

"the catcher in the rye" by j.d. salinger essay sample

Literature



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In the novel *The Catcher in the Rye*, written by J. D. Salinger, I found the idea of self-isolation from human relationships that was portrayed through the protagonist Holden Caulfield very interesting. While over the course of the novel, which is set into a timeframe of three days, Holden interacts with many others, we see that he does not have a close relationship with any of these people other than his sister, Phoebe. This self-imposed isolation from any close human relationships is to protect himself from becoming a 'phony', which is what he labels those that he believes are fake and shallow. By isolating himself, he feels that he is protected from becoming this stereotype, and this is a source of strength to him however it also can also create problems for him. While his solitude drives him to get in contact and go on a date with Sally Hayes, his drive to be alienated eventually leads him to being rude and offensive towards her, with him saying she gave him "a royal pain in the ass".

In addition, we are shown that his isolation is leading him to have crazed, delusional moments, admitting to himself that "I swear to God I'm a madman" and insisting that, although Sally kept asking him to speak quieter, he "wasn't even screaming at her". In the television series *Sherlock*, the main character Sherlock Holmes is in a similar situation to that of Holden. At the beginning of the series, in the episode 'A Study in Pink', we see that Sherlock does not have any close human relationships as he feels that he has a superior intelligence to most people, and therefore is above them. This leaves him leading a secluded lifestyle similar to that of Holden's, showing us that this theme of isolation from human relationships is also apparent in other pieces of literature.

I also found the strong symbolism of Holden's red hunting hat to be particularly effective. The hat is a symbol for his individuality and alienation throughout the novel, as he wears it to prove to himself that he is not a phony. This is because its uniqueness sets him apart from the rest, and although he admits that the hat looks foolish, he tells himself that " I didn't give a damn how I looked". Consequently, the hat is a source of protection to Holden that brings him comfort and reassurance, and is why he ultimately ends up giving the hat to Phoebe to protect her from those that are phony and may be hurtful to her. However we are led to believe that he is self-conscious about wearing the hat, as he only wears it when he is alone or around people he does not know, saying that " I took my old hunting hat out of my pocket while I walked and put it on. I knew I wouldn't meet anybody that knew me".

As Holden knew that he would not encounter anybody that would recognise him, he felt comfortable wearing the hat, however when going to sneak into his house he removed the hat. This is ironic, as while Holden wears the hat to set himself apart as individualistic, he doesn't wear it around people that he knows, which shows us that he still cares about what people think of him. As an outsider, Holden would label this as a phony characteristic, as he cannot be genuine around others and has to mask his desire to express his individuality in order for others to not think of him badly. The symbolism of the red hunting hat showed the readers Holden's true personal character, and was therefore an effective technique in the novel.

I found the significance of the title of the novel an interesting feature, as it has strong parallels to themes that we are Salinger shows us. We first hear <https://assignbuster.com/the-catcher-in-the-rye-by-jd-salinger-essay-sample/>

of the title when Holden hears a child walking through the street humming lines to the poem that the book gains its title from, "A Catcher in the Rye" by Robert Burns, a famous Scottish poet. This moment made Holden "feel not so depressed", as he could see that the boy was singing just for the fun of it, and this showed his innocence as he was careless as to what other people thought of him. Later on, after Phoebe asks him what he would like to achieve with his life, Holden explains that he wants to be the catcher in the rye. By this he pictures children running in a large field next to a cliff, and he wishes that his job would be to catch these children if they started to run off the cliff. To him, the cliff symbolises innocence, and he wants to catch these children before they fall off the cliff and consequently lose their innocence.

Holden wants to preserve this innocence that they have as children, so that they do not become corrupted, as he feels that they surely will do when they are exposed to the phoniness of the adult world. However, later in the novel we are shown that Holden accepts that children will all inevitably grow up and lose their childhood purity. This is while Phoebe is on the carousel, and he muses that "...if they want to grab the gold ring, you have to let them do it, and not say anything. If they fall off they fall off, but it's bad if you say anything to them." which shows that he accepts children must metaphorically fall off the carousel horse, or the cliff, and be exposed to the adult world to grow up, albeit them losing their innocence. This shows us the strong relevance that the title has to key ideas in the novel.

I enjoyed reading the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger, as it included many significant themes and portrayed these by using techniques. Holden's self-isolation from human relationships was particularly interesting, <https://assignbuster.com/the-catcher-in-the-rye-by-jd-salinger-essay-sample/>

and I also found the symbolism of the red hunting hat effective. In addition, the strong significance of the title helped us understand some of the key themes. This novel made me think about the corruption of our current society, despite the novel being written over sixty years ago.