

# The catcher in the rye and the stranger



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Albert Camus' *The Stranger* and J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* are both among the most important and innovative novels of the twentieth century, however it is not the only similarity shared in common by these two masterpieces. The modern world's general moral change and the individual's alienation from the society serve as the main, basic topic for both novels.

The most visible and outright similarity lies in Holden Caulfield and Meursault getting indifferent and alienated from their society and their whole environment but the main reasons of this change, their backgrounds, the time and place of the novels, and also their fates differ greatly. This essay will seek to summarise the two works and evaluate the similarities and differences throughout the novels. The Nobel recipient Albert Camus's *The Stranger* is arguably his most influential and best known work, written in 1942.

The Algerian-born Camus's novel explores various philosophical schools of thought, including absurdism, nihilism but most importantly existentialism. The protagonist of *The Stranger* is a French man, called Meursault, who seemingly can not fit into the society of French Algeria and thus into the Arab culture. In the very beginning, we get to know about the death of Meursault's mother, however, he does not seem to be affected by the loss at all, he is not even willing to see her mother for a last time.

Meursault is completely indifferent towards the world and the society itself, being completely uninterested in what he does and why he does these things. Another example to his aloofness is when he lends a helping hand to his neighbour, Raymond who wants to assault his former girlfriend sexually

and physically, however, Raymond is then arrested and taken to court but Meursault testifies so that Raymond is only given a warning. The climax of the story is when the Arab friend of Raymond's girlfriend pursues Meursault and tries to confront him for testifying against the girl, and when the Arab flashes his knife at him, Meursault shoots.

Despite killing the Arab man with the first gun shot, he shoots the corpse four more times after a brief pause. He does not disclose to the reader any specific reason for his crime or emotions he experiences at the time, if any, aside from the fact that he was bothered by the heat and bright sunlight. Then he is arrested and tried for murder, at the trial, Meursault's quietness and passivity is seen as demonstrative of his seeming lack of remorse or guilt by the prosecuting attorney, and so the attorney concentrates more upon Meursault's inability or unwillingness to cry at his mother's funeral than on the actual murder.

The attorney pushes Meursault to tell the truth but never comes through and later on his own Meursault explains to the reader that he simply was never really able to feel any remorse or personal emotions for any of his actions in life, and due to seeing no hope in Meursault's repentance the court finds him guilty and the decision is public decapitation, so his fate ends in being executed. There is no redemption for Meursault and the reader does not ever get to know about his reasons for killing the Arab.

The other novel to discuss is one of the most well-known works of American literature, it is Jerome David Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, a classic book written in 1951. This piece of work explores the philosophical idea of

essentialism, this means that certain qualities and certain properties are universal, not dependent on context and environment. Holden Caulfield, the main character and protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye* is essentialist in a way, that he does not want to be dependent on other people's opinion.

He is a 17-year-old teenager, who calls every adult a phony, and he is always disgusted by narcissism and hypocrisy of mostly adult people. At the beginning of the book he explains the reader how he dislikes all his classmates and how he has been expelled from his school, the Pencey prep. He does not want to admit his mistakes, and does not care about what his teachers tell him.

Then he takes a train to New York, but instead of visiting his family he rents a room in an old hotel, and has a controversial encounter with a prostitute, however Holden only tries to talk to her, but he gets beaten up by her pimp. He spends some days in the hotel until he sets off to visit his parents' house, only to talk with the only person he likes, his sister Phoebe. Being with his little sister gives him strength and patience, he finds the child's innocence in Phoebe, who in turn considers Holden as a hero.

Holden also daydreams about being a hero, 'The Catcher in the Rye' who catches children from falling off the brink of a rye field, which is located at the edge of a cliff. The rye field here symbolises the childhood, and the abyss depicts the adulthood in a way, so Holden wants to become the saviour of innocence. After going home to his parents, he tells us at the end of the story that he will be attending another school. The most outright similarity

between these two classic novels is that both Holden and Meursault are aloof and indifferent to their society.

They are rarely willing to cooperate with other people for their own sake, and do also seldom take the advice from others and obey the natural, conventional rules of society. Holden, however, as opposed to Meursault seemingly has the reasons to do what he does, and he at least can explain why he acts in the story. Holden is a man with feelings, deep feelings toward his sister and the innocent childhood, which he places on a pedestal.

Meursault in turn can be considered throughout the most of the novel as only a body without any feeling.

He is neither able to give reasons for killing the Arab, nor can he express feelings for his lost mother. All in all, I believe that both character's fates are relevant to their deeds. The completely indifferent Meursault gets death penalty as a punishment, but Holden Caulfield has only a kind of mental breakdown that he is likely to recover from. I, personally (and luckily) couldn't identify myself with either protagonists, but I would most certainly choose the destiny of Holden, who is still considered as a hero of youth and childhood.