

# [Catcher in the rye: close reading](https://assignbuster.com/catcher-in-the-rye-close-reading/)

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J. D. Salinger tells the story of The Catcher in the Rye in the first person perspective through the main character Holden Caulfield. Holden tells the reader the events that he is going through, trying to explain his world view, dominated by unreal, two-dimensional people with " phony" intentions. Webster's Dictionary defines a " phony" as, " a person who is not what he pretends to be" (Webster 952). The entire story consists of Holden's narrative, as he develops his stream of thoughts about the world and his own role in it. Near the middle of the story, in chapter thirteen, Holden narrates about his encounter with a prostitute.

Prior to the scene with the prostitute, Holden spends time in a Greenwich Village nightclub, as he drinks scotch and soda, unintentionally listening to the conversations that surround him, which Holden views as depressing and " phony. " The scene begins as Holden checks into a hotel after a long walk back to his hotel after leaving the nightclub. In the scene Holden encounters Maurice the elevator operator, and pimp. Maurice offers Holden a prostitute. Holden agrees to the offer, but soon regrets his decision to allow the prostitute in his room. During this time Holden is nervous and anxious of his soon encounter with a prostitute.

Soon the prostitute arrives, and Holden shows his true side of a typical teenage boy. Holden, still a virgin, is extremely uncomfortable with the prostitute. Holden feels uneasy about the situation he gets himself into because of the prostitute's nonverbal communication and appearance. Late in the scene, Holden decides he does not want to have sex with the prostitute and looks for reasons to convince the prostitute not to have sex with him. After the prostitute leaves his room, Holden fights with Maurice, because he refuses to pay the prostitute more money.

Salinger's development of Holden's character, use of irony, creative style, sympathetic figurative language, informal and loose word choice, and strong diction in the scene not only show Holden how Holden thinks the world is nothing but full of phonies, but due to Holden's thought, words, and actions in the scene makes Holden possibly the biggest " phony" of them all. Salinger's development of Holden's character in the scene extensively indicates how Holden views himself as an adult, but has childlike behavior. Holden is extremely nervous before the prostitute even enters his room.

Abruptly and quickly Holden waters down his hair, attempts to smell his breath to make sure it smells good, and continuously changes his attire. Holden admits, " I knew I didn't have to get all dolled up for a prostitute or anything, but it sort of gave me something to do. I was a little nervous. I started to feel pretty sexy and all, but I was a little nervous anyway" (Salinger 120). In addition to Holden running around like a " madman," often in the scene Holden tends to lose focus on one thought and keeps skipping around to numerous topics.

Like a little kid, the monologues he gives to his audience are simply rambling thoughts that flow through his mind. For example, towards the middle of the, Holden begins talking about how he had quite a few opportunities to loose his virginity, he says, " I came quite close to doing it a couple of times, though" (Salinger 120). Holden quickly changes the subject and explains to the reader to the circumstances that prevents it from happening. Holden yet again shifts his focus and begins to talk about how he thinks girls are dumb. He rambles telling the reader story after story, quickly changing the subject and moving onto a different story.

Holden has certain issues with intimacy; even though he constantly talks about it and before we find out he is a virgin we might consider he isn't a virgin. Thinking of a prostitute coming into his room excites Holden, but his nervousness seems to get the best of him; wanting to just get it done and over with. This shows that Holden is just like a typical teenager, he wants something really bad, right away, just as much as he wants it to be done and over with. Salinger's development of Holden's character in the scene show Holden how he views himself, but his childish behavior tells otherwise.

In addition to Salinger's development of Holden's character, Salinger's also uses irony in the scene to make it easier to see Holden as the typical teenager that he really is. Holden wants to be able to do what ever he wants inside a glass case. In the scene Holden doesn't want others to view him as a " phony," but he will be able to do everything a " phony" does. We see many examples of this throughout the scene with the prostitute. Holden first meets the elevator boy who is also trading in prostitutes, he offers a prostitute to Holden. Holden at that time is 'depressed', he quickly accepts the offer before he clearly thinks about it.

