

The catcher in the rye and world holden

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



Holden and the Rest of the World Holden is everybody's favorite judgmental cynic. He also has a bit of a problem: he's completely alone and he knows it — we stopped count at about 22 when we tried to track the number of times he admits to being lonely. The clear conflict here is that he judges and hates everyone, but at the same time wants them to join him for a drink and chat it up for the evening. He seems perpetually caught in this very limbo: judging a person, making a half-hearted attempt to reach out, and then being disappointed when that person isn't there to support him, talk with him, or try to understand him. Often, Holden can't even get to the point of reaching out at all. His passivity and indecision take over at key moments. Check out the very first thing he does when he gets off the train in New York City — he goes into a phone booth. He knows he wants to call someone, but proceeds to veto all of his options: D. B. is in Hollywood, Phoebe is sleeping, he " doesn't feel like" calling Jane's mother, he's afraid Sally's mom will pick up at her house, and he " doesn't like" Carl Luce. Holden steps out of the phone booth after twenty minutes, having not called anyone. This is the story of his life. Or at least the story of *The Catcher in the Rye*. When Holden does end up interacting with people, he usually gets the short end of the stick. He invites Ackley along to the movies, but Ackley won't return the favor by letting Holden sleep in his roommate's bed. He writes Stradlater's composition for him, and in return gets yelled at (and socked in the nose, but technically that was for different reasons). He even had to type that essay on a junky old typewriter because he had lent his own to the guy down the hall. He gives up his hound's-tooth jacket for the night, knowing it'll get stretched out in the shoulders. He gets stuck with the tab for the three " moronic" girls'

drinks in the Lavender Room at his hotel. He pays Sunny even though he doesn't have sex with her, and ends up getting cheated out of five more dollars (and socked in the stomach, although technically this, too, was for different reasons). Despite all these instances, Holden never makes himself out to be a victim. He doesn't seem to notice that he gets taken advantage of — repeatedly. This is part of his own youth and naïveté. Despite his judgmental exterior, Holden is surprisingly eager to please — and to make friends. Holden and the Phonies OK, but how can Holden be enthusiastic about meeting people when he deems everyone and their mother (literally — he encounters quite a few mothers in this story) to be phony? In his mind, everyone is a social-climber, a name-dropper, appearance-obsessed, a secret slob, a private flit, or a suck-up. Holden finds any semblance of normal adult life to be "phony." He doesn't want to grow up and get a job and play golf and drink martinis and go to an office. And he certainly doesn't want anything to do with the "bastards" that do. Except that, really, he sort of does. So what's the catch? Basically, if Holden calls everyone a phony, he can feel better when they reject him. It's not his fault the three girls in the Lavender Room weren't terribly interested in giving him the time of day; they were just phonies who couldn't carry on a conversation. He can't feel bad if Ackley doesn't want to let him stay and chat; Ackley's just a pimply moron. If Stradlater doesn't want to hang out, it's because he's a jerk. We prefer not to use tired, old terms like "defense mechanism," but we're certainly tempted to in this case. Holden: Crazy or not? So far, Holden doesn't sound too different from a typical, disaffected youth. We all know people like this. We've probably all felt like this at one point or another. But

there are definite hints in the text that Holden isn't just another normal teenager. For one, we know he had to take some sort of "rest" from regular life to go through therapy and get psychoanalyzed. We know he's prone to violent outbreaks, like breaking all the windows in the garage the night Allie died, or tackling Stradlater after his date with Jane, or screaming at Sally in public (he claims he's not yelling, but she repeatedly asks him to "stop screaming" at her). He's flunked out of multiple boarding schools. He's admittedly depressed all the time. By the end of the novel, Holden's depression/anger starts to take physical form: he's nauseous, he has a headache, he feels dizzy, and he eventually passes out. His comments at the beginning of the novel suggest that his breakdown or whatnot was in fact physical: he says he "practically got t. b. and came out here for all these goddam check-ups and stuff." So we can pretty sure there's something up with Holden — something more than average teenage disillusionment.

