

The Catcher in the Rye, a novel narrated by main character and hero Holden Caulfield, is the story of Holden's life in the few days after being expelled from his Pennsylvania prep school. Published in 1951 by J.D. Salinger, *The Catcher in the Rye* has been banned many, many times (because of its mention of profanity, sex, alcohol abuse, and prostitution), but it is much ado about nothing because nothing profane ever occurs. As Shmoop.com states, Holden is "*in love with a girl; nothing happens. He goes to the Big Apple; nothing happens. He hires a prostitute; nothing happens. All that scandal the censors were promising? It never happens.*" Interestingly, J.D. Salinger has never allowed *Catcher* to be produced as a film; some claim this is because he, much like his main character (he is essentially a social recluse; he grants no interviews and makes no public appearances), lending even further mystery and controversy to the work.

While reading, consider the following ideas:

1. Innocence
2. Mortality
3. Youth
4. Isolation
5. Sexuality and Sexual Identity
6. Sadness
7. Wisdom and Knowledge
8. Lies and Deceit
9. Madness
10. Religion

After reading, write one theme regarding each of the above ideas
(What does the novel reveal about each idea?).

Significant Literary Devices

1. Setting:
2. Narrative Structure:
3. Narrator Point of View:
4. A Hero's Journey from Innocence to Knowledge—what does Holden learn?
5. Tone:
6. Writing Style:
7. Allusions:

Holden's name: a "caul" is a membrane that covers the head of a fetus during birth. Thus, the caul in his name may symbolize the blindness of childhood or Holden's inability to see the complexity of the adult world. Holden's full name might be read as Hold-on Caul-field: he wants to hold on to what he sees as his innocence, which is really his blindness.

Chapters 1-8

VALUES: The word "value" is defined as "a principle, standard, or quality considered as worthwhile or desirable." *What does Holden say and do that shows what he thinks and believes?* One way to define a person's character is to examine his values. Look over chapters 1-8 and, for each chapter, describe at least one thing that Holden reveals about his personal values. Pay specific attention to the times when he contradicts himself and how he comes into conflict with the world around him.

Chapter 1:

Chapter 2:

Chapter 3:

Chapter 4:

Chapter 5:

Chapter 6:

Chapter 7:

Chapter 8:

What are Holden's values? Briefly define at least two.

Value #1:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

Value #2:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

The following are key theme quotations. Explain the significance of each quote.

1. "Life is a game, boy. Life is a game that one plays according to the rules" (8).
2. "Ask her if she still keeps all her kings in the back row" (34)
3. "For Chrissake, Holden. This is about a goddamn baseball glove" (41)
4. "I'm not too tough. I'm a pacifist if you want to know the truth" (46).
5. "I had to pack these brand-new skates my mother had practically just sent me a couple of days before. That depressed me... I wanted racing skates and she bought hockey—but it made me sad anyway. Almost every time somebody give me a present, it ends up making me sad" (51-2).

6. Select a significant quote to write (and describe) in the space below (be sure to write down the page number).

Chapters 9-17

There is a famous quote that states,

“Character is revealed when a choice is made.”

For this section of the novel, chapters 9-17, describe Holden’s choices—
and what they reveal about him / his view of the world.

Chapter 9:

Chapter 10:

Chapter 11:

Chapter 12:

Chapter 13:

Chapter 14:

Chapter 15:

Chapter 16:

Chapter 17:

Choices also reveal values—briefly describe at least two of Holden’s values
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Value #1:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

Value #2:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

The following are key theme quotations. Explain the significance of each quote.

1. “I was half in love with her by the time we sat down. That’s the thing about girls. Every time they do something pretty, even if they’re not much to look at, or even if they’re sort of stupid, you fall half in love with them, and then you never know *where* the hell you are. Girls. Jesus Christ. They can drive you crazy. They really can” (73).
2. “He’s so good he’s almost corny, in fact. I don’t know what I mean by that, but I mean it” (80).
3. “I’m always saying ‘Glad to’ve met you’ to someone I’m not at all glad I met. If You want to stay alive, you have to say that stuff, though” (87).
4. I felt like jumping out the window. I probably would’ve, too, if I’d been sure somebody’d cover me up as soon as I landed. I didn’t want a bunch of stupid rubbeneks looking at me when I was all gory” (104)
5. “I can even get to hate somebody, just *looking* at them, if they have cheap suitcases with them” (108).
6. “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” (122).

7. React to the following quotes (all from Chapter 17):
- “I swear to God I’m crazy. I admit it” (124).
 - “I’m crazy. I swear to God I am” (125).
 - “I don’t get hardly anything out of anything. I’m in bad shape. I’m in lousy shape” (131)
 - “I swear to God I’m a madman” (134).
8. Select a significant quote to write (and describe) in the space below (be sure to write down the page number).

Chapters 18-26

QUEST: *noun*

1. The act or an instance of seeking or pursuing something; a search.
2. An expedition undertaken in medieval romance by a knight in order to perform a prescribed feat: *the quest for the Holy Grail*.

In *The Catcher in the Rye*, Holden is often described as being on a quest. What is he seeking—and what is he learning along the way? Review chapters 18-26 and, in each, describe Holden’s quest.