Holden's fear begins to set in as he agrees to let the elevator operator get him a prostitute. Instantly he regrets his decision since he is a virgin. Inexperience and fear assail him in his hotel room as he tries to prepare himself for her visit. Even though Holden wants to become part of the adult world; but unconsciously he still relates to his childhood feelings, his innocence. Just like when he meets the prostitute, he needs company like a child always does when he is away from home, he doesn't treat her like a prostitute. He tries to strengthen his resolve by telling himself, " I sort of figured this was my big chance, in a way.

I figured if she was a prostitute and all, I could get in some practice on her, in case I ever get married or anything" (Salinger 121). He also imagines himself becoming like Monsieur Blake, a fictional character in a book he once read. Holden narrates Monsieur Blake as a charming and sophisticated rake, ruthlessly getting what he wants from women (Salinger 122). Holden is blind towards the fact that she is not an ordinary young lady, but instead sells her body. In addition to Salinger's development of Holden's character, Salinger's use of irony in the scene makes it easy for the reader to view Holden as the typical teenager.

Also in the scene with the prostitute, Salinger's style is very creative in showing Holden as an unreliable narrator. Salinger makes the scene seem like a real experience a teenage boy is going through. Holden is not wholly reliable in his understanding and reporting the events he encounters with the prostitute. First he is a youth, a young boy of sixteen who does not have much experience in living. Often during the scene with the prostitute Holden admits he is extremely down, and his mood colors everything. As Holden tells his story through flashbacks, his memory is never perfect.

Because of these things, the reader has to make some assumptions and perform some interpretations on the story. As Holden narrates, he inadvertently shows his real side throughout the scene. In the scene with the prostitute, Holden's fumbling halting language adds authenticity to his character. Holden's immaturity leads to his lies during the scene with the prostitute. Holden's willingness to lie is exceptional; he is " the most terrific liar you ever saw" (Salinger 16). Holden lies selfishly and often uncontrollably. When speaking with the prostitute Holden lies about his actual name and age. Holden says, " Allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Jim Steele" (Salinger 123). As the scene continues to unfold Holden again lies to the prostitute saying that he is twenty-two years old (Salinger 123), when the reader knows the truth; Holden is only sixteen years young. Holden is unreliable and impulsive, occasionally being insensitive of others feelings, and is often unable to control himself in their company. Just like a typical teenager Holden withholds the truth for several reasons; one to avoid the possibility of getting into trouble, due to his actual age, to make him appear better in the eyes of the prostitute, and to help make him ultimately feel better about himself.

Indeed Salinger's style is very creative in a way that shows Holden as a narrator who is not reliable. Furthermore, in the scene with the prostitute, Salinger also uses figurative language that makes it easier for the reader to have sympathy for Holden even though Holden makes " phony" comments. Salinger presents him as a realistic teenager, and the language Holden uses is typical of a boy his age. The reader sees this near the end of the scene when Holden first tells the prostitute, " I don't feel much like myself tonight. I've had a rough night. Honest to God. I'll pay you and all, but do you mind if we don't do it?

Do you mind very much? " (Salinger 125). Later in the scene he goes on to tell the prostitute, " I said I'd pay you for coming and all. I really will. I have plenty of dough" (Salinger 127). He sees himself as above them, perhaps considering it an insult that he is forced into the situation. The reader gets the sense that, in his eyes, they live their own " phony" lives, and judging by the hostility in his tone, that they are probably more content than he is. The words make Holden seem jealous and his sarcasm is surely seen. All of the language in the scene enhances thematic concerns as well as characterization.