Holden and Mortality One way we can understand Holden's abnormality is to look at the traumatic events in his childhood, most importantly the death of his brother Allie. Holden's confession that he broke all the windows in the garage the night Allie died is an important one — it tells us right off the bat that Allie's death has had a huge impact on Holden's life. That Allie pops up over and over throughout the course of the narrative confirms this. The death of James Castle, too, seems to be significant, since it was the second time Holden had a close and personal encounter with death. Because of these events, Holden is plagued with thoughts of mortality. Half the symbols we discuss in "Symbols, Imagery, and Allegory" have to do with death. The way Holden deals with his own mortality is interesting. At times he is self-

destructive and seems to possess almost a death wish. After all, he talks about suicide after the Maurice and Sunny (prostitute) incident, and he says he'd volunteer to sit on top of the next atomic bomb. Other times, he seems terrified at the thought of his own death, as when he prays to Allie while crossing the street not to let him disappear. Even stranger, he's sometimes indifferent and objective to the notion, like when he sits in the freezing cold park after looking for the ducks and wonders what his family would think and what his funeral would be like if he got pneumonia and died. Such morbid thoughts do color the way Holden sees the world, and we're guessing they are at least partially responsible for his jaded cynicism. Holden and Sexuality

Of course, you can't talk about Holden Caulfield without talking about sex. We'd like to start with Holden's hugely revealing digression in Chapter Nine. The digression is spurred on by the scenes Holden witnesses looking out of his hotel window into other rooms, namely, a "distinguished-looking" man prancing about in women's clothes, and a couple squirting water or highballs or something into each other's mouths. Holden declares the hotel is "full of perverts" and launches into his thoughts on sex and perverts in general. His problem, he admits, is that if you really like a girl, you wouldn't want to "do crummy stuff" to her. It looks as though Holden sees sex as inherently degrading, no matter how it's done. If he cares about a girl, like Jane for instance, he can't have a sexual relationship with her because it would turn her into an object. This means Holden has to either fulfill his sexual urges with girls he doesn't care about, or not fulfill them at all. Holden's second problem, he says, is that when he's fooling around with a girl and she suggests they stop, he actually stops. Other guys, he says, just keep going,

but Holden actually stops. As we talk about in Stradlater's "Character Analysis," Holden isn't really talking about rape. Keep in mind that this is 1951 and before today's levels of sensitivity. Remember Holden's earlier argument about sex being somehow degrading; he can't find a balance between respecting a woman (and her saying "no") and taking sexual control of a situation where — maybe — the woman wants him to. Moving on to our other sensitive topic, we have to cover the issue of sexual molestation with regards to Holden and Jane. We go into the nuanced, argumentative details in Mr. Antolini's "Character Analysis" and also in Jane's, but what does it mean for Holden? He either did or did not experience a come-on at the hands of his former teacher, and he either did or did not have "perverted" stuff happen to him "about twenty times since [he] was a kid." And Jane either did or did not get molested by her stepfather. Why all this ambiguity? Can't you just tell us what's going on!? Well, yes, an omniscient, third-person narrator could. But the fact is, Holden isn't sure. The Antolini incident, much like the situation with Jane and her stepfather, is ambiguous. Why? Because all this sex stuff is often ambiguous. Especially when you're sixteen. This ambiguity is what makes sex so confusing to Holden, who openly admits he "just [doesn't] understand it." Lastly, there's a theory out there that Holden is gay. That's one solution to why he feels confused and alienated and so forth. If you want to argue for this theory, pay attention to the way Holden often focuses on the physicality of the male body (like with Stradlater, Ackley, or Mr. Spencer). You could say he reads homosexuality into others when it actually may not be there (like Carl Luce or Mr. Antolini). And he's not comfortable with the thought of having sex with a woman. Holden, Religion,

and Money If you want some gory details on Holden's view of religion, check out the " Character Analysis" on the two nuns. For now we'll just say that Holden dislikes money and religion for the same reason — they create social barriers between people. Education isn't too far off that mark, either, since it's part of classism. We also think Holden views religion and education similarly, since he doesn't seem to have a problem with personal spirituality or the pursuit of knowledge per se, but rather is upset at the institutions that promote them. In other words, believing in God would be fine if there weren't rules and people (like " phony" priests) trying to tell you what to think. And learning would be fine (look at the way Holden talks about books) if there weren't all these rules and people (like teachers) telling you what to think. See the connection? Holden = Yoda Speaking of knowledge, we happen to be under the impression that Holden is one wise kid. Sure, he says he's not that intelligent, and he keeps failing all his classes, and some call him " ignorant" and " troubled," but when you actually read *The Catcher in the Rye*, you'll see that Holden comes up with a slew of Yoda-like statements that really knock our socks off. Examples: " If [girls] like a boy, no matter how big a bastard is, they'll say he has an inferiority complex, and if they don't like him, no matter how nice a guy he is [...], they'll say he's conceited." " Lots of times you don't know what interests you most till you start talking." " You hate to tell new stuff to somebody about a hundred years old. They don't like to hear it." Now, this isn't exactly Algebra or Ancient Egyptian History, but there's a real emotional intelligence here. Holden understands people: how they think, how they act, and why they do what they do. In fact, we've even seen it argued that Salinger's one flaw in

