

# Maturity in the catcher in the rye

Literature, American Literature



Maturity in the Catcher in the Rye Maturity is a process in life that usually no one can run away from. The novel the Catcher in the Rye, by J. D Salinger, tries to disprove that lesson through its protagonist. Holden often behaves like a prophet or a saint, pointing out the “phonies” around him because he believes they are not as mature as he is, but as the novel progresses, Holden makes choices that prevents him from maturing rather than enabling him to mature. Holden’s main goal is to resist the process of growing up. Holden also mocks the adults around him to make him feel better.

To cope with society, Holden alienates himself from the people he considers “phonies”. Usually, novels such as The Catcher in the Rye tell the story of a young protagonist’s growth to maturity; ironically, Holden’s main goal is to resist the process of maturity. Holden does not want to mature because he fears change and is overwhelmed by complexity. On page 201 of the novel, Holden says “Somebody’d written ‘fuck you’ on the wall. It drove me damn near crazy. I thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and finally some dirty kid would tell them”.

This quotation shows that Holden is scared and worried about Phoebe growing up. Eventually, Phoebe will learn what the word means just like Holden did. There is no stopping the process but Holden erases the sign anyways to symbolize his determination. He does eventually realize that he cannot stop the process when he tries to erase another sign that does not come off. Not only is Holden afraid of change, but he refuses to acknowledge this fear so whenever he is forced to, he invents a fantasy that adulthood is a world of “phonies”. Holden shows this when he says “Sex is something I just don’t understand.

"I swear to God I don't" on page 93. Instead of acknowledging that having sex scares and mystifies him, Holden invents a fantasy that adulthood is a world of superficiality and hypocrisy by telling the readers horrible things about sex. The first step to solving a problem is admitting that there is one. Holden does not even know he has a problem let alone admitting it. At the end of the novel, Holden does however find out that he has a problem but he still does not want to admit it which suggests that he is still trying to achieve his goal and believes that one day he will achieve it.

Holden's view of society shows that Holden only points out the phonies around him to make him feel better, yet he does not realize that he is flawed. Through out the novel, Holden criticize adults behind his smiles because it makes him feel superior without having the sense of guilt since the adults does not know. This is shown when Holden vents his feelings about Spencer's advice. On page 8 he says " Game, my ass. Some game. If you get on the side where all the hot-shots are, then it's a game, all right—I'll admit that. But if you get on the other side, where there aren't any hot-shots, then what's a game about it?

Nothing. No game.. ". Hiding behind Holden's nodding and smiling is himself cursing and mocking Spencer. While Spencer is trying to tell Holden the importance of playing by the rules, Holden mocks his analogy instead of looking at the main point which shows that he doesn't really care about what Spencer has to say even though it has been established that Holden thinks about Spencer quite a lot. Every time Holden criticises the " phonies" around him, he criticises them in a way that convinces the reader that he is right to build up his self esteem.

This is shown when Holden says " Then I tried to get them in a little intelligent conversation, but it was practically impossible. You had to twist their arms. You could hardly tell which one was the stupidest of the three of them. Then the three of them of them kept looking all around the goddam room, like as if they expect a flock of goddam movie stars to come in any minute. " On page 73. Holden believes that the three women were looking around the room because they are stupid, but he does not consider the fact that the three women were looking around the room because they were bored of him and wanted him to go away.

Holden makes a statement that can be easily argued into a true fact that is written in stone and cannot be erased by using slang and the unique tone of voice he has. It makes everything he criticises seem true which makes himself feel better. Holden needs to realize that his view of society is wrong and that children will have to grow up and that there is no way to stop it. Holden says on page 119 " God, I love it when a kid's nice and polite when you tighten their skate for them or something. Most kids are. They really are" because he loves children. Throughout the novel, Holden has never criticised, offend or cursed at children.

He always says nice things about them. This is because he likes children and he does not want children to mature into young adults. On the contrary, Holden's view of a perfect childhood is as incorrect as his view of the adult world as entirely " phoney," and just helps Holden hide from the fact that the complex issues he will have to face in growing up terrify him. This form of delusional craziness can only last so long. Holden will eventually grow up, whether he likes it or not. Mr. Antolini and Phoebe both make it clear that

unless he learns to accept the complexities of adulthood, he will end up, at best, bitter and alone.

To cope with society and the adult world, Holden alienates himself from the people he considers “phonies” so that he will be able to resist growing up. Throughout the novel it is seen that Holden’s alienation is the cause of most of his pain but it is also a source of Holden’s strength. This is shown when his loneliness gets him into his date with Sally Hayes, but his need for isolation causes him to insult her and drive her away. As the novel progresses it shows that Holden desperately needs human contact but his protective wall of bitterness prevents him from having interactions with other humans for too long.

He wants to have a relationship but he does not want to commit to it because he knows that when he does commit to a relationship, he will turn into an adult and live an adult life. That is why he tells Sally Hayes to run away with him. Holden does not want to deal with the complexities of the world around him so he tries to escape it to resist the process of growing up. Holden tries to escape the adult world by not thinking about it and dreaming of a world where nothing changes.

But when Holden goes to the Museum of Natural History, it gives him something to think about. He says “The best thing, though, in that museum was that everything always stayed right where it was. Nobody’d move. . . . Nobody’d be different. The only thing that would be different would be you.” (page 212) The Eskimos are silent, and always the same. Holden can think about and judge the Eskimo in the display case, but the Eskimo will never

judge him back. It troubles him that he has changed each time he returns, while the museum's displays never changes.

They represent the simple and manageable vision of the perfect life that Holden wishes he could live and stay in forever. After reading the novel, readers learn that although Holden goal is crazy, in the end he has great determination. Readers notice that at the end of the novel, Holden has not changed. He still tries to resist growing up, he still mocks the people he considers phonies, and he still alienates himself from the people he considers "phonies". Holden's character is very unusual but it teaches readers about maturity and how hard it is to not grow up.