makes him depressed. When he arrives back at the hotel, Maurice, the elevator man asks if he would like a prostitute. He tells Holden it will be five dollars for a brief encounter and fifteen dollars for a girl who will stay until noon. Holden says he would like the five-dollar deal. He goes into his room and nervously prepares for the prostitute by brushing his teeth and changing his shirt. The prostitute arrives and Holden is surprised to see that she is only about his age. She takes off her dress, but Holden he is too depressed by the situation to have sex. He lies and tells her he is recovering from an operation, but says he will pay her for her time. He gives her five dollars. She demands ten dollars, but he refuses. She calls him a bum and leaves.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Salinger makes Holden's character very realistic by showing the contradictions in his personality. For instance, Holden thinks that he is a coward because he is scared to fight, yet he was quick to attack Stradlater. Later, despite calling himself a sex maniac, he loses desire to have sex with the prostitute. This makes Holden more realistic and human. It is also interesting to note that again Holden seems like a dubious narrator. Earlier in the novel, he described himself as looking very mature for his age. However, nearly every person he has encountered in New York has questioned his age. Even the prostitute does not believe that Holden is in his early twenties.

Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

It is just after the prostitute has left. Holden is alone in his hotel room, thinking about Allie. He recalls a time he didn't let Allie go with him and a friend to shoot a BB gun. Now in his room, he talks out loud to Allie, telling him he can go. He talks out loud to the dead boy whenever he feels especially depressed. Holden gets into bed and thinks about religion and Jesus. He considers himself an atheist. He hears a knock on his door and opens it, still wearing his pajamas. Maurice and the prostitute, Sunny, come into his room and demand five dollars. Holden refuses to give it to them, even when Maurice threatens him. Sunny takes Holden's wallet and pulls out five dollars. He begins to cry and calls them thieves. Maurice punches him in the stomach and they leave. Holden struggles to the bathroom, feeling sick. He begins to imagine that he has been shot. He fantasizes that he stumbles down the hotel stairs and shoots Maurice. Jane then comes and nurses his wounds. Snapping back to reality, Holden thinks that he would like to commit suicide by jumping out of the window. However, he doesn't want people looking at his dead body on the street.

Chapter 14 Analysis

Holden bravely begins the confrontation with Maurice by refusing to give him the five dollars. However, as soon as Sunny takes the money, Holden begins to cry. It seems as if he is crying not just over the small amount of money, but over the mess his life has become. He is trying to handle adult situations, while still feeling like a child. As soon as they leave, Holden loses interest in the money. Instead, he comforts himself by creating a Hollywood style fantasy about a shootout and being nursed by Jane. Ironically, Maurice is less of a threat to Holden than the boy is to himself. Again, Holden thinks about suicide. These thoughts foreshadow the emotional breakdown that will eventually lead to his hospitalization.

Chapter 15

Chapter 15 Summary

Holden gets up in at about ten o'clock in the morning and calls Sally Hayes. He invites her to a matinee and she agrees to meet him at two o'clock that afternoon. He goes to Grand Central Station to put his bags in a locker. He thinks about his parents and the affect Allie's death has had on his mother. Holden says that she has become nervous. He orders himself a big breakfast. While eating, he sees two nuns with cheap suitcases. Holden thinks, "I can even get to hate somebody, just looking at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them." He strikes up a conversation with the nuns and gives them a ten-dollar donation.

Chapter 15 Analysis

Holden calls up Sally Hayes because he is lonely. Instead of feeling happy that she has decided to go to a movie with him, he criticizes her. Later, upon seeing the nuns, Holden immediately notices their inexpensive suitcases and thinks that he hates people just because they have cheap bags. This is an important statement, because it is proof that Holden is a snob. Holden says that one of his former roommates had a good sense of humor but had cheap suitcases. The disparity in their luggage eventually led to the unraveling of their relationship. Therefore, Holden surmises that it is better to live with someone like Stradlater, because at least they both had the same fine, leather suitcases. This shows that Holden may prefer to spend time with people in his own social class, even if he does not enjoy personalities. While he condemns others for being elitist, at the same time, he shows himself to be equally stuck-up.

Holden's spending habits are also again discussed in this chapter. Although Holden clearly covets what money can buy, he has no real sense of monetary value. He remarks that he is a free spender and is not overly concerned about losing money. The reader can assume that Holden's cavalier attitude comes from the fact that his father is rich. He thinks he will always be taken care of and he will have access to more money once his current supply is depleted. His lack of responsibility with his money is just another way to avoid behaving like an adult.

Chapter 16

Chapter 16 Summary

After breakfast, Holden still has two hours before meeting Sally, so he decides to walk to Broadway in order to find a record that he wants to buy for Phoebe. It's called "Little Shirley Beans" and he knows Phoebe will love it. As he walks down the street, he sees a little boy who is singing while he walks with his parents. Holden is impressed by the little boy's voice as he sings, "If a body catch a body coming through the rye." Hearing the song makes Holden feel a little happier and less depressed. He finds the record he is looking for and buys it. He then buys two tickets for a play starring the Lunts. He doesn't like shows, but he knows Sally will be impressed. She likes things that seem dry and sophisticated. Holden says he can never really watch an actor and become lost in the story because, "I keep worrying about whether he's going to do something phony every minute." He still has time before the show, so he takes a cab to Central Park. He goes to the Mall to see if Phoebe is playing there, but he doesn't see her.

However, Holden does see another little girl playing and he asks her if she knows Phoebe. She replies that she does, but she doesn't know where Phoebe is. Holden helps her tighten her skate key and she politely thanks him. He thinks that most little kids are very nice and he loves it when they are polite. Holden decides to walk to the Museum of Natural History in the park. As he walks he fondly remembers going there as a child and thinks about how the exhibits never change. He likes that Phoebe is having the same experiences he had as a child. When he finally gets to the museum, he suddenly changes his mind and does not want to go in.

Chapter 16 Analysis

This chapter shows just how obsessed Holden is with "phoniness." He can't even enjoy a play without watching the actors for signs of pretense. It is now becoming clear that Holden distrusts anyone his age or older, but he loves children. Perhaps Holden feels this way because children are never "phony." Holden idealizes the life children have, which is apparent in the way he admires the little boy singing and the girl in the park. Holden does not express any happiness in his narrative until he hears the boy sing about a catcher in the rye, which of course, explains the title of this novel. Holden also likes the museum because the exhibits never change. No matter how much he changes, the museum remains constant. It is clear, through both his reactions to children and his dislike for change that Holden is afraid of growing up.

Chapter 17

Chapter 17 Summary

Holden waits for Sally at the Biltmore Hotel and looks at all of the girls in the lobby. Although he enjoys looking at the young women, he becomes depressed thinking about the men they will marry and the lives they will eventually lead. Sally appears and Holden takes one look at her and decides he wants to marry her, even though he does not really like her. During the play's intermission, she sees a young man that she knows. He comes over and they discuss mutual friends. Holden is disgusted by their phony conversation. After the play, Sally wants to go ice-skating at Radio City. Holden agrees to take her. They try to skate, but neither one of them is any good at it, so he suggests they sit down and have a drink. While they are having their Cokes, Holden begins to tell Sally that he hates school. He says, "It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddamn Cadillac some day." Sally is flustered by the conversation. Suddenly, Holden comes up with a plan. He wants to take Sally to New England and stay in a cabin. He says that when his money runs out, he will get a job and they can get married. Sally says his plan won't work. She says that if they ever get married, they can do it after college. Holden calls her a "royal pain in the ass." Sally is shocked by his coarse language and starts to cry. Holden apologizes, but Sally is angry and refuses to let him take her home. Holden leaves. He realizes that he really would not have wanted to take Sally to New England, but also admits that he meant it when he asked her to go.

Chapter 17 Analysis

The fear of growing up that was first shown in the previous chapter is now becoming a major theme in the story. As Holden looks at the girls waiting in the Biltmore lobby, he feels depressed thinking about the types of men they will marry and the adult lives they will lead. This is yet another indication that Holden does not want to become an adult. This fear foreshadows the self-destructive choices Holden will make as the story progresses. Later, when he and Sally talk about school, he says he hates Pencey because he thinks it is designed just to make boys smart enough to eventually make a lot of money. He correctly sees school as part of the process that will eventually make him an adult. That is why he rejects it. Holden likes having money, yet he doesn't want to ever have to make his own. He prefers to stay a child who can take his expensive clothing, luggage, and theater tickets for granted. His plan of running away to New England is a desperate attempt to escape the adult future he faces. He thinks if he lives in the woods, he can remove himself from society and the responsibilities of typical adulthood and exists forever as a child.

Upon seeing Sally, he impulsively decides he loves her and wants to marry her, even though he doesn't even really like the girl. Although Holden knows he is acting foolishly, he is unable to control his impulses. Because he is lonely, he reaches out to Sally. After

all, she is the only person who has agreed to spend some time with him. When Sally refuses him, he realizes that he never would have really wanted to go to New England with her, yet at the time of the request, he was sincere. This is an example of Holden's troubling tendency to act on impulse, without questioning his motives. The same impulsive behavior sparked the fight with Stradlater. His actions now foreshadow the trouble ahead for him.

Chapter 18

Chapter 18 Summary

Holden tries to call Jane again, but gets no answer. He only has a few numbers in his address book, so he calls an old friend named Carl Luce, who now goes to Columbia. Carl agrees to meet him at ten o'clock. That gives Holden a lot of time to kill, so he goes to see a movie. He thinks about D.B.'s experiences during World War II. The chapter ends with Holden thinking that if there is another war, he will volunteer to sit on top of an atomic bomb.

Chapter 18 Analysis

Holden spends some time in this chapter thinking about inferiority complexes. This is important, because for the first time, Holden seems to understand that people are not always what they appear. Although very little action happens in this chapter, Holden's thoughts about love and war show that he enjoys pondering weighty topics. He once called Carl Luce a phony, yet he decides to invite him to dinner because he says Carl can be enlightening and he is looking for intellectual stimulation. Holden is clearly a very troubled young man, but he is aware of his situation and seems to want to find a solution to his problems.

Chapter 19

Chapter 19 Summary

Holden meets Carl at the Wicker Bar. Holden is glad to see Carl, but the feeling is not mutual. Carl is offended by Holden's questions about his sex life. He calls Holden immature and Holden agrees with him. Holden is fascinated to learn that Carl is dating a Chinese woman in her late thirties. He continues to ask Carl personal questions about their relationship until Carl refuses to talk to him any longer. Carl tells Holden that he needs to go to a psychoanalyst. He gets up to leave and Holden begs him to stay, saying that he is lonely, but Carl insists on leaving.

Chapter 19 Analysis

The conversation between Holden and Carl is short, but it is significant in that it answers questions about Holden's state of mind. Holden and Carl have obviously discussed Holden's mental instability in the past, which tells the reader that Holden is not just going through a phase (as he told Mr. Spencer.) Holden is very flippant in all of his conversations. While this is also true with Carl, Holden seems to genuinely respect his older friend's opinion. He asks Carl about what would happen during session with a psychoanalyst. This shows that Holden is at least considering getting professional help. Holden, although never an entirely truthful narrator, is remarkably honest with Carl. He admits he has problems and that he is very lonely. He knows that Carl does not want to spend time with him, yet he is so desperate for help and companionship that he begs Carl to stay for one more drink.

