

Founder of the open circles committee english literature essay

[Literature](#), [British Literature](#)



Ivy Nguyen Ms. Corradi ENG 4UE-01 Friday April 12, 2013

Masking the True Identity

Nisandeh Neta, founder of the Open Circles committee, once stated: " It is fear which creates the mask, and fear which keeps it in place. The mask is hiding our true and most beautiful self from both ourselves and from the world." Without realizing, human beings wear masks in their lives and act accordant to the mask they are wearing. Nonetheless, the mask does not cover the face completely and thus, reveals their genuine personalities and actions unconsciously. J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is about a sixteen-year-old boy who seeks refuge in New York City in an effort to escape the hypocrisies of life at his boarding school. Holden Caulfield, the novel's protagonist, is afraid of growing up and prefers to remain an innocent child. However, he hides underneath the facade of maturity manifested by his smoking, drinking, swearing and lusting after women. Holden wears a mask, pretending to be mature, to hide his fears of growing up. *The Catcher in the Rye* portrays Holden Caulfield as a cynical and impertinent character who, in fact, masquerades his true nature as a sensitive, compassionate, generous and moral person. Throughout the novel, Holden Caulfield's sensitivity was demonstrated on countless trifle occasions. Holden was emotional and shed tears as an expression of distress or happiness. As he was leaving Pencey Prep, Holden felt melancholic. " When I was all set to go, when I had my bags and all, I stood for a while next to the stairs and took a last look down the corridor. I was sort of crying. I don't know why" (Salinger 52). In addition, Holden shed tears when Phoebe offered her Christmas money to him. He was grateful and sentimental by Phoebe's kind gesture. " Then, all of a sudden, I started to cry. I couldn't help it" (179). Holden continuously ridiculed and

criticized the people around him yet, he failed to listen to Mr. Spencer's criticisms about himself. Mr. Spencer felt affection for Holden, bluntly reminding Holden that he failed his class. He read aloud Holden's terrible essay about the ancient Egyptians. Although Mr. Spencer's actions were motivated by concern for Holden's well-being, Holden characterized his behaviour as vindictive and mean-spirited. " It was a very dirty trick, but I went over and brought it over to him – I didn't have any alternate or anything [...] I don't think I'll ever forgive him for reading that crap out loud" (11-12). Holden did not enjoy being confronted by his actions. He was disturbed and offended by Mr. Spencer's honest opinions. Furthermore, Holden was shocked when he woke up to find his former English teacher at Elkton Hills, Mr. Antolini, patting his forehead. Believing that Mr. Antolini was making a homosexual advance towards him, Holden left the apartment awkwardly and hastily. " What it was, it was Mr. Antolini's hand. What he was doing was, he was sitting on the floor right next to the couch, in the dark and all, and he was sort of petting me or patting me on the goddam head. Boy, I'll bet I jumped about a thousand feet. [...] ' I have to go, anyway,' I said – boy, was I nervous!" (192)." Holden's reaction, and his conclusions, may have been exaggerated. As Holden's trusted mentor, Mr. Antolini's gesture could have been a sign of affection for a student in pain. " I mean I started thinking maybe I should've gone back to his house. Maybe he was only patting my head just for the hell of it. The more I thought about it, though, the more depressed and screwed up about it I got" (195). Holden was melodramatic about an occurrence that was meant to be a kind gesture and was quick to respond to slight changes. Holden Caulfield's compassionate

nature was portrayed through his behaviour towards other people, even to the people he disliked. Holden did not like Ackley, a schoolmate whose room was next to him at Pencey Prep. Holden revealed his feelings for Ackley as he said, " I wasn't too crazy for him" (19). When Holden and his friends decided to go to see a movie, he asked to take Ackley out despite his dislike of him. " The reason I asked was because Ackley never did anything on Saturday night" (36). Holden wanted Ackley to do something entertaining since he always stayed in his room. Although he did not share a friendly relationship with Ackley, he was sympathetic towards him. Holden pitied people who did not enjoy the status of a rich person. When Holden saw two nuns carrying a " beat-up old straw basket," he felt discontented (113). In addition, he felt really bad and sorry for the nuns since they were having toast with coffee while he was having an expensive breakfast. " I hate it if I'm eating bacon and eggs or something and somebody else is only eating toast and coffee" (110). Holden did not like to see the class difference as he considered himself richer than the nuns. At Elkton Hills, Holden's roommate, Dick Slagle, had " very inexpensive suitcases" (108). With the intention of not wanting Dick Slagle to feel inferior, Holden hid his suitcases under his bed, " so that old Slagle wouldn't get a goddamn inferiority complex about it" (108). Holden was sympathetic for people who were not wealthy. Deep in Holden's heart, he cared for the people around him. He was sensitive to the difficulties of others and was always willing to help. When Holden stayed in a hotel, he hired a prostitute named Sunny. When Sunny gave Holden her dress to hang, he felt sorry for her. " I thought of her going in a store and buying it, and nobody in the store knowing that she was a prostitute and all.

