

The catcher in the rye – childhood and adulthood

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



In today's society, people want to protect their future and are more focused on what's to come rather than what's happening now. Many people believe that the future is important, but what about childhood? Robert Frost once said, Nothing gold can stay. Giving the impression that innocence doesn't last forever and that it goes away at a certain age.

The early point of life is childhood. People try to preserve childhood but we grow up too fast. One person who seems to be struggling with childhood is Holden Caulfield. In J. D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*, he creates an image about a teenager who is struggling with the concept of growing up. Throughout the book he creates the message about childhood. Through the author's use of text structure, Salinger creates the theme that nothing gold can stay. Therefore, society needs to cherish childhood because it only comes around once.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, the main character Holden Caulfield, expresses that he felt depressed by what his professor, Mr. Spencer was saying when they were talking about Holden leaving Pencey Prep. In this point in the story, Mr. Spencer gives Holden a word of the wiser moment and Holden gives the impression that he doesn't want to grow up. While Mr. Spencer and Holden are talking, Mr. Spencer asks Holden, "Do you feel absolutely no concern for your future, boy?" (Salinger 17). Holden responds by saying, "Oh, I feel some concern for my future, all right" (Salinger 17). Holden has no future plans like a normal teenager would. He then later mentions that "[He] didn't like hearing him say that. It made me sound dead or something. It was very depressing." (Salinger 17). Holden's feelings of depression show that he finds adulthood repulsive. Holden finds Mr. Spencer's comment depressing

<https://assignbuster.com/the-catcher-in-the-rye-childhood-and-adulthood/>

because Holden's ideal world of adulthood is being able to be a kid and not have to worry about growing up. He wants to be the catcher in the rye for children and stop them from growing up into adulthood. In Holden's mind adulthood is full of phonies and as one grows up, they lose innocence. Holden seems to not want to have a future. Holden is holding onto his childhood and he is struggling with growing up.

In the second half of the book, Holden goes to his sister Phoebe's school to give the principal the note he wrote for her and as he's walking up the stairs, he sees Somebodyd written fuck you on the wall [He] thought how Phoebe and all the other little kids would see it, and how theyd wonder what the hell it meant (Salinger 222). Holden Wanted to kill whoever had written it. (Salinger 221). Holden wants to protect the children at the school from growing up and he decides to scratch out the words that would potentially preserve the kids innocence. He then later realizes it's hopeless, anyway. If you had a million years to do it in, you couldnt rub out even half the Fuck you signs in the world. It's impossible. (Salinger 222). Holden doesnt make the realization that it's pointless anyway to scratch out the words. It's pointless because Holden doesnt see that eventually the children will grow up. For this reason, Holden has such a hard time understanding the process of growing up. He wants to think that childhood and innocence has to stay, but nothing lasts forever. Holden is trying to preserve that for himself, for Phoebe, and the children.

Throughout the story of the Catcher in the Rye, Holden faces many challenges and his big challenge is his struggle with growing up. Holden is a

confused character who is stuck in between childhood and adulthood. Holden isn't focused on his future, he is still confused on whether to grow up or remain in childhood. However, at some points in the story he attempts to act like an adult. When he does attempt to act like an adult they result in setbacks. His encounter with the prostitute for example, Holden didn't do anything with her then realized he wasn't into it and backed down. This results into thinking that maybe Holden isn't quite ready for adulthood yet. In our society, we are told to plan for the future, but not enough is said about preserving childhood. In what point in life do we stop growing up and enter adulthood? It's different for everyone, but what effect does that have on ourselves holding onto childhood and delaying adulthood?