this novel is making Holden too emotionally mature. Who would've thought. Holden: The Catcher in the Rye Last and certainly not least, let's talk about Holden's grand ambition to be...the catcher in the rye. We already talked about the irony here in "What's Up With the Title?" So you already know the deal: Holden's ambitions = impossible. There are just too many "Fuck you" signs in the world. But why does he have this fantasy in the first place? Why is Holden so obsessed with innocence? To answer this question, you have to take into account e-v-e-r-y-t-h-i-n-g we just said up there in Holden's "Character Analysis." That's why we put this section last. Does it have to do with his feelings on and past (bad) experiences with sexuality? Probably. Does it also have to do with the fact that Allie died when he was ten years old? It's highly likely. Is it related to Holden's feelings on adult phoniness, his brewing madness, his emotional intelligence and eschewing of societal constructs? We think yes, sure thing, and in deed. But we're done here. It's all you now — take it away. Phoebe Caulfield: Holden talks his sister up to no end. She's the smartest kid ever, he assures us, as well as a great dancer, emotional, and funny. She always knows what you're talking about. She can tell the difference between a good movie and a bad one. She listens. Then we meet Phoebe. And basically, she's everything Holden said she would be. She's a pretty amazing character because she somehow manages to be all over the above, but still very much ten years old. (Check out her notebook scribbles — they're a ten-year-old's in every way.) We do feel the hand of authorial manipulation when Phoebe corrects Holden about Robert Burns, but hey, it was the forties, so maybe kids just knew that stuff back then. Still, it's this mingling of child-like enthusiasm and adult-like incisiveness that

makes Phoebe so compelling. Her notebook entry has exclamation points (child), but she points out to Holden that, really, he doesn't like anything (adult). She's smart enough to figure out that Holden's gotten the ax again (adult), but responds by putting a pillow over her head and repeating, "Daddy'll kill you" (child). Now what about her wanting to run away with Holden? Child, or adult? Child, sure, because she packs a suitcase thinking stubbornly that she'll go out West somewhere and not come back. No, wait, that's Holden. Phoebe isn't gung-ho to run away, she's gung-ho to be with Holden, and it's rather likely that she's doing so because she feels — probably not consciously — that he needs someone to care for him. When Holden refuses to let her come, she takes care of him in her own way, in that touching carousel scene when she puts his red hunting hat back on his head. Phoebe gives back to Holden, unlike every other character ever. So, in Holden's eyes, Phoebe is exactly the sort of child he wants to protect by being the catcher in the rye. It's no surprise that she's the one he chooses to tell about his dream. Her reaction ("Daddy's going to kill you") doesn't convey it, but we have a feeling Phoebe knows exactly what Holden's talking about — just as he promised us she would.

Allie Caulfield: Holden's digression into Allie's baseball mitt is a fantastic example of how narration works in *The Catcher in the Rye*. It all starts when Holden agrees to write an English composition for his roommate, and before you know it, we have all this crucial information about Allie Caulfield: he died of leukemia on July 18, 1946. He was eleven and Holden was thirteen. The night of his death, Holden broke all the windows in the garage and had to be hospitalized. Allie was red-haired and left-handed. He wrote poems on his glove in green ink. The

information Holden gives us may seem overly-factual or even sparse, but it's incredibly telling. Allie was left-handed — he was a unique individual. He had red hair — he really stood out from everyone else. He wrote poems on his glove — he was sensitive and emotional, and he did so in green ink — again, he was a unique individual. Holden's rendering of this information also tells us a lot of about the way he thinks about Allie: he idealizes him. We don't doubt that Allie was a great kid, but according to Holden, he's the most intelligent, nicest, sweetest, most endearing kid with the best sense of humor you'll ever meet. In Holden's love for his brother and in his pain over Allie's death, Holden has glorified Allie into something of a saint. This makes sense when we think about Holden's mindset. Allie died when he was eleven years old — while he was still a child, and still "innocent." Having never been corrupted by the world of sex and adults, Allie is possibly the only person Holden could catch in a field of rye, the only person who never has to "go over the edge" of the great cliff. This is why, when Phoebe asks Holden to name one thing he likes, he responds with "Allie." Of course, being a saintly and perpetually-young deceased person makes Allie a great go-to security blanket for Holden in times of distress which, we have to say, are none too infrequent. For having passed away years ago, Allie certainly makes a lot of appearances in the novel. Seriously — check out his timeline. Those are all the instances Holden stopped to think about or talk to his dead brother. See anything in common? It looks like Holden turns to his brother when times are worst. Allie ends up being a red flag for us, the reader, to know when things are bad for Holden. Just think about the disappearing-while-crossing-the-street incident. Allie also plays into the way Holden thinks

