

Evaluation of the debate around the catcher in the rye, a j.d. salinger's book

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



Ever since its publication in 1951, J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* has served as a cornerstone for controversy and debate. It is a story of a teenager growing up in New York, who has been expelled from school for poor grades. In an attempt to deal with this, he leaves school a few days prior to the end of term, and goes to the city to take a vacation before returning to his parents. The central theme of *The Catcher in the Rye* emanates from the confrontation and ultimate loss of innocence that occurs hand in hand with the assimilation into society and the loneliness that arises thereafter. Holden's misguided morality brings about a dysfunctional personality that begs to be psychoanalyzed, not only in his interactions with the outside world, but also his internal motivation. The psychological battles of this novel's main character serve as the basis for critical argument. Caulfield's self-destruction over a period of days forces one to look at society's attitude toward the human condition. Salinger's portrayal of this teenager, which includes incidents of depression, nervous breakdown, impulsive spending, sexual exploration, vulgarity, and other erratic behavior, have all attributed to the controversial nature of the novel.

Holden's sensitivity is one of his main aspects, in fact he is probably too sensitive for his own good. He suffers from an almost uncontrollable urge to protect people he sees as vulnerable. He is attracted to the weak and the frail, and he "feels sorry for" losers of all kinds, even those who cause him pain, discomfort, or trouble. But the main focus of Holden's protective instinct is children, whom he sees as symbols of goodness and innocence, and whom he would like to shield against corruption. He has a daydream about children who never grow up, who remain in that perfect world forever

and his own problems of facing the real world are linked to that daydream. I kept picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of That s all I do all day. I just be the catcher in the rye and all. (Salinger 173) One sign of corruption in Holden's worldview is the process of growing up, since it removes us from the perfect innocence of childhood. His vision of the cliff develops out into his own dream to be saved. What he wants to be saved from, isn t exactly clear even in Holden s mind. Caulfield s apparent virtue helps to mask his true character. It s not difficult to understand why readers have always ignored Holden s grave deficiencies as a person.

Loneliness motivates the character, Holden Caulfield, to break off communication of with society. His problem is one of communication: as a teenager, he simply cannot get through to the adult world that surrounds him. As a sensitive teenager, he cannot get through others of his own age. Adult communication intimidates and alienates his character. Moreover, Holden expresses his problem with communication indirectly and in a striking and decisive moment, he relays his desire to become a deaf mute. I did not care what kind of job it was, though. Just so people did not know me and I did not know anybody. I thought what I would do was, I would pretend I was one of those deaf-mutes. If anybody wanted to tell me something, they'd have to write it on a piece of paper and shove it over to me. They'd get bored as hell doing that after a while, and then I'd be through with having conversations for the rest of my life. . . I'd cook all my own food, and later on, if I wanted to get married or something, I'd meet this beautiful girl

that was also a deaf-mute and we'd get married. She'd come and live in my cabin with me, and if she wanted to say anything to me, she'd have to write it on a piece of paper, like everybody else (Salinger 198). Holden is essentially a loner, but not because he dislikes people. His loneliness arises from the fact that no one seems to share his view of the world, no one understands what's going on in his head. His poor academic record is one indication of his failure to deal with this problem, a problem that builds to a climax in the course of the novel.

One character that Holden is compared to in some ways is Hamlet. Like Hamlet, he is bothered by words that only seem true, but really quite phony. The integrity and truthfulness that Caulfield cannot seem to find in others he tries to maintain within himself. Holden often makes a point of using the word "really" to state the fact that something is really so, to prove to the reader that he had not become a phony himself. I knew old Jane like a book. I really did I really got to know her quite intimately. Holden is frightened often by the occasional realization that he too, must be phony to exist in the adult world. The irony of this situation is that, he is phony to everyone even to himself. Through out the novel he tells us that he can't stand most of the people that he meets. At the end of the novel, Holden says, "About all I know is, I sort of miss everybody I told about. Even old Stradlater and Ackley, for instance. I think I even miss that goddam Maurice." (Salinger 217). This phrase alone contradicts most of his actions through out the book.

Only Salinger will ever completely understand all of the character's complexities and flaws. He penned Holden to be purposely puzzling; to

evade all attempts to pin him down to one stereotype. Through his actions and reactions to society and others, Holden demonstrates to the reader the theme of acceptance, illustrated throughout the novel. Holden speaks his mind, which the average teenage reader values highly.