

# How does holden's past affect him

Literature, American Literature



The past's absolute effect on humanity serves as the foundation of both crisis and opportunity. Yet, most typically notice the effects of the past when personal sacrifices are made and loss is involved, thus characterizing themselves as victims of the past. Holden Caulfield, who is the protagonist of *The Catcher in the Rye*, portrays himself as a victim of his past due to the death of his younger brother Allie and the suicide of James Castle. While said occurrences hinder him in his efforts of closely relating to those around him, they are also the sources of his unfamiliarity when placed in difficult situations such as interacting intimately with another person or even trying to remember the positive aspects of his life. As a result of these occurrences, he often questions the merit of those around him in both society and school, which ultimately leads to him making bad decisions as they are mostly the result of his depression.

The death of Holden's brother Allie was the event that gave him a great deal of distaste for those around him throughout the story because it made him devoid of the ability to find happiness or comfort with nearly everyone as they were all pieces of Holden's ideal and unrealistic world. He portrays Allie as a virtuous human being who is somehow free of ever losing his innocence while giving him nothing but praise. His dark and empty feelings of adulthood presented in *The Catcher in the Rye* reflect notable examples of denial of even having a coming of age experience such as "I know he's dead! Don't you think I know that? I can still like him though, can't I?" (222-223). This section rests on the idea that a potential solution for coping with traumatic experiences such as the death of his brother would be the task of reconnecting with his little sister as a much needed form of closure, the

person that Holden also talks about several times throughout the book with the utmost praise. Holden's way of responding to his brother's death every time he randomly thinks about him serves as the driving force for his internal conflict being how to cope with his loss. It was suggested throughout the novel that the main conflict was how he would manage to live on his own until Wednesday so that his parents would not know of his expulsion, yet his internal conflicts seem to carry more meaning. In the same way that Allie's remembrance might function as a trigger for Holden's depression, causing him to question his own value, the recollection of James Castle's suicide was enough to prompt Holden to question his own innocence equally as much as the innocence of those around him.

Much like Allie's death, the suicide of James Castle functions as a reminder that innocence is not a permanent aspect of someone's life. James Castle was Holden's former classmate who jumped out of a window after being beaten into submission by several others. Holden in a peculiar turn of events mentioned that he somehow felt close to James though he never truly knew him: " All I knew about him was that his name was always ahead of me at roll call" (222). This idea that innocence is temporary fuels Holden's hatred for a life without purity or adulthood. Due to the fact that he can no longer keep his innocence, he makes an attempt to preserve Phoebe's at the end of the novel, thus seemingly rectifying the mistake that he made with Allie before he died. Although it is less recurring, Holden's recollection of James Castle's death is an example of how quickly a person can be stripped of his innocence either by experiencing an unfortunate event or merely witnessing one.

In summation, the past can have a very important effect on humanity due to its role as the driving force for the good or bad decisions of many. However, in Holden's case, he uses the events of his past such as the death of his younger brother Allie and the suicide of James Castle as well as his profound guilt to make an effort to better the life of his younger sister rather than simply telling her the truth about the many taxing aspects of life, thus preserving her innocence.