Chapter 20

Chapter 20 Summary

After Carl leaves, Holden stays at the bar and gets drunk. He pretends he has been shot. After awhile, he calls Sally. Her grandmother answers the phone and refuses to put her on the phone. Holden slurs his words, repeatedly asking for Sally. Sally picks up the phone and he tells her that he is going to help her trim her Christmas tree. She knows he is drunk tells him to call her the next day. Holden goes into the bathroom and pours water over his head. He sits there for a long time and talks to the bar's piano player. The man tells him that he is drunk and should go home. Holden decides to go to Central Park. As he walks, he drops the record that he bought for Phoebe and becomes very sad. When he reaches the park, which is empty and dark, Holden thinks about dying and his own funeral. He decides to go home to his apartment so he can see Phoebe before he dies. He wants to sneak in and talk to her without waking up his parents..

Chapter 20 Analysis

Earlier in the novel, Holden stated that he never got drunk. This was obviously another example of his attempts to exaggerate his abilities because he gets very intoxicated at the Wicker Bar. The sadness Holden feels over breaking Phoebe's record shows how much he loves her. It also symbolizes the broken state of his life. After leaving the bar, Holden walks to Central Park. This is just one of the many times throughout the novel that Holden repeatedly returns to the park. The park has come to symbolize his childhood. As a young boy, he played there. His trips to the park are an attempt to regain the simplicity and innocence of childhood. However, while in the park, his thoughts turn to death. He has already called everyone in his address book, yet he is still desperately lonely. It is this feeling of despair that prompts him to go home to his younger sister. His depression and thoughts of death foreshadow his suspected suicide attempt later in the novel.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary

Holden returns home and finds Phoebe sleeping in D.B.'s room. She likes to sleep there when he is in Hollywood because it is the largest room in the house. Before waking her up, Holden reads through her school notebook and is amused by her notes. Finally, he wakes her up. She is thrilled to see him and immediately starts telling him about her school play and a movie she saw earlier in the day. She also tells Holden that their parents went to a party in Connecticut and will not be home until very late. She asks Holden why he is home from school so early. At first, he denies he was kicked out of school, but Phoebe is smart and guesses the truth. She becomes very upset with him. Holden tells her that he is going to get a job on a ranch in Colorado, but Phoebe pulls a pillow over her head and will not talk to him. Holden goes into the living room to get some cigarettes.

Chapter 21 Analysis

Holden is pleased to see Phoebe again. He doesn't wake her at first because he is simply content to be in her childlike world. He enjoys reading her notebook because she writes only about simple subjects. Holden is desperate to once again have the feelings of safety and security that come with being truly innocent. However, the idealized Phoebe that Holden has created in his mind is different from the real Phoebe. Once she wakes up, Phoebe proves to be more realistic and mature than her older brother. She knows that Holden will be in trouble with their father, even though Holden has never really considered how his father might react to finding out that he has been kicked out of Pencey. When Holden tries to make Phoebe share his escape fantasy, she covers her head with a pillow. She knows that Holden will not be going to Colorado. Once Holden sees that Phoebe disapproves of him, he once tries to escape the truth of his situation by leaving the room.

Chapter 22

Chapter 22 Summary

Holden goes back into the bedroom, but Phoebe will not talk to him. He tries to joke around with her, but she only tells him, "Daddy'll kill you." Holden repeats that he is going to Colorado to get a job on a ranch, but Phoebe reminds him that he can't ride a horse. Holden pinches her playfully, but she keeps asking Holden about school and why he flunked. Holden tells her that the guys at Pencey were phonies who ignored the students with pimples. He mentions how they excluded Ackley. Phoebe listens to Holden, but does not make any comments. He continues telling her about the phonies at Pencey, saying that even the teachers were insincere. Finally, Phoebe accuses him of not liking anything. Holden denies it, but has trouble immediately thinking of anything he likes. He remembers the nuns and a student at Elkton Hills named James Castle. Other boys at the school had tormented James. In order to escape them, he jumped out of a window and died. He was wearing a turtleneck sweater he had borrowed from Holden when it happened. Finally, Holden tells Phoebe that he likes Allie and talking to her. He says that he doesn't want to be a doctor or a lawyer when he grows up. Instead, he wants to be a "catcher in the rye." His job would consist of watching children playing in a field of rye and catching them before they fell off of a cliff. Phoebe listens, but only responds by saying again that their father is going to kill Holden. Holden decides to call Mr. Antolini, one of his teachers at Elkton Hills.

Chapter 22 Analysis

This chapter provides the first real glimpse into the relationship between Holden and Phoebe. Even though she is much younger than him, Phoebe is by far the more mature of the two. When Holden fantasizes about escaping his problems by working on a ranch, Phoebe reminds him why his plan is impractical. She presses him to tell her what he wants to do for a living. Again, he only tells her a fantasy about catching children in a field of rye. This dream "job" symbolizes Holden's desire to hold onto his childhood. Because Holden has lost his brother Allie, the fantasy also symbolizes his deep desire to save other children. Phoebe does not play along. Instead, she keeps telling him that their father is going to kill him. Phoebe is only a child, but she understands the serious consequences of Holden's actions. Holden, on the other hand, does not have any idea of the trouble he has created for himself. Phoebe also sees Holden's depression. She is correct when she says he doesn't like anything. It is telling that Holden thinks of James' suicide when asked what he likes. He didn't know James very well, but was clearly impacted by his death. Plus, Holden has contemplated his own suicide. Because Holden often exaggerates, the reader is not sure whether to believe the improbable story that James was wearing one of Holden's sweaters when he died. Perhaps, Holden invented the details about the sweater to further link himself to the death.

Chapter 23

Chapter 23 Summary

Holden calls Mr. Antolini and tells him that he has flunked out of Pencey. Mr. Antolini is very nice and tells Holden to come right over. Mr. Antolini had picked James up after he jumped out of the window and taken him to the infirmary. After their conversation, Holden and Phoebe dance until they hear their parents come home. Holden hides in the closet. When his mother has left the room, Holden asks Phoebe for some money. She gives him the money she is supposed to use to buy Christmas presents. As he takes the money, he starts to cry. The crying scares Phoebe, but he can't stop. He tells Phoebe goodbye and gives her his hunting hat.

Chapter 23 Analysis

Holden seems to be preparing for his demise. Many of his actions in this chapter foreshadow his eventual suicide attempt. First, he calls Mr. Antolini, the man who picked up James' body. Then he gives Phoebe his hat, which has been the only possession he has seemed to take pride in during the course of the novel. The hat symbolizes his love for Phoebe. He appears to be giving her the hat as a way to hold onto him after he is gone.

Chapter 24

Chapter 24 Summary

Holden arrives at Mr. Antolini's house. Mr. Antolini is drinking a highball. They discuss Holden's problems at Pencey. Mr. Antolini says that he has talked to Holden's father and Mr. Caulfield is very worried about his son. He says he is also worried about Holden and is afraid something terrible is going to happen to him. The teacher tells Holden that he may end up in his thirties, simply hating everyone who looks like they played college football or speaks with bad grammar. He takes a piece of paper and writes something on it for Holden to read and keep. It is a quote by the psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel: "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." Holden appreciates the deep concern Mr. Antolini has for him, but he is too tired to concentrate on what the teacher is trying to tell him. They put sheets and blankets on the couch and Holden immediately falls asleep. A short time later, he wakes up to find Mr. Antolini petting his head. Holden is horrified and quickly puts on his clothes and leaves. He tells Mr. Antolini that he has to get his bags in Grand Central Station and he will be right back. However, he does not intend to return to the house.

Chapter 24 Analysis

Mr. Antolini understands the depth of Holden's problems more than any other character in the book, including Holden himself. He knows that Holden is likely to end up an angry man who hates people without reason. However, he also knows that Holden may not live long enough for that scenario. He says he is worried that Holden is headed for tragedy and even gives him a quote meant to deter him from suicide. He wants Holden to mature and focus on his schooling in order to prevent an early death. Unfortunately, Mr. Antolini lets alcohol and inappropriate behavior negate the impact of his good intentions. It is not clear that Mr. Antolini was really trying to molest Holden. After all, Holden is prone to exaggerating his narrative and he has previously accused men of homosexuality. Unfortunately, whether or not Mr. Antolini was making a sexual advance toward Holden makes no difference, because the damage has been done. Holden feels he can no longer trust the only adult he has respected.

Chapter 25

Chapter 25 Summary

Holden takes the subway to Grand Central Station and sleeps for several hours. When he wakes up, he thinks about Mr. Antolini and wonders if he should have gone back to his house. He starts to think that the teacher might have been innocently touching him. He also thinks about the good things Mr. Antolini has done. There is a magazine on the bench beside him. He reads a couple of articles that convince him there is something wrong with his hormones and he might have cancer. He tries to eat doughnuts for breakfast, but feels unable to swallow.

He goes outside and starts walking down Fifth Avenue. As he walks, he thinks that he is going to fall down and no one will ever see him again. He starts to speak to his brother, Allie, begging him not to let him disappear. He decides he will never go home again and will instead run away and get a job at a gas station. Holden creates a plan that involves him pretending to be a deaf mute so he never has to have a conversation again. He will meet a deaf girl and marry her. If they have children, they will hide them from the world, and teach them how to read and write. The plan makes him excited. He runs to Phoebe's school to tell her goodbye. Once he arrives, he writes her a note, telling her that he is going out West and that she should meet him at the museum at quarter past noon. While waiting for Phoebe at the museum, he talks to two young brothers about mummies. Holden gets diarrhea and then faints as he is coming out of the bathroom.

Phoebe is late, but she shows up wearing his red hunting hat and carrying a big suitcase. She tells Holden that she has brought her clothes because she is going with him. Holden, feeling like he might faint again, tells her that she cannot go. She begs him, but he refuses. She starts to cry, then takes off his hat and throws it at him. Holden tries to talk to her, but she won't speak to him. He starts walking toward the zoo, knowing that she will follow him. They reach the carousel and Holden buys her a ticket. He watches her go around on it. Afterwards, she tells him that she is no longer angry. She takes his hunting hat out of his pocket and puts it on his head. It starts to rain, and Holden gets soaking wet while he enjoys watching her ride the carousel again in her blue coat. He feels so happy, he almost cries.

Chapter 25 Analysis

Holden now suspects he is going to die. Although he does not openly contemplate suicide, he fears cancer. Later, as he walks down the street, he is convinced that he is going to fall down and be forever lost. For the first time, Holden seems more than troubled; he seems insane. In order to improve his mood, he resorts to yet another escape fantasy. He has wanted to run away to New England with Sally, work on a ranch in Colorado, and now thinks he will go out West and pretends to be deaf so he never

has to talk to anyone. He knows the plan is not feasible, but he would rather focus on a fantasy then confront his true problems.

Holden has been suffering from a severe headache. However, as he prepares to say goodbye to Phoebe, he faints. He has now collapsed mentally, emotionally and physically. It is not until he sees Phoebe enjoying an innocent childhood pleasure by riding on the carousel, that he feels truly happy. This scene between Holden and Phoebe, starting when Phoebe arrives carrying her suitcase, creates the climax of the story. It is clear Holden's days of running away are ending. Phoebe is at once both realistic and innocent and she manages to stop Holden from leaving. The happiness he feels at the end of this chapter seems to end his desire for self-destruction. However, in the last chapter, the reader learns that the positive feelings did not last.