about his own mortality. We even get to see the two explicitly connected in the drunk-and-stumbling, searching-for-ducks scene in the park. Mostly, and this is incredibly telling about Holden's compassion, he worries about how others — his mom and his kid sister in particular — will feel if he dies. He remembers the pain of Allie's death and wouldn't want his family to have to go through that again. Of course, if Allie is so important, why doesn't Holden just start talking about him right away? Why do we have to accidentally stumble into the topic via Stradlater's English composition, or a reminiscence about Bobby Fallon, or pneumonia? To answer that, we direct you to Holden's conversation with Mr. Antolini, when he declares that "you don't know what interests you most till you start talking about something that doesn't interest you most." D. B. Caulfield: D. B. is Holden's older brother is a screenwriter in Hollywood. He used to write great stories — so great, in fact, that Holden credits him (twice) with being his favorite writer. D. B. is the height of phoniness in Holden's mind because he's sacrificed his art (writing stories) for money (writing screenplays). Compare this, by the way, to Estelle Fletcher, who avoided sounding cheesy and phony in her Little Shirley Beans record. D. B. is just the opposite — at least according to Holden. In short, he's a sell-out. But the most telling information we get about D. B. has to do with the war. Holden reveals in a flashback that D. B. used to be in the Army. From what the narration reveals, the experience had quite a traumatizing effect on D. B. When he would come home on leave, Holden says, he used to lie on his bed the whole time and stare at the ceiling. His response to Allie that being in the war "doesn't do a damn thing to help his writing" has a bitterness and melancholy to it. His statement to Holden that the Army is as

full of " bastards" as the Nazis, and his claim that if he did have to shoot he wouldn't even know where to point his gun, argue for the absurdity of war. When Holden has a comparable opinion on the atomic bomb — that he'll volunteer to sit on top of the next one — we see that, despite his younger age, he too has similar feelings on the war. D. B. reminds us, then, that *The Catcher in the Rye* has a lot to do with the war (WWII that is). This is 1949 (or 1948) after all — how could it not? We talk about this in greater detail in the Setting section, but D. B. makes it personal, renders human the effects of the historical events. We can talk generally about isolation and depression and disillusion, but it takes the image of D. B. lying on his bed and staring at the ceiling to remind us what this all means to a person living through it. Jane Gallagher: Sex is complicated. But for Holden, and specifically for Holden's relationship with Jane, it's really complicated. We talk in Holden's " Character Analysis" about how he can't imagine getting too sexy with a girl he has genuine emotion for, and Jane is a prime example. They hold hands, they sit close to each other, Jane puts her hand on the back of his neck...cute, but not exactly the most exciting Friday night with your significant other. Again, this was the 1940s, but as we see from the other boys at Pencey, young relationships aren't devoid of fooling around. We can't blame Holden's lack of advances on old-fashioned values — we have to look further. The most telling scene is one we get in a flashback. The checker-playing scene is to Jane's character what the baseball mitt is to Allie's. We lead into it sort of accidentally (Holden just sits down in a " vomity-looking" chair in the hotel lobby and ruminates), and he delivers the crucial information we've been looking for. Well, he sort of delivers it. Much like the Mr. Antolini incident,

Holden leaves it up in the air as to whether or not Jane has been the victim of sexual abuse at the hands of her stepfather. Holden's not sure, so we're not sure (although we can take a pretty good guess). Even if Jane's step-father hasn't raped, we know there's at least something wrong; Jane refuses to look the man in the face and cries after he leaves the room. Either way, it's not a good relationship, and Holden's suspicions that sexuality have something to do with it don't seem far off the mark (especially considering his earlier statement, back in Chapter Four, that her "booze-hound" stepfather used to run around the house naked). So this, combined with Holden's history of possible sexual abuse, is a pretty good reason for their stunted sexual relationship. What's great is that it doesn't inhibit their emotional relationship at all — look at how Holden describes Jane to Stradlater. She keeps her kings in the back row, she used to be a dancer, she was a terrible golfer. Holden remembers personal, revealing details. He doesn't focus on the physical, as someone like Stradlater might, and he obviously cares about Jane as a person. Of course, Holden's inability to reach out to Jane despite his feelings is a big reminder of his passivity and indecision. When he finds out she's downstairs waiting for Stradlater, he says over and over that he'll go down to say hello, but never does. He repeatedly contemplates calling her once he's in New York, but can't bring himself to go through with it. When he finally does pick up the phone already, she's not there. Sally Hayes: Sally is like a lot of girls for Holden. Sure, she's attractive, but ultimately she's kind of shallow. Holden is lonely and want physical affection, and this means he puts up with matinees and ice skating, just so he can make out with Sally in a cab and profess his love. Holden is under the impression that the world is

