

# [Holden caulfield undertakes a journey of personal discovery](https://assignbuster.com/holden-caulfield-undertakes-a-journey-of-personal-discovery/)

Caulfield undertakes a journey of personal discovery.

Every journey begins with a first step. What are Holden’s first steps? How does his character react to the world around him as he begins his ‘ hero’s quest’? Holden Caulfield is an extremely unique character. Through his inability to conform to the rules of the adult world that he is sucked into, he frequently criticizes people and is extremely judgemental to those around him. He calls people who reject him “ phonies”, as a way to psychologically defend himself to control his emotions and preserve his childhood. His innocence that he unknowingly tries to protect constantly reminds us of his juggling between childhood and adulthood. He is sucked into and fascinated by the adult world, but still has the actions and emotions of a child.

As we progress through the book though, his opinions and judgements slowly change and widen, which reveals the first steps of his “ hero’s quest”. Holden’s first step is very significant in the first few chapters of the novel. It shows the reader Holden’s “ Ordinary World”. Holden, having been kicked out of three classes, and failing four out of his five classes as his current school, Pency Prep, received a notice that he was being expelled. He goes and visits his old history teacher Spencer, but when he is lectured about his future, although he appears to play along with Spencer in his conversation, “ shooting the bull”, eventually leads to him lying to end it, and is clearly annoyed with the fact that he is treated like a child.

The hypocrisy Holden possesses is extremely evident here; as he is a compulsive liar. His conceptions of the adult world, and all the “ phoniness” that he perceives in nearly everyone he meets is very shallow. Alas, he fails to notice his own phoniness, as he is too busy judging others rather than judging himself. A recurring motif is obvious here, and that is his lying. His self-deception drives him, and he is unable to acknowledge his own weaknesses.

His red hunting cap which he often wears is a symbol for his own psychological armour. He wears the cap “ how he likes it”, with the peak at the back, when he is hurt or upset, and he is seen to flip it round the right way again when he feels nervous. The quote “ I didn’t give a damn how I looked. Nobody was around anyway,” again gives away his hypocrisy. He definitely is self-conscious about the cap, because he doesn’t want to look like a “ fool”, but there is a raging mental struggle in Holden’s mind.

To defend himself from others he “ shoots them” in his hunting cap, but doesn’t literally do this. He reacts in his own way, through his mind, to criticize and denigrate the people around him. Holden’s decision to leave Pency Prep early is an identifiable sign of the “ Call to Adventure” stage. Because of his conscious judgement on the people around him, to what started as a normal conversation with Ackley resulted in a verbal argument, and it drives Holden to move out altogether. He can’t stand being around these “ phonies”. As he packs, sadness and loneliness take over his emotions, as he feels that there is no one he can talk to.

This step that he takes is one that kick starts his adventure into the adult world. His fight with Stradlater and Ackley shakens him up, and thus, his departure symbolises the leap into a different world. Some may argue that this stage is actually the “ Crossing the Threshold” stage, as he is still leaving the ‘ ordinary world’, and entering a new one which the rules and values are unknown to him. As he is leaving, he is crying, but unsure why. His personality is somewhat, unpredictable, which suggests to the reader that he may be emotionally or mentally instable. However, once he puts on his red hunting cap, his emotions are altered again, as he screams out “ Sleep tight, ya morons! ” throughout the whole ward, as a way of “ shooting” the others mentally.

The way Holden reacts to the people around him, and how he starts off his “ hero’s quest”, is definitely individual because of his unique personality. The theme of ‘ phoniness in the adult world’ shows us that because of his cynical nature, his judgement of innocents and phonies are always changing. A hero always starts off in their “ original world”, and throughout their journey, the way they perceive others and their own personality changes, and this is seen in Catcher in the Rye, through Holden. Holden at the beginning of the book is “ standing on the cliff between childhood and adulthood”. These first few stages of a Hero’s Quest, “ Ordinary World”, “ Call to Adventure” and “ Crossing the Threshold” are all evident in the first few chapters of Catcher in the Rye, and his own personal journey of self-discovery has definitely begun in this first part as he leaps into the unknown world of adulthood.