

# The Catcher in the Rye: A Critique of America

## *My Radical Intro*

The author was so sick of America that as soon as he had enough money to retire and disappear, he did. The novel's hero, Holden Caulfield, is the spitting image of the author. He also dreamed of disappearing, and he had no desire to play the American 'game.' Indeed, he is sick of America, literally.

Holden is a sharp critic of the cold, exploitative capitalist and competitive world he lives in. He does not believe in competing for profits or victories. He has a deep need to be loved but cannot find love in America. Except for his little sister, everyone fails to give him love. Even his English teacher is only interested in making him a 'good' student.

Of course, since the novel was written during the communist hysteria of the Cold War, Salinger could not make his critique too obvious.

Additionally, *Catcher in the Rye* is loaded with nonsense and errors that the common reader, professors included, don't notice. We could blame all those errors on the teenage narrator, but I think the author just had a little laugh at America's expense.

## *Other People's Essay Topics*

Directions: Thoughtfully write a five-paragraph essay about one of the topics below. Be sure to consult the essay-writing guidelines in your journal for assistance.

1. Salinger weaves a variety of symbols into *The Catcher in the Rye*, including (but not limited to) the red hunting hat, the ducks in Central Park, and Allie's mitt. Select and analyze one symbol that Salinger uses in the book. Explain how Salinger develops this object as a symbol throughout the story (see Journal 88). Discuss the symbol's meaning and significance, and explore its contributions to the overall message of the novel.

2. Throughout the novel, Holden is a tormented adolescent. He feels alienated and isolated at Pencey Prep, he is belittled by women he wants to impress, he is beaten up twice, he wants to run away and cut himself off from all other people, and he even considers suicide. Yet, in spite of Holden's pain, the novel is funny. It really is. Why did Salinger choose humor as the tone for the novel? How does Salinger's use of humor contribute to the book's overall meaning and effect? Consider how the book's overall meaning would be different if Salinger did not use so much humor.

3. Critic David D. Galloway said, "Wherever Holden turns, his craving for truth seems to be frustrated by the phoniness of the world." Analyze Holden's use of the word "phony." What does the word mean in the context of the book, and does Holden offer any alternative to phoniness? Is Holden himself guilty of being a phony? How

does Salinger want readers to judge ideas about phoniness?

4. Discuss the meaning or impact of the title of the book as a central, controlling symbol of the story. How does Holden's wish to be the catcher in the rye. help readers understand both his character and the nature of his deep troubles and concerns about life? Be sure to address the significance of Holden's misreading of the Robert Burns poem.

5. Critic Maxwell Geismar writes, *The Catcher in the Rye* protests, to be sure, against both the academic and social conformity of its period. But what does it argue for?. Write an essay to explain what the book argues for." What might Salinger have been trying to communicate to his readers through this novel, and how does he do so?

6. Holden, like each of us, faces living in a world he didn.t create. Nobody, not even Holden, can live in a culture without having some of it rub off on them. What faults of his society does Holden exhibit? How does Salinger reveal these faults to readers?

### **RESEARCH AND CREATIVE WRITING**

3. *Holden and Depression*: Research depression in teenagers, including information about its symptoms and treatment. After doing so, look at Holden. Which symptoms does he exhibit? Use evidence from the story to create a "diagnosis" of Holden. Requirements: Title page, 3 pages, typed, proper documentation, good mechanics.

4. *Holden, Ten Years Later*: Write a piece of short fiction in which you join Holden's life ten years after the story ends. Try, as best you can, to replicate Holden's unique voice. Write it in the style of *The Catcher in the Rye*. Try to use what you know of him from the book along with Holden's state of mind throughout the novel to guide your prediction. Requirements: Title page with title, 4 pages minimum, typed.

### **Chapter by Chapter Questions**

### **Chapters 1-3**

#### **Word Mastery**

<b>hemorrhage</b> (n.) massive, heavy bleeding	<b>foils</b> (n.) swords
<b>grippe</b> (n.) flu	<b>gore</b> (n.) blood
<b>sadist</b> (n.) torturer	<b>innumerable</b> (adj.) countless
<b>falsetto</b> (adj., n.) high voice	<b>exhibitionist</b> (n.) show-off
<b>qualms</b> (n.) misgivings	<b>unscrupulous</b> (adj.) unprincipled
<b>pacifist</b> (n.) peace lover	<b>crude</b> (adj.) lacking tact or taste

**compulsory** (adj.) necessary

**rostrum** (n.) a platform or podium

### **Literary Definitions**

**symbol**—something that is itself but also stands for something else

**motif**—an image, metaphor, or symbol that appears over and over again in a work

### **Essential Questions**

- What does it mean to be true to yourself?
- What does it mean to be a good person?

