

# The maturation of holden caulfield and henry fleming

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



The *Catcher in the Rye* and *The Red Badge of Courage* detail the gradual maturation of two immature boys into self-reliant young men. The steady speed at which Salinger's and Crane's language streams enables the reader to see the independent events that lead up to the ultimate rite of passage for both Henry and Holden. Although the pinnacle of maturity Holden reached concerned his pessimistic view of the world and Henry's was a unifying moment of bravery, both boys experienced an epiphany over the course of their respective tales. Holden came to a realization in the timeless peace of an Egyptian tomb that forced him to reevaluate his immature and selfish views. His new attitude was first displayed while he watched Phoebe snatch at the gold rings of the Central Park carousel. Henry found his manhood during the fierce chaos of battle. These final rites of passage differ in particulars, but their underlying themes possess many similarities. As *The Catcher in the Rye* progresses, Holden comes to terms that he is powerless to rid the world of evil and forever protect both young children and himself from growing up. Although his perception of the world as a corrupt and phony place is not modified significantly, his final realization is a tremendous step towards accepting the inevitable- he must mature eventually, and the world will never be pure. The enlightenment itself is a step towards manhood. His epiphany occurs after spotting another "fuck you" etched in the serene Egyptian tomb. Holden sees he cannot escape perversion even in the ancient vault. He grasps that he cannot possibly go about the world erasing all the profanity scrawled throughout it; eventually, every child is going to have to be concerned and upset as they come to terms with its meaning. They must grow up one day, as he knows he must as well. Salinger

follows up Holden's epiphany with several supporting events. Holden has a nervous breakdown because he now knows with an abrupt and sickening certainty that he is unable to stop both evil and maturation. His emotional outpouring at the merry-go-round further sustains his prior reasoning that he cannot stop maturation. "All the kids kept trying to grab for the gold ring, and so was old Phoebe, and I was sort of afraid she'd fall off the goddam horse, but I didn't say anything or do anything. The thing with kids is, if they want to grab for the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off, they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." He knows that he cannot catch them with his net spun of dreams—they will eventually have to experience a fall. It's part of growing up. Upon seeing this, Holden himself has developed. Henry Fleming enlists as a youth with heroic fantasies of battle lingering in his mind and walks off the "place of blood and wrath" three days later a serene veteran of battle. He came from hot plowshares seeking a Homeric Iliad, timid and anxious about his potential and what others think of him. He ponders a great dilemma: will he run from battle? He is reassured after asking the tall soldier his question. His friend tells him that he would do what the rest of the regiment was doing. Henry is not an individual yet, he is a fragment of a mass of men. Henry feels as though running from the backlash of the first skirmish he fought was a great debacle, and he is further tormented when the tattered soldier asks him how he got his feigned wound. He is haunted by pangs of guilt. As he participates in more battles, the opposition grows more and more human, as opposed to the monsters he envisioned them to be earlier. He sees them as human when he experiences his first surge of fierce, animalian anger.

Henry's epiphany occurs in the following "battle". He discards the expectations of his peers and declares his individuality and courage by seizing the flag from the dead color sergeant and waving it before the regiment. He risks death as the easiest of targets and thus displays his courage and strength. The seizing of the flag is Henry's ultimate rite of passage. He discards the terrified and cautious youth he enlisted as and becomes a mature, courageous adult. His reach for the flag proves he is as brave and courageous as the warriors whose stories dazzled him as a boy. Henry and Holden began both their stories weaker and more ignorant than they left them. How are their rises to maturity similar and different? Both stories cover a time period of about three days. The three days are greatly important, as they detail the rite of passage from youth to maturity. Such a prodigious transformation in a mere three days implies an extraordinary sequence of preceding events. Both *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Red Badge of Courage* tell a story of one of the most relevant time periods in both of the main character's lives- their rise to adulthood. Both characters seem to have promising futures ahead of them. Holden ends his account of "the madman stuff" that happened to him last Christmas giving the impression that he will try harder in school and that he actually missed the people he criticized so harshly. Henry's story closes as he strolls through a landscape he now appreciates. The concluding sentence, "over the river a golden ray of sun came through the hosts of leaden rain clouds," is an almost romantic depiction of the bright future Henry has before him. The language the authors use to convey the story differs. In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden himself describes the events. The language is down to earth and

flows easily, exactly as if the reader were sitting and listening to Holden instead of the psychiatrist. Because Holden told his story in one sitting, there is no prominent change in language over the course of the story. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, a narrator tells Henry's tale. Figurative language and a vivid use of color support the narration. The story opened with a paragraph darkened with ominous red and black shading and ended on a blissful golden tone, illustrating Henry's rise to maturity even through colorization. The narration also differs in that Henry's narrator is impartial to the story, whereas Holden clearly attempts to alter certain facts in his favor. For example, when he and Sally are talking, Holden speaks as though Sally was a bit mixed up and that he was in fact speaking in a normal tone of voice. However, the reader can still manage to detect this falsity from his frenzied narration. *The Red Badge of Courage's* narrator does not try to shield events out of shame or haste; the story is much more straightforward. Again, Holden's immaturity is displayed through narration as he scrambles to hide his embarrassment. The rise to adulthood is a common theme explored by authors. The path from youth to maturity can be prodigious in its complexity and length, but Salinger and Crane have each provided an account of this nature that occurred over only three days. Fueled by the strength they acquired after overcoming personal barriers, the protagonists reached maturity through their own epiphanies. Henry found his in the dignity he wished to uphold for himself and his regiment, and Holden in a pitiful realization that he is powerless to change the world. The price Henry and Holden paid for their maturity was a loss of much of the egocentricity they

had possessed. As Tolstoy said, “ everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself.”