

Loss of innocence:
the catcher in the rye
and rebel without a
cause



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Each day, someone loses his or her innocence due to a seminal moment that changes his or her life forever. This concept of lost innocence is represented in both the novel *The Catcher in the Rye* and the film *Rebel Without a Cause*. Protagonists Holden Caulfield and Jim Stark strive to preserve the innocence of others in order to protect them from the turmoil they see every day in the real world. Similarly, both highly developed characters take on the role of protecting someone they care for immensely.

In *Rebel Without a Cause*, Jim befriends a boy named Plato who has trouble fitting in with the other teenagers at their school. When the two friends and Judy go to an abandoned mansion late at night, Plato opens up and shares his belief that his parents have completely cast him aside. It is apparent to Jim that his friend is beginning to see the true colors of the world, so he steps in to try to preserve his friend's innocence as long as he can. He and Judy pretend to be a couple who are looking at the mansion in hopes of a new home for them and their kids. Plato starts off by pretending to be the real estate broker, but quickly switches to portraying their son when Jim starts acting as a parental figure to him. By acting like a father to his friend, Jim is allowing him to live the youth Plato is afraid he has already lost. However, in *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden talks with his little sister Phoebe about what he really wants to be; a catcher in the rye. He explains what that means when he says " what I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff" (Salinger 173). The " cliff" Holden is referring to is the seminal moment in which innocence is lost. He wants to " catch" or shield them from "[going] over" or growing up. Holden knows what it's like to fall off the cliff and see what the world is actually like, so he wants to keep

them happy and oblivious of the metaphorical cliff they are constantly nearing.

Holden and Jim share the belief that almost all grown-ups are phonies because they no longer have the innocence that used to make them comfortable in their own skin. Throughout *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is constantly using this term to negatively refer to many adults he encounters. While talking about parents and people of high status, such as priests, he says “ I don’t see why the hell they can’t talk in their natural voice. They sound so phony when they talk” (Salinger 100). He is trying to say that people who don’t “ talk in their natural voice” are unauthentic and extremely fake. The reason Holden wants to preserve the innocence of others is so that they don’t have to camouflage themselves with a phony identity. Instead of thinking that all those who have lost innocence are phonies, Jim just simply believes that they make phony excuses for their own behavior. When trying to open up to his parent’s about his involvement of the death of Buzz, his mother reluctantly claims that they are going to move again. Jim tries to explain that their can’t just run away from the event because she doesn’t want to deal with it. He calls her out on her actions and says that she is always using any phony excuse she can find to move instead of facing the problem at hand. She denies it again which does not surprise Jim because he knows that grown-ups are unauthentic and will use any reason they can think of to get out of their problems.

In both narratives, there is a reoccurring theme of the color blue representing innocence and the color red representing maturity. Toward the end of *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden takes Phoebe to a carousel so she can <https://assignbuster.com/loss-of-innocence-the-catcher-in-the-rye-and-rebel-without-a-cause/>

try to grab for the gold rings. He watches her go around and around on the wooden horse and says “ my red hunting hat really gave me quite a lot of protection, in a way” and that “[Phoebe] just looked so damn nice...in her blue coat and all” (Salinger 212-213). Right before this, Phoebe puts the hat on Holden’s head to keep him safe and because she is not ready to wear it yet. When he sees her in that blue peacoat, Holden knows he’s properly kept her safe. The red hunting hat he wears signifies his maturity and gives him “ protection” or reassurance that for now, Phoebe still has her innocence.

When Plato is shot by the police in *Rebel Without a Cause*, Jim stays near his friend’s lifeless body in grief. He moves Plato’s pants up so he can look at his mismatched socks; one is red and one is blue. The different colored socks signify that Plato wanted to feel mature, but he wasn’t ready to give up his innocent youth. He was also wearing his friend’s red jacket at the time, which was his attempt at showing he was mature like his friend. Before the police carry his body away, Jim cries and zips up his red coat that is on Plato. He is upset because he feels like he has failed his friend by not being able to preserve his innocence. Jim decided to let Plato keep the jacket because he had lost his innocence and seen the world for what it truly is right before his death; he earned it.

Although Jim and Holden do not attempt to make the mature become innocent again, it is because they know lost innocence cannot ever be found. Preserving the youth of the people they care about before they lose it is how they tackle this problem head on. Even though innocence cannot last forever, these two characters want to shield others from the harsh realities

of the world for as long as they can in order to make the world a better place.