

Preserving innocence in the catcher in the rye

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



The worst worry for a child is losing a favorite toy or forgetting to bring lunch. A child's innocence is a fundamental piece of their adolescence. It suggests they are not completely mindful of the world's inconveniences.

J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* portrays Holden Caulfield, a struggling 16 year old and narrator of the novel, values innocence in particular and attempts to preserve it throughout the story. It is clear to readers that Holden obtains many psychological traits that result in his stay at a sanatorium. Despite the fact that he has made irrational choices for his age, he had purposes for his decisions. Throughout Holden's life, he has felt the necessity to preserve innocence from his psychological traits like selective memory and emotional instability.

In the novel, Holden is conveyed as naive to the realities of adulthood and wishes to forever save the purity of childhood innocence. Holden uses his selective memory to reminisce about his encounters when innocence was apparent. For instance, when Holden was headed to get a record for Phoebe, his younger sister, he sees a young boy singing, If a body catch a body coming through the rye (Salinger 129). When Holden recalls what he heard to Phoebe, she corrects him claiming, It's ? If a body meet a body coming through the rye (Salinger 191). Holden knew she was right, however, when he had seen the innocence of the child, his selective memory and longing to become the catcher in the rye made him overlook this detail. This is a reference to the infamous Robert Burns poem, *Comin Thro the Rye*, which is a poem about sex, an adult reality that Holden cannot comprehend. The young child singing about a catcher influenced him to disregard the genuine meaning of the poem.

Furthermore, Holden's utmost desire to preserve purity is shown all in the novel by his recurring emotional instability. Holden's date with Sally, a woman he likes, is one of the numerous examples in which reveal this trait. For instance, he asked her, How would you like to get the hell out of here? I could get a job somewhere and we could live somewhere with a brook and all and, later on, we could get married or something (Salinger 147). Of course, this led to an unpleasant argument that influenced him to make the conclusion that she was a phony and did not contact her much afterward. Once again, Holden is in conflict with adulthood and realizes that his innocence was taken away when he came to Sally on the date. He wishes that he could elude from the adult world with someone he had believed would help preserve purity, yet is compelled to reason that she is phony like the rest of the world. In addition, Holden demonstrates his emotional instability due to his violent thoughts and outbursts.

When Holden saw the swear words f*** you composed on the walls of Phoebe's school, he has brutal contemplations. He exclaims, I kept picturing myself catching him at it, and how I'd smash his head on the stone steps till he was good and goddam dead and bloody. I kept wanting to kill whoever written it (Salinger 221). When Holden saw these words in Phoebe's elementary school, he saw the innocence of a child being taken away and he was so angry and frustrated, that he thought of hurting the child. This only helped his belief that grown-ups ruin and contaminate children.

All through the novel, Holden was confronted with many adult concepts with which he did not want to be associated. He prefers that adulthood does not

exist so that the innocence of a child can remain throughout his or her life. He used his selective recollection and emotional instability to try and last the pureness of a child. He feels that no child should grow up and be compelled to live in the world of adults due to the standards of society, and tries his hardest to avail these children as the catcher of the rye.