[...] It made me feel sad as hell" (96). Holden was depressed that she was so young to lead her life as a prostitute. It saddened him to think of her going to a store to buy the green dress and no one knowing what she did for a living. His compassion for her made Holden depressed which discouraged his sexual desire. Holden Caulfield's generosity was shown through his kind gestures to the people around him. When Holden's roommate, Stradlater, asked to borrow his jacket, Holden was willing to lend it to Stradlater. " ' You gonna use your hound's-tooth tonight or not?' ' No, but I don't want you stretching it with your goddam shoulders and all' " (25). Although he was low on money, Holden gave the two nuns a ten dollar donation. " I could make a small contribution. You could keep the money for when you do take up a collection" (109). After the nuns left, he wished he had given them more money. Holden's encounter with the nuns revealed his kindness. After his encounter with the nuns, Holden searched for a record store, hoping to buy a rare " Little Shirley Beans" record to give to Phoebe. " There was this record I wanted to get for Phoebe, called ' Little Shirley Beans,' It was a very hard record to get" (114). Although he did not have a lot of money left, he paid five dollars for the record. The gift was purely a sign of affection for his sister. Holden Caulfield was moral through his desire to act upon his conscience when dealing with various issues. Throughout the novel, Holden wished to save the innocence of children from entering the adult world that was corrupted by " phonies." When Holden went to Phoebe's school and found " f**k you" written on the wall, he became very distressed as they demonstrated the innocent world of children being infected by the vulgarity of the adult world. He was infuriated because he knew the children would

see it. " It drove me damn near crazy" (201). Holden tried to wipe it off because he wanted to protect the children from seeing it. " I tried to rub it off with my hand again, but this one was scratched on, with a knife or something. It wouldn't come off. It's hopeless, anyway" (202). Holden fantasized on becoming the " catcher in the rye." He envisioned a field of rye, standing by a dangerous cliff. The cliff would represent innocence, and Holden wished to prevent the children from falling off and losing their innocence. " I'm 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—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them" (173). Holden's desire was completely selfless and humane. The beneficiary of his good deeds would be society at large, not himself. He viewed himself as the savior of children, innocence and human dignity. He acted upon his conscience and performed good deeds, doing so for the sake of ethics and the wellbeing of the children.

Furthermore, Holden's attitude towards sex illustrates his morality. In contrast to Stradlater, " a very sexy bastard" (32), who had only sexual interest in girls, Holden was sincere in his attitude to girls. He respected girls' requests and controlled his sexual desires on her. " The thing is, most of the time when you're coming pretty close to doing it with a girl - a girl that isn't a prostitute or anything, I mean - she keeps telling you to stop. The trouble with me is, I stop" (92). Underlying his sexual desires was a strong sense of what was right and what was wrong. Holden felt that sex should happen between people who respected and cared deeply for one another. As a result, he was displeased by the realization that sex could be casual.

According to Holden, he had to get to know a girl, and like her a lot, before he was comfortable with intimacy. " I know it's supposed to be physical and spiritual, and artistic and all. But what I mean is, you can't do it with everybody - every girl you neck with" (147). Holden believed that sex without love is improper. In *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, Holden Caulfield was introduced to the readers as a young man who was confused about life but in no way immoral. Throughout the book his actions showed that he was sensitive, compassionate, generous and moral. Holden was a good adolescent by nature that he would not throw a snowball at a car because " the car looked so nice and white" (36). However, he covered up his genuine feelings under a disguise of " coolness" in order to fit in with the " phoniness" of society. Although he did not acknowledge the fact that he wanted to belong in society, it was implied through his attempt to connect with the people in New York City. Holden wore mask that served to provide his inner self with protection. Holden was undeniably a kind-hearted and moral person who feared to show his true identity, anxious about other people's judgments.