

The catcher in the rye

Literature



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Many occurrences, either positive or haunting, in one's life force them to mature, but often these experiences produce fear in that adolescent, keeping them from taking the next step into life. J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* details the protagonist, Holden Caulfield, and his confrontations with death, sex, innocence, adults, and the "phoniness" of the world. These experiences mold *The Catcher in the Rye* into a coming-of-age novel, in which Holden's conflicts with these difficult situations and issues support the concept that Holden matured from an adolescent into an adult.

Although the step into adulthood was not simple, but rather a difficult task, Holden's first wary steps into adulthood provide the framework of this prodigious novel. His maturation occurred during his time at various schools, his weekend in New York, and at home. Death presents itself as a prominent theme in the novel, and it helped Holden develop into a mature young adult. The passing of his brother, Allie, struck Holden hard, and he continuously reminisced on his memories of Allie.

Holden also spoke to Allie often when he felt emotionally and physically distressed, such as when he decided to move to the sunny west as means to escape life (Unrue 109). Seeing as Allie escaped from the burdens of life, Holden found comfort in him. From Holden's point of view, Allie was immune to the "phoniness," corruptness and lying of society because he died; he escaped from a world in which a child must inevitably sacrifice their innocence (Mitchell 5 of 9). This "immunity" ultimately led Holden to turn to Allie for unbiased guidance, and a source to sort out his problems.

In addition, Holden had been only thirteen when Allie died; He had not fully matured to face such a tragic situation. Years later at one of Holden's previous schools, Elkton Hills, a fellow student named James Castle committed suicide as a response to the ridicule he received from the other boys. This incident also heavily affected Holden's personality, and he often considered committing suicide to break away from the real world he loathed. Not only do these two examples support Holden's wish to escape life by means of death, but also convince one that death easily affected Holden, and the shock that followed one's death.

Both of these immature qualities of Holden support the concept of his immaturity, because unlike an adult, Holden ran from problems as an alternative to resolving them. Sex and sexual orientation were also significant conflicts to Holden, and faced them frequently throughout the novel. Holden's student advisor at Whooton School, Carl Luce, often enlightened the students with his tales of sex. Holden felt Luce acted a bit pretentious and too mature, but nonetheless felt pressured into engaging in sexual activity. The pressure to feel accepted by others made up another component of the immature Holden.

Later, during his weekend of freedom in New York, Holden had the chance to "practice" with a hooker provided by the bellhop. When the opportunity to with Sunny arose, Holden's adult personality wished to continue, but his innocence told him otherwise (Kallen 53). Adults consider sex a significant decision in their life; Holden only wished to continue for the sake of , and useful practice. "... I sort of figured this was my big chance, in a way. I

figured if she was a prostitute and all, I could get in some practice on her, incase I ever get married or anything" (Salinger 92).

He did not feel any love for Sunny; accordingly, he poorly planned his decision in a very immature manner. After she left though, Holden felt pleased with himself for not with her. Prematurely, he saw sex as a feat one must achieve, rather than an act of love, a feeling he did not have for any woman. Moreover, the inane acts of adoration and sex displayed while staying in the city shocked Holden, such as the couple spitting water in each other's faces.

Clearly, Holden felt at ease observing rather than participating in the city's sexual practices (Pinsker 56). Lastly, Holden paid a visit to a former teacher of his, Mr. Antolini, the only adult with whom Holden could connect. During the night after everyone had seemingly fallen asleep, Holden awoke to Antolini stroking his head in a fatherly way. Shocked by the situation, Holden bolted out of the room faster than a speeding bullet. Holden had previously expressed a fear of homosexuals, and took Antolini's affection as a sexual advancement. Holden's immaturity shone after the Antolini incident: he lacked the ability to distinguish between sex, love, and kindness.

Hours later though, as he reflected on the situation, Holden realized that Mr. Antolini acted merely affectionately, not flirting - the conclusion to which he had initially jumped. Both Holden's pressure to be accepted, and seeing affection as sexual advancements were two of his most immature qualities, but the realization that followed those situations helped Holden mature.

Holden regarded protecting and preserving innocence as his lifetime occupation. The title of the book portrays this, as Holden self-proclaimed himself the "Catcher in the Rye," as he hoped to protect children from falling into the cruelty of society. . . . 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- they and I mean if they're running 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" (Salinger 173). Holden's wish to protect these children exemplified his fear to grow up, known as the peter-pan complex.

