

A comparison of "the catcher in the rye" and "rule of the bone" essay sample

[Life, Adolescence](#)



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The Tortured Road of Adolescence Patrick Royle Central to J. D Salinger's “ The Catcher in the Rye” and Russell Banks “ Rule of the Bone” is the theme of change. Both male protagonists - Holden Caulfield and Chappie Dorset - transform, while traversing the tortured path from adolescence to adulthood. Both young men have similar characteristics; and seemingly parallel lives. Both authors portrayal of adolescence follows a pattern: a deep-set urge to protect innocence, providing an image of courage, callousness and compassion that defines the transition to adulthood.

While reading Rule of the Bone, certain themes and symbols were revealed, consistent in both books. Both protagonists hold within them a certain feeling of innocence, which they attempt to protect. Holden Caulfield, the 16 year old protagonist of The Catcher in the Rye alienates himself, in order to preserve not only himself, but his private world. His efforts to protect other people's innocence reflect Chappie Dorset, the protagonist of Rule of the Bone; who seems to have the same mission. Innocence, by definition is seen as “ the lack of experience and maturity”, displayed by both characters. Everybody grows older; starting as an innocent child, they grow and gradually shedding their innocence, become mature and experienced adults. Chappie and Bone went through these stages, but instead of shedding their innocence, struggled to hold on to it. Unable to gain a grasp on their innocence, both characters attempted to hold fast the innocence of others, protecting them.

Phoebe, Holden's 10 year old sister is still an immature child, whose innocence is what Holden attempts to protect. By preserving Phoebe's innocence, Holden gains the satisfaction he is unable to obtain on his own. Holden is seemingly obsessed with preserving those things innocent. The Museum of Natural History, an important symbol in the book, signifies his mission of holding on to others, and his dislike of change. Much like a baby, Holden reacts badly to change, and prefers to keep his surroundings stable. "Certain things they should stay the way they are. You ought to be able to stick them in one of those big glass cases and just leave them alone. I know that's impossible, but it's too bad anyway" (pg. 122). Chappie, the protagonist in the other work of fiction also attempts to preserve innocence, but not as obsessively as his equivalent.

They were the only three people I'd chosen on my own to love, and they were gone. But still, that morning in Mobay when I saw Russ for the last time, I saw clearly for the first time that loving Sister Rose and I-Man and even Bruce had left me with riches that I could draw on for the rest of my life, and I was totally grateful to them. (pg. 384) In Rule of the Bone, Chappie- later adopting the label of " Bone" attempts to save Froggie, a 7 year old girl pimped by Buster, a drug dealer and child porn artist. At 7 years old, Froggie has lost all form of innocence, taken away by Buster, who kept her in submission with drugs. After saving Froggie, whose name is revealed to be Rose, Chappie attempts to better her quality of life. Chappie's ongoing struggle to save Froggie carried on through the story, as he displayed his compassion even after Froggie disappeared from the tale.

Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself . People change. They think they don't, but they really do. We may notice the changes to ourselves, our surroundings, to other people. Our surroundings cause us to change, as do issues and hurdles we pass through in our lives. Although the change from adolescence to adulthood is a long and arduous journey, we change nevertheless. Much like in our lives, various issues and hurdles the characters face trigger the change we see through the book. Holden is a sixteen-year-old junior who has just been expelled for academic failure from a school called Pencey Prep. His first step in change is leaving the school, where he had resided for so long. Although the story *The Catcher in the Rye* takes place over a short time span of a weekend, a significant change is still evident. Leaving school, Holden is given a newfound sense of freedom, and liberty.

This false sense of independence changed Holden, as he seemed to mature slightly; as a result of the change in setting. Traveling to New York, Holden was surprised to find himself acting not as a young adolescent, but rather a young adult, living in a Hotel, frequenting the hotel bars, and nightclubs. This sense of independence causes him to become cocky, thus making mistakes. Chappie, the protagonist in *Rule of the Bone* underwent a similar experience; leaving an abusive stepfather and unloving mother. Chappie, like Holden left in order to gain his freedom, which he welcomed with open arms. Living with a group of drug dealing bikers, Chappie changes to become a hardened street thug; changing his look with black leather, a Mohawk, and earrings.

Although Chappie changed in a bad way, the change benefited him later on in the story.

The struggle between adolescence and adulthood being over, both protagonists seem to have changed similarly, although still withholding their original characteristics. Changing from adolescence to adulthood takes a long time; and the hurdles we cross make it memorable. At the end of the road, we realize the changes we've undergone -those not apparent during the process. People's characteristics don't usually change drastically; many people have the same traits, qualities, and values. At the same time, we let go of some of our ambitions in order to tackle new ideas. Holden Caulfield and Chappie Dorset both held on to their characteristics throughout their appropriate stories. Innocence, originally an issue in both characters lives changed; they finally let go of their urge to hold on to other's innocence, and accepted the fact that they were growing up. Comparing the two novels is somewhat difficult, seeing as they both take place over a different period of time. The Catcher in the Rye takes place over a few days, while Rule of the Bone takes place over a few years. These differences create a discrepancy in the two boy's transformation, but remarkably, they change in a similar manner.

The process of breaking away from the things the characters were familiar with was the first step in their transformation. Leaving home signifies the pushing away of adolescence, the urge to grow older and demonstrate maturity. Their experiences after this event demonstrated both character's resourcefulness, in living in the adult world. The acceptance of change is

what both characters seem to fear through the story, which is finally embraced in the end. Chappie, who was consistently steadfast in the protection of Froggie, found that after her death, he had to finally let go.

" For a few minutes I stood there in the hospital lobby with the receiver in my hand looking at it like it was a bug. Then I set it on the hook. I had I-Man's message in my other hand and still thought of it as I-Man's message even though it was about Sister Rose and not him or me so I put it into my mouth and chewed it up and swallowed it." (pg 354) Although letting go of his issues and their values proved to be a difficult and arduous experience, Holden also manages to let go of his past. Mr. Antolini, one of Holden's teachers and role models quoted the following from a man named Wilhelm Stekel: " The mark of the immature man is that he wants to die nobly for a cause, while the mark of the mature man is that he wants to live humbly for one" (pg 188) A framework in a comparative study of the two novels reveals that adolescence is a pivotal moment in one's life. Looking back and drawing a perspective to our lives we acknowledge feelings of both compassion for others and a callous disregard for those who do not earn our trust. It takes a courageous person to stand up for their principles and values, which never change but only deepen in intensity.