The result is that the reader fully understands Holden Caulfield and the trauma that he experiences. Additionally, the tone and word choice Salinger uses in the scene is often informal and loose throughout the scene with the prostitute; which ultimately makes Holden lie and feel down. Salinger often shows Holden using fictional words when communicating with other characters in the scene. In addition, Holden, as a storyteller, possesses a temperament as he tells the reader about his episode with the prostitute. Late in the scene, Holden doesn't feel like sleeping with the prostitute anymore and just wants to talk instead.

Holden tries countless times to strike up a conversation with the prostitute, but she keeps hinting that she is in his room for sex, not just to talk to him. Holden, at this point of the book, feels quite low about his life and the overall situation he is in. Holden realizes he is found guilty of making a stupid yet simultaneously mature choice. Noticing that the prostitute did not want to talk, Holden then makes an excuse to get out of having sex with the prostitute. Holden tells the prostitute he recently had an operation that would not enable him to have sex with her.

He says his operation was, " On my wuddayacallit-my clavichord" (Salinger 126). Countless times Holden complains about his untrue operation and continues to use fictional words, as he keeps making excuses about why he can not have sex with her. Here you can clearly see Holden's child like attitude towards sex and exposing himself to a strange woman, he tries to act out sensitivity of adult behavior. Holden is a sensitive and innocent boy in a world that has no sympathy for his sensitivity, a world whose hypocrisy and ugliness disappoints and threatens him very deeply.

Holden's cynical attitude is an attempt to defend his feelings from the shortcomings of the outside world; at heart, Holden is an idealist, and resorts to bitterness and anger when the world's failure to match his ideal picture of it; making Holden feel down. Salinger's use of figurative language makes it easy for the reader to have sympathy for Holden even though Holden makes " phony" comments. Finally, Salinger also uses strong diction in the scene, as he shows Holden being judgemental of others, even though he is just like the characters he is criticizing.

Salinger's use of diction in the scene is brilliant; the scene seems so real in the sense that it seems that Holden is sitting next to you telling you the story face to face. Salinger wisely chooses to keep his narrative and prose straightforward and simple. Holden dominates the scene, and the scene is as if he is telling it as a story. The scene begins and ends in the present, as Holden provides a minimal amount of background information as to his current situation. He avoids providing much background information to the reader. Throughout the story, Holden thinks of most people as being fake and self-centered individuals.

He refers to these people as being " phony," (Salinger 17) and he is judgemental of others in his statements. He sees others in a negative manner, saving his complements for a select few people that he actually does like. Often throughout the scene Holden makes generalizations about other characters in the scene. At the beginning of the scene Holden checks into a hotel and encounters Maurice the elevator operator, and pimp; the pimp begins to inquire more and more about Holden; asking how old he is and approaching him with the opportunity to have sex. The pimp makes Holden feel like he is just like everyone else in the world, a " phony.

In addition to making generalizations of the pimp, Holden shows his judgmental side of the prostitute in his room. Prior to the prostitute leaving his room, Holden says, " She was a pretty spooky kid. Even with that little bitty voice she had, she could have scared you a little bit. If she'd had been a big old prostitute, with a lot of makeup on her face, she wouldn't have been half as spooky" (Salinger 127). This causes Holden to hold to his opinion that the adult world is " phony". When Holden says things like this, he is sinking to the level of phoniness of everyone else around him.

Through Salinger's strong diction in the scene, he clearly shows Holden as being judgemental of others, though, Holden he is just like the characters he is criticizing. Indeed, Salinger's development of Holden's character, use of irony, creative style, sympathetic figurative language, informal and loose word choice, and strong diction in the scene not only show Holden how Holden thinks the world is nothing but full of phonies, but due to Holden's thought, words, and actions in the scene makes Holden possibly the biggest " phony" of them all.

Phony" is one of the words heavily used by Holden. He uses the word " phony" several times throughout the course of this book and he uses it to describe the actions of others and not himself. Before Holden judges others, he should take a look at himself and see his faults. Holden Caulfield is a very intriguing young man. Holden does not know how to express himself, therefore is constantly contradicting himself and often becoming physical.