

The catcher in the rye critical essay



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It's highly intriguing that years after it's publishing, *The Catcher in the Rye* remains such an intriguing novel to teachers, students, and the general population alike. Yet through analyzing the main themes of the book, one can deduce that although the slang and fashion might be outdated, *The Catcher in the Rye* is still relatable and relevant. This can be primarily attributed to the constant theme of teenage angst and desire for rebellion, a common feeling spurred amongst the young for decades. The book also remains relevant because of the history behind the book as well as the culture it has created.

Regardless of opinions however, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, although written half a century ago, maintains relevance in this time as a coming of age novel that opens perspectives and boldly exposes themes that were once tabooed in the American society. To begin, Holden has primarily maintained relevance in the modern age because he continues to give a voice to the youth of our society.

Taking a tone of rebellion, Holden separates himself from the society that is so illegitimate in his eyes, and seems to form a realm of his own within his mind. This primarily entails his disrespect for most adults and the rules they make for everyone. You can see Holden's disdain for adults during his conversation with Mr. Spencer, "[...

] I could shoot the old bull to old Spencer and think about those ducks at the same time... You don't have to think too hard when you talk to a teacher. " (Salinger 18).

The aspect of Salinger's novel that is most relevant to youth today is how it shows teenage years as a time of conflict and change. Conflict is found not only between a teenager and their society, but also between other people, and even within themselves. Holden seems to despise his environment, mocking others as phonies and criticizing actions and events everywhere. Says Holden about a friend of Sally's, "[..

.] he went to Andover. Big, big deal... He was the kind of a phony that have to give themselves room when they answer somebody's question.

" (Salinger 165) This is parallel to the infamous teenage stereotype of rebellion and disobedience, as youth today are perceived as arrogant and wanting to create their own rules. The novel provokes emotion within the reader because they are finally able to connect with someone on that level. On that note, the book also connects with a teenager's insecurities and self-evaluation, proven by its usage by other authors. An example of this would be the novel King Dork, in which the main character Tom criticizes his school for lauding *The Catcher in the Rye* when it really isn't that special.

The truth of the matter, however, is that Tom is extremely similar to Holden, in that they both have emotional and complicated lives as teenagers filled with angst and discord. The fact that *Catcher* is referred to so much in this novel that is half a century newer shows that J. D. Salinger has made an impact in youth literature and created a template for which writers can explore the complexity of the teenage mind. Finally, the book remains an essential part of the 20th century culture not only because of the message of teenage angst it portrays but because of the following it gained and

notoriety of some supporters. Notably, *The Catcher in the Rye* was noted to be an integral part to two separate, high profile murder attempts, one of which was successful.

The most famous incident was the 1980 assassination of John Lennon by Mark David Chapman. Chapman, who at one point even tried to change his name to Holden Caulfield, assassinated John Lennon in 1980. When arrested, Chapman was clutching a copy of *The Catcher in the Rye*, and wrote inside, "This is my statement" (Ball). In an interview, Chapman stated he "[

..] was literally living inside...

The Catcher in the Rye" (Chapman). While Chapman was institutionalized, and the connection he made from the book to the murder has yet to be determined, the mystery of the book's inspiration for murder still intrigues people (Ball). In conclusion, *The Catcher in the Rye* still captures interest from readers today because the message of teenage angst and growth is timeless. The novel is able to effectively portray a teenager's rebellious nature and rejection of society that masks uncertainty of one's own self.

It also has a sense of mystery surrounding it, as inspired one of the most well known murders of the 20th century. J. D. Salinger captivates readers because the novel lacks the stereotypical sugar coating of a young adult novel; it gives a true perspective on the trouble of being a teenager and exposes a whole new realm that people can appreciate.

Reference <http://transcripts.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0009/30/lklw.00.html>

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