

"oliver twist" and "the catcher in the rye" by charles dickens essay sample

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Oliver Twist was written by Charles Dickens and published between 1837 and 1838 in a monthly magazine called "Bentleys Miscellany". It was published in parts of 3 or 4 chapters every month. It was written about a poor, 9-year-old boy who has to survive in a harsh, Victorian England. Using Oliver Charles Dickens often criticises Victorian society, especially the poor laws. Oliver also has to survive losing his innocence on the mean streets of London and this is where the first similarity with the Catcher in the Rye comes in. Written by J. D Salinger and published between 1945 and 1946 the book is about a 16-year-old boy who is stuck between childhood innocence and adult corruption. All through the book he can't stop thinking about how children start innocent but as they see more of the world, they lose that innocence to adulthood.

In Dickens' book Oliver is portrayed as the young, innocent little boy caught up in the dark underbelly of Victorian London. He has to try and simply stay alive in the book at times such as when he is shot and when he has to walk to London with almost no food. He never comes to be corrupted himself though and really only used as a tool to look around at the kind of society the poor had to live in. He really represents all poor people of the time, and is merely pointing out all the things wrong with they way people viewed the poor and also some of the laws that were made to "help" them. He may also be used to look at the way moral values in Victorian times were changing by using his innocence to show how they are struggling to stay good with the huge changes going on around them.

Because of this Oliver is really quite a 2D character with no real depth. He is simply at the mercy of fate and can't control what is going on around him. Victorian novels were often like this as they were great believers in fate, this may explain Oliver's blandness.

This is in stark contrast to Holden Caulfield, a very confused 16 year old. Holden is a much, much deeper character than Oliver. He is constantly thinking for himself and doing his own thing and rarely does another lead him. Holden, like Oliver has to travel into the mean city streets where he encounters threats to his moral and psychological survival. He, like Oliver, is in danger only that this time it is more from his own mind rather than thieves and villains.

Holden often thinks about his brother Allie who died when Holden was young. He also sometimes pretends Allie was there with him and talks to him. He also has a young sister, Phoebe, who is very intelligent and wants to grow up fast. For Holden, both these characters represent childhood innocence. In page 190 of the book Holden says " I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling I was felt damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you could have been there." This shows how Phoebe and her innocence are one of the few things that make Holden happy.

Maurice and Sunny are two characters that really threaten Holden. At one point Sunny, a prostitute, gets up and takes her dress off in front of Holden.

But this just makes him depressed, this maybe because she is so young and lost her innocence so quick. This is a bit like Holden who had to grow up very fast to cope with Allie's death.

The narrative styles of the novels differ greatly. In *Oliver Twist* the narrator is in the third person and is omniscient meaning that he is all seeing and hearing. This puts us one step ahead at all times. It lets us see his innocence as he is tumbling through a world that he does not know. It also allows Dickens to comment on society by being able to describe more than just what Oliver sees. Dickens' also likes to use irony and satire as a sort of dark, hidden humour in the book. You will also often find that some chapters end on real " cliff-hangers" this is because the book was meant to be read in monthly parts and so the ending of a part would be made as tense as possible to get the reader to read next time.

In comparison, *Catcher* is written in the 1st person. This means that the reader gets lots of opinions and thoughts that are in the mind of the main character. But it does also mean that you only get one persons perspective on the ideas in the book. This however does sometimes hold his part together. By repeating ideas like sex, family, Allie and the ducks the author keeps the reader interested by making them want to find out what is going on in Holdens mind and whether he will survive his own confused depression. Again like in *Oliver Twist* the author is criticising aspects of society including the class system, wealth, snobbery and most of all the way people put on a face to look good in other peoples minds.

Both novels criticise society. Oliver Twist criticises more physical aspects like the way poor people were treated. The Catcher in the Rye criticises moral things, however both novels use innocence to explore these ideas. Both authors have managed to show these ideas well, as both books have been massively successful. They also quite clearly point out their issues by repeatedly covering them in different situations.