full of Sally Hayeses. This is depressing. What bothers him so much about her is that she's completely phony. She's a social climber. She thinks she's hot stuff. She drops names. But wait a minute. Isn't Holden being a little harsh? Yes. If you look at it in the right light, Sally's just your average teenage girl. Sure, she wants to go ice skating just to show off her buns, but she's seventeen. And the name-dropping? The social climbing? You could argue that Holden's just exaggerating, as he does with every other person he meets. Ever. So the question of how to interpret Sally is really the question of how to interpret everyone Holden meets and dislikes — from Ackley to Stradlater to Luce to the three women in the Lavender Room. Either we agree with Holden and judge everyone to be morose, or we realize that everyone — including Holden, including ourselves — is human and therefore flawed.

Mr. Antolini: Let's just cut right to the chase. Does Mr. Antolini come on to Holden? The answer is...it's not clear. But you can argue either way. There are definitely some hints that something is up here. We know that Mr. Antolini's wife is much older than he is, unattractive, and has a lot of money. While the two kiss a lot in public, they're never in the same room together, which makes us wonder if they're making a public show of what privately may be a marriage of convenience. If this is true, we could buy that, although married to a woman, Mr. Antolini is in fact gay. Mr. Antolini calls Holden "handsome" before heading off to bed, and then sits next to him in the dark (while Holden's sleeping), and pets his head. When asked about it, he pretends things are casual, but lets slip a "I'm simply sitting here, admiring." Admiring? Sure sounds like he's attracted to Holden. When he's caught and accused, Mr. Antolini tries to shift the focus to Holden, accusing

him of being a "very, very strange boy." On the other hand, Holden and Mr. Antolini have been friends a long time, and the two are obviously close. They used to play tennis together, Mr. Antolini hangs with Holden's parents, and we can tell from his lengthy discoursing that he cares a lot about his former student. You could see calling Holden "handsome" as simply a friendly "good night." And Mr. Antolini may have been too distraught at this young man's plight to get any sleep. He might simply be ruminating about the boy's future when Holden wakes up, has a cow, and leaves in a nervous huff. As it turns out, we have to choose not only how to interpret this scene, but also how to interpret Holden's subsequent comment that "When something perverted like that happens, I start sweating like a bastard. That kind of stuff's happened to me about twenty times since I was a kid." Twenty times? Holden is prone to exaggeration, but still — twenty times. Now we also have to wonder what exactly falls into Holden's category of "perverted" behavior. If the preceding fiasco was sexual in nature, and if that sort of thing has happened frequently to Holden, we can understand why he always sees sex as degrading — might have been the victim of sexual molestation on several occasions. On the other hand, if the Antolini business wasn't sexual, and if Holden just thinks that normal behavior is "perverted," the problem is with him, not his environment or circumstance. Now let's look at Mr. Antolini's big lecture on education. He makes some rather compelling points in his argument that Holden needs to take school seriously. 1) Teaching and learning is a beautiful and symbiotic relationship, 2) Native talent can go to waste without the proper cultivation, and 3) Holden's much less likely to die a bitter, angry death if he gets an education. Now, if he's coming-on to