Chapter 26

Chapter 26 Summary

Holden says he will end his story without telling what he did when he got home and how he became sick. He does not say the name of the place where he is staying. He does say that a lot of people, including a psychoanalyst, keep asking him if he will apply himself when he goes back to school in September. D.B. came to visit him and asked him questions about what happened. Holden says he doesn't know what to think about all of it. He is only sorry he told his story to so many people. Now he misses everyone he talked about, even Maurice. He says not to ever tell "anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody."

Chapter 26 Analysis

Holden does not say that he has tried to commit suicide. However, he mysteriously mentions "what I did after I went home, and how I got sick," which leads the reader to believe he tried to harm himself. Holden has told his story while hospitalized. However, even after he has had the time to reflect on his actions and has received treatment from a psychoanalyst, he seems to have no clear understanding of what caused his behavior. He also does not seem to be sure he can change. For instance, he cannot even say he will apply himself next year at school. He will only say he will try. Holden also still seems lonely when he says he misses everyone. Therefore, Salinger ends the novel without a clear ending. The reader is left to guess whether Holden can overcome his troubles or will end up living out the grim life predicted by Mr. Antolini.

Characters

Robert Ackley

Holden's unpleasant dormmate, whose personal habits are dirty and whose room stinks.

Holden suspects that Ackley does not brush his teeth and describes them as mossy. Cursed with acne, Ackley constantly picks at the sores. Ackley dislikes Stadlater, calling him a "son of a bitch." Holden finds Ackley disgusting but appears to feel sorry for him at the same time.

Mr. Antolini

Holden's former English teacher, Mr. Antolini, "the best teacher I ever had," invited Holden to come right over, even though Holden probably woke him and his wife up in the middle of the night. Mr. Antolini asked why Holden was no longer at Pencey, warned him about heading for a fall, and wrote down a quote on paper for him: "The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one." Later that night, after falling asleep on the couch, Holden wakes up to find Mr. Antolini patting his head in the dark. Holden leaps up, convinced Mr. Antolini is a pervert, and rushes out of the apartment Later Holden is unsure whether his reaction was mistaken

Allie Caulfield

Allie Caulfield is Holden's younger brother.

While he has died of leukemia, he is very much alive throughout the book. Holden refers to him as still living and even talks to him. Bright and charming, Allie Is/was Holden's best friend other than Phoebe.

D. B. Caulfield

D.B. Caulfield is Holden's and Phoebe's older brother. He is a successful and financially secure screenwriter in Hollywood. But Holden feels that D.B. has prostituted his art for money and should instead be writing serious works. While D.B. shows great solicitude for Holden, the relationship between the brothers is distant.

Holden Caulfield

Holden Caulfield is a deeply troubled sixteen year-old boy who is totally alienated from his environment and from society as a whole. He looks on people and events with a

distaste bordering on disgust. The reader can view him either as an adolescent struggling with the angst of growing up (the Peter Pan syndrome) or as a rebel against what he perceives as hypocrisy (phoniness) in the world of adults (i.e., society).

The novel is the recollection of three depressing days in Holden's life when his accumulated anger and frustration converge to create a life crisis. The events of this long weekend eventually propel him to a hospital where he is treated for both physical and mental disorders. Since the book is written in the first person, we see all people and events through Holden's eyes. He tells his story from the vantage point of the 17-year-old Caulfield, who is still in a California hospital at the outset of the book.

He begins with a statement of anger that includes the reader in its sarcasm:

"If you really want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me and all that David Copperfield land of crap, but I don't feel like going into *It,* If you want to know the troth.... I'm not going to tell you my whole goddam autobiography or anything I'll Just tell you about this madman stuff that happened to me around last Christmas Just before I got pretty run-down and had to come out here and take it easy. Where I want to start telling about is the day I left Pencey Prep".

Holden has once again flunked out of prep school, where he failed every subject but English. On this day, he says goodbye to his history teacher, Mr. Spencer, who is home with the grippe. He views the sick man with both sympathy and disgust and escapes hastily after the teacher begins to lecture him about flunking out of three prep schools.

The novel continues with equally flawed encounters with two fellow students, Bob Ackley and his playboy roommate, Ward Stradlater. Holden decides to leave Pencey that very night.

He packs his belongings, heads to the railroad station and grabs a train to New York City. There he embarks on a harrowing weekend staying at hotels, frequenting bars, and trying desperately to communicate with everyone he meets—the mother of a classmate (to whom he lies about his identity), hangers-out in bars, taxi drivers, a prostitute and her pimp, and two nuns in a restaurant. His two most memorable encounters are with his old friend, the pseudo-sophisticated Sally Hayes, and a former schoolmate, Carl Luce. Both take place on Sunday.

Late Sunday night—thoroughly chilled from sitting in Central Park and having used up most of his money and everyone else's patience—Holden sneaks into his family's apartment. He wakes up his engaging ten-year-old sister, Phoebe. Phoebe is the only human being with whom Holden can communicate except for the memory of Allie, for whom he continually grieves Phoebe represents the innocence and honesty of childhood, which is all Holden truly respects—a viewpoint shared in part by Salinger himself. (In contrast, Holden sees his older brother, D.B., as a "prostitute" because he

has sold out his art, becoming a Hollywood scriptwriter instead of what Holden views as a serious writer.)

Phoebe is direct and blunt. When she learns that Holden has been expelled from yet another private school, her instant comment is, "Daddy'll *kill* you." And of course that's what Holden has been running away from all weekend—confronting his parents about his expulsion. Later, Phoebe tells him: "You don't like anything that's happening ... You don't like any schools. You don't like a million things. You *don't."* Holden is stunned and defensive. When he tries to think of something he likes, he finally comes down to nothing but Allie and Phoebe. He tells Phoebe that he's going to hitchhike to Colorado and start a new life there.

Still avoiding his parents, he arranges to spend the rest of Sunday night with a former favorite English teacher, Mr. Antolini, and his somewhat frowsy wife. During the night, he awakes to find Antolini stroking his hair. He immediately panics, deciding that Antolini is just another pervert in a world full of twisted people, and flees the Antolini apartment.

On Monday, he goes to Phoebe's school to leave a message for her to meet him at the Museum of Natural History. He wants to say goodbye. When Phoebe shows up, she is dragging a huge suitcase along the sidewalk. She intends to go with him. This is not in his plan at all. Instead, he takes her to the Central Park Zoo. While watching her ride on the merry-go-round, he worries that she'll fall off while trying to catch the gold ring. "The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them," muses Caulfield. This, in a way, is the end of a dream he has told Phoebe:

" . I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all thousands of little lads, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going. I have to come out from somewhere and *catch* them. That's all I'd do all day I'd Just be the catcher in the rye and all I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be I know it's crazy".

Is this a turning point in Holden's withdrawal from the world—a point at which he know he has to accept the inevitable realities of life and people? Or will he continue to run away toward his dream of saving the world?

We leave Holden where we found him—or he found us—in the California hospital. When he is well, his brother D.B. will drive him back East, where he will attend yet another school.

Holden Caulfield is both tragic and funny, innocent and obscene, loving and cruel, clear-sighted yet viewing the world from a warped perspective, an expert in identifying phonies and the greatest phony himself. Of course, how you see Holden depends upon your own point of view. For many young readers of the book, especially in the 1950s and' 60s, Holden still represented the true reality—the innocent abroad in a corrupt

world. For older readers, he represents the angst of adolescence in its nightmarish extreme. For the ultraconservative, he still remains a threat to the status quo.

Phoebe Caulfield

Phoebe Caulfield, Holden Caulfield's pretty, redheaded ten-year-old sister, is straightforward and independent. She says exactly what she means

She does not share Holden's disenchanted view of the world. Quite the opposite, she scolds Holden for not liking anything at all. This hurts him very much because Phoebe is his favorite person—the only one with whom he can truly communicate. Phoebe is bright, well organized, and creative. She keeps all her schoolwork neatly in notebooks, each labeled with a different subject. She also loves to write books about a fictional girl detective named

Hazle [sic] Weatherfield, but according to Holden, she never finishes them. Holden delights in taking her to the zoo and the movies and other places, as did their dead brother, Allie. Her directness and honesty are both refreshing and amusing.

Faith Cavendish

Faith Cavendish is the first person Holden calls when he gets to New York City. He met her previously at a party, where she was the date of a Princeton student. A burlesque stripper, she is supposed to be an "easy" conquest She turns down Holden's invitation to get together and wishes him a nice weekend in New York.

Jane Gallagher

While she does not appear in the book, Jane Gallagher is very much present. Holden has a crush on this attractive and interesting young woman, who dances well and plays golf abominably. He resents the fact that his roommate, Stadlater, takes her out on a date and suspects that Stadlater, who likes to brag about his alleged sexual conquests, has forced her to have sex with him. When he first arrives in New York, Holden wants to call her up, but he never actually does so.

Sany Hayes

Sally Hayes is Holden's very attractive ex-girlfriend. He considers her stupid, possibly because she has an affected, pseudo-sophisticated manner. But he makes a date with her anyway. They go ice skating in Rockefeller Center, then go to a bar. Holden asks her to go away with him to Massachusetts or Vermont. She refuses, pointing out that they are much too young to set up housekeeping together and that college and Holden's career come first.

Holden doesn't want to hear about a traditional career. He becomes angry and tells Sally she's a "royal pain in the ass." She "hit the ceiling" and left. Later, drunk, he calls her late at night to tell her that, yes, he will come to help trim her family's Christmas tree.

Horwitz

Horwitz is the second taxi driver Holden encounters in New York City. Holden tries to strike up a conversation with him about where the ducks in Central Park go when the water in the lake freezes over. But Horwitz obviously considers Holden somewhat of a loony and is abrupt with him.

Carl Luce

Carl Luce, Holden's former schoolmate, ostensibly his Student Adviser, was about three years older and "one of these very intellectual guys—he had the highest I.Q. of any boy at Whooton."

Holden called him, hoping to have dinner and "a slightly intellectual conversation," but Luce could only meet him for a drink at the Wicker Bar at ten that evening.

He arrived saying he could only stay a few minutes, ordered a' martini, kept trying to get Holden to lower his voice and change the subject. Before leaving, he suggested that Holden call his father, a psychoanalyst, for an appointment.

Mrs. Morrow

Mrs. Morrow is the mother of Holden's classmate, Ernest Holden runs into her on the train to New York. They have a superficial conversation in which Mrs. Morrow is very friendly. So is Holden— but he lies about his identity because he doesn't want Mrs. Morrow to know he has been kicked out of school.

Piano Player in the Wicker Bar

Holden encounters the Wicker Bar's "flirty" piano player in the men's room. He asks him to find out whether the waiter delivered his message to the singer, Valencia, whom Holden wanted to invite to his table. The piano man, seeing how drunk Holden is, tells him to go home.

Lillian Simmons

Lillian Simmons is D.B.'s ex-girlfriend. Holden's main observation about her: "She has big knockers." Holden encounters her in Ernie's, a Greenwich Village hangout, where she introduces Holden to her companion, Navy Commander "Blop."

Mr. Spencer

Mr. Spencer is Holden Caulfield's history teacher at Pencey. Before leaving on Saturday of his long weekend, Holden goes to Spencer's house to say goodbye. Spencer, ill with the grippe, is wearing pajamas and a bathrobe. Holden finds old men dressed this way to be pathetic, with their pale, skinny legs sticking out under their bathrobes and their pajama tops askew, revealing their pale, wispy chests. Spencer obviously likes Caulfield, but he cannot resist giving him a lecture on his poor performance in history. Holden listens, agrees, and leaves as soon as he can.

