

# J.d. salinger's novel the catcher in the rye

Literature, American Literature



In J. D. Salinger's realistic fiction novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden demonstrates signs of severe depression. Depression is fairly common in teens. Depression may be caused by unreasonable expectations from family, friends, and society. These expectations make it easy for teens to become stressed and fatigued. Another source of depression can be from the lack of certain chemicals in the brain. Holden has depression because he faces substance abuse, suicidal thoughts and actions, and anxiety.

To begin, Holden constantly meddles with drugs throughout the novel. According to MentalHealthAmerica, one of the most obvious signs of depression is substance abuse. In spite of Holden being under the legal drinking age, he still attempts to persuade waiters into giving him alcohol. He says, " I ordered a Scotch and soda, and told him not to mix it- I said it fast as hell, because if you hem and haw, they think you're under twenty-one and won't sell you any intoxicating liquor." (Salinger 78)

Like most substance abusers, Holden is searching for a way to escape the hardships in his own life. His recent move from Pencey to the streets certainly takes a major toll on his emotions. In addition to his drinking, Holden is also a heavy smoker. He says, " I must've smoked about three cartons that day." (Salinger 178). These heavy smoking and drinking habits may have lead to his suicidal thoughts towards the end of the novel.

On page 156, Salinger writes, " I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will." As stated by Mental Health America, suicidal thoughts and actions are also indicators for depression.

Holden often refers to suicide and death when he is nervous or in a difficult situation. When he is outside in the cruel winter weather, he worries about catching pneumonia.

He says, " I thought probably I'd get pneumonia and die. I started picturing millions of jerks coming to my funeral and all." (Salinger 171). Mental Health America also states that obsessions with death are common for people suffering from depression and suicidal thoughts. These thoughts may be the source of his anxiety.

Mental Health America also claims that " restlessness and agitation" are clear signs of depression. Holden experiences severe agitation when he is walking down Fifth Avenue. On page 217, Salinger writes, " Every time I came to the end of a block and stepped off the goddam curb, I had this feeling that I'd never get to the other side of the street. I thought I'd just go down, down, down, and nobody'd ever see me again. Boy, did it scare me." He is worried about meeting his parents after being expelled from Pencey. He doesn't know if he is going back home. His difficulties in life are causing his anxiety to come to a peak. It is very evident that his anxiety is a symptom of his depression.

Through his struggles, he resorts to drugs, has suicidal intentions, and undergoes periods of deep anxiousness. His distress makes his life a difficult life to lead. The author is very descriptive and allows the reader to comprehend Holden's emotions. In conclusion, it is apparent that Holden suffers from depression.