Holden, one and two could be potentially self-serving. But, giving Mr. Antolini the benefit of the doubt, these are all rather reasonable arguments. We'd go ahead and argue that it sounds like the tone here is genuine; that is, it doesn't seem like the author is poking fun at this set of beliefs in any way. It sounds a lot more like this is the real deal. And interestingly, Holden doesn't make sarcastic comments in response. He's tired, and he doesn't exactly applaud the speech, but he doesn't berate it as being phony either, which is sort of a first. What does it mean, then, if the one person (besides Phoebe) who offers Holden real emotional help ends up trying to take advantage of him sexually? Or, what does it mean for Holden to imagine that this one person is trying to molest him? Does it negate the value of Mr. Antolini's advice? Taint it in some way? We'll let you take it from here. Mr. Spencer: Mr. Spencer is old. And aesthetically displeasing. Holden doesn't really get past that, which means that we don't really get to, either. We're bombarded with images of white, hairless legs, a ratty bathrobe, pills, and the smell of Vicks Nose Drops, which again, is not so attractive. It's no surprise then, that Mr. Spencer lectures Holden, and is all around very un-hip. He is, however, good for one thing: he introduces us to the way adults (or at the least authority figures) view Holden, and the way he views them in return. What we see is primarily a big lack of understanding. Mr. Spencer can't understand what's wrong with Holden, why he doesn't apply himself, or how to help him. Holden can't understand what's wrong with him either. The one thing he can be certain of is that he doesn't understand the appeal of the sort of life Mr. Spencer (and all un-cool authority figures everywhere) promotes, a life of office work and martinis and a certain number of miles to the gallon.

Stradlater: Believe it or not, Holden devotes significant text time to telling us about Stradlater. He's an athlete, he's handsome, girls really go for him, he's got a nice body, he's always walking around in a towel to show off that body, and he's a " moron." On the other hand, sex is definitely Stradlater's forte. His technique is coercion. As far as sex goes, Stradlater is the opposite of Holden. We get to see this contrast play out over Jane; look at how each of them think and talk about her. Holden focuses on the emotional, on their friendship, on Jane's unique qualities as a person. Stradlater doesn't even know her name. All he's concerned about is the fact that she only signed out until 9: 30pm. If we were Holden, we'd be worried about this date, too. Even worse (in Holden's mind, of course) is that Stradlater is one of the phoniest phonies he's ever met. Sure, he's good-looking on the outside, but Holden deems him a " secret slob" because his razor blade is always full of hairs and junk. He's obsessed with appearances (he spends a ton of time standing in front of the mirror), but there's not too much under the surface. Sounds a lot like what Holden doesn't want to be when he grows up. Of course, we have to ask the ever-popular question, can we trust Holden's descriptions? Is this guy really so bad? We might be able to get Stradlater off the hook (as we did for Sally) for simply being an average guy. But he's still not a guy you'd want in the backseat of a car with a girl you care about.

Ackley: Ackley is dirty, pimply, and all-around unhygienic. Holden really doesn't like this guy. He's annoying. He'll come into your room and pick up your personal stuff and put it back in the wrong place. He'll cut his toenails all over your floor. And he thinks being two years older than Holden makes him superior. Despite all this, Holden seems to spend an awful lot of time with Ackley. On the one

hand, you could argue that's because, despite his cynicism and judgment, Holden is actually a compassionate guy. He invites Ackley to come along with him and Mal Brossard to the movies because no one else would hang out with Ackley for the night. Or, you could say that Holden is so lonely he hangs out with Ackley, even though he can't stand the guy. After Stradlater punches Holden in the nose, he goes into Ackley's room looking for company and conversation for the night. Most likely, it's a combination of both.

Two Nuns: The nuns are yet another example of a minor character (or in this case, a set of minor characters) that exist only to tell us about Holden. We don't know enough about the nuns to analyze them as characters, but we can delve into the way Holden views them and, consequently, what that tells us about Holden. The conversation about Romeo and Juliet is an interesting one. Holden has claimed before that he's not too smart. His brothers and sister, he says, are about fifty times more intelligent than he is. But the Romeo and Juliet conversation reminds us that, while Holden does have issues with formal education, he's a smart guy. His thoughts about the play are far from trivial, and he delves into the emotional gut of the story to identify what is indeed one of the most tragic moments of the play: when Mercutio dies. The point is, Holden is both intellectually and emotionally sharp. He knows what's up. And not just in 17th century literature, either. Holden's observation that nuns "never [go] anywhere swanky for lunch" is a touching one. Like his interaction with Sunny, this shows us how compassionate Holden really is. He constantly puts himself in other people's shoes, has an incredible awareness of those around him, and thinks conscientiously about how that relates to his own position in life (just think