Ward Stradlater

Ward Stradlater is Holden's obnoxious roommate at Pencey Prep. A playboy, he asks Holden to write an essay on a room or a house for him while he goes out on a date with Jane Gallagher, the girl Holden really cares about. A resentful Holden writes an essay about his brother Allie's baseball glove, on which Allie scribbled Emily Dickinson poems. A secret slob (he shaves with a dirty, rusty razor), Stradlater makes a good appearance. Smooth and slick, he likes to boast about his alleged sexual prowess when he returns from his date, he is irate because Holden has written an essay about a baseball glove instead of a house. Holden tears It up, has an argument with Stradlater, and ends up in a fistfight with him.

Sunny

Sunny is the prostitute Holden requests. When she comes to his room in the Edmont Hotel, she discovers that Holden just wants someone to talk with. She leaves in disgust. Later, she returns with her pimp, Maurice, the hotel's elevator operator. They demand another five dollars for her time. Holden protests, and after she takes the money from his wallet.

Three Girls from Seattle

After checking in and calling Faith Cavendish, Holden goes to the bar of the Edmont Hotel—"a goddam hotel" that was "full of perverts and morons," comments Holden. In the bar, he strikes up a conversation with three thirty-ish girls from Seattle who are spending their vacation touring New York City. He dances with them all, one by one, but the whole experience fizzles and he leaves the bar, calls a cab, and goes to Ernie's, a night club in Greenwich Village.

Two Nuns

Two nuns with whom Holden strikes up a conversation in a restaurant. They are both school teachers, and Holden charms them with his expressions of enthusiasm about

English literature. Since they have a wicker collection basket with them, Holden gives them $10 as a contribution to their charity.

Themes

Alienation and Loneliness

The main theme that runs through this book is alienation, whether the book is read as the funny/tragic account of a deeply troubled, rebellious, and defensive teenager or as a commentary on a smug and meaningless social milieu. Phoebe sums up Holden's sense of separateness from and anger at other people when she tells him he doesn't like anything. Holden's red hunting cap, which he dons when he is most insecure, is a continuing symbol throughout the book of his feeling that he is different, doesn't fit into his environment, and, what's more, doesn't want to fit in.

Failure

A second theme is that of failure. Holden continually sets himself up for failure, then wears It like a badge of courage. Thus he falls in every encounter with other people in the book with the exception of Phoebe. Why would a sixteen-year-old want to fail? Failure serves as a great attention-getting device. And perhaps, more than anything, Holden wants attention from his parents, the absent characters in the book. What Holden really longs for, most likely, is acceptance and love.

Guilt and Innocence

Holden is deceitful and manipulative in most of his dealings with others. And he knows this all too well and even boasts of his prowess as a liar. But throughout the book we glimpse another Holden, the one who feels sorry for the people he cons His basic kindness comes through in glimpses, particularly in the passage where he reveals that the only thing he would like to be is a "catcher in the rye" protecting innocent children from falling into the abyss of adulthood.

Anger

Holden is angry at everyone except Allie and Phoebe and perhaps the ducks in the pond in Central Park. Anger, of course, is the flip side of hurt.

Holden is wounded by his disappointment in the faults of the world and frustrated because he finally realizes that he can't fix them. His failures may also be a way of acting out his anger at his parents and society at large.

Sexuality

Holden struggles with his emerging sexuality. He is unable to relate in any meaningful way to the girls he encounters along the way, writing them off as sex objects. He writes off other males as perverts or morons and views their sexuality with disgust. Confusion about sexual identity is common in adolescents. For Holden, it is terrifying.

Courage

Courage is one of the subtle themes running throughout the novel. Holden, in his own twisted way, confronts the demons in his life and, therefore, stands a chance of wrestling them to the floor.

Style

Narrator

In essence, we have three narrators of the events that take place in this book. The first is the author, J. D. Salinger, who was looking back in anger (or in creativity) from his thirty-two-year-old vantage point. The second is the seventeen-year old Holden, still institutionalized, who tells the story as a recollection. And the third, and most immediate, is the sixteen-year-old Holden who does all the talking. The form of the narration is first person, in which a character uses "I" to relate events from his or her perspective.

Stream of Consciousness

The technique of the narration is a form known as "stream of consciousness." While the book proceeds in a rough chronological order, the events are related to the reader as Holden thinks of them. Wherever his mind wanders, the reader follows.

Notice how his language often appears to be more like that of a ten-year-old than that of a smart sixteen-year-old. This is a continuing demonstration of Holden's unwillingness to grow up and join the hypocritical adult world that he despises. Holden's conversation in the Wicker Bar with Luce demonstrates this reluctance aptly, when Luce expresses annoyance at Holden's immaturity.

Setting

The settings for *The Catcher in the Rye* Pencey Prep and New York City—were the settings for J. D. Salinger's early life as well, although the novel is not strictly autobiographical. Through his description of Holden's history teacher, Mr. Spencer, and his portrayals of Holden's fellow students, Salinger recreates the stifling atmosphere of a 1940s prep school, where a sense of alienation often resulted from not conforming to narrow social standards. The New York City where Holden spent his nightmare weekend is the same Manhattan where Salinger grew up—smaller, a little homier, and a lot less glitzy than the New York City of today. And Holden's home and family are similar to those of Salinger. However, Salinger had only one sibling, a brother. From the taxi ride, to the seedy hotel where Holden stayed, to Rockefeller Center to Central Park, Holden's New York is tangible, real, and plays an active role like any other character in the book. The descriptions of places and events are colorful and immediate. Salinger entices us into Holden's world whole and without resistance. He is a master of vivid story telling.

Symbolism

The book is rich in symbolism. The author drops hints of the meaning of its title twice before we find out what it is. The first time, Holden hears a little boy in New York sing-songing "If a body meet a body comin' through the rye," an Americanization of Robert Burns's poem and the song it inspired. The second time, Holden is with Phoebe and brings up the topic, referring to the song as "If a body *catch* a body comin' through the rye." Phoebe corrects him. But Holden's dream of being a catcher in the rye (derived from the second line of the poem) persists. He will save the children from adulthood and disillusionment.

Holden's red hat is an abiding symbol throughout the book of his self-conscious isolation from other people. He dons it whenever he is insecure.

It almost becomes his alter ego. After he gives it to Phoebe, she gives it back to him. We do not know at the end of the book whether he still needs tins equivalent of a security blanket.

Historical Context

Postwar Prosperity

The events in *The Catcher in the Rye* take place in post-World War II America. Adults at this time had survived the Great Depression and the multiple horrors of the war. Paradoxically, the war that wounded and killed so many people was the same instrument that launched the nation into an era of seemingly unbounded prosperity. During the postwar years, the gross national product rose to $500 billion, compared with $200 billion in prewar 1940. In unprecedented numbers, people bought houses, television sets, second cars, washing machines, and other consumer goods. No wonder the nation wanted to forget the past and to celebrate its new beginnings. The celebration took the form of a new materialism and extreme conservatism. Traditional values were the norm. People did not want to hear from the Holden Caulfields and J. D. Salingers of the era. They were in a state of blissful denial.

Holden has withdrawn from this society enough to see it from a different perspective. He abhors the banality and hypocrisy he sees in the adult world and is therefore reluctant to participate in it, so his behavior, while that of an adolescent trying to affirm his own identity, also symbolizes the perceived shallowness of people and society

Most of the things Holden fears peak in the 1950s, when conservatism, rigid morality, and paranoid self-righteousness held the nation in a tight grip. Small wonder that 1950s parents assailed Salinger's novel when it hit bookstores and libraries in 1951. It undermined the foundations of their beliefs and threatened to unsettle their placid but pleasant existence, which was sustained by their hatred of an outside enemy—communism.

Cold War Concern

Despite the materialistic prosperity of the 1950s, many people were concerned about what appeared to be a troubling future. The Soviet Union acquired nuclear technology soon after the war, and the successful launch of the first artificial satellite, Sputnik, in 1957 appeared to give the Russians a threatening advantage over the United States.

Americans also questioned the success of their educational system, which had failed them in the space race. The fear of nuclear war became so pervasive that students were regularly drilled on how to "duck and cover" in the case of an attack, and many families built bomb shelters in their back yards and stocked them with food and other supplies to survive a possible holocaust.

Education

In 1950 about ten percent of all children were educated in Catholic schools, which at the time received federal funding. This became a topic for debate as people disputed whether or not private institutions should receive taxpayer money. Public schools that employed Roman Catholic nuns as teachers also became a target of debate, as some states, such as Wisconsin, denied these schools public support. Such actions were supported by the National Education Association, which took a strong antireligious stance. On the other hand, the National Catholic Educational Association argued that Catholic citizens supported public schools, and so it was unfair to deny parochial schools funding when they were meeting the same educational goals. Religion was more prevalent in public schools during the 1950s; religious topics were routinely taught in public schools: students listened to Bible readings (which were required in twelve states and the District of Columbia), and many students were given "released-time" breaks, during which they were allowed to leave school for one hour a week to attend religious classes.

Pressure to Conform

Social pressures to conform were intense in the 1950s, not only in politics but also within the nation's educational system, which enjoyed multiple infusions of government funds. A college education became the passport to prosperity, especially after the G I. bill of 1944 helped pay for war veterans' higher education. Corporations grew rapidly to meet the increasing demands of consumers and sopped up the growing number of skilled employees. Dress codes and embedded company cultures muted individualism. Jobs for white males were secure, while women stayed home and raised the many children ushered in by the postwar "Baby Boom"

The Growing Generation Gap

The "Baby Boom" caused Americans to pay more attention to the younger generation. While *Catcher* in *the Rye* was somewhat before ItS time in this regard, the subject had particular relevance in the years after its publication. Lifestyles began to change dramatically as teenagers began to date and become sexually active at a younger age. Teenagers became more rebellious, a trend that their parents viewed to be strongly influenced by a new, decadent form of music called rock 'n' roll. This new attitude of rebelliousness was typified by Hollywood actors such as James Dean and Marlon Brando, the bohemian lifestyle of the beatniks, and later in the literature of Jack Kerouac and Alan Ginsberg. Juvenile delinquency became an alarming problem and was considered a major social issue. Teens were skipping classes and committing crimes, and parents were alarmed by their children's lack of respect for authority.

Critical Overview

Mixed reviews greeted J D. Salinger's first novel, *The Catcher in the Rye,* published on July 16, 1951. *New York Times* critic Nash K. Burger, for example, lauded the book as "an unusually brilliant first novel," and *Chicago Tribune* reviewer Paul Engle called the novel "engaging and believable." In contrast, T. Morris Longstreth stated in the *Christian Science Monitor* that "the book was not fit for children to read." Regarding Holden Caulfield, the book's teenage narrator and protagonist, Longstreth wrote. "Fortunately there cannot be many of him yet. But one fears that a book like this given wide circulation may multiply his kind as too easily happens when immorality and perversion are recounted by writers of talent whose work is countenanced III the name of art of good intention." In the novel's defense, critic James Bryan wrote in *PMLA:* "The richness of spirit in this novel, especially of the vision, the compassion and the humor of the narrator, reveal a psyche far healthier than that of the boy who endured the events of this narrative. Through the telling of his story, Holden has given shape to, and thus achieved control of, his troubled past."

