

About the ending of the catcher in the rye

[Literature](#), [American Literature](#)



The ending of J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* is convincing, following logically from the nature of the characters and from the preceding action. Holden Caulfield felt happy as he watched his sister Phoebe Caulfield ride on the Central Park carousel. Holden confessed, I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy (Salinger 275). But Holden also admitted he didn't know why he felt so happy, or why he was about to cry at the time. Even so, Caulfield's sense of relief after his long depression felt perceivable.

One way of reading *The Catcher In The Rye* takes Holden at his word, believing his happiness is authentic/genuine and predicts an eventually full recovery, seeing Holden shedding his distrust about the world and developing warmer feelings about others. Holden indicated as much as noted above when he claimed, I sort of miss everybody I told about. (Salinger 277). If it's true Holden grew less bitter by the end of *The Catcher In The Rye* and he's learned the value of other people, then he may grow past his depression and move on to a more successful career at his new school and in his life beyond, emphasizing a sense of optimism, if not absolute happiness.

A doubtful reading places suspicion on Holden's optimism. Over the course of *The Catcher In The Rye*, Holden's evaluations of others consistently prove to be both inaccurate and oversimplified, making his own self-evaluation suffering from a similar shortsightedness very likely. For example, the scene with Phoebe on the Central Park carousel, where Holden's happiness bordered on insanity and madness suggests after his laboring and long depressive spell, the suddenness of his emotional breakthrough seems suspicious.

Also suspicious is the simplicity of Holden's happiness. Holden damn near bawling (Salinger 275) suggests his emotions are far more complex than he can comprehend. As Holden frequently revealed in the final pages of *The Catcher In The Rye*, he didn't really know what he felt or why. In Holden's emotional immaturity, he may have reduced this complexity to an overly simple label: happiness. Indeed, Holden may be just as confused and troubled as ever.

Reaching the end of *The Catcher In The Rye*, the climax of Holden's 3 dramatic days turned out to be rather anticlimactic. Holden returns home and hesitates talking about what happened over the 3 dramatic days as he anticipates his transfer to another new school and another new beginning. In the end of *The Catcher In The Rye*, it's supposedly random events turning things around for Holden. He has a moment of absolute relief while he watches Phoebe go on a merry-go-round in the rain, realizing for the first time his actions may seriously hurt someone he loves more than life itself (Phoebe). There's someone who would feel a terrible loss at Holden's absence (The little girl with her blue coat on the Central Park carousel in the pouring rain).

Holden's life is fruitful, absolutely necessary to the wellbeing of others. Therefore, while Holden still has a fair amount of growing up and maturing to do, the worst is mainly over, producing a surprisingly optimistic and appropriate ending. Holden's attitude shifts near the end of *The Catcher In The Rye* when he realizes Phoebe and other children must be allowed to "grab for the gold ring," to choose their own risks and take them, even though

their attempts may be dangerous. Holden's indication of his acceptance of life changes at the end of *The Catcher In The Rye*, leaving some hope for himself.

Towards the end of *The Catcher In The Rye*, when Phoebe asks Holden what he'd like to do with his life, he explains his desire to be a catcher in the rye (Salinger 225). In this metaphor, he visualizes a field of rye standing by a dangerous cliff. Children play in the field with joy. If they are too close to the edge of the cliff, Holden catches them. Holden's ambition to save children from falling off a cliff significantly represents his desire to save innocence. He wants to rescue Phoebe, as well as other children, so he can rescue the purity he believes can only be found within innocent children. Holden dreams about saving the children in the rye field because saving them means preserving the purity left in the world. Yet Holden has given up on saving his own purity, as he believes it has been lost. By the end of *The Catcher In The Rye*, it seems Holden will continue to rescue others and fail to recognize it's him who needs rescuing.

Holden's last words in *The Catcher In The Rye* are: Don't tell anybody anything. If you do, you start missing everybody (Salinger 277). The words missing everybody seems out of character for Holden. Possibly towards the end in *The Catcher In The Rye*, when Holden is in therapy and recovering, his childish pessimism broke, pointing out Holden uncomfortableness in opening up to anybody because he's afraid of establishing a connection and then losing them. This goes a long way towards comprehending why Holden sabotages any relationship he begins to establish, because he's afraid of

losing others close to him. This fear has such a rigid grip on Holden that he continues to be depressed and lonely, even to the extent that by the end of *The Catcher In The Rye* he's afraid to even speak to anyone.

Salinger wanted Holden to feel once he tells about something, even if it's how false things can be/seem, he misses it/them in some way. Here, Holden reveals his softer side, the side missing his older brother D. B., the side worrying about children scared by mummies in a museum, the side wondering about Central Park ducks in the winter and watching Phoebe ride the Central Park carousel. Holden says it's not always wise to go back and talk about things a person may never see again. He's saying no matter what he narrated, what his feelings and thoughts were, there was a lot he appreciated about it, and letting 'the public' know may not be good.

The Catcher In The Rye ends with Holden stopping the story after taking Phoebe to the Central Park Zoo. Holden simply says he's going back to school and misses his classmates (Even those he didn't like much), and that discussion about his story made him miss them. Holden informs and reminds that telling a story digs the feelings of lost for the early days. The significance is Holden unable to grow from his experience and move forward, instead just recalling past memories and drowning in melancholy. Salinger doesn't spoon-feed a "happy" ending, making *The Catcher In The Rye* more authentic, more genuine, more convincing, more lifelike, and more realistic than some bildungsroman novels.