

The catcher in the rye: a book that should be remembered

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When *The Catcher in the Rye* was first published in 1951, it was ranked number one on the New York Times Best Seller list (Time Magazine). Yet it has been one of the most frequently banned books in schools and libraries. Written in the late 1940's by J. D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* tells the story of Holden Caulfield, a teenage boy, who gets kicked out of boarding school and how he passes the days before returning home, wandering New York City. Since its publication, it has been a book both adored and ostracized. However, whichever opinion one may have, one cannot deny the mark it made in history. *The Catcher in the Rye* is a novel that will be remembered throughout the ages for its depiction of post World War II life, both through the story and American society's reaction to the tale.

The portrayal of post World War II American society was accurately portrayed through Holden Caulfield's adventure during the course of *The Catcher in the Rye*. The book exemplified the daily American life and culture during mid twentieth century, which when read in the context of the present day, demonstrates how the American society has changed. In the time period Holden Caulfield lives in, the economy was very different from the present day's. Holden buys a record at a record and states, " They charged me five bucks for it but I didn't care," (Salinger 116). This quote implies that five dollars for a record was very expensive. In contrast, in today's society, one would be lucky to find a CD for as cheap as five dollars. Movies were also becoming an increasingly popular entertainment event in the post World War II era. Holden's first idea for a date with a girl, is to take her to the theater or movies. He stated, " I went over and bought two orchestra seats for *I Know My Love*...I didn't much want to see it, but I knew old Sally

would,”(Salinger 116). Despite the fact that Holden has no interest in the theater, he decides to take his date anyway, because it was a common and acceptable event for dating at the time. This exemplifies America’s budding love of movies in addition to theater which began in the World War I era. The Catcher in the Rye also exemplified America’s society in a larger sense. During the time period of the setting, American’s were concerned with the communist threat as well as a society of conformists (Aubrey). Holden, throughout the book, is constantly critical, as well as irritated by the amount of “phonies” in his life. ““ You ought to go to a boy’s school sometime. Try it sometime’, I said. ‘ 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’,” (Salinger 131). Holden, despite his problems, was a one of a kind hero for the time. He was a hero for those hailing individuality. Although there were people of the time that disliked the book because of this new outspoken individuality, Holden was also a hero for the Americans in need of one then, and today allows new generations to glimpse of what life nearly sixty years ago was like for the “ common man”.

The Catcher in the Rye not only depicts typical mid twentieth century society but also through the contemporary social reaction. Despite the fact that it was a widely popular story, it quickly went from the number one on the New York Times Bestseller List, to being banned from schools and libraries, starting in 1960 (Time Magazine). Many have banned the book on the grounds of violating the regulations of “ excess vulgar language, sexual scenes, things concerning moral issues, excessive violence, and anything dealing with the occult,” (Time Magazine). The first of these “ regulations”

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that *Catcher in the Rye* violated was its “ excess vulgar language” (Time Magazine). Throughout the book, Holden constantly uses words such as, “ goddam”, “ moron”, and “ hell” (Salinger 1-214). Because of the language, many schools have found it inappropriate for their students. However, the largest problem many people have had is its frank discussion of subjects such as sex. Throughout the book Holden often refers to sex and his feelings about it, a taboo subject at its time of publishing. In one scene Holden states, “ In my mind, I’m probably the biggest sex maniac you ever saw,” (Salinger 62). In another scene, Holden buys a prostitute. During the time of publishing these factors were “ incompatible with America’s positive self-image” (Aubrey). Many Americans of the time felt that Holden represented America in a negative way. However, even today, *The Catcher in the Rye* is banned for the same reasons, despite how much time is passed. Censorship of *The Catcher in the Rye*, both now and today represents America’s desire to present itself as pristine and perfect. However, by censoring this book America merely presents itself as fearful, that anything could tear it down at any moment.

The Catcher in the Rye is a book that every young person should read because it represents how life was like long ago for the average person. Some may say it should not be read because of its vulgarity. However, by censoring something, a person is deprived of knowledge they could have attained, as well as denying someone the chance to make their own opinion of something. *The Catcher in the Rye* should not be remembered as a book banned by schools and parents alike, but as a book that represents America and its culture in the mid twentieth century. After all, do people really want

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to prove Holden right when he says, “ People never notice anything,” by not noticing that by depriving this book, people are disadvantaged of learning an important part of history ?

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