It can be argued that *The Catcher in the Rye* is as much a critique of society as a revelation of the rebellion and angst of a teenage boy. The book takes potshots at a post-World War II society full of self-righteousness and preoccupied by the pursuit of the "American Dream" of everlasting prosperity. Salinger depicts this goal as being empty and meaningless. Commented the great American novelist William Faulkner, who praised Salinger's novel, "When Holden attempted to enter the human race, there was no human race there."

The reader never finds out how Holden turns out. Will he compromise with the realities of people and society, becoming like the people he despised? Will the banality of everyday events engulf his reluctant coming of age, leaving him a tormented misfit for the rest of his life? Or will he become a superhero, leading others out of the slough of the ordinary and into a more enlightened view of life? The reader will never know unless Salinger writes a sequel. His most recent novel, *Hapworth* 16, 1924, released in the spring of 1997, is a republication of a long short story that appeared in the *New Yorker* in the 1960s. The featured character in the new book is Seymour Glass, member of another well-to-do fictional New York family depicted in a number of Salinger short stories. For some readers and critics, however, the endless saga of the eccentric Glass family eventually wore out its welcome. *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Hapworth* 16. 1924 are the only two novels Salinger has thus far written. But he did write a wealth of short stories for such magazines as the *New Yorker Saturday Evening Post,* and *Collier's.*

If *The Catcher in the Rye* were introduced as a new book today, it would certainly not be considered as shocking now as it was in the I950s. But it would still be viewed as a true and vivid portrait of adolescent angst. It can therefore rightly take its place among the literary classics of the twentieth century.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

Critical Essay #1

In the following essay, Bennett, a doctoral candidate at the University of California-Berke1ey, argues that despite its status as a "minor" classic, The Catcher in the Rye *is a work with literary significance that rewards the reader with several types of interpretations.*

Even though *The Catcher in the Rye* is usually considered only a "minor" classic of American fiction, it is a very popular novel that frequently provokes strong reactions—both positive and negative—from its readers. In fact, *The Catcher in the Rye* is one of the most widely read and discussed works in the American literary canon. Despite its widespread popularity and significant reputation, however, some critics argue that it is too vulgar, immoral, and immature to be considered serious literature. Moreover, a few teachers and parents have censored the novel because they feel that it will corrupt children who read it. While there are undoubtedly subversive, or corrupt elements in the novel, arguments for censoring it generally misrepresent its more nobler intentions and greatly exaggerate its subversive designs. Putting aside the over inflated claims of the novel's most extreme critics and supporters, the diversity and intensity of readers' reactions to *The Catcher in the Rye* suggest that the issues it raises are significant ones. Consequently, it seems likely that readers will continue to have heated discussions about this "minor" classic for a long time to come.

One of the issues that has been debated ever since the novel's initial publication is whether or not it qualifies as a significant work of literature. Does it offer significant insights into the complexities of human existence and the development of American culture, or does it simply appeal to vulgar adolescent minds with its obscene language, complaining about everything without developing any positive insights of its own? While some of the initial reviews of *The Catcher in the Rye* were negative, critics later acknowledged it as a significant literary work and demonstrated how the novel's narrative structure, themes, and character development resemble other great works of literature. For example, Arthur Heiserman and James E Miller's essay, "J. D. Salinger: Some Crazy Cliff," helped establish the literary significance of *The Catcher in the Rye* by showing how it belonged to the long tradition of epic quest narratives in western literature. Similarly, Charles Kaplan's essay, "Holden and Huck: The Odysseys of Youth," points out similarities between *The Catcher in the Rye* and Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn.* Both novels are about a young man who tells the story of his own personal odyssey using his own comical wisdom and colloquial everyday language. Critic Lilian Furst compares *The Catcher in the Rye* to Russian novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky' s novels in the *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature.* Helen Weinberg compares It to Franz Kafka's novels in *The New Novel in America* while John M. Howell in his essay "Salinger in the Waste Land," compares it to T. S. Eliot's poetry.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect about *The Catcher in the Rye,* however, is that it redefines the focus of the literary text. Instead of focusing primarily on plot development lIke most traditional novels, *The Catcher in the Rye* focuses more on character development. In fact, most of the plot is mundane and uneventful; it only becomes

interesting because Salinger makes the character of Holden and the perspective through which Holden narrates the story interesting. Consequently, when reading *The Catcher in the Rye* It is important to pay attention to how Salinger represents Holden's character, language, and world view While some critics simply dismiss Holden's character as purely negative, vulgar, whining, and cynical, a more balanced reading of the novel could indicate that there is something more to Holden than his academic failures and adolescent cynicism: He is perceptive, sensitive, creative, and even intelligent in his own way.

There are several ways that critics have attempted to describe Holden's positive characteristics, including rather obvious childlike innocence

This quality is evident in a number of passages, including when Holden expresses his desire to be a catcher in the rye who protects little children from falling over the edge of a cliff, his fight with Stradlater for making sexual advances to Jane Gallagher, his inability to have sex with a prostitute, and his tender dance with his sister. In his essay "The Saint as a Young Man," Jonathan Baumbach, as other critics have, notes that Holden acts like a Saint or savior of the innocent. It is this sensitive, innocent, and childlike side of Holden that makes him a complex and endearing character in spite of his vulgarity and immaturity.

Another way that critics have tried to show the positive side of Holden is by focusing on his demonstrated ability to use language creatively. After all, the one course that Holden passes is English. Not only does Holden write a good essay for himself but he also writes a good one for his roommate Stradlater. In addition to writing, Holden is a natural actor and storyteller He is often seen imitating Ins classmates or mimicking roles from the movies. In fact, A. Robert Lee goes so far as to argue in his essay "Flunking Everything Else Except English Anyway" that Holden continually performs himself by endlessly putting on a new mask and new identity for each new situation. In the train scene for example, Holden makes up stories about one of his classmates in order to please Ins classmate's mother; he not only adopts a new identity for himself, but he also fabricates a whole new fictional history of life at Pencey. Speaking is another area of importance. Even If Holden may not amount to much else, he is always a smooth talker who can keep the reader interested simply by the way in which he creatively tells his story using the vernacular slang that American teenagers used in the early 1950s.

While such positive interpretations of Holden correct reductive interpretations that simply dismiss Holden as an immature cynic, Duane Edwards's essay, "Holden Caulfield: Don't Ever Tell Anybody Anything," advances an even more complex interpretation of Holden. Instead of trying either to redeem Holden as a Saint or to condemn him as a pessimist, Edwards argues that Holden is an Ironic character who critiques his phony culture but ends up participating in the same phony culture that he condemns. His argument becomes even more interesting when readers remember that Holden is the novel's narrator. By making such an unorthodox and unreliable character as Holden the narrator, Salinger subtly suggests that maybe readers cannot completely trust everything Holden tells them about himself and the world in which he lives. Obviously, the perspective of a cynical failure like Holden cannot be trusted completely

as an accurate description of the way things really are, but neither can his compassionate wit be dismissed entirely. Consequently, the reader must always read between the lines like a detective looking for hints and clues that might help explain which of Holden's insights are valid and which are as phony as the phoniness he condemns.

Moving beyond purely literary interpretations, *The Catcher* in *the Rye* can also be interpreted from the perspective of the social sciences. In particular, many critics have advanced psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel because it repeatedly explores questions relating to death, sexuality, and processes of both psychological development and psychological breakdown. In general, these psychoanalytic interpretations usually try to get beneath the surface of Holden's psyche to discover some hidden force that explains why Holden thinks and acts the way that he does. One way to uncover the hidden layers of Holden's mind is to look back on his childhood in order to find some significant or traumatic event that might explain his current state of being. Clearly, one of the most traumatic, formative moments in Holden's childhood was the death of his brother Allie. Throughout the novel, Holden repeatedly thinks about his dead brother. For example, when Holden agrees to write a paper for his roommate Stradlater, he writes about Allie's baseball mitt. Or when Holden starts to have a breakdown while walking around New York City, he pleads in his mind with Allie to protect him. Perhaps as a result of this traumatic childhood experience involving death, Holden seems to be somewhat obsessed with It. For example, when Phoebe asks Holden to name people that he enjoys, the only people other than Phoebe that he can think of are all dead: Allie and James Castle, a boy who died at Holden's school. This obsession with death, therefore, might be one clue that can offer insight into the inner workings of Holden's mind.

Another place where one might find clues about Holden's psychological make-up is in his relationships with other people and especially in his sexual or almost sexual relationships with women. Throughout the novel, Holden is continually obsessed with women, but he rarely does anything about it. He likes Jane Gallagher, but they never get beyond holding hands. He even orders a hooker to his hotel room, but he decides that he only wants to talk. Instead of developing sexual or even intimate relationships with women, Holden seems to focus most of his emotional energy on his younger sister, Phoebe. While some critics have interpreted this as evidence of Holden's repressed incestual desires and psychological Immaturity, others have interpreted it as simply an affectionate bond between siblings that demonstrates Holden's innocence. While the novel may not provide any definitive explanation of Holden's sexuality, sexuality is clearly an important and interesting aspect of his character.

A final way to interpret *The Catcher in the Rye* is to read it from a sociological perspective. Instead of simply analyzing Holden's individual psychological make-up, a sociological analysis probes deeper into the social and economic contexts that shape Holden's personality. Carol and Richard Ohmann's essay, "Reviewers, Critics, and *The Catcher in the Rye,"* offers an excellent example of such an interpretation. In their Marxist analysis, the Ohmanns argue that critics' narrow focus on moral issues causes them to overlook how these moral issues are related to broader social and economic

contexts. By situating the novel in its broader historical context at the beginning of the cold war, the Ohmanns argue that the novel is less about the morality of Holden's internal psychological character than it is about the capitalist economic system that produces Holden's character. As the Ohmanns point out, the people who Holden criticize are virtually all representatives of a corrupt capitalist society. Mr. Haas is the phony headmaster who gets money for the school by kissing up to wealthy parents while Ignoring poorer parents; Mr. Ossenburger is the phony funeral parlor owner who makes money off of personal tragedies; and the majority of Holden's classmates are simply the spoiled children of similar bourgeois money-grabbers. As the Ohmanns demonstrate, Holden consistently directs his strongest criticisms against the evils of capitalism: the commercialization of culture, class based social hierarchies, exploitative sexuality, phony image-minded people, etc. From a socioeconomic perspective, therefore, *The Catcher in the Rye* portrays the manners and follies of the rising

American bourgeois class during the post-World War II era of rapid capitalist expansion, and Holden represents a sensitive social critic who reveals the evils of this phony bourgeois society.

Source: Robert Bennett, In au essay for *Novels for Students,* Gale, 1997.

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Mitchell considers the significance of Holden Caulfield being an unreliable narrator.

In the work, Holden has analyzed his family as a representative slice of society and has concluded that adult society is phony and corrupt. But can we really trust his observations of his family after he has told us that he lies? Is he not, like the Cretan who declared that all Cretans were liars, a person declaring that all people are phony? If everyone is phony, then he is phony, too! Although Holden has claimed that he is a liar, he does not always realize whether he is lying or telling the truth. The distinctions between truth and falsehood become blurred as he often adds the phrase "to tell you the truth" onto whatever he is saying. But does this catch phrase ensure that his words are any more truthful? This unambiguous rhetorical statement is restated in an even more paradoxical way when Holden tells Sally that he loves her and then comments to the reader, "It was a lie, of course, but the thing is, I *meant* it when I said it." Again we are forced to read the work, as de Man suggests [in his essay "Semiology and Rhetoric," appearing in *Contemporary Literary Criticism,* edited by Robert C. Davis, 1986], in "two entirely coherent but entirely incompatible" ways. Is he lying, or does he "mean" It? First we may claim that Holden is telling the truth: he is a har, people are phony, society is corrupt. Or we may claim that Holden is lying: he is truthful, people are genuine, and society is untainted.