about the toast and coffee vs. bacon and eggs comment). Speaking of toast and coffee, all this nun business allows Holden to digress on both money and religion. This pairing is no accident. Holden ends up concluding that if one person has money and another person doesn't, it makes it hard to spend time together. Not impossible, of course, but certainly more difficult. He concludes the same about people from different religions; Catholics are always trying to find out if you're a Catholic too, he says, because they'd enjoy the conversation more if you were. It's the same thing — in Holden's mind, all these constructions create social barriers. And for an isolated teenager trying to make a connection with someone, barriers are not a good thing. Carl Luce: In Chapter Nineteen, Holden admits that the main reason he called his childhood friend Carl Luce, besides wanting some company, is that old Luce was always good for a sex talk. Apparently, that's all he did at the Whooton school as a student advisor. It looks to us like Carl used sex as a way to make friends and get attention. As Holden says, he never wanted the boys to hang around and talk if he wasn't there — he had to be the big shot running the show. Unfortunately for Holden, Carl isn't so much into the open sex talks anymore. He's far too mature for that now. Luce is all " I'm SO sophisticated and worldly I can't even talk to you right now." Ugh. The funny part is that Carl obviously wants Holden to know about his sex life. Carl lets it drop that he's dating a much older woman, that she's Chinese, and that he's into the Eastern philosophy of sex. Of course, he ends all these little slip-ups with a " If you must know." What's interesting is how Holden acts around Luce. For the first time, we see Holden as a badgering kid, instead of as a pensive, compassionate guy. Look at the line, " Wuddaya mean 'Philosophy'?"

Ya mean sex and all? You mean it's better in China?" This isn't the Holden we know and love. But in this scene, we also get to see how truly lonely he is. As annoying as Carl is, Holden begs him to stay for another drink (" Please. I'm lonesome as hell"). Perhaps, then, it's no surprise that this little episode directly precedes Holden's drunken wandering in the freezing cold park. There's also the question of whether or not Carl is gay. Holden seems to suspect he is, or at least to have suspected at some point in the past. Luce, he says, was always talking about other people being gay, even those who were quite blatantly not. He also engaged in what Holden called " flitty" activities around the dorm. It could be that Luce is gay. Or, Luce isn't gay, in which case Holden needs to stop suspecting this of men he knows. Maurice: Holden misses Maurice. Let's just start with that. Maurice is an angry pimp who prostitutes out a young girl, steals five dollars, and punches Holden in the stomach. And then Holden misses him. What is going on? Maurice reminds us that Holden is lonely in every way. The whole reason Holden agrees to the prostitute thing in the first place is that he's " depressed" and has no one to talk to. Since he's still incredibly isolated at the end of the novel, it makes sense that he thinks he " misses" all the people he met over the course of the novel — even Maurice. This brings us back to Holden's basic conflict: the world is full of " phonies and bastards," but he needs to connect with them anyway. We were also rather interested in the punch-in-the-stomach scene and subsequent bulletin-the-gut imaginings. Maurice gives us some insight into Holden's self-destructive tendencies. Holden knows Maurice is bigger than him, tougher, stronger, and probably not going to back down from a fight. Still, Holden persists in insulting him until he gets

socked — hard — in the stomach. It's almost like Holden wants to get punched, to feel something, anything. This isn't the only instance of Holden intentionally making things worse for himself. You could argue that he purposefully gets kicked out of Pencey, drinks to dangerous levels, and wanders around the freezing park at night because he's acting out a wish to self-destruct. Yes, we got all that from Maurice. Crazy, isn't it? Sunny: Sunny is supposed to be the first girl Holden ever has sex with. At least, he thinks so at first. It's not that he needs sex, he says, but he should really get some practice in case he's ever married. By the time the girl is on his bed and taking her dress off, Holden realizes he's not into this after all. But maybe they could just talk? This creates some problems. Sunny isn't really the world's greatest conversationalist, and soon just leaves. This incident features more of the classic Caulfield passivity. He thinks he wants something, he sort of goes for it, and then he changes his mind. It's the phone booth scene all over again, it's just that his indecision is a little more expensive this time. To be fair, part of the reason Holden hesitates to have sex with this girl is that she's just that — a girl. Not only physically (though he does note that she doesn't look much older than he) but also emotionally and mentally. She says "like fun you are," which he comments makes her sound like a little kid. She's got a "tiny little wheeny-whiny voice." Because Holden sees Sunny as a person, not as a prostitute, it's difficult for him to treat her like a whore. We are reminded again of his compassion when he imagines her going into a store, buying a green dress, and leaving without anyone realizing she's a hooker. That he finds this depressing is just one more indication of Holden's emotional depth, and again, his ability to put

