

Holder's desires in the catcher in the rye

Literature, American Literature



Throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*, by J. D. Salinger, Holden's adolescence shows through as a time of trials and tribulations.

During these times, Holden struggles to find not only pleasure in his current endeavor but a future worth living for. He has gone through more than a young man should have at his age, beginning with the death of his brother. He will encounter some less than friendly people in the city, including a prostitute, irritable drivers, and some old friends that seem to have matured without him. At the end of it all, Holden is still a young, sexually frustrated, rebellious teen.

From an astonishingly young age, Holden was faced with severe mental trauma that no child should have to endure. The death of his brother, Allie, brought severe grief to Holden, causing him to become distraught and rather violent. He says, I was only thirteen, and they were going to have me psychoanalyzed and all, because I broke all the windows in the garage. I don't blame them. I really don't. I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it (Pg. 39). This clearly brought Holden into an irrational state from far too early of an age. This may have carried over into Holden's later issues including his academic failure, smoking habit, and rebelliousness.

Catcher in the Rye uses this corruption of Holder's innocence as a direct contrast to his primary goal in life to combat growing up. His main goal is to be the catcher in the rye, one who saves children as they are about to fall over a cliff. Holden wants to protect the children from the terror of growing up as he struggles to do the same, clinging to his immaturity as becomes

evident through his social encounters. One of the more prominent examples of this clinging is Holden's conversation with a child as he tries to find Phoebe. He struggles to interact comfortably with any adults, but finds it remarkably easy to gain direction from a child in just one question. These types of encounters contrast heavily with Holden's sarcastic and often immature conversations with adults, most of which end with Holden being abandoned.

Holden's desire to be a safe haven of innocence most likely stems from his siblings. His failure to protect Allie's childhood and in turn the deterioration of his own, most likely created these feelings. He feels the need to maintain a childhood that Allie could not have; the childhood that they could not share. The adult world seemed to Holden very artificial and cruel, while he admired the innocence of children and longed to protect it.

Toward the end of the novel, Holden begins to realize that he cannot protect the innocence of every child, nor should he. He decides through Phoebe, while watches her ride a carousel, that every child should be able to take their own risks and make their own decisions, despite the possible danger. The children should be allowed to grab for the gold ring.

Throughout the entire story of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden's innocence or lack thereof brings forth his desire to protect the innocence of children from the trials that he has and will face. While he does alter this perspective slightly near the end of the novel, Holden's admiration and desire for general innocence remains strong. With his new outlook, he looks toward his future with a sense of eagerness and cautious optimism.