This complex also includes a longing to live in their head opposed to the real world, a need to grow up, and a life that lacks a set course (Flynn). Holden's preservation of innocence reflected his own; he hoped to stay a child for as long as possible, and disregard responsibilities. The only problem for Holden's preservation of his childhood was that he neared treacherously to the edge of the cliff, but unlike the children, he did not have a catcher to save him. In addition, Allie's death took Holden's childhood from him, as his travesty forced him to grow up at a very young age.

Additionally, when James Castle committed suicide, Holden wished he weren't in the shower so he could protect and prevent the death, and loss of a child (Kallen 55). Moreover, Holden found that society had tainted innocence at the Museum of Natural History, and at Phoebe's school, where he found "you" scrawled across the walls. He saw this profanity as another demon from which he needed to protect the children. His wishes to protect every child in the world from profanity could never occur. Holden, oblivious <https://assignbuster.com/the-catcher-in-the-rye-essay-samples/>

to their impossibility and implausibility, felt they were one thing in life for which he should have strove.

Holden's passion to save the world also qualified an immature quality, as children believe they can achieve anything, while adults are able to recognize their limitations. At the end of the novel, though, Phoebe assisted Holden in his journey from childhood to adulthood. When she tells Him that he has been reciting the wrong words to "Comin' Thro the Rye," he accepts the fact that he cannot save children from their inevitable loss of innocence. Holden's inability to understand adults, or relate to them on the same playing field also prevented him from maturing.

He did not have much of an adult influence in his life, as he attended boarding schools. What's more, his encounters with these adults usually left him feeling unintelligent or out of place, like a child. First, Holden's meeting with his history teacher at Pencey, Mr. Spencer, made him feel idiotic, particularly when Spencer read Holden's essay aloud. He was embarrassed of the poor quality of his work and even more embarrassed because Spencer treated him like a child. As opposed to accepting the constructive criticism, Holden took Spencer's comments as poking fun at him.

This instance illustrated Holden's inability to conduct an adult conversation, during which an adult would accept the criticism. Secondly, when Holden traveled on the train from Pennsylvania to New York, he met a fellow student's mother. Holden lied about her son, instead of expressing his true feelings, that he considered her son "... doubtless the biggest that ever went to Pencey, in the whole crummy history of the school" (Salinger 54). Holden,

unable to connect with her, "shot the bull" and lied through his teeth. Like a child, Holden had a fear of the truth, and telling it.

Later, Holden's conversation with the two nuns at the train station left Holden feeling embarrassed because he had conversed on s. When he explained his likes and dislikes about William Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet, he realized the nuns had taken a vow of celibacy, during which they do not partake in sex. Holden immediately felt uncomfortable talking about the topic. These encounters with adults, during which he felt stupid, expressed the need to lie, or felt overall uncomfortable, show Holden's immaturity like that of a child's - his inability to connect with mature adults.

Lastly, "phonies" were Holden's greatest annoyance, and the last conflict he faced before completely maturing into an adult. Everywhere he went, everyone to whom he spoke, and every film he saw, he considered "phony." Holden failed to realize that not everybody needed to comply with his perception of the way one's life should be lived. Holden's first failure to come to this realization was seen through his father, whom Holden criticized because Mr. Caulfield was the epitome of everything Holden despised. Even though Holden expressed hatred toward people like his father, he himself lived the lifestyle of a hotshot.

He attended boarding school, owned expensive luggage, and bought expensive drinks (Miller 2 of 12). Unknowingly, Holden had the beginnings of a man whom he, by no means, wanted to become. His statements, which lacked consistency, and often truth, characterized the largest portion of Holden's immature side. Additionally, Holden criticized the actors of popular

films, the girls whom he dated, and the residents of the hotel, yet he associated himself with all. He went to the films with Sally Hayes, even though he despised the "phony" actors.

Moreover, he took Sally Hayes on a date, a girl whom he thought fake from the moment she answered the telephone when he called her. Lastly, he insisted on jitterbugging with the women from the hotel, despite the fact that they only cared about meeting the famous star, Peter Lorre. Holden's incessant self-contradictory statements prove his juvenile behavior and incapability to make a decision regarding his point of view. Additionally, Holden tried to control everybody, and the morals by which they live their lives, which again proves his immature behavior.

Holden's confrontations with these people, issues, and conflicts are the reason many consider J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* a coming of age novel. All of these experiences restricted Holden from maturing into an adult. By facing many difficult situations, including death, sex, a loss of innocence, adults, and "phonies," Holden eventually comprehended that one could not change the world, only his life, and the way he lived it. He also learned that it is important for one to become an adult, as proved in the story; he realized the effects on others he had when he acted matured, instead of like a child.