himself in others' shoes. Dr. Thurmer: The headmaster of Pencey Prep. Clearly a phony. Selma Thurmer: The headmaster's daughter. Clearly knows her father is a phony jerk. Wears "falsies." Ossenburger: The rich alumnus that made all his money from inexpensive funeral parlors. Gives boring speeches about applying oneself and praying. (Check out "Symbols, Imagery, Allegory" for more on Ossenburger.) Herb Gale, a. k. a. Ely: Robert Ackley's roommate, who never makes an appearance. Edgar Marsalla: The Pencey boy that "laid [a] terrific fart" during Ossenburger's big speech, making the event worth attending. Ed Banky: The basketball coach. He lends Stradlater his car for dates. Mal Brossard: A "friend" of Holden's at Pencey. On the wrestling team. He goes to the movies with Holden and (begrudgingly) Ackley. Mrs. Schmidt: The janitor's wife. Ernest Morrow: A guy at Pencey. Holden meets his mother on the train. Mrs. Morrow: An attractive woman and a classmate's mother that Holden meets on the train. He spins some entertaining lies for her benefit, including a fake name of "Rudolf" and having a brain tumor. Holden also humors Mrs. Morrow by pretending her son is a quality guy, when Holden really can't stand her son. Rudolf Schmidt: The janitor at Ossenburger Hall that lends his name to Holden's fictional persona on the train away from Pencey. Mrs. Hayes: Sally Hayes's mother. She thinks Holden is "wild" and not a big fan of him going out with her daughter. In Holden's opinion, she would use collection money to go out for a swanky lunch. Faith Cavendish: A "friend" of Eddie Birdsell. Not exactly loose, but she doesn't mind doing it once in a while. Eddie Birdsell: A Princeton guy Holden met at party. Bernice: The attractive blonde that Holden dances with in the Lavender Room. She's a lousy conversationalist,

but a terrific dancer. Mrs. Spencer: Mr. Spencer's wife. Marty: One of Bernice's unattractive friends. Laverne: Bernice's unattractive friend. Mr. Cudahy: Jane's alcoholic stepfather. He may or may not have " tried something" with Jane, but regardless, he's not a nice guy. He also walks around the house naked. Horwitz: Cab driver #2 for Holden. He's not as concerned with the ducks as he is with the fishes, which he knows open their pores while frozen in place in the lake to get nutrients. Quite a character. Ernie: The amazing piano player at Ernie's. He takes himself really seriously and bows after he plays, which Holden finds disgusting. Joe Yale-Looking Guy: Guy that Holden sees at Ernie's. This guy gives his date a feel under the table while telling her about a guy that committed suicide. The Navy Guy: Lillian's date. This guy doesn't really like Lillian, but is probably with her for her " big knockers." Raymond Goldfarb: A guy at the Whooton School that Holden got drunk with in the chapel. Bobby Fallon: A childhood friend of Holden and participant in the famous " Allie, go get your bike and meet me in front of Bobby's house" scenario. Arthur Childs: A Quaker whom Holden knew at the Whooton School, who, unlike Holden, was a fan of the disciples. Dick Slagle: Holden's very short-term roommate at Elkton Hills. Dick was the owner of some very inexpensive suitcases. Miss Aigletinger: One of Holden's elementary school teachers. She " never got sore," which is a nice quality for teachers to have. Gertrude Levine: Holden's side-by-side partner for the walk through the museum. Gertrude always wanted to hold (sticky) hands. Harris Macklin: A big bore from Elkton Hills, but the greatest whistler ever. George Something: The phony guy that Sally talks to at the matinee. George is a big social climber who went to Andover. Al Pike: A guy that Jane Gallagher dated

once. She said he had an inferiority complex. Bob Robinson: Bob Robinson has an inferiority complex, according to Holden, but girls think he's simply arrogant. Roberta Walsh's Roommate: The girl who thinks Bob Robinson is arrogant. Tina and Janine: Two French entertainers at the Wicker Bar at the swanky Seton Hotel. Valencia: The sexy woman who performs after Tina and Janine at the Wicker Bar. Pete: The regular elevator boy. Thankfully AWOL when Holden goes home . The Dicksteins: Holden's neighbors. James Castle: A boy at Elkton Hills that killed himself while wearing Holden's turtleneck sweater. See " Symbols, Imagery, Allegory" for more. Alice Holmborg: A friend of Phoebe's at school who showed her how to belch. Richard Kinsella: One of Holden's classmates in Oral Expression class. He's a spinner of fantastic digressions that entertained Holden but didn't go over so well with the instructor. Mr. Vinson: Mr. Vinson is Holden's Oral Expression teacher. According to Holden, he's " very intelligent and