

Catcher in the rye



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Catcher In The Rye Although J. D. Salinger has only one novel to his credit, that novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, is recognized as an exceptional literary work. The key to the success of *The Catcher in the Rye* is the main character Holden Caulfield. There are many different critics that view Holden in many different ways. Some believe Holden to be a conceited snob, while others see Holden as a Christ-like figure.

It is my opinion, however, that Holden is somewhere in the middle. Holden Caulfield is a character who has a definite code of honor that he attempts to live up to and expects to abide by as well. Since the death of his brother Allie, Holden has experienced almost a complete sense of alienation from the world around him. This alienation is evident in every part of his life. Holden is unable to relate to anyone at the three prep schools he has attended. While standing on Thomsen Hill, Holden cannot help but feel isolated when he observes the football game, "you were supposed to commit suicide or something if Old Pencey didnt win" (Salinger 2).

Not only does Holden feel isolated at the schools he has attended; he has this feeling when it comes to his family as well. Upon his return to New York City, Holden does not go home. Instead, he chooses to hide out from his family. According to Ernest Jones, "with his alienation go assorted hatreds of movies, of night clubs, of social and intellectual pretension, and so on. And physical disgust: pimples, sex, an old man picking his nose are all equal cause for nausea" (Jones 7).

Holden feels Preverts 2 as though all of these people have failed him in some way or that they are all "phonies" or "corny" in some way or another. It is

Holdens perception of those around him as "phonies" and again according to Jones; "Holdens belief that he has a superior moral standard that few people, only his dead brother, his 10-year-old sister, and a fleeting friend [Jane] can live up to" that make him a snob (7). Presenting Holden as "snobbish" hardly does him justice. Critics such as Frederick L. Gwynn, Joseph L. Blotner, and Frederic I. Carpenter view Holden as a character who is "Christ-like in his ambition to protect children before they enter the world of destruction and phoniness" (Carpenter 24). Holdens experiences throughout the course of his life have created a desire in him to preserve the innocence of those he considers to be innocent. He attempts to physically overpower Stradlater when he realizes that Stradlater may have "screwed around" with Jane Gallagher, whom Holden considers to be innocent simply because she "plays checkers with more regard for the symmetry of the pieces on the board than for the outcome of the game" (Gwynn 13). Along with Jane Gallagher, Holden wishes to protect his sister Phoebe, who is very much like Allie in that she has a mix of youthful innocence and generosity that overwhelms Holden. The best example of this generosity is when Holden is moved to tears because Phoebe gave him all of her Christmas money.

Simple acts like this motivated Holden to want to be Christ-like. Holdens desire to be Christ-like is best evidenced in the following quotation: "Anyway, I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousand of little kids, and nobodys around- nobody big, I mean, except me. And Im standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff.."

Previts 3 Not only is Holden Christ-like in his desire to protect those who are

"innocent" but he, like Jesus, truly loves his neighbors, especially the poor in goods, appearance, and spirit" (Gwynn 14).

Not only does Holden give ten dollars to the nuns in the station, but he is also depressed by their meagre breakfast and the fact that they will never be "going anywhere swanky for lunch" (Salinger 110). He also worries about the ducks freezing in Central Park, sympathizes with the ugly daughter of Penceys headmaster and even Sunny the prostitute (Carpenter 24). Perhaps the quality that is most Christ-like in Holden is his ability to "forgive like Jesus with his Judas, he [Holden] forgives Stradlater and the bellboy Maurice who have betrayed and beaten him" (Gwynn 14). Because of his compassion and ability to forgive others, Holden can also be viewed as a Christ-like figure. While there is evidence to support Holden as both a snob and a saint, I believe that Holden is a mix between the two. The Catcher in the Rye is the choice of nine of ten murders, whackos, serial killers and, oddly enough, disgruntled teenagers. John Lennon was killed to promote this book.

In the movie Silence of the Lambs, the serial killer John Hinkley was also a big Catcher in the Rye fan as well. The level of general craziness surrounding the book is so bad the movie Conspiracy Theory made it a running joke, even tracking the protagonist portrayed by Mel Gibson by monitoring purchases of The Catcher in the Rye. The reason that this book has a universal appeal to such a variety of people lies in the main character, Holden Caulfield. He can be saintly or snooty, cynical or sincere. Holden is generous to charitable to nuns and protective of children, or be agitated at the "zit-encrusted" Ackely. Still yet, Holden is capable of being quite cynical, Preverts 4 the best example of this is in the very opening of the book when Holden states, "If you really

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want to hear about it, the first thing you'll probably want to know is where I was born, and what my lousy childhood was like, and how my parents were occupied and all before they had me, and all that David Copperfield kind of crap, but I don't feel like going into it, if you want to know that truth"

(Salinger 1).

Despite his ability to be pejorative, Holden can still be able to be quite sincere. This is evident in his dealings with Phoebe. When Phoebe begins to cry, Holden first "wanted her to cry until her eyes practically dropped out. [He] almost hated her" (Salinger 207). Yet, a few seconds later he wants to take Phoebe to the zoo and the park to assuage her pain.

That is what I believe makes Holden Caulfield such a fascinating and widely admired character. One minute he can be bashing "phonies" then the next he will be acting "phoney" to a mother of a classmate as he was on the train to New York City. So, Holden is neither a saint nor a snob. He is a sarcastic yet sincere teenager who is pursuing Quixotic ideals of moral order. Holden is caught between the anxiety of childhood and the maturity of the adult world. The appeal of J. D. Salinger's novel *The Catcher in the Rye* is due in no small part to the main character and sole provider of information, the one and only Holden Caulfield.

While some view Holden strictly as an elitist or as a Christ-like figure, I find Holden to be a curious mix of the two. Holden is capable of displaying qualities associated with either at any moment throughout the novel. It is this mixture of qualities that makes Holden one of the most fascinating and popular characters in modern literature. Previews 5 Bibliography Carpenter, Frederic I.

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