

"catcher in the rye" –
to what extent is
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character? essay
sampl...



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“Catcher in the Rye” – To What Extent is Holden a Likeable Character? Essay Sample

Likeable. When looked up in the dictionary produces synonyms such as ‘ nice and pleasant’, words which would not be associated with Holden Caulfield, the main character in the novel ‘ Catcher in the Rye’. However, I want to explore a different meaning to the word likeable, a version that brackets Holden’s personality and allows us to strip off his layers of self awareness to reveal the real him. Holden Caulfield. The likeable guy.

The Bildungsroman ‘ Catcher in the Rye’ was written in the early 20th century, an era more reserved and dissimilar to today’s generation. Yet surprisingly, Holden uses a very realistic idiom which reflects the youth of today, with his mixture of expletives and slang;

‘...lousy childhood’

‘...David Copperfield kind of crap.’

‘...crumby place’

‘...my whole goddam autobiography’

Holden begins the book as he means to go on, and does not pretend to be something he is not, by hiding his unconventional idiom. This makes him likeable as readers can relate to him, as he is very genuine, and blend in with the language of today’s youth.

Another attribute of ' typical Holden idiom' is the theme of sarcasm which recurs throughout this book, normally outlined in italics. The element of derision adds depth to Holden's persona,

'...They're nice and all...'

as when he uses a sarcastic tone it indicates that he is holding something back about the subject which he is referring to. This makes him likeable because it adds realism to his character as he does not totally disclose his feelings, making us, the reader feel as if we have to earn his trust as the book furthers. We can see this if we contrast an extract from the beginning of the book,

' If you really want to hear about it...

and one further on in the book, for example when he is in Ernie's and he goes off on a tangent about people clapping,

' People always clap for the wrong things...'

It is obvious to see the difference between these two extracts. Holden adapts a hostile tone in the beginning of the book and is less open. Nevertheless his idiom becomes friendlier further on. The extract from when he is in Ernie's bar shows this, as he deviates from the subject which he is explaining to us, proving that he is comfortable enough to do so. This is likeable because it builds a relationship with him as you have ' earned his trust', he does not award his deepest feelings freely. This idea also reinforces the theory that Holden is conversing with a psychiatrist. (He never really gives away who he is talking to and where he is) This is because if he was talking to a <https://assignbuster.com/catcher-in-the-rye-to-what-extent-is-holden-a-likeable-character-essay-sample/>

psychiatrist he might have been very aware of them at first, hence his air of hostility, but as his conversations develop a relationship builds between them and Holden evaluates that there is enough trust present to unravel his layers.

Holden is a true individual. There is no doubt about this. Throughout the book he communicates his rebellious streak both verbally and metaphorically. Most obviously, his red hunting hat portrays his defiance to conform. The colour red is symbolic of communism, and the fact that it is a hunting hat clashes, because it is typically countryside attire yet he chooses to wear it in the city. His unruly side gives him a slightly different slant on life to everybody else. This different slant on life is demonstrated in his memory. Holden has a very quirky memory, his attention to detail is shown throughout the book, as the reader, you have to step back from the book and remember it is a collection of his memories and not him telling a story, as normally memories tend to be hazier and less detailed. Yet he defies the odds, and constantly remembers niceties which would seem insignificant to use but are symbolic, or important to him.

An example of this is when Holden hears that his friend Jane is in town and Stradlater is going to see her, he asks him to deliver a message,

'...Ask her if she still keeps all her kings in the back row...'

This is a very unusual thing to ask, yet it is very important to Holden. This makes him likeable because as a character he is a strong contrast to everyone else, making the book even more interesting, as Holden is very random and instinctive,

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' I figured that I'd give old Jane buzz...'

features frequently throughout the book, normally when he feels lonely or emotional.

His individuality is both likeable and inspiring as even though he knows his individuality is cutting him out of social acceptance he still stays true to himself, which is very uncommon as people sometimes adapt themselves for social inclusion. However, he does not, and accepts his position on the peripheral of other social groups.

Another likeable attribute of Holden's is his self awareness. Holden is aware of his flaws and is prepared to admit them. Unlike many other auto biographers he is willing to depict his imperfections,

' I shake my head quite a lot...'

This makes him very likeable as he is a very authentic and admits that he is human and does have his flaws. His analytical view of the world around him also gives the book a different angle as it would be a very boring book without Holden's diagnostic mind scrutinizing everyone, including himself, as he reveals aspects of people that others may never thought of scrutinizing, for example the zits on Ackley's face

He is also a brave and passionate character. People he loves create great emotions inside of him.

Another example of this is when Stradlater speaks poorly of Holden's close friend Jane. Even though physically, Holden is no match for the athletic

Stradlater, he is still willing to risk his own health in a cause worth fighting for. Jane.

'...and then I tried to sock him one...'

This is a very likeable attribute because it shows how loving Holden is, even though he scarcely finds companionship.

I also find that Holden's character is much like Richard in the play 'King Richard III'. Like Richard Holden plays many characters in this Bildungsroman,

'...mother darling give me your hand'

'Rudolf Schmidt' I told her...

making a great contrast between him and the other characters. Holden has a tendency to fantasise, which is not always a bad thing because it adds a great element of humour to this book. This is a likeable because he adds another dimension to the book, just as Richard and his schizophrenic tendencies do in 'King Richard III'. Holden's tendencies to fantasise also provoke the question, is Holden phoney? As he pretends to be a lot of things to other people and yet he criticizes other characters because of this same thing.

The last element of Holden which makes him likeable is his childish vulnerability. Throughout the book he tries to be older and more sophisticated,

'...I made my voice quite deep so that she wouldn't suspect my age'

' Me? Twenty Two'

Yet he reveals his true colours whenever he is angry or emotional,

' Get your dirty stinking moron knees off my chest'

' I'm not tired'

Reverting back to a childish idiom. He shows that he maybe that this is where his heart lies. In the purity of his childhood, as many people idealise their childhood memories as the problems encountered then are on a minor scale compared to those of adulthood. Holden tends to do this frequently, and views things differently now as an adult e. g. Central Park is no longer a beautiful scenic place for escapism, but a dirty park. This triggers the question was Central Park like this before? Did the fact that Holden visited Central Park in his childhood, sway him to lionize it. This then brings into question all that he has recalled to us, making the book an even bigger topic for discussion.

To conclude I think that Holden is a likeable character because he is a very much ' real' character who is just like us, the readers, for example, he is childish but acts grown up. I find myself admiring Holden because of his superior intelligence that he poses, but also because he is so willing to undermine his aptitude, while he idealizes other characters e. g. his dead brother Allie. The main quality of Holden's which I think cannot be ignored is his quirky memory as I know that without this, the book involving three days in New York would have been extremely tedious.

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