

The catcher in the rye

Business



Eccentricity intrigues the human mind. Conformity is so common in society that any spark of individuality is instantly notable. To those around him, Holden Caulfield appears to be an awkward individual who struggles to be responsible and sociable. He strikes out at the bounds of society in his peculiar fashion. In "The Catcher in the Rye" by JD Salinger, Holden Caulfield earns a place in fiction because he becomes a symbol of adolescent rebellion as he strives to acclimate his noble beliefs with the realities of life and, through the use of his unique voice, struggles to deal with his own troubled past.

Salinger portrays Caulfield as the antithesis of a conventional protagonist in order to create an unorthodox main character. Caulfield is introduced as a rebellious young adult with a reputation for disobedience. He has been expelled from school multiple times and is a free smoker. Holden, speaking to his date Sally, describes school: "Its full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a god dam Cadillac some day..."(Salinger 131). Caulfield seems discontent with his life and does not shy away from expressing his displeasure.

He also appears to be very judgmental of those around him, repeatedly branding people as "phonies". He abhors hypocrisy, and superficiality; this is especially evident when he watches movies. Caulfield ponders while watching a movie:".. There was a lady sitting next to me that cried all through the goddam picture. The phonier it got, the more she cried"(Salinger 139).

To Holden, movies are the epitome of the fakeness of adult life. They are based on fabrications and feed lies to the masses. Salinger's initial description of Caulfield seems to brand him as a callous young rebel. However, the author intentionally misleads readers as a deeper look into Caulfield's personality reveals far more than a miscreant. Underneath Caulfield's tough exterior lies a noble heart troubled by the loss of innocence and honesty. He is constantly exposed to this bitter truth as he enters manhood.

He recoils from the artificiality of adult life and yearns to preserve the innocence of the young. In a conversation with his sister, Holden declares: "... I keep picturing all these little kids.. in this big field of rye...I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff..

"(Salinger 173). The field represents youth and all of its happiness and the cliff symbolizes descent into adulthood, a tragic transition. Holden wishes to prevent this fall. He wants to save children from the trials and dangers of life but eventually realizes that his dream is impossible. Holden realizes this when he sees profanity etched into the walls of a school.

He describes: " 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"(Salinger 202). The futility of this act reveals that Holden cannot be the catcher in the rye. He cannot remove the influence of corruption nor can he stop the flow of time. He sorrowfully accepts this fact when he imagines that someone will even engrave profanity on his tombstone Holden's gritty voice reveals how

his troubled past haunts him perpetually, thus inducing the sympathetic support of the readers.

Salinger uses the authentic voice of Caulfield to great effect when he describes the tragic memories that Holden harbors. The death of Allie lingers on the mind of Holden. He describes: “ I slept in the garage the night he died, and I broke all the goddam windows with my fist, just for the hell of it”. The use of profanity underlines the intensity of his sadness and his actions reveal the turmoil within his young mind. His unrefined voice cannot conceal the pain. Holden is crushed by the knowledge that such an innocent soul can be lost so suddenly.

The loss of his brother makes Caulfield fearful for his own safety. Battered by depression, Holden ponders: “...I had this feeling that I’d never get to the other side of the street.

I thought that I’d just go down, down, down and nobody’d ever see me again”(Salinger 197). His previous contempt for the world is replaced by abject misery. Holden seems to have given up. Seeing a noble soul suffer so forces empathy from the reader. Salinger portrays Holden Caulfield as a nonconforming individual with strong opinions and an unforgettable voice.

His harsh language and callous exterior merely accentuate the passionate and often fragile soul within. Holden earns his place in the immortal halls of fiction because he connects with the reader as no others can.