

The catcher in the rye
– that the novel
justifies the murder of
john lennon essay...



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

On the evening of December 8, 1980, Mark David Chapman calmly approached John Lennon outside of his apartment, pulled out a gun and fired five steady shots, four of which hit their mark. As the former Beatle, semi-conscious, lay on the ground haemorrhaging, Chapman pulled out his copy of *The Catcher in the Rye* and began to read. He later explained that he saw himself as an incarnation of the novel's main character, Holden Caulfield. On the inside cover, below the inscription, "This is my statement," Chapman signed the name Holden Caulfield. Chapman has claimed that his reasons and justification for the murder were contained in the book. This essay will prove that justification for the murder can be derived from the novel and the themes within.

First, Holden's criticism towards what he refers to as "phonies" is a recurring theme throughout the book. Holden uses the broad term "phoniness" to describe the superficiality, hypocrisy, pretension, and shallowness that he encounters. He feels this way because of the adult tendency to adopt these qualities in social situations, and because he fears the idea of adulthood. He believes that he must protect the children who are growing up from adopting these qualities, and that he must keep them pure. Lennon was an outspoken purveyor of peace and was one of the largest political activists at the time. Imagine, his single, besides being an anthem for anti-war protests, powerfully spoke against aspects of life such as greed and the concept of possessions. The many people who believed in the message of Lennon's music began to view the world differently, without knowing that Lennon was living a contradictory lifestyle. While Lennon was spreading the idea of peace and sharing, he was living a luxurious lifestyle, squandering his money on

yachts and expensive artwork. Essentially, he was buying unnecessary, extravagant possessions, which was a complete contradiction to what he proclaimed as his beliefs. Chapman felt that this was a clear sign of Lennon being a phony, and stated his opinion about this in an interview.

He told us to imagine no possessions, and there he was, with millions of dollars and yachts and farms and country estates, laughing at people like me who had believed the lies and bought the records and built a big part of their lives around his music (Mark David Chapman).

Holden is constantly critical of this phoniness throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*. Chapman, believing to be an incarnation of Holden and a quasi-saviour, felt that he had to ensure that Lennon would no longer be a phony. He felt that he had to protect people from being influenced by what he believed to be the living of a lie. Lennon had to be removed.

Second, Holden's want for the past and a state of permanence were an influence to Chapman. Holden's want to maintain the past is shown throughout the book. A prominent example of this happens at the Museum of National History. It is there that he explains why he is attracted to the museum.

Certain things they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone... (Holden Caulfield, *The Catcher in the Rye*).

Shortly after the break-up of The Beatles, who Chapman loved, Lennon became a peace activist and transformed into a phony. This change into a

phony meant that the time when the music was solely for the people had gone. His music had lost that carefree purity that Chapman loved, and had changed. Chapman had been angered by these changes. He wanted to preserve Lennon from losing what was left of his innocence, purity, and sincerity: the qualities that Holden admires in children. Chapman's shooting of Lennon was, in his eyes, the way to preserve what was left of what once was and to protect him from changing further.

The final piece of evidence that justifies the murder is Holden's attitude towards children. He feels that they are almost sacred, as they have been untouched by the adult world, and all of its insincerity and pretension. He loathes the idea of growing up, and wishes to prevent children from doing so. He states near the conclusion of the novel his wish to be a catcher in the rye.

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. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all (Holden Caulfield, *The Catcher in the Rye*).

The cliff is the brink of adulthood in Holden's mind, and he feels that any children that fall over it change into the phonies that he despises. John Lennon's music was very popular with younger audiences as well, and Chapman would have felt that Lennon was influencing them with his phoniness. His need to protect the children, to remove what he saw as a corrupting influence, would have arisen. In his murder of John Lennon, he felt that he was saving the masses of young people from becoming just as bad as Lennon was, and becoming a true catcher in the rye.

In conclusion, we can see that elements from the novel, *The Catcher in the Rye*, reflect upon Lennon and Chapman. We can see that Chapman saw himself as the next Holden Caulfield, and that he saw qualities within Lennon that made him a danger. Lennon's hypocritical lifestyle displayed him as a phony, and his changes into the world of "phoniness" and superficiality showed that Holden's own want for nothing to change and for the world to remain simple was false. His music was popular with children, and Chapman would have believed that the children who enjoyed were in fact being corrupted by the very aspects of Lennon that he came to loathe. These aspects of Lennon were the very qualities that Holden hated, and therefore Chapman hated. In doing this, Chapman was being the next catcher in the rye. Because of all of this, we can see that justification for the murder can be derived from the novel and elements within it.