There are obvious problems with both sides of this paradox. Can Holden, people, and socIety be entirely unchanging—always lying, always corrupt, always phony? Or are there internal forces within each that cause them to change (un)willingly? Holden would argue that each is unchanging, labeled forever. In fact, this is how he presents his information to us. He may go out with Sally, but he does not harbor any hope that she will cast off her phoniness. He may loan Stradlater his coat, but he still believes Stradlater is a phony.

Because we view all of the events in the book through the eyes of one narrator, our observations

are necessarily biased. Holden is an unreliable narrator not only because he is a self-proclaimed liar but also because he perceives reality in a simplistic way. In his work SIZ[1974], Roland Barthes outlines two ways of perceiving reality: *readerly* and *writerly.* Barthes explains these Ideas in terms of reading books. He claims that the only way to read a different story is to reread the same book. By rereading, a person can learn how this book differs from itself rather than how it differs from other books. When a reader rereads a work, he is perceiving writerly. When a reader refuses to reread, Barthes maintains that he is condemned to "read the same story everywhere." Holden refuses to reread as he perceives reality readerly, seeing only the surface differences between people, not the underlying differences within each person To perceive a person readerly would be to perceive in terms of overt, easily distinguishable differences.

Because Holden avoids investigating deeply, he sees the same story everywhere. Everyone is phony, he insists. But can we honestly believe him? Is he telling the truth? Even so, he is not passing on false or limited information since he has not gone to the trouble to read one story well. To approach accuracy, Holden would have to perceive a person writerly, to judge the fragmentation, the differences within the person, the covert, often contradictory intentions that war within and cause overt actions. We can draw conclusions only from the data which Holden perceives and selects to reveal to us (and he does select carefully as when he refuses to discuss his childhood or his parents); hence, we must be astute readers indeed lest we miss the multidimensionality of the characters that he develops. His readerly perception creates blinkers for the reader.

Throughout the novel, Holden tries to lull us into accepting his view of surrounding life as he makes statements that seem to make sense, but which, upon closer inspection, do not bear up to a writerly view. This simplistic mode of perception is revealed particularly through his description of his family. First of all, the Caulfield parents are described in such a way as to cause the blinkered reader to view them uncompromisingly as irresponsible, alienated, skittish parents. For example, the parents are off at work away from their children, who are scattered throughout the country. D.B. in Hollywood, Allie dead, Phoebe at home, and Holden at Pencey Prep. Mr. and Mrs. Caulfield seem to be isolated characters. The reader never meets Mr. Caulfield and only hears Mrs. Caulfield when, Holden is hiding in Phoebe's room. Holden will not tell much about his parents beyond his veiled opinion that they both are phony hypocrites. The reader is not even told their first names. From the beginning we are led to believe that they are hypersensitive about Holden's revealing their personal life because they want to protect their created image of conformed perfection. Because Mrs. Caulfield is a nervous woman who has smoked compulsively ever Since Allie's death, Holden avoids confrontation about his being kicked out of Pencey Prep. He therefore hides from her as he stays in a hotel orin Mr. Antolim's apartment. Each of these examples appears to show that Mrs. Caulfield does not really communicate with her children. On the other hand, Mr. Caulfield is a lawyer. Holden makes no bones about his opinion of lawyers: they "make a lot of dough and play golf and play bridge and buy cars and drink Martinis and look like a hot-shot" and are phony but can't know it.

Holden's warped view of his parents denigrates them without even considering that the Caulfields may be blameless. Can we really trust Holden's view of ills parents? Isn't he unethically stacking the deck so that we are prohibited from obtaining an objective view of them? We are given so few facts and scenes to describe them that we have trouble refuting Holden, except that we know he is holding something back from us. No couple could merit such a denunciation from a son. If what he has revealed about the Caulfields is true, carefully selected though the information may be, can we blame them for their anger, hysteria, and desire for privacy? These would be logical reactions if an offspring were so apathetic as to be kicked out of several reputable schools and then became anxious to write a book about his family while recovering from insanity. And what is wrong about working hard to support children, to enable them to have the best education possible? What exactly is phony about being a lawyer? Even though Holden's vagueness works well for hIm, making his parents appear base, mercenary, Isolated,

distant, and careless, it denies any redeeming qualities that would upset Holden's persuasive thesis that adult society is corrupt.

According to Holden, D. B. represents wholehearted acceptance of society's norms. In Holden's caustic terms, D. B. is a "prostitute" who lives in Hollywood, where he makes buckets of money producing popular movies, such as the Annapolis love story, which might prevent him from joining the family at Christmas D. B. appears to symbolize the successful all-American man Since he lives in Hollywood, one of the most prestigious areas of the country, displays a noticeable sign of wealth by owning a Jaguar, and has a "good-looking" albeit affected English girlfriend. However, D. B.'s own name is revealing of both society's worst qualities and his embracing of its values. Like many of the movies that he is writing, D. B.'s name is abbreviated, easy to remember, and void of significant meaning. The very fact that D. B.'s name is compressed into two initials makes one wonder what lies behind them. Just as his name used to mean something, he used to have something to say. But now as D. B. apparently bows to society's pressure and to his desire to pursue the American Dream, he loses the meaning in his life and therefore cannot communicate the message he once had, the message he once published in his short story, "The Secret Goldfish," one of Holden's favorites.

After being bombarded with these loaded examples of D. B.'s phoniness, we must ask certain questions to reveal whether Holden is right to condemn his brother. For instance, we should ask why it is wrong to display signs of wealth. Don't the signs reveal a truth about D. B.—that he is indeed wealthy? Also, does his meaningless name necessarily mean that he has no message of truth and beauty? D. B. is actually an unselfish, caring brother, as demonstrated by his numerous visits ("practically every week") with a recovering Holden. He does have other commitments, a girlfriend and work, that do keep him from devoting himself wholeheartedly to his immediate family; it is to his credit that he finds as much time as he does to visit his family. However, to prove hIs thesis, Holden holds fast, emphasizing that because D. B. has rejected an accepted art form and taken up the mass media that a technological society promotes, he has become visibly corrupt. But what is so corrupt about writing movies? Is it the medium that makes the difference? Can paper itself be any more artistic than celluloid? And is Holden really as against movies as he claims to be? If so, why does he volunteer to see so many? By seeing movies, Holden embraces that which he says he rejects. Although he distinguishes between "good" movies and "lousy" movies, he still claims that they are all phony. But what is the difference between a good movie and a good book? Holden does not answer our question. He doesn't follow his proclaimed norms; he is phony.

In Holden's readerly view, Allie represents Immunity from the dangers of society. Allie is dead, escaped from the clutches of a culture that ultimately requires that children give up their innocence and individuality. Fascinated with Allie's solution to the problem, Holden defies him, preserving him in his memory by carrying Allie's uniquely poem-laden baseball mitt, praying aloud to him, and remembering ills good-natured innocence. At the beginning of the novel, Allie is Holden's ally, his closest friend and kin Holden *wants* to ally himself with Allie, to lie down, subside, become extinct, to simply leave this corrupted Eden. Throughout the novel, Holden contemplates physical death in innumerable scenes, such as when he writes about Egyptian mummies in his history

class, when he asks what the ducks do during winter, and when he remembers the suicide of James Castle.

However, does he want to unite himself with Allie because Allie truly is perfectly pure, or simply to assuage free-floating feelings of guilt associated with Allie's death? His guilt seems to arise primarily from an incident that occurred when Allie was alive. Holden and a friend decided to have a picnic and shoot their BB guns, and Allie wanted to go with them. However, Holden called him a child and would not let him come along. Now that Allie is dead, whenever Holden gets depressed, he does penance, telling Allie out loud, "Okay. Go home and get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house. Hurry up." Holden's recurring feelings of guilt distort his (and our) image of Allie. Did Holden refuse to allow Allie to join him on the expedition because Allie was not perfect? Looking back on the incident, Holden states, "[Allie] didn't get sore about it—he never got sore about anything—but I keep thinking about it anyway, when I get very depressed."_ Or was Holden the gUIlty party by refusing without a good reason to allow Allie to come along? In his guilt, Holden paints Allie larger than life.

Phoebus, the name of Apollo, means the genius of poetry. This association is not lost on Phoebe as she writes a synthesized gothic-detective thriller in which her protagonist, Hazle Weatherfield, is an orphan detective who has a father. Holden believes that Phoebe is also an orphan who has parents, but because they are alienated, they do not offer the example, guidance, and support that true parents should. Of course Holden proves this neglect as he chooses to tell us that although Phoebe is to play Benedict Arnold in "A Christmas Pageant for Americans," her father plans to fly to California on that day anyway. Also, her mother, instead of lecturing Phoebe when she admits to smoking, simply closes the subject with the irrelevant question "Do you want another blanket?" Because Phoebe is still young and alive, Holden transfers many of his guilt feelings about Allie to her, causing her to grow, in Holden's perception, more and more innocent and uncorrupted. She trusts Holden wholly as she gives him her Christmas money and packs a suitcase to run away with him. In spite of his guilt over Allie, he commits the same guilt-inducing act with Phoebe as he refuses to allow her to accompany him on the new expedition.

As pure as Holden makes Phoebe appear, she has a wisdom that belies her years. She shrewdly sees through Holden's facade of well-being, realizing that he doesn't like anything. When she tests him to prove her theory, he cannot name anything "really" that he likes. She is also a very literate young lady. She is able to identify Holden's song as belonging to Robert Burn's poem and to correct the miswording in it. She perceives reality writerly, as shown when she writes the same story over and over again. When her mother smells smoke and assumes that Phoebe has been smoking cigarettes, Phoebe is too quick—she, like Holden, lies about the truth, saying that she only took one puff of the cigarette when It was actually Holden who had been smoking. Again, when Mrs Caulfield complains of a headache, Phoebe promptly supplies the remedy. "Take a few aspirins". Does Phoebe's covert wisdom support Holden's premise that society is corrupt? Does the thesis prove truer than he wants it to be? Holden wants to hold out for children, to proclaim their Edenic innocence. However, his flawed readerly perception blinds him to the writerly truth: not all is as easily categorizable as it appears

Naturally, Holden is the only character shown to be heroically struggling with exactly how to relate to society. He is locked into a self that desires to be genuine but finds no way *to* return to the pastoral ideal. He believes that he is holed in, trapped by the games of phoniness that society requires its citizens to play. He tries to escape this trap by flunking out of school and by searching for a quiet retreat, only to discover that there is no pure retreat on earth—log cabins are distant and lonely, deserted museum rooms are corrupted With permanent obscenities, private hotel rooms lure prostitutes and pimps. Frustrated by the readerly evidence which he has gathered to support his thesis, Holden is himself fragmented and ravaged by the warring forces within him. For instance, within Holden, the desire to reject others conflicts with the desire to be accepted by others; he doesn't want to lend Stradlater his coat, but his overt actions belie this covert, warring want; he despises Ackely, but he invites him to see a movie; he hates movies, believing them to foster phoniness in society, but during the three days of the book he sees or talks about several; he craves truth, but he tells blatant lies. Despite his own inherent writerliness or differences within, Holden still perceives only readerly. He views himself as a liar, but he refuses to acknowledge that this means that he is phony, too

What does this mean for us? What is Salinger trying to prove? Perhaps by making Holden unreliably readerly, he is saying that society is both phony and necessary. Holden's unreliability forces us to question everything about the subject: Holden's View, society's View, our own view as readers. The apparently stable themes are radically unstable; Holden does change, and society can, too, for society is neither entirely phony nor wholly pastoral. Instead, It is both one and the other. It cannot be placed in a fixed category since it is writerly.