### **Getting Things Straight**

#### **Ch. 1**

1. What does Holden mean when he says that his brother D.B. is out in Hollywood "being a prostitute"?
2. What is Pencey Prep, and why does Holden dislike it? (2)
3. How did Holden let the fencing team down? (3)
4. Why was Holden being kicked out of Pencey Prep? (4)
5. What kind of health does Holden appear to be in? (5)

#### **Ch. 2**

1. What does Spencer do that particularly annoyed Holden? Is he right to be annoyed?
2. What can you infer about Holden's character and attitude about school through his note to Mr. Spencer?
3. What does Holden give us as the reason for "leaving" Elkton Hills? (13)
4. What is he wondering about in terms of the ducks? (13)
5. What insight does Holden have about injustice and inequality?

#### **Ch. 3**

1. What does Holden mean when he says, "I'm quite illiterate, but I read a lot?" Give examples of what he reads. (18)
2. Who is Ackley? Describe him. (19)
3. What does Ackley do that annoys Holden? (22)

### **Delving In**

1. Holden is critical of many things and often uses the word "phony" to express his criticism. What would you say he is critical of? (Incorporate at least 4 examples/quotes from in your response.)
2. Why do you think Holden is concerned about the ducks during the winter (13)? (Hint: perhaps he feels an affinity with their situation?)

**Chapter Four: What themes are developed in this chapter? Explain.**

### **Literary Road Map: *Catcher in the Rye* Chapters 5-13**

### Vocabulary Words

<b>unanimous</b> (adj.) all in agreement	<b>snub</b> (v.) to slight; behave coldly toward
<b>conscientious</b> (adj.) careful; honest; painstaking	<b>nonchalant</b> (adj.) seeming to be coolly unconcerned or indifferent
<b>incognito</b> (adj.) unknown	<b>bourgeois</b> (adj.) middle-class
<b>putrid</b> (adj.) rotten and disgusting	<b>lavish</b> (adj.) extravagant

### Literary Definitions

**symbol**—something that is itself but also stands for something else

**motif**—an image, metaphor, or symbol that appears over and over again in a work

**hyperbole**—conscious exaggeration

### Getting Things Straight Questions.

#### Chapter 5

1. Who is Allie, and why is his baseball mitt so special to Holden? (38)
2. Why did Holden's parents want to have him psychoanalyzed? (39)

#### Chapter 6

1. What does Stradlater criticize Holden for? (41)
2. Why is Holden so concerned about what happened with Jane Gallagher and Stradlater? What does this possibly reveal about Holden? (42)
3. What do Holden and Stradlater fight over?
4. What does Holden put on after the fight? Have we seen him put this on before (45)?

#### Chapter 7

1. Holden decides to go visit Ackley. How is he received by Ackley?
2. What is he thinking about while lying in bed? (49)
3. Why doesn't Holden want to stay at Pencey any more? (50-51)
4. Where does Holden then decide to go? (51)
5. What is his final good-bye to Pencey Prep?
6. Why do you think Holden was crying as he left?

#### Chapter 8

1. What does Holden think of Mrs. Morrow?
2. What are some of the lies Holden tells Mrs. Morrow?
3. Why do you think he tells her these things?
4. "But I wouldn't visit...Morrow if for all the dough in the world, even if I was desperate" (58). Desperate for what? Is Holden desperate?

#### Chapter 9

1. Sally Hayes' mother says that Holden "was wild and that [he] had no direction in life" (59). Would you agree? Why?

2. The cab driver thinks Holden is kind of crazy for asking him a certain question. What is this question? Is it a question that he has been concerned with before? (a possible motif???)
3. What's so terrible about the bellboy? (61) What does this reveal about Holden's character?
4. What kind of person is Faith Cavendish? (66)
5. Holden calls other people phony. Does he count as one sometimes as well?

**Chapter 10** (After reading about Phoebe, 66-68, you can skim the rest of the chapter)

1. Who is Phoebe, and what is Holden's opinion of her?
2. What evidence is there that shows us that Holden probably doesn't look as old as he says he looks?

**Chapter 11**

1. What is he worried about in terms of Jane and Stradlater? Why? What does this reveal about his Holden's character?
2. Why is Jane so special to Holden? Describe their past relationship.

**Chapter 12**

1. What do Holden and the cab driver talk about
2. Why does Holden leave Ernie's?

**Chapter 13**

1. Describe how Holden would deal with the "glove thief."
2. Previously, Holden stated he was a "pacifist." Does his description of how he would deal with the "glove thief" support this, or is he just "yellow"?
3. Why does Holden stop when girls tell him to?
4. Why do you think he doesn't have sex with the prostitute?