Chapter 18:

Chapter 19:

Chapter 20:

Chapter 21:

Chapter 22:

Chapter 23:

Chapter 24:

Chapter 25:

Chapter 26:

Holden's quest also reveals his values—briefly describe at least two.
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Value #1:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

Value #2:

This value is illustrated by Holden when:

The following are key theme quotations. Explain the significance of each quote.

1. "The trouble with girls is, if they like a boy, no matter how big a bastard he is, they'll say he has an inferiority complex, and if they don't like him, no matter how nice a guy he is, or how big an inferiority complex he has, they'll say he's conceited. Even smart girls do it" (136).
2. "You don't like anything that's happening" (169).
3. "I keep picturing all these little kids playing some game in this big field of rye and all. Thousands of little kids and nobody's around—nobody big, I mean, except me. And I'm standing on the edge of some crazy cliff. What I have to do, I have to catch everybody if they start to go over the cliff—I mean if they're running and they don't look where they're going I have to come out from somewhere and catch them. That's all I'd do all day. I'd just be the catcher in the rye and all" (173).
4. "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" (188).

5. "That's the whole trouble. You can't ever find a place that's nice and peaceful, because there isn't any" (204).
6. "I felt so damn happy all of a sudden, the way old Phoebe kept going around and around. I was damn near bawling, I felt so damn happy, if you want to know the truth. I don't know why. It was just that she looked so damn nice, the way she kept going around and around, in her blue coat and all. God, I wish you couldn't been there " (213).
7. Select a significant quote to write (and describe) in the space below (be sure to write down the page number).

Post Reading: *The Catcher in the Rye*, Reflections

1. Holden is often referred to by critics as an unreliable narrator—why? Using specific evidence from the text, support your response.
2. Why does Holden feel so alienated from the world? Be sure to use specific evidence from the novel to support your response.
3. What is Jane Gallagher's function in the novel? Describe what Jane reveals about Holden.
4. Describe the significance of Holden's red hunting hat.
5. Holden is repeatedly concerned about the ducks in Central Park; he is worried for their welfare, as he sees their vulnerability. Does Holden see himself as similar to the ducks? What other characters concern Holden because of their vulnerability? How does he react to threats to their welfare?

6. Throughout the novel there are many characters Holden describes as “phony,” yet who are also viewed with pity. Who are these characters? Why would Holden feel sorry for them?
7. The tone of the novel is often described as “sarcastic”—using specifics from the text, agree or disagree.
8. Besides an obvious connection of family, how are Phoebe and Allie similar in Holden’s eyes? How does the older brother, D.B., differ?
9. Describe how Holden acts in each of the following situations—and state what his actions reveal about his character:
 - A. With Ackley at Pencey
 - B. With the ladies from Seattle
 - C. With Phoebe
10. Describe Holden’s view of the world in the beginning of the novel—and state why/how he has changed by the end of the story. What forces have altered his attitude/view of the world?
11. Describe the symbolism of:
 - A. Holden’s hair
 - B. Suitcases
 - C. Checkers
12. Describe Mr. Antolini’s advice to Holden. Is it good advice?
13. Throughout much of the novel, Holden longs to retreat from the world, yet he often tries to reach out to others—describe this division in his character.

14. Critics often say that Holden's visit to the museum and Phoebe's ride on the carousel prompt his change at the end of the novel. What *else* has fostered this change?
15. Holden is a person who, for whatever reasons, is removed from society and therefore more independent than others who must rely upon society; in this sense he is similar to other characters in American literature, a type known as the "American Adam." Give evidence that Holden enjoys isolation—and evidence that reveals his need for connection with others.
16. Look closely at the image at the end of the novel where Holden recognizes that you have to let the kids on the carousel reach for the gold ring. What does this mean?
17. Is Holden a misanthrope? (Misanthropy is the general hatred, mistrust or disdain of the human species or human nature; a misanthrope, therefore, is someone who holds such view.)

After completing the novel, turn each of the ideas on the cover page of this guide into a theme.

- Innocence
- Mortality
- Youth
- Isolation
- Sexuality and Sexual Identity
- Sadness

- Wisdom and Knowledge
- Lies and Deceit
- Madness
- Religion

“Comin Thro' The Rye,” by Robert Burns

O, Jenny's a' weet, poor body,
 Jenny's seldom dry:
 She draigl't a' her petticoatie,
 Comin thro' the rye!

Comin thro' the rye, poor body,
 Comin thro' the rye,
 She draigl't a' her petticoatie,
 Comin thro' the rye!

Gin a body meet a body
 Comin thro' the rye,
 Gin a body kiss a body,
 Need a body cry?

Gin a body meet a body
 Comin thro' the glen,
 Gin a body kiss a body,
 Need the warl' ken?

Gin a body meet a body
 Comin thro' the grain;
 Gin a body kiss a body,
 The thing's a body's ain.

--Robert Burns, © 1781

ROUGH MINI GLOSSARY

a' weet all wet
draigl't a' her petticoatie dragged her petticoats
Gin a body If somebody saw
Need the warl' ken? need the whole world know?
The thing's a body's ain it's nobody else's business