[Although some critics believe] that there is a coherent, knowable meaning of a work, they refuse to analyze why the meaning varies so radically from one critic to the next. Of course, some of them would rationalize that one critic may not be as intelligent or educated as another. This is possible but does not really answer the fundamental question satisfactorily. Therefore the meaning is ultimately undecidable. Since this is a writerly text, a text that splits down the middle into positive and negative factions, the ultimate meaning of it is undecidable. The reader's expectations of having an orderly, coherent world of meaning are unraveled by the thread that holds the work together. Salinger places his story *en abyme,* to use [J. Hillis] Miller's term [as quoted from "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure, II," in *Georgia Review,* 1976], so that it becomes undecidable. Society now appears genuine, now phony, now genuine again, and so on endlessly. There is an endless free play of meaning because the book lacks a genuine center—the apparent center of the book is actually phony. Therefore, the meaning of *The Catcher in the Rye* can never be totalized.

Source: Susan K Mitchell, "To Tell You the Truth..." III *CLA Journal,* Vol 36, No.2, December, 1992, pp. 145-56

Critical Essay #3

In the following excerpt, Baumbach explores the meaning of "innocence" in The Catcher in the Rye.

J D Salinger's first and only novel, *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951), has undergone in recent years a steady If over insistent devaluation. The more It becomes academically respectable, the more it becomes fair game for those critics who are self-sworn to expose every manifestation of what seems to them a chronic disparity between appearance and reality. It is critical child's play to find fault with Salinger's novel. Anyone can see that the prose is mannered (the pejorative word for stylized); no one actually talks like its first-person hero Holden Caulfield. Moreover, we are told that Holden, as poor little rich boy, is too precocious and specialized an adolescent for his plight to have larger-than-prepschool significance. The novel is sentimental; it loads the deck for Holden and against the adult world; the small but corrupt group that Holden encounters is not representative enough to permit Salinger his inclusive judgments about the species. Holden's relationship to his family is not explored: we meet his sister Phoebe, who is a younger version of himself, but his father never appears, and his mother exists in the novel only as another voice from a dark room. Finally, what is Holden (or Salinger) protesting against but the ineluctability of growing up, of having to assume the prerogatives and responsibilities of manhood? Despite these objections to the novel, *Catcher* in *the Rye* will endure both because it has life and because it is a significantly original work, full of insights into at least the particular truth of Holden's existence. Within the limited terms of its vision, Salinger's small book is an extraordinary achievement; it is, if such a distinction is meaningful, an important minor novel.

Like all of Salinger's fiction, *Catcher in the Rye* is not only about innocence, it is actively for innocence—as if retaining one's childness were an existential possibility. The metaphor of the titleholder's fantasy-vision of standing in front of a cliff and protecting playing children from falling (Falling)—is, despite the impossibility of its realization, the only positive action affirmed in the novel. It is, in Salinger's Manichean universe of child angels and adult "phonies," the only moral alternative—otherwise all is corruption. Since it is spiritually as well as physically impossible to prevent the Fall, Salinger's idealistic heroes are doomed either to suicide (Seymour) or insanity (Holden, Sergeant X) or mysticIsm (Franny), the ways of sainthood, or to moral dissolution (Eloise, D. B., Mr. Antolini), the way of the world. In Salinger's finely honed prose, at once idiomatically real and poetically stylized, we get the terms of Holden's Ideal adult occupation:

Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids, and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean—except me. And 1'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff What I have to do, I have to catch everybody If they start to go over the cliff—I mean If they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and *catch* them That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all. I know it's crazy, but that's the only thing I'd really like to be. I know it's crazy.

Apparently Holden's wish is purely selfless. What he wants, in effect, is to be a saint—the protector and savior of innocence. But what he also wants, for he is still one of the running children himself, is that someone prevent *his* fall. This is his paradox: he must leave innocence to protect innocence. At sixteen, he is ready to shed his innocence and move like Adam into the fallen adult world, but he resists because those no longer innocent seem to him foolish as well as corrupt. In a sense, then, he is looking for an exemplar, a wise-good father whose example will justify his own initiation into manhood. Before Holden can become a catcher in the rye, he must find another catcher in the rye to show him how it is done.

Immediately after Holden announces his "crazy" ambition to Phoebe, he calls up one of his former teachers, Mr. Antolini, who is both intelligent and kind—a potential catcher in the rye.

He was the one that finally picked up that boy that jumped out of the window I told you about, James Castle Old Mr. Antolini felt his pulse and all, and then he took off his coat and put It over James Castle and carned him all the way over to the infirmary.

Though Mr. Antolini is sympathetic because "he didn't even give a damn if his coat got all bloody," the incident is symbolic of the teacher's failure as a catcher in the rye. For all his good intentions, he was unable to catch James Castle or prevent his fall; he could only pick him up after he had died. The episode of the suicide is one of the looming shadows darkening Holden's world; Holden seeks out Antolini because he hopes that the gentle teacher—the substitute father—will "pick him up" before he is irrevocably fallen. Holden's real quest throughout the novel is for a spiritual father (an innocent adult). He calls Antolini after all the other fathers of his world have failed him, including his real father, whose existence in the novel is represented solely by Phoebe's childish reiteration of "Daddy's going to kill you." The fathers in Salinger's child's-eye world do not catch falling boys—who have been thrown out of prep school—but "kill" them. Antolini represents Holden's last chance to find a catcher—father. But his inability to save Holden has been prophesied in his failure to save James Castle; the episode of Castle's death provides an anticipatory parallel to Antolini's unwitting destruction of Holden.

That Antolini's kindness to Holden is motivated in part by a homosexual interest, though it comes as a shock to Holden, does not wholly surprise the reader. Many of the biographical details that Salinger has revealed about him through Holden Imply this possibility For example, that he has an older and unattractive wife whom he makes a great show of kissing in public is highly suggestive; yet the discovery itself—Holden wakes to find Antolini sitting beside him and caressing his head—has considerable impact. We experience a kind of shock of recognition, the more intense for its having been anticipated. The scene has added power because Antolini is, for the most part, a good man, whose interest in Holden is genuine as well as perverted. His advice to Holden is apparently well-intentioned. Though many of hIS recommendations are cleverly articulated platitudes, Antolini evinces a prophetic insight when he tells Holden, "I have a feeling that you're riding for some kind of a terrible, terrible fall", one suspects, however, that to some extent he is talking about himself. Ironically, Antolini becomes the

agent of his "terrible, terrible fall" by violating Holden's image of him, by becoming a false father. Having lost hIS respect for Antolini as a man, Holden rejects him as an authority; as far as Holden is concerned, Antolini's example denies the import of his words. His disillusionment with Antolini, who had seemed to be the sought-for, wise-good father, comes as the most intense of a long line of disenchantments; it is the final straw that breaks Holden. It is the equivalent of the loss of God. The world, devoid of good fathers (authorities), becomes a soul-destroying chaos in which his survival is possible only through withdrawal into childhood, into fantasy, into psy chosis... .

Obliquely searching for good in the adult world, or at least something to mitigate his despair, Holden is continually confronted with the absence of good. On his arrival in the city, he is disturbed because his cabdriver is corrupt and unsociable and, worst of all, unable to answer Holden's obsessional question: where do the Central Park ducks go when the lake freezes over? What Holden really wants to know is whether there is a benevolent authority that takes care of ducks. If there is one for ducks, it follows that there may be one for people as well. Holden's quest for a wise and benevolent authority, then, is essentially a search for a God-principle. However, none of the adults in Holden's world has any true answers for him. When he checks into

a hotel room, he is depressed by the fact that the bellboy is an old man ("What a gorgeous Job for a guy around sixty-five years old") As sensitized recorder of the moral vibrations of his world, Holden suffers the indignity of the aged bellhop's situation for him, as he had suffered for Spencer's guilt and Ackley's self-loathing Yet, and this is part of his tragedy, he is an impotent saint, unable either to redeem the fallen or to prevent their fail...

After his disillusionment with Antolini, who is the most destructive of Holden's fathers because he is seemingly the most benevolent, Holden suffers an emotional breakdown. His flight from Antolini' s house, like his previous flights from school and from the hotel, is an attempt to escape evil. The three are parallel experiences, except that Holden is less sure of the justness of his third flight and wonders if he has not misjudged his otherwise sympathetic teacher.

And the more I thought about It, the more depressed I got I mean I started thinking maybe I *should've* gone back to his house Maybe he *was* only patting my head Just for the hell of It The more I thought about It, though, the more depressed and screwed up about It I got.

The ambivalence of his response racks him. If he has misjudged Antolini, he has wronged not only his teacher, but he has wronged himself as well; he, not Antolini, has been guilty of corruption. Consequently, he suffers both for Antolini and for himself Holden's guilt-ridden despair manifests itself in nausea and in an intense sense of physical ill-being, as if he carries the whole awful corruption of the city inside him. Walking aimlessly through the Christmas-decorated city, Holden experiences "the terrible, terrible fall" that Antolini had prophesied for him.

Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that 1'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought 1'd go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me. You can't imagine I started sweating like a bastard—my whole shirt and underwear and everything.. Every tIme 1'd get to the end of a block 1'd make belIeve I was talkmg to my brother Allie 1'd say to him, "AllIe, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Allie, don't let me disappear. Please, Allie" And then when 1'd reach the other side of the street without disappear109, 1'd *thank* him.

Like Franny's prayer to Jesus in one of Salinger's later stories, Holden's prayer to Allie is not so much an act of anguish as an act of love, though it is in part both Trapped in an interior hell, Holden seeks redemption, not by formal appeal to God or Jesus, who have in the Christmas season been falsified and commercialized, but by praying to his saint-brother who in his goodness had God in him.

Like so many heroes of contemporary fiction—Morris' Boyd, Ellison's Invisible Man, Malamud's Frank, Salinger's Seymour—Holden is an impotent savior. Because he can neither save his evil world nor live in it as it is, he retreats into fantasy—into childhood. He decides to become a deafmute, to live alone in an isolated cabin, to commit a kind of symbolic suicide. It is an unrealizable fantasy, but a death wish nevertheless. However, Holden's social conscience forces him out of spiritual retirement. When he discovers an obscenity scrawled on one of the walls of Phoebe's school, he rubs it out with his hand to protect the innocence of the children. For the moment he is a successful catcher in the rye. But then he discovers another such notice, *"scratched* on, with a knife or something," and then another. He realizes that he cannot possibly erase all the scribbled obscenities in the world, that he cannot catch all the children, that evil is ineradicable.

This is the final disillusionment. Dizzy With his terrible awareness, Holden insults Phoebe when she insists on running away with him. In his vision of despair, he sees Phoebe's irrevocable doom as well as his own, and for a moment he hates her as he hates himself—as he hates the world. Once he has hurt her, however, he realizes the commitment that his love for her imposes on him; if he is to assuage her pain, he must continue to live in the world. When she kisses him as a token of forgiveness and love and, as if in consequence, it begins to rain, Holden, bathed by the rain, is purified—in a sense, redeemed.

A too literal reading of Holden's divulgence that he is telling the story from some kind of rest home has led to a misinterpretation of the end of the novel. Holden is always less insane than his world. The last scene, in which Holden, suffused with happiness, sits in the rain and watches Phoebe ride on the merry-go-round, is indicative not of his crack-up, as has been assumed, but of his redemption. Whereas all the adults in ills world have failed him (and he, a butter-fingered catcher in the rye, has failed them), a ten-year-old girl saves himbecomes his catcher. Love is the redemptive grace. Phoebe replaces Jane, the loss of whom had initiated Holden's despair, flight, and quest for experience as salvation. Holden's pure communion with Phoebe may be construed, as

a reversion to childlike innocence, but this is the only way to redemption in Salinger's world—there is no other good. Innocence is all. Love is innocence.

The last scene, with Holden drenched in Scott Fitzgerald's all-absolving rain, seems unashamedly sentimental. Certainly Salinger overstates the spiritually curative powers of children; innocence can be destructive as well as redemptive Yet Salinger's view of the universe, in which all adults (even the most apparently decent) are corrupt and consequently destructive, is bleak and somewhat terrifying. Since growing up in the real world is tragic, in Salinger's ideal world time must be stopped to prevent the loss of childhood, to salvage the remnants of innocence: At one point in the novel, Holden wishes that life were as changeless and pure as the exhibitions under glass cases in the Museum of Natural History. This explains, in part, Holden's ecstasy in the rain at the close of the novel. In watching Phoebe go round and round on the carrousel, in effect going nowhere, he sees her in the timeless continuum of art on the verge of changing, yet unchanging, forever safe, forever loving, forever innocent.

Source: Jonathan Baumbach, "The Saint as a Young Man: A Reappraisal of *The Catcher in the Rye,"* in *Modern Language Quarterly,* Vol 25, No.4, December, 1964, pp. 4672.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate current research on adolescent psychology. According to current theory, argue whether Holden Caulfield is a typical troubled adolescent or a seriously mentally ill young man.

Is Holden Caulfield a reliable narrator? Why or why not?

Compare Holden's generation of the 1940s to today's generation. How are the two cultures similar and different?

Compare and Contrast

1950s: Religion is an integral part of many classrooms. Bible readings and regular lessons about religious topics are included in course plans.

Today: The separation of Church and State is rigorously upheld and children do not study religious texts; prayer in schools becomes a burning issue, and there is growing pressure from religious factions to have educators teach creationism to counterbalance lessons in Charles Darwin's theory of evolution.

1950s: Only about 58% of students finish high school, but jobs are so plentiful that employment rates remain high. Employer loyalty is the norm, and employees often remain with one company until they retire.

Today: Most employers that offer jobs with living-wage incomes require employees to have college degrees, even for low-level positions. Routine layoffs and downsizing largely eliminate company loyalty, and it becomes common for workers to switch Jobs and even careers.

1950s: Classroom curricula focus on basic skills, including reading, writing, and arithmetic, but the inclusion of science in classes becomes a growing priority as the educational system tries to prepare students for the needs of a more technology-oriented world.

Today: Educators aim to give students well rounded educations that include sex education and an emphasis on multicultural studies; parents become concerned that children are not being taught the basics and that high school students are graduating without knowing how to read. Educators recognize the need to train students in the use of computers, which become common equipment in classrooms and libraries.

1950s: Postwar prosperity brings with it a preoccupation with material goods as the middle classes enjoy unprecedented buying power; children begin to rebel against this crass materialism and conservatism, and nonconformist icons like actor James Dean become popular.

Today: Adults who were the rebellious children of the 1950s and 1960s long for a return of the "family values" of the 1950s; "family values" becomes a campaign buzz phrase for politicians as the American people return to conservative beliefs.

What Do I Read Next?

The Member of the Wedding (1946) by Carson McCullers tells of an awkward young girl living in a southern town as she suffers the pangs of growing up and feelings of isolation.

In her influential first novel, *The Outsiders* (1967), S. E. Hinton writes of how two gangs—the Socs, who are teens from well-off families, and the Greasers, who come from lower-income homes—come to blows that lead to murder. Hinton, who was a teenager when she wrote the novel, creates remarkable, sympathetic portraits of the troubled teens in the Greasers gang.

In Judith Guest's *Ordinary People* (1976), a disturbed teenager comes to grips with the events underlying his attempted suicide with the help of his psychotherapist.

Three Friends (1984), by Myron Levoy, in which an intelligent fourteen-year-old boy who enjoys chess and psychology becomes involved with Karen, a feminist activist, and her artistic friend, Lori; all three consider themselves outsiders and develop complex and troubled relationships with each other.

Further Study

Jonathan Baumbach, "The Saint as a Young Man: A Reappraisal of *The Catcher in the Rye,"'* in *Modern Language Quarterly,* Vol 25, no. 4, December, 1964, pp 461-72.

This defense of *The Catcher in the Rye* valorizes Holden's childlike innocence as a form of saintly Idealism.

Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Major Literary Characters,* edited by Harold Bloom, Chelsea House, 1996, pp. 1 4.

A general analysis of the character Holden Caulfield which situates him relative to other literary figures

Donald P. Costeno, "The Language of *The Catcher in the Rye,"* in *American Speech,* Vol. 34, no. 3, October, 1959, pp.I72-81.

An analysis of how Salinger's use of language realistically portrays American teenage slang during the 1950s

Duane Edwards, "Holden Caulfield: Don't Ever Tell Anybody Anything," in *English Literary History,* Vol 44, no. 3, Fall, 1977, pp. 556-67.

This analysis of the character of Holden Caulfield emphasizes how Holden is an ironic character who exemplifies the same kind of phoniness that he criticizes in others.

Warren French, *J. D Salinger, Revisited,* Twayne Publishers, 1988.

This book provides an overview of Salinger's life and fiction, and one of its chapters also contains an excellent introduction to the themes and issues raised in *The Catcher in the Rye.*

Lillian Furst, "Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* and Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye,"* in *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature,* Vol 5, no 1, Winter, 1978, pp. 72-85.

An analysis of parallels between *The Catcher in the Rye* and Dostoyevsky's *Notes from Underground* .

Arthur Heiserman and James E Miller, Jr., "J D. Salinger' Some Crazy Cliff," in *Western Humanities Review,* Vol. 10, no 2, Spring, 1956, pp 129-37.

An analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* which shows how It belongs to the western literary tradition of epic quest narratives.

John M Howell, "Salinger in the Waste Land," in *Critical Essays on J D. Salinger's* The Catcher in the Rye, edited by Joel Salzberg, G. K. Hall & Co, 1990, pp. 85-91.

An analysis of parallels between *The Catcher in the Rye* and T. S. Eliot's poetry.

Charles Kaplan, "Holden and Huck The Odysseys of Youth,"_ in *College English,* Vol. 18, no. 2, November, 1956, pp 76-80.

A comparison of *The Catcher in the Rye* to Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* .

Robert A Lee, "'Flunking Everything Else Except English Anyway' Holden Caulfield, Author,'" in *Critical Essays on J. D. Salinger's* The Catcher in the Rye, edited by Joel Salzberg, G. K Hall, 1990, pp. 185-97.

An analysis of Holden's character which focuses on his artistic creativity.

Carol and Richard Ohmann, "Reviewers, Critics, and *The Catcher in the Rye,"* in *Critical Inquiry,* Vol 3, no. 1, Autumn, 1976, pp. 15-37.

A Marxist analysis of how capitalist Social and economic strategies influence the development of Holden's character.

Jack Salzman, "Introduction,"' in *New Essays on* The Catcher in the Rye, edited by Jack Salzman, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 1-22.

An overview of critical interpretations of *The Catcher in the Rye.*

Mary Suzanne Schriber, "Holden Caulfield, C' est MOl," in *Critical Essays on J D Salinger's* The Catcher in the Rye, edited by Joel Salzberg, G. Khan, 1990, pp. 226-38.

A feminist analysis of the critical reception of *The Catcher in the Rye* which argues that male Critics inflate the significance of the novel because they identify with Holden as a representation of their own male adolescence and because they ignore female perspectives.

Helen Weinberg, *The New Novel in America: The Kafkan Mode in Contemporary Fiction,* Cornell University Press, 1970.

An analysis of parallels between *The Catcher in the Rye* and Franz Kafka's fiction.

Bibliography

James Bryan, "The Psychological Structure of *The Catcher in the Rye,"' PMLA' Publications of the Modern Language Association,* Vol 89, no 5, 1974, pp. 1065-74.

Nash K Burger, "Books of *The Times,* " in *New York Times,* July 16, 1951, p. 19.

Paul Engle, "Honest Tale of Distraught Adolescent," in *Chicago Sunday Tribune Magazine of Books,* July 15, 1951, p.3

William Faulkner, "A Word to Young Writers,"' in *Faulkner in the University. Class Conferences at the University of Virginia* 1957-1958, edited by Frederick L Gwynn and Joseph L. Blotner, University of Virginia Press, 1959, pp. 244-45

T. Morris Longstreth, "New Novels in the News,"' in *Christian Science Monitor,* July 19, 1951, p. 11.

BOOKRAGS

Copyright Information

This Premium Study Guide is an offprint from *Novels for Students*.

Project Editor
David Galens

Editorial
Sara Constantakis, Elizabeth A. Cranston, Kristen A. Dorsch, Anne Marie Hacht, Madeline S. Harris, Arlene Johnson, Michelle Kazensky, Ira Mark Milne, Polly Rapp, Pam Revitzer, Mary Ruby, Kathy Sauer, Jennifer Smith, Daniel Toronto, Carol Ullmann

Research
Michelle Campbell, Nicodemus Ford, Sarah Genik, Tamara C. Nott, Tracie Richardson

Data Capture
Beverly Jendrowski

Permissions
Mary Ann Bahr, Margaret Chamberlain, Kim Davis, Debra Freitas, Lori Hines, Jackie Jones, Jacqueline Key, Shalice Shah-Caldwell

Imaging and Multimedia
Randy Bassett, Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Mary Grimes, Lezlie Light, Jeffrey Matlock, Dan Newell, Dave Oblender, Christine O'Bryan, Kelly A. Quin, Luke Rademacher, Robyn V. Young

Product Design
Michelle DiMercurio, Pamela A. E. Galbreath, Michael Logusz

Manufacturing
Stacy Melson

For more information, contact
The Gale Group, Inc
27500 Drake Rd.
Farmington Hills, MI 48334-3535
Or you can visit our Internet site at
http://www.gale.com

Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of □classic□ novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members□educational professionals□ helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an □at-a-glance□ comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes □The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature,□ a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

When quoting the specially commissioned essay from NfS (usually the first piece under the □Criticism□ subhead), the following format should be used:

Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

When quoting a journal or newspaper essay that is reprinted in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

When quoting material reprinted from a book that appears in a volume of NfS, the following form may be used:

Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

We Welcome Your Suggestions

The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

Editor, Novels for Students
Gale Group
27500 Drake Road
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535