

# Catcher in the rye word choice

Literature



Word choice is a crucial element in a well-crafted story. The *Catcher in the Rye* by J. D. Salinger is about a 16-year-old in New York in the 1950's named Holden Caulfield. The book is about his exploration in the world as he suffers from severe mental trauma from his point of view. J. D. Salinger uses word choice for realism, theme, and depth of character to make the story relate to the reader and add dimension. The *Catcher in Rye* contains many distinct characters, and the dialogue and inner thought are crucial in the reader's view of them.

The word choice is one of the key components in displaying the character's personality, and makes them into a round character. Holden is the most important character in the story, because the book revolves around his actions and thoughts as he narrates his story. He has a lot of depth and character traits that are very important to the story. Holden talks in a way that really shows his youth and naive nature. " He also started picking his nose... he was really getting the old thumb in there... it's pretty disgusting to watch somebody pick their nose" (9).

He makes many small observations throughout the book that show his unique character. Holden uses certain words that show his age (" jerks", " pansy", " knockers", etc. ). Yet he also uses terms that show his deep-thinking. "'You ought to go to a boy's school. It's full of phonies, and all you do is study so that you can learn enough to be smart enough to be able to buy a goddam Cadillac some day, and you have to keep making believe you give a damn if the football team loses, and all you do is talk about girls and liquor and sex all day, and everybody sticks together in these dirty little goddam cliques'" ( 131).

His outlook of school shows how deep his observation skills are. He has a lot of focus on certain things. He says things that are truly noteworthy, but he says them as a teenager might. His words show his character, but in a realistic way. The realistic wording that J. D. Salinger uses is impeccable. For a book to have depth it really needs to drag the reader in with realistic dialogue. Without that the wording really just sounds unrealistic and awkward.

If Salinger had Holden using words that didn't sound like they might come from a 16-year-old in the 1950's nobody would really be absorbed into the story. The wording also sounds real in the realm of the setting. “ Boy, she was lousy with rocks” (Salinger 55). “Well, don't get sore... nobody's sore!”(82). His language really fits the time period. It shows how people talked at the time of the book's release with phrases and words that were popular in the 1950's. This use of slang and talk from the time period also help show Holden's naive nature.

Themes are very clear in *Catcher in the Rye*, and this is partially due to the author's choice of words. One major theme is “ phoniness of the adult world”. Holden commonly notices conformity, hypocrisy, and shallowness in people. The dialogue of these people is a key component to Holden's analysis. They use words such as “ grand” that really show this in themselves. “ Grand. If there's on word I hate, it's grand. For a second, I was tempted to tell her to forget about the matinee” (106).

During that time period society had a very distinct shallow “ everything is just swell” kind of attitude, and Holden really observes that well via people's dialogue. Despite all of Holden's astute observations he does tend to act “

phony” in front of people from time to time. He notices it by his word choice as he does it, but fairly often he will do it just as much as some people he labels as ones who heavily conform. The things people say are directly related to their personality, and the book touches on that with their diction showing who they are as people.

There are many elements in *The Catcher in the Rye* that are worth analyzing, but word choice stands out due to its importance in making the story so well written. Word choice is a key part of revealing character, making the story seem realistic, and making themes identifiable. The words that are said are all deep in meaning which help the story's dimension. It improves the story drastically. Half of the book's charm comes from how Holden describes things in his life. That just goes to show how much of a part wording comes into play in making *The Catcher in the Rye* such a classic novel.