

Psychoanalysis in 'catcher in the rye'

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

You know that one person in your group of friends that just isn't "all right" in the head? That you're always kind of worried about in the back of your head? Well that would describe Holden Caulfield perfectly. J. D. Salinger's *Catcher in the Rye* is all about a teenage boy named Holden Caulfield in a mental hospital recalling a crazy weekend he had the previous year. It goes everywhere from prostitutes to illegal drinking. In the novel Holden exemplifies a borderline personality disorder with his mood swings, what most would call impetuous decisions, and constant morbid thoughts.

Holden has intense mood swings throughout the whole novel. Holden states, "I probably wouldn't've taken her even if she wanted to go with me. She wouldn't have been anybody to go with. The terrible part, though, is that I meant it when I asked her." (Salinger, 1951, p.

134). A sane person doesn't just change their mind about going away with somebody that quickly. He went from truly believing he was in love with Sally to not being able to wait to get away from her. As it is, he decided he loved her after around 15 minutes into the date when he was just talking about how "phony" she was. Another example of his mood swings is when Holden recalls his fight with Stradlater.

He says, "This next part I don't remember so hot. All I know is I got up from the bed, like I was going down to the can or something, and then I tried to sock him, with all my might, right smack in the toothbrush, so it would split his goddam throat open." (p. 43). Just a few moments before this happened he was perfectly fine with Stradlater. Sure, he thought he was a phony, but he thinks that about everyone.

Holden's approach to making decisions in the novel probably isn't the best choice. In chapter seven Holden tells us, " But all of a sudden, I changed my mind. All of a sudden, I'd decided what I'd really do, I'd get the hell out of Pencey right that same night and all" (p. 51). Holden even admits in this quote that's it's " all of a sudden".

He didn't have to leave for another 3 days or so and out of nowhere he decides to leave. He's on his way to see a friend on another floor just in the stairway and he decides to leave. He had just gotten into a fight with Stradlater and he clearly wasn't in the correct state of mind to make decisions like going to New York and staying in a hotel. He doesn't even stay in the hotel for the whole weekend. In chapter 15 Holden talks about his departure for the hotel saying, " After I made the date with Sally, I got out of bed and got dressed and packed my bag. " (p.

106). This didn't make sense to me because he seemed happy enough at the hotel. He had gotten beaten up by the elevator man earlier, but he didn't seem to care that much. So unless his reaction to the elevator man was just really delayed, I don't see a valid reason for Holden leaving the hotel so out of nowhere. Holden is constantly having all these really morbid thoughts that should concern the people around him.

Holden imagines his funeral and those that would be there in chapter 20 as he says, " I thought probably I'd get pneumonia and die. I started picturing millions of jerks coming to my funeral and all. " (p. 154). Somebody content with life doesn't want to think about their own funeral, much less talk about it. Holden is way too interested in his funeral.

These kinds of thoughts, if expressed out loud, would be a big concern to those around him. One more thing that worried me a little about Holden's well-being and mental health was when Holden decides, " Anyway, I'm sort of glad they've got the atomic bomb invented. If there's ever another war, I'm going to sit right the hell on top of it. I'll volunteer for it, I swear to God I will. " (p.

141). This was the biggest " red flag" I encountered in this entire novel. Considering the damage an atomic bomb to those just around the bomb itself, I can't imagine the damage it would do to someone on top of it. They would die before they even knew what was going on. Plus, it's basically him telling us he would willingly kill himself. There is absolutely no reason for Holden to want to kill himself, especially in that way.

Sure, he failed out of school and is alone in New York, but both of those things are of his own doing. He's intelligent enough to get into the school; I'd imagine he didn't magically forget everything once he was there. And as far as the New York thing goes, that is definitely his fault completely. He decided to just get up and leave a warm, safe environment at Pencey to get a hotel in New York, again proving his " wonderful" decision-making skills. Reading this book I couldn't help but think maybe Holden should have gotten help sooner than he did, but hey, at least he got it.

He definitely needed it what with his crazy mood swings, outrageous decisions, and morbid thoughts being all over the place. Sure, a lot of us show some of these signs, but Holden was almost the poster-child for

borderline personality order, from what I saw in J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*.