**Delve In Questions**

**Pick 2 questions to answer fully. Have a claim, follow format, and incorporate 4-6 quotations for each claim.**

1. What is Holden's mental and emotional state? How do you know?
2. Select the red hunting hat, the ducks in Central Park, or anything else as a symbol to analyze. Discuss how Salinger develops the symbol, discuss its meaning, and explain how the symbol is significant (why Salinger decided to put it in?)
3. Is Holden himself guilty of being a phony?
4. Is Holden mature or immature? Or both? How do you know?
5. We find out a lot about Holden through his reactions to and thoughts about Jane Gallagher. What do we discover about Holden's character?

**Academic Challenges—You can complete the academic challenges for extra credit.**

1. Research J. D. Salinger's life. Find the similarities between his life/character and Holden's life/character.
2. Find a map of New York City and label four places that are mentioned in the novel on your map.

3. Do an extra Delve In question.
4. Make a timeline of the places and events that take place, beginning with Holden's time at Pencey Prep.

<b>Getting Things Straight: The Catcher in the Rye</b> <b>Chapters 14-19</b>
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Please read Chapters 14-19 over Mardi Gras. I will count every two chapters as a homework point. Have fun!

**Chapter 14**

1. Does Holden have any guilty feelings about Allie? Do you feel this is abnormal in any way, or normal?
2. What made Holden cry?
3. What evidence shows us that Holden might have made a good actor?

**Chapter 15**

1. What is the point that Holden tries to make about people when he elaborates about the suitcases of the nuns and of his former roommate?
2. How does Holden treat the nuns?

3. Why does Holden think it spoils a conversation if someone asks what religion he is?

#### **Chapter 16**

1. Who does Holden make a date with? Why does he call her up if he thinks she's a phony?
2. How does Holden treat little kids? Give an example.
3. Does Holden know his way around the city? What does this tell us about him?

#### **Chapter 17**

1. How do Holden's feelings for women compare to his feelings for men? (123)
2. How does Holden feel about actors? The Lunts? (124)
3. What is Holden's point about the difference between men owning a car and men owning a horse? (131)
4. How does Holden describe a boy's school when talking to Sally? (131)
5. Why does Holden want to take off with Sally now instead of after college? What is the difference in his eyes? (133)

#### **Chapter 18**

1. What is Holden's opinion of the Christmas show at Radio City? (137)
2. Why did Holden think the woman who cried through the movie was a phony? (140)

#### **Chapter 19**

1. Why did Holden get mad at Luce for calling his (Luce's) old girlfriend the "Whore of New Hampshire"?
2. Who was Luce to Holden?

<p><b>Literary Road Map: <i>Catcher in the Rye</i></b> <b>Chapters 20-26</b></p>
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#### **Vocabulary Words**

**halitosis** (p. 155) bad breath (medical condition)  
**boisterous** (p. 150) loud and noisy  
**pedagogical** (p. 164) relating to teaching  
**foyer** (p. 158) entrance hall  
**provocative** (p. 164) stimulating; tending to provoke  
**cockeyed** (p. 169) foolish; ridiculous; absurd  
**harrowing** (p. 186) extremely distressing  
**swanky** (p. 180) fancy, high class  
**reciprocal** (p. 189) mutual; performed, experienced, or felt by both sides; interchanged or given by both sides  
**digress** (p. 183) wander; stray; get sidetracked; go off on a tangent  
**bawling** (p. 213) sobbing; crying

### **Literary Definitions**

**theme** – underlying meaning of a literary work. It makes some statement about or expresses some opinion on a topic. (For example, the topic of a story might be war, while the theme might be the idea that war is useless.)

### **Essential Questions**

- What does it mean to be mature and immature? What does it mean to be grown up?
- Why are people cruel to one another?
- How do people deal with seeing cruelty around them?
- What does it mean to stay true to yourself?
- Is it possible to grow up without becoming phony?
- Is it possible to protect everything that matters to you?

### **Getting Things Straight Questions—**

#### **Chapter 20**

1. What does Holden pretend happens to him at the Wicker Bar? (p. 150)
2. What happens to Phoebe's record? How does he feel at this point?
3. Where does Holden go after he leaves the bar? (p. 154)
4. What information does Holden finally tell us about Allie's funeral?
5. What does Holden say about Allie that contradicts all his other statements about being an atheist?
6. After he leaves the park, where does Holden go?

#### **Chapter 21**

1. What does Holden find so intriguing about Phoebe's notebook?
2. What is the one critique Holden has about Phoebe?
3. Why does Phoebe become so upset?

#### **Chapter 22**

1. Why did it depress Holden when an "old guy" told him that his days at Pencey were the happiest days of his life?
2. What does it tell us about Holden when Phoebe states, "You don't like anything that's happening"?



3. Why does Holden think about James Castle when Phoebe asks him to name one thing that he likes a lot?
4. What does it tell us about Holden when he says, "Just because somebody's dead, you don't just stop liking them, for God's sake---especially if they were a thousand times nicer than the people you know that're alive and all"?
4. What does Holden tell Phoebe he'd like to be?

### **Chapter 23**

1. Who is Mr. Antolini?
2. How does Phoebe cover for Holden when their parents come home?
3. In talking with her parents (top 178) how does Phoebe "sound" like Holden?
4. What does Phoebe do that makes Holden cry?
5. What does Holden give to Phoebe?

### **Chapter 24**

1. Why did Holden fail his speech class?
2. How does Holden feel physically while he talks to Mr. Antolini?
3. What does Holden say about him hating people, such as Ackley and Stradlater? (187)
4. What does Antolini's quote mean: "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" (188).
5. How does Antolini upset and scare Holden? Can you relate this to Holden's previous digression about "flits"?

### **Chapter 25**

1. Later, after he has had time to think about it, what does Holden think about Antolini?
2. Why does the article on hormones upset Holden?
3. What strange feeling does Holden start to have when he steps off of curbs?
4. Why does he keep repeating, "Allie, don't let me disappear"?
5. What does Holden decide he must do next? Where does he first go?
6. With all the bad language that Holden uses, why was he so upset that curse words were written on a school wall?
7. How does Holden treat the two small boys in the museum?
8. Why is it so important to Holden that Phoebe not be mad at him? Relate this to his past, and Allie.
9. What does Holden mean when he states, "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"?
10. Is the carrousel symbolic?

### **Chapter 26**

1. What do we finally find out about where Holden is while he is telling the story?
2. Why shouldn't we ever tell anybody anything?

<b>Delve In Questions</b>
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1. Mr. Antolini claims that "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” (188). From this definition of maturity, do you think Holden is mature or immature or both? Explain your claim.
2. After finding out where Holden is, do you think he needs to be where he is? Why or why not?
  3. After hearing Holden’s thoughts at the end of the story, how do you think he has changed with regards to preserving innocence?
  4. Holden is often hypocritical—he says one thing but does another. Analyze three examples of him being hypocritical.

### **Delve-In Response Graphic Organizer (TCITR)**

**Claim** (including the author and book title):

In The Catcher in the Rye by J. D. Salinger, the main character, Holden Caulfield, is protective of and worries about those who are vulnerable.

**Quote #1 Introduction and Analysis:**

For example, Holden worries about and is protective of his friend, Jane Gallagher, who goes on a date with his roommate, Stradlater, known for being sexually aggressive with girls.

**Quote #1:** (Introduce the quote before you quote. Use only the words you need).

During this incident, Holden claims that he was “so nervous [he] almost went crazy” and “so damn worried” to the point that “[he doesn’t] want to interrupt [his] worrying to go” to the bathroom (Salinger 40). He is worried because he has double-dated with Stradlater, and he has seen Stradlater be “unscrupulous” when it comes to pushing girls to have sex with him (40).

**Quote #1 Analysis:** (Explain. How does the quote “prove” your point?)

Holden is friends with Jane, used to live next door to her, plays checkers with her, and claims that she has had a “lousy childhood” (?). He knows that she is vulnerable, especially when it comes to a sexual predator like Stradlater. So, he worries and feels protective of her.

**Quote #2 Introduction and Analysis:**

In fact, Holden is so protective of Jane that he gets in a fight with Stradlater over the fact that he won’t tell her whether he “gave her the time” or not.

**Quote #2:**

Holden tells him that he “didn’t even care whether a girl kept all her kings in the back row or not, and the reason he didn’t care was because he was a goddamn stupid moron” (44).

**Quote #2 Analysis:**

Holden is referring to how Jane used to play chess, and he is implying that Stradlater has taken advantage of a girl who is vulnerable and should be protected, rather than taken advantage of. Holden takes a punch in the face from Stradlater when he refuses to stop calling Stradlater a “moron.”

**Quote #3 Introduction and Analysis:**

Furthermore, Holden worries about and is protective of the ducks in Central Park during the winter, where it seems that they don’t have anywhere to go.

**Quote #3:**

While speaking with Mr. Spencer, Holden’s history teacher, he thinks to himself, “I was wondering about where the ducks went when the lagoon got all icy and frozen over. I wondered if some guy came in a truck and took them away to a zoo or something. Or if they flew away” (13).

**Quote #3 Analysis:**

Holden is worried about the ducks in the winter because they seem vulnerable—their natural habitat, the lake, seems to be hostile to the way they live. In addition, it seems like they don’t have anywhere to go, and he wants to know whether they will be taken care of—hopefully, either by the zoo or by flying away naturally.

**Quote #4 (optional):****Quote #4 Analysis (optional)****Concluding Sentence: (Restate your claim).**

In short, Holden shows that he is protective of and worries about those who are vulnerable in his reactions to Stradlater’s date with Jane and his thoughts about the ducks in Central Park.