

Catcher in the rye questions essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

CATCHER IN THE RYE QUESTIONS: 1. The novel can be described as a bildungsroman genre, in other words, a rite of passage novel. In what way does Holden experience a rite of passage? The rite of passage experienced by Holden in the text involves the original identity of Holden: a typical representation of the angst teen, susceptible to extreme dips between depression and contentedness, who has a profound distaste for most of society fed by his belief he has the ability to read behaviour to determine the motives of human beings and in short prove the ‘ phoney’ nature of almost everyone. His character alter through one pivotal moment in the text, where he satisfies a desperate need to be close to someone by spending time with his little sister, the perfect representation of innocence, and ultimately realizes the potential of genuinely un-phoney entities, and therefore a reason to desist with his marginalized existence, and enjoy life! 2. Comment on the tone of the novel. Include specific examples in your answer.

There is no doubt ‘ Catcher in the Rye’ is a depressing read. Through the eyes of the narrator, Holden, a pessimistic teen, a materialistic, empty and cold world is depicted, lacking in any substance. Short sentences give a blunt tone: ‘ the Goddam movies. They can ruin you. I’m not kidding’ and contrary to drawn out, floury sentences, the Catcher moves at a fast pace with little detailed descriptions and imagery utilized.

The ever present profanity gives the reader a clear sense of a youthful viewpoint or else one significantly distanced from high society. Persuasive and abbreviated language contributes to a young, blunt and quick paced feel: ‘ I swear you’d like her’. The book has a negative tone, even to the

point that positive things have negative connotations: where Holden says ' That killed me' he is expressing contentedness. .

How does Holden's use of vernacular (colloquialisms, slang and profanity) assist the reader? Holden's use of swearing (Goddam, Chrissake) may be further evidence to show the reader his non-conformist attitude. People are often telling him to ' cut it out' yet his persistence contributes to his inept social habits. Using language popular in his context (' the other two grools nearly had hysterics', ' tossed their cookies') indicates an attempted trendy vocabulary and youthful outlook which hints to the reader Holden's juvenility. They also give the whole text a bitter feel, rich with negative connotations. Using words such as Goddam as an adjective immediately sheds a pessimistic light on the noun and perfectly captures -and indicates to the reader- the contempt Holden has for it. 4.

Salinger has characterized Holden as an iconoclastic outsider or misfit. Describe Holden; his appearance and personality. Holden has a blunt and somewhat socially unaccepted personality. His use of profanity and sarcasm are frequently frowned upon and he enjoys compulsive lying, for entertainments sake.

On the surface, Holden attempts to come across as cool and mature. He smokes, drinks and participates in activities (such as going to clubs and hiring prostitutes) that are familiar to -in his opinion- a phoney demographic which furthermore makes him somewhat hypocritical. Underneath the surface it is evident Holden still has an immature mind. Being unable to commit or apply himself let alone decide how he feels about someone, and

stay true to that opinion before the end of an encounter are all testimony to that.

His despise for the adult world, love for children, desire to be 'Catcher in the Rye' and his inability to actually have sex with the prostitute he hired highlights a childlike and mentally immature nature. Classic of a teenager, Holden more than often has a depressing outlook on life. His frequent periods spent bursting into tears and not knowing why, gives the impression Holden suffers a deep, bottled up and misunderstood depression, which causes a strange, cold behaviour to be reverberated through his personality. Holden's physical appearance is subversive in itself. Late teen with grey hair and plenty of height, Holden definitely differs physically from his contemporaries.

This may be an additional source for his non-conformist character: physically, he looks as though he does not fit in. 5. What does the use of first person narrative, integrated with alternative narrative viewpoints such as Mr. Spencer's allow Salinger to do? Is Holden a reliable narrator? By using the contrast of Holden's opinion and viewpoint to those of other characters, Salinger has created a character and narrator that the audience may not necessarily believe.

The constant conflicting opinions between Holden and all other characters may lead the reader to believe that Holden isn't reliable. Not that he is necessarily lying. The opinions he states aren't false, but the reader definitely gets a sense that Holden may be oblivious to the truth, when he's positive he knows the truth already. For example, the scene in chapter 11

situated in the 'lavender bar', Holden attempts to connect with 3 30 year old women by giving them 'a very cool glance'. From Holden's perspective the women 'started giggling like three morons'.

When reading from Holden's point of view it seems the women are somewhat immature and rather stupid. But when remembering Holden is 17 years old with grey hair and attempting to woo a table of thirty year olds perhaps this 'giggling' wasn't a venting of girlish excitement, rather a reaction to the unenlightened social habits performed by Holden, and the pure hilarity of the situation. It is this presence of alternate viewpoints that give Holden's opinions less of an impact, and place the reader in a wary state, aware that perhaps Holden is not a reliable narrator. 6. How does Salinger use flashbacks as a literary device? Find two examples in the novel.

Salinger utilizes flashbacks to ensure the reader gradually and consistently can explore the deeper truth about Holden's character. A rebel without a cause upon the first introduction to Holden Caulfield, through the course of the book a deeply depressing insight to Holden is provided through flashbacks dictating a troubled past. One includes the flashback of Holden dealing with his Brother Allie's death by smashing all the windows in his garage (pg 34) rather than confronting the grief sensibly and passively. Obviously, a deep anguish triggered this act and furthermore, makes Holden's bottled up, depressing and socially awkward dispositions more understandable. The flashback of the discovery of Holden's exposure to significant gore (the death of James Castle- page 153) also further develops the audience's understanding of Holden's character.

' He was dead, and his teeth, and blood, were all over the place'. Having an experience of witnessing such bloodshed clearly affects Holden, as in the context of this quote (where Holden attempts to think of something he actually likes) the image of the ultimate victim is what he feels affection for. This possibly also contributes to Holden's love for children. Conforming to the child stereotype, James Castle (an innocent school boy) was crudely murdered for being completely honest and un-phoney, which is something Holden deeply admires.

7. What is Holden's hunting hat symbolic of? What idea does this suggest about nonconformity? Holden's hunting hat is an object he has created emotional attachments with. Whenever he experiences moments of heightened depression, brought on more than often by his inability to connect with others and therefore his isolated existence, the hunting hat is the motif that is reintroduced in every instance. Perhaps a material shelter or comforter against moments where Holden feels isolated, it brings up the concept that perhaps non-conformity isn't something that is chosen by the individual but rather, society.

Why feel the need to be shielded against something that you have elected or desired? Holden is clearly a melancholy character to the extreme and through the constant reappearance of this hunting hat as a necessary way to deal with the apparent gulf between him and the rest of society, the concept that Holden truly dislikes being alone and that he didn't choose to become a non-conformist in the first place is evident. . The metaphor of the ducks in the pond in central park can represent change, adaptation and survival.

Explain this metaphor and include other possible interpretations. The motif of the ducks is open to many interpretations.

The one given can be justified possibly through Holden and his desire on how to conform and go with the flow. The way he constantly wonders how the ducks know how to change and adapt to changes in their environments, Holden desires the ability to fit in and adapt to the environment and society he is in (assuming that being marginalized is something he doesn't want). Other interpretations could be the symbolic representation of Holden's depression through the weather. The ducks having the ability to fly away from the winter, and Holden's apparent desire to find out where the ducks go to survive possibly mirrors Holden's desire to know how to survive on